

Wild Carrot Seeds for Herbal Contraception
Summary of Findings from a 1992 Study by Robin Bennett

I first heard about women using wild carrot seeds (wcs) for contraception in 1978. I was living in northern California and met a couple who used wcs as their sole means of contraception by having her chew approximately one teaspoon of the seeds daily. She'd been using them for more than a year. I knew nothing about herbs and was incredulous. I asked her how she could trust the seeds, considering the consequences if she was wrong. She told me that her sister had conducted a seven year study on 100 women in Alaska (where she lived) and over the years there had been no unwanted pregnancies. In addition, women who had stopped using the seeds because they wanted to become pregnant, had no trouble conceiving, and birthed healthy babies.

I next heard about wcs in 1985. I read about their use for preventing implantation in Susun Weed's Wise Women Herbal for the Childbearing Years. I regretted that I hadn't had the foresight to get the name and address of the woman who conducted the study in the 1970's, but at that time, I simply couldn't believe that I would ever be interested in using them. I began using wcs, slowly at first, in conjunction with my cervical cap. By 1986, I was using them alone and have been using them ever since.

Wild carrot, botanically named *Daucus Carota*, is the ancestor of our cultivated orange carrot. Wild carrot grows abundantly in open fields, has a white, spindly root, and feathery green leaves. The white flowers form an exquisite lacy umbel, usually with a purple dot near the center, and give this plant its most common name: Queen Anne's lace.

The seeds, which are green in late summer and early fall, turn light brown as they ripen to maturity and the nearly flat umbels contract to form a cup-like seed-head or "bird's nest."

It is these seeds, harvested when brown in the fall, which were used by the women in the study.

The wild carrot seed study is a grass-roots project that was conducted in NYC from March 1992 through February 1993. It is not a scientific study with rigorously controlled data, it is a study of women using wcs and reporting their experiences on a monthly basis, via charts that detailed day by day their use of wcs, and times of ovulation, menstrual bleeding and sexual intercourse. 13 women participated in the study enough to be counted in the results.

10 of the women participating in the study had been pregnant previously, thus establishing their fertility. The other three had never conceived.

There were three dosage regimes used:

1. Every day
2. Daily for three days before ovulation, during ovulation, and for at least three days after ovulation
3. Daily for a least seven days following sexual intercourse.

All of the women used the same dosage and method of preparation...one teaspoon of wcs chewed well and rinsed down with something to drink.

During the study, three women apparently conceived; one confirmed her pregnancy with a laboratory test and terminated it clinically. She had been using the carrot seeds daily until the month she conceived when she used them on only three of the recommended 7-8 days around ovulation.

The others felt pregnant but did not confirm their suspicions. They both used herbal emmenagogues and menstruated. One of the two women used seeds for 7-8 days around ovulation. The other women used them daily.

None of the other women in the study became pregnant, and half were using wcs as their only method of contraception (including when they had sexual intercourse during ovulation). Half used withdrawal and condoms as back-up, but only during ovulation. One woman in the study stopped taking the seeds in order to conceive and had a healthy pregnancy and a healthy baby, suggesting that their anti-fertility effect is temporary and reversible.

Two of the women reported mild side-effects, some gas and diarrhea, from using the seeds. There may also have been some fluctuation in a few women's menstrual cycles, with their periods coming a few days early. Several women reported a feeling of fullness and an energy difference after taking the seeds.

One question raised by an herbalist at a preliminary presentation of these findings was whether wcs might work through irritati^{ng} a womān's womb. No women in the study experienced this or had any evidence of it reveal^{ed} through physical examinations. There were no consistent or severe side-effects in any of the women.

My conclusion, based on the study results and supplemented by scientific studies, anecdotal information, and my own eight years of experience harvesting and using wcs for contraception, is that wcs are an excellent method of contraception; especially for women who are willing to pay careful attention to their bodies' cycles. The side benefit of using this form of natural contraception is that it encourages women to become more informed about and aware of their bodies.

The study provided roughly 156 possibilities for a pregnancy to occur (13 women, 12 months, assuming one ovulation per month). Counting all three possibil pregnancies, even though only one was clinically confirmed, shows a 98% success rate. WCS, like all methods

of contraception, are not 100% reliable, nor are they for everyone.

