

The May 2020 Newsletter of The GP-TCM Research Association



Monthly Chinese Materia Medica Highlights

Sweet flag (*Acorus calamus*, Acoraceae, 水菖蒲, left) and
grass-leaf sweet flag (*Acorus gramineus*, Acoraceae, 石菖蒲, right)



Although fresh leaves and rhizomes of both plants are sweetly aromatic when broken, sweet flag (leaves longer and wider, with a distinct midrib, and rhizome stouter) and grass-leaf sweet flag (leaves shorter and thinner, without distinct midrib, and rhizome slender) can be easily differentiated by their appearances.

The dried rhizome of sweet flag is a **Tibetan medicinal** that warms the stomach, reduces inflammation, and alleviates pain. The dried rhizome of grass-leaf sweet flag is a **Chinese medicinal** that opens the orifices, dispels phlegm, arouses the spirit, benefits the mind, transforms dampness, and improves the appetite. According to Chinese *materia medica* literature investigation, grass-leaf sweet flag has been the main botanical origin from ancient times up to now, but rhizomes of both plants were probably used interchangeably before the Tang Dynasty (618~907 AD).

水菖蒲

瘟神肆虐久时长
本草书中觅圣方
采药归来宣内外
青青两把煮闻香

石菖蒲

山中有水洗清石
此物花白三两支
野外林深千万树
谁能稍解世人痴

The above colour photographs, English texts and Chinese poems are contributed by Prof **Hubiao Chen** (Hong Kong), Dr **Ping Guo** (Hong Kong) and Prof **Jiqing Liu** (Shenzhen), respectively. This column is advised by Prof **Zhongzhen Zhao** (Hong Kong).