



**THE
INDEPENDENT HERBALIST**

**A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO
HERBAL PREPAREDNESS
BY AGATHA NOVEILLE**

The Independent Herbalist: A Beginner's Guide to Herbal Preparedness

By Agatha Noveille

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Disclaimer: The information contained in this book is for educational purposes only and centers around historical records of use. First aid uses described in this book are meant to be complementary to modern emergency medical services and not a replacement for them. Consult with your primary care physician before using herbs. Information contained in this book is not intended to diagnose, treat or cure diseases.

Dedication

To my mother and grandmother, for walking me through so many gardens and up and down mountains when I was a child; and to my father and grandfather, for teaching me the value of hard work and how to pick blueberries.

Thank you. Without your support and inspiration, I never would have learned how to garden or to dream.

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Introduction

This handbook is a new take on herbalism for everyday people. It's designed for people who want to learn how to apply herbs in everyday life, but also in extraordinary circumstances. People who want to be practical everyday herbalists, but also want to be prepared for something more. It focuses on a foundation of twelve herbs, and includes suggestions on how and where to learn more. The herbs featured in this book were chosen for their versatility, their hardiness, and their availability. These herbs will grow almost anywhere, and can even be found already growing wild across most of the North American continent.

Independent Herbalism

Historically speaking, there have been many types of herbalism, each with different philosophies and important contributions to herbalism as a whole. Despite their differences, the core at every type of herbalism expresses a belief that herbs can benefit the health and wellbeing of families and individuals of all walks of life.

Independent herbalism takes this to its full potential by encouraging a modern lifestyle that emphasizes taking personal responsibility for health, promoting herbal self-sufficiency, and encouraging community wellbeing. It does this by focusing on botanical methods of self care using safe, common plants that can be grown or found growing wild almost anywhere. In addition to supporting the use of herbs for health in conjunction with modern medical care, it also acknowledges that herbs could potentially be a useful stop gap measure for short or long term emergencies when nothing else is available.

Independent herbalism is about everyday people learning how to be herbalists. Becoming an herbalist isn't complicated, and it isn't expensive; It's a straight forward process that anyone can master. No particular spiritual or religious orientation is required, no specific type of educational background, financial standing, or political persuasion. Anyone can learn herbalism and be an herbalist, as long as they use common sense and can pay attention to detail.

Independent herbalists are a special breed, and yet they're just common folks. Many people may already identify with the tenets of independent herbalism without realizing it. Independent herbalists can be urban homesteaders, rural farmsteaders, survivalists

and preppers; or they can be soccer moms, grandmothers, teenagers or anyone else who takes an interest in learning about herbs to support health with a DIY attitude. They are novices and old hands, or somewhere in between. They're savvy, down to earth people with a can do, will do take on life.

Independent herbalism is essentially a frame of mind and a set of values. Here are ten ways to learn to think like an independent herbalist:

1. Take it with a grain of salt. Independent herbalists don't buy into health fads or extreme ideologies. They love tradition, science, and balance, and take everything with a grain of salt. They understand that things are rarely as good as they look or, conversely, as bad as they seem.

2. Love local. Sure, the rainforest and other exotic locales have a lot of great herbs, but so does a typical backyard or vacant lot. What could be more easily and inexpensively available than something growing by the back door or front porch? Independent herbalists are comfortable working with local plants and weeds, and they understand the value and usefulness of plants that can grow quite happily without human intervention in places close to home.

3. Exercise critical thinking. Independent herbalists read widely on herbal and health topics rather than rely on a single source for information, and think critically about what they read. Who is behind the information? How accurate is the information likely to be? Critical thinking is a skill that can be learned, and independent herbalists practice it daily.

4. Look at the bigger picture. Independent herbalists understand that a discomfort isn't an isolated symptom- an overall balanced lifestyle is important for health. Without balance, good health is hard to come by.

5. Be proactive. Independent herbalists make changes, they shake things up, they plan for the future. They refuse to be a victim.

6. Learn from tradition and science. Independent herbalists don't believe in Magic Bullet herbs. They realize that the latest and greatest, over marketed herb is often so far removed both from its roots in traditional herbalism and our understanding of it in modern science that the current claims about it are way off the mark.

7. Learn resourcefulness. Independent herbalists are flexible, capable of working with what they have on hand. They understand that in a pinch, there are ways to substitute herbal ingredients in a formula to achieve the desired results even if all of the original ingredients aren't available.

8. Do It Yourself! Independent herbalists have DIY spirit. Making their own extracts? No problem! Foraging or growing a garden to fill their home with useful herbs? They're on it! When they don't make it themselves, they try to find it through other local herbalists and small businesses to support their community.

9. Be open and tolerant. Independent herbalists come from all walks of life and all kinds of backgrounds. Although they might have very different opinions and ideas about other topics, their ideas about health and healing and their practical approach to herbalism stem from a shared set of beliefs common to all herbalists. They realize that valuable herbal information can be shared and gleaned from all types of herbalists and many different kinds of resources. They are respectful of other people's choices and don't proselytize.

10. Be compassionate and inclusive. Independent herbalists realize that they may never know someone else's full story- all the things that have happened and all the choices that have been made that have shaped that person's life. They relate to others as being worthy of kindness and respect no matter where they are in life, and understand that extending this respect is as important for health as any other choice they make.

The Independent Herbalist Part One Herbs+DIY

DIY and the independent herbalist: Plants, Alcohol, Vinegar, Milk, Bees

Herbs are a very accessible DIY medium, and continue to be an important community resource throughout much of the world. The World Health Organization estimates that as much as eighty percent of the world's population still rely heavily on herbs for their health care. Unfortunately, in our country, much of information surrounding the safe use of herbs has been obscured by mass market oversimplification and the lack of an oral tradition that would allow us to learn about herbs as part of our culture.

In the past, herbs were grown mainly at home or harvested from the woods and fields close to home. In recent years, the commercial side of herbalism has blossomed, and herbal products are widely available both from specialty shops and mass market retailers. Returning to the DIY roots of herbalism by growing herbs and making herbal products at home has several advantages, however. For one thing, extracts and teas made with bulk or home grown ingredients cost much less than the same products bought off the shelf. For another, there is no doubt of the quality and purity of the ingredients being used. There is also the benefit of being directly a part of the sustainable cycle that begins with a seed and ends with a harvest of useful plants. No weak links in this supply chain! Nature has a resiliency that is to be admired.

Besides herbs, a number of other ingredients useful to the herbalist can be grown or produced at home. These include milk from goats or sheep, alcohol and vinegar made from fruit, and the honey and wax from a beehive. Most areas of the country have a suitable climate for growing at least some plants for making cooking and skin care

oils: nuts, olives, flax, or sunflowers are a few examples. In keeping with the theme of independence, this book focuses on herbal recipes and projects that can be made from goods obtainable with household industry (like apple cider vinegar and honey) plus a few inexpensive, reusable tools and supplies.

Getting Started: Stocking an Herbal Pantry from Scratch

The main tool of any herbalist is the herbal pantry. Filled with dried herbs and herbal preparations such as extracts and salves, the herbal pantry allows the herbalist to meet any challenge with ease and options.

Although it might sound expensive and intimidating, stocking an herbal pantry from scratch is a very simple, inexpensive matter. Many herbs can be grown in a home garden for next to nothing or carefully foraged from wild stands for free. See part two, Herbs + Practicality, for more information on gardening and foraging.

Although growing and foraging are immensely rewarding activities, both rely on the natural cycle and timing of the seasons, and require access to dirt which can be a hot commodity in urban settings. Thankfully, there is always commerce, which can supply high quality dried herbs on demand by the ounce. Some health food stores carry dried herbs in their bulk sections, and they can also be mail ordered. Bulk herbs can be used to get started, and then the transition to gardening and foraging can be made as time and resources allow.

Dried herbs typically come as either a fine powder or as small pieces of cut and sifted leaves or roots. They are usually sold by the ounce or the pound, and are inexpensive and versatile. As an example, a single ounce of extract can cost \$12 or more if purchased at the store, but an ounce of the dried herb costs a dollar or two and can make five ounces of liquid extract. Dried herbs are also good for much more than just extracts: they can be used to flavor foods and to make syrups, salves, teas, and many other projects.

Tools for Independent Herbalists

Herbalism doesn't require fancy tools. After all, teas are one of the most basic herbal preparations available, and a pot for boiling water and a mug to drink from are technically the only tools required. The following list of tools is very basic, and everything on it can be obtained inexpensively, either new or by hunting through yard sales or second hand shops. That doesn't make it any less valuable, however. Sometimes, simple is better! Most of the projects in this book can be completed using only items from the 'Very Basic Tools' list, and a few ingredients.

The Very Short List of Very Basic Tools:

Glass canning jars with lids

Small enamel pot with lid

A yard each of un-dyed muslin and flannel

Wooden spoons

A large funnel
A small funnel

Add to this list as budget or interest dictates:

Mesh Strainers, large and small
Tea Kettle
Tea ball or strainer spoon
A coffee grinder
A glass mixing bowl
Storage jars for dried herbs
Brown glass bottles with screw tops (not dropper tops-droppers can get clogged by homemade extracts, and also break or come apart and are just generally annoying)
Bar cloths and kitchen towels
Cutting board
Measuring cups (stainless steel)
Measuring spoons (stainless steel)
Kitchen Scale

Non-Herbal Supplies for the Independent Herbalist:

Other than basic tools and the herbs themselves, there are a few more things that are called for in the projects in this book. Here's a list of all the other ingredients that are used in the recipes:

Beeswax
Milk
Apple Cider Vinegar
Honey
Olive oil
Brandy
Vodka

Notes on Measuring Ingredients

To bring a bit of poetry out to play: To measure, or not to measure? Or rather, how precisely to measure, that is the question! Most herbal preparations can be made either with exact measurements, or by using what is commonly referred to as the 'folk' method. Exact measurements can be written either as ratios, such as a 1:2 extract, or in specific measurements such as ounces or tablespoons. The folk method is usually expressed in more vague directions, such as "cover the herbs with boiling water." However, it should be noted that while either method is appropriate for common herbs, much more care should be taken with certain 'low dose' botanicals. Please note that all of the recipes in this book are made using herbs that can be measured either way. In fact, information on both folk preparation and exact measurement is included for most of the recipes in this book- each has merits in certain situations, but for consistent results it's always best to measure.

Herbs+Water

Herbs plus water is as simple as it gets when it comes to using herbs, unless you count nibbling on leaves directly from the plant. The most basic of all herbal preparations, infusions and decoctions require nothing more than an herb, some water, a pot, and a heat source. Once prepared, they can be used internally or externally as suits the herbalist or the need.

Because they are so versatile and easy to make on demand, infusions and decoctions are an ideal place for herbalists to focus their efforts when just starting out. They provide the herbalist with flexibility and the ability to adapt immediately to a health challenge or need.

Infusions and decoctions are sometimes referred to as herbal teas. However, 'Tea,' in its most specific sense, refers to a particular plant: *Camellia sinensis*, from which we get green tea, Oolong tea, English Breakfast and everything in between. Still, specifying 'herbal tea' is more relatable than infusion and decoction when speaking with non-herbalist persons, and generally gets the point across that *tea* tea is not the topic of conversation. Herbalists often use the formal terms amongst themselves, and many older references also use 'infusion' or 'decoction,' so it pays to be familiar with the words.

The point behind infusing or decocting plant matter is: extraction. Plant walls are made up of cells, which hold all of the good stuff like the essential oils, alkaloids, and acids- the naturally occurring things that give each plant their particular health supportive characteristics. Hot water helps to release these things, or 'principles,' from their little cellular jails to make them readily available to the human body. Alcohol, vinegar, and milk can all be used for extracting, with slightly different results for each liquid, or 'menstruum.'

While both the basic process and the end results of infusions and decoctions are similar, they differ in the amount of time used during the soaking process and in the temperature of the water being used. Because infusions are mostly made with flowers and leaves, (which are relatively thin and easy to extract) and decoctions are made with roots, seeds, and bark (which are thicker and tougher) infusions are usually steeped for shorter amounts of time than decoctions, and herbs are added to the water after it is removed from the heat source. Decoctions are often simmered for a bit and then allowed to steep for an extended period of time.

Infusions

Generally, infusions are most suitable for leaves and flowers. Fresh leaves should be torn or chopped into small pieces, and fresh flowers can be infused whole. Dried flower petals and leaves should be crumbled a bit before using

To make an infusion, hot water fresh off the boil is poured into a cup over a tablespoon or so of fresh or dried herb, and allowed to steep for anywhere from three

to ten minutes. Three minutes yields a light tea, while ten minutes yields a much stronger beverage. With a little trial and error, the herbalist can make their infusions to taste preference, or brew a stronger cup as needed. Infusions are at their best if covered with a saucer or lid while the herbs steep, because leaves and flowers tend to be rich in compounds that would otherwise float away with the steam.

If making a pot of infusion, rather than a single cup, the herbalist can choose between an ounce of herb by weight to sixteen ounces of water by volume, or an ounce of herb by weight to thirty-two ounces of water by volume. Then again, the herbalist may devise some other ratio of measurement based on personal preference- within reason. The folk equivalents for measuring tea involve 'pinches' for cups of tea, and 'handfuls' for larger quantities.

More than one kind of herb can be blended together for infusions, so don't feel limited to using only one herb at a time. Typically, herbs should be selected based on their ability to complement one another's actions in the finished tea. There is also room to play with adding ingredients strictly for taste, such as mint, which many people find palatable, or licorice root, which naturally sweetens the brew.

Herbs+Water Project: Flu Season Infusion

Mix equal parts of dried yarrow, elderflower, and peppermint and store in an airtight container away from direct light. Use one teaspoon to one tablespoon per cup of water to make an infusion. During cold and flu season, the infusion can be used whenever a fever is taking place, or when first beginning to feel under the weather. Drink the tea while it is still warm, and then cover up with blankets or take a hot bath to promote sweating. Intentional sweating is a traditional herbal approach to helping the body eliminate a fever.

