

HERBS THAT TONIFY YIN

Revised: 5/2/2023

Sources:

- Bensky, D. (2004). *Chinese Herbal Medicine: Materia Medica*. Seattle, WA: Eastland Press. pp. 817-851
- Wiseman and Brand (2008). *Concise Chinese Materia Medica*. Paradigm Publications. pp. 387-393, 435-446

Herbs that Tonify Yin

These herbs tonify the yin of the Lung, Stomach, Liver, and Kidney; they also generate fluids to moisten dryness.

Lung Yin Deficiency:

- dry cough, loss of voice, thirst, dry throat, dry skin, coughing up thick sputum

Stomach Yin Deficiency:

- lack of appetite, irritability, thirst, dry mouth, constipation

Liver Yin Deficiency:

- diminished visual acuity, dry eyes, night blindness, dizziness, tinnitus, dry nails, low-grade sensation of heat
- vertigo, dizziness, tinnitus, dry mouth and throat, insomnia (Liver yang rising)

Kidney Yin Deficiency:

- dizziness, tinnitus, weak low back and legs, warm palms and soles, afternoon fever, scanty and dark urine

Tongue: red with little or no coat

Pulse: thin, rapid

Herbs that Tonify Yin

Taste:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• sweet
Temperature:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• cold
Channels:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• LU, ST, LV, KI
Main Action:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• tonify yin, moisten dryness
Cautions/ Contraindications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• These herbs are cold, sweet, sticky, and cloying. They can easily obstruct the Spleen and Stomach

Herbs that Tonify Yin

LUNG/STOMACH YIN

- shā shēn
- mài mén dōng
- xī yáng shēn
- tiān mén dōng
- shí hú
- yù zhú
- bǎi hé

LIVER/KIDNEY YIN

- mò hàn lián
- nǚ zhēn zǐ
- hēi zhī má
- guī bǎn
- biē jiǎ

shā shēn

glehniae/adenophorae radix

Temp: slightly cold
Taste: sweet, slightly bitter
Channels: LU, ST
Dosage: 9-15 grams

沙
参

1. tonifies Lung yin
 - for dry cough, dry mouth, thirst
2. tonifies Stomach yin and generates fluids
 - for dry mouth, thirst, irritability

There are two varieties:

- Bei Sha Shen (*glehniae radix*) - northern Sha Shen
- Nan Sha Shen (*adenophorae radix*) - southern Sha Shen

Bei Sha Shen is better at tonifying yin (esp ST yin); Nan Sha Shen is better at treating phlegm (it's slightly bitter). Some say Nan Sha Shen also tonifies LU qi as well.

- For febrile diseases that has damaged fluids (ST yin xu with thirst), use Bei Sha Shen.
- For chronic cough due to LU yin xu with phlegm, use Nan Sha Shen.

If someone just says "Sha Shen," you can assume they mean Bei Sha Shen.



mài mén dōng

ophiopogonis radix

Temp: slightly cold
Taste: sweet, slightly bitter
Channels: HT, LU, ST
Dosage: 6-15 grams

麦
门
冬

1. tonifies Lung yin
 - for dry cough, cough with thick phlegm, or coughing up blood
2. tonifies Stomach yin
 - for dry mouth and dry tongue
3. clears Heart heat
 - for irritability and fever that worsens at night
4. moistens Large Intestine
 - for constipation due to dryness



xī yáng shēn

panacis quinquefolii radix

Temp: slightly cold
Taste: sweet, slightly bitter
Channels: HT, KI, LU
Dosage: 3-9 grams

1. tonifies qi

2. tonifies yin

- for heat from yin deficiency
- for aftermath of febrile disease: weakness, irritability, thirst
- for Lung qi and yin deficiency: cough, coughing up blood, loss of voice

Xi Yang Shen differs from Ren Shen in the following ways:

- Xi Yang Shen is weaker than Ren Shen at tonifying qi
- Xi Yang Shen is stronger than Ren Shen at tonifying yin and generating fluids
- Xi Yang Shen is colder than Ren Shen, and it will not cause heat or dryness if used long term.

西
洋
参

tiān mén dōng

asparagi radix

Temp: very cold
Taste: sweet, bitter
Channels: KI, LU, (ST)
Dosage: 6-12 grams

1. tonifies Lung and Stomach yin

- for dry mouth, cough, cough with thick or blood-streaked phlegm

2. tonifies Kidney yin

- for wasting and thirsting disorder, low-grade afternoon fever, constipation due to dryness

天
门
冬



shí hú

dendrobii herba

Temp: slightly cold

Taste: sweet, slightly salty, bland

Channels: KI, ST

Dosage: 6-12 grams

石斛

1. tonifies Stomach yin

- for damage to fluids in the aftermath of a febrile disease
- for severe thirst, fever, dry mouth and throat

2. tonifies Kidney yin

- for low-grade fever, dry throat
- brightens the eyes
 - for diminished visual acuity due to LV/KI yin deficiency



yù zhú

polygonati odorati rhizoma

Temp: slightly cold

Taste: sweet

Channels: LU, ST

Dosage: 6-15 grams

玉竹

1. tonifies Lung and Stomach yin

- for dry cough with scanty phlegm
- for irritability, thirst

2. extinguishes wind and relaxes tendons

- for wind generated by insufficient fluids leading to pain and spasm in sinews

Yu Zhu also goes by the name “Wei Rui.” It is special because it can tonify yin without being cloying. This means it can restore fluids during a wind-heat attack without retaining the pathogen, so it is commonly used in wind-heat attacks with underlying yin deficiency, as in Jia Jian Wei Rui Tang.



