

## Honoring the Hawthorn

It is spring and May brings us the snow hite blossoms of the hawthorn. It is the owner of the heart and a member of the rose family. The hawthorn brings us an abundance of bright red berries in the autumn. Hawthorn is one of my favorite trees as it has an energy of peacefulness and a lightness that encourages the heart to open. I often feel a lifting of my spirit when walk through a field of blooming hawthorn trees.

The hawthorn has been used in healing since the Middle Ages. It is considered sacred and protecting tree. Some rituals passed down include attaching sprigs of hawthorn to the cradle of a newborn to bring protection against illness and evil forces. Hawthorn is said to give psychic protection and bring luck.

In ancient Greece and Rome hawthorn was a symbol of hope and protection. Guests attending Greek weddings carried sprigs of hawthorn to bring happiness and prosperity to the newly married couple. In Rome, the bridegroom saved a sprig of hawthorn as he led his bride to the nuptial chamber, which was lit with hawthorn torches. The Christian church dedicated the hawthorn to the Virgin Mary. It was believed for centuries that

lightning would not strike a hawthorn tree. There are many stories relating hawthorn to matters of the heart and fertility.

Hawthorn, or *Crataegus*, is a heart tonic, which means that it nourishes, tones and regenerates the heart. It is one of the best remedies for both the heart and circulation. The whole plant provides benefit. Historically it is



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by Moira Fitzpatrick, PhD, ND

used for all heart conditions including degenerative heart disease, arrhythmias, angina, palpitations, breathlessness, and congestive heart failure. It is also known to speed recovery from myocardial infarction. The flowers, leaves and berries provide a vasodilatory effect and improve blood flow to the coronary arteries and myocardial circulation. Hawthorn has been used for individuals who have poor circulation to

the legs and who have memory problems related to poor blood supply to the brain.

Hawthorn has a relaxing effect on the nervous system. It often relieves anxiety and stress, calms agitation and nervous palpitations. It is not surprising then that a decoction of the flowers and berries are soothing and effective for acne rosacea. Some individuals use hawthorn successfully for sleep. It has a relaxing effect on the digestive system. It helps guard against weakness after infections such as pneumonia. Hawthorn also has a diuretic effect, thus relieving fluid retention.

How does it work? Hawthorn directly affects the cells of the heart muscle, providing nutrition and enhancing activity. It is positively inotropic meaning it gently increases the force of contraction of the heart. Hawthorn is a slow-acting herb that facilitates a long-term, sustained effect on age-related changes in the heart. It needs to be used for three months or longer. The primary constituents are flavones and

flavonoids. The flavones affect the calcium metabolism of the heart muscle and increase its ability to contract. The flavonoids have a potent anti-oxidant effect and strengthen the blood vessels. Research suggests that the OPCs (oligomeric proanthocyanidins) in the hawthorn leaves and flowers both scavenge free radicals and inhibit neutrophil elastase, an enzyme released by white blood cells in greater amounts during hypoxia (lack of oxygen).

What does the research say? Hawthorn is used as a treatment option for chronic heart failure. The German Commission E approved the use of extracts of the leaf and flower in patients suffering from grade II heart failure (slight limitation of physical activity resulting in fatigue, palpitations, shortness of breath, or angina). The Cochrane review of randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled trials suggest that there is significant benefit in both symptom control and physiologic outcomes from hawthorn when used as adjunctive treatment with conventional medicine. There was significant improvement in the symptoms of fatigue, shortness of breath, and exercise tolerance in patients with heart failure. Clinical studies found that hawthorn increases the force of contraction of the heart and increases coronary blood flow.

Are there drug interactions? Hawthorn enhances the activity of cardioactive drugs such as digoxin. For safety, any individual on cardiac medications, who wants to use hawthorn adjunctively, needs to be monitored by a physician. Many integrative cardiologists will work with naturopathic doctors to enhance the quality of life for individuals with congestive heart failure and other conditions. Hawthorn is safe for long term use in the elderly and is especially useful with age-related loss of cardiac function. It causes no toxicity or habituation.

How is hawthorn dosed? Hawthorn is available in standardized capsules, tinctures, solid extracts, and teas. It is often the case that hawthorn is included as a part of a regimen for heart failure with other supplements and herbs as well as medication when needed.

The energy of the hawthorn has a significant history and its effect on the psych and nervous system is profound. As a flower essence, hawthorn can aid in healing a broken heart. It helps to heal disappointment, anger, and bitterness from a failed relationship. Hawthorn has a balancing effect in easing emotional extremes and problems in giving and receiving. I have experienced the effects of hawthorn on the heart chakra as the energy invites us to open the heart and express love.

During this month of May, let us take time to be with the hawthorn and feel its loving energy.

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## Birthing the New World

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faith and devotion, we find true humility. Humility that is a relinquishing of the ego-mind's will, acting on its own behalf, and instead, being open to divine will, which is our soul's blueprint in action. As this divine light flows through us, it emerges through our creative play, turning ordinary moments into extraordinary realities.

It's in this way that a new world will be born. And this is the call that 2010 represents to humanity.

*Jessica is a spiritual life coach, indigo child/teen empowerment mentor, and channel for a group of light beings called The Host of Seven. E-mail [Jessica@thehostofseven.com](mailto:Jessica@thehostofseven.com) to book your session, or for more information visit [www.TheHostOfSeven.com](http://www.TheHostOfSeven.com).*

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