

Milk Thistle

good for the liver

By Maya Cointreau

Milk thistle is perhaps the most powerful herb for cleansing and treating the liver. In fact, clinical studies have proven that it can significantly regenerate liver tissues. It's a potent preventative and corrective for liver damage of any kind, and considered a safe herb for extended use. Milk thistle seeds contain hesperidin and silymarin, which are cell-strengthening antioxidants.

PROTECT, CLEANSE AND BALANCE

- Milk thistle seeds are excellent as a spring tonic and should be given to your horse for a month to six weeks, as the body absorbs their essence slowly. Grind the seeds well before adding them to the feed. This is especially good for horses and ponies that might be suffering from liver damage due to prolonged use of drugs, or from worming difficulties. Just a teaspoon each day will help protect the liver from toxins and can counteract the liver damage a horse may experience when on stronger anti-inflammatory medications.
- Milk thistle can improve appetite and be used to prevent colic and indigestion.
- Consider milk thistle for lactating mares, too – in Europe, it was used for centuries by wet-nurses to improve their milk production, and it can be found in many modern day lactation tea formulas.
- Milk thistle has a balancing effect on temperament. The liver is considered by many to be the seat of ill humor and anger in the body. When the liver is clogged or imbalanced, a horse may become anxious or cranky. Milk thistle is a good herbal tonic to counteract emotional disturbances, including obsessive-compulsive behavior. It can even be used as a flower essence – a homeopathic, vibrational decoction of the thistle flower – to counteract anger issues. Milk thistle flower essence may help calm and soothe nervous animals with fear and trust issues stemming from abuse or abandonment.

CANCER-FIGHTING PROPERTIES

Milk thistle has been shown in preliminary laboratory studies to inhibit the growth of tumors, including human breast and prostate cancer cells. On a similar note, it has also been found to have anti-fungal properties. Although the research in both these arenas is still in its early stages, given the many other beneficial effects of milk thistle it is certainly worth adding to most anti-cancer or anti-fungal regimes. It has even been found to have significant benefits when used in cases of mushroom poisoning.

Although some companies supply milk thistle herb finely cut for horse consumption, the majority of benefits lie in the seeds. Milk thistle seeds have hard shells and can pass through the digestive system, so it is generally best to utilize milk thistle powder or liquid extract supplements. The liver is most active during the night when animals are sleeping, so milk thistle will have a more significant effect when added to evening feedings. 

SILYBUM MARIANUM

Parts used: Seeds

Tall spiny biennial in the daisy family, Compositae

Properties: Antidepressant, demulcent, digestive, galactagogue, hepatoprotective, tonic

General dosage: 1-2 tsp of the seeds or powder each evening



Maya Cointreau has over 18 years of experience in holistic healing. She is an herbalist, energy healer and co-founder of Earth Lodge, a company serving equines for over 15 years. She has written several books on alternative healing, including *The Comprehensive Guide to Vibrational Healing*, *Natural Animal Healing* and *Equine Herbs & Healing*. You can find her books and more information at mayacointreau.com.