



## Turkey Rhubarb

Historically, Turkey Rhubarb has had several medicinal uses:

- it's been used to help relieve constipation and clean the intestines.
- it's been used to detox spleen and liver.
- it may have anti-tumor properties.
- it's been used to stimulate appetite.
- applied externally, it has been used to treat infections of the skin (*Staphylococcus aureus* infections) like furuncles and boils.



Originating from northwest China and Tibet, rhubarb has been used in medicine for more than 2,000 years and is considered one of the strongest herbs in Chinese Medicine. The Chinese call the root *Da huang*, which means 'big yellow' which is the color of Rhubarb's tinctures and decoctions. Its use gradually spread through India, reaching Europe during the Renaissance overland via Asia Minor – hence the common name, Turkey rhubarb. The plant was a favorite remedy with early Persian and Arabian physicians. The Rhubarb grown for cooking and eating is usually *r. rhabarbarum*, an 18th-century cultivar.

Turkey rhubarb has an organ-affinity with the intestines and colon and so is believed to assist them in their function. The parts of rhubarb used are its roots and stalks and its effectiveness is controlled by the amount taken. When taken in small doses, it has a tonic effect as a blood builder and blood cleanser. It increases salivary and gastric flow, improves appetite and cleanses the liver by encouraging bile flow. Rhubarb, by its cleansing action, is thought to encourage the healing process of duodenal ulcers and enhances gallbladder function.

It is believed to have anti-cancer, anti-bacterial, and diuretic (increased urine output) properties. It has been combined with various herbs to relieve chronic constipation, relieve kidney pain, ease hemorrhoids, and reduce fever. Turkey rhubarb is believed to stimulate the smooth muscle of the bowel to push stool through the intestines. It is dependent on the bacteria in the bowel to be effective.

### Purgative

The earliest recorded uses for Turkey rhubarb are detailed in the "Divine Husbandman's Classic of the Materia Medica," an ancient Chinese medical text. The text describes the roots of this plant as a potent purgative, capable of easing both constipation and diarrhea. Its laxative properties affect the colon and

intestine muscles,

encouraging movement, while its astringent properties can make the stool firmer without inhibiting the purgative effects. Turkey rhubarb may also promote improved digestion, and is included as an ingredient in some natural body cleansing regimens. Rhubarb contains powerful laxative compounds called anthraquinones, which irritate the colon and stimulate bowel movements. Rhubarb root also contains tannins, which are believed to reduce inflammation in the colon. Small amounts of rhubarb are used in traditional Chinese medicine for diarrhea due to the tannin content.



Purgation was also adopted worldwide as a therapy for diseases. The idea behind this broad application was that something in the body, the entity or toxin that caused the disease, needed to be flushed out. The elimination of this pathological influence was thought to be accomplished by sweating it out through the pores, vomiting it out through the mouth, or disposing of it through the intestines or urinary tract. In the ancient Chinese system of therapy prevalent during the Han Dynasty, the three methods of diaphoresis, emesis, and

purgation were widely used for this purpose. Although the reliance on such approaches to treating diseases faded at times (some medical authorities considered the methods too drastic, debilitating the patient), they were later revived. For example, these methods were again promoted during the Jin-Yuan medical reform (12th-13th century) by proponents of the Purgation school (or Attacking school). In America, treatment of numerous diseases by elimination techniques, especially purgation, has become a hallmark of the natural healing profession since the 19th century and is still deemed an important component by its practitioners.

### **Skin Infection Treatment**

In modern Chinese medicine its applications have since expanded to include topical skin treatments for boils, furuncles and various other stubborn infections. For these applications, Turkey rhubarb root powder is usually mixed with some other simple substances to create a paste, and this paste is applied directly to the affected skin and left to dry. The root's astringent properties can help shrink and dry up boils and blisters, and it is believed that the root may also have antibacterial benefits that promote accelerated healing. This paste is a natural alternative treatment to antibiotics for mild staph infections caused by staphylococcus aureus.

### **Clinical Summary**

Rhubarb, a perennial herb, is cultivated in many parts of the world. The stalks are consumed as food; the rhizome and root of Rhubarb are widely used in Chinese medicine for a variety of conditions including cancer, immunosuppression, constipation, diarrhea, gastrointestinal ulcers, and hypertension. The anthraquinones and tannins are thought responsible for the laxative and constipating effects, respectively. Limited human clinical data are available for the claims made. The majority of the studies were conducted in China, often using formulations of rhubarb along with other herbs.

Cytotoxic (a toxic effect on certain cells) and cytostatic (inhibits cell growth and division) effects have been reported in cancer cells in vitro. Antitumor effects were also shown in mice. One study found that a rhubarb extract reduced radiation-induced lung toxicity and increased pulmonary function in lung cancer patients.

**Alternate Names:** Turkish rhubarb, Chinese rhubarb, tai huang, da huang, Rheum palmatum

## Side Effects and Safety

Rhubarb should not be used long-term for constipation.

Pregnant or nursing women should not use rhubarb. Children should not use rhubarb.

Rhubarb or other anthraquinone-containing herbs should not be used by people with ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, severe hemorrhoids, blood vessel disease, congestive heart failure, heart disease, severe anemia, abdominal hernia, gastrointestinal cancer, recent colon surgery, or liver and kidney disease.

Rhubarb may interact with drugs called cardiac glycosides, such as digitalis and digoxin (Lanoxin).

Rhubarb may cause harmless discoloration of urine.



Be sure to try NSP's LBS II® (100 caps) or CleanStart® Wild Berry (14 Day). Both contain Turkey Rhubarb

References:

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