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Maca Root

Botanical Name: *Lepidium meyenii*

Family: cruciferous

Part Used: root

Systems Affected: structural, immune, digestive

Maca root (also known as Peruvian ginseng, though not a member of the ginseng family) is off-white, purple or yellow in color. Its leaves grow close to the ground and produce a small, white, four-petal flower common to the cruciferous family. It has been grown at exceptionally high elevations (9,000 to 14,000 feet) in the Peruvian Andes for about 2,600 years and is the highest altitude crop on earth.

Maca is known as a superfood, which nutrition expert David Wolfe defines as “a food with a dozen or more unique properties that nourish the brain, bones, muscles, skin, hair, lungs, liver, kidneys, reproductive system and immune system and heal by correcting imbalances within the body.”

Maca contains adaptogenic properties that help the body manage stressors; it supports healthy energy, endurance and performance. Maca has the elements of both food and medicine. I use it for both purposes in my practice for older pets, for working and breeding dogs, for mares to relieve common symptoms from their cycle (like fatigue, headache, backache and painful cramping), and for animals with a weaker constitution as well as an overly strong constitution (thanks to the adaptogenic properties).

Dried maca powder contains nearly 60 percent carbohydrates, about 9 percent fiber and nearly 12 percent protein. It contains the fatty acids linolenic acid, oleic acid and palmitic acid. It is high in calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, potassium, sodium and iron. It also contains high amounts of vitamins B1, B2, B12, C, E and is a rich source of immune-enhancing sterols like sitosterol, campesterol, ergosterol and brassicasterol.

Maca helps balance the thyroid and hormones; it gives mental clarity and improves memory (with continued use), increases energy and oxygenates the blood. It nourishes the body, supports regeneration of cartilage and bones, enhances fertility for males and females, helps feed, nourish and support the entire endocrine system of the body, supports physical stamina and strength, reduces stress and balances the hypothalamus gland.

Maca has been used medicinally with great success for centuries in South America to enhance fertility in humans and animals. Recent studies have identified four alkaloids present in maca that are known to nourish the endocrine system, benefiting reproductive function in males and females. It offers potential to breeders who need to balance the hypothalamus and pituitary in their dogs.

A study of maca’s effect on human cartilage published by the US National Library of Medicine found that maca nearly triples cartilage’s anabolic activity, even if there is inflammation; when combined with the anti-inflammatory action of cat’s claw (another Peruvian herb), the anabolic stimulation in the cartilage nearly quadruples. The

study concluded that maca holds significant promise in the treatment of debilitating joint diseases.

Maca is available in red, black and yellow varieties. I use powdered extracts or make liquid alcohol based extracts, depending on the use and constituents as well as the ease of dosing that I need to achieve.

For medicinal use it’s best to consult a herbalist; maca has so many uses that dosage will depend on the health reason for using it as well as the animal’s constitution and age. But if you want to add maca as an overall nutritional supplement to your dog’s food, I would suggest using certified organic powdered extract mixed into food at ½ tsp per 60 lbs of body weight, five days on, three days off. Try this for a two to three month period and note subtle or significant changes in your pet. 🐾



Joyce Belcher is an herbalist/formulator of pet supplements and herbal medicinals for veterinarians and is the founder of Herbs for Life Inc. She lives in York, Maine with her husband, two dogs and two cats; they are all rescues. Visit Joyce at petwellnessblends.com