

# Introduction to Herbology

Methods of Preparation  
Principles of Combination  
Methods of Delivery

## Methods of Preparation

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Before being added to a decoction, individual herbs can be prepared in certain ways to enhance their properties or diminish side effects - a process called *páo zhì* (炮炙).

- **DRY-FRYING** (炒 chǎo) - Herbs are cooked in a dry wok until browned. This enhances the herb's ability to tonify the Spleen and Stomach, and makes herbs easier to store.

*e.g. Chao Bai Zhu*

# Methods of Preparation

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- **STIR-FRYING** (炙 zhì) - Herbs are cooked in a wok with some sort of liquid medium. Examples include:
  - **Honey** - increases and herb's tonifying and moistening actions
  - **Ginger Juice** - reduces the tendency of cold herbs to upset the stomach; enhances an herb's ability to warm the Stomach and stop vomiting; reduces toxicity
  - **Vinegar** - increases an herb's astringent, analgesic, and blood-invigorating actions
  - **Wine** - increases an herb's ability to unblock the channels, expel wind, and alleviate pain
  - **Salt** - directs an herb's actions to the Kidney; nourishes yin and reduces heat signs

# Methods of Preparation

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- **CHARRING** (炭 tàn) - Herbs are charred until black, enhancing their ability to stop bleeding (e.g. *Jing Jie Tan*).
- **CALCINING** (煨 duàn) - A substance (usually a mineral or shell) is heated until it turns red. This makes the substance brittle and easier to break into a powder. In some cases, it enhances the substance's astringent actions (e.g. *Duan Mu Li*).
- **ROASTING IN ASHES** (煨 wēi) - An herb is coated in paper, a paste, or mud and then roasted. The dried coating is cracked and discarded. This process can draw out toxic oils from seeds and nuts (e.g. *Rou Dou Kou*)

# Principles of Combination

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Traditionally, there are seven types of herbal combinations:

- **MUTUAL ACCENTUATION** - Combination of two herbs with *similar* functions to accentuate their therapeutic action.  
*e.g. ren shen and bai zhu are used together because they both tonify Spleen qi*
- **MUTUAL ENHANCEMENT** - Combination of two herbs with *different* functions to to enhance the effect in a clinical situation.  
*e.g. bai zhu (tonifies Spleen qi) is combined with Fu Ling (drains dampness)*
- **MUTUAL COUNTERACTION** - Combination in which an herb's toxicity is reduced by another herb.  
*e.g. ban xia is counteracted by sheng jiang (ginger)*

# Principles of Combination

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- **MUTUAL SUPPRESSION** - The converse of mutual counteraction. One herb reduces with side effects of another.  
*e.g. sheng jiang (ginger) suppresses ban xia*
- **MUTUAL ANTAGONISM** - The ability of two herbs to neutralize each other's positive effects.  
*e.g. ren shen antagonizes wu ling zhi*
- **MUTUAL INCOMPATABILITY** - Combination that gives rise to side effects or toxicity that would not occur if each herb was used alone.
- **SINGLE EFFECT** - Use of one herb to treat a patient.  
*e.g. ren shen is used alone to treat yang collapse*

# 18 Incompatible Herbs

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## GAN CAO

- gan sui
- da ji
- yuan hua
- hai zao

## FU ZI (WU TOU)

- bei mu
- gua lou
- zhi ban xia
- bai lian
- bai ji

## LI LU

- ren shen
- dan shen
- ku shen
- xi xin
- bai shao

# Methods of Delivery

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## DECOCTION - 汤 *tāng*

Literally “soup.” Raw herbs are boiled 30-60 minutes, strained, and the resultant liquid is drunk.

Aluminum utensils should not be used. Clay or porcelain cooking pots are preferred, but many believe that stainless steel is ok.

### PROS:

- Strongest effect
- Easily customizable

### CONS:

- Patient compliance (time consuming to make, smells bad, tastes worse)

# Methods of Delivery

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## POWDERS - 散 *sǎn*

Raw herbs are ground into a fine powder. This powder can be boiled for ten minutes and strained, or mixed with hot water and taken as a draft.

The character “散 *sǎn*” also means “to disperse” or “to scatter.”

Traditionally, powders were used for excess conditions when the treatment principle was to drain or disperse.

In modern usage, almost all raw herbal formulas are prepared as a decoction, even if they are named as a powder (e.g. Xiao Yao San)

### PROS:

- Easy to store large quantities

### CONS:

- More effective than pills, but less effective than decoction

# Methods of Delivery

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## PILLS/TABLETS - 丸 *wán* / 片 *piàn*

Raw herbs are ground into a fine powder, mixed with a medium (usually honey or tea), and formed into pills or tablets.

Pills can vary in size from mustard seeds to longan fruit.

Pills are mild and slow in action. They are usually recommended for long term use.

### PROS:

- Easy to take

### CONS:

- Less effective
- Cannot be modified

# Methods of Delivery

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## MEDICINAL WINE - 酒 *jiǔ*

Raw herbs are steeped in strong alcohol for long periods of time (usually 3-6 months). The alcohol itself is thought possess nourishing, invigorating, and channel-unblocking properties.

Small dosages can be taken internally on a regular basis (usually about 1 oz), or formulas can be made to apply externally (e.g. die de jiu).

### PROS:

- Easy to take
- Customizable

### CONS:

- Must be prepared a long time in advance

# Methods of Delivery

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## SYRUPS - 膏 *gāo*

Raw herbs are cooked in water and strained into a concentrated decoction, then mixed with sugar or honey.

Most appropriate for chronic diseases, cough, and sore throat.

# Methods of Delivery

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## PLASTERS - 膏 *gāo*

For external use.

Herbs are simmered slowly in oil (usually sesame oil) and strained. The oil is then mixed with beeswax.

The resulting paste can be applied externally by itself, or spread over paper or cloth.

These are usually used for dermatological conditions such as abscess, boils, or eczema; joint problems such as bi syndrome or chronic pain; or injury and trauma.

# Methods of Delivery

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Modern and miscellaneous methods of delivery include:

- **Granules** - the “instant coffee” equivalent of herbal decoctions
- **Tinctures** - alcohol based or glycerin based, taken via dropper
- **Soaks and Washes** - e.g. Yin Care
- **Lineaments** - e.g. Po Sum On, Whiteflower oil, Dit Da Jiao, Zheng Gu Shui

# Herb Categories

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Herbs are divided into categories based on their principal medical function:

1. Herbs that Release the Exterior
2. Herbs that Clear Heat
3. Downward-Draining Herbs
4. Herbs that Drain Dampness
5. Herbs that Dispel Wind-Dampness
6. Herbs that Transform Phlegm and Stop Cough
7. Aromatic Herbs that Transform Dampness
8. Herbs that Relieve Food Stagnation
9. Herbs that Regulate Qi
10. Herbs that Regulate the Blood
11. Herbs that Warm the Interior and Expel Cold
12. Tonifying Herbs
13. Herbs that Stabilize and Bind
14. Substances that Calm the Spirit
15. Aromatic Substances that Open the Orifices
16. Substances that Extinguish Wind and Stop Tremors
17. Herbs that Expel Parasites
18. Substances for Topical Application

# Herb Categories

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Knowing the category of an herb can give us clues about each herb's:

1. Major actions
2. Taste and temperature
3. Entering channels