***Atractylodes macrocephala* Koidz.**

Asteraceae
Source of: bái zhú 白术
white atractylodes rhizome

Summary Description

Classified in the Carlineae tribe of the Asters, white atractylodes is a stout, branching, thistle-like perennial, 7-20 inches in height. This heat and sun-loving plant is hardy to Zone 5, but the rhizomes may grow bigger in warmer zones. Smooth, elliptical leaves are 2-3 inches long with spiny serrated edges. In August, rose-colored (pink to reddish-purple) flowers grow out of a small artichoke-like receptacle covered with scales. Plump, light brown seeds, ½ inch long with white hairs, form in late October. This plant is widely cultivated for medicine throughout China.

Propagation

Tear apart the dried receptacle to harvest seeds in late October, then hold in cool dry storage until February. Plant one seed per cell in a 72-cell deep tray, keep the surface moist. Germination occurs in 7-14 days at 70°F. Place trays in bright, indirect light and protect from rodents (who relish these seedlings). Needs at least 3 months to reach transplant size.

Cultivation

Transplant sturdy seedlings at a 1-foot radius in average, well-drained soil. Light straw or gravel mulch is effective. Tolerates periods of drought but not standing moisture.

Harvest & Processing

Harvest whole plants at the end of season 3. The rhizome is a thick, hard, knobby mass about 2-3 inches in size. Slices will show a lighter brown, fibrous interior with hollow spaces. Slice thinly but evenly; the pieces will be odd-shaped. Dry at no more than 110°F until the pieces break cleanly.

References

Flora of China: http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=2&taxon_id=200023528
Bensky *Materia Medica* page: 726

CHINESE MEDICINAL PLANT FACT SHEETS © 2016 Jean Giblette
NEW YORK GROWN CHINESE MEDICINAL HERBS PROJECT

Photo: Anna Malinowski

CHINESE MEDICINAL PLANT FACT SHEETS © 2025 Jean Giblette

Atractylodes macrocephala