Sowing Your Wild Oats and Reaping Love's Benefits

by TERRY WILLARD, Ph.D., CI.H.

Often couples come into the clinic wanting to find natural ways to improve their sex life. First off I have to say there is no magic aphrodisiac but there are some great tonics to rekindle the spark in your sex life. In my pursuit of healing plants over the last 25 years, I have been lucky to be able to travel all over the world on a 'Herbal Adventure.' I found many other cultures use herbs for increasing sexual enjoyment in both men and woman. Some of these herbs have been used by local people for thousands of years, when they ran into marital snags that included loss of sexual interest. Now modern herbalists combine these herbs into exciting blends that have proven to be helpful for many of my clients.

When considering sexual tonics there are three basic effects that increase their usefulness:

1. Increase the blood flow to the genital organs to prolong or enhance arousal. (This is the strategy of the drug Viagra.)
2. Increase the amount of testosterone in the blood to promote desire in men and women.
3. Improve the nerve endings and nerve conduction in parts of the brain that control pleasure, making touch more enjoyable and heightening sensation.

The blend that has proven most exciting and stimulating for men includes: Maca, Muira Puama, Wild Oats, Guarana, Korean Ginseng, Ginkgo, Epimedium and Niacin.

MACA (Lepidium meyenii) comes to us from high in the mountains of Peru where it has been used in traditional Andean culture for male impotence, especially for increasing sexual desire or as an aphrodisiac. The active ingredients consist of glucosinolates, sterols and saponins. These sterols are precursors to hormones, especially sex hormones, the ones we want to awaken for healthy passion. It has also been effective for menstrual and menopausal symptoms in women. Other traditional uses include increasing energy, stamina and endurance in athletes, promoting mental clarity and improving chronic fatigue syndrome.

MUIRA PUAMA (Psychotemia olacoides) is native to the Brazilian Amazon. In a French study Muira Puama was given to 262 men with lack of sexual desire and inability to attain or maintain an erection. Within two weeks, with a daily intake of this herb, 62 percent of the men claimed that Muira Puama had produced a dynamo effect. In other studies there was an increase in the frequency of sexual intercourse for 66 percent (62 out of the 94) of the participants. One Brazilian study claims effectiveness in over 70 percent of the people studied. Indigenous tribes of Brazil use this plant internally as a tea for treating sexual debility and impotency, neuromuscular problems, rheumatism, grippe, cardiac asthenia, gastrointestinal asthenia and to prevent baldness. It is also used externally in baths and massages for treating paralysis and beriberi.

WILD OATS (Avena sativa). In folk medicine and among current herbalists oats are used to treat nervous exhaustion, insomnia and "weakness of the nerves." Wild oat contains alkaloids that are believed to account for oats' relaxing action. One Finnish study has shown that wild oats increases the sexual drive in both males and females, giving fuel for the folk saying of "sowing your wild oats."

GUARANA (Paullinia cupana) has a stimulating nervine effect and has been used for headache or depressions that accompany menstrual problems. We include Guarana because its stimulant activity gives the body and mind the alertness needed for an energetic sex life.

KOREAN GINSENG (Panax ginseng) study of this herb has focused mostly on radioprotective, antitumor, antiviral and metabolic effects on fatigue. The saponin hormonal-like structure has a stimulatory action on sexual function in both males and females. We also see many studies on antioxidant activity, effects on the nervous system, sexual performance, cholesterol and lipid metabolism and endocrine activity. Ginseng has a tonic effect, acting on the pituitary (stimulating ACTH release) and thus activating the adrenals, giving the adaptogen effect. By hastening the nervous reflexes, this herb increases analytical and overall mental performance while diminishning fatigue. Just what the doctor ordered for an active night of passion.

GINGKO (Ginkgo biloba) has high flavonoid content. The focus of the first scientific study of Gingko involved its...
flavonoid action on the human vascular system. This effect can be found throughout the body especially in the brain, making Gingko the most famous herb for improving brain function. It has been shown to be very useful for stimulating blood supply to aid men with erectile impotence, showing improvement in duration and quality of erections. At low doses it can improve both mental behavior and sexual function in elderly patients who originally showed problems with alertness.

**EPIMEDIUM** (Epimedium koreanum) comes to us from China where the literal translation of the Chinese characters for herba epimedi (Yin Yang Huo) is "horny goat herb." It is used in Chinese medicine to enhance male sexual function, performance and to correct reproductive disorders. It is being prescribed for impotence, infertility, premature ejaculation, low sperm count and reduced sex drive and is used to nourish or tonify the male sexual area (called kidney Yang Qi). Epimedium has been studied extensively and has demonstrated effects to increase the levels of corticosterone, cortisol and testosterone. These studies have concluded that its androgen-like effects stimulate sexual activity, increase sperm production and heighten sexual desire.

Niacin is well-known for increasing circulation, evidenced by the tingling feeling one gets on the skin after taking it. By increasing blood circulation, we can help deliver the nutrients needed in the sexual areas to perform better. Several studies have shown that niacin can help in sexual function for both males and females. This makes sense as the flush associated with niacin is rather similar to the flush we experience when the chemistry with a lover is just right.

For women the female blend we like to use is Maca, Muira Puama, Wild Oats, Kava, Korean Ginseng, Dong Quai, Damiana and Niacin. Most of these herbs are also found in the male stimulating formula, so I will only discuss the herbs unique to women.

**KAVA KAVA** (Piper methysticum) comes from the Polynesian Islands where it is reputed to be very useful by helping women relax into a mood for increased sexual pleasure. Kava is excellent for de-stressing and relaxing all the muscles of the body, so one is more receptive to his/her partner. This herb also has a relaxing function on the entire pelvic area. It is being employed in our clinic to calm down bladder infections and relax the urinary area. It also has strong anti-microbial action.

**DONG QUAI** (Angelica sinensis) is classified as having a tonic action (mostly seen in its ability to "tone the blood") in China. This is the most commonly used herb in the Orient to regulate menstrual function and to tone the female organs. Dong Quai has been shown to both contract and relax uterine muscles and is also used to increase sexual activity in females.

**DAMIANA** (Turnera aphrodisiaca) has a volatile oil that is known to stimulate the genitourinary tract—the basis of the claim for its aphrodisiac properties. Other constituents: arbutin is a known antimicrobial agent for the urinary tract; thymol is useful against fungus, intestinal worms, parasites, jaw and lung tumors and athlete's foot; copaene and cadinene are useful in the treatment of lung inflammation; both sitosterol and gonzalitosin have mild anti-tumor effects.

In addition to herbal formulas, there are other lifestyle recommendations to follow for a healthy, active sex life.

1. Avoid excess alcohol consumption as it decreases the body's ability to produce testosterone. In other words, the mind may be willing but too much alcohol definitely diminishes a man's erection. Avoid cigarette smoking or being around second-hand smoke.

2. Vigorous exercise, hot tubs, saunas and tight underwear lead to increased temperature in the gonads and reduced sperm count. That means boxers for men if you want to keep that sperm count high.

3. Reduce sexual activity when exhausted or under stress and don't overindulge while feeling weak or ill as this may reduce your sexual responsiveness in the future.

4. Communicate with your partner and find out what she likes. This can be a fun and exciting way to improve your sexual experience. We can help you with herbs to prime the physical body, but you have to do the rest.

With this array of botanicals used throughout the world to help couples heat up their sex life we have been able to address a larger spectrum of sexual issues than in the past. Hopefully you will reap the same benefits as others have enjoyed. We usually need to give these formulas up to six weeks to reach their potential effect but many feel their impact almost immediately.

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