Angelica sinensis
syn. Angelica polymorpha var. sinensis
Apiaceae

Dang gui
Dong quai

Part used: dried root (see note below)
Native range: high altitudes / mountain woods in China, Korea, Japan
Harvestable status / sustainability: widely cultivated
Flavor: sweet, acrid; slightly bitter
Energetics: warming
Actions: emmenagogue, blood / xue tonic, circulatory stimulant, analgesic, spasmylytic to uterine tissue, mild laxative, mild hypotensive, mild hepatoprotective, bronchiodilator, vulnerary

Dang gui is a supreme Blood (xue) builder and Blood mover. It is one of the most commonly used herbs in Chinese medicine to nourish and strengthen Heart and Liver blood, and to promote circulation and movement of Blood in the context of both menstrual disorders as well as traumatic injury. It is most directly indicated when Blood is deficient with a cold / yang depleted state (as opposed to bai shao / white peony which is more indicated when there is deficient blood with yin deficiency and false heat).

Traditionally Dang Gui has never been used alone; it is most often combined with Rehmannia, cinnamon, white peony, Ligusticum, and licorice. It can also be combined with motherwort, Chaste tree, or black cohosh or other herbs as indicated.

Indications:
- Xue/ Blood tonic:
  - Deficient blood: pallor, fatigue, dizziness, anemia / low RBC count, amenorrhea, irregular cycles, brittle hair, weak nails
Stagnant blood: ovarian cysts, fibroids, endometriosis, dysmenorrhea, PMS (see cautionary note below)
Post-partum fatigue and discomfort
May improve red blood cell count (anemia, chemotherapy, etc.)
Perimenopausal complaints, when combined with other herbs
Disturbed Shen: forgetfulness, cloudy thinking, anxiety, insomnia, including both PMS and menopausal anxiety
Vertigo, palpitations
Cardiotonic: normalizes lipid levels, slows and strengthens heartbeat, normalizes arrhythmias, reduces blood pressure, improves circulation to heart (angina and ischemic conditions), myocarditis
Constipation with debility, especially due to old age or PMS
Dyspnea, cough, shortness of breath
Deficient, cold abdominal pain
Also used in China to treat trauma associated with blood stagnation: bruising, swelling, tendon injuries, broken bones / fractures, other trauma and injury (topically and internally)
May help prevent damage to the liver from hepatotoxic drugs.

Interactions and/or toxicity:
AHPA Safety Class 1, Interaction Class C
Discontinue use at least one week prior to surgery due to potential blood thinning effect.
Use caution if taking blood thinning medications – there are no known case reports of interactions but this should be done only under the supervision of a qualified practitioner.
Not to be used during pregnancy (not traditionally contraindicated in second and third trimesters, but this should only be done under supervision of a qualified practitioner)
Can exacerbate heavy menstrual flow / menorrhagia especially when used in the 2-3 days prior to menses. Can in some cases also exacerbate other bleeding disorders – endometriosis, nosebleeds, bleeding gums, etc.
Traditional contraindications include:
  • Caution in cases of Spleen deficiency with loose stools, abdominal bloating
  • Caution in yin deficiency with vacuity heat / fire; best avoided or combined with cooling yin nourishing herbs such as bai shao (white peony root).

Preparation:
Decoction
Tincture
Capsule
Dosage:
1 tsp to 12 oz water, lightly decoct for 20 minutes, three times per day as decoction
3-15 g dried root per day
1-4 ml three times per day as tincture
500 mg three-six times per day as capsule

Major plant constituents: ferulic acid, flavonoids, furanocoumarins, polysaccharides, alkaloids
• Dang Gui has no direct estrogenic activity.

Additional notes:
• Michael Tierra reports using *A. brewerii* which is native to North America, as an effective substitute. On the other hand, Thomas Avery Garran’s listed uses for *Angelica brewerii* overlap only partially with *Angelica sinensis*.
• Traditionally the “head” of the root is used more as a tonic and hemostatic, the “tail” more to move blood.
  o Head: moves blood and stops bleeding
  o Body: nourishes blood
  o Tail: removes blood stasis
  o Rootlets: improve peripheral circulation

Sources:
AHPA Botanical Safety Handbook, 1st and 2nd Editions
Bensky and Gamble, Chinese Herbal Medicine Materia Medica
Bone and Mills, Principles and Practice of Phytotherapy
Brinker, Herb Contraindications and Drug Interactions
Chen and Chen, Chinese Medical Herbology and Pharmacology
Gaby, A to Z Guide to Drug-Herb-Vitamin Interactions
PDR for Herbal Medicines, Third Edition
Skenderi, Herbal Vade Mecum
Trickey, Women, Hormones, and the Menstrual Cycle
Winston and Kuhn, Herbal Therapy and Supplements