

# PINELLIA & MAGNOLIA BARK FORMULA

BAN XIA HOU  
PO TANG

ORIGINS: Prescriptions from the  
Golden Cabinet (Jin Gui Yao Luo)  
by Zhang Zhong-jing c. 220 CE

**Pinellia & Magnolia Bark Formula** (*Ban Xia Hou Po Tang*) was originally developed by Zhang Zhong-jing and first appeared in the herbal classic, *Prescriptions from the Golden Cabinet (Jin Gui Yao Luo)*, which was published around 220 CE. Later, during the Tang dynasty, this formula was included in the *Important Formulas Worth a Thousand Gold Pieces*.

## GENERAL SIGNS/SYMPTOMS

**Pinellia & Magnolia Bark Formula** (*Ban Xia Hou Po Tang*) treats a wide range of respiratory, digestive, and emotional conditions. Whatever the indication being treated, the presence of combined qi stagnation and phlegm must be confirmed before prescribing. These signs and symptoms usually include one or more of the following: sensation of something caught in throat (plum pit qi), stifling feeling in the chest and hypochondriac region, excessive mucus production in throat or chest, and nausea with or without vomiting. The patient might also present with swallowing difficulty, belching of sour fluids, difficulty breathing, lingering bronchitis, emotional upset, loss of voice or any mental disorders where there is a verifiable excess of both phlegm and qi stagnation. Tongue: excessively moist or greasy coat. Pulse: slippery, or slippery and wiry.

## CLASSICAL ACTIONS

1. Regulates qi and breaks up qi stagnation
2. Transforms phlegm and dissipates clumps
3. Directs qi downward, stops cough, relieves nausea and vomiting

## INGREDIENTS

PINYIN	LATIN	ENGLISH	PERCENT OF FORMULA
<i>Sheng Jiang</i> (assistant)	<i>Zingiberis Rhizoma recens</i>	Fresh Ginger Rhizome	23.1%
<i>Zhi Ban Xia</i> (co-chief)	<i>Pinelliae Rhizoma Preparatum</i>	Pinella, ginger-cured	18.5%
<i>Fu Shen</i> (deputy)	<i>Poriae Sclerotium Pararadicis</i>	Poria Spirit	18.5%
<i>Hou Po</i> (co-chief)	<i>Magnoliae Officinalis Cortex</i>	Magnolia Bark	13.8%
<i>Zi Su Ye</i> (deputy)	<i>Perillae Folium</i>	Perilla Leaf	9.2%
<i>Qing Pi</i> (deputy)	<i>Citri Reticulatae Viride Pericarpium</i>	Green Tangerine Peel	9.2%
<i>Xiang Fu</i> (deputy)	<i>Cyperi Rhizoma</i>	Cyperus, Nut Grass	7.7%

## GENERAL INDICATIONS / MODERN APPLICATIONS

- Bronchitis, chronic or lingering
- Cervical spine syndrome
- Chest, fullness of
- Cough with excess sputum
- Depression
- Epilepsy
- Esophageal strictures or spasms
- Gastritis
- GERDS
- Glomus hystericus ("plum pit qi")
- Goiter
- Hyperthyroidism
- Hysteria
- Indigestion
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome
- Laryngitis, chronic
- Meniere's disease
- Morning sickness
- Motion sickness
- Nausea
- Neurosis
- Overwhelm, feeling of
- Perimenopausal syndrome
- Premenstrual syndrome
- Psychosis
- Reflux, esophageal
- Snoring
- Swallowing disorders
- Vocal cords, edema of
- Vomiting
- Wheezing

## FORMULA DISCUSSION

The original indications for Zhang Zhong-jing's Han Dynasty formula were 1) "for women who feel as if a piece of broiled meat is stuck in their throats," and 2) chest distention with hardness below the heart. The sensation in the throat described here has since become known as "plum-pit qi," which is a hallmark sign of the pattern addressed by this formula. Yet, as will be demonstrated presently, it is not a necessary sign for the formula to be applicable.

