

Dit Da Jow

by John Crescione

For as unique a martial art as Wing Chun, it's still a Kung Fu system like the rest. That means herbal medicine, point hitting and chi kung are included in its curriculum and system structure. However, depending on which Wing Chun Sifu you speak to (including your own), these subjects will bring about wonderful coffee-table philosophical discussions.

The purpose of this small article is to give the Wing Chun practitioner the ability to learn how to make an herbal preparation and learn something about Chinese medicine and Wing Chun. Oh, and by the way, I'm going to try and do it for you as quickly and cheaply as possible AND without pushing anyone's buttons on the above subjects.

Dit Da Jow (Cantonese) or Tieh Ta Chiao (Mandarin) means "Hit and Fall Wine" (or liniment). Jow, as it is commonly referred to, can be broken down into two types: Han Dit Da Jow (cold hit medicine) and Rei Dit Da Jow (hot hit medicine).

Hot Jow is actually heated for situations that require a lot of circulation, blood flow and lymphatic drainage into an area - such as with iron palm training where you are constantly challenging the skin, bone, muscles and connective tissues of the hand and arm to become tougher and stronger while at the same time attempting to keep the acupuncture points in the hand open so that you can project energy through the hand into the target (P8 and Heart8 - look them up in any acupuncture book if you're not familiar with these two points).

Cold Jow is used as an all-purpose, when in doubt and after the fact, injury liniment. Its properties are similar to hot Jow except:

1. it's not heated,
2. the herbs used are different and,
3. to promote the breakup of stagnant blood, lymph and chi circulation (if you don't believe in chi circulation then ignore the last two words and replace them with "breaking connective tissue adhesions that interfere with normal tissue healing and the electrical charge flow of the body.")

Both types are rubbed into the skin before and after a workout for best results. It should be noted that one of the secrets of the magical Jow formula is in the rubbing. Remember way back as a kid, when you got a cold and Mom or Grandma would come in and rub you down with alcohol or Vicks, the secret was in the rub. Soft tissue manipulation alone will promote many of the qualities without the Jow, though the medicine speeds up the healing time and prevents improper drainage and stagnation problems. While we are on the subject of rubbing, Tiger Balm is the oriental version of Ben Gay or Vicks. If you can't get a good Jow, or if you don't want to buy it store-bought because of the quality, or "it just has to be made fresh and official by Sifu", Tiger Balm is almost as good. If you want to make your own because you can't find it (hard to believe), here's how to do it. I'll get to the Jow recipe in a minute.

- Take a small jar of Vaseline, a small jar of Vicks, cayenne red pepper (it's somewhere in the kitchen on your spice rack) and either dried red chilli peppers (most gourmet stores have them) or red chilli peppers that have already been bottled (they're probably next to the cayenne pepper).
- Put the Vaseline in a pot and melt it on the stove at low heat.
- Add two or three tablespoons of Vicks - depending on how smelly and mentholly you want it - until that also is melted.
- Grind up the red pepper until it's a powder, mix it with the cayenne pepper and add to the melted Vaseline.
- While in its liquid state, repour it back into a jar and let cool.

I did not mention the quantities of either the cayenne pepper or the chilli pepper because that will be up to you based on the desired strength of your compound. If you use a small jar of Vaseline and you want it hot, use two tablespoons of both peppers finely ground and stirred into the compound. When it cools it will be somewhere between a pink to red color. You've just made Red Tiger Balm - congratulations!

Now back to the Jow - the recipe that I will give you is a simple one that uses common Chinese herbs that are for the most part easy to get in herb catalogs or herbal stores if you have a Chinatown or wholistic community near you. (these are the botanical names and Chinese names) 1 oz.=30 grams

- 1 bottle of strong vodka, gin or Chinese rice wine
- Artemesia (Liu ji nu) - 5g
- Borneol (Bingpian) - 1g
- Carthamus (Honghua) - 5g

- Catechu (Ercha) - 8g
- Cinnabar (Zhusha) - 5g
- Cirsium (DaJi) - 1g
- Dragon's Blood (Xuejie) - 30g
- Mastic (Ruxiang) - 5g
- Musk (Shexiang) - 1g
- Myrrh (Moyao) - 5g
- Pinellia (ShengBanXia) - 5g

