

## **Milk Thistle (Silybum marianus)**

This plant is native to the Mediterranean and grows wild throughout Europe, North America and Australia. Milk Thistle has been used in Europe as a remedy for liver problems for

thousands of years. Its use was recorded in the first century (AD 23-79), noting that the plant was excellent for protecting the liver. Early Christian tradition dedicated milk thistle to Mary, calling it Marian thistle. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Eclectics used the herb for varicose veins, menstrual difficulty, and congestion in the liver, spleen and kidneys. Milk thistle has also been taken to increase breast-milk production, stimulate the secretion of bile, and as a treatment for depression. Milk thistle nutritionally supports the liver's ability to maintain normal liver function. It has shown positive effects in treating nearly

every known form of liver disease, including cirrhosis, hepatitis, necroses, and liver damage due to drug and alcohol abuse. Milk thistle works due to its ability to inhibit the factors responsible for liver damage, coupled with the fact it stimulates production of new liver cells to replace old damaged ones.

Milk thistle has been proven to protect the liver from damage. The detrimental effects of environmental toxins, alcohol, drugs and chemotherapy may be countered with this valuable herb. The active chemical component in the herb is silybin, which functions as an antioxidant and is one of the most potent liver protective agents known. Clinical trials have proven silybin to be effective in treating chronic liver diseases and in protecting the liver from toxic chemicals. An injection of silybin is a proven antidote for poisoning with the Deathcap mushroom (*Amanita phalloides*). Silybin is a part of the chemical structure of the flavolignan silymarin. Milk thistle's hepatoprotective effects may be explained by its function of altering the liver cell membrane structure, blocking the absorption of toxins into the cells. Hepatoprotection by silymarin can also be attributed to its ability to increase the intracellular concentration of glutathione, a substance required for detoxicating reactions in liver cells. Milk thistle is also an antioxidant that is more potent than vitamins C and E.

**Parts Used:** Seeds for powdered or liquid extract.

**Common Use:** Helps the liver detoxification process. For all liver disorders such as

Jaundice and hepatitis. Fights pollutants and prevents free radical damage by action as antioxidant.

Protects the liver and stimulates the production of new liver cells. Helps common skin conditions related to poor liver function.