

Milk thistle ☐ the drinker☐s dietary supplement

28 Aug 2008 by Jancis Robinson

Those of you who have followed this website from its tentative first steps in late 2000 and have memorised every word (can such a person exist?) may well be aware of milk thistle already. This natural health product reputed to protect the liver against toxins such as alcohol has been part of my life for years now. Based on silymarin, or *Silybum marianum*, it is now obviously so popular that the leading British chemist Boots offer their own brand of milk thistle in an easy, flat blister pack. I do wish I had bought shares in a milk thistle farm.

I don't take it as a matter of course, but I do take one or two when I know I have a seriously heavy tasting, or drinking, session ahead. If by any chance I forget to take it, I really do think I can tell the difference. I took it assiduously when in Alsace recently when I had to tackle nearly 90 full bodied whites during one day, followed by more than 30 wines chez Trimbach and felt absolutely fine both that evening and, more importantly, the following morning.

I see that my first article about it, [Milk thistle - the drinker's friend](#), was published way back in 2002. It was based on how I felt just after our 10-years-on dinner of 1989 Bordeaux first growths at which our host Edmund Penning-Roswell used to insist that the six of us, including Michael Broadbent, finish as much as possible of the seven or eight bottles opened. You may not be surprised to know that this article generated considerable interest – not least among my fellow wine professionals. You can also read various threads on our past forums in which many a purple pager asked for details of this miracle product, or swore their allegiance to it - just click on the tag below.

Update 24 Nov 2008: grape expert José Vouillamoz reports that the French name for milk thistle is Chardon-Marie. José recently attended a conference by a world expert on pharmacognosy, Prof Hostettmann from University of Geneva, who said that milk thistle was the best liver protecting (or liver booster) plant available – and Hostettmann said he takes it himself before serious dinners. However, José also added that some recent clinical studies have been inconclusive with regard to its effectiveness in protecting against liver diseases.