Dong Quai (*Angelica sinensis*)

**Common name:** Chinese angelica

**Parts used and where grown:** Dong quai is a member of the celery family. Greenish-white flowers bloom from May to August, and the plant is typically found growing in damp mountain ravines, meadows, river banks, and coastal areas. The root is used.

**Historical or traditional use** (may or may not be supported by scientific studies): Also known as dang-gui in traditional Chinese medicine, dong quai is often referred to as the “female ginseng.” In traditional Chinese medicine, dong quai is often included in prescriptions for abnormal menstruation, suppressed menstrual flow, painful or difficult menstruation, and uterine bleeding. Dong quai was traditionally used for hot flashes associated with perimenopause. It is also used for both men and women with cardiovascular disease, including high blood pressure and problems with peripheral circulation.1

**Active constituents:** Traditionally, dong quai is believed to have a balancing or adaptogenic effect on the female hormonal system. Contrary to the opinion of several authors, dong quai does not qualify as a phytoestrogen or have any hormonelike actions in the body. This is supported by a double blind study showing that dong quai capsules did not help women with menopausal symptoms.2 A large part of its actions with regard to premenstrual
syndrome may be related to its antispasmodic actions, particularly on smooth muscles. Human research published in English is lacking to support any of the traditional uses of dong quai, though Chinese studies suggest it is beneficial for painful menses and infertility.

**How much is usually taken?** The powdered root can be used in capsules, tablets, tinctures, or as a tea. Many women take 3–4 grams per day.

**Are there any side effects or interactions?** Dong quai is generally considered to be of extremely low toxicity. It may cause some fair-skinned persons to become more sensitive to sunlight. Persons using it on a regular basis should limit prolonged exposure to the sun or other sources of ultraviolet radiation. Dong quai is not recommended for pregnant or lactating women.

**References:**