

# Seven Chinese Medicinal Foods Easily Grown in a Florida Garden

by Ellen Teeter, AP

China has a long tradition of using food to not only keep the body in harmony but to heal disease. Coughs, skin ailments, and indigestion are ills that are often healed by the perceptive family cook. Often, these healing foods are grown in family gardens or are purchased at a nearby market selling locally grown produce.

Florida is fortunate in that a huge variety of foods can be grown in a relatively small space almost all year long. Most of us are aware that locally grown food and, even better, food grown in our own gardens is fresher, healthier, and tastes great. Not all of us know that many fruits and vegetables easily grown in Florida have medicinal properties that can harmonize the body. Of course, growing one's own food helps to reduce our carbon footprint as well.

As a practitioner of Chinese medicine, I have taken advantage of the extended growing period of our subtropical climate to cultivate fruits and vegetables for the culinary delight, as well as the digestive harmony of my family. I have found that growing food in raised beds or in Earth Boxes has been the most efficient way to raise almost any edible plant. Earth boxes are an excellent way to easily grow food in a limited space. They can be used on porches, balconies, and rooftops. Visit [www.earthboxresearch.com](http://www.earthboxresearch.com).

Here are just a few of my favorite healing foods that you can easily cultivate in your own back yard. I have also included some basic medicinal properties from the Chinese perspective. Please consult your Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) practitioner when considering the use of foods medicinally.

**Banana.** Bananas can easily be grown as part of the landscape blending with Birds of Paradise or ornamental palmettos. Because bananas flourish in warm temperatures, the Sarasota/Bradenton area is an ideal place to grow this delightful fruit. Frost can damage banana trees; however, new shoots will usually appear once warmer weather begins.

In Chinese medicine, bananas are considered a cooling food and can lower

blood pressure, relieve constipation, and soothe hemorrhoids. Because they are moistening, it would not be good to eat too many if you have lung or nasal congestion.

**Basil.** Basil can be grown in raised beds, in the ground, or in Earth Boxes. My basil grows in a number of large ceramic pots as part of



my herb garden. Usually, the plants last for about two years. I move it to a somewhat shady spot in the heat of summer.

In Oriental medicine, basil has a long "folk medicine" history being used to treat the common cold, stimulate the appetite, and help heal gum ulcers.

**Broccoli.** Broccoli grows extremely well in good soil. I have had the best luck growing it in Earth Boxes. Broccoli is best planted from September through January. Harvesting and eating that long awaited first head of broccoli is quite a delight.

Modern research shows that the cruciferous family, of which broccoli is a member, are strong cancer fighters. In Oriental medicine, broccoli is considered a cool food that helps balance people who often feel overheated.

**Ginger.** Ginger can also be grown in Earth Boxes and kept going year after year. Eventually, the box will become filled with ginger if not regularly harvested. Ginger has a long history of use in Asian medicine. Fresh, it is a premier herb to take at the first sign of the common cold, helping to ease cough and nasal congestion and promoting a little perspiration to help expel the cold. Fresh ginger tea also soothes

indigestion.

**Longan.** Longan trees are subtropical trees and should be planted in the sunniest part of the landscape. The thick-skinned plum-like fruit has a sweet, exotic taste. Delicious!

The longan fruit is an important herb for insomnia, especially for women who tend to have anemia. Brew three or four longan fruits for an hour along with lotus seeds or a red date. Consume the liquid at bedtime as a tasty and calming tea.

## Orange and orange peel.

Orange trees are the hallmark of Florida agriculture. Those of us who do not have a backyard tree usually know someone who does. Oranges can soothe a dry cough, increase appetite, and quench thirst. The orange peel, when used in a tea, can be used for a productive cough and chest congestion. It's best to use an organic orange if you are planning to use the peel.

**Papaya.** Papaya trees can also be used as a beautiful and nutritious element of a landscape.

Trees usually produce fruit in the very first year of planting. Papaya is a wonderful fruit! It is an element in many digestive enzyme supplements. It is used in Oriental medicine for cough, stomachache, eczema, skin problems, and indigestion. Eat several slices before bedtime to improve your digestion.

These are only a few of the many possibilities for growing only healing foods as part of your landscape.

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