The throat is the primary zone that separates the interior from the exterior for pathogens entering the body via the lungs or stomach and especially for those draining into the interior from behind the nose. When the portals of the head and neck (sensory orifices, Du-14, and the *cou li* of the head) fail to prevent the progression of an exterior pathogen inward, the body's last chance to lock it down in the (semi-) external terrain is the throat. This is why we typically develop throat symptoms before chest symptoms. The lungs and the stomach are, anatomically speaking, the first

**FORMULA ACTIONS**

- Regulates qi and breaks up qi stagnation
- Transforms phlegm and dissipates clumps
- Directs qi downward, stops cough, relieves nausea and vomiting

**TONGUE**

Excessively moist or with a greasy white coat, possibly with scallops.

**PULSE**

Slippery or slippery and wiry, often slow. May also be deep and tight.

**CONTRAINDICATIONS / CAUTIONS**

This formula is strongly dispersing and drying; therefore caution should be exercised with those who are deficient in yin and fluids. Do not use with patients who exhibit a red tongue with scanty coat, a thin pulse, a flushed face or bitter taste in mouth.

*zang-fu* to contact the exterior. The lung is the yin organ receiving yang qi from heaven and the stomach is the yang organ taking in yin qi from the earth. It is because of their office of “first contacted” organs that the lung and stomach are often paired as “channels entered” by substances that release the exterior or drain exteriorly-contracted pathogens downward. In contrast, the *tonics* tend to pair lung with spleen, since this pairing represents how yin and yang nutrition (food and oxygen, respectively) create qi. But Zhang seems to have conceived of his formula to treat emotional issues rather than patterns contracted from an exteriorly-contracted pathogen, like cold or damp. If we look at the throat’s role more closely and with the understanding that in Chinese philosophy, spiritual, psychological, emotional, and physical factors are phenomena on a continuum rather than existing as compartmentalized entities, we will begin to appreciate the connections.

As stated, the lung and stomach are respectively the yin and yang organs that initially contact the exterior. Their close relationship when it comes to the exterior is emphasized in the channel system by the fact that the lung channel begins in the abdomen under CV-12, which is the place where the 1st branch of the stomach channel ends. This first branch of leg *yangming* is the one that passes through the throat and along the chest. So both channels have a governing action upon both the chest and abdomen. It is significant that the throat is the zone where both these channels combine forces to block entry by an exterior pathogen into the interior.

Like his contemporaries, Zhang Zhong-jing considered stressful situations/ events to be an external pathogen. Nowhere is that more clear than in his application of his formula, *Ban Xia Hou Po Tang*. Tang and Song Dynasty commentators explain his description of a “sensation of an obstruction in the throat like a piece of broiled meat that cannot be swallowed or expectorated” as a sensation that is the result of a situation that we simply “cannot swallow.” The pathological development of plum-pit qi is this: We are experiencing a situation which we find pathogenic and overwhelming. In order to prevent this external pathogen from penetrating into the interior, we must block it with something. Qi is the only humor that can be summoned immediately, so we block the pathogen by stagnating the qi of the yin and yang organs that will be affected first (lung and stomach) in the zone that separates interior from exterior (the throat). The qi stagnation impairs the transportation of fluids in the throat causing them to congeal into phlegm. This is how the *glomus hystericus* (plum pit qi) forms.

Both the lung and the stomach are supposed to descend qi, but when they are working together to form a barrier in the throat, since the throat is located superiorly to these organs, it is at the expense of their descending function. If the qi is slow or late to respond, or if the person’s *wei qi* is weak, the congealing of qi and phlegm can descend deeper, causing cough or bronchitis if it slides down the trachea, or nausea/ vomiting if it slides down the esophagus. Other possible developments as a result of unsuccessful or incomplete blockage at the level of the throat include wheezing with profuse sputum, a stifling sensation in the chest, epigastric tension, and even food stagnation.

