Hawthorn, or *Crataegus oxyacantha*, is the oldest known medicinal plant in European medicine; it was first described by Dioscorides in the first century. A thorny, flowering shrub that is part of the Rosaceae, or rose family, hawthorn originated in northern Europe, but has since spread throughout the world. In medieval times, the hawthorn tree was considered sacred, and its red, berry-like fruit was used extensively in myriad medicinal and culinary applications.

From a therapeutic perspective, hawthorn berry is recognized as a potent heart tonic. It has been used for thousands of years to treat heart failure, chest pain, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure and atherosclerosis, in both alternative and conventional medicine. In fact, hawthorn berry was included in the U.S. Pharmacopeia up until the 1930s, when it was discontinued in favor of more aggressive, pharmaceutical options.

Today, hawthorn is still widely accepted as a heart tonic, and constitutes an excellent treatment for diseases of the heart and blood vessels, including angina, myocarditis, arteriosclerosis, strengthening blood vessels, vascular insufficient and blood clots, as well as for restoring the heart muscle wall and lowering cholesterol. Indeed, so much scientific validation has hawthorn received, that both the German Commission E and the World Health Organization recommend hawthorn use in cardiac insufficiency.

Hawthorn is a particularly rich source of heart-protective antioxidants like oligomeric proanthocyanidins and quercetin. Interestingly, berries, leaves, and flowers of hawthorn are phytochemically similar in composition, differing primarily in the ratio of specific flavonoids and procyanidins present. The berries also contain phytonutrients such as anthocyanidins and proanthocyanidins, which have a variety of therapeutic effects on the cardiovascular system, including strengthening blood vessel walls and tonifying the heart and vascular system. More tangibly speaking, hawthorn dilates coronary arteries, improves oxygenation and energy metabolism within the heart, and decreases lactic acid, the waste product of exertion that causes heart muscle pain.

Further, hawthorn improves the heart muscle’s metabolism, improving pumping capacity and making the heart’s job easier by relaxing the blood vessels - in essence making the heart work more effectively.

If you have a cardiovascular condition and are on prescription medication such as digitoxin, it is advisable to work with your treating healthcare practitioner, should you wish to integrate hawthorn into your treatment protocol, as it can increase the medication’s effects.

Hawthorn has also been used in a variety of other therapeutic applications, such as digestive and kidney problems, circulatory disorders, migraines, menopausal conditions, insomnia and to address symptoms of anxiety. Topically, hawthorn may be
MEDICINAL PROPERTIES

- ANTISPASMODIC
- ANTIOXIDANT
- CARDIAC
- HEPATOPROTECTIVE
- HYPOTENSIVE
- REJUVENATING
- SEDATIVE
- VASODILATOR

Applied to sores, ulcers, boils, frostbite and to alleviate itching.

PATHOLOGIES

ARTERIOSCLEROSIS: Hawthorn assists the cardiovascular system by improving the amount of blood pumped out of the heart during contractions, widening blood vessel width, and increasing nerve signal transmission. Further, it appears that key flavonoids and oligomeric procyanidins present in hawthorn, help dilate blood vessels, which improves circulation and lessens the amount of pressure exerted on arteries by the blood, thereby decreasing the amount of stress placed on the heart muscle and so, reducing the risk of heart failure, heart attack and stroke.

In addition, considerable scientific evidence suggests that hawthorn offers solid antioxidant protection against the formation of plaque throughout the body - plaque which can lead to arteriosclerosis. Indeed, plaque buildup in the blood vessels that supply the heart with oxygen-rich blood can cause chest pain (angina) and heart attacks, while plaque buildup in the arteries that supply blood to the brain, can result in stroke. When one considers the potential implications of plaque buildup in the body, it seems a no-brainer to recommend hawthorn supplementation as a first rate preventative measure, especially for those with a family history of coronary artery disease.

Cardiovascular diseases: Hawthorn is recognized to promote the health of the cardiovascular and circulatory systems and has been scientifically demonstrated to be effective in treating angina, high blood pressure, congestive heart failure and cardiac arrhythmias. Hawthorn has also been found to strengthen the heart and stabilize it against arrhythmias. Further, there is evidence for cardiovascular system improvement, particularly in clinical parameters associated with acute angina and acute myocardial infarction.

In addition, hawthorn has been studied extensively in individuals with congestive heart failure. In fact, five of the six major published studies to date found dramatically improved symptoms (such as shortness of breath and fatigue). One study even reported that hawthorn supplementation was as effective as low doses of the leading heart medication in improving common symptoms associated with congestive heart failure.

CONCOMITANT PRODUCTS:

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CONCOMITANT PRODUCTS: Improvement and maintenance of cardiovascular health and function depend highly on the quality of blood and blood flow. This can be achieved by adhering to a quality diet, a healthy exercise regime, and a general diet and lifestyle that are both healthy and balanced. In addition, some key herbs and supplements should ideally be added to bolster support and to maximize the nutritional profile. Hawthorn is obviously an ideal heart tonic, to support and maximize heart health. It can be combined with other plants such as oregano, cayenne, garlic, green tea, lavender, ginkgo, ginseng, as well as with certain key nutrients like omega 3 fatty acids, CoQ10, magnesium, potassium and vitamin D.
