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*Astragalus membranaceus*

**ASTRAGALUS** is a perennial. Native to temperate Asia it has small pea-like, yellow flowers. It is also known as *Huang qi* (Chinese), Milk vetch, and Milk-vetch root; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of ‘your presence softens my pains’.

*Membranaceus* is derived from Latin *membrana* (thin skin, film, membrane) meaning ‘skin-like or membranous’.

The gum is used commercially by the food industry eg. to prevent crystallization in ice cream or jam.

This is one of the most important species used in traditional Chinese medicine and is often combined with drugs, including ginseng (*Panax ginseng*). Astragalus is used particularly in remedies for lost appetite, digestive problems and lung ailments, and it is also employed in treatment to build up the immune system.

The American Cancer Society has recorded in its journal that of patients taking this species a high proportion appeared to have strengthened immune functions.