

## Contraindicated herb mixes by type

Here are common contraindicated (or potentially dangerous) herb mixes, grouped by type/category. These draw from traditional systems like Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), Ayurveda, and Western herbalism, as well as documented interactions from clinical reports, pharmaco vigilance, and reviews. Note: Most well-documented contraindications involve herb-drug interactions rather than pure herb-herb ones.

Pure herb-herb contraindications are more prominent in TCM (e.g., "Eighteen Incompatible" and "Nineteen Contrary" pairs). Always consult a qualified healthcare provider or herbalist before combining herbs, especially if you have health conditions or take medications. Many interactions are dose-dependent, hypothetical, or based on case reports/animal studies rather than large human trials.

1. Blood Thinning / Anticoagulant / Bleeding Risk Combinations Herbs with antiplatelet or anticoagulant effects can amplify each other or drugs like warfarin, increasing bleeding risk (e.g., bruising, hemorrhage).

- Ginkgo biloba + Garlic (*Allium sativum*)
- Ginkgo biloba + Ginger
- Ginkgo biloba + Dong quai (*Angelica sinensis*)
- Ginkgo biloba + Danshen (*Salvia miltiorrhiza*)
- Garlic + Ginseng (in some cases)
- Multiple blood-thinning herbs together (e.g., turmeric/curcumin + ginger + garlic + ginkgo)

2. Sedative / CNS Depressant Combinations (Over-Sedation Risk) Combining multiple sedatives can cause excessive drowsiness, respiratory depression, or cognitive impairment.

- Kava + Valerian
- Kava + Alcohol (though alcohol isn't an herb, often mixed with herbal sedatives)
- St. John's Wort + Melatonin (can amplify sedative effects adversely)
- Multiple strong sedatives (e.g., valerian + passionflower + hops + kava in high doses)

3. Stimulant / Hypertensive or Cardioactive Combinations Excessive stimulation can lead to high blood pressure, anxiety, or heart issues.

- Multiple stimulants (e.g., ephedra/ma huang + caffeine/guarana/green tea + ginseng)
- Ginseng + stimulants or MAOIs/antidepressants (risk of mania or overstimulation)

4. Serotonergic Combinations (Serotonin Syndrome Risk) Herbs affecting serotonin can combine dangerously with SSRIs or each other.

- St. John's Wort + certain antidepressants (e.g., SSRIs)
- St. John's Wort + other serotonergic herbs (limited but potential additive risk)

5. TCM-Specific Incompatible / Antagonistic Pairs (From "Eighteen Incompatible Medicaments" and "Nineteen Contrary Medicaments") Traditional Chinese texts list pairs considered mutually incompatible, often leading to toxicity, reduced efficacy, or antagonism.

- Glycyrrhiza (licorice) + Daphne genkwa (or Euphorbia kansui, similar purgative conflicts)
- Glycyrrhiza (licorice) + Euphorbia kansui
- Sophora flavescens + Veratrum nigrum
- Pinellia + Aconite (Aconitum spp.)
- Ginseng + Veratrum nigrum
- Other classic pairs include aconite with certain herbs (risk of amplified toxicity), or licorice with strong purgatives.

6. Other Notable or Pharmacokinetic Combinations

- St. John's Wort + many herbs/drugs (induces CYP3A4, reducing efficacy of other substances)
- Goldenseal + herbs metabolized by CYP enzymes (strong inhibitor)
- Multiple potassium-lowering herbs (e.g., licorice + aloe) with certain conditions

These lists focus on the most cited contraindicated or high-risk mixes. Evidence varies—some are well-supported (e.g., bleeding risks with ginkgo/garlic combos), others traditional/theoretical (TCM pairs). Herb-herb interactions are less studied than herb-drug ones, but additive effects (e.g., too many sedatives or thinners) remain a practical concern.

For personalized advice, professional guidance is essential, as individual factors like dosage and health status matter greatly.

