

Schisandra

Schisandra chinensis



Schisandra (*Schisandra chinensis*) is a plant whose deep red berries have long been used in [traditional Chinese medicine](#). Schisandra is a deciduous climbing vine native to China and Russia that thrives in almost all types of soils.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), schisandra is considered an "adaptogen," meaning a plant or herb that balances the body's functions and maintains homeostasis.

The berry itself is often called "five-flavor berry" because it possesses all five of the basic flavors of Chinese herbal medicine: salty, sweet, sour, spicy, and bitter. Having these flavors means that it can benefit all five yin organs: the liver, lungs, heart, kidneys, and spleen.

Schisandra berries are referred to as wu wei zi in traditional Chinese medicine and omicha in Korea. In the West, the plant is better known as magnolia vine, even though it is not closely related to true magnolias.

What Is Schisandra Used For?

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, schisandra is revered for its anti-aging properties and is used to promote physical, emotional, and even sexual stamina. The berries or seeds may be used to treat cough, asthma, indigestion, diarrhea, flu, insomnia, skin allergy, heart palpitations, insulin resistance, and premenstrual syndrome, among other conditions.

Schisandra has been used as herbal therapy for centuries in Eastern cultures. However, the health benefits have yet to be extensively studied from a Western clinical perspective. Here is what some of the current research says:



Asthma

A number of recent studies have suggested that schisandra extracts may play a beneficial role in treating certain respiratory disorders, including [asthma](#).

A [2014 study](#) from Korea reported that schisandra berries exert anti-asthma properties by inhibiting the [immunoglobulins](#) (antibodies) that incite the allergy while tempering the [hyperresponsiveness](#) that causes airways to spasm and close.

The study supported earlier research in which schisandra was shown to reduce coughing and lung inflammation in guinea pigs exposed to cigarette smoke.

High Blood Pressure

In Korean medicine, schisandra is sometimes used to treat cardiovascular symptoms associated with menopause.

In a 2009 study conducted at Pusan National University, researchers found that various oral schisandra extracts were able to relax cardiac blood vessels in test rats, improving circulation and lowering blood pressure.



Liver Injury

Schisandra contains compounds that alleviate oxidative stress on the liver and improve liver function. Much of this is attributed to flavonoids in schisandra—particularly quercetin and hesperetin—that function as antioxidants, ridding the body of [free radicals](#) that cause long-term cell damage. Recent research supported these claims.

According to the [2010 study](#) from China, the flavonoids in schisandra were able to significantly reduce liver inflammation in

rats with severe liver damage (as measured by the enzymes [ALT](#) and [AST](#)).

Other studies have shown that schisandra lowers another type of liver enzyme, known as [SGPT](#), which is a marker of liver damage.

On top of all this, the suppression of nitric oxide inhibits an enzyme known as [cyclooxygenase 2](#) (COX-2). This is the same enzyme that drugs like [Celebrex](#) (celecoxib) target to relieve pain and inflammation, benefiting not only the liver but the entire body.



Fatigue

One of the central benefits of schisandra, according to TCM healthcare providers, is its ability to increase endurance and mental performance. Recent research suggests that the claims may have some basis in science.

A [2009 review of studies](#) from Sweden reported that schisandra is able to stimulate the [adrenal gland](#) and the production of hormones

like epinephrine, increasing heart rate, muscle strength, blood pressure, and sugar metabolism.

These physiological changes translate to increased mental alertness, energy, stamina, and feelings of well-being. This, in turn, can enhance libido (sex drive) simply by the fact that you feel stronger and are more energized.

A number of other herbs have been found to possess similar properties, including rhodiola, [ginseng](#), and ashwagandha.

Possible Side Effects

Schisandra berries are safe to consume and have an unusual flavor reminiscent of a red currant crossed with a slightly salty goji berry. The seeds can also be swallowed and are believed to aid in digestion. In some people, schisandra has been known to cause heartburn, upset stomach, decreased appetite, and stomach pain. Itching and skin rashes are uncommon but can occur.

You should not use schisandra if you have uncontrolled [gastroesophageal reflux disease](#) (GERD) as it may trigger reflux symptoms. Pregnant women, nursing women, and children should also avoid schisandra given the lack of research into their long-term safety.

Alternative medicines should never be used as a substitute for standard care. Self-treating a medical condition and delaying the standard course of treatment may have serious consequences.

Drug Interactions

Schisandra may interact with drugs that are broken down by the liver. Because schisandra is also metabolized by the liver, it can alter drug concentrations in the body. In some cases, the concentrations may increase (increasing the risk of side effects) and, in others, drop (decreasing the effectiveness of the drug).

Here are just some of the drugs that may interact with schisandra:

- Antibiotics like Biaxin (clarithromycin)
- Diabetes medications like Glucotrol (glipizide)
- Diuretics ("water pills") like Coumadin (warfarin)
- Estrogen-based contraceptives
- Immune suppressive drugs like Sandimmune (cyclosporine)

- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) like Advil (ibuprofen), Celebrex (celecoxib), and Voltaren (diclofenac)
- Statin drugs like Mevacor (lovastatin) and Lescol (fluvastatin)

While most interactions are relatively mild, others may be severe enough to require a dose adjustment. To avoid interactions, tell your healthcare provider about any supplement, herb, or alternative remedy you may be taking.

Dosage and Preparation

In the United States, schisandra is most often found in capsule, tablet, extract, or powder formulations. The dried berries can be purchased online and eaten as you would dried goji berries. Schisandra powder, berries, and seeds can all be used to make medicinal tonics and teas. Fresh berries are not readily available.

There are no universal guidelines directing the appropriate use of schisandra remedies. As a rule of thumb, never exceed the dose recommended by the product manufacturer. Most commercial extracts can be safely consumed at doses of between 500 and 2,000 milligrams daily. Schisandra supplements are generally prescribed at a daily dose of 500 to 1,000 milligrams.

What to Look For

Dietary supplements like schisandra are not tested for safety in the United States. Instead, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) provides supplements manufacturers with guidelines and standards that most adhere to. Others don't.

To ensure quality and safety, choose supplements that have been tested by an independent certifying body like the U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP) or ConsumerLab. For added safety, only buy dried berries that have been certified organic.