

Ginseng and *Huang Qi* Mushroom Soup

This soup is a powerful *Qi* tonic to stimulate energy levels. It contains wood ear fungus (*Hei Mu Erh*), which is rich in amino acids (needed to build protein), phosphorus, iron, calcium and sugars. It was traditionally used, boiled in milk or beer as a remedy for throat inflammations and is also an effective immune tonic. It also helps replenish *Jing* (essence).

The shiitake mushrooms (*Xiang Gu*, *Lentinus edodes*) have a proven anti-viral action and are an important and effective immune stimulant. Oyster mushrooms (*Pleurotus ostreatus*, known as *hiratake* in Japan) can be used instead of the shiitake. These are a traditional remedy used to ease tendon pains, but have more recently been shown to possess similar anti-tumour and immune-strengthening action to shiitake mushrooms.

Serves 6

25g/1 oz *Hei Mu Erh*
1 onion, finely chopped
4 tablespoons olive oil
700g/1 ½ lb fresh shiitake or oyster mushrooms, sliced
1.5 litres/2 ½ pints chicken or vegetable stock
15g/½ oz *Ren Shen* (ginseng)
15g/½ oz *Huang Qi*
Crème fraîche, to serve
2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley, to garnish

Soak the *Hei Mu Erh* in water for 5-10 minutes to soften them, then rinse in clean water and set aside.

Sauté the onion in the oil for 2-3 minutes until it is soft and golden, then add the mushrooms and continue cooking for 3 minutes.

Add the stock, then the *Ren Shen*, *Huang Qi* and pre-soaked *Hei Mu Erh*. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat, cover (leaving a small vent to allow the steam to escape) and simmer for 45 minutes.

Take the pan from the heat and remove the *Ren Shen* and *Huang Qi*. Allow to cool slightly, then purée the soup in a food processor or blender until smooth.

Return to the pan and warm through before serving garnished with a spoonful of crème fraîche and a little chopped parsley.

The *Ren Shen* may be chopped and served with the soup, rather like croutons, if desired, but the *Huang Qi* is too fibrous to eat and should be discarded.