

DR. CHRISTOPHER'S  
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## **Tulsi: An Herb for Our Stressful Times**

-Alice Gowans, MH



My first introduction to Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*), also known as Holy Basil or Sacred Basil, came while attending the Master Herbalist Certification Seminar at the School of Natural Healing in 2012. My sister and I took advantage of the herb garden outside the School in the morning and at lunch, exploring the collection of plants there. We came upon one we did not recognize; it appeared to be of the mint family, had an intriguing spicy scent and nice little blossoms. David Christopher told us it was Tulsi, and I scribbled the name down in my notebook in the middle of my chemistry lecture notes to remind me to investigate it later. Thus began my captivation with this nice little herb.

I came to discover that Tulsi has been appreciated for centuries in Ayurveda for its many beneficial effects. Its historic uses are many, and include reducing inflammation, lowering fevers and cholesterol, enhancing periodontal health, preventing and easing insect stings and bites, lowering and normalizing high blood pressure, as well as being antibacterial, antifungal and anti-

viral. As with our other medicinal herbs, its effects are obtained by using the herb in its natural state, its properties being lost when its compounds are isolated or extracted.

According to Rosemary Gladstar in *Medicinal Herbs, A Beginner's Guide* (Storey Publishing, 2012) Tulsi has more than 3,000 years of recorded medicinal use. It is classified in Ayurveda as an herb that "nourishes a person's growth to perfect health and promotes long life. The daily use of this herb is believed to help maintain the balance of chakras, or energy centers in the body, and to bring out the goodness, virtue, and joy in humans." Given the state of the world today, perhaps we should encourage everyone the world over to keep a pot of Tulsi growing in the kitchen.

I find its use as an adaptogen intriguing. Adaptogenic herbs help boost the body's vitality, aiding it to adapt to and defend against the effects of environmental stress. David Hoffman tells us in *Medical Herbalism* (Healing Arts Press, 2003) that adaptogens "do not block the stress response, but instead smooth out the associated highs and lows". I like the idea of normalizing the response rather than blocking it, achieving results through a gentle action which is a quality common to many of our favorite herbs. Given the stress most people seem to find themselves facing today, including an adaptogen in their routines would seem beneficial. Tulsi fits the bill, and is a surprisingly tasty option. I have started including Tulsi in my everyday tea blend, and have found it to be quite refreshing in a blend used for iced tea. I would be inclined to include it in my tea just for the taste.

Tulsi is also said to increase the body's efficient use of oxygen, supplying antioxidants and other nutrients including vitamins A and C, calcium, iron, zinc and chlorophyll. It contains no stimulants and yet is considered a general vitalizer, increasing physical endurance, enhancing stamina, boosting the immune system and sharpening memory.

Tulsi has definitely found a place among my list of favorite herbs, and I hope more people will familiarize themselves with this spicy little powerhouse.

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