

## HEALTH

Edited by Suzanne Harrison [suzanne.harrison@scmp.com](mailto:suzanne.harrison@scmp.com)

## TCM

Rose Tse and  
Angela Collingwood  
[info@shen-nong.com](mailto:info@shen-nong.com)

## Heed the seed

Traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) clinics in Hong Kong often have mirrors on the walls bearing the Chinese characters *yu man xing lin*.

This expression derives from a story about a famous Chinese herbalist, Dong Feng, who retired to the Lu Mountains in Jiangxi province for a simple life.

Being Taoist, he didn't accept money for his services. Instead, he asked to be paid in apricot trees (right). The number of trees depended on the illness. After many years, his collection of trees was known as Dong the Immortal's Apricot Orchard.

This has now become an expression of praise for good doctors.

Traditional Chinese herbalists use apricot seed to treat coughs. According to TCM theory, it redirects rising *chi* (energy) flow. Apricot seeds are said to be a natural cough suppressant and expectorant for treating all stages of coughing, depending

on how it's prescribed. Apricot seed is the small kernel enclosed within the centre of the fruit. Apricot is a stone fruit closely related to the peach.

There's been considerable controversy about apricot seed, specifically one of its components, amygdalin, as a possible cancer preventative and malignant cell growth inhibitor.

Several studies in the US in the 1970s and early 80s demonstrated that amygdalin didn't kill cancer cells. Consequently, raw apricot seed isn't sold in US health food stores with information about potential effects on cancer. Only processed

apricot seeds, with their important enzymes neutralised, are generally available. However, apricot seeds are available in China and other Asian markets.

They're sold either as the whole kernel or seed, or in decoctions, including cough syrups. Chinese practitioners usually combine apricot seed with other herbs, including white mulberry leaf, which has been shown in Chinese medical trials to relieve chronic bronchitis.

Apricot seed is also an ingredient in traditional soups, such as pork spare ribs and old yellow cucumber soup, a nourishing soup for

dispelling summer heat. You'll need 1kg of old ripened yellow cucumbers, 500g of pork spare ribs, 9g of apricot seed, some dried sweet dates and a few slices of dried tangerine peels.

Scald the pork spare ribs in boiling water and cut the cucumbers into large pieces. Pour 10 cups of water into a pot and bring to the boil. Add all the ingredients to the pot and bring to the boil again. Finally, turn the burner to low and boil for 2½ hours. A pinch of salt can be added for seasoning.

*Before taking medicine, consult your TCM or medical practitioner*