

HEALTH

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TCM

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Flower power

Japanese honeysuckle (*lonicera japonica*) is a fast growing, woody vine that bears fragrant, two-lipped flowers and is used as a medicinal plant.

Its flowers are known in Chinese as *jin yin hua* or “gold-silver flower”, referring to the silvery yellow blooms in the flower clusters. It has high medicinal value in TCM because of its anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory properties.

It's used to dispel heat and remove toxins and can treat

carbuncles, fever, influenza and ulcers. But its cold, yin nature means it shouldn't be taken by anyone with a weak or “cold” digestive system.

A Chinese legend tells how Japanese honeysuckle (right) came into being. In a small village, there were twin girls called Gold Flower and Silver Flower. One day, Gold Flower fell ill with a high fever and red spots all over her body.

The doctor said she had an incurable contagious disease and warned Silver Flower not to go near her sister. Despite this, Silver Flower vowed to never leave her sister's side. Soon, she also became infected. They died a few days later and were buried together.

In the spring of the next year, all kinds of plants grew

over the graveyard, but nothing grew on the grave of the twin sisters except for one plant with yellow and white blossoms. People were curious about this strange phenomenon, and some even believed the twins had turned into flowers. While the plant was in full bloom, another set of twin girls in the village fell ill with the same disease. Although there was supposedly no cure for the disease, their parents decocted

the plant on the twins' grave for their daughters to drink. The two girls recovered from their illness, and the people named this plant after the twins who died.

Jin yin hua is commonly used to clear heat and eliminate toxins from the interior and the exterior of the body.

A common heat-and-toxin clearing prescription consists of 10-15g *jin yin hua*, 10g *lian qiao* (*Fructus Forsythiae*) and 10g *ban lan gen* (*Radix Isatidis*).

However, many people misunderstand what is meant by a “heat condition” and so misuse and overdose on this herb. Earlier this year, western doctors in Hong Kong claimed that an overdose of *jin yin hua* in children may kill red blood cells and lead to brain damage. Therefore, always consult a TCM

practitioner before prescribing this herb to children.

But researchers have demonstrated that *jin yin hua* has a broad spectrum of inhibitory actions against numerous micro-organisms such as *staphylococcus aureus*, *E.coli* and *mycobacterium tuberculosis*. It also has anti-inflammatory and antipyretic effects in mice.

Administration of a herbal formula, which contains 60g of *jin yin hua*, 60g of *guan zhong* (*Rhizoma dryopteridis*) and 20g of *gan cao* (*Radix glycyrrhizae*) in 120ml of liquid extract, is said to help prevent upper respiratory tract infections, colds and flu.

Before taking any medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner