

Nature, love, and life. These three elements are so closely intertwined that they are inseparable. Mother Nature's master plan, it seems, was to create in all living beings an instinctual drive to create more life. Built into this plan is the ultimate motivation for procreation: The sensual ecstasy of lovemaking.

Though the customs may differ across cultures, continents and generations, there is nothing more universal than the drive for sexual love. When the power of passion overwhelms us it triggers our most primal urges. We all recognize the body's responses to love and desire: Flushed skin, weak knees, fluttering stomachs and the palpable throbbing of an amorous heart. When we love, our most eloquent words are reduced to whispers and moans, and we indulge in the most ancient pleasure known to humankind.

But the desire for sexual intimacy brings questions in its wake: What sparks passion? How can we enhance sexual ecstasy? How can we restore fading libido? Pharmaceutical companies have tried to answer these questions by investing billions of dollars in the research and production of synthetic

Nature's Potions of Passion

By Patrick Dougherty

For thousands of years, people in cultures from Asia to South America have used the earth's natural herbs to enhance the ecstasy of lovemaking. Here's how you can, too.

sex-enhancing drugs. But this pursuit is hardly groundbreaking. For thousands of years, medicine men, shamans and folk medicine practitioners around the globe have scoured their surroundings for natural sex enhancers, known as *aphrodisiacs*. Mother Nature, in all her wisdom, has supplied us with plants that ignite passion, enhance potency and stamina, and elevate sexual pleasure. The cosmic logic is irrefutable: Mother Nature offers fuel for passion's fire because she wants us to make love and create life.

Herbal Health—and Sex—Aids

While aphrodisiacs may be associated with cavorting Casanovas and bewitching temptresses, in truth they can help anyone improve their sex life. Even those who feel that their sexual health is at its peak may desire to fan passion's flames even higher. But the most raging inferno must eventually be reduced to embers. As we age, our libidos decline. What's more, environmental changes caused by our modern technological society seem to pour a bucket of cold water over our

MUIRA PUANA • GINKEO BILOBA • DONG QUAI • MACA • DAMIANA

• MUIRA PUANA • GINKEO BILOBA • DONG QUAI • MACA • DAMIANA • TONGKAT ALI • GINSENG



• TONGKAT ALI • RHODIOLOJA ROSEA • GINSENG • MUIRA PUANA • GINKEO BILOBA • DONG QUAI

• MACA • DAMIANA • TONGKAT ALI • RHODIOLOJA ROSEA • GINSENG

Photo Credit: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Francis M. Weld Gift, 1950. (50.164) Photograph © 1977 The Metropolitan Museum of Art

hottest desires. Stress, anxiety, smoking and hectic schedules can isolate us from our natural, primal selves—further diminishing our passions.

Pharmaceutically created sex-enhancers treat symptoms of sexual dysfunction without addressing root causes. Mother Nature's solution takes a more holistic approach, achieving results by treating the causes of sexual dysfunction. Since sexual health and overall well-being are usually linked, we are most inclined to procreate when we achieve a state of optimal health. Chris Kilham, master herbalist and author of *Hot Plants: Nature's Proven Sex Boosters for Men and Women* (St. Martin's Griffin), says: "It is often the case with [natural aphrodisiacs] that they are not just sex enhancers, they are valuable tonic plants that also enhance sex."

The best of these sexual tonics are looked upon with such reverence in their native lands that they have migrated to different parts of the world. And the longevity of these ancient herbs as aphrodisiacs is astonishing. "You don't have plants used by hundreds of millions of people for thousands of years if they don't work for that purpose," Kilham observes. Though their working mechanisms are in some cases still a mystery, some plants have earned undeniable legitimacy as herbs that enhance sexual intimacy.

Getting Steamy in Brazil

Among the lush tropical vegetation of the Brazilian rainforest, there grows a shrubby, white-flowered tree known as **muira puama**, or "potency wood." For ages, indigenous peoples have used muira puama (scientific name: *Liriosma ovata*) for a myriad of medicinal purposes, but in Brazilian culture it is most famous as a sex-enhancing aphrodisiac. The harvest and sale of muira puama bark is a booming business. Thriving "sex drink" stands sell lusty concoctions of exotic Amazonian fruits, powdered guarana (an herbal energy booster) and powdered muira puama. Couples indulge in these sex

drinks as a precursor to long nights of passionate lovemaking. "It's very, very popular as a love potion," says Kilham, "like chocolate ice cream is popular in America."