The strategy of **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** (*Ban Xia Hou Po Tang*) is to simultaneously rectify the qi by strongly directing downward both the lung and stomach qi and to break up phlegm accumulation in the throat, chest, and abdomen. Because these actions benefit more than just a particular sensation in the throat, **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** (*Ban Xia Hou Po Tang*) has come to be utilized for a wide range of stress and nervous disorders as well as many respiratory and digestive issues. Some of the more modern applications of **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** (*Ban Xia Hou Po Tang*) include the treatment of hysteria, neurosis, anxiety, depression, perimenopausal syndrome, gastritis, colitis, edema of the vocal cords, lingering bronchitis or other lingering respiratory conditions with phlegm, depression, vomiting up phlegm, and more. Because this formula is drying and warm, it is essential that the presence of phlegm or sputum be confirmed before prescribing. Confirmation can be obtained by a tongue coat that is excessively moist or greasy white, copious expectoration, a rattle in the chest or throat, a slippery and wiry pulse, or, of course, “the sensation of something in the throat that cannot be coughed up or swallowed.”

## SYNERGY OF INGREDIENTS

There are two equally important primary actions in **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** (*Ban Xia Hou Po Tang*). Those are 1) to promote the downward direction of the qi in the lung and stomach and 2) to transform phlegm/ break up phlegm accumulations. The first chief, prepared pinellia (*zhi ban xia*), is responsible for transforming phlegm and breaking up accumulations. It also directs lung and stomach qi downward and helps to stop cough and vomiting. The other chief, magnolia bark (*hou po*), strongly moves the qi downward and secondarily breaks up masses and resolves phlegm. Each of the chiefs assists the other in the two primary actions of the formula.

The version of the formula under discussion here contains four deputies and one assistant. Poria spirit (*fu shen*) replaces Zhang Zhong-jing's *fu ling* here because it has a stronger action than the original ingredient to settle the spirit. But like *fu ling*, it helps to guide out the disintegrated phlegm through the urine. Immature tangerine peel (*qing pi*) and nut grass (*xiang fu*) are added to the original formula in order to augment its ability to break up qi constraint. Both of these substances enter the gallbladder channel, which expands the actions somewhat without interfering with the original intention. This channel, in Zhang Zhong-jing's six-channel theory, is the "pivot" between interior and exterior. The *shaoyang* is the channel most closely associated with damp and, as the "pivot" is often part of a pattern where a pathogen is not quite interior and not quite exterior. These two deputies add to the formula a powerful action to harmonize the liver over-acting upon the stomach. This is an important addition if the stress has begun to affect digestion leading to food stagnation or other gastric distress. Both nut grass (*xiang fu*) and immature tangerine peel (*qing pi*) reach into the qi to break up qi clumps and they are often combined to address any type of accumulation in the digestive tract. The fourth deputy is perilla leaf (*zi su ye*). Perilla leaf is an exterior-releasing herb that can also descend floating qi in the chest and diaphragm. When combined with ginger, it helps to drain the lung qi and regulate the exterior. Zhang most likely included perilla leaf because it was used to detoxify and stop vomiting in addition to draining lung qi. Perilla leaf is the only ingredient of this formula that is aromatic. It therefore, along with the ginger, can help vent pathogenic factors outward that are being broken up in a zone that is not quite interior and not quite exterior.

The assistant in **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** (*Ban Xia Hou Po Tang*) is fresh ginger (*sheng jiang*). It is the substance with the highest percentage in the present formulation. It enters the lung (to release the exterior) as well as the stomach. It has a legendary ability to harmonize the stomach and alleviate nausea, but it also has actions to stop cough and transform phlegm. As stated above, when combined with perilla leaf (*zi su ye*), ginger can vent the still-exterior aspect of the pathogenic factor back outward while the other substances drive the qi downward and break up accumulations.

