

A Quick Guide to a TCM Spring

ELEMENT = WOOD

ORGANS = LIVER, GALLBLADDER

COLOUR = GREEN

EMOTION = ANGER

NATURE = YANG

TASTE = SOUR

The Wood element refers to living, growing entities: trees, plants and the human body.

It symbolises life and the process of renewing life.



Green is the colour of nature in Spring. We see it as the green plants, leaves and sprouts emerge around us.

In China, green symbolises a variety of ideas, such as growing, striving, refreshing, balancing, calming, healing, self assurance, benevolence, harmony, sensitivity, patience vs anger.

“Yang is the energy, active and noisy, the vital force responsible for expanding.” “Yang is the sun and heaven. Yang enables growth; the warmth of the Spring gives rise to birth.”

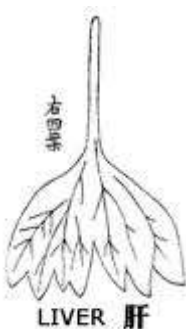


The Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Medicine (The Neijing Suwen)

“The Liver is like the general, courageous and smart.” (The Neijing Suwen)

The liver is the biochemical mastermind of the body. It is the major centre for neutralizing environmental toxins and the primary organ for preparing nutrients for transport though the bloodstream, this is why the Chinese say the liver builds the blood. The gallbladder helps digest fats, which are essential to healthy skin, nerves and glands. It also eliminates certain toxins.

A healthy liver establishes a smooth and soothing flow of Qi through the whole person in both body and mind. When the liver is harmonious there is never stress or tension. People with vital livers are calm; they also have unerring judgment and can be naturally effective as leaders and decision-makers.



Anger in TCM is considered to represent resentment, frustration, and irritability. An excess of rich blood is believed to make one prone to anger, and can affect the liver, causing this organ's energy to rise to the head and result in headaches or dizziness.



Ancient Chinese Medicine practitioners found that the five flavours of foods each have their own characteristics and functions for health. These flavours not only taste different, they can act on certain organ imbalances. Chinese medicine theory therefore uses the different flavours of foods and herbs to balance the body. Sour flavour can apparently calm the body and is linked to the liver.

The wood energy of Spring enables us to make plans, to create, to strategise, organize and have the courage to make decisions and take action. This is what makes Spring the perfect time to make positive changes in our lives, relationships and work. Shake off our old bad habits, perhaps those in our diet or routines and develop new patterns. Spring is the time to aim a little higher and reach a little further towards our goals.

SPRING EXERCISE

Get outside! Enjoy the environment around you gearing up for Spring. Take brisk walks in nature.

Sports such as jogging, tennis, dancing or swimming build strength and endurance and create a good cleansing sweat.

Other more internal practices such as yoga, tai chi or Feldenkrais will help nourish you with your own vital energy as well as stretching your muscles, tendons, and ligaments.

Gentle meditation and breathing exercises can help with any anger or excess emotion that may arise from an unbalanced wood or liver in Spring.



Quick massage exercise for the Liver and Gall Bladder

Place the heel of the right hand on the side of the body under the rib cage, and just above the hip bone. The fingers should point straight across the body. Pressing firmly, move the hand slowly across the body to the middle of the abdomen; you should end up with the hand over the navel. Repeat this action 10-15 times.

This exercise massages the Liver and Gall Bladder, tonifying and cleansing these organs whilst aiding digestion and easing abdominal wind.

Recommended Diet for Spring

As usual, try to eat seasonal foods. Green leafy foods are good for the liver and are at their most nutrient packed in Spring. Unlike the Winter recommended dark greens aim for lighter green leaves such as spinach and chard. You can also increase pungent, sweet or bitter foods.

- **Fresh fruits** such as, apricots, figs, grapes, pineapples, plums, apples, cherries, dates and bananas.

- **Fresh vegetables** such as, cabbage, carrots, celery, potato, pumpkin, radish leaf, shiitake mushrooms, string beans, sweet potato, lettuce, onions, beetroot, young beets, chard, cucumber, aubergines, squash, yam.



- **Beans** such as, kidney beans, adzuki beans, yellow soybeans.
- If you eat fish or meat then choose beef, carp, duck, pork and oysters.
- **Nuts and seeds** such as, sesame seeds and oil including black sesame seed which tones up the liver, sunflower seeds and oil, almonds, chestnuts, coconuts and walnuts.



- **Increase raw and sprouted foods.** Most seeds, grains, peas, beans and some nuts will sprout. You can use alfalfa seeds alone or mix several kinds together – lentils, garbanzos, mung and/or adzuki beans. Radish and fenugreek seeds are another nice combination.
- Use pungent cooking herbs such as basil, fennel, marjoram, rosemary, caraway, turmeric, coriander, dill, and bay leaf.
- Spring is the best time for major cleansing, drinking nourishing liquids such as fruit and vegetable juices for a period of 5-10 days.
- Limit salty foods such as soy sauce, miso and sodium-rich meats and avoid too many heavy foods, which clog up the liver.
- **Teas** such as Lavender, Lime Tree Flowers, Milk Thistle and Dandelion.

SPRING GREENS AND LEMON SOUP

Nigel Slater's, Spring Greens and Lemon Soup, is one of my favourite recipes for those Spring evenings when you've been warming yourself in the sun's rays all day and suddenly as the sun goes down the temperature drops and the remnants of the winter chill hits you. A pot of this soup on the stove is the perfect remedy! Furthermore, with all those healthy, green, spring veggies and the touch of lemon for the liver, it's just what the Chinese Medicine doctor ordered!

SPRING GREENS AND LEMON SOUP

A lovely, fresh-tasting soup for a winter-spring day.

Serves 4

Leeks 3, medium
butter 30g
carrot 1, medium sized
celery 1 stick
vegetable stock 1 litre
bay leaves 2
spring greens 4 handfuls
lemon 1, small and unwaxed (preferably organic)



Photograph: Jonathan Lovekin for the Observer

DIRECTIONS

Trim and wash the leeks, and slice them into thin rings. Melt the butter in a large saucepan and add the leeks, leaving them covered, to soften over a low heat. They should not colour.

Finely chop the carrot and celery and add to the pan. Pour in the vegetable stock, add the bay leaves, salt and pepper and leave to simmer for 20 minutes until the vegetables are soft but the colour is still bright.

Rinse the greens, place the leaves on top of one another and shred into thin ribbons.

Finely grate the lemon zest and add to the soup with the greens. Taste as you add, stopping when you feel it is sour enough. Simmer for 2 or 3 minutes until the greens are just tender. Check the seasoning, squeeze over the lemon juice and serve.