



**Materia
Medica**
of Western Herbs

CAROLE FISHER

MATERIA MEDICA OF WESTERN HERBS

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Carole Fisher

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	x	ARALIACEAE	30
INTRODUCTION	xi	<i>Eleutherococcus senticosus</i> [Also known as <i>Acanthopanax senticosus</i>]	30
GENERAL NOTES	xiii	<i>Panax ginseng</i>	33
ALPHABETICAL LIST OF BOTANICAL NAMES	1	ARECACEAE	40
ALPHABETICAL LIST OF COMMON NAMES	4	<i>Serenoa serrulata</i>	40
APIACEAE [Formerly Known as Umbelliferae]	9	ASCLEPIADACEAE	44
<i>Angelica archangelica</i>	10	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	44
<i>Apium graveolens</i>	12	ASTERACEAE [Formerly Known as Compositae]	46
<i>Carum carvi</i>	13	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	48
<i>Centella asiatica</i>	15	<i>Arctium lappa</i>	51
<i>Foeniculum vulgare var. dulce</i>	18	<i>Arnica montana</i>	53
<i>Lomatium dissectum</i>	20	<i>Artemisia absinthium</i>	55
<i>Pimpinella anisum</i>	21	<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	57
APOCYNACEAE	24	<i>Calendula officinalis</i>	59
<i>Vinca major</i>	24	<i>Cichorium intybus</i>	63
<i>Vinca minor</i>	25	<i>Cynara scolymus</i>	65
ARACEAE	27	<i>Echinacea angustifolia</i>	67
<i>Acorus calamus</i>	27	<i>Echinacea pallida</i>	68
		<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>	69
		<i>Eupatorium cannabinum</i>	73
		<i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i>	74

<i>Eupatorium purpureum</i>	75	CARYOPHYLLACEAE	137
<i>Grindelia camporum</i>		<i>Stellaria media</i>	137
[Syn. <i>G. robusta</i> var. <i>rigida</i>]	76		
<i>Inula helenium</i>	78	CLUSIACEAE	139
<i>Matricaria recutita</i> [Formerly <i>M. chumomilla</i>]	80	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	139
<i>Silybum marianum</i>	84		
<i>Solidago virgaurea</i> and <i>S. canadensis</i>	87	CUPRESSACEAE	147
<i>Tanacetum parthenium</i>		<i>Juniperus communis</i>	147
[Formerly <i>Chrysanthemum parthenium</i>]	90	<i>Thuja occidentalis</i>	149
<i>Tanacetum vulgare</i>	93		
<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>	95	DIOSCOREACEAE	152
<i>Tussilago farfara</i>	97	<i>Dioscorea villosa</i>	152
BERBERIDACEAE	100	DROSERACEAE	155
<i>Berberis vulgaris</i>	100	<i>Drosera rotundifolia</i>	155
<i>Mahonia aquifolium</i>			
[Formerly <i>Berberis aquifolium</i>]	102	EPHEDRACEAE	157
<i>Caulophyllum thalictroides</i>	104	<i>Ephedra sinica</i> [Restricted Herb]	157
BETULACEAE	106	EQUISETACEAE	159
<i>Betula alba</i> & <i>Betula pendula</i>	106	<i>Equisetum arvense</i>	159
		<i>Equisetum hymale</i>	159
BIGNONIACEAE	109	ERICACEAE	162
<i>Tabebuia avellanedae</i>	109	<i>Arctostaphylos uva-ursi</i>	162
		<i>Gaultheria procumbens</i>	165
BORAGINACEAE	112	<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>	166
<i>Borago officinalis</i>	112		
<i>Symphytum</i> spp. [<i>Symphytum officinale</i> , <i>S. asperum</i> and <i>S. x uplandicum</i>]	114	EUPHORBIACEAE	171
		<i>Chamaesyce hirta</i>	
		[Formerly <i>Euphorbia pilulifera</i>]	171
BRASSICACEAE [Formerly Known as Cruciferae]	118	FABACEAE	173
<i>Armoracia rusticana</i>	118	<i>Baptisia tinctoria</i>	174
<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>	121	<i>Cassia acutifolia</i> and <i>Cassia angustifolia</i> [Formerly listed as <i>Cassia senna</i>]	175
		<i>Cytisus scoparius</i>	
BURSERACEAE	123	[Formerly <i>Sarothamnus scoparius</i>]	178
<i>Commiphora molmol</i>	123	<i>Galega officinalis</i>	179
		<i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i>	181
CANNABACEAE	126	<i>Melilotus officinalis</i>	188
<i>Humulus lupulus</i>	126	<i>Piscidia piscipula</i> [Formerly <i>P. erythrina</i>]	189
		<i>Trifolium pratense</i>	190
CAPRIFOLIACEAE	131	<i>Trigonella foenum-graecum</i>	193
<i>Sambucus nigra</i>	131		
<i>Viburnum opulus</i>	134		
<i>Viburnum prunifolium</i>	135		

