

Preface

The concept of “food is medicine” can be dated back to 2,000 years ago in the earliest traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) literature “Huang Di Nei Jing” (“黄帝内经”, or “Emperor’s Inner Canon,” 475 BCE–220 CE), where it emphasized the importance of maintenance or preservation of wellness and health and the prevention of illness and diseases, with the old but still valid notion “the best doctor prevents, not treats illness.” As such, maintaining system balance with the use of food, herbal medicine, and other complementary approaches in an integrated manner is the essence of TCM for disease prevention and treatment.

Over thousands of years, food materials have been continuously studied for their health benefits, while a wide range of TCM herbs have also been investigated and incorporated into the daily diet for maintaining general wellness or prevention of certain diseases in China. In the West, the convergence of food and medicine driven by market force has led to increasing demand for dietary supplements, natural health products, nutraceuticals, or functional foods. This trend has also stimulated interest in the West to look at many natural materials that could be used as sources for developing new, effective, and safe ingredients to capture the rapidly expanding opportunity in the global market place.

The book idea came out a few years ago when the three of us, working in China, Canada, and the United States at that time, were all involved in studying or reviewing the bioactive components of dietary herbs. We realized that, although there is a large and rapidly growing body of scientific information in the literature for various Chinese herbs, it is somewhat scattered and not specific toward dietary applications. The book *Dietary Chinese Herbs* is our first attempt to bring together selected TCM herbs and highlight the plant source, traditional use, main chemical components, biological and pharmacological activities, and clinical and dietary uses. It is not meant to cover all the available information, but rather to introduce these selected herbs with some of the research findings and relevant information on TCM and dietary uses in China. We hope it can be a useful reference for researchers and students in academia, R&D, and business managers in dietary supplement, natural health products, and the functional food industry.

The contents are arranged by starting with a brief chronological review of Chinese literatures on dietary herbs, overview of food and nutraceutical applications, and followed by chapters dedicated to each selected dietary herb. For each dietary herb or group of similar herbs, the plant source, processing method, TCM, and dietary uses will be introduced, and then followed by up-to-date literature reviews of some key chemical, pharmacological, and clinical studies.

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