Native Brazilians do not need a scientific study to verify what they already know: Proper use of muira puama enhances many aspects of lovemaking, from increased libido to more powerful orgasms to enhanced

Wild About Ginseng

Used in medicinal applications for thousands of years, **ginseng** (*Panax ginseng*) is one of the most highly regarded natural tonics in the world. It has been shown to boost energy, reduce stress, increase stamina and enhance mental clarity, and it's one of the oldest aphrodisiacs on the planet. Known to some as "Man Root" for its human-like shape,

Other Natural Paths to Passion

Since the beginning of time, cultures all over the world have utilized their own sex-enhancing herbs. Some of these passion helpers include:

- **Damiana** is a shrub that grows in Mexico, the West Indies, and Central and South America. Both men and women have reported increased libido and sexual pleasure after taking damiana.
- **Dong Quai** is a Chinese plant whose root is known as "female ginseng." It is the most popular aphrodisiac herb among Chinese women, reputed to possess powerful sex-enhancing properties. It is also used to regulate menstruation.
- **Ginkgo Biloba**, native to China, has been shown to help reverse sexual dysfunction brought on by antidepressants; in one study, it aided 91% the women and 76% of the men who took it. In otherwise healthy people, ginkgo has been shown to have significant sex-enhancing properties, associated with its ability to improve genital bloodflow, ease cramps and relieve menopause symptoms.
- **Maca**, also known as "Peruvian ginseng," is an adaptogen associated with increased energy and improved stamina. It has been shown to boost sexual desire in both men and women.
- **Tongkat Ali**, a rainforest herb from Malaysia, is considered a powerful aphrodisiac that enhances arousal and sexual performance among men; it is believed to increase sperm counts and boost testosterone. Tongkat ali is also thought to improve energy levels and mental clarity.



sensitivity for both men and women.

Scientific research has backed muira puama's amorously stimulating properties. At the Institute of Sexology in Paris, France, a study with 262 people suffering from sexual dysfunction showed that muira puama extract was amazingly effective. After two weeks, at a daily dose of 1 to 1.5 grams of extract, 62% of the people in the study who had diminished sex drive reported that muira puama had a "dynamic effect," while 51% of those struggling with impotence felt that muira puama helped them attain and maintain erections.

ginseng root is widely farmed throughout the world. In China, ginseng's true home, it grows wild in the deep forests of mountainous regions. Over thousands of years the harvesting of wild ginseng has stripped more accessible regions bare, and a mystical wonder surrounds the well-hidden ginseng plants still shrouded in their wooded lairs.

In Chinese culture, the largest roots are believed to possess the greatest medicinal powers. Even more valued are ginseng roots that have a phallic appearance or bear the strongest resemblance to the human body.

These roots are most prized for their aphrodisiac powers. The Chinese belief in ginseng is realized in its value: Large, human-shaped ginseng roots can sell for astronomical prices, in the tens of thousands of dollars.

In Chinese culture, ginseng is ubiquitous. Ginseng wine, ginseng extract, ginseng tea, ginseng roots and ginseng ampules are available on every street corner. "It's a very significant energy, stamina and strength builder," says Kilham. "It's used widely by athletes throughout China, Russia and the Eastern Bloc to enhance performance."

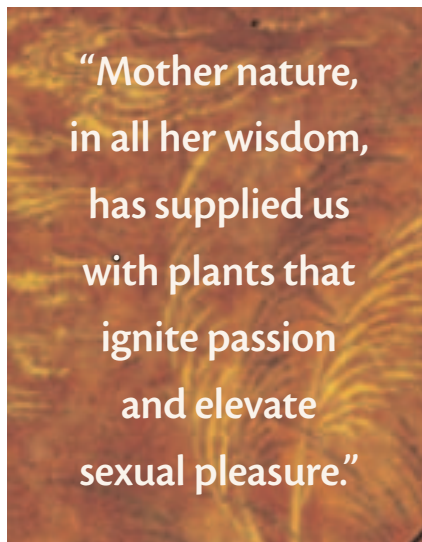
The Chinese approach to treating sexual dysfunction differs from the Western "pop-a-pill" attitude. In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), ginseng is what is used to establish and maintain the overall health that fosters sexual potency and erotic pleasure.