Decoctions

Decoctions are made out of roots, barks, and seeds, which should be ground into small pieces or powdered prior to use. A very simple decoction can be made using a handful of herb to a quart of water. Or, if precise measurements are preferred, use an ounce of herb by weight to a pint of water by volume. As with infusions, the ratio an herbalist will eventually employ for making decoctions will vary based on experience, personal preference, or the herbal traditions they follow.

To make a decoction, place herbs into a saucepan with enough water to cover them about a quarter of an inch, and allow them to sit for a few hours. Or overnight. Or . . . not at all. Soaking gives the herbs a chance to absorb some of the water and begin to soften, which makes it easier for the good stuff to come out. However, if the decoction is needed immediately, soaking can be skipped.

Once the herbs have had time to soak (or not), bring the herbs and water to a boil. Allow the material to simmer for ten to fifteen minutes and either strain through a sieve for use while hot, or allow the decoction to cool before using. Decoctions should be covered like infusions, but decoctions can be left to stand for several hours if desired.

After the decoction is cool, it can be poured off through a mesh strainer to separate the water from the herb. The decoction can also be strained through a paper coffee filter or clean cloth to make the final beverage more visually appealing and less gritty. Some herbalists add additional water at this point, to bring the amount of decoction back up to the original measurement of water. This is customary because the prolonged simmering of the decoction causes it to become quite concentrated as the water evaporates.

Combination Brews

Sometimes, it's nice to have a blend of leaves or flowers and roots or bark, some of which will need to be infused and others that need to be decocted. To create a blended brew, simply start by making a decoction, and add the infusion worthy ingredients for a few minutes at the end.

Solar Teas

Stove tops, campfires and camp stoves can all be used to make infusions and decoctions, but even sunlight can be used as an alternative heat source. To make a solar tea, add the herbs for the infusion to a mason jar full of water, cap with a lid, and set out in direct sunlight for several hours. This works best in the summer, when sunlight is strongest, but can also be done in winter by placing the jar inside on a sunny windowsill. After the herbs have steeped for several hours, strain them and use as per any regular preparation.

Herbs+Water Project: Peppermint and Rose Solar Tea

Combine a large handful of fresh peppermint with a small handful of dried rose hips and place into a glass jar. Fill the jar with water and find a warm, sunny place to leave the jar for a few hours. Once the tea is finished infusing, chill and then enjoy over ice. This blend is especially good in the summer because of the cooling effects of the mint.

Cold Infusions

Infusions and decoctions can also be made without heat. To make a cold water preparation, place a tablespoon of the herb in a jar with cold water and leave to steep overnight. To get technical, some herbalists prefer to hang the herb in a tea ball or muslin bag towards the top of the jar. This way, the water will circulate through the material and yield a stronger infusion. A wooden spoon or chopstick laid across the top of the jar can provide a good hanging point for this method.

Delicious herbal beverages can be made using fresh herbs and the cold infusion method. Simply add a handful of fresh herb (culinary herbs usually taste best) to a pitcher of water and place in the refrigerator overnight. Fruit can be added as well to create an even wider variety of tastes to enjoy. If fruit is used, the cold infusion becomes similar to *aguas frescas*: fresh fruit and herb drinks common in Mexico and

South America. It can be rewarding to experiment with different combinations to find what tastes best.

Herbs+Water Project: Lemon Balm Cold Infusion

For a refreshing summertime drink, place a handful of fresh lemon balm leaves into a pitcher of water and refrigerate overnight. It is alright to leave the leaves on the stems. Fresh fruit can also be added- raspberries, strawberries, and blackberries are all good choices.

A Note on Sweeteners

Infusions and decoctions that are made strictly for enjoyment can be sweetened if desired, but many herbalists prefer to give infusions and decoctions sans sweetener if they're given with a specific purpose in mind. In traditional herbalism, the bitter taste of some herbs is considered to be very good for the liver. Disguising it with sweeteners is thought to detract from the full benefit of the plants.

Homegrown options for sweeteners include molasses, honey, stevia (an herb that can be grown in a sunny spot indoors on a windowsill), and fruit juice.

Compresses

Herbs+Water preparations have applications other than just in the beverage arena. If desired, herbal infusions and decoctions can be applied topically to the skin by soaking a folded cloth in the herbal preparation, and then laying the cloth on the skin. This is called a compress. Leave the compress in place until cool, and then replace with a freshly dipped cloth as needed. This type of herbal preparation works well in dealing with skin problems, sore muscles, abrasions, and sunburn, depending on the herbs used.

Herbs+Water Project: Bee Balm Compress

Make an infusion with fresh or dried bee balm. Soak a clean, folded cloth in the infusion (make sure it is comfortably warm and won't scald the skin). Wring out the cloth until it is wet but not dripping, and lay it on the skin or over the eyes. Bee balm was traditionally used this way for skin infections, sores, bites, and wounds; and also for sore, inflamed, or infected eyes. The cloth may be left in place until cool, and replaced with a fresh cloth if desired.

Herbal Soaks

Strained infusions and decoctions can also be added to baths. Make two quarts of an infusion or decoction- extra strong preparations are ok because they will be diluted in the bath water, but they aren't necessary. Filter the herbs out, and add the liquid directly to the bath after the tub is full. The leftover herbs can also be placed into a muslin bag or bundled up into cheesecloth and allowed to soak in the tub with the bather- this will allow any good stuff left over from the infusion/decoction process to continue to extract into the bath.

Herbs+ Water Projects: Elderflower Bath

Prepare a two quart infusion of dried elderflowers, and add to a bath. Elderflowers are excellent for any type of skin discomfort, and also promote a good sweat, which was a traditional trick to stave off illness at the first signs of feeling crummy.

Herbs+Fire

Cooking with Herbs: The Possibilities of Herbs in the Kitchen

Herbs are often used as a spice or flavoring ingredient in cooking, but there are many other ways to enjoy herbs in the kitchen. Herbal oils, vinegars, honeys, and spice rubs made with dried herbs can add wildly new flavor dimensions to cooking.

Most herbs with cooking applications also have health applications, but that isn't necessarily true in reverse. Sadly, not all herbs blessed with health applications are also blessed with heavenly flavor and delightful aroma. Then again, some traditional dual purpose herbs are downright vile, yet somehow are still used as a spice despite their gag inducing capacity. Asafetida comes to mind: it's used frequently in several ethnic cuisines, but a little goes a loooong way. As a general rule, however, herbs that are dual purpose are going to be reasonably palatable.

Some common kitchen herbs with health applications include: sage, rosemary, thyme, fennel, peppermint, lemon balm, parsley, dill, cilantro/coriander, cayenne, basil, garlic, horseradish, oregano, and ginger.

Herbs generally associated with health uses, but that also have kitchen potential include: nettles, juniper berry, lavender, hawthorne berry, elderberry, mugwort, fenugreek, burdock, calendula, turmeric, dandelion, chickweed, cleavers, birch, and fir.

Herbs+Fire Project: Herbal Salads

The leaves and flowers of the following herbs can be tossed in to any salad to add nutrition and new flavors: nasturtium, which tastes peppery; chickweed, which has a slightly sweet, mostly neutral taste; dandelion, the greens are bitter unless they are picked very young but the flowers are very nice; and violets, which are also best when young.

Herbs+Fire Project: Herb Sprinkles

Mix equal parts dried nettle leaves, dandelion leaves, and bee balm. Bee balm has a rich, spicy taste that's reminiscent of oregano, and the dried nettles and dandelion provide a dash of extra nutrition and minerals. This mix can be used as a condiment on soups, stews, and over cooked grains like rice or couscous.

Smudges

Smudges aren't a cooking ingredient, but they do involve Herbs+Fire. A "smudge" is an herb or blend of herbs that are tied in a bundle and burned to make use of the smoke. Smudges were used before bug sprays, air fresheners, and chemical room sanitizer sprays were available. Typical candidates include sage, mugwort, angelica, lavender, pine, citronella, cedar, rosemary and thyme. They aren't as strong as

chemical air fresheners, and they do rely on burning (and therefore smoke) to be useful, but they can still be handy to have during mosquito season or when someone has been sick.

Herbs+Fire Project: Bug Be Gone Smudge Stick

To make a smudge, collect six or seven stems of sage or other herbs in the desired length. Hold or hang the stems together and upside down with a cotton string knotted tightly around the end of the stems to make a bundle. Wrap the bundle of herbs firmly with cotton twine, so that the herbs are bound about every two inches. Tie off string at the other end of the bundle, and hang the smudge stick to dry for one week before using. To make a bug repellent smudge stick, use sage, mugwort, and/or lavender. To use, light the smudge stick and allow to smolder in a bowl or other non-flammable container so that the smoke can drift around the desired area.

Smoking

Tobacco is currently the most common herb associated with smoking, but originally smoking was just another delivery method for certain herbs, such as mullein. Smoking blends of herbal ingredients were traditionally made to assist with lung problems, enhance dreaming and sleep quality, aid in meditation, or act as stimulants. Herbal smoking blends are also sometimes used by people desiring to lessen their dependence on products containing tobacco. Still, it's probably best not to use herbal smoking blends often because of the stress that inhaled smoke can place on the lungs.

When designing an herbal smoking blend: Choose a base herb, complementing herbs, and flavor enhancing ingredients. For quick and simple lung relief, try using mullein and mint.

Herbs+Honey

Honey is a very interesting and delicious, albeit disgusting, substance. The process for making honey goes like this: Bee Number One drinks nectar from flowers. Bee Number One then takes the nectar home to the hive. Bee Number One vomits nectar into the mouth of Bee Number Two. Bee Number Two digests the nectar, and then vomits the digested nectar into the cells of the honey comb. The nectar-vomit evaporates until it is 17% to 18% moisture content, aka Honey. Yep. Honey = Bee Vomit.

The digestion process that takes place in Bee Number Two, which involves enzymes, is partially responsible for honey's curious shelf life of practically forever. It is also responsible for honey's peculiar bacterial animosity, which is important to bees as it forms part of their hive defenses; and to us, as per its historical use for wound and burn dressings. And yes, it is also responsible for honey's deliciousness, despite the fact that it is nothing more than barfed up flower juice.

Thanks to its versatility, honey can easily be a staple in the herbal home. Some excellent honey applications include electuaries, syrups, salves, and pills, but electuaries and syrups are the preparations covered here.

Electuaries

Electuaries are simple preparations of dried herbs and honey. An electuary has a basic proportion of 1:2 (one part powdered herbs to two parts honey). To make an electuary, blend a selection of powdered herbs in the desired proportions to equal one-fourth to one-half cup of herbs. Add the powdered herbs to one cup of honey. Dried chopped fruit can be included as well, to make the electuary more interesting or add variety. One-half to three-quarters of a cup of fruit to one cup of honey is a good range for experimenting.

These traditional preparations of powdered herbs, dried fruit, and honey are as delectable as they are versatile. Electuaries can be enjoyed spread on a piece of toast, as a sandwich spread along with nut butters, or as sweet treat over pancakes or waffles. They can be dissolved into hot water or herbal tea as a drink, used as an ingredient in sauces, dressings, marinades or desserts, or enjoyed right off the spoon. Most electuaries are used a teaspoonful at a time.

Depending on the herbalist's preferences, more herbs and fruit can be used to make the electuary thicker.

Herbs+Honey Project: Rose Electuary

Mix one cup of honey and one-third cup dried, powdered rose petals in a glass canning jar. Use as a sweet condiment instead of jam, stir into herbal teas, or enjoy for rose's calming, uplifting influence. For variation, try adding dried chopped apricots or cherries.

Syrups

Syrups are convenient and palatable herbal preparations that can be given right off the spoon, used as a flavored sweetener, or stirred into warm water to make a beverage. Honey makes a nice syrup medium, and also has the benefit of being easily obtained from backyard or homestead hives. The only ingredients needed are: a strong infusion or decoction of the desired herb, or herbs, and raw honey. The ratio to use is 1:2 (one part infusion or decoction to two parts honey).

Place the herbal infusion/decoction and the honey into a saucepan over low heat. Stir gently until the honey and herbs are combined. Be careful not to heat the syrup to the point that it simmers or boils, because that will harm the enzymes and other beneficial properties of the raw honey. Once the herbal infusion and honey are completely blended together, pour into glass canning jars and cap with screw on lids.

Opened syrups are best stored in the refrigerator. If mold forms on the syrup, throw it away. Honey is naturally antimicrobial, but mold becomes a possibility for syrup because adding the herbal decoction or infusion creates a higher water content. If the syrup is stored carefully, spoilage usually isn't a problem.

Herbs+Honey Project: Quick and Easy Elderberry Syrup

Make a strong decoction from one cup water and one-fourth cup dried elderberries. Combine the decoction and one cup of honey over very low heat, stirring gently until it is thoroughly combined. Pour into jars and refrigerate. Feel free to use creatively, such as over oatmeal, stirred into yogurt, or in soda water.

Honey For Wound Care

Honey has often been used during war time shortages as a fallback for wound care. When other supplies were low, a thin layer of raw honey was spread over the skin to protect and moisturize wounds and help keep them sterile. Traditionally, honey was used in this way to support the healing of the skin from cuts, scrapes, burns and wounds. A bandage can be applied over the honey to prevent it from coming off and making everything sticky.

Honey Precautions: Endospores

Honey can contain bacterial endospores (which are sort of like dormant, undeveloped bacteria) that immature immune systems can't handle, so honey should never be given to children under one year of age. Usually, the endospores are introduced during processing from unhygienic packaging facilities, but it's always better to play it safe than sorry.

