



WILD ROSE
College of Herbal Medicine

Ginkgo

Ginkgo biloba

Description & Harvesting:

Ginkgo grows to become a medium to large deciduous tree, with narrow spreading branches and a pyramidal shape when young, but after a hundred years or so becomes more widely branched with a large or upright oval crown. The bark is light brown to brownish-gray, and becomes deeply furrowed with age. The characteristic bi-lobed leaves have forked veins that radiate outward from the stem. Ginkgo is dioecious, and like the conifers, wind is required to carry the pollen to female trees. The fruit is a large, woody stone, enclosed in a green inedible flesh, which has a very strong vomit-like smell. The nuts, after being cleaned, are edible in small quantities (USE CAUTION, see contraindications and toxicity below).

History & Folklore: Ginkgo is one of the oldest living tree species in the world, found in the fossil record more than 200 million years ago, first appearing in the Carboniferous period. During the Jurassic period, Ginkgo was widespread throughout Asia, Europe and North America, and even survived the Cretaceous period that marked the end of the dinosaurs. It appears that Ginkgo disappeared from North America about 7 million years ago, in Europe by about 2.5 - 3 million years ago, and was next to non-existent in most of Asia. Most European botanists had begun to think that Ginkgo was extinct, but in 1691 the German botanist Engelbert Kaempfer discovered it growing in the courtyards of Buddhist temples in Japan. Buddhist monks had cultivated these specimens since the 12th century, taken from older specimens found in China.



Other names: Yin xing, ginkgo nut, living fossil

Family:
Ginkgoaceae

Parts Used: Dried leaf; fresh and dried fruit (nuts)

Taste & Energetics:
Sweet, bitter, astringent, neutral, and slightly toxic

Actions: Antioxidant, circulatory stimulant, cerebrovascular stimulant, geriatric restorative; the nuts are used in China as an expectorant and antitussive

This is an excerpt of our full plant monograph which is available to members of the Herbal Village