TCM incompatible pairs

The most well-known and systematically documented antagonistic pairs of herbs come from Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), where they are classified under two classic categories:

- Eighteen Incompatibilities (十八反, Shí Bā Fǎn) — These pairs are considered mutually incompatible or antagonistic, potentially causing toxicity, adverse reactions, or severe side effects when combined.
- Nineteen Counteractions (十九畏, Shí Jiǔ Wèi) — These involve mutual restraint or antagonism, where one herb typically diminishes, counters, or abolishes the therapeutic effect (or increases toxicity) of the other.

These rules date back centuries (e.g., from texts like Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing derivatives and later compilations) and are still widely taught and followed in TCM practice, though modern research shows mixed evidence—some pairs show pharmacokinetic or toxic interactions in studies, while others remain more traditional/theoretical. Evidence is strongest for certain pairs (e.g., licorice with strong purgatives like kansui or genkwa causing amplified toxicity). Eighteen Incompatibilities (十八反) These are typically grouped by a "key" herb antagonized by several others:

- Gan Cao (Radix Glycyrrhizae / Licorice) antagonized by:

- Gan Sui (Radix Kansui / Euphorbia kansui)
- Yuan Hua (Flos Genkwa / Daphne genkwa)
- Da Ji (Radix Euphorbiae Pekinensis / Knoxia/Euphorbia)
- Hai Zao (Sargassum / Seaweed)
- Wu Tou (Radix Aconiti / Prepared Aconite, including Chuan Wu, Cao Wu) antagonized by:
  - Ban Xia (Rhizoma Pinelliae / Pinellia)
  - Gua Lou (Fructus Trichosanthis / Trichosanthes fruit)
  - Bei Mu (Bulbus Fritillariae, including Chuan Bei Mu and Zhe Bei Mu)
  - Bai Lian (Radix Ampelopsis)
  - Bai Ji (Rhizoma Bletillae)
- Li Lu (Radix et Rhizoma Veratri Nigri / Veratrum nigrum) antagonized by:
  - Ren Shen (Radix Ginseng / Ginseng)
  - Sha Shen (Radix Adenophorae or Glehniae)
  - Dan Shen (Radix Salviae Miltiorrhizae)
  - Xuan Shen (Radix Scrophulariae)
  - Ku Shen (Radix Sophorae Flavescentis)
  - Xi Xin (Herba Asari)

(Note: Slight variations exist in some sources, e.g., including Fu Zi specifically or minor additions.)

Nineteen Counteractions / Mutual Restraints (十九畏) These are pairs where one herb restrains or antagonizes the other (often reducing efficacy):

- Ren Shen (Ginseng) is restrained by Lai Fu Zi (Semen Raphani / Radish seed)
- Mi Meng Hua (Flos Buddlejae) restrained by Meng Shi (Lapis Chloriti)
- Shui Yin (Hydrargyrum / Mercury) restrained by Po Xiao (Mirabilite)
- Ding Xiang (Flos Caryophylli / Clove) restrained by Yu Jin (Radix Curcumae / Turmeric tuber)
- Sha Ren (Fructus Amomi) restrained by Hu Gu (Os Tigris / Tiger bone) — though rarely relevant today
- Rou Gui (Cortex Cinnamomi / Cinnamon bark) restrained by Shi Zhi (Halloysitum rubrum / Red halloysite)
- Chuan Wu / Cao Wu / Fu Zi (Aconite types) restrained by Xi Jiao (Cornu Rhinoceri / Rhino horn) — historical, now irrelevant due to bans
- Ya Jiao (Semen Crotonis / Croton seed) restrained by Qian Niu Zi (Semen Pharbitidis)
- Ba Dou (Semen Crotonis / Croton) restrained by Lu Dou (Semen Phaseoli Radiati / Mung bean) — mung bean can reduce toxicity

These are the core, classically recognized antagonistic pairs in TCM literature. Outside TCM, few other herbal traditions have similarly formalized "antagonistic pair" lists—most Western herbalism or Ayurveda focus on additive risks (e.g., too many sedatives) rather than strict

pairwise antagonism. Always consult a qualified TCM practitioner or healthcare provider, as individual factors (dosage, preparation, patient condition) influence safety, and some pairs appear in certain classical formulas under specific processing/contexts despite the general prohibition.