Take all ingredients and grind into a fine powder, add the whole bottle of vodka or gin. Mix well and rub into the injured area. The beauty of this particular recipe is that you don't have to bury it for 35 days to two month before you can use it. Classically when you made Jow it had to be buried underground for an extended period of time before it was ready to be used. There was no magical/mystical reasoning behind it. Sunlight and heat oxidize the herbs and change the chemical properties so, keeping in mind it's around the year 1700, where are you going to store this stuff when you need a dark cool dry place? And what do you use to ferment and age your herbal combination to get the most out of your ingredients - alcohol. That's why a 100 year old Scotch Whiskey is supposed to be so good. If you desire to have the herbs soak, pour the combination into a dark glass container and place it in a closet or cupboard where it shouldn't get too hot, and periodically shake the liniment once or twice a week. You should note that if you do this the traditional way then the herbs are loosely ground, and not into a powder. And the longer they sit in the bottle the stronger the Jow becomes. This is the reason many Kung Fu practitioner's who are traditionally or classically trained (like myself) will not buy store bought Jow, but prefer to make our own. The store bought Jow never has any of the herbs at the bottom of the bottle that they come in. Also some Jow is sold in plastic bottles, and over time the plastic starts to break down into the herbal formula. And some Jow is even sold in clear bottles with no way to know how long it's been in there. A decent Jow should look like soy sauce in color and have a slight alcohol, medicinal smell. Please note this Jow recipe may not be as dark or "smelly" due to the quality of herbs, time left to soak before usage, cooking properties of some of the herbs, combinations of the specific herbs or the specific usage properties. This is a "fast" formula, it's original intent is to be made now to use now, not in a month or two. The Wing Chun player usually needs Jow on their hands, forearms and chest. The first couple of times that you try to punch with the bottom three knuckles, blood vessels are usually broken between the last two knuckle valleys. Jow should be applied in between the knuckles before and after punching the bag, wall bag or focus mitt. A very important reason for this is because two very powerful acupuncture points reside in those two valleys and are responsible for the hormonal system and small intestines. With any type of bruise or blood stagnation, problems in circulation and health may occur. When doing any prolonged bridge (forearm) work such as Pak Sao where bruising can occur, Jow needs to be worked into the bridges. And anyone who is up to Chi Sao level knows why they have to apply Jow to the chest, especially if your partner is using you as the Wooden Man to practice new techniques, or just delights in pounding on you. But what becomes more important is that the famous Wing Chun centerline is in Chinese medicine the conception vessel meridian which basically is involved with the alarm point systems of the body. Cv-17 is dead center on the sternum and is responsible for controlling the diaphragm, controlling energy to the G.I. and G.U. systems and is a storage area for chi in the body. A pretty good place to hit! And we do this to each other repeatedly and on purpose.

It is important that Jow not be rubbed into open wounds, taken internally or gotten in the eyes.

Jow recipes are common in every system and every instructor has a favorite or favorites based on their uses. I have personally spoken to Yip Chun, Yip Ching, William Cheung, Augustine Fong and Moy Yat, all of whom have their own Jow recipes (that were given to them personally by Yip Man and is the true historical Jow handed down from Leung Jan). Now, if you have a true Wing Chun mentality then you really don't care if it is the true Leung Jan Jow - only whether it works.

Two last points. First, if you do Chi Kung, or your system of Wing Chun has it in it (that's another article) try this: rub the Jow or balm into some of your injuries, then do your Chi Kung, concentrating on directing the Jow into the skin and into the injuries. In about two weeks of this you should be pleasantly surprised. If it's an old chronic injury the rubbing technique is usually slow and deep, if it's relatively new then it's a light, quick type of rubbing. Secondly, learn as much as you can about herbs, both American and Chinese. Do you know why the Chinese used Ginseng, Ma Huang and Tang Kuei? BECAUSE THEY WERE IN CHINA!! Those herbs were indigenous to that country. If Kung Fu was invented in this country our "traditional" Jow would contain completely different ingredients! So if you like to think of yourself as a "true" martial artist, start learning about American herbs and their qualities to heal externally and internally.

If there is interest, I will write another article on how to make a homegrown / Americanized Jow.

I have tried to make a complex and complicated subject as easy as possible, and given you a little idea about how to make a simple Jow and balm. If you have any questions or comments you can reach me at my e-mail address. This is only one simple starting recipe out of hundreds. I didn't address the cooking, non-cooking, Yin vs. Yang qualities, when to change Jows, liniment vs.oil base Jows, etc., etc. This is Wing Chun - it should be as simple as a straight punch.

Camphor 10g
Raw Fruit of Cape Jasmine 5g
Raw Root of Kusenoff Monkshood 25g
Raw Aconite Root 25g
Raw Tuber Of Jackinthepulpit 25g
Raw Pinellia Tuber 25g
Cattail Pollen 25g
Raw Chinese Quince 200g
Raw Rhubarb 150g
Root-Bark of slenderstyle acanthopanax 100g
Rhizome of incised notopterygium 200g
Root of double teeth pubescent angelica 200g
Root of Red Peony 150g

Place in a jar with white wine (Gao Liang Wine or any other high alcohol content wine) for 7-15 days. Can be used for all injuries that don't break the skin.

Dit Da Jow recipe: Secretio Moschus moschiferi she-hsiang 1.5g
Semen Strychnotis ma-chien tzu 120g fry in oil, remove hairs
Flos Carthami tinctorii hung-hua 150g
Semen Persicae tao-jen 120g
Myrrha mo-yao 120g vinegar processed
Gummi Olibanum (Frankinsense) ju-hsiang 120g vinegar processed
Eupolyphagae che-chung 60g
Herba Ephedra ma-huang 90g
Semen Sinapis albae pai-chieh-tzu 60g
Radix Angelica (dong kwei) dong kwei 90g
Radix et rhizoma Ligusticii kao-pen 90g
Pyritum dipped in vinegar tzu-jan-tung 90g dipped in vinegar 7x
Radix Glycyrrhizae kan-tsao 60g (licorice not ginger)