

REVISED AND UPDATED 4TH EDITION

THE NEW HEALING HERBS

THE **ESSENTIAL GUIDE** TO MORE THAN 130
OF NATURE'S MOST POTENT **HERBAL REMEDIES**



Saffron
(*Crocus sativus*)

MORE THAN
**ONE
MILLION**
COPIES SOLD

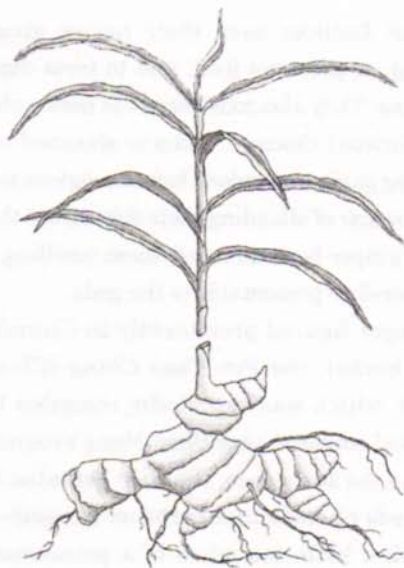
MICHAEL CASTLEMAN

Once established, the plant requires little care other than abundant water and shelter from wind and excessive sun. But establishing gentian can be a problem. The seeds need frost to germinate, and even with frost, germination may take a year, if it occurs at all. Most authorities recommend using root cuttings instead.

Gentian prefers rich, loamy, slightly acidic soil. An annual dressing of peat moss helps. Harvest the roots in late summer. Desirable roots are dark reddish brown, tough, and flexible, with a strong, unpleasant odor. They should taste rather sweet initially, then very bitter. Dry the roots, then powder them.

GINGER

Put a Stop to Motion Sickness and Morning Sickness



Family: Zingiberaceae; other members include turmeric and cardamom

Genus and species: *Zingiber officinale*

Also known as: Jamaican, African, and Cochin (Asian) ginger

Parts used: Rhizomes (commonly called roots)

An old Indian proverb says, "Every good quality is contained in ginger." That's not much of an exaggeration.

Fleshy and aromatic, ginger has played a role in cooking and healing since the dawn of history. Modern science has supported some of its traditional medicinal uses, most notably its remarkable ability to prevent the nausea of motion sickness and morning sickness.

Researchers have discovered that the herb has other therapeutic benefits as well.

Healing History

Ancient Indians used their native ginger in cooking, to preserve food, and to treat digestive problems. They also considered the herb a physical and spiritual cleanser. Indians shunned strong-smelling garlic and onions before religious celebrations for fear of offending their deities, but they ate lots of ginger because it left them smelling sweet and therefore presentable to the gods.

Ginger figured prominently in China's first great herbal, the *Pen Tsao Ching* (*Classic of Herbs*), which was reportedly compiled by the mythical emperor-sage Shen Nung around 3000 B.C. As the story goes, the wise herbalist tested hundreds of medicinal herbs on himself—until he took a little too much of a poisonous herb and died.

Shen Nung recommended ginger for colds, fever, chills, tetanus, and leprosy. The *Pen Tsao Ching* also echoed Indian practice, saying that fresh ginger “eliminates body odor and puts a person in touch with the spiritual [realm].”

Over time, Chinese women began taking ginger for menstrual discomforts. Then they noticed that the herb relieved the nausea of morning sickness. Chinese sailors adopted ginger to prevent seasickness by chewing the root while at sea. Chinese physicians prescribed it to treat arthritis, ulcers, and kidney problems.

The Chinese also consider ginger an antidote to shellfish poisoning. This is why Chinese fish and seafood dishes are often seasoned with the herb.

Ancient Greek traders learned of the Asian practice of using ginger as a nausea-preventing

digestive aid. They brought the herb to Greece, where, after big meals, it was wrapped in sweetened bread and eaten as a stomach-settling dessert. Eventually, the Greeks began baking the herb into the sweet bread, and the herbal seasickness remedy evolved into the world's first cookie, gingerbread.

The Romans also used ginger as a digestive aid. After the fall of Rome, however, the herb became scarce in Europe and quite costly.

Once renewed Asian trade made ginger more available, European demand proved almost insatiable. The ancient Greeks' modest gingerbread cakes evolved into sugary gingerbread men and elaborate confections like the witch's gingerbread house in *Hansel and Gretel*.

In England and her American colonies, ginger was incorporated into a stomach-soothing drink called ginger beer, the forerunner of today's ginger ale. Ginger ale is still a popular home remedy for diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting.

America's 19th-century Eclectic physicians, forerunners of today's naturopaths, prescribed ginger powder, tea, wine, and beer for infant diarrhea, indigestion, nausea, dysentery, flatulence, fever, headache, toothache, and “female hysteria” (menstrual complaints).

