

Astragalus

Over 3,000 species, see list of Astragalus species

Astragalus is a large genus of over 3,000 species[2] of herbs and small shrubs, belonging to the legume family Fabaceae and the subfamily Faboideae. It is the largest genus of plants in terms of described species.[3] The genus is native to temperate regions of the Northern Hemisphere. Common names include milkvetch (most species), locoweed (in North America, some species)[4] and goat's-thorn (*A. gummifer*, *A. tragacantha*). Some pale-flowered vetches (*Vicia* spp.) are similar in appearance, but they are more vine-like than Astragalus.

Most species in the genus have pinnately compound leaves.[5] There are annual and perennial species. The flowers are formed in clusters in a raceme, each flower typical of the legume family, with three types of petals: banner, wings, and keel. The calyx is tubular or bell-shaped.[6][7]

The genus was formally described in 1753 by Carl Linnaeus in his *Species Plantarum*. [8]

The name Astragalus is Greek, an old name for this group of plants which were believed to have a positive effect on goat milk production.[9]

Astragalus testiculatus

Astragalus glycyphyllos

Astragalus alpinus

Astragalus dasyanthus

Astragalus species are used as food plants by the larvae of some Lepidoptera species including many case-bearing moths of the genus *Coleophora*: *C. cartilaginella*, *C. colutella*, *C. euryaula*, and *C. onobrychiella* feed exclusively on Astragalus, *C. astragalella* and *C. gallipennella* feed exclusively on the species *Astragalus glycyphyllos*, and *C. hippodromica* is limited to *Astragalus gombo*. [citation needed]

Astragalus has been used in traditional Chinese medicine over centuries to treat various disorders, but there is no high-quality evidence that it is effective or safe for any medical purpose.[11][12]

Extracts of astragalus root include diverse phytochemicals, such as saponins and isoflavone flavonoids, which are purported in traditional practices to increase lactation in nursing mothers.[13] There is no valid clinical evidence to indicate such use is effective or safe for the mother or infant.[13] Dietary supplement products containing astragalus extracts may not have been adequately tested for efficacy, safety, purity or consistency.[13] The root extracts of astragalus may be used in soups, teas or sold in capsules.[11]

Although astragalus supplements are generally well tolerated, mild gastrointestinal upset, diarrhea, and allergic reactions may occur.[11][13] Because astragalus may affect regulation of blood sugar and blood pressure, it may be risky for people with blood disorders, diabetes,

or hypertension to use it as a supplement.[11] Astragalus may interact with prescribed drugs that suppress the immune system, such as medications used by people being treated for cancer or recovery from organ transplants.[11]

Some astragalus species can be toxic, such as those found in the United States containing the neurotoxin swainsonine, which causes "locoweed" poisoning in animals.[11] Some astragalus species may contain high levels of selenium, possibly causing toxicity.[11]

Several species, including *A. alpinus* (bluish-purple flowers), *A. hypoglottis* (purple flowers), and *A. lotooides*, are grown as ornamental plants in gardens.[citation needed]

