



HerbClip™

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FILE: ▪ *Trypterygium wilfordii*
▪ Thunder God Vine

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RE: Profile of Thunder God Vine – Chinese Traditional Herb

Balick MJ, Lee R. Digging in the herb garden: responding to a patient's query about thunder god vine. *Alternative Therapies* 2001; 7: 100-103.

A patient queried the second author, a physician, about the use of Chinese Thunder God Vine for the relief of arthritis pain. In response, the authors of this paper gathered the following information on the herb. Chinese Thunder God Vine (*Trypterygium wilfordii* Hook F.) was first described in 1862. It is known by several Chinese names: *Chi Hsueh Teng*, *Koikema*, *Lei Gong Teng*, *Lei Ling Ting*, *Lei Kung Teng*, and *Mang Cao*. It is found in southern China, Japan, and Korea. *T. wilfordii* is a perennial vine or shrub, which grows up to 10 meters high. Traditional uses include treatment of boils, fever, abscesses, and inflammation. The leaves, stock, flowers, and skin of the roots are poisonous and can cause death when ingested. Even ingestion of honey containing the pollen of this plant can cause death. It is used as an insecticide in China. (The article does not state what parts of the plant.) Thus, the plant has toxic properties and, when used appropriately, can be used medicinally. *T. wilfordii* is currently used for lupus, multiple sclerosis, rheumatoid arthritis, and vitiligo. In Chinese texts topical application is more commonly recommended than oral consumption. Some reported side effects include severe brain anomalies after a mother's use of *T. wilfordii* in early pregnancy and blood disorders (leukopenia, thrombocytopenia, and aplastic anemia). One mechanism of action that has been discovered is that *T. wilfordii* extracts inhibit prostaglandin synthesis, which is important in the inflammatory cascade. Rheumatoid arthritis is an inflammatory joint disease.

Products containing *T. wilfordii* are usually made in China and called *Lu Fan Teng*. Efreim Korngold, OMK, LAc, a well-known practitioner of Chinese medicine, found the product "not very effective except in the mildest of cases—even when using it consecutively for 3 months." However, he admitted that he was conservative in his dosing due to the potential toxic side effects. He also expressed concern about the reliability of a product manufactured in China and only sporadically available in the U.S.

The authors also spoke to Dr. Peter E. Lipsky, scientific director of the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases at the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Lipsky said that he and his group have been studying *T. wilfordii*. They have made extracts, Phase I (safety) and phase II (efficacy) testing are completed, and they are planning a trial on rheumatoid arthritis. Dr. Lipsky advises patients not to take *T. wilfordii* yet. He says that the major issue is quality control. He said that numerous small pharmaceutical companies in China make the available extracts and the potency of the products is variable. The amounts of active components in the products are also variable.

Cursory search of the literature, search of databases, and various telephone conversations, indicate that clinical research is not complete. Despite a long history of use in China, the authors do not recommend that patients take Thunder God Vine at this time. A clinical trial with this plant will be underway.

—Heather S. Oliff, Ph.D.

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