Contemporary herbalists recommend ginger for colds, flu, and motion sickness and as a digestive aid.

Therapeutic Uses

Break out the gingerbread and ginger ale. Scientific research has lent support to some of ginger's traditional uses—and has revealed even more benefits.

MOTION SICKNESS AND MORNING SICKNESS. The ancient Chinese were right.

Ginger does indeed prevent the nausea associated with seasickness and other types of motion sickness, as well as the morning sickness of pregnancy.

Ginger's anti-nausea action first received scientific validation in 1982 in a study conducted by researchers at Brigham Young University and published in the British medical journal *Lancet*. The researchers gave 36 volunteers with a history of motion sickness either 100 milligrams of the popular anti-motion sickness drug dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) or 940 milligrams of ginger powder. A short time later, the participants were seated in a computerized rocking chair programmed to move in such a way that it would trigger motion sickness. The chair was equipped with a switch that allowed its riders to stop the movement when they began to feel nauseated.

Compared with the people who had taken Dramamine, those who had taken ginger were able to stay in the chair 57 percent longer. Based on their finding, the researchers also recommended ginger capsules, ginger tea, or ginger ale for morning sickness.

Since that study, many others have confirmed ginger's value for the prevention of motion and morning sickness. Here's a small sampling.

- ♥ Swedish Navy researchers gave ginger to 80 naval cadets who were sailing in turbulent seas. Compared with a group that took medically inactive placebos, those who took ginger experienced 72 percent less seasickness.
- ♥ British surgeons gave 60 women about to have gynecological surgery either ginger or the prescription anti-nausea drug metoclopramide (Reglan). Those who received ginger experienced significantly less postsurgical nausea and vomiting.

♥ Danish researchers gave 30 pregnant women, all battling morning sickness, either ginger or placebos for 4 days. Then the women switched treatments for 4 days. While taking ginger, 70 percent of the study participants reported significant relief from nausea. Doctors discourage moms-to-be from taking any drugs, including anti-nausea medications, but ginger is safe to use during pregnancy.

♥ Italian researchers asked all of the passengers boarding a cruise ship if they were prone to seasickness. Sixty reported a history of the condition. The ship's doctor gave these people either a standard dose of Dramamine or ginger (500 milligrams before embarking and 500 milligrams every 4 hours during 2 days of rough seas). Among those taking Dramamine, 50 percent reported "very good" or "excellent" results. Among those taking ginger, the figure rose to 70 percent.

♥ Another group of Italian researchers studied 28 children who took a 2-day class trip that involved travel by car, boat, and airplane. All were given either a standard children's dose of Dramamine or ginger (for those younger than 6, 250 milligrams before departure and every 4 hours thereafter; for those 6 and older, 500 milligrams). A physician rated their motion sickness symptoms. Among those who took Dramamine, 31 percent showed "good" benefits, while 69 percent demonstrated "modest" benefits. Among those who took ginger, 100 percent had "good" results.

Commission E, the expert panel that evaluates herbal medicines for the German counterpart of the FDA, endorses ginger for the

prevention and treatment of motion sickness. In addition, many cancer specialists recommend it for the nausea associated with chemotherapy.

DIGESTIVE PROBLEMS. Ginger is a gastrointestinal antispasmodic. It prevents indigestion and abdominal cramping by soothing the muscles that line the intestines. It also contains some compounds similar to digestive enzymes that break down proteins. Commission E approves ginger to prevent and treat indigestion.

HEART DISEASE AND STROKE. Few people in the ancient world lived long enough—or combined a high-fat diet with a sedentary lifestyle—to develop heart disease or stroke. Today, these conditions account for half of all deaths in the United States.

Ginger may help prevent heart disease and stroke by controlling three key risk factors. The herb helps reduce cholesterol levels, according to a study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. It also helps lower blood pressure, and it prevents the blood clots that trigger heart attacks and most strokes.

ULCERS. Research confirms the ancient Chinese practice of using ginger to treat ulcers. In experiments involving animals that were given drugs known to produce ulcers, pre-treatment with a ginger preparation acted as a preventive.

Ginger does not cure ulcers, nor has it been well researched in humans. But a small pilot study, in which 10 people with ulcers took 6 grams of ginger a day, showed that the herb can help relieve symptoms.

ARTHRITIS. Studies have identified anti-inflammatory substances in ginger, lending support to the herb's traditional use in treating arthritis.

WOMEN'S HEALTH CONCERNS. Anti-

spasmodics soothe not only the digestive tract but also other smooth muscles, such as the uterus. As an antispasmodic, ginger may help ease menstrual cramps.

