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Ginkgo

ASK GRANNY EARTH

I've been hearing a lot about Ginkgo for circulation and Alzheimer's. I would like to know more about this herb and what does it mean when the label says "standardized".

Ginkgo biloba is the world's oldest living tree species, whose fossil record dates back more than 200 million years. Once widespread in North America and Europe, Ginkgo was destroyed in many regions during the Ice Age, surviving only in China. It was brought to America in 1784 to the estate of William Hamilton, near Philadelphia, and today Ginkgo is planted throughout the United States both for its ornamental beauty and because of its ability to resist insects and pollution. Ginkgo is also known as the maidenhair tree. Earliest mention of Ginkgo as a medicine is found in the Chinese materia medica, *Pen T'sao Ching (The Classic of Herbs)*, published in 2800 B.C.: Used for respiratory ailments (such as asthma), as well as its benefits for brain function.

Ginkgo contains over 100 components, which by working synergistically, attribute to its healing effects. This synergism was a critical consideration in the creation of the "standardized" extract. There were over 280 laboratory and clinical studies done before a guaranteed balance of these components were established to ensure optimal medical benefits from Ginkgo. In the late 1950's, Dr Willmar Schwabe of Schwabe Gmbh in West Germany, came up with a formula for a standardized concentrated extract of Ginkgo biloba leaves, which contained 24% of flavone glycosides (sugars derived from the chemical of the natural color of the leaf: flavo, is a prefix indicating yellow: Ginkgo leaves turn yellow-gold in the fall), including kaempferol, quercetin, isorhamnetin and proanthocyanidins. The 27 step extraction process requires 50 pounds of dried leaves to yield 1 pound of the standardized extract and takes up to two weeks to complete. (The exact method of this process is beyond my scope of knowledge, but from what I can understand the phytochemical, flavone glycoside, is isolated from the other components in the leaves and then added back into the formula in concentrated amounts.) These compounds contribute to Ginkgo's powerful antioxidant and free radical scavenging properties. Schwabe's formula, which he called, EGB761, is marketed in Europe under the names Rokan, Tanakan and Tebonin. The demand for this extract became so immense that Schwabe's company now owns Ginkgo plantations totaling 5 million trees.

In the last 15 – 20 years Ginkgo has had a rise in popularity due to its documented ability to increase circulation to the brain and to the body's extremities.

Ginkgo protects arteries, veins and capillaries from damage, while regulating their tone and elasticity. It also helps circulation by reducing the stickiness of platelets (a key factor in the formation of arteriosclerosis) and by protecting red blood cells from destruction. What all of this means, is a healthier, more efficient circulatory system, and in turn, a more efficient delivery of oxygen to tissues of the body.

Studies show that by age 70, the blood flow to the brain can be reduced by as much as 20 - 30%, resulting in dementia. Poor circulation to the brain limits the delivery of oxygen and glucose, the brain's primary fuel. Optimal brain function depends on a large and constant supply of glucose and oxygen. Without these important circulation-dependent substances a long list of conditions, including memory loss, decreased concentration, dizziness, vertigo and tinnitus can result.

Ginkgo can play a triple role in the protection of the cells of the body and particularly those of the brain-

1. It increases circulation and the delivery of glucose and oxygen to cells.
2. In the presence of free radicals threatening cellular damage, Ginkgo can protect cells from damage and scavenge free radicals from the system.

3. Ginkgo has the ability to protect the blood-brain barrier, the guard station for the central nervous system (against harmful pathogens).

Due to the extensive research that has been done on Ginkgo, the safety of long-term use is well understood. There have been no reports of adverse reactions when Ginkgo is used at the recommended dosage. Elderly persons with a history of arteriosclerosis and compromised blood flow to the brain should begin with a lower dose of Ginkgo and build up to the recommended dosage over a period of two weeks.

There is much to learn about the Ginkgo tree and its healing powers. I for one am so fond of Ginkgo that a few years ago I began learning how to grow my own. This has been an exciting process, because first of all good seeds are difficult to find, and then the planting is different than that of most kinds of seeds. Ginkgo is a slow growing tree. It loses its leaves in the fall, leaving just a little stick-like trunk in the early years of its growth. But then in the spring, it is so exciting to see those first little buds of leaves, knowing that Ginkgo has survived the winter.

Occasionally, I do sell some of the 2nd year seedlings. Someday I hope to have my own orchard where I can harvest the leaves and also provide Ginkgo trees to EVERYONE!