

# TCM: Forsythia

In TCM, heat is a pathogenic factor in many diseases found in tropical regions. Forsythia, cool in nature, is used to address heat disorders.

The herb is a deciduous shrub which produces yellow flowers from March to May followed by green fruits in summer. Its dried fruits, which are used in Chinese medicine, have a bitter taste. They are collected in autumn and winter when ripe, and are sun-dried before use.

Native to China, forsythia is found in many provinces throughout the mainland. It is used to treat upper respiratory infections, influenza, early stage epidemic febrile diseases and bacterial infections.

Forsythia has been used for more than a thousand years, its benefits first recorded in the *Shennong Bencaojing* (Classic Encyclopedia of Herbal Medicine) in the second century for treatment of feverish conditions, lumps, nodules and skin sores. Nowadays, the herb is often used with other heat-clearing or toxin-eliminating herbs such as honeysuckle, peppermint and schizonepeta, for lowering temperatures and treating the early stages of infectious diseases. Honeysuckle and forsythia powder is possibly the most popular remedy in modern Chinese herbal medicine.

In TCM, forsythia can be combined with other herbs to treat heat-related ailments. For example, in cases of heart fire that irritate the throat and lead to soreness and swelling forsythia is used with isatis root and Vietnamese sophora root. Skin rashes due to overheated blood can be treated with forsythia, fresh rehmannia root and red peony root. Jaundice is believed to be due to damp heat in the liver, which can be relieved by forsythia, wormwood herb and bupleurum root.

Forsythia also acts on blood and *qi*

circulation. It is an essential herb for treating skin sores and abscesses caused by poor blood and *qi* supply, and can be used alongside herbs such as great burdock fruit, dandelion and wide chrysanthemum. Purpura is a disorder that causes bleeding under the skin, and forsythia is one of the effective ingredients in its treatment. For the growth of lymph lumps in the neck and groin regions, forsythia is often combined with selfheal fruit spike, figwort root and oyster shell.

Clinical and animal research have shown that forsythia can treat clinical indicators associated with inflammatory diseases. An animal study investigating the anti-inflammatory effect of forsythia concluded that it may be helpful for inhibiting secretion of the inflammation mediators TNF-alpha and histamine. The injection of forsythia in guinea pigs has shown the herb can also reduce inflammation by reducing the permeability of the blood vessels.

In modern Chinese medicine, it is prescribed when a broad range of antibiotic effects is desired. In addition, it seems to have an anti-microbial, anti-emetic and anti-parasitic effect.

Forsythia fruit is high in oleanolic acid, triterpenes, phenols, sterols and flavonoids. It is contraindicated for individuals with a weak digestive system although there are no reports of harmful side effects from using the fruit. The extracts are used in cosmetic products, including anti-dandruff shampoos, acne cream and athlete's foot products for their anti-microbial and traditional detoxifying properties.

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**Rose Tse and Jenny Eagleton are with Integrated Chinese Medicine Holdings ([icm.com.hk](http://icm.com.hk)). Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner.**