



白扁豆

bái biǎn dòu

PHARMACEUTICAL NAME Lablab Semen album

FAMILY Fabaceae

STANDARD SPECIES *Dolichos lablab* L. (扁豆 *biǎn dòu*)

ENGLISH lablab, hyacinth bean

JAPANESE *henzu*

KOREAN *pyeontu*

PROPERTIES sweet, neutral

CHANNELS ENTERED Spleen, Stomach

TEXT IN WHICH FIRST APPEARED *Miscellaneous Records*

KEY CHARACTERISTICS strengthens the Spleen, transforms dampness, eliminates summerheat

DOSAGE 9-30g

CAUTIONS & CONTRAINDICATIONS Do not take without cooking. See TOXICITY below.

Actions & Indications

- Strengthens the Spleen, nourishes the Stomach, transforms dampness, and harmonizes the middle: for chronic diarrhea with loud stomach growling and reduced appetite due to Spleen deficiency. Also for vaginal discharge due to Spleen deficiency.

— With *Dioscoreae Rhizoma* (*shān yào*) for Spleen tonification when other tonics are not tolerated (虛不受補 *xū bù shòu bǔ*). Often *Pseudostellariae Radix* (*tài zǐ shēn*) is also included for this purpose.

— With *Codonopsis Radix* (*dǎng shēn*), *Atractylodis macrocephalae Rhizoma* (*bái zhú*), and *Poria* (*fú líng*) for Spleen deficiency with significant dampness manifesting with diarrhea. See Ginseng, Poria, and White Atractylodes Powder (*shēn líng bái zhú sǎn*).

— With *Atractylodis Rhizoma* (*cāng zhú*), *Euryales Semen* (*qiàn shí*), and *Sepiae Endoconcha* (*hǎi piāo xiāo*) for vaginal discharge due to Spleen deficiency.

— With *Pseudostellariae Radix* (*tài zǐ shēn*) and *Setariae Fructus germinatus* (*gǔ yá*) for loss of appetite and other signs of Spleen and Stomach deficiency after a prolonged illness.

— With *Atractylodis macrocephalae Rhizoma* (*bái zhú*), *Amomi Fructus* (*shā rén*), and *Gigeria galli Endothelium corneum* (*jī nèi jīn*) for lack of appetite in children from Spleen deficiency and stagnation due to dampness.

- Clears summerheat accompanied by dampness: for summerheat patterns, especially those with pronounced diarrhea or vomiting.

— With *Moslae Herba* (*xiāng rú*) and *Magnoliae officinalis Cortex* (*hòu pō*) for sudden turmoil disorder due to smoldering summerheat and dampness. See Mosla Powder (*xiāng rú sǎn*)

— With *Lophatheri Herba* (*dàn zhú yè*), *Gypsum fibrosum* (*shí gāo*), and *Artemisiae annuae Herba* (*qīng hāo*) for children suffering from unremitting feverishness in the summer due to summerheat.

- Treats poisoning: can be used for a variety of food related poisoning, including that from spoiled food.

— With *Phragmitis Rhizoma* (*lú gēn*) for puffer fish toxicity.

— With *Amomi Fructus rotundus* (*bái dòu kòu*) and *Puerariae Flos* (*gé huā*) for hangovers.

Commentary

We have classified this as a tonifying herb because when it is dry-fried or baked it is sweet and warm, and strengthens and tonifies the Spleen with relatively little cloying or greasy properties. Its fragrant aroma transforms dampness without being overly drying. It is an excellent mild restorative for weakness of the Spleen causing diarrhea or vaginal discharge, and is often used as a mild initial treatment when a patient cannot tolerate stronger tonics.

It could also be classified as an herb for clearing summerheat, especially when the pathogen has accumulated and led to nausea and vomiting. Here it is said to enter the qi aspect of the greater yin in order to help direct turbidity downward. For this purpose, Lablab Semen album (*bái biǎn dòu*) is best used in its unprepared form.

Regarding its properties when it is prepared, Zhang Jie-Bin notes that “The beans should be dry-fried until fragrant before using, then they will tonify Spleen and Stomach qi deficiency, harmonize [away] nausea, vomiting, and sudden turmoil disorder.” Zhang goes on to say that this herb is an ideal choice for a light, gentle tonic. In *Convenient Reader of Materia Medica*, Zhang Bing-Cheng observes:

Its flavor is sweet and neutral, [it] reduces summerheat, benefits the Spleen, and also relieves toxicity. These effects accrue to the Stomach organ, as it raises the clear and directs the turbid downward while harmonizing the middle.