bǎi hé

lilii bulbosus

Temp: slightly cold
Taste: sweet, slightly bitter
Channels: HT, LU
Dosage: 9-30 grams

百
合

1. tonifies Lung yin

- for dry cough and sore throat
- esp. for chronic cough when Lung heat has damaged yin

2. clears Heart heat to calm shen

- for irritability, restless, and insomnia in the aftermath of a febrile disease



To calm the spirit, use unprepared Bai He.
To moisten Lung and stop cough, use honey-fried Bai He (Mi Zhi Bai He).

mò hàn lián

ecliptae herba

Temp: cool
Taste: sweet, sour
Channels: KI, LV
Dosage: 9-15 grams

墨
旱
莲

1. tonifies Liver and Kidney yin

- for dizziness, blurred vision, premature greying of hair

2. cools blood to stop bleeding

- for nosebleed, vomiting or coughing up blood, blood in urine or stools, or flooding and spotting



Mo Han Lian is also sometimes called Han Lian Cao. It is traditionally picked at the summer solstice.
Can be applied externally to stop bleeding or darken the hair.

nǚ zhēn zǐ

ligustri lucidi fructus

Temp: cool
Taste: bitter, sweet
Channels: KI, LV
Dosage: 9-18 grams (crush before decocting)

1. tonifies Liver and Kidney yin

- clears deficiency heat
 - for fever, steaming bones, night sweats
- blackens the hair and beard
 - for premature greying of hair
- brightens the eyes
 - for diminished visual acuity due to LV/KI yin deficiency

Nu Zhen Zi is special because it tonifies without being cloying. It is traditionally picked at the winter solstice. Mo Han Lian and Nu Zhen Zi are often used together as paired herbs, as in Er Zhi Wan (*two-solstice pill*)



女
真
子

hēi zhī má

sesami semen nigrum

Temp: neutral
Taste: sweet
Channels: KI, LV, LI
Dosage: 9-30 grams (crush before use)

1. tonifies Liver and Kidney yin

- for blurred vision, dizziness, tinnitus
- for recovery from illness or insufficient lactation

2. tonifies blood and extinguishes wind

- for headache, dizziness, numbness due to blood or yin deficiency

3. moistens Large Intestine

- for constipation due to dryness or blood deficiency

Hei Zhi Ma is black sesame; it is most commonly used in food therapy. It is often dry-fried or toasted and then crushed before use.



黑
芝
麻

guī bǎn

testudinis plastrum

Temp: cold
Taste: salty, sweet
Channels: HT, KI, LV
Dosage: 15-45 grams (cook first)

1. tonifies yin and subdues yang
 - for yin deficiency with Liver yang rising
 - for fever, night sweats, dizziness, tinnitus, steaming bone disorder
 - for yin deficiency stirring internal wind
 - for facial spasms, tremors on hands and feet
2. tonifies Kidney and strengthens bones
 - for bone wilting, sore low back, delayed skeletal development, non-closure of fontanel
3. stabilizes menses and stops bleeding
 - for flooding and spotting or profuse menses due to deficiency heat and instability of Ren and Chong
4. tonifies Heart blood to calm shen
 - for anxiety, insomnia, forgetfulness, fright palpitations

Contraindicated during pregnancy.



龟板

guī bǎn jiāo

testudinis plastris colla

Temp: cold
Taste: salty, sweet
Channels: HT, KI, LV
Dosage: 3-9 grams (dissolve in wine or melt in strained decoction)

1. tonifies yin
 - richer and more cloying than gui ban
2. tonifies blood
3. stops bleeding

Contraindicated during pregnancy.

龟板胶

biē jiǎ

trionycis carapax

鳖
甲

Temp: slightly cold
Taste: salty
Channels: LV, SP
Dosage: 9-30 grams (cook first)

1. tonifies yin and subdues yang
 - for yin deficiency with Liver yang rising
 - for fever, night sweats, steaming bone disorder
 - for yin deficiency stirring internal wind
2. softens hardness and disperses clumping
 - for abdominal masses, palpable masses during malaria (splenomegaly), accumulations causing amenorrhea



Gui Ban is better at tonifying yin. Bie Jia is better at clearing heat and softening hardness.
Contraindicated during pregnancy.

Summary

shā shēn
glehniae radix

tonifies LU & ST yin

- Bei Sha Shen: better at tonifying
- Nan Sha She: better at phlegm

mài mén dōng
ophiopogonis radix

tonifies LU & ST yin

- clears Heart heat
- moistens Large Intestine

xī yáng shēn
panacis quinquefolii radix

tonifies qi
tonifies yin

- cooler in temp than Ren Shen

tiān mén dōng
asparagi radix

tonifies LU yin
tonifies KI yin

shí hú
dendrobii herba

tonifies ST yin
tonifies KI yin

- brightens the eyes

yù zhú
polygonati odorati rhizoma

tonifies LU & ST yin

- extinguishes wind (pain & spasm)
- used during wind-heat attacks

bǎi hé
lilii bulbosus

tonifies LU yin

- clears Heart heat

mò hàn lián
ecliptae herba

tonifies LV & KI yin

- stops bleeding

nǚ zhēn zǐ
ligustri lucidi fructus

tonifies LV & KI yin

- blackens hairs
- brightens eyes

hēi zhī má
sesami semen nigrum

tonifies LV & KI yin

- tonifies blood
- moistens Large Intestine

guī bǎn
testudinis plastrum

tonifies yin and subdues yang rising

- strengthens bones
- stabilizes menses
- tonifies Heart blood
- contraindicated during pregnancy

biē jiǎ
trionycis carapax

tonifies yin and subdues yang rising

- softens hardness and masses
- contraindicated during pregnancy