## MODERN APPLICATIONS

### Ear, Nose, Throat Disorders

*Loss of voice, laryngitis and hoarseness*—when due to nervousness or hysteria.<sup>i</sup>

*Meniere's syndrome*—The symptoms of Meniere's syndrome are often aggravated by emotional strain and upset. If the root of this condition is liver qi constraint and the accumulation of phlegm and damp leads to stagnation in the liver and gallbladder channels, then **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** can be very helpful. This formula's ability to disperse qi constraint, transform phlegm, and descend qi can relieve the symptoms of dizziness, vertigo, irritability, fatigue, nausea and vomiting.

*Edema of the vocal cords or glomus hystericus*—If the underlying pattern for these is qi constraint with phlegm accumulation they can be successfully treated with **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula**.<sup>ii</sup>

*Esophageal neurosis* is a functional disorder. This diagnosis is made when all diseases of the digestive tract have been ruled out. There is often an emotional component, and the symptoms occur in conjunction with emotional upset. Difficulty swallowing, belching, the sensation of stricture in the esophagus all may accompany this disorder. The pulse of this patient is generally deep, indicating confinement of the qi by yin factors.<sup>iii</sup>

### Gastrointestinal Disorders

*Morning sickness*—**Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** has been used to treat morning sickness for centuries. It can be safely prescribed to pregnant women. It descends qi and treats nausea and vomiting, especially when there is an emotional component causing qi constraint.

*Esophageal strictures and spasms or indigestion accompanied by the feeling of something stuck in the throat*—**Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** has the ability to relax spasms, largely due to the anti-spasmodic and mildly sedative actions of magnolia bark (*hou po*).

*Irritable Bowel Syndrome*—The symptoms of IBS often worsen with emotional upset. When this is the case and when there is phlegm in the stool, **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** can relieve symptoms significantly.

### Psycho-Emotional Disorders

*Depression*—When depression is accompanied by throat symptoms, insomnia, gastrointestinal complaints, and if there are clear signs of phlegm, then **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** can be used to address all these symptoms. Other symptoms may include: chronic fatigue, dizziness, vertigo, palpitations, stuffiness in the chest or beneath the heart, cold feet, gurgling in the digestive tract, gastrointestinal neurosis.<sup>iv</sup>

*Hysteria*—A 1985 study reported successful treatment of 103 out of 104 patients who suffered from hysteria characterized by phlegm stagnation with a modified version of **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula**. A follow-up with 94 of those patients 7 years later indicated 91 patients had stabilized.<sup>v</sup>

*Panic attacks, anxiety, and nervousness*—These are sometimes accompanied by symptoms of constraint or obstruction of the throat, gastrointestinal symptoms, insomnia, cough, irritability, palpitation, vertigo, dizziness or headaches. In this case, the emotional and physical symptoms may be treated successfully with **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula**.<sup>vi</sup>

## FORMULA COMPARISONS

**Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** and **Cyperus and Atractylodes Combination** (*Yue Ju Tang*; KPC 3300). These two formulas have several indications and actions in common. The chief commonality between the two formulas is that both treat qi constraint that results from stagnation caused by the seven emotions. This constraint then causes an accumulation of phlegm-damp and interruption of the correct qi dynamic, causing counterflow qi. This condition is worsened by lack of activity and continued emotional disturbance. One primary difference is that *Yue Ju Wan* is more appropriate for usage with patients who have heat symptoms due to constraint or when blood stasis or food stasis are significant factors. **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** is warming and therefore not as suitable for heat patterns.

**Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** and **Bupleurum D Formula**. These two formulas can be used to treat qi constraint and counterflow qi that accumulates in the upper burner causing chest tightness and a sensation of fullness, palpitations, irritability, anxiety, and depression that may be accompanied by throat disorders as well. There is one significant: **Bupleurum D Formula** is used in case of liver heat and liver yang rising

symptoms. It frees the three yang, but does not relieve the lungs. **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** is used when qi constraint is accompanied by phlegm damp in the middle and upper burners, without significant heat.

**Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** and **Citrus and Pinellia Formula**. Both formulas have two chiefs consisting of *ban xia*, and a qi regulating herb; the patterns they treat have some overlap. The most significant difference between these two formulas is that **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula** is used when the qi stagnation causes the congealing of phlegm and damp; while **Citrus and Pinellia Formula** treats a pattern when phlegm-damp has obstructed the qi mechanism. To determine which came first is not as difficult as it may seem. The **Citrus and Pinellia Formula** patient will have developed her/his condition from diet or having a phlegm-damp constitution. Stress does not have to be a factor for the **Citrus and Pinellia Formula** patient. Stress is often a significant factor in the patient benefiting from **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula**. **Citrus and Pinellia Formula** is a bit milder for moving qi and is therefore safer for longer term application, while **Pinellia and Magnolia Bark Formula**, since it is stronger at regulating qi and breaking up clumps, can be used for acute or severe cases with faster response.

## USEFUL COMBINATIONS

For symptoms of depression that occur with gastrointestinal neurosis and/or plum pit qi, Liver qi xu with spleen qi xu <sup>vii</sup>	Combine with <b>Free and Easy Wanderer Plus</b> .
For mental depression caused by liver congestion and qi stagnation with weak respiration, forceless speech, insomnia, soft, slippery pulse, pale tongue with thick, greasy coat <sup>viii</sup>	Combine with <b>Cyperus and Atractylodes Combination</b> ( <i>Yue Ju Tang</i> ; KPC 3300).
For polyp of the vocal cord <sup>ix</sup>	Combine with <b>Opiopogon Combination</b> ( <i>Mai Men Dong Tang</i> ; KPC 2950).
For esophageal obstruction and globus hystericus. This condition may include a feeling of throat obstruction, difficulty swallowing, belching. This syndrome may or may not include emotional symptoms such as anxiety or hysteria <sup>x</sup>	Combine with <b>Cyperus and Perilla Formula</b> ( <i>Xiang Su San</i> ; KPC 1950).
For cardiac neurosis combined with esophageal neurosis. This condition may include a feeling of throat obstruction, difficulty swallowing, belching, chest tightness and palpitations. This syndrome may or may not include emotional symptoms such as anxiety or hysteria <sup>xi</sup>	Combine with <b>Bupleurum D Formula</b> .

## ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> Hsu, H. VIII Ear, Nose, Throat Disease, *Bulletin of the Oriental Healing Arts Institute of USA*, 1981, 6:7, p.42-45.

<sup>ii</sup> Kikutani, T., Clinical Research on the Use of Pinellia and Magnolia Combination in Treating Esophageal and Gastrointestinal Neuroses, *International Journal of Oriental Medicine*, March 1992, 17:1, pp. 33-40.

<sup>iii</sup> Kikutani, T., *ibid*.

<sup>iv</sup> Fruehauf, H., Commonly Used Chinese Herb Formulas for the treatment of Mental Disorders, *Journal of Chinese Medicine*, 1995, 48, p. 29.

<sup>v</sup> Guo Wai Yi Xue Zhong Yi Zhong Yao Fen Ce (*Monograph of Chinese Herbology from Foreign Medicine*) 1985: 4-41.

<sup>vi</sup> Hsu, H., Chinese Herbal Therapy for Chronic and Recalcitrant Diseases: Neurosis, *International Journal of Oriental Medicine*, Dec. 1998, 23:4, pp. 189-194.

<sup>vii</sup> Fruehauf, H., Commonly Used Chinese Herb Formulas for the treatment of Mental Disorders, *Journal of Chinese Medicine*, 1995, No. 48, p. 29.

<sup>viii</sup> Hsu, H., *op. cit*.

<sup>ix</sup> Fruehauf, H., *op. cit*.

<sup>x</sup> Kikutani, T., *op. cit*.

<sup>xi</sup> Kikutani, T., *ibid*.