WCS are reputed to contain substances with estrogenic activity and to have their anti-fertility abilities negatively affected by progesterone. One of the important connections suggested by the study results is that the reliability of wcs^{is} decreased by extreme hormonal changes such as suddenly starting or stopping any hormonal medications, including birth control pills, or shortly after giving birth, miscarrying^{or} aborting. It seems that, under these circumstances, a woman needs to wait until her natural cycle re-establishes itself before relying on wcs as her sole means of contraception. WCS are probably not the contraceptive^{of} choice at the onset of a woman's menopausal years when her hormonal changes are typically intensified. Under ordinary circumstances, wcs are effective immediately and quite reliable.

We don't know exactly what it is in wcs that inhibits the implantation of a fertilized egg. Some women (myself included) feel that the oil (s) in wcs cause the uterine lining to change texture, becoming too slippery or perhaps too viscous, to hold an egg. Scientific studies have shown wcs to prevent implantation of a fertilized egg in mice and rats.

The bitterness of the oil(s) in the seeds may have something to do with their effectiveness. According to the ancient system of Ayurvedic medicine, the seeds make the "ovum bitter to the sperm."

One minor drawback to using wcs is that many women don't particularly like to chew them. They're not awful tasting (some women like them) but they're a little bristly and dry and can be hard on sensitive gums. They are, however, convenient on other levels; affordable to buy, easy to harvest, and save a woman a gynecological visit for her birth control (or the constant expense of drug-store options). The fact that all the evidence indicates that they are

safe and reliable is certainly the major concern for most women.

There is another possible drawback. Two women reported that they felt the seeds made them more fertile. One of the women who felt this effect had one of the unconfirmed pregnancies. She sensed that there might be a dosage threshold for each woman, below which the seeds promote fertility. This is interesting in that one other confirmed pregnancy that I heard about before the study began, happened when a woman inadvertently halved her dosage to a 1/2 teaspoon daily. There is precedent for this in herbal history. Nicolas Culpepper recommended the "^{seeds} boiled in wine" to help conception. However, he also recommended them to "provoke women's courses" as did Dioscorides and Hippocrates, and other famed physicians. It would seem that the menstruum; the medium used to extract the seed's properties, may be crucial to achieving the desired effect. The seeds are mentioned as an emmenagogue far more frequently in the herbal literature than as a fertility enhancer. Scientific studies have apparently only revealed anti-fertility effects through animal testing.

It seems that wherever communities of women are actually using seeds for contraception; in Alaska, in the 1970's, in India currently and dating back 2,000 years, in New York City and in rural North Carolina, they are all chewing the dried seeds to release their oils and washing them down with something to drink. I've read that some women drink the seeds in a glass of water. This seems more likely if the seeds had been ground. (You would, or at least could, choke trying to swallow a teaspoon of whole seeds in water). The question is, how much potency is lost in the grinding? Can they be ground in advance or would it be best to grind them just before eating? This could solve a problem for those women who don't like to chew the seeds.

There are other possibilities to be explored such as wcs tincture or infused oil. WCS tea, made by steeping the seeds in boiled water is another possible modality. Maude Grieves says that though "the volatile oils in wcs are dissipated by boiling, they yield their virtues by infusion to water at 212 degrees F." WCS essential oil is most likely too concentrated, and therefore potentially dangerous, to consider using internally for this purpose.

I think that the next steps are:

1. To produce a 10 page pamphlet citing all relevant studies and providing a clear explanation of how to use wcs for contraception.
2. To print and distribute at low or no cost 25,000 of the above pamphlets.
3. To collect anecdotal results from women who have used wcs but did not participate in this study.
4. To explore other modalities of using wcs for contraception.

The following are some comments from women who participated in this study:

- * Three women (who were all in monogamous relationships) said that wcs were "the best form of birth control ever."
- * One woman said the astringency of wcs made them "slightly drying to the colon." She also said that "wcs don't intrude on sex and that makes them a very sexy method."
- * Another participant said a woman had to "have very clear intent when using wcs"

and have a back-up plan."

- * Another woman said, "I feel much more confident in wcs than in my previous methods (the Pill and Gynol II)."
- * Most of the women participating said, "this is exciting and empowering."

The following are some additional thoughts, comments, feelings and questions that I have:

I question the wisdom of a woman taking any single substance every day through all of her sexually active childbearing years. There could be unforeseen long-term consequences. One article by a woman (written under a pseudonym) who used wcs said she and her friends take one tablespoonful daily. She cites the Alaskan study, too, but since I've been sharing that (anecdotal) information publicly since 1985, I might be reading someone who's quoting me.

My feeling is that the modality of using the wcs before, during and after ovulation is the safest and most reliable of the three methods used in the study. The post-coital method is a safe, but probably not quite as reliable.

