

You want caterpillar fungus with that?

TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE ITEMS CAN ALSO ADD KICK TO YOUR COOKING

BY CHRIS TRABER
Staff Writer

Fatigued with your food's flavour? Tired of the traditional? Bored with bland?

How about kick-starting your taste buds and health with some white fungus, lily leaves or diced deer antler?

Or, how about a mystical Tibetan caterpillar valued at many times its weight in gold?

These and many more exotic items have been a mainstay in traditional Chinese medicine for centuries. Now, creative and health-conscious cooks are borrowing recipe secrets long guarded and used by Asian cultures.

The vast array of plant and animal products available at Kam Yuen Chinese Herbs in First Markham Place shouldn't be daunting, said Sammi Lam.

"All these items are natural and found in traditional Chi-

nese medicine," she said. "But we also look at trees, stems, leaves and plants much the way Western culture views vegetables. Most of these products can be used in daily meals."

Most of Ms Lam's products are used for medicinal purposes but wise chefs employ the nutrient-rich ingredients in or as everyday meals.

The dried sea cucumber, for example, can be soaked in water and cooked with mushrooms and various meats.

The cucumber is cholesterol-free and loaded with skin-invigorating collagen, as is white fungus, which can be cooked in rock sugar and served with south almonds in a fragrant soup.

"Many people wonder why Asian people age so well," she says with a wink. "It's all that collagen."

Another delectable entree consists of fresh lily flower leaves stir-fried with beef or chicken in an oyster sauce. The lily contains compounds that improve lung function, she said.

At \$540 and \$450 per pound respectively, dried shark fins

and abalone truly are "the food royalty would eat", according to Ms Lam, suggesting each delicacy can be consumed alone or as a soup.

These tasty tidbits are said to balance the "qi", your internal energy source.

Reputed to revitalize life force and invigorate libido is cordyceps. However, you may have little appetite or desire after paying \$6,600 for 600 grams of the product also known as Chinese caterpillar fungus.

Actually a parasitic mushroom-like organism that grows on a rare Tibetan caterpillar after it dies, cordyceps can be crushed into a powder and mixed with a meal or boiled into a tea or soup.

If you want to add flavour and colour to a meal while boosting blood circulation, try Ms. Lam's red dates.

As for the calcium-rich deer antlers, chopped to resemble poker chips, they add zing to chicken or other meat-based soups.

First Markham Place is at 3255 Hwy. 7 East or call 905-948-9436.




STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Sammi Lam (above) weighs cordyceps, also known as the Chinese caterpillar fungus, at Kam Yuen Chinese Herbs Company in First Markham Place Mall. Stanley Mak sells mixed and packaged herbs from his Herbs Centre Inc.

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Correction
The notice that appeared on the Whitchurch-Stouffville Town page in the Thursday June 1st, 2006 edition of the Stouffville Sun-Tribune, regarding temporary street closure at the intersection of 10th Line and Main Street, has been deferred until further notice.

An Invitation...
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