Honey Precautions: Toxic Honey

Honey produced by bees visiting plants in the mountain laurel, rhododendron, and azalea family can be toxic to humans! To avoid this, honey was not collected during certain times of the year in areas where these plants are endemic and found in high concentrations. When honey is collected later in the year, because it is pooled in with

honey from other places and times of the year, the toxic honey is diluted to a level that is no longer a problem. However, be aware of this if hives are located next to large stands of these plants or in an area where these plants are very common.

Herbs+Oil

Oil infusions are another versatile herbal preparation, and are almost as simple as Herbs+Water infusions. Type of herb and type of oil can be varied according to the desired outcome for the project. Oil producing plants are surprisingly plentiful, and there are many that can be grown around the home or garden. These include sunflowers, nut trees, and even olive trees in some parts of the country.

Herbal oils can be either edible or topical for end use. Edible herbal oils can be turned into salad dressings, bread dips, and flavorful cooking ingredients. Herbal oils created for topical purposes can be used as a base for salves and ointments.

Two of the simplest ways to make herbal oil infusions are presented here: cold infusion and hot infusion. The main thing to remember when making herbal oils is to protect the infusing oil from too much light, heat, and moisture. Dried herbs are fine to use for either cold or hot oil methods, but fresh herbs should only be used for hot oil methods. This is because the water content of fresh herbs can lead to dangerous spoilage problems if used in a cold oil process. 'Dangerous,' as in 'fatal if ingested,' read: Botulism. So, once your oils are made, play it safe- refrigerate. And if you notice any funny changes in the oils, toss 'em. Period. No excuses, no nothing. This includes: bubbling, turning cloudy, changing colors during storage, or starting to smell weird.

Cold Infused Oils

Oils made with dried herbs are less likely to spoil than those made with fresh ones, because the water content is lower. To make a cold oil infusion for topical uses, pour enough oil over dried herbs of choice to cover by a half-inch. Place the jar in a sunny window for a week and shake daily. The slight warmth from the sun will help create a stronger extract than leaving the jar at room temperature. The jar may also be placed in a paper bag to keep it out of the light, which can break down the oil and the herbs, but benefit from the heat. Prolonged, direct light is damaging to herbs and herbal preparations. After a week, strain the oil to remove the herbs, and store the oil in a cool, dark place. For culinary oils, use ¼ cup powdered herbs per cup of olive oil, and allow to infuse for two weeks before using. Culinary oils don't need to be strained before using – the spices just add extra flavor.

Herbs+Oil Project: Elderflower and Rose Petal Oil

Fill a clean glass jar halfway with dried elderflowers and dried red rose petals. Add olive oil to cover, and cap the jar. Place in a sunny windowsill for a week or two and shake daily. Strain and bottle. Can be used as a topical oil, or as the oil in a salve recipe. Great for topical first aid uses; see the chapters on elder and rose for more information.

Hot Infused Oil

Adding heat to the Herb+Oil equation can make the finished oil stronger and shorten the time it needs to infuse. Again, hot oil infusion is the better for making oils with fresh herbs because fresh herbs may spoil during the cold infusion process.

Hot oil infusions do take less time to make than cold oil infusions, but they need more attention during the process because the temperature must be maintained accurately. The temperature range to aim for is 100-140 degrees Fahrenheit, which should be maintained for one to four hours minimum, or up to 72 hrs if time allows.

There are several ways to achieve the target temperature, and many herbalists employ one of the following: a double boiler, a crock pot, or an oven. With a double boiler or crock pot, a thermometer should be kept handy to regularly check the temperature, and the heat source for these methods may need to be turned on and off regularly to keep the oil in the desired temperature range. This can be a pain, but it does work. An oven, on the other hand, may be a more reliable source of steady heat, and may even be able to hold the desired temperature with nothing more than the interior light turned on once it warms up.

Herbal Oils Are Not For Burn Care

Herbal oils for topical uses should *not* be applied to fresh burns. Oils can hold in the heat of cooked skin- yes, that's all a burn is: cooked skin- which prolongs the healing time for the burn, or even makes the burn worse. Not good! Don't do it! If herbal burn support is desired, use herbal compresses, honeys or vinegars instead.

Herbs+Oil Project: Mullein Oil

Fill a glass canning jar halfway with dried mullein flowers and add olive oil to cover. Place the canning jar in a pot on the stove (neither the jar nor the pot should have a lid) and add an inch or so of water to the pot to make a double boiler. Let the mullein infuse for an hour or two, checking frequently to make sure there is still water in the pot and that the water is only warm. If you have a thermometer, keep the temp between 100 and 140 degrees Fahrenheit. If you don't have a thermometer, know that simmering usually occurs at around 200 degrees Fahrenheit, so you want the water to be steamy but not simmering. Once the infusion is finished, allow the oil to cool and then strain through a cloth into a clean bottle. Mullein oil is an old favorite for ear and skin troubles- see the chapter on mullein for more details.

Herbs+Wax

Bees create honeycomb inside their hives, where the honeycomb cells are then used to raise bee babies and store honey. Honeycomb is made entirely of wax, which is secreted by worker bees from specialized glands along the sides of their bodies.

Although not much can be done with herbs and wax on their own, wax plus oil that has been infused with herbs is another matter: Herbs+Oil+Wax=Salve.

Salves

Salves are useful for skin care applications, and they are fairly straight forward to make.

To make a salve, place oil and wax into an enamel pan or double boiler over low heat. Stir slowly until the wax melts and the ingredients are combined. To test what the finished salve will be like, place a few drops of the hot wax and oil mixture onto a cool plate. The drops of salve will cool quickly and the true form of the final product will be revealed. If the salve is too hard, add a little more oil to the pan. If the salve is too soft, add a little more wax. Adjust as necessary until the salve samples are ideal for the intended purpose of the salve.

A good ratio for salve making is 8:1 of oil to wax, both measured in ounces. But, of course, ratios for salve making, like the ratios used in making so many other herbal products, are just guidelines. By varying the amount of wax in the recipe, the hardness or softness of the final product can be tailored to the herbalist's specific purposes.

Some recipes that call for beeswax measured by the tablespoon assume that two tablespoons will equal half an ounce. This will probably only be true if beads or pastilles of beeswax are being used, because shaved beeswax is a bit fluffy and takes up more space than pastilles but weighs less. If a scale is not available and a set recipe is being followed, it is more accurate to measure by one inch cubes rather than attempt to shave or crush the beeswax and measure out tablespoons.

Of course, none of that is a problem as long as the salve is tested before it is poured into jars, by checking the texture of a few drops of the salve-in-progress on a cool plate and adjusting the ingredients as needed. Checking the salve before pouring it out is a good idea anyway, regardless of whether a recipe is being followed or constructed on the fly.

For reference, a cubic inch of solid beeswax weighs about half an ounce, and a tablespoon of olive oil is also a half ounce. Beeswax cuts best by scoring repeatedly with a knife dipped into hot water. By the 8:1 ratio, eight tablespoons of olive oil and a one inch cube of beeswax will make a very manageable batch of salve.

To plan what container to store the salve in, know that the volume of oil used will usually be very close to the final volume of the salve. So if the amount of oil in the recipe fits in the container, most likely the finished salve will as well. Appropriate containers for salves are short glass jars, lip balm tubes, or small tins.

Herbs+Wax Project: Elder and Rose Salve

Make a double boiler by adding an inch or two of water to a cooking pot and placing a glass canning jar upright in the middle of the pot. Place the desired amount of elder and rose infused oil and beeswax into the jar and combine over low heat. Test the salve on a cool plate to judge how it will set up, and add a small amount of oil or beeswax as needed to achieve the desired consistency. Remove the pot from the heat, and pour the hot salve into its permanent storage container. Allow the salve to cool, label the container, and store for first aid use.

Herbs+Vinegar

Vinegar exists thanks to a type of bacteria that eats alcohol (ethanol) as its main energy source. The byproduct that the bacteria make is called acetic acid, and vinegar is essentially Acetic Acid+Water. Vinegars can be made at home from juice, apple cider, or a wide variety of fruit wines. The process for vinegar creation is fairly simple, and many excellent tutorials are available from other sources.

Vinegar rivals water in its versatility for herbal applications. It can be used to make extracts, oxymels, tonics, liniments, herbal vinegars for cooking, natural electrolyte replenishers, and various other concoctions for skin and hair care. Vinegar has unique extraction properties, and can make a good alternative if alcohol isn't available, or isn't desired.

Vinegar Extracts

Vinegar works a little differently than alcohol or water as an extract medium, which is mainly important to very technical herbalists who like to compare experiment with and compare different mediums. However, if the herbalist plans to avoid the use of alcohol altogether and wishes to use vinegar as their sole menstruum, the differences between the two should be taken seriously. Vinegar is exceptional at extracting certain constituents from plants, mainly the alkaloid class of compounds, but has a much lower efficiency rate for other parts of a plant's chemical make up. The American Eclectic physicians often recorded the differences they noticed between alcohol and vinegar extracts, so reading up on period literature is often a good place to begin. Otherwise, bear in mind that:

Vinegar extracts can be made either with a weight to volume ratio, or with the no-measure method. As with alcohol based extracts, a 1:5 weight of plant material to volume of vinegar is the traditional ratio for most herbs.

With the no measure method, add the ground or powdered herbs to a glass jar, and stir in enough vinegar to cover the herbs with an extra quarter inch or so of vinegar. Allow the vinegar to stand for two weeks, and be sure to shake the jar daily. As with alcohol based extracts, allowing the jar to have one day of rest before it is filtered will make the process much easier. Sediments will settle to the bottom of the jar and the majority of the extract can be poured off into another container without the filter cloth becoming clogged and prone to overspill.

The serving size of a vinegar extract is usually the same as for an alcohol extract. To use a vinegar extract, add the measured amount of extract to a few ounces of water and sweeten with honey or juice if the taste is a problem. Vinegar extracts have a reliable shelf life of six months to a year, although some herbalists report that a longer shelf life is common.

Infused Vinegars

Depending on the ingredients, infused vinegars and vinegar extracts can be used as daily tonics or cooking ingredients, or even skin and hair care products. Liniments for sore muscles, washes for sunburn and skin irritations, skin toners and hair rinses can all be made with a vinegar base and a few herbs.

Infused vinegars use the same process as making a vinegar extract, but the ratio of vinegar to herbs is a little higher so that the end result is less concentrated.

Herbs+Vinegar Project: Peppermint Vinegar for Sore Muscles

Fill a large canning jar half full with dried peppermint, and add apple cider vinegar to cover. It will be best to cover the jar with a small bowl or saucer, because the vinegar may corrode the metal lids and rings that usually come with canning jars. Let sit for two weeks. The peppermint may soak up most or all of the vinegar, just add more as needed. After two weeks, filter through a cloth and pour into a bottle with a cap that isn't made of metal. Use as needed as a rubdown for sore muscles. Actually, the vinegar can be used internally for indigestion, too. To use internally, add a teaspoon of the vinegar to a small glass of water. Sweeten with honey if desired.

Oxymels

An oxymel is a beverage made with honey and vinegar. Oxymels date back to ancient Greece, but have experienced a moderate revival with modern herbalists. The basic oxymel recipe is 4 parts honey + 1 part infused vinegar or vinegar extract. Either mix cold- it may take a bit of stirring, but the honey will dissolve eventually- or if a thicker consistency is desired, place the ingredients in a pot over low heat and simmer to the desired consistency. Use plain by the spoonful, or mix into water as a beverage. Don't worry, unless dill is one of the herbs involved, oxymels won't taste like pickle juice. The honey makes oxymels taste deliciously sweet and sour, and they are wonderful thirst quenchers after exercise or hard work outdoors.

Herbs+Vinegar Project: Violet Oxymel

Place one cup of apple cider vinegar and one cup of fresh violet flowers into a glass canning jar and cover with a saucer or small bowl. Allow to sit for a day or so, until the violet flowers have lost their color and the vinegar has taken on a red or purple hue. Strain out the flowers, and place the violet infused vinegar back into the jar. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup honey to the jar and stir to combine. Once the honey and vinegar are mixed, pour them into a container with a non reactive lid and refrigerate. Add a teaspoon or two to a glass of water for a refreshing summer drink or supportive lung tonic.

Herbs+Alcohol

Alcohol Extracts

Alcohol extracts, also known as tinctures, are one of the most common forms of herbal preparations currently in use, and are popular because of their convenience and long shelf life. To make herbal extracts with alcohol, “distilled spirits” (such as vodka or brandy), or “dilute alcohol” are needed. The making of distilled alcohol is closely regulated in the United States to the extent that it is not practical for the average DIY enthusiast. But, because of their popularity and long shelf life, alcohol extracts deserve some discussion, regardless of whether or not alcohol can be produced via home industry.

Chemically speaking, there are actually several different types of alcohol. The true chemical name for the type of alcohol that humans can drink is ethyl alcohol, or ethanol. Alcohol, in this case, is usually ethanol+water, and usually some other stuff for flavor. The ratio of ethanol to water is called the ‘proof’, and dividing the proof of a spirit by two will tell you what percentage of ethanol is in the product.

Extract making in its precise form uses weight to volume ratios (usually measured by grams of herbs to milliliters of dilute alcohol or spirits). Making an extract this way requires a metric scale and metric measuring cup for best results. To create a 1:5 extract, which is probably the most common ratio used, the weight of the herb in grams is multiplied by 5. The final number represents the number of milliliters of alcohol.

If accurate measuring tools aren’t available, the no-measure ‘folk’ method can be used instead. Simply place the herbs for the extract into a clean glass jar and top off with enough alcohol to cover the herbs. Add enough extra alcohol to have about a quarter inch above the herbs. In both styles of extract making, herbs should be powdered, chopped, or otherwise broken up into small pieces to make the extract process more efficient.