I feel a physical and energetic shift in my womb after taking the wcs. I've found, over the years, that I can tell when I've taken enough to know I will bleed when my time of the month arrives. It has ranged anywhere from using them for one day after sexual intercourse to seven days. When I wanted to feel absolutely protected, early on, I would take them from three days before ovulation until menstruation. These days I only take the wcs when I've had sexual intercourse during the fertile part of my cycle.

I believe that the wcs work on more than the physical level. I think that they help a woman (and a couple) to engage the "energy of contraception." WCS provide a focal point

for clarifying the intent not to conceive a new life, and to consciously choose where we are directing our fertility. This is one of the basic tenets of practicing mental birth control. It is the "children" of the carrot plant, her seeds, which are helping human women not to bear unwanted children. Those who harvest the wcs with gratitude, ^{thinking} about what they will be used for also contribute to the "energy of contraception" which grows out of a deep respect for life.

I harvest my seeds as late as possible in the fall, in the death part of nature's life cycle because that feels right to me. I know some people use the younger, greener seeds. I suspect that those might be somewhat irritating for long term use and I don't know if they'd prove to be ^{as} effective.

I've always sensed that chewing the wcs to release their oil(s) is crucial to their effectiveness. I still feel that receiving enough of the volatile oil(s) from the wcs is the key to their working. But I'm intrigued about the prospect of grinding them directly before use or simply bruising them with a mortar and pestle to make them a little quicker and easier to chew.

I have experimented on myself with tincture; wcs infused in 100 proof vodka for six weeks, oil; wcs infused in olive oil for six weeks, and wild carrot seed tea; wcs steeped covered, in boiled water for 15 minutes. The tincture was very strong and I took about 10-15 drops in water as a rough equivalent to the one teaspoon dosage. The oil tasted of wcs but I wasn't sure it was strong enough. I took a half-teaspoon of it and felt more was probably needed. Finally, the tea tasted of wcs, was gentle and yet seemed potent. I'm going to continue to experiment with wcs tea, starting by drinking it when I don't need it, to investigate it further.

It's interesting to consider that wcs are categorized as stimulating and as deobstruent.

Some ancient herbalists considered them abortive. They've been traditionally used for removing calculi, kidney stones, gall stones, gravel etc. I wonder if these properties could cause wcs to treat a fertilized, yet un-implanted egg as an obstruction to be removed and then stimulate its move out of the uterus. This could be one of the things happening when wcs are used post-coitally.

Scientific studies of herbs are conducted with an underlying hope of eventually manufacturing an effective and profitable drug.

This is done by examining ^{the herb} to isolate and name the ^{alkaloids} ~~active~~

which are considered, scientifically speaking, to be the active ingredients.

Studies have shown that wcs block progesterone in laboratory animals. I am wary of a synthetic form of wcs' active ingredients, which might actually change a woman's hormonal balance, menstrual and ovulatory cycles, and be more likely to induce side-effects. I trust wcs in nature's form to contain organic buffers to the stronger hormonal properties and terpenoids that the seeds have been found to contain. ^A synthetic, standardized form of wcs would obviously be better for mass marketing, but →

there are benefits to a non-standardized method of contraception. Birth control is actually a misnomer, for we can't control birth anymore than we can control death. We can only interact with it, delay it, speed it up, sometimes re-direct it. We are in relationship with energies larger than we are.

One does need to gradually develop a relationship with wcs. I usually suggest using it in conjunction with a more familiar method of contraception for at least the first month; taking time to notice any physical and emotional changes. It takes time to develop confidence in such an unfamiliar (to most of us) form of contraception. This also gives a woman who's first

learning to chart her cycles, or check her temperature and cervical mucous, time to get to know her body better. Many women learn to physically and intuitively feel when they ovulate. Another side-benefit of a woman deepening her relationship with her body's cycles is that when contraception fails, the woman is likelier to realize it and emmenagogues are generally at their most effective before ~~the~~ a missed period.

Development of a relationship with wild carrot as a contraceptive plant will be rewarding, not only to the women of our generation, but also to the women of future generations. They will go on to use wcs with confidence, knowing that their mothers and grandmothers relied on it and trusted in its effectiveness.

This empowers women and their partners, and challenges each woman to engage in a deeper relationship with herself, and with the gifts that nature provides. It can also help people learn to re-direct the energy of fertility generated during love-making, resulting in far less unwanted pregnancies, and reducing or perhaps even eliminat^{ing} the need for clinical abortions.

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P.S. I suspect intuitively that wcs may enhance male fertility and help with problems like low sperm count. This presents another avenue for research and also implies that a woman's partner may not be well-advised to join her in taking wcs in the spirit of togetherness and solidarity.

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