FAGACEAE	197	<i>Stachys officinalis</i> [Formerly <i>Stachys betonica</i>]	257
<i>Quercus robur</i>	197	<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>	259
FUMARIACEAE	200	LAURACEAE	262
<i>Fumaria officinalis</i>	200	<i>Cinnamomum zeylanicum</i>	
		[Synonym <i>Cinnamomum verum</i>]	262
GENTIANACEAE	202	LILIACEAE	265
<i>Gentiana lutea</i>	202	<i>Aletris farinosa</i>	265
GERANIACEAE	205	<i>Allium sativum</i>	266
<i>Geranium maculatum</i>	205	<i>Aloe barbadensis</i> [Formerly <i>Aloe vera</i>]	274
		<i>Chamaelirium luteum</i>	279
GINKGOACEAE	207	<i>Convallaria majalis</i> [Restricted Herb]	280
<i>Ginkgo biloba</i>	207	<i>Smilax ornata</i> and spp.	281
		<i>Trillium erectum</i>	282
HAMAMELIDACEAE	215	<i>Urginea maritima</i>	283
<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>	215	LINACEAE	285
HIPPOCASTANACEAE	218	<i>Linum usitatissimum</i>	285
<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i>	218	LOBELIACEAE	289
IRIDACEAE	222	<i>Lobelia inflata</i> [Restricted Herb]	289
<i>Iris versicolor</i>	222	LOGANIACEAE	291
JUGLANDACEAE	224	<i>Gelsemium sempervirens</i> [Restricted Herb]	291
<i>Juglans cinerea</i>	224	LORANTHACEAE	293
<i>Juglans nigra</i>	226	<i>Viscum album</i>	293
<i>Juglans regia</i>	227	MALVACEAE	296
LAMIACEAE [Formerly Known as Labiatae]	229	<i>Althaea officinalis</i>	296
<i>Ballota nigra</i>	231	MENYANTHACEAE	299
<i>Glechoma hederacea</i>		<i>Menyanthes trifoliata</i>	299
[Formerly <i>Nepeta hederacea</i>]	231	MONIMIACEAE	301
<i>Hyssopus officinalis</i>	233	<i>Peumus boldo</i>	301
<i>Lamium album</i>	234	MYRICACEAE	303
<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i> subsp. <i>angustifolia</i>	235	<i>Myrica cerifera</i>	303
<i>Leonurus cardiaca</i>	238	NYMPHACEAE	305
<i>Lycopus europaeus</i>	239	<i>Nymphaea odorata</i>	305
<i>Marrubium vulgare</i>	241	OLEACEAE	307
<i>Melissa officinalis</i>	242	<i>Chionanthus virginicus</i>	307
<i>Mentha x piperita</i> var. <i>piperita</i>	245	<i>Olea europaea</i>	308
<i>Nepeta cataria</i>	248		
<i>Rosmarinus officinalis</i>	250		
<i>Salvia officinalis</i>	253		
<i>Scutellaria lateriflora</i>	256		

PAPAVERACEAE	311	ROSACEAE	370
<i>Chelidonium majus</i>	311	<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>	370
<i>Eschscholzia californica</i>	314	<i>Alchemilla vulgaris</i>	372
<i>Sanguinaria canadensis</i>	315	<i>Crataegus laevigata</i> and <i>Crataegus monogyna</i> [<i>C. laevigata</i> formerly known as <i>C. oxyocantha</i>]	373
PASSIFLORACEAE	318	<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>	377
<i>Passiflora incarnata</i>	318	<i>Prunus serotina</i>	379
PEDALIACEAE	321	<i>Rubus idaeus</i>	380
<i>Harpagophytum procumbens</i>	321	RUBIACEAE	383
PHAEOPHYCEAE	324	<i>Cephaelis ipecacuanha</i>	383
<i>Fucus vesiculosus</i>	324	<i>Cinchona</i> spp. [Restricted Herb]	385
PHYTOLACCACEAE	327	<i>Galium aparine</i>	386
<i>Phytolacca americana</i> [Formerly known as <i>Phytolacca decandra</i>]	327	<i>Mitchella repens</i>	387
PIPERACEAE	330	RUTACEAE	389
<i>Piper methysticum</i>	330	<i>Agathosma betulina</i> [Formerly <i>Barosma betulina</i>]	389
PLANTAGINACEAE	335	<i>Ruta graveolens</i>	390
<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	335	<i>Zanthoxylum americanum</i> <i>Z. clava-herculis</i>	393
<i>Plantago major</i>	337	SALICACEAE	396
<i>Plantago psyllium</i>	339	<i>Populus</i> spp.	396
POACEAE [Formerly Known as Graminae]	344	<i>Populus alba</i>	396
<i>Avena sativa</i>	345	<i>Populus x gileadensis</i>	398
<i>Elytrigia repens</i> [Formerly known as <i>Agropyrum repens</i> ; <i>Agropyron</i> <i>repens</i> ; <i>Triticum repens</i>]	347	<i>Salix</i> spp.	399
<i>Zea mays</i>	349	<i>Salix alba</i>	400
POLYGONACEAE	351	SCROPHULARIACEAE	403
<i>Rheum officinale</i>	351	<i>Digitalis</i> spp. [No longer used]	403
<i>Rheum palmatum</i>	355	<i>Euphrasia rostkoviana</i> [Formerly <i>E. officinalis</i>]	405
<i>Rumex crispus</i>	355	<i>Scrophularia nodosa</i>	406
RANUNCULACEAE	357	<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>	408
<i>Anemone pulsatilla</i>	357	<i>Veronicastrum virginicum</i> [Formerly <i>Leptandra virginica</i>]	409
<i>Cimicifuga racemosa</i>	359	SOLANACEAE	411
<i>Hydrastis canadensis</i>	363	<i>Atropa belladonna</i> [Restricted Herb]	411
<i>Ranunculus ficaria</i>	365	<i>Capsicum annuum</i>	413
RHAMNACEAE	367	<i>Datura stramonium</i> [Restricted Herb]	418
<i>Rhamnus purshiana</i>	367	<i>Hyoscyamus niger</i> [Restricted Herb]	419
		TILIACEAE	421
		<i>Tilia</i> spp. [<i>Tilia x europaea</i> , <i>T. platyphyllos</i> and <i>T. cordata</i>]	421

TURNERACEAE	424	APPENDIX I—DEFINITIONS	458
<i>Turnera diffusa</i> [Formerly known as <i>Turnera</i> <i>aphrodisiaca</i>]	424	APPENDIX II—ABBREVIATIONS USED	462
ULMACEAE	426	APPENDIX III—GLOSSARY OF CONSTITUENTS	464
<i>Ulmus rubra</i> [Formerly <i>U. fulva</i>]	426		
URTICACEAE	429	APPENDIX IIIA GLOSSARY OF BOTANICAL TERMS	469
<i>Parietaria diffusa</i> [Also known as <i>P. officinalis</i>]	429		
<i>Urtica dioica</i>	430	APPENDIX IV CONTRAINDICATIONS TABLE	473
VALERIANACEAE	435	APPENDIX V INTERACTIONS	478
<i>Valeriana officinalis</i>	435		
VERBENACEAE	441	APPENDIX VI SUBSTRATE AND INTERACTION TABLE FOR CYTOCHROME P450	480
<i>Verbena officinalis</i>	441		
<i>Vitex agnus-castus</i>	443		
VIOLACEAE	447	REFERENCES	483
<i>Viola odorata</i>	447		
<i>Viola tricolor</i>	448	PRIMARY REFERENCES	560
ZINGIBERACEAE	451	THERAPEUTIC INDEX	561
<i>Zingiber officinale</i>	451		

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INTRODUCTION

Herbal medicine is the traditional medicine of all cultures and still accounts for three quarters of the remedies used throughout the world today. Although the principles and practice of herbal medicine had been largely dismissed in the west in the last several centuries, studies are increasingly supporting their age-old uses as well as discovering new properties and applications for them. The recent interest in herbs and their constituents is the result of awareness of iatrogenic diseases; side effects of allopathic medicine; the resistance that has developed to over-used antimicrobials; and the search for new and better medicines.

This book is a series of monographs of some of the most commonly used herbs in western herbal medicine. They have been arranged in a format similar to Dioscorides' original text, *De Materia Medica* written about 2000 years ago, but in a modern framework that also presents a summary of the knowledge that has accumulated in recent years for the herbs and/or their constituents. Each herb is presented with:-

- Plant name and picture
- Parts used
- Actions

- Pharmacy
- Interaction with drugs
- Botanical description
- Active constituents
- Scientific information
- Precaution and/or Safety
- Historical uses
- Habitat and geographical location
- Nutritional constituents
- Medicinal uses
- Contraindications

Unfortunately not all monographs contain information in all these areas for whilst a great deal is known about a few herbs, like *Panax ginseng* and *Hypericum perforatum*, for others virtually no research exists or what there is may be many decades old and based on using scientific tools that lack today's level of reliability.

Also included in this text is information on scheduled or restricted herbs. These have been included for information only as many countries do not allow their general use and in some cases do not allow herbalists to use them.

Scientific information (both positive and negative) from reputable journals and texts has been

compiled, without personal evaluation, with the aim of providing an understanding of the scope of activity and mechanisms, as far as they are known, for each herb. Scientific methods used and conclusions drawn from this data should be assessed bearing in mind that the goals of modern science are not necessarily in harmony with the tenets of herbal medicine and the hypotheses being tested may be at odds with the herbs' traditional use. Moreover the aim of phytotherapy is not to simply treat symptoms or conditions, by suppressing biochemical reactions, and herbalists should not rely solely on this science to guide their application of these unique and complex

healing agents. Their actions and effectiveness have been gleaned and refined over many thousands of years of practical use which is one of the soundest ways to evaluate their medicinal value for human health. At the same time science can provide us with important scientific information as well as ensure our method of practice is safe as well as appropriate.

Information on the botany, growing and harvesting of herbs has been provided by Gilian Painter so that those who are keen gardeners can plant and work directly with fresh herbs and the various preparations that can be manufactured from them.