

# Barley Grass Profile

## Also known as

Also known as- *Hordeum vulgare*, green grass, mai ya in Chinese markets. The term mai ya could refer to either barley or wheat grass, but barley is preferred to wheat in traditional Chinese medicine. Gu ya, or rice shoots, are eaten as a food rather than taken as a medicine.

## Introduction

Barley grass has been used in traditional Chinese medicine for at least 1800 years. The tender young shoots of freshly sprouted barley seed were used to treat diseases of the "spleen," or poor digestion, but also "stagnation of the liver," conditions characterized by an inability to respond to the emotional environment, usually depression after chronic anger or disappointment. Barley grass is grown by soaking the seeds in clean water until they sprout and grow shoots approximately 2 inches (5 cm) long.

## Constituents

Barley grass is an extraordinarily rich source of many vitamins, minerals, and amino acids, although it does not, as sometimes claimed, contain absolutely all the nutrients needed for human health. The dried shoot is approximately 4% glutamic acid (needed for recharging antioxidants), 4% methionine (needed for the production of natural SAM-e), 3% vitamin C, 1% valine, and 1% calcium. A single tablespoon contains a day's supply of beta-carotene, betaine, biotin, boron, copper, iron, lutein, magnesium, niacin, riboflavin, and thiamine. It also contains nutritionally significant amounts of alpha-linoleic acid, oryzanol, potassium, selenium, zinc, and the tocopherols that make up vitamin E. Barley grass doesn't contain every nutrient, but it comes closer than any other food. The medicinal action of the dried shoot is due to its content of hordenine, not to be confused with a plant chemical with a similar name that is implicated in celiac disease.

## Parts Used

The dried unjointed leaf. In traditional Chinese medicine, the barley grass may be "massed" or fermented before drying.

## Typical Preparations

A level tablespoon (3-4 grams) of barley grass powder added to teas, smoothies, cereals, or other foods daily. As a capsule or in extract form.

## Summary

The ancients used barley grass to treat galactorrhea, that is, excessive or untimely lactation. In modern complementary medicine, barley grass is appropriate whenever diet fails to provide a full range of nutrients. Research published as recently as September 2005 notes that one of the principal growth

factors in the barley shoot is melatonin. This finding may explain the calming effect of the herb.

## **Precautions**

Barley grass may stop lactation in nursing mothers. Not recommended while nursing or pregnant.