



**Himalayan Herbs**

## Herbal Sources of Tibetan Medicines

Protecting the Himalayan varieties used in Tibetan medicines, exploring growing them as crops, and evaluating the healing properties of plants that grow elsewhere.

[overview](#) ● [directory](#) ● [web resources](#) ● [books](#)

◆ [Tibetan Medicine Resources](#) ◆

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◆ [Dharma Haven](#) ◆

### Overview

---

[overview](#) ● [directory](#) ● [web resources](#) ● [books](#)

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Tibetan medicine is celebrated as a source of sustainable and affordable healing preparations that are effective without lasting negative side effects. Our goal is to give people all over the world access to this unique insight into human well being.

Along with the need to provide training for a new generation of physicians and herbal pharmacists, and to translate the Tibetan medical so that students can begin their training without first having to learn to read Classical Tibetan, the main obstacle to wider use of Tibetan medicine is the limited supply of many herbs used in compounding the medications, some of which are already endangered by excessive non-professional harvesting.

His Holiness The Dalai Lama has warned that the health of the billions of people in the world cannot be sustained by medicines made with rare and endangered Himalayan plants. Even now, when Tibetan medicine has hardly begun to be practiced in Western

countries, the herbs needed for making many of the medicines are in short supply. For example, the Men-Tse-Khang pharmacy in Dharamsala, India -- the most respected source of Tibetan medicines -- turns away all requests for medications except those accompanied by a prescription written by one of their own doctors. They will not accommodate even orders from their own graduates, those who have emigrated from India to other countries, explaining that to do so would deplete the supply of medicines needed in their branch clinics in India and Nepal.

Three different approaches to this scarcity of medicines are being explored. The most obvious and the most urgent is to preserve whenever possible the plants and animals currently used in Tibetan medicines, by protecting the ecologies that support those organisms, planting some species to increase the supply, and developing resources like seed banks to insure these species against extinction.

A second strategy is to extend the area where the herbs grow by planting in the wild and by finding ways of cultivating some species, as a way of preserving those that cannot be preserved in the wild, and as a way of increasing supplies.

The third is to evaluate the medicinal qualities of plants in other areas. Tibetan doctors have always used many imported materials in making their medicines, and believe that using substitute materials with similar therapeutic action is entirely appropriate when the ingredients of choice are unavailable. Tibetan physicians can identify plants indigenous to other areas that are suitable for use as substitutes for ingredients in traditional formulas and in developing new preparations.

Herbal medicine systems from other cultures will be useful in identifying promising species. Especially promising are two other systems which have ancient connections with Tibetan medicine and are still practiced: Indian Ayurvedic medicine and Chinese herbal medicine. Many of the herbs used in these systems are already used in Tibetan medicine.

The research needed for effort seems endless. The newsletter of the Chakpori Tibetan Medical Institute in Darjeeling, India, comments on some of the main issues: "To know which plants are vulnerable, endangered, or close to extinction, detailed studies have to be made. Also, the cause of rarity should be investigated (e.g., environmental causes, over exploitation by non-expert gathering, etc.). An

important decision has to be made to replant not only the economically valuable plants but also the plants that are environmentally valuable and supportive of the total environment.

"Replanting sites should have the same characteristics as the original habitat. In traditional Tibetan medical texts, the side of the mountain, altitude, climatic condition, soil composition, etc. are mentioned [as important influences on the properties and potency of the herbs] .... research findings are essential guidelines for replanting the herbs in their natural environment. The size of the replanting area is also crucial because of genetic diversity and the problems of insular ecology. Monocultures, like the usual big plantations, should be avoided: mass plantations of certain species will not have the desired quality or power."

Here on this page we offer links to Web sites relevant to preserving the plant species used in making Tibetan medicines, and increasing the supply of those herbs or finding substitutes, along with books and audio tapes on Tibetan herbs and related topics. Another page, [Medical Research, Tibetan Style](#), gives resources relevant to other aspects of the immense task of preserving Tibetan medicine and making it available to the world.

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[top of page](#)

## Dharma Haven's Tibetan Medicine Pages

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[overview](#) • [directory](#) • [web resources](#) • [books](#)

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- ◆ [Tibetan Medicine Resources](#) ◆
- ◆ [Ancient Healing Wisdom for the Modern World](#) ◆
- ◆ [Medical Research, Tibetan Style](#) ◆
- ◆ [Tibetan Medical Clinics and Pharmacies](#) ◆
- ◆ [Books on Tibetan Medicine](#) ◆

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[top of page](#)

## The Herbs of Traditional Medicine: Web Sites

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[overview](#) ● [directory](#) ● [web resources](#) ● [books](#)

---

### [Men-Tse-Khang Materia Medica Department](#)

[International Trust for Traditional Medicine](#) (ITTM) supports many relevant projects, including their [Experiment on Biodynamic Cultivation of Medicinal Plants](#): "small-scale pilot research cultivation projects to study the various aspects of a sustainable cultivation of medicinal plant species under biodynamic conditions." They publish a periodical on the Web, [AyurVijnana](#), with excellent articles on research and other topics, including articles on "Biodynamic Cultivation of Medicinal Plants:"

[Part I](#) -- [Part II](#)

### [Tara Rokpa: Tibetan Medicines](#)

[The Yuthog Foundation for Tibetan Medicine](#): Promoting the exchange of experiences in use and identification of medicinal plants. Also leading excursions designed for western people.