Interestingly, ginseng's active constituents, ginsenosides, are thought to increase nitric oxide in the blood vessels, which is a mechanism by which the pharmaceutical drug Viagra boosts erections. The University of Ulsan and the Korea Ginseng and Tobacco Research Institute in Seoul conducted a study in which 45 men with impotence were given 900 mg of Korean red ginseng or placebo (look-alike pill) per day. After 16 weeks, 60% of the men who took ginseng reported stronger erections and increased stamina, compared to 20% taking the placebo. Overall, men taking ginseng reported higher sex drive and sexual satisfaction during intercourse. Ginseng's ability to increase nitrous oxide in the blood vessels is also thought to stimulate pelvic blood flow in women, leading to enhanced sensitivity and pleasure.

Consistent with TCM practices, ginseng is rarely used on its own. It is usually combined with other herbs; in cases of sexual dysfunction, ginseng is often combined with ginkgo, another reputed aphrodisiac. (For information on ginkgo and other herbal aphrodisiacs, see page 20.)

Siberian Sex Enhancer

Siberia, Russia, conjures up images of a frozen wasteland, a place one might be sent as punishment for some abominable crime. However, in more seasonable months, Siberia blossoms into beauty: Thick, dense woodlands; meadows dotted with wildflowers; and the majestic Altai Mountains, blanketed with evergreens. This area is also home to



thousands of medicinal herbs, none more significant than **rhodiola** (*Rhodiola rosea*). This shrubby plant appears unremarkable save for its pretty, scented flowers that can blossom in yellow, red and pink hues. At traditional Siberian weddings, the bride and groom are presented with a bouquet of rhodiola as a symbol of future fertility.

But the fertility-enhancing effects of rhodiola are more than symbolic. It is considered one of the world's most powerful adaptogens. (Without harmful side effects, adaptogens provide resistance to physical, chemical or biological stressors. They also boost recovery and bring our bodies into balance.)

For decades, Russian cosmonauts and athletes have used rhodiola to improve their performance, stamina and focus. Rural farmers and laborers rely on rhodiola to help them through arduous workdays. Raves Chris Kilham: "Rhodiola may be the single most beneficial medicinal plant on Earth. It imparts energy,

improves mental clarity, enhances cardiovascular function, relieves depression, boosts the immune system in a dramatic way, helps people to recover from fatigue and is a straight on, full-blown, no-nonsense sex enhancer."

Like ginseng, rhodiola's adaptogenic properties disarm sexual dysfunction from many angles. As a stress-fighting herb, rhodiola effectively neutralizes one of the common causes of impotence and fading desire. One study reported that 26 out of 35 men experiencing erectile dysfunction and/or premature ejaculation responded to rhodiola (150-200 mg/day for three months) with substantially improved sexual function.

From the Amazonian rainforests to remote reaches of the Far East to the pastoral beauty of Siberia, **muira puama**, **ginseng** and **rhodiola**, respectively, have emerged from these natural settings to achieve global prominence as effective aphrodisiacs. But even more significantly, these herbs are tightly woven into the cultural tapestry of the lands in which they were found. And the sensual pleasure human beings derive from them is a powerful reminder of Mother Nature's sublime master plan: We are gently urged to create new life just as we ourselves were created. ■

ETip

Enter the Rainforest Via the Armchair Portal

While the lush rainforests of South America have yielded some of the world's most potent aphrodisiacs, their therapeutic advantages extend to many different ailments. To learn how to put these plants to work for you, read *The Healing Power of Rainforest Herbs* by Leslie Taylor, ND (Square One, \$23.95). Dr. Taylor, who says she used herbal medicines to overcome a rare form of leukemia, provides information on 75 Amazonian herbs, including traditional uses and the latest in clinical research.