

Subhuti Dharmananda, Ph.D., the director of the Institute for Traditional Medicine in Portland, Oregon relates the following on his web site:

“Several years ago, a large Western herb company began promoting the idea that Chinese herbs were problematic for those with sulfite sensitivity because many of them were treated with sulfites. Sulfur treatment is sometimes used to prevent herbs from deteriorating, usually by placing the herbs on a screen and having sulfur vapors briefly flow from below the screen, which could leave traces of sulfur dioxide (sulfur prevents the herbs from deteriorating). At the Institute for Traditional Medicine, herb formulations have been provided for nearly 20 years and administered to hundreds of thousands of people seeking Chinese medical health care. Among these people are many who claim to be sulfite sensitive. ITM has not received any reports of sulfite-sensitive patients having evident sulfite reactions to the herb products, despite the fact that some of the herbs are "sulfured". It may well be that there is so little residual sulfur dioxide (or any related compounds) that it doesn't cause a reaction, or it may be that the form of sulfur residue is not one that causes the reactions, or it may be that many of the sensitivities that are described as reactions to sulfites are not actually reactions to sulfites. Nonetheless, some Chinese herb companies have described the items that they provide as "sulfur-free" in response to the concerns that were raised.”

In short, we find no evidence that the type of fumigant sulfuring to which Chinese herbs are exposed produces in the herbs the sulfites which cause the reactions that occur when liquid sulfites are sprayed on salad bars or powdered sulfites are added to wine.

So why then does Spring Wind seek out and promote herbs that have not been sulfured? Firstly, we entered the field of Chinese medicine because of its emphasis on natural healing. We see no reason to add any foreign substance to the herbs. Secondly, just because it does not appear to cause sulfite reactions is no reason to condone the use of sulfur. It smells bad, it probably changes the pH of the herbs and we don't really care if our herbs look pretty. Thus, for the last fifteen years we have always sought out unsulfured items. We never made an issue of it. It is just what we do. On the other hand, practitioners should keep in mind that should they require an herb and it is not available in unsulfured form, most SO₂ gas dissipates when the herbs are boiled and, as mentioned above, despite concerted effort we have not encountered documented evidence of sulfite reactions to Chinese herbs.