80 proof vodka or brandy usually has a high enough ethanol content to make a shelf stable extract at home with dry herbal ingredients. These extracts can be kept for a minimum of two years and often much longer. Fresh herbs, because of their water content, may decrease the proof of homemade extracts, which can lead to a shorter shelf life. If fresh herbs are being used for an extract with an 80 proof alcohol, the shelf life may be shorter but the extract will still be effective. Grain, grape, or cane alcohol can be found as high as 190 proof from some specialty companies, and diluted to 100 proof to make fresh herbal extracts with a longer shelf life if these are desired.

Herbs+Alcohol Project: Yarrow Extract

Place enough dried yarrow in a jar to fill the jar half way. Add high quality, unflavored vodka to cover the herb, and mix well. Allow to stand for two weeks; shake the jar

daily and add more vodka as needed to keep the yarrow submerged under about a quarter to half inch of liquid. After two weeks, strain the yarrow and vodka mixture through a cloth and pour into a clean bottle. Make sure to squeeze or press the left over herb until it is as dry as possible to get every drop of extract. Bonus trivia: the dried up herb bits left over after squeezing are called the 'marc'.

Elixirs

Elixirs are usually an alcohol extract of herbs where the base spirit is brandy. Extracts made with brandy usually taste better than extracts made with vodka. A little honey may be added to make the elixir taste even better.

Herbs+Alcohol Project: Hawthorn Brandy

Fill a large jar half full with dried, crushed hawthorn berries and add brandy to cover. Let sit for two weeks before straining. Use the brandy as you would any alcohol extract of hawthorn, or use it as a delicious and unusual cocktail base.

Wine, Mead, and Cider

Wine, mead, and cider are all alcoholic products which can legally be made at home. However, herbal extracts made with them will have a very short shelf life, usually only a few months after they are made. This is because the ethanol content of these products is much lower than that of distilled spirits, so they spoil more readily.

To make an herbal extract using a wine or homebrew as a base, simply powder the desired herbs and combine with the alcoholic beverage of choice, just as you would for a normal alcohol extract. The herb/alcohol combination should be kept in a jar with very little to no airspace (exposure to air may cause the brew to go bad, such as causing wine to go sour and turn into vinegar), and shaken daily. After one or two weeks, filter the beverage, pour into a sterilized bottle and store in a cool, dark place. A tablespoon several times a day to a half wineglass full once a day may be used as desired for most wines and most herbs.

Herbs+Milk

Herbs and milk go very well together – herbs and cheese come to mind immediately, but Herbs+Milk are one of the secret recipes that should be familiar to all independent herbalists.

Milk makes a nourishing carrier for herbs, and milk from cows, goats, or sheep can be used. Adding spices to milk and ‘scalding’ it (heating until the milk is just below boiling) are traditional ways of making milk easier to digest and decreasing the amount of mucus sometimes produced by the body as a result of drinking milk. Milk is naturally high in protein, good fats, and certain minerals like calcium.

Milk Infusions

Making a milk infusion is very simple. Use one or two teaspoons of powdered herbs per cup of milk for the main herbs, and other spices for seasoning as desired. Put the milk in a small pot and add the herbs and spices. Heat the milk, stirring gently, until the milk begins to develop tiny bubbles and froth around the edge of the pot. Pour the milk into a mug and allow it to cool to a comfortable temperature before drinking.

Alternatively, a teaspoon or two of herbal syrup or electuary can be stirred into the milk instead of using powdered herbs.

Herbs+Milk Project: Catnip Milk

Catnip is a great herb for insomnia associated with stress, so catnip milk makes a nice bedtime drink. Scald one cup of milk, and remove from the heat. Depending on the desired strength of the milk, add one or two teaspoons of catnip and allow to steep, covered, for five to ten minutes. Add honey to taste. Drink before bed.

Topical Milks

Milk also makes a soothing base for herbal skincare products. An herbal milk makes a nice cleanser, either by itself or mixed with a little castile soap. A tablespoon of milk plus a teaspoon of liquid castile soap is a good recipe base. Honey can also be mixed with a teaspoon of milk to make a mask- either the honey or the milk can have herbal ingredients, or they can be used plain. Extra herbal milks should be stored in the refrigerator and used within a few days.

Herbs+Milk Project: Milk and Flower Facial Cleanser

Mix equal parts dried rose petals and elderflowers in an airtight container. Use one tablespoon of this mix per cup of milk to make an infusion. Once cool, use as is or combine with one teaspoon of liquid castile soap per tablespoon milk.

The Independent Herbalist Part Two: Herbs+Practical Application

Getting Started: Gardening and Foraging

To be truly versatile and useful longterm, herbalism should be locally based. The independent herbalist should be comfortable working with plants that can be either grown at home or found already growing close to home.

Gardens

Gardening has the advantage over foraging in two ways: one, the herbalist is reasonably sure of the quantity of supply available; and two, the herbalist can manage the garden in such a way as to protect native plant resources. Over-harvesting or harvesting with disregard to long term health of plant populations is an unfortunate trend in areas with wild ginseng, goldenseal and other native herbs that fetch a good price at market. And really, in a hypothetical situation where plants are suddenly needed, chances are that time is going to be an important factor. Having a versatile supply of plants growing in a central location (i.e. a garden) is much better than having to wander the neighborhood looking for weeds.

With that in mind, gardens can take many different forms, depending on the space available and the interests of the gardener-herbalist. They can be a jumble of things planted on a whim, a carefully planned layout with a theme, a native plant sanctuary, or even a collection of pots lining the patio or front porch. Many herbs will happily grow in containers, and some herbs, like mint and lemon balm, will try to take the whole garden for themselves if they are NOT planted in containers!

A few herbs planted in a containers and tended regularly can easily provide enough raw plant material for the home herbalist to make extracts and teas, and possibly other projects as well, so don't think that herbs can't be grown just because space is a little tight.

Herbs are tenacious: perennial herbs will continue to grow year after year without much fuss, and annuals (plants that have a life cycle of only one year) will often reseed themselves. Herbs don't usually need fertilizer because they are used to fending for themselves, so once established an herb garden won't require much from the herbalist other than water if there's been a dry spell and a watchful eye towards weeds that might try to crowd out the plants.

The herbs included in this book are reasonably adaptable and can be found growing throughout Europe and North America. Because of their hardiness and versatility, they make an ideal first time herb garden. Herbs can be tricky to start from seed, because each herb requires very specific conditions before they will germinate, but patience is usually rewarded. Some nurseries and mail order companies sell herb seedlings which can be an excellent way to get started, especially for perennial herbs.

Foraging

Gardening isn't the only option for herbalists interested in harvesting their own plants close to home. Herbs may also be obtained from foraging (aka wildcrafting). Native plants can often be found this way, of course, but so can naturalized and invasive species: plants that have escaped from gardens to establish themselves in the wild. These are generally a better focus for wildcrafting than native species. Naturalized and invasive species often compete with native plants, so targeting them can free up room and resources to strengthen native populations.

The golden rule of foraging is simple: Treat wild plants as though they are a shared community resource by leaving stands of plants healthier than when they were discovered. This can be accomplished by spreading seeds, thinning and spreading overcrowded stands, helping to control soil erosion, and getting rid of invasive species threatening to crowd out native plants.

There are other important rules to consider, too. These all have to do with being a considerate neighbor and an ambassador for the art of herbalism: respect trespassing laws, respect laws regarding foraging on public lands in your area, and respect endangered plants by leaving them alone. Know before you harvest.

Know before you harvest also means know how to identify the plants you are searching for with complete accuracy. Wild carrot and water hemlock look confusingly similar to a beginner, but one is edible while the other can kill you. Know your target plant and any look-alikes you might encounter.

Also, be careful of soil toxicity in areas where you plan to harvest (or plant a garden, for that matter!) Roadsides are out of the question, thanks to smog, de-icing chemicals and other pollutants. So are many neighborhoods where yards are sprayed with herbicides and other nasties, or subjected to overspray and runoff from the neighbor's yard -or field, if you live next to Farmer John. But don't let these rules intimidate you, foraging is actually a lot of fun and is an extremely satisfying skill to learn. Be safe and respectful and have fun!

The Herbs

The herbs covered in the next section were chosen for their versatility and their wide growing range. All of the plants selected are widely grown and available throughout most of Europe and North America. The chapter on Mint is actually a brief overview of three herbs in the mint (*Lamiaceae*) family. They were included this way because mints are typically less versatile than the other plants in this book. Not to say they are less useful- far from it! They might have a more limited scope of use, but are very good at what they do.

The herbal profiles in the next chapter often discuss health in terms of “Heat,” “Coldness,” “Dampness,” and “Dryness.” These are very traditional terms that might not make sense at first, but there is information in Part Three to help explain them fully. Also, the traditional Actions-how an herb was perceived to effect the human body- of the herbs are included in each profile. A guide to definitions of these actions can be found in Appendix Four : A Glossary of Historical Herbal Actions.

Angelica

Angelica archangelica; *Angelica atropurpurea*

Introduction

There are over thirty different species of angelica throughout the world, many of which have herbal uses. Preparations of the root and the candied stems are the most commonly used parts of Angelica.

Angelica archangelica is native to Europe, but *A. atropurpurea*, which is native to the US, can be used interchangeably. *A. archangelica* is usually classified as a biennial (although it will live longer than two years in some cases) while *A. atropurpurea* is a perennial.

Seasons Available

Summer: Flowers and stems Late Summer/ Fall: Seeds Fall: Roots

The roots of angelica are the most commonly used part, and are best if harvested in the fall of the first year. After that they have a tendency to rot or become infested with bugs. The roots are usually dried before use.

The leaves, stems, and flowers can be harvested just prior to or during flowering, and used fresh or dried. The fresh stems can be candied, and are a convenient and delicious way to enjoy the benefits of the herb. The seeds are harvested at maturity and dried, and then used for extracts and infusions.

Safety

Angelica is generally a safe herb when used by most people in traditional amounts.

However, the fresh root of angelica can cause burning sensations to mucous membranes in some people, so most herbalists use it dried. It is probably best avoided during pregnancy, because it was traditionally used to bring on delayed or suppressed menstruation. Some photosensitivity after consuming angelica has been reported, but it's usually only a problem if large amounts have been taken over an extended period of time. One other issue of note, Angelica may increase blood sugar levels in some individuals.

Actions

astringent, carminative, cholagogue, diaphoretic, diuretic, emmenagogue, expectorant, stimulant, tonic, vulnerary

Summary of Traditional Uses

A. archangelica has traditionally been considered a tonic to improve overall health and immunity. It has an affinity for the respiratory tract, the gastrointestinal tract, and the reproductive organs. It was commonly used for problems with digesting food, coughs and colds, asthma, delayed menstruation, and muscle and joint pain. Angelica was considered an herb of inspiration used by poets and singers in Scandinavian cultures, and was considered a panacea or tonic during the middle ages.

Angelica:

Traditional Uses by Body System

Respiratory

This herb offers support for the lungs in the presence of inflammation and coughing. It is antitussive, and if added to a cough syrup formula it helps to relax the lungs, warm them up and dry them out. Better suited to 'Cold' conditions with clear or white mucus, not thick, yellow, 'Hot' mucus. The root and stems are both used for coughs; a compress or poultice of the leaves can also be used topically on the chest.

Circulatory

Angelica can be used to 'warm up' the body in cold individuals and increase circulation of blood. Herbs that increase circulation are considered 'Blood Moving' herbs in traditional Chinese medicine, and often used to help clear bruises as well as promote overall circulation.

Immune

Historically, angelica was perceived to be an immune tonic that helped improve overall immunity during cold and flu season.

Digestion

Angelica is an excellent carminative and digestive bitter. It is good for lack of appetite as well as problems with digestion such as heartburn, gas, and bloating; and to help settle a sour stomach with nausea or vomiting. Angelica is a good choice where there are issues with the digestion that include diarrhea or irritable bowel type problems, especially where the person has the appearance of being thin and 'Cold.'

Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat

The infusion or candied stems can be used to soothe sore throats and hoarseness.

Kidneys and Bladder

Angelica can lend support for kidney and bladder inflammation and act as a urinary antiseptic.

Liver and Gallbladder

Angelic increases bile secretion from the gallbladder, but is Warming, unlike dandelion which does the same thing but is Cooling.

The Skin

Angelica was traditionally used to help clear bruises, especially in the presence of Cold or a tendency to bruise easily.

Nervous System and Emotional Wellbeing

Angelica has a reputation for relaxing the mind and open the imagination. It is a wonderful herb for people who are seeking inspiration for their creativity because they feel blocked or depressed. It can be helpful in patterns of rigid thinking and a tendency to be judgmental, or an inability or unwillingness to consider new ideas or differing opinions.

Musculoskeletal System

Angelica can be beneficial for people with gout related arthritis, especially if cold hands and feet also present. Even though angelica is often “drying” for the lungs and intestinal tract, it often seems to have a “moistening” effect on the joints, and can be helpful for arthritic conditions or muscle pains in the presence of “cold” symptoms or constitutions.

A few drops of angelica juice from the leaves or stems can be used to deaden the pain of toothache until it can be taken care of by a dentist.

Angelica: Support by Populations

Women

The seeds of angelica were used as a warm decoction to help with retained placenta after childbirth. Also, the root or the seed could be used if the menstrual cycle were delayed and women wanted to encourage it to begin promptly

Men

Because of it's supportive nature for “damp” inflammatory conditions, men with prostate problems may benefit from angelica.

The Elderly

Angelica can be a restorative tonic for “cold” elderly people who have poor digestion and are struggling with recurring respiratory infections and/or stiff joints.