Mechanisms of Selected Combinations:

- WITH *Dioscoreae Rhizoma* (*shān yào*)

Both herbs tonify the Spleen qi. Lablab Semen album (*bái biǎn dòu*) is slightly yellow in color, warm and harmonious in nature, and sweet in flavor with a light aroma—perfectly suited to the Spleen. Dioscoreae Rhizoma (*shān yào*) tonifies the Spleen qi and yin, with a moderate action that tonifies without obstructing.

Excess dampness with yin deficiency is seen more often in the clinic than textbooks would indicate, and it is rather difficult to find herbs that address both aspects of the disorder. This pair of herbs is an excellent choice when the locus of both the yin deficiency and the dampness is the Spleen: Lablab Semen album (*bái biǎn dòu*) gently transforms the dampness while Dioscoreae Rhizoma (*shān yào*) tonifies the yin, and both herbs tonify the Spleen qi. Because of their gentle activity and capacity to address the yin, dampness, and qi, this pair is especially well-suited to the recuperative stage of a severe illness, or for patients who are so deficient that other tonics may not be tolerated.

Traditional Contraindications

Records of Thoughtful Differentiation of Materia Medica notes: “It has abundant power to tonify the Spleen, but is appropriate only when the Spleen is oppressed by dampness and there is no abdominal pain, and no stifling sensation due to constraint.”

Harm and Benefit in the Materia Medica elaborates:

Excessive consumption clogs the qi, so those with chills and fever should not take it. Generally, if a malarial pathogen is not completely eliminated, or a fever due to an externally-contracted cold pathogen has just flared, this tonifying medicinal cannot be taken. However, it is not contraindicated for chills and fever due to Spleen and Stomach deficiency with injury from food, or from exhaustion.

Toxicity

The raw form of this herb contains toxic proteins which are denatured by heat. The unprepared or powdered herb should therefore not be used unless it is cooked; otherwise, it is to be used only with great caution. Symptoms of toxicity include nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and diarrhea, and, in severe cases, a burning sensation in the stomach, panic, fear of cold, vertigo, headache, and numbness of the extremities.

Nomenclature and preparation

Literal English translation: “white flat bean”

There are white, black, and red varieties of lablab bean, but only the white are used for medicinal purposes; this is specified by the pharmaceutical name white lablab bean (白扁豆 *bái biǎn dòu*). Although they are boiled to remove the outer skin, the beans are not thoroughly cooked through, and thus are still called raw lablab bean (生扁豆 *shēng biǎn dòu*). This is the preferred form for treating summerheat.

> DRY-FRIED LABLAB BEAN (炒扁豆 *chǎo biǎn dòu*)

The beans are baked or dry-fried until yellow and slightly scorched. This enhances their ability to tonify the Spleen, transform dampness, and harmonize the middle burner. Prepared in this manner, they tonify without obstructing, and are thus particularly indicated for patients with weak digestion.

> LABLAB TESTA (扁豆衣 *biǎn dòu yī*) – PHARMACEUTICAL NAME: LABLAB TESTA

This is the dried outer testa of the bean which is sweet and slightly cool and enters the Spleen and Stomach channels. It is often dry-fried. Its effects are similar to those of dry-fried Lablab Semen album (*chǎo biǎn dòu*), although somewhat weaker: it very gently nourishes the Spleen and Stomach with absolutely no propensity to cause stagnation. The dosage is 5-10g. This was first listed in *Convenient Reader of Materia Medica*.

> LABLAB FLOWER (扁豆花 *biǎn dòu huā*) – PHARMACEUTICAL NAME: LABLAB FLOS

This is sweet, neutral, and quite aromatic, and enters the Spleen and Stomach channels. It eliminates summerheat, transforms dampness, and harmonizes the Stomach. It is commonly used for summertime problems due to summerheat and dampness such as feverishness, diarrhea, or dysenteric disorders. Also used for red and white vaginal discharge. The dosage is 5-10g. This was first listed in *Illustrated Classic of the Materia Medica*.

Quality Criteria

Good quality consists of big, full, white, and heavy beans. The best quality comes from Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces. That from Burma, rather misleadingly called Yunnan lablab bean (雲南扁豆 *yún nán biǎn dòu*), is larger but flat and light, and is of inferior quality.

Major known chemical constituents

Fixed oil: linoleic acid, elaidic acid, stearic acid, behenic acid, palmitic acid, oleic acid, arachidic acid

Alkaloids: trigonelline

Amino acids: methionine, leucine, threonine

Sugars: stachyose, raffinose, maltose, glucose, galactose, fructose, sucrose

Other constituents: L-2-pipecolic acid, phytin, hemagglutinin A, B, pantothenic acid, proteins, carotene, vitamin B1, steroids

Alternate names

扁豆 *biǎn dòu*

蛾眉豆 *é méi dòu*

肉豆 *ròu dòu* – Jiangxi

藤豆 *téng dòu*

羊眼豆 *yáng yǎn dòu*

雲南扁豆 *yún nán biǎn dòu*