[The Tibetan Plateau Project](#): to protect and conserve medicinal plants and animals, support the practice of Tibetan medicine and assist local communities in developing income-generating projects using medicinal plants.

[Tanaduk Foundation](#): -- preserving Tibetan medicinal herbs in costal Washington: "Fortunately, over 400 medicinal plant species that are used in Tibetan medicine grow very well on the San Juan Islands."

### [Monasteries growing Himalayan herbs saved from extinction](#)

### [Reviving Ancient Cures: Growing Medicinal Herbs in Israel](#)

[Herbal Medical Systems Links](#) from Medical Herbalism: A Journal for the Clinical Practitioner.

[Tibetan Herbs: Rhodiola and Hippophae](#), by Subhuti Dharmananda, Ph.D., [Institute for Traditional Medicine](#)

[History of Traditional Indian Medicine](#) from [Karolinska Institute](#)

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[Medicinal Plants of Kalimpong, Eastern Himalayas, India:](#) information from ITTM on sources of medicinal plants in Northern India.

[Flora of China Checklist:](#) - from the [Missouri Botanical Gardens botanical database](#).

[Chinese Medicinal Herbs Database](#)

[Ayurvedic Pharmaceuticals: An Overview](#)

[Ayurveda - an important source of medicines](#)

[University of Maryland's American Herbalism Links](#)

[The Apothecary -- Medicinal Herbs:](#) from [Algy's Herb Page](#)

[Herb Alchemy: Bulk Herbs](#)

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[Plants for a Future: Database Search](#)

[The Gatherer:](#) Plant Use Multiple Database Search Engine

[US Agricultural Research Service: Ethnobotany Databases](#)

[Native American Ethnobotany Database](#)

[Southwest School of Botanical Medicine:](#) Images, illustrations, maps, manuals, old texts, etc.

[A Modern Herbal](#)

[Centre for Economic Botany Links:](#) Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

[Herb research Foundation: Links](#)

[Plant Net:](#) horticultural databases on the net.

[Society for Economic Botany:](#) "concerned with basic botanical, phytochemical and ethnological studies of plants known to be useful or those which may have potential uses so far undeveloped."

[Center for International Ethnomedicinal Education and Research](#)

[Ethnobotanical Resource Directory](#)

[WWW Virtual Library of Botany](#)

[Permaculture and Sustainable Agriculture Links](#)

---

[top of page](#)

## Books and Tapes

---

[overview](#) ● [directory](#) ● [web resources](#) ● [books](#)

### AUDIO TAPES

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The First International Congress on Tibetan Medicine, held in Washington, D.C. in November of 1998, included a session titled "Environmental Implication for Health Systems: The Case of Tibet." The following audio tapes from that session, available from [Conference Recording Service](#), may be of interest:

"Environmental Issues of the Tibetan Plateau" -- TMC98-027

"Utilization & Conservation of Medicinal Plants" -- TMC98-028

"Utilization & Conservation of Animal Species" -- TMC98-029

"Environmental Implication for Health Systems: The Case of Tibet" -  
- TMC98-030

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### BOOKS

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*Tibetan Medicinal Plants*, by **T. J. Tsarong**. 120 pp., 95 color photos \$19.95

Available from Wisdom Books

In the Himalaya mountains grow some of the loveliest and most colorful flowers in the world. Many of these wild and exotic plants have been used for centuries as ritual offerings and healing drugs by the lama-physicians of Tibet. These healers, through painstaking trial and observation, have identified these plants and documented their therapeutic action and uses in herbals.

This is the latest book by the famous teacher who has spent his life devoted to the preservation of Tibetan medical wisdom. Here are excellent photos and descriptions of many medicinal plants giving both the Tibetan and Latin names as well as indigenous information about their taste, potency, action, uses and the parts that are to be utilized in medicine.

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[Medical Plants of Himalayas](#), Vol.1, by Gyanendra Pandey; US\$ 33.30

[Materia Medica of Tibetan Medicine](#), by Vaidya Bhagwan Das; US\$ 80.00

[Pharmacopoeia of Tibetan Medicine](#), by Vaidya Bhagwan Das; US\$ 26.67

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[Handbook of Traditional Tibetan Drugs](#), by T.J. Tsarong; Tibetan and English names, composition, use, action, and dosage of 175 popular Tibetan natural drugs.

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[Blue Poppy Press](#): Books on Chinese medicine, including herbal medicine and dietary medicine.

[Indian Books Center](#): Ayurveda, Siddha (a medical system similar to Ayurveda), Herbal, and Alternative Medicines

[Vedams Books](#): Pharmacopoeia of India: Books on Alternate Systems of Medicine: Ayurveda, Tibetan, Unani

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[top of page](#)



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● [Your Comments and Suggestions](#) ●  
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Revised on March 22, 2002

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[top of page](#)