Bee Balm

Monarda fistulosa; Monarda didyma

Introduction

Bee balm is native to the US and can be found growing wild in almost every state, and often in flower gardens as well. Many of the native cultures used the plant medicinally and as a cooking spice, or for making incense and fragrance. Bee balm is not typically available for sale in extract or tea form, but the live plant can often be found at garden centers or through seed catalogs. It's a beautiful addition to the garden, and because the flowers are large and vibrant they attract bees, butterflies and even the occasional hummingbird.

Seasons Available

Summer: Leaves and Flowers

This herb usually blooms around mid summer; the leaves, stems and flowers can all be used together, or the leaves may be used alone. Like many herbs, it is best picked either right before or during blooming when the essential oil content of the leaves is highest.

Safety Considerations

Bee balm is a very safe herb when used as a cooking spice. The tea and extract should probably be avoided by pregnant women because of its traditional uses to bring on delayed or suppressed menstruation. Otherwise, safe for all ages.

Main Actions

carminative, diaphoretic, nervine

Summary of Traditional Uses

Monarda was traditionally used as a digestive aid, for gynecological support or respiratory support, as a vulnerary, and also used for skin problems such as acne and boils. It is particularly suited to conditions involving Heat and/or Dampness.

Bee Balm: Traditional Uses by Body System

Respiratory

Bee balm can be used as a steam for inhalation or as a tea for discomfort from pneumonia, lung inflammation, coughs and colds, and flu.

Immune

Contains many of the same natural compounds as thyme and oregano, so can be used to support the immune system in the same ways. There is also a history of use for swollen lymph glands.

Digestion

Bee balm is an excellent carminative and is especially beneficial for gas with feelings of heaviness; it can be used for digestive support in cases of diarrhea and dysentery originating from a weak digestive system.

Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat

An infusion of bee balm was used in the past as compress over the eyes for soreness and inflammation.

Kidneys and Bladder

Historically, bee balm was used for “aching kidneys”- most likely, this indicated use for kidney and bladder infection.

The Skin

This herb is very helpful for Hot skin problems such as burns, and infections with redness, swelling, and painful inflammation, like pimples and boils. Modern herbalists have had good results using it topically to help the body overcome staph infections.

Nervous System and Emotional Wellbeing

Bee balm is an uplifting nervine; it can be used to help with headaches and to promote sleep when insomnia when the problems arise from nervousness or anxiety.

Bee Balm: Traditional Uses by Population

Infants

Bee balm was once used as a bath for infants who were ill or suffered from seizures, or as a bath to help strengthen weak babies that struggled to thrive.

Women

This herb was used by women to help bring on a delayed or difficult period.

Dandelion

Taraxacum officinale

Introduction

Almost everyone is familiar with dandelion, but not many people know that this tenacious weed is actually a vegetable in disguise.

The roots, leaves, and flowers of dandelion are all edible and enjoyable when prepared correctly. It's also an important pollen and nectar source if you keep bees, and can be fed to rabbits. Even better, it requires almost no attention in return for a bountiful crop, and as any angry homeowner knows it is actually rather difficult to kill.

For those reasons alone, cultivating a bed of dandelions should be standard procedure for every home or farmstead. Beyond that, it has several herbal uses, although it was viewed as a very mild herb by most traditional sources and some dismissed it as hardly worth mentioning. Many modern herbalists, however, would staunchly disagree.

Seasons Available

Spring: flowers and leaves Summer: leaves Fall: root

Dandelion greens start to be available in early spring, and will be at their least bitter when they are young and small. Older leaves can be used, but may need to be boiled through several changes of water to make them palatable- use the water for the garden, because it's high in minerals. Any recipe calling for spinach can use dandelion greens or half dandelion/half spinach depending on the bitterness of the leaves in any given harvest. Dandelion blossoms can be made into jelly, wine, or eaten raw in salads.

The root should be collected in the fall. Dandelion is another example of how a plant's chemical makeup changes over the course of a year. In the spring, the root has hardly any sap (which is what has the good stuff in it), and the sap that is present is clear-ish and almost sweet tasting. By the fall, dandelion root is bitter, full of milky sap, and ready for harvest. The dried root is the part used by herbalists, and it can even be roasted to make a bitter, caffeine- free coffee substitute. Dandelion shrinks a lot during the drying process thanks to its high water content, but considering its weedy nature it shouldn't be difficult to find enough to compensate.

Safety Considerations

Dandelion is mild enough to be eaten as a food.

Actions

aperient, diuretic, liver tonic

Summary of Traditional Uses

Historically, dandelion leaves were mainly used as a food, while the roots were used to help support the liver. Dandelion is an excellent tonic for the liver and because of this can benefit skin problems and constipation. A beneficial herb for Hot people who indulge in lots of rich foods.

Dandelion: Traditional Uses by Body System

Immune

Dandelion root is “cooling” to the liver and can be useful to keep the liver working in top condition. This can help out immensely during allergy season and to keep the immune system up and going.

Digestion

This herb is good when there is no appetite. Dandelion is an herbal bitter that is suited to Hot people. It can benefit constipation from not having enough bitter foods in the diet or from Heat in the digestive tract, which often manifests as constipation with hard, dry stools. Dandelion is not the herb for people with Cold digestion signs like alternating constipation and diarrhea, chronic loose stools, or lots of gas. For those sorts of digestive problems, try angelica.

Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat

Dandelion was sometimes used in the past for yellowing of the eyes from jaundice, which was seen as a Heat problem that involved the liver.

Kidneys and Bladder

Because of its diuretic properties, dandelion was sometimes used for edema and kidney stones.

Liver and Gallbladder

Dandelion is a tonic for the liver and gallbladder. It gives them a gentle cleanse and supports healthy bowel movements.

The Skin

The liver and the skin are traditionally tied together. If rashes and skin problems were occurring, many old time herbalists immediately looked to see if the liver was overworked or not functioning properly. Rashes, eczema, pimples, and yellowing of the skin from jaundice all fall under this category. Dandelion is best suited to Hot skin conditions with redness, inflammation, feelings of heat, or yellow discharges.

Nervous System and Emotional Wellbeing

Ever heard the old saying that someone has a “bilious disposition”? It means that someone is angry or bad tempered, and comes from the association of a bad mood that stems from too much “bile” from an unbalanced liver. Herbalists often noted that

people with certain organ imbalances exhibited certain emotions in excess. People with liver imbalances had a reputation for being very angry and hard to please. Herbs like dandelion were used to help cool and cleanse the liver, which was believed to help cool the temper as well.

Dandelion: Traditional Uses by Population

Women

Some types of PMS and menstrual irregularities can be positively affected by gentle liver cleansers such as dandelion. The liver plays a big part in hormone balance, and if it is backed up and overworked, women can feel the effects around the time their period starts. Typical candidate for dandelion will be a woman who eats a very rich diet that stresses the liver- lots of alcohol, chocolate, milk, nuts, cheese and fatty foods, with very little quality protein, veggies, or variety in the diet.

Children

Children tend to run Hot, and dandelion can assist with the resulting constipation, and/or lack of appetite. The good thing about using dandelion is that it focuses on the liver and gallbladder to promote healthy bowel movements, so it is non-habit forming. Other herbs commonly used for the same purpose, such as senna and cascara, are irritating to the intestinal tract, which can lead to problems if relied on over long periods of time.

Elder

Sambucus nigra

Sambucus nigra is the European Elder, and *Sambucus canadensis* is the American Elder. *S. nigra* looks more like a tree, while *S. canadensis* is more of a shrub. Both species are used interchangeably by most herbalists. Modern research involving elder mainly focuses on the berry, but the flowers are also very useful.

Seasons Available

Spring: flowers Spring/Summer: leaves Summer: berries

The flowers and berries, the most commonly used parts of elder, are very safe and have many different potential applications. The bark and inner stems, however, are almost never used anymore. They have been used in the past, but modern research indicates that they are toxic- so it's best to avoid them. The leaves don't have a record of internal use, but are used externally. They contain many of the same compounds as the bark and stems, so it is probably best to stick with external applications and avoid using the leaves internally.

Safety

Elder can have blue, black or red berries depending on the type. Many sources agree that red berried varieties of elder shouldn't be used, as they are potentially toxic if prepared incorrectly. The bark and inner stems are toxic and should not be used internally.

Actions

Elder is a good example of how different parts of an herb can have very different uses. In this case, the berry, flower and leaf each exhibit distinct properties.

Flower: *anticatarrhal, antispasmodic, diuretic, diaphoretic, sedative* Berry:

antirheumatic, diaphoretic, diuretic, immunomodulator, laxative

Leaf: *emollient, vulnerary*

Summary of Traditional Uses

The entire elder plant was a very well respected herb in the past. It's only recently that the berry has been favored so highly over the other portions that the leaf and flower have been neglected.

The flowers, when combined with yarrow and mint, make a traditional infusion for support during cold and flu season. Elder leaves were considered to be excellent for bruises and any type of injury to the skin. Then, as now, the berries were used as a cough syrup and for support during cold and flu season alongside the flower infusion.

The berries were considered a blood tonic, to help increase the health of the blood and build iron levels in anemia.

Elder is suited to many conditions involving Dampness, which was the old herbalists' way of describing sluggish blood or fluids, swelling, and any appearance of being excessively wet or moist.

Elder:

Traditional Uses by Body System

Respiratory

Elderberries and flowers make a wonderful addition to herbal cough syrup recipes. They are used to open the lungs and assist in bringing up mucus.

Immune

Elderflower is very good for swollen glands, while the berries are excellent for immune system support. Modern research has shown elderberries to have a positive impact on immune system activity and response.

Digestion

The flower and berries of elder can be used for digestive issues like gas and bloating that are tied in with the nervous system; both are also very gentle laxatives that cleanse and gets things moving without being habit forming or harsh. The benefit is usually noticed over several days, rather than all at once.

Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat

Elderflowers can be beneficial for hay fever, inflammation of the upper respiratory tract that includes sinusitis, and cases of too much mucus and buildup in the ears or sinus complications that lead to difficulty hearing.

Kidneys and Bladder

Elder is associated with balancing edema (water retention) from kidney troubles. An infusion of the flower was prepared hot, but allowed to cool before it was given to drink. Interestingly, the cooled infusion of elderflower acts like a diuretic while a hot infusion acts like a diaphoretic (promotes sweating).

The Skin

Elder leaves make a wonderful salve or oil. The salve can be applied to assist healing from bruises, sprains, strains, or muscular stiffness. It can also be used for ulcerations, hemorrhoids, old burns (ones that have had a chance to cool), or infected wounds.

An infusion of the flowers used as wash, compress, or bath is excellent for helping to sweat out fever or to improving overall condition of the skin, and also work well as a face wash for skin that is too oily.

Nervous System

The flowers have a mild sedative action; they were traditionally used for epilepsy and convulsions in children, and also have a history of use for neuralgic pain.

Musculoskeletal System

An oil made with elder leaves can be applied for chronic muscle pain, arthritis with swelling around the joints, and sore muscles.

Elder: Support by Population

Infants

Elderflower was used as a general tonic for infants to help ease the stress of suddenly having to perform all of their cleansing functions themselves, after relying on their mother while in the womb.

Children

Elderflowers can be used safely by children, and have a historical record of use in children for epilepsy and convulsions, respiratory ailments (asthma, chronic respiratory infections), and buildup of fluid or mucus in the ears that contributes to hearing problems.

The Elderly

Elderflower can be used for the elderly in instances of water retention that results from the kidneys struggling to do their job, chronic respiratory problems, and fluid buildup in the ears that contributes to hearing problems.

Hawthorn

Crataegus spp.: C. monogyna, C. oxyacantha, or C. laevigata

Hawthorn is a large, thorny shrub in the rose family. The berry was the part of the plant used traditionally, but modern herbalists also use the leaf and flower. For making an extract, it's best to dry the berries first. The fresh berries contain too much pectin for alcohol extracts, but are great for preserves and other culinary uses. For best results, use the older or wild varieties, not modern hybrids. If the berry has more than two seeds, it is probably a modern hybrid. Wild varieties and older cultivars typically only have one or two seeds.

Seasons Available

Spring: Leaves and Flowers Fall/winter: Berries

The berries will be sweeter and better tasting after cold weather arrives, so some herbalists prefer to wait until after first frost to harvest them.

Safety Considerations

In the past, hawthorn has been viewed as a very safe herb, and is even viewed as a food. However, some of the turn of the century herbal physicians mention in their writings that people occasionally experienced nausea or headaches while using hawthorn berry extract. The problems went away once the serving size was divided in half.

Main Actions

astringent, cardiac, diuretic, nervine, tonic

Summary of Traditional Uses

Hawthorn was well respected in the old literature as a cardiac tonic, a diuretic, and a digestive remedy.

Hawthorn: Traditional Uses by Body System

Respiratory

Hawthorn was used for difficulty breathing associated with heart trouble, rather than with lungs problems.

Circulatory

One of the premier heart herbs, hawthorn is tonic and restorative. Any heart imbalance can usually benefit from hawthorn, including those manifesting with high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart failure, angina, or hypotension. Hawthorn has an overall balancing effect on the heart muscle and blood pressure. It can also be used as a first aid herb to help the body re-establish healthy balance between strength of the heartbeat and blood pressure after trauma, shock, or hemorrhage and

to help restore balance to the circulation. Everyday poor circulation that shows up as chronically cold hands and feet can also be helped by hawthorn.

Immune

Hawthorn berries contain vitamin c and substances called bioflavonoids, both of which are important for healthy human immune systems. The ability of hawthorn to promote good circulation can also help support the immune system.

Digestion

Hawthorn was also be used as a digestive herb in the past. It helps the body digest and assimilate food, especially meat, and assist with bloating after meals. It can help with poor appetite and boosts digestion in cases where the food seems to 'sit' in the belly. Hawthorn can also help out with diarrhea and inflammatory bowel disorders with bloating.

