

Radishes

Radishes are yet another branch of the humble yet indispensable cabbage family, along with cauliflowers, brocolli and turnips, but it is only the root that is used medicinally or culinarily. Our word Radish comes from the Latin word "radix", which literally, and unimaginatively means root, but there is also a possibility that it comes from the Sanskrit rudhira which I believe means red. Radishes most probably originated in China however, and made their way across Asia, into Europe via trade routes and the Middle East.

Unsurprisingly, they have a rich history of folk use that dates all the way back to The Egyptians and Greeks. Although there are over a hundred different varieties, there are four main types: the first, and by far the most common in the west today, are Red Globe Radishes, the ones that Peter rabbit liked. The second are called White Icicle Radishes and have a milder flavor, and are long like a white carrot. The third is less common in Australia today but is still found in Europe, the black radish which was well utilized by herbalists, and the final one making an appearance in our shops now is the Japanese Daikon Radish.

All of these varieties have the same pungent flavor to a greater or lesser degree and for home purposes can be used interchangeably. In fact, it is this very pungent taste which defines the action of the radish as a medicine. All pungent herbs such as ginger, garlic and radish have compounds which render them powerful antibacterial and anti infectious agents. Each one has its speciality of course, and for radish it is the digestive tract.

As a home medicine it may be used to oxygenize and clean a toxic gastro intestinal tract, helping to remove parasites and normalize intestinal flora. A course of radish pickles are an excellent idea before and after travelling abroad for this very reason.

In Chinese Medicine the seeds of the Daikon radish are used to Reduce Food Stagnation, phlegm and Distension. In this way it is used to treat indigestion with fullness and belching, acid reflux with a rotten smell, abdominal pain and certain types of diarrhea.

In traditional European Medicine black radishes in particular are used for stimulating the production of bile, treating gallbladder stones and serving as a liver tonic. Radishes have apparently been shown to contain a variety of chemicals that increase the flow of bile, which plays an important role in the digestive process. Culpeper says of radishes that, "It provokes urine and is good for the stone and gravel. The expressed juice of the root, with the addition of a little wine, is an admirable remedy for gravel.

In addition to its cleansing and oxygenating action on the gut, radishes are also universally employed to open the lungs and fight bacterial and viral infections in the respiratory tract. The macrobiotic tradition would assert that for this purpose the Daikon is the best, but could also be substituted by our own milder European White Icicle radish. This is a great one to consume during the winter months in order to boost the defensive chi and ward off the flu for which it has been shown to be effective. The general oxygenating and stimulating action of this not so humble house hold herb will be carried through the blood stream and produce a broad improvement in a wide range of chronic

disorders, from Graves' disease to hypothyroidism. Adding it to winter salads is simple, but it can also be pickled and consumed at leisure.

To obtain these benefits however it is always best to only buy organic!

- The Barefoot Doctor