

# Herbal Explorations

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## Spotlight: Isatis

by Natha Surinsuk, L.Ac.

The Isatis is a plant that we should strongly consider during the cold and flu season. This biennial plant is native to China and India and is an integral part of both traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and Ayurvedic pharmacopeia. Its flowering parts are hermaphrodites, containing both male and female parts, and are pollinated by insects. It loves fertile soil of well-drained areas that are exposed to sunlight because it cannot grow in the shade. Recently, this plant has been harvested in the United States. Isatis leaves are often harvested during the summer and autumn and its roots harvested in early winter at the formation of the first frost.

The Chinese medicine materia medica most often uses the leaves (*Da Qing Ye*) and roots (*Ban Lan Gen*) for their antiviral, antibacterial, antimicrobial, antiseptic and antipyretic effects. Both herbs enter the Heart, Lung, and Stomach channels and strongly

clear heat, relieve toxicity and cool the blood. Isatis is effective in treating warm-febrile diseases and febrile epidemic outbreaks, as in the case of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS). TCM practitioners have used this plant in cases of viral illness, blood poisoning, leukemia, hepatitis, meningitis, scarlet fever, laryngitis, tonsillitis, mumps, and other similar ailments. Although *Ban Lan Gen* is most commonly used, *Da Qing Ye* will often be combined for upper respiratory infections because leaves tend to direct Qi to the upper part of the body. Due to their bitter and cold nature, these herbs should not be used long term and can injure the Spleen and Stomach. *Da Qing Ye* can also be used in cases of skin eruptions caused by heat. Additionally, processed *Da Qing Ye* (*Qing Dai*) is used as a topical remedy for inflammation of the throat and oral cavity as well as an

# Q&A



## TCM Journeys: Aimee Raupp, L.Ac.

*Aimee Raupp, L.Ac. is a young practitioner who is working hard to educate women about how simple life modifications can effect a host of positive changes in their bodies and their lives. The advice in her first book, [Chill Out and Get Healthy](#), translates some of the core tenets of TCM for the modern woman.*

### ***Why did you become involved with Traditional Chinese Medicine?***

Basically, I discovered TCM while I was pursuing higher education in western medicine. I was working on a graduate degree in neuroscience and through some of the doctors and scientists I was working with, I was introduced to TCM. I was at UCSD researching Alzheimer's disease and was becoming increasingly frustrated with the microscopic approach that western science takes towards understanding a disease. My mentor—the scientist whose lab I was working in—was fascinated by TCM and really urged me to pursue higher education in a medicine where my level of “compassion” would not be stifled. He also introduced me to Ted Kaptchuks, The Web That Has No Weaver. And the rest is history....

### ***What is in your cupboard/medicine cabinet?***

In no specific order... ginger, garlic, cayenne pepper, lemon, fennel, dandelion root tea, raw honey, curing pills, acupuncture needles, loose gold moxa, peppermint tea, licorice, *yin qiao san*, *ba zheng san*,

*gan mao ling*, superior sore throat powder, probiotics, spirulina, chorella and cod liver oil.

### ***What prompted you to write a book for the general population, specifically females?***

[Chill Out and Get Healthy](#) was written out of sheer concern and frustration. I began to see a pattern where young female patients—who were typically on an antidepressant and/or sleep medication-- were seeking treatment for “diseases” that didn't need to exist. And, over and over again I saw how these extremely capable and educated women—who are the future mothers of America—were so entirely uneducated about their health. I felt, being a young woman myself, I could get a message out to them, in their language, to really encourage them to tune into their bodies, to practice prevention and to drive home the point that popping a pill isn't always the answer.

### ***Do you feel that people are becoming more receptive to learning about TCM? Why or why not?***

Absolutely. I feel that many people are turning to TCM because western medical care is failing them. More often than not, people are intrigued by TCM and ultimately, it's the idea of prevention that really speaks to them. It makes sense to them that if given the best circumstances the body does have the natural ability to heal itself. In my practice I do “westernize” TCM terminology a bit, not at all because I don't have a passionate and solid foundation in TCM but because I

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feel when we put terms into a language the general population can digest, we can get in a bit deeper and help them see the body and disease the way we do.

***What are your thoughts on the future of Traditional Chinese Medicine?***

Generally, I feel optimistic. I do think that as a profession we need to gel. We need to protect our ability to treat patients as respectable and educated practitioners, to rally insurance companies to value our services and reimburse accordingly and we really, really need to work towards educating the general public on the differences between medical acupuncture and TCM. I also feel strongly that we need to move towards stricter regulations on who is qualified to prescribe Chinese herbs as well as the safety and source of our Chinese herbs.

*Aimee E. Raupp is a New York state and NCCAOM licensed acupuncturist and Chinese herbologist. Her practice focuses on emotional and psychological disorders, reproductive health, fertility enhancement and gynecology, gastrointestinal disorders and facial rejuvenation.*

*Aimee received a Bachelor's degree in biology from Rutgers University and later studied neuroscience at the University of California in San Diego where she also worked as a research scientist. She received her Master's of Science in Traditional Oriental Medicine from the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine in San Diego, California.*

*Her first book, *Chill Out And Get Healthy*, published by NAL, a division of Penguin Group, was released August 2009. She has appeared as an expert on ABC's "The View", Fox 5's "Good Day New York", Martha Stewart's *Whole Living* radio, *Glamour.com* and *VitalJuiceDaily.com*.*

*Aimee is currently in private practice in both Manhattan and Nyack, NY. For more information, please check out her website, [AimeeRaupp.com](http://AimeeRaupp.com).*

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internal remedy for conditions caused by heat toxicity. Isatis also contains several dark pigments, such as blue indigo and red indirubin, that have been used as natural dyes. Thus, the plant is also known as Dyer's Woad.

Other major known chemical ingredients of Isatis include indoxyl, isatin/isatan, and amino acids that are essential for protein synthesis, such as arginine, glutamine, proline, and tyrosine. Studies show *Ban Lan Gen* has an inhibitory effect on gram-positive and gram-negative bacteria and viruses, and platelet aggregation. The plant exerts broad spectrum antimicrobial effects against *Shigella*, *Salmonella*, *Streptococcus* and *Leptospira*. Various strains that are resistant to pharmaceutical antibiotics have responded favorably to Isatis extract. The indirubin in Isatis

have been observed to inhibit replication and proliferation of cancer cells, especially in cases of leukemia. Furthermore, Isatis also strengthens the immune system. In a laboratory study, the polysaccharides contained in its root have been shown to increase the size of the spleen and number of white blood cells and lymphocytes. Neutralization of the immune suppression effects of hydrocortisone was also observed in these studies.

***Natha Surinsuk received a B.S. in Psychobiology from the University of California, Los Angeles. Passionate about Eastern Medicine and helping others, Natha went on to complete her Masters of Science in Traditional Oriental Medicine at the Pacific College of Oriental Medicine. She practices in the Los Angeles area.***

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3820 Penniman Avenue  
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