Kidneys and Bladder

Hawthorn can be used as a diuretic for water retention in the presence of heart problems. The Eclectics (physicians from the late 1800s and early 1900s) also used it for diabetes insipidus, a hormonal disorder that affects the kidneys and leads to frequent, copious urination. It should be noted that even though both disorders are hormonal and can lead to frequent urination, diabetes insipidus is not the same as diabetes mellitus, which is the type of diabetes that involves blood sugar and that most people are familiar with.

Nervous System and Emotional Wellbeing

Hawthorn berries can be used as a nervine tonic for restless, irritable adults and children, who may also have trouble focusing. Hawthorn is also a nervine for 'taking heart,' where feelings of discouragement are prevalent. This is also a good convalescence herb, to help feelings of hopelessness in the face of a long term illness and support good circulation to promote healing.

Hawthorn: Traditional Uses by Population

Children

Can be used as a calming nervine to help settle and calm children with hyperactive personalities, either by itself or with other nervine herbs.

The Elderly

Hawthorn lends itself well to age related heart imbalances because of its tonic and restorative properties.

Mint

This section is actually an overview of several plants in the mint family, because they are all so useful and easy to cultivate. They make delicious herbal waters and teas, and have a multitude of culinary uses. But be warned: plants in the mint family will gang up in the garden, smothering their neighbors and choking out everything around them with their prolific exuberance!

To solve this problem, grow mints in containers. The mint will grow just as happily, but will be much better behaved.

Mints should be harvested when they first start to bloom- many of them will have almost no scent in the spring, so it's important to wait until mid- to late summer when they are blooming and at their smelliest.

There are many varieties of mint, but the three covered in this section are lemon balm, peppermint, and catnip.

Lemon Balm

Melissa officinalis

References from the middle ages describe the actions of lemon balm as strengthening to the mind and uplifting to the mood. Many modern herbalists respect it for these purposes as well. Although it was venerated in the middle ages, by the time the Eclectics began writing their references lemon balm was known only as a mild diaphoretic for use during fevers. More recently, it has developed a reputation as herbal support for anxiety and having antiviral properties, specifically for viruses in the herpes family. Because of its diaphoretic and antiviral properties, it can be used as a soothing tea for children with the chickenpox.

Lemon balm infusion is also a nice tea to have around just to enjoy. It's every bit as refreshing as mint as a summertime drink, but tastes like lemon instead of menthol.

Like many of the mints, lemon balm is almost completely odorless when it first puts up new growth in the spring. The volatile oils that give lemon balm its characteristic smell are also the compounds that make it effective, so don't harvest until the plant is about to bloom. The compounds will be at their strongest right before and during the first stages of blooming.

This herb loses almost all of its scent once it's dried, so be sure to make all of your lemon balm projects with the fresh herb if you can. An alcohol extract made in the summer with the fresh plant will insure that there is some available for home use in the winter.

Teas made with dried lemon balm will taste much more mild than those made with fresh, but they still retain some of the same beneficial properties as the fresh plant.

Peppermint

Mentha x Piperita

Once upon a time, peppermint was considered to be a unique species of mint, but then botanists realized it's actually a cross between watermint and spearmint. Besides being delicious, peppermint excels at two things. One is its use as a diaphoretic to promote sweating, and the other is to soothe the stomach after a large meal. It is included here because it often turns up in old herbal formulas as a supporting herb.

Peppermint is wonderful for digestion, and peppermint infusion with a little honey makes a nice tea after meals. Whereas hawthorn is typically used to support digestion where there is difficulty digesting meats, and angelica is often used as a carminative for Cold people, peppermint is exceptional for cases of mild heartburn after meals as well as being carminative for people that tend to run Hot.

Mint can also be used to make other herbs taste more acceptable. Combined with elder flowers and yarrow, it is a traditional recipe during cold and flu season. See the Herbs+Water section on infusions for more information. Peppermint typically dries and stores the best out of all of the mints; as long as it is kept in an airtight container away from direct light it will be good for several years.

Catnip

Nepeta cataria

Catnip isn't just a cat thing: no, it's actually great for people too! Oddly enough, it has the opposite effect on humans that it does on our feline friends and makes us calm. It has a reputation as a children's herb, especially for colic and fevers, but is just as good for adults for the same purposes. It's a good nervine for stressed out adults too.

Catnip is good for digestion, but in a different way than peppermint. Peppermint is more for the over acidic stomach or discomfort from over eating. Catnip is good for sharp, colicky pains like children get, or colicky pains in anyone of any age who is simultaneously irritable or cranky.

Catnip, like most mints, is also a diaphoretic, and therefore good for fevers. Again, catnip's signature is irritability and anxiety, so it can be especially good for fevers with restlessness and irritability.

The other main uses of this herb are as a nervine and to promote sleep, especially in cases of insomnia that are tied in to anxiety or overworked nerves. Check out Herbs+Milk for the recipe for Catnip Milk. Catnip can be beneficial for headaches from nervousness or anxiety, or irritability from stress.

Like other mints, harvest catnip when it's flowering. Catnip naturalizes easily so sometimes it can be found while foraging, especially near old home sites or in fields. Catnip dries fairly well, so it can be saved for winter use. However, it doesn't store well for long periods of time; it's best to gather in a new crop every year.

Mullein

Verbascum olympicum, V. thaspus

Mullein is native to Europe, but has naturalized in many areas here in the United States. It may or may not be happy in the garden, because in the wild it doesn't seem to appreciate growing in the same place twice. If it's not doing well in a place it grew previously, give it a try in another corner of the garden and see if that helps. The leaves and flowers are the most commonly used parts of Mullein.

Seasons Available

Spring/Summer: Leaves Summer/Fall: Flowers

Mullein is biennial, and blooms in the second year; the first year the plant produces only leaves.

Mullein will mold easily during the drying process, so the harvest should be determined by the weather. Pick an especially dry, hot day, and make sure to spread the leaves and flowers out well to get good airflow. Using drying screens for mullein is a very good idea, and it also helps to cut or tear the leaves and flowers into smaller pieces. Just be careful not to crush while tearing.

Safety Considerations

Mullein leaves and flowers are covered in small hairs that can cause contact dermatitis or itchiness in some people. Using several layers of muslin or other tightly woven material in a colander or strainer to filter any mullein preparations will easily take care of the problem. The seeds have been used in the past, but are not typically used in modern herbalism because they are considered toxic by modern standards.

Main Actions

antitussive, anodyne, antispasmodic, emollient, expectorant, demulcent, diuretic, mild nervine

Summary of Traditional Uses

Most forms of traditional herbalism view the organs of the body based on how they are perceived to relate to one another, and many other parts of the body organized in groups alongside the organs. Traditional uses of mullein center around the lungs and kidneys, which are considered to be part of a group, and the other body systems that are traditionally associated with them, especially the ears and the bones. However, mullein is also said to offer some support for the nervous system as well. Mullein is, accordingly, particularly suited for any situation that involves the lungs, kidneys, and nerves simultaneously.

An important historical preparation of mullein with many uses is mullein leaf poultice. It was traditionally used to soothe the discomfort associated with broken bones and to help them set properly, and was also often used for mastitis.

Mullein Leaf Poultice

In a small saucepan, make a strong infusion of mullein leaves (either fresh or dried). Filter the infusion, and return it to the pot. Add a handful of fresh mullein leaves to the infusion, and keep over low heat until the fresh leaves are wilted. Place the leaves directly on the skin over the affected area and wrap lightly with a length of clean flannel to hold them in place. The poultice can be left in place until cool, or even left overnight.

Mullein: Traditional Uses by Body System

Immune system

Mullein leaf poultice can be used topically for swollen glands of any sort, but especially lymph glands around the neck and head.

Respiratory

Mullein is well suited to harsh, dry coughs without much mucus, where the person is coughing hard enough to cause pain in the chest or ribs. Coughs that seems to come from being overly sensitive to cold air, dust, or environmental factors, or when it seems as if the cough reflex is over reacting are other good uses for mullein, thanks to its mild sedative properties.

Mullein can be used to help the body deal with the runny, clear mucus during the first part of a cold or allergies.

Another clue that mullein might be effective is that either case- coughs, or allergy-related runny nose- may also be associated with dry, irritated throat or hoarseness. Dried Mullein was sometimes smoked in small quantities for asthma and laryngitis.

Digestion

Mullein had many traditional uses related to the digestive tract, and some of the old herbalists favored a milk infusion for digestive use. This preparation would then be used for dysentery, diarrhea, hemorrhoids, loss of appetite and ulcers.

Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat

In modern times, mullein is most commonly known as the herbalist's ear remedy: mullein oil is still a staple of many households for this and other purposes (see below). Ear conditions that mullein can assist in soothing include ulceration/perforation of the ear drum; childhood ear problems; too much mucus or wax build up that interferes with hearing; and earache.

Mullein tea is can be very soothing for cases of hoarseness and sore throat.

Kidneys and Bladder

Historically, mullein was used to support the kidneys and bladder where there was difficulty urinating, or when the urine smelled very strongly because of an underlying

disease. Mullein is very moistening and strengthening to the kidneys, and can be used when there is edema present alongside problems with the lungs.

Mullein oil (1-10 drops taken orally) was a traditional remedy for bedwetting/overnight incontinence, painful urination, bladder stones, bladder inflammation, incontinence and dribbling of the urine.

The Skin

Mullein flower oil is a soothing topical oil for old burns (not fresh ones- remember, oil and fresh burns don't mix), cuts, scrapes, dry skin, and diaper rash.

The leaves have a long historical record of being used as a poultice for chronic abscesses, and to draw out splinters. See the section 'Summary of Traditional Uses' at the beginning of this chapter for directions on how to make a mullein leaf poultice.

Nervous System and Emotional Wellbeing

Mullein as a nervine is typically beneficial to inflamed and irritated nerves where there is sharp, nerve-related pain, and nerve pains in the extremities. The nervine effect of mullein is mostly a secondary effect, and it's not typically used as a nervine on its own.

Musculoskeletal System

Broken bones and spinal injuries are good occasions to remember mullein. Traditional sources observed that mullein had a knack for helping the body to set bones back into correct place and to straighten the back after an injury. It can provide support for healing after bones have been broken, or for injuries that resulted in problems with spinal alignment. In these cases, mullein can be applied as an oil or poultice or taken as an extract or infusion. Mullein oil is also good for non-arthritis joint pain and muscle pain.

Mullein: Support by Population

Women

Mullein leaf poultices were traditionally used for mastitis.

Men

Old herbal resources describe Mullein as being useful for orchitis, the inflammation of the testes.

Children

Many modern herbalists are familiar with mullein as a children's herb. The oil can be used for ear problems and bedwetting, and the infusion of the flowers can be used to give support for diarrhea, asthma, and allergies.

Infants

Infants can benefit from mullein in the same ways as older children, and mullein oil can also be used to soothe diaper rash.

The Elderly

A few drops of mullein oil can be taken internally for incontinence.

Rose

Rosa spp.

Even though most people know them as simply an ornamental garden flower, roses have a long history of herbal use that dates back to ancient China. Four species in particular have been used around the world and throughout history: *R. canina*, the dog rose; *R. Gallica*, the French, or Gallic Rose; *R. damascene*, the Damascus or Damask Rose, and *R. centifolia*, The Provence, or Cabbage, rose. *R. Damascena* and *R. centifolia*, are both complex hybrids whose parentage include *R. Canina*, *R. Gallica* and *R. Moschata*, or musk rose, which is believed to have originated in the Himalayas.

All parts of the rose have been used in traditional healing systems, including the thorns, bark, root, flower petals, and the hips (the edible, red “fruit” that forms where the blossoms were after the flower petals fall off the plant). *R. canina* is the most common wild rose; the others are domesticated forms.

R. gallica, *R. damascene*, and *R. Centifolia* are all discussed in turn of the century British and American herbal literature for their flower petals, and red varieties were especially favored. *R. canina*, which often has pale pink or white flowers, was often employed for its hips. Although the varieties mentioned above will be the most available in commerce, it is useful to note that the hips of any rose, and the flowers of any red or pink rose with a strong, complex scent can be used instead.

Heirloom and wild roses are usually better for herbal purposes, because they are much hardier than modern hybrid garden roses, and also because they bloom like crazy, with each bush carrying loads of fragrant flowers that need very little care. Modern hybrids, on the other hand, tend to lack as much fragrance and hardiness as they have been bred strictly for appearance.

Seasons Available

Spring/Summer: Flowers Fall/Winter: Hips

Flowering begins in mid to late spring, and hips form sometime in late summer and fall. The hips are often sweeter after the first frost, and they have a slightly sweet, mildly acidic taste that is similar to a fruity tomato. They are usually soft when ripe but are rarely juicy, but still make wonderful preserves and delicious, tart infusions and teas.

Safety Considerations

Rose has a long tradition of common uses, and is considered a food plant in many cultures. It is safe for children as well as adults.

Main Actions

anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, antitussive, antiviral, astringent, bronchodilator, hypnotic, nervine, immunomodulator, tonic, vulnerary

Summary of Traditional Uses

Roses were valued for many specific purposes of their own, as well as to make a syrup to help mask the unpleasant flavors of other herbs. Rose was viewed as a tonic, as an astringent that benefited the liver and the digestion, and as a nervine to help to lift the spirits and improve mood. Traditional associations are with the eyes, the heart, the lungs, the liver, and the stomach. Good indications that rose will be beneficial are the presence of inflammation, especially inflammation with too much mucus in the respiratory tract or in the intestines, or a system challenged by autoimmune imbalances.

Rose: Traditional Uses by Body System

Respiratory

Rose was used for congestion or restriction of the lungs, or inflammation in the lungs alongside coughing up blood. Petals were favored for respiratory uses over the hips. Rose petals offer support for tickling coughs, allergies, respiratory infections, and colds.

Circulatory

Probably because of their high vitamin c and bioflavonoid content, hips are prized for conditions where the skin is easily bruised. Petals have a tonic effect on the heart, circulatory and nervous systems and were traditionally used for fainting and heart weaknesses and irregularities. Rose is more of a soothing, calming nervine than its relative, hawthorn.

Immune

Rose is well suited to the heat and inflammation associated with overactive, autoimmune type imbalances, or an overactive immune system with Hot liver imbalances that lead to allergies with lots of mucus and poor lymphatic drainage. Historically, rose petals and hips were combined to assist with high fevers and to protect the immune system during epidemics of infectious illness.

Digestion

Rose has a beneficial effect on the digestive tract for two reasons: one, it has astringent properties which tone and soothe the lining of the intestines. Two, it has a tonic, cooling effect on the liver. Rose was traditionally used for constipation with mucus in the stool, feelings of heat in the belly or lower abdomen, or inflammatory bowel conditions. The leaves are more drying and astringent than the petals and can be used like blackberry or raspberry leaves during bouts of diarrhea

Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat

Rose petals are very useful for oral health. Sore throats or ulcers in the mouth can benefit from gargling with a rose infusion or the use of rose syrup, and powdered rose petals make a nice addition to an herbal tooth powder for their ability to soothe inflammation and freshen the breath.

Rose petal infusion makes a nice compress or wash for sore, inflamed eyes.

Kidneys and Bladder

Rose can be used to aid frequent urination or urinary tract infections. The hips are especially suited for this because, similar to cranberries, they are more astringent than the petals, but the petals have a soothing effect for the urinary tract that can be beneficial as well.

Liver and Gallbladder

Rose petals are traditionally used to cool and cleanse a Hot, congested liver. In herbal parlance, such a liver condition fosters imbalances in the body that lead to poor appetite and poor digestion.

The Skin

Vinegar infused with rose petals can be used for skin outbreaks, pimples or pustules, insect bites, burns, sunburns, and rashes. The vinegar can sting a little so children might not like it on cuts or abrasions, but it can be used for those sorts of skin injuries as well. Rose petal vinegar can be safely applied directly to fresh burns and sunburns.

Nervous System and Emotional Wellbeing

Petals made into an infusion or extract soothe and lift the emotions, and are appropriate for the emotional fall out from shock, trauma or injury, as well as to balance the emotions during stressful times or after grief, illness, or depression. Whereas hawthorn helps the physical heart in a first aid scenario, rose can help the emotional 'heart.'

Musculoskeletal System

Rose is traditionally associated with arthritic pains where the arthritis takes an autoimmune form or is accompanied by inflammation with physical heat, as well as shooting pains related to nerves or slipped discs. For muscle cramps and sore muscles, rose petal extract can be taken internally, or rose petal vinegar can be used as a liniment.

Rose: Support by Population

Women

An imbalance in the body leading to vaginal discharges and chronic yeast infections can be helped with rose, as can imbalances leading to urinary tract infections. In these cases, the petals can be used internally, or a rose petal vinegar can be added to bathwater. Historically, the petals have been used to assist with heavy or irregular flow and cramping during menstruation.

Men

Although rose has a connotation of being a 'feminine' herb, it is just as suitable for men as it is women for mood, inflammation, and any of its myriad other uses. Both women and men may find that the scent of roses can be quite the aphrodisiac, although that will vary from person to person and even from one variety of rose to the next.

Children

A preparation of petals and hips is good for children who seem delicate. Rose may also be useful for children with poor appetite, or who have heart troubles, or children that struggle with allergies. Rose is especially suited to seasonal allergies with runny noses and red, itchy, watery eyes.

Infants

Rosewater or an infusion of rose petals can be used as a wash or in the bath water for rashes and cradle cap, and to help soothe infants that seems anxious.

The Elderly

A blend of petals and hips can be used as a tonic for age related weakness and poor appetite. The same blend can be used to tone the kidneys and bladder and help with the need to urinate frequently.

Valerian

Valeriana officinalis

Valerian is a physical relaxant, carminative, and vulnerary. It is an excellent nervine, but has the quirk of being either relaxant or stimulant according to dosage and constitution. Because of this, it has a reputation among herbalists for unreliability. As long as a few rules are kept in mind, though, valerian will be much more consistent.

Rule number one: constitution is very important with valerian. valerian is better suited to people that run Cold, or problems that have Cold indications.

Rule number two: small amounts of valerian are more likely to have the desired effects than large ones. Valerian is the perfect example of how more of a good thing isn't necessarily good, and can even be counter productive.

Rule number three: During the early 1900s, fresh valerian juice had a reputation for being the most effective and reliable form of the plant, and the powdered form was the least favored. If fresh preparations aren't available, decoctions of the dried root made with cold-to-warm temperature water seem to be more reliable than a normal decoction of the dried root made with hot or boiling water. Alcohol extracts of the dried root also seem to give fairly good results. This is due to chemistry- what comes out of an herb changes during the drying process and according to the temperature of the water used to make the decoction, or the type of liquid used to make the extract.

In any case, valerian is usually excellent as a supporting herb in formulas where antispasmodic, relaxant qualities are desired and it also seems to be less unpredictable when used in conjunction with other herbs.

Seasons Available

Summer: leaf and flower Fall: root

Valerian root should be harvested in the fall, after the first frost.

Several older sources also discuss using the leaf and flower, especially for topical uses such as for wound care and eye health. Valerian is an easy to grow garden plant that starts easily from seed and is adaptable to a wide range of growing conditions.

Safety Considerations

Large amounts of valerian can cause headache, hyperactivity, and nausea. People that run Hot may have similar experiences even with moderate amounts. Traditional suggested use is from one to thirty drops of the tincture, up to three times a day, or one to two ounces of the decoction. With valerian, it's usually best to start low or in the middle and only increase if needed.

Main Actions

carminative, nervine, relaxant, vulnerary

Summary of Traditional Uses

In the past, valerian was generally valued for its nervine properties. During the middle ages and before, it was also used internally as an emmenagogue, diuretic, and carminative; and externally as a wash for wounds or in eyedrops. Cats and rats love the smell of it. In cats it has a similar effect to catnip, and it can be used to bait rat traps.

Valerian is the herb of choice for physical tension, muscle cramps, or manifestations of nervous system imbalance that manifest as involuntary movements or seizures.

It's especially suited if any of the above also occur alongside depression, hypochondria, or a despondent outlook.

Valerian: Traditional Uses by Body System

Respiratory

Valerian is a good supporting herb for cough syrup formulas to relax constricted lung passageways. Its nervine properties also help to lessen the anxiety that can accompany, and worsen, difficulty breathing.

Circulatory

In the 1900s, the fresh juice was seen to act as a cardiac herb that slowed the heart rate and increased the force of the heartbeat. It also had the effect of raising the blood pressure, so the picture here would be someone with heart irregularities and low blood pressure, possibly with the accompanying mental outlook that seems to benefit from valerian: overanxious, tendency to hypochondria, with depression or despondency. It was viewed as less of a tonic than hawthorn, and specifically suited to someone with heart imbalances that included low blood pressure.

Immune

No particular immune properties have been recorded or researched in modern times, although during the middle ages it was used as a panacea during epidemics. A lot of strange things were used as panaceas in those days, so that doesn't necessarily mean anything, but Culpeper has a more specific approach to valerian, saying: "It is of a special virtue against the plague, the decoction thereof being drank, and the root being used to smell to." In some cases, valerian was burned like incense to help purify homes and sickrooms.

Like valerian's uses for the eyes, uses for immunity seem to have gone out of fashion before modern times. There's no way to know for sure at present if this is due to it not being particularly useful for such things, or if it's just a matter of popularity.

Digestion

Used as a carminative where there is cramping or indigestion from anxiety.

Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat

Fresh pressed leaves and roots boiled in white wine were traditionally used for dimming vision or excessive eye secretions. It could be applicable as drops or an eye wash when the eyes are sealed shut in the morning due to inflammation or infection, or when the eyes occasionally do that for no discernible reason.

As far as what was meant by “dimming vision” in the old texts, there’s no real way to know if the authors meant cataracts, macular degeneration, or some other eye disorder, or just considered it beneficial in any and all cases.

Kidneys and Bladder

Decoction of the dried root has some historical record for diuretic properties. It can be used as a supporting herb for spasms or cramping of the ureters or bladder.

Liver and Gallbladder

Valerian has no common historical uses associated with the liver or gallbladder directly, although it is interesting to note that in traditional Chinese medicine muscular tension and cramps, digestive problems such as gas and bloating, and certain types of menstrual disorders are all thought to point toward a liver imbalance. Additionally, the tendons and the eyes are associated with the Liver system.

The Skin

Valerian can be used as a vulnerary for wounds; it was commonly used as a wash for that purpose in the past. A unique historical use for valerian was as a nervine for sensations of itching when the itching was caused from a fault in the nervous system, or of psychosomatic origins rather than from a physical or external cause.

Nervous System and Emotional Wellbeing

Valerian is first and foremost a nervine. Instances where valerian might prove useful include depression with tendencies to hypochondria and all of the anxieties that go with it; nervous system disorders that exhibit involuntary movements (its main traditional use for these disorders was chorea, specifically, but it was also used for others); pruritus (constant itching sensations) with roots in the nervous system rather than an external cause; and nerve pain. Another historical use, it was given to civilians in Britain during World War Two to help them cope with the emotional stress from air raids.

Musculoskeletal System

Can be used for cramping and muscular tension of any sort, either due to anxiety or from other causes.

Valerian: Traditional Uses by Population

Women

Valerian has many uses for women, including as an emmenagogue, for menstrual cramps, and for anxiety and tension related to menses.

Children

Valerian is safe for all ages, but children's constitutions tend to run on the Hot side of things, so valerian is generally not a good match for them. There is an exception to every rule, of course. In some cases, valerian may be well suited to a particular child, or it may do quite well as part of an herbal formula for meant for children, since the herbs acting together will have different influences on the body than valerian alone.

Yarrow

Achillea millefolium

Yarrow is an herb with delicate, lacy looking leaves that is native both to Europe and to North America. Modern varieties can have colorful blossoms, but herbalists generally prefer the wild and traditional yarrows that have white or pale pink blossoms. Yarrow has a bitter taste. Anise seed, which tastes like licorice, was traditionally used to make it more palatable.

Seasons Available

Summer: leaves and flowers

Yarrow blooms May through October but is usually at its best when the weather is hottest and driest. Preparations may be made from the fresh or dry herb, but the dried is usually preferred. Check for wild yarrow in fields, pastures, and vacant lots. Some herbalists prefer yarrow that has been growing in dry areas over that growing in permanently damp soil because they have found yarrow to be stronger, with more highly concentrated essential oils, when it grows in dry ground. This would make sense in that some plants produce certain chemicals or higher concentrations of them in response to stressful growing conditions such as drought.

Safety Considerations

Some people may be bothered by the fresh leaves of yarrow, but may not react to them after they've dried. Don't use yarrow if there is an allergy to plants in the daisy family, because yarrow is a member of that family.

Main Actions

alterative, diaphoretic, diuretic, haemostatic, tonic

Summary of Traditional Uses

Yarrow's traditional uses mostly center around imbalances which involve the blood, and injuries with profuse, bright red bleeding or bruising from physical impact. Yarrow is usually considered to be a wound and blood herb, and is also a tonic for mucous membranes that are Hot and Dry. Yarrow infusion can be used cold as a diuretic, or warm as a diaphoretic- like elder, the temperature of the preparation influences the usefulness of the herb.

Yarrow:

Traditional Uses by Body System

Respiratory

Yarrow can be used for the respiratory tract in cases of inflammation, pain in the chest from bronchitis, pleurisy, and other lung problems. It is especially useful in the early stages of discomfort before mucus begins to be a problem, and where there is excessive dryness and the sensation of heat or fever. Yarrow could also be used if there is blood in the mucus or blood is being coughed up.

Circulatory

For the circulatory system, yarrow was traditionally used for internal bleeding, especially when caused by physical injury.

Immune

Yarrow is suited to extremely high fevers, and fevers with bleeding of any sort, whether nosebleeds, internal bleeding, or hemorrhaging.

Digestion

Yarrow can be used internally or externally for hemorrhoids, and can be used as a carminative or tonic for the digestive tract when there are signs of Heat and Dryness like small, hard stools.

Eyes, Ears, Nose and Throat

Yarrow is naturally antiseptic. The fresh leaves can be chewed for toothache until a dentist can take care of the problem.

Kidneys and Bladder

Yarrow can be used for support of the kidneys and bladder when there is inflammation and infection, especially when there is blood in the urine.

The Skin

Yarrow is beneficial for situations involving trauma to the skin such as deep cuts, wounds, and lacerations. Yarrow can also be used to help the body clear bruises caused by trauma, or the bruised areas around wounds. The dried herb can be used as a styptic powder.

Nervous System and Emotional Wellbeing

Like hawthorn, yarrow is an appropriate nervine for stressful or traumatic emergency situations, but it has a reputation for being better suited to someone stressed out or overwhelmed from giving aid rather than for someone who experienced the trauma firsthand.

Yarrow:

Traditional Uses by Population

Women

Yarrow is very beneficial for helping to balance menstruation when the flow is extremely heavy and/or prolonged.

The Elderly

Yarrow can be a supportive herb for the elderly when they are recovering from strokes. Traditionally, yarrow was said to help the blood flow along its proper channels, and thus help the body re-absorb and redirect blood when it was in an inappropriate place, such as when it leaks out into the brain during a stroke.

The Independent Herbalist

Part Three:

Herbs+Knowledge

Getting Started: Simples and Compounds

Using herbs can be as simple or as complicated as the herbalist likes it to be. In fact, 'simpling' is the art of using a single herb at a time rather than a formula that combines several herbs at once. Focusing on a simpling is an ideal way to begin learning herbalism, because once familiar with ten to twenty herbs and how to use them individually, combining them and creating formulas comes naturally.