### Known Eclectic herb antagonists

Known antagonistic pairs in Eclectic herbalism are not formalized into strict lists like the TCM "Eighteen Incompatibilities" (十八反) or "Nineteen Counteractions" (十九畏). The Eclectic school (roughly 1830s–1930s in the US) emphasized empirical observation, specific diagnosis, and the use of simples (single herbs) or simple combinations based on individual patient presentation rather than rigid pairwise prohibitions. Eclectic physicians (e.g., John King in King's American Dispensatory, Harvey Felter, John Uri Lloyd, Finley Ellingwood) documented cautions, contraindications, incompatibilities (often in pharmaceutical compounding contexts), and occasional antagonistic or counteracting effects, but these were more pragmatic and less systematized than in TCM.

Key points from Eclectic sources and related modern interpretations (e.g., Brinker's Herb Contraindications and Drug Interactions, which draws heavily on Eclectic materia medica):

- No comprehensive "antagonistic pairs" list exists equivalent to TCM's classic recitations.
- Focus was on:
  - Toxicity potentiation (e.g., combining highly irritant/purgative herbs).
  - Counteracting effects (one herb diminishing another's action).
  - Incompatibilities in preparations (chemical/physical, like precipitation in tinctures or elixirs).
  - Additive risks rather than strict antagonism.

### Notable Examples of Antagonistic, Counteracting, or Incompatible Pairings Noted in Eclectic/Western Herbal Contexts.

These are drawn from Eclectic texts, dispensaries, and later syntheses (e.g., Brinker, who references Eclectic sources extensively):

#### 1. Stimulants vs. Relaxants / Sedatives (functional antagonism):

- Strong stimulants (e.g., *Lobelia inflata* in full doses, *Capsicum* / cayenne) could counteract or clash with strong relaxants/sedatives (e.g., *Aconitum* / aconite, *Gelsemium*, *Veratrum viride*).
- Eclectics noted that over-stimulation could oppose or nullify sedative effects in nervous/irritable states.

#### 2. Purgatives / Cathartics vs. Astringents:

- Strong purgatives (e.g., *Podophyllum*, *Leptandra* / Culver's root, *Jalap*) often counteracted by astringents (e.g., *Geranium*, *Quercus* / oak bark, high-tannin herbs), reducing evacuant action.
- Used intentionally in some formulas but avoided in others to prevent neutralization.

#### 3. Iron Preparations and Tannin-Rich Herbs:

- Tannin-heavy astringents (e.g., *Geranium maculatum*, *Quercus*, *Uva ursi*) were noted to antagonize/inactivate iron salts by forming insoluble complexes (pharmaceutical incompatibility, common in Eclectic compounding).
4. Alkaloid-Rich Herbs with Opposing Actions:
- *Veratrum viride* (American hellebore, a strong cardio-depressant) could antagonize stimulants or be potentiated dangerously by other cardioactives.
  - *Aconitum* (highly toxic in excess) was cautioned against with many herbs due to additive cardiotoxicity rather than strict antagonism.
5. Other Practical Antagonisms:
- *Lobelia* (emetic/relaxant) sometimes noted to oppose or be opposed by strong tonics/stimulants in certain conditions.
  - High-dose *Cimicifuga racemosa* (black cohosh, relaxant to spasms) vs. stimulants in nervous tension.

### Summary and Context

- Eclectic herbalism prioritized energetics (stimulant vs. sedative, astringent vs. relaxant, etc.) and patient-specific matching over fixed antagonist lists. Combinations were chosen to harmonize or correct imbalances, not avoided due to blanket antagonism.
- Modern resources like Francis Brinker's *Herb Contraindications and Drug Interactions* (published by Eclectic Medical Publications) compile Eclectic-derived cautions, focusing more on herb-drug and safety issues than herb-herb antagonism.
- If seeking strict pairwise antagonists, TCM's lists (e.g., licorice with kansui/genkwa, aconite with pinellia, ginseng with veratrum) remain the primary formalized system. Western/Eclectic traditions emphasize additive/overlapping risks (e.g., too many sedatives or blood thinners) over mutual cancellation.

For precise guidance, consult primary Eclectic texts (e.g., King's American Dispensatory) or modern syntheses like Brinker. Always work with a qualified herbalist, as individual responses vary.

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