



Herbal Superhero

THE HUMBLE GARLIC has been viewed with awe and respect for centuries, and had vast volumes written about it. The ancient Egyptians revered this superb herb for its potent medicinal properties - its mentioned in a papyrus dating 1500 BC as an important 'cure-all'. The famed pharaoh, Tut ankh amun, was even buried alongside his garlic.

Much superstition surrounds garlic: ancient Greeks and Romans used it for courage and stamina in soldiers and Olympic athletes, Romanians and Bulgarians lauded its supposed vampire-repellent powers, and in the Middle Ages no sane person would have a home undecorated with strings of garlic to ward off the Plague.

Did you know?

Due to its pungent smell, garlic was classed as 'unfit for ladies' in 17th century England. Those who wished to court an English lady were also instructed to avoid it, and it was considered to be unacceptable coarse and 'lower class'. How times have changed!

THE STINKING ROSE

Garlic has been known as "the stinking rose" since ancient Roman times, although no one is quite sure where the "rose" part comes from. One thing is for sure: it certainly has a characteristic smell! In fact, it is the very chemical compounds responsible for this smell that are also responsible for a great deal of garlic's most miraculous medicinal powers. Garlic contains over 100 sulphur compounds, the most important of which is probably alliin. Upon crushing or chewing, alliin becomes allicin, the primary compound involved in both the smell and medicinal properties. Allicin has a limited life span and is broken down after a relatively short period of time. Some of the medicinal properties remain, and some new compounds are created. For this reason, the best way to take your garlic is as fresh as possible: crush it and add to salad dressing or sprinkle over food. It is said that the fresher the garlic, the less your breath will smell - the more processed it is (e.g. In ready-made meals), the more you will exude the aroma of the 'stinking rose'! On the bright side, though, eating parsley contains high amounts of chlorophyll, which absorbs odours and is therefore used to combat bad breath.

NATURE'S ANTIBIOTIC

Garlic has a powerful effect on the immune system, and is antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal, and is considered to be a potent natural antibiotic. As such, it has great application in treating respiratory tract infections like colds, sinusitis, flu and bronchitis, as well as digestive infections and chronic candidiasis. It even helps to clear the body off intestinal parasites (e.g. Worms). When eaten raw, it helps clear nasal congestion, and, although not for the faint of heart, slowly chewing a raw garlic clove is a traditional (and effective) treatment of sore throats. It can be taken alongside conventional antibiotics to support their action, as a replacement in less severe infections, as a preventative. Garlic also has appreciable antioxidant effect, and thus benefits overall health, particularly if used on a daily basis.

CIRCULATORY REMEDY

As a mild anticoagulant, (colloquially referred to as a "blood thinner"), garlic could help to prevent circulatory problems and strokes. Garlic reduces the likelihood of blood platelets to stick to artery walls (a key process involved in causing heart attacks) and dissolves clot-forming proteins, thus reducing the chances of a heart attack. In addition, garlic lowers cholesterol levels, possibly through an effect on its metabolism in the liver. It has a gentle dilating effect on the blood vessels which, combined with its anticoagulant properties, can cause a slight lowering of high blood pressure. Garlic reduces blood sugar levels, making it an excellent addition to the diabetic diet - although all of us can benefit from its powerful effect on our health.

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Safety

Taking excessive amounts of garlic could cause nausea or gastric irritation, so stick to the package instructions. The safety of taking garlic as a medicine during pregnancy or breast feeding has not been established (although anecdotal evidence shows that it is safe) so it is best to consult a qualified herbal practitioner before use.