COLDS AND FLU. Chinese studies show that ginger helps kill influenza virus, and an Indian report found that the herb increases the immune system's ability to fight infection. These findings lend some support to ginger's traditional role in treating colds, flu, and other infectious illnesses.

Intriguing Possibilities

In animal studies, ginger reduces blood sugar levels, suggesting that the herb may help control diabetes.

Other animal studies have shown that ginger promotes the shrinkage of tumors. While these findings don't necessarily apply to humans, ginger may someday find a role in the treatment of cancer. And if you have cancer, there's no harm in using ginger in consultation with your doctor.

Rx Recommendations

Use ginger to taste in cooking to create warm, spicy, aromatic dishes.

For motion sickness, the recommended dose of ginger is 1,000 milligrams approximately 30 minutes before travel. Commercial capsules are usually most convenient, but you'll easily get that amount from a 12-ounce container of ginger ale, provided that it's made with real ginger and not artificial flavor. Check the label to be sure.

You can also drink 2 cups of ginger infusion. To make it, use 2 teaspoons of powdered or fresh grated root per cup of boiling water, steep for 10 minutes, and strain if you wish.

To ease other digestive upsets or to treat colds or flu, make an infusion. To help relieve arthritis or prevent heart disease and stroke, use the herb in cooking or drink ginger ale or ginger tea.

You may give weak ginger preparations to children under age 2 for colic.

The Safety Factor

Ginger's anti-nausea effects may prevent morning sickness, but the herb has a long history as a menstruation promoter. Might it cause miscarriage? One study suggests that its uterine effects depend on the amount used.

In the study published in *Lancet* that was previously mentioned, less than 1 gram of ginger was needed to prevent nausea. To trigger menstruation, Chinese physicians recommend 20 to 28 grams. A strong cup of ginger tea contains about 500 milligrams, and an 8-ounce glass of ginger ale contains approximately 1,000 milligrams. None of these come close to the amount that promotes menstruation.

There have been no reports in the scientific literature of ginger triggering abortion or causing birth defects. Pregnant women with no history of miscarriage should feel free to try modest amounts of ginger tea or ginger ale to treat morning sickness.

Ginger is on the FDA list of herbs generally regarded as safe. For adults, ginger is safe when used in the amounts typically recommended.

You should use medicinal amounts of ginger only in consultation with your physician.

Although ginger generally relieves indigestion, some people who take it to prevent motion

sickness report heartburn. If you experience heartburn or other minor discomfort after taking the herb, reduce the dosage or stop using it altogether. Let your doctor know if you experience any unpleasant effects or if the symptoms for which you're taking the herb do not improve significantly within 2 weeks.

Growing Information

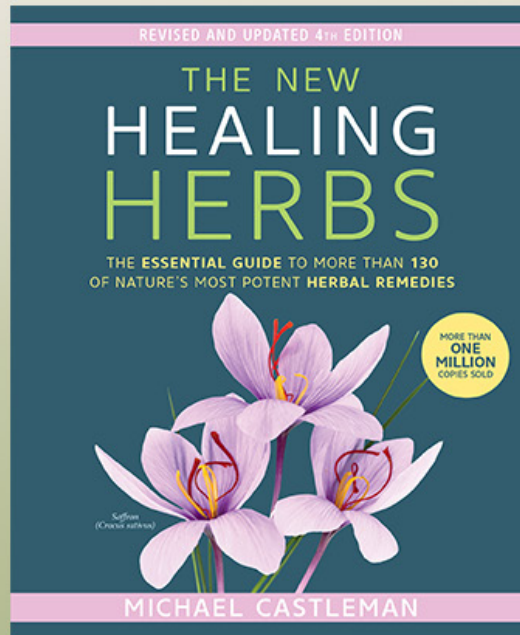
Ginger is a tropical perennial that grows from a tuberous underground stem, or rhizome. Each year, the plant produces a round, 3-foot stem with thin, pointed, lance-shaped, 6-inch leaves and a single, large, yellow and purple flower.

Ginger grows outdoors in Hawaii, Florida, southern California, New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas. It does best when well-watered in partial shade in raised beds deeply cultivated with composted manure and kelp.

Ginger is propagated from young fresh roots, which contain eyes similar to those in potatoes. The ginger root sold in most supermarkets, with tough, tan skin, is neither young nor fresh, so its propagation potential is low. The best place to obtain growable ginger root is at an Asian specialty market, although some nurseries carry it as well. Look for roots with light green skin.

Plant the roots about 3 inches deep and 12 inches apart. After 12 months, uproot the plant, harvest some roots, and replant the rest.

You can also grow ginger indoors in deep pots with a soil mixture of loam, sand, compost, and peat moss. Indoors, it needs warmth, plenty of water, and high humidity. A greenhouse environment is best.



Learn More

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Author's website