



Herbal Garden (Muligai Vanam)



Ashwagandha

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Botanical Name	:	<i>Withaniasomnifera</i> (L.) Dunal
Tamil Name	:	Amukkira
Sanskrit Name	:	Ashwagandha
English Name	:	Winter Cherry

Distribution and Habitat

Withania somnifera(L.) Dunal belongs to the family *Solanaceae* and is commonly known as Ashwagandha. This shrub is found in the drier parts of India, Baluchistan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, South Africa and Egypt. It grows widely throughout India particularly in hotter parts, on waste places and road sides. *W.somifera* is an erect branching, woolly pubescence shrub that grows to a height between 30 and 150 cm, branches extend radially from a central stem. Leaves are dull green, elliptic, up to 10-12 cm long and 2.5-5 cm wide. The flowers are green or yellow and become red in colour when it is mature. The fruits are fleshy and roots are cylindrical in shape.



Parts used

Leaves, fruits, roots and seeds.

Phytochemical constituents

Withanine, withsomine, withaniol, withanic acid, somnine, somniferine, and amino acids.

Uses

Ashwagandha is a potent anti-stress agent and it is the principal component of many poly herbal preparations. Fruits of *W.somnifera* have a milk-coagulating property, which is used in the preparation of vegetable rennet ferment for making cheese.

Medicinal uses

Withania somnifera Dunal (ashwagandha) is a commonly used herb in Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani system of medicines. It is an imperative herb in traditional medicine systems for over 3000 years. The name “*somnifera*” in Latin means “sleep-inducer” which probably refers to its general use as a



remedy against stress. In Ayurvedic medicine, Ashwagandha is considered a Rasayana, means that it helps maintain youth, both mentally and physically. Traditionally, plant was used as aphrodisiac, anti-inflammatory agent, as an ingredient of liver tonic, rejuvenating agent and to treat insomnia. The leaves of *W.Somnifera* are bitter in taste and used as an anti-helmantic. The roots are used in constipation, loss of memory, and loss of muscular energy. The fruits of plant are claimed to be sedative, emetic, stomachic, a blood-purifier, febrifuge, diuretic and bitter tonic in dyspepsia as well as a growth promoter in infants (Kapoor, 2001). *W.Somnifera* and its botanical constituents are reported as anti-tumour, anti-parkinson, immuno-stimulatory, cardio-protective, hypo-glycaemic and hypo-lipidaemic agents (Vyas et al. 2011). *W.somnifera* is normally consumed with warm milk or lukewarm water.

Conclusion

W.somnifera is a main ingredient of many marketed formulations used for a variety of clinical conditions like arthritis and rheumatism and as a general tonic to improve health of the elderly and during pregnancy in women. It is used as anti-arthritic, anti-spasmodic, anti-inflammatory, nervine tonic, nerve soothing, sedative, anti-oxidant, immune-modulator, free radical scavenger, anti-stress and anti-cancer agent.