Some herbalists feel that formulas are more reliable and that simpling can be hit or miss. This isn't necessarily true. When learning to simple, keep in mind that no two herbs are exactly the same. Even though they both might be useful for headaches, chances are they are good for different kinds of headaches. Once a little research has been done to determine the nuances of a particular herb, and the root cause of a particular problem, simpling becomes much more precise.

But simpling isn't the full story: sometimes it's fun, interesting, or necessary to play with more complex recipes. Herbalists usually refer to a recipe containing several herbs as a formula or compound.

Formulas and compounds usually contain one or two main herbs, and include several other herbs in smaller amounts to round out the recipe. To make an effective blend, the synergy of how the herbs work together should be considered as well as how the individual herbs behave by themselves.

The herbs in a formula can support each other, such as when two sedative herbs and a nervine (an herb that helps balance the health of the central nervous system) are used in a formula to promote restful sleep. Or, the supporting herbs can have an entirely different action than the main herbs. An example of this would be adding a pinch of hawthorn to the formula mentioned above- hawthorn is traditionally used to support circulatory and heart health, so adding it to the sedative and nervine herbs could help strengthen circulation and see to it that the body is able to use the other herbs more efficiently.

This book focuses on simpling because it is more accessible for the beginner and requires fewer herbs to start, but many other resources are available that provide recipes for compounds and formulas.

Different Lenses: Herbalism Over Time

Herbalism has changed a great deal over the course of history. Herbalism is always colored by the people who practice it and shaped by the political, religious and scientific climate of the culture in which they live. There are three main ways that herbs have been viewed up to now: in terms of their observable qualities, in terms of how they compare with a specific symptom picture, and in terms of their chemical make up.

Even though they may seem to differ radically, each style of description and classification is useful in its own way, and herbalists eventually develop a preference among the styles that guides how they approach herbalism. In a sense, becoming an herbalist is about finding a comfortable way to relate to or retain knowledge about herbs that makes sense to the individual. Over time, herbalists may even combine styles or develop a unique personal style different from any of the traditions available to draw upon.

Herbal Qualities

One of the oldest ways to organize herbs into an easily approachable system is by assigning certain descriptive qualities to each herb. Almost all older herbal traditions make use of this system, even though each tradition might do so in slightly different ways. See the section “Herbal Qualities Explained” for more information on what these terms mean.

Descriptions like ‘drying,’ ‘moistening,’ ‘cooling,’ and ‘warming’ form the basis of this system: these words describe the quality the herb has in relation to its observable effect on the balance of the human body.

In some cases, herbs are assigned qualities based on their taste: sweet, sour, acrid, salty, or pungent. So, for example, in some traditional systems pungent herbs are described as ‘drying’, while sweet tasting herbs are said to be ‘moistening.’

Many herbalists refer to classifying herbs by their qualities as ‘the study of energetics,’ or by their ‘elemental associations,’ but that is unnecessarily esoteric for our purposes here. It is good to know, however, so that the new herbalist can be prepared for the terms when exposed to it from other resources.

The qualities that herbalists use to talk about their work and their herbs developed by using the five senses to describe both herbs and conditions or states of the human body. Before modern scientific instruments and tests, herbalists had to rely exclusively on sight, smell, touch, and taste to describe and classify herbs. Because this type of system is largely influenced by cultural worldview – including mythology and religion—each tradition that uses a system of physical qualities (again, sometimes also called a system of energetics) will use slightly different words to describe the patterns that they noticed, but the underlying concept as a system is the same.

Each tradition also holds a similar view of disease and the human body. Herbalists noticed over time that certain types of people were prone to certain types of illnesses, and these observations were used to organize people into different 'constitutions'- similar types of physical appearance and inherited health- as way to describe these similarities and recurring themes of the human body.

The healthy human was described as balanced, and any illness or discomfort was looked upon as an imbalance in the health or 'constitution', rather than as a disease per se. This idea is fundamental to most herbalism, even today. When an herbalist looks you in the eye and explains that they don't care about disease, they aren't joking. Herbalists are concerned exclusively with health and balance, and have been literally for ages. Rather than looking for symptoms of disease, a good herbalist looks for clues about the constitutional health and balance of the human body.

Because of the elemental vocabulary used by older traditions, these systems of herbalism may seem unnecessarily esoteric or even fallaciously bizarre to the casual reader or student. It helps to remember that these systems were devised thousands of years ago, and to allow for the cultural gap between modern science and early efforts to build a framework with which to understand illness, the human body, and health. Today's science often makes connections between these early associations and a modern scientific worldview, whether it is obvious at first glance or not. Most traditional, five-senses- based systems are complex and remarkably consistent when studied with historical context in mind.

Herbal Specifics

A slightly more recent system developed for organizing herbs, the study of specifics is the method of pairing an herb with a very detailed outline that indicates when the herb should be used. This is done by assigning the herb to a very precise description of constitution and imbalance in the human body.

The system of specifics often pairs an herb with a very detailed description of a group of observable mental states, emotions, and physical ailments that might be experienced together: a well developed picture of a human constitution in a specific state of imbalance. The description often includes many minute details about the physical and emotional state of a person, and the nuances of a given situation in which the herb would be most appropriate as compared to other herbs with similar attributes.

This style of classification is typical of the Physiomedicalists of the late 1800s and early 1900s, directly before and during the emergence of modern medicine. As described in the language of its original time period, specifics often uses more scientific sounding words than older cultural and traditional systems. While studying specifics, the herbalist might encounter mystifying words like 'astringent' and 'demulcent.' These are essentially fifty-dollar words for 'drying' and 'moistening.' There are many other similar cases, so just take it one word at a time and don't let the old fashioned vocabulary become a source of frustration.

Specifics can seem complicated at first, but it is well worth learning because it can make the use of single herbs much more targeted and effective. It's very much like a more advanced version of simpling- a Simpling 102 of a sort.

Herbal Constituent Actions

Chronologically, this is the most recent way of organizing herbs. It's really exactly the same information described by 'Qualities' and 'Specifics,' but it is packaged in the most culturally updated, scientific-sounding form.

Like specifics, words like 'astringent' and 'demulcent' are used frequently. Remember that the physiomedicalists of the 1800s/early 1900s were part of the transition to our modern medical tradition, and the continuation of the scientific sounding vocabulary makes perfect sense. Discussions of constituent actions are also going to get pretty heavy on the chemistry vocabulary. "Constituent" is itself a chemistry word, but hang in there- getting an overview of this system is not as complicated as it sounds

To understand the system of organizing herbs by their constituent actions, imagine this: herbs are essentially a neatly packaged cluster of tiny chemical ingredients, or constituents, that looks like what we call a plant. These chemicals exist naturally in the plant to help it alive: to carry out daily functions like absorbing food and water, to help it adapt to its environment, and to help protect it by making it taste nasty to hungry animals that take a curious bite.

Modern life has benefited greatly by the scientific ability to break a plant down into its chemical building blocks and isolate the ingredients for further study. Many pharmaceuticals available to us today were first made possible by plants. However, if an herbalist focuses strictly on when to use an herb based on a single chemical it contains, then the results can lead to using herbs as substitutes for modern drugs. Which they aren't; and using them like they are can cause big problems.

However, when used judiciously this system seeks to understand the possible uses of herbs according to modern scientific analysis, while still keeping in mind that the whole plant has a unique way of interacting with the human body. A whole plant is often milder and more well rounded than the actions of any single chemical.

Analysis of constituent actions can often affirm that there is indeed a method to the traditional herbalist's madness, but the true nature of the complex relationship between whole plants on whole human bodies still eludes even the most curious and tenacious of scientists.

The way our culture thinks about progress and science makes it all too easy to scoff at the roots of herbalism as nothing more than ignorant superstition, and to dismiss the system of Specifics as a turn of the century curiosity. Despite their differences, all three systems have something to offer. The great thing about pre-modern systems is that they are accessible and reliable even with limited technology. The wonderful thing about modern research is that it confirms what herbalists have known since the beginning: there really are a number of things going on with these plants that make them beneficial to human health.

Herbal Qualities Explained: Heat/Coldness, Dryness/Dampness

The qualities discussed in the previous section may still seem a little confusing. Here's a look at each one, with more information on how they look or feel and how they relate to each other. Remember, each of the qualities can be used to describe either the states of the organ systems such as the liver or kidneys, or the state of a person's constitution- the appearance of their physical body as a whole.

Heat:

Heat signs include physical heat like fever or an infection, pain with redness, and yellow discharges; Someone with a hot constitution is usually boisterous or outgoing, may be temperamental, and seems excitable. They may also have a reddish cast to their complexion, and prefer winter over summer or feel hot most of the time. Heat can occur in the presence of either Dryness or Dampness.

Coldness

Cold signs can include physical coldness like cold hands and feet, or discharges that are clear or white colored. Cold related pain usually occurs without much redness or swelling. People with cold constitutions are generally more withdrawn than their Hot counterparts, and may prefer summer over winter and feel constantly cold even indoors or when the weather is warm. Cold constitutions will usually appear pale or bluish. Cold can also appear in the presence of Dryness or Dampness.

Dryness

Dryness is a physical quality that describes either dryness to the touch, or the lack of lubrication where it is needed. Think dry eyes, dry or brittle hair, stiffness in the muscles or joints, or constipation with small hard stools. Someone with overall Dryness will usually appear thin. Nourishing or moist herbs are used to balance Dryness.

Dampness

Dampness is a physical quality that includes water logged tissues from edema, excessive urination, weeping or puss filled skin conditions, too much mucus, or watery eyes. Unlike dryness, which is thin and light, dampness is heavy. Someone with overall dampness in their constitution will usually be overweight, or they may experience water retention. Dampness in the constitution can occur with either Heat or Cold. Drying or diuretic herbs are used to balance Dampness.

World Traditions: Herbalism and Place

As we have seen in the previous section, herbalism has changed with time. But herbalism also developed into distinct local systems based on place. Traditional Chinese herbalism and Ayurveda are perhaps the most well known, but resources on Unani, Medieval Western, and Thompsonian herbalism are all worth looking into. Many other cultures and viewpoints are represented under the study of ethnobotany.

Traditional Chinese Herbalism

The system of traditional Chinese herbalism, also called Traditional Chinese Medicine and abbreviated TCM, dates back thousands of years, and uses a system of organization based on five elements and a system of observable qualities, or energetics. This system is well known for complex formulas which were developed based on the qualities of herbs and tailored based on how herbs interact with one another in any given formula.

Ayurveda

Ayurveda is an ancient system of herbalism that developed in India. It uses a category system based on three 'doshas', or elements, and classifies human constitutions and herbs within the dosha framework. Individual herbs and constitutions are considered to be a combination of the three elements, rather than represented as a single element- a trait that sets Ayurveda apart from other traditions, which prefer to categorize herbs based on a single element.

Unani

Not as old as Ayurvedic or Traditional Chinese systems, Unani herbalism developed in ancient Greece, Italy, and the Middle East. As is common with other highly developed traditions, Unani herbalism is based on a system that categorizes human constitution and classes of herbs based on their qualities and actions, but Unani herbalism organizes everything energetically/elementally as belonging to one of four 'humors.'

Ethnobotany

Many other traditional cultures and indigenous peoples also have well developed styles of herbalism. However, rather than possessing manuscripts and written records, many cultures use oral tradition to preserve their knowledge, so information from these traditions may be more difficult to access unless the herbalist learns directly from an herbalist involved in one of these traditions.

For many herbal traditions, though, there are a number of archived texts ranging from old to ancient, and there are also many new books available that explain ancient traditions in terms that can be easily understood by modern readers.

Independent Herbalism: Always More to Learn

Once they have set out with the intent to learn about herbs, every herbalist needs a plan for continuing their education. The most inexpensive, accessible, and potentially quality education an herbalist can receive is from hands on experience. Because independent herbalism is first and foremost a way of life, the key to learning in depth about herbs is to stay involved with them at a daily level. Every day, try to do two small things: read a page or two in a well written book, and find a way to use at least one herb – perhaps as a tea, a cooking ingredient, or in an herbal project of some sort. It will only take a few minutes, and think of it as an investment. From week to week or month to month, if time can be found to garden, forage, or learn to make new herbal preparations- that's icing on the cake. To really take it to the next level, here are a few projects to help the beginning herbalist stay organized and curious.

Collect an Herbal Reference Library

Ah, libraries. How marvelous. How practical. How. . .old fashioned? Excuse me? Independent herbalists, unite! Ditch the digital and get back to the old paper and ink! Digital is convenient, yes, but only until the power goes out. An herbal reference library should be comprised of engaging, delightful, glorious books in corporeal form. All types: slim, small volumes; big hefty ones; scholarly masterpieces; humorous treatises; herbal books by every type of herbalist imaginable. Even the resources that the reader finds disagreeable can have value- by understanding why the material seems objectionable, the herbalist can better understand their own emerging viewpoint. At the very least, make sure to select three books with in depth theory; three herbals -also sometimes called *materia medica*- that give detailed descriptions of how individual herbs are useful; two or more identification guides if any foraging is planned; and at least one good gardening guide. Herbal magazines, journals, or other subscriptions are also excellent, and can be a fantastic way to broaden the library. Independent herbalists should strive to be curators of herbal knowledge- what we study is important, both as a means to preserve the past and to insure our futures.

Create A Personal Herbal

An herbal, as the word was once used, is a type of book that developed during the middle ages. Herbals were a bit like encyclopedias, with an entry about each herb paired with beautiful, hand painted illustrations. With a nod to the traditional herbal, creating a personal herbal is a way for the modern herbalist to stay organized. The personal herbal should become a compendium of herbs familiar to the independent herbalist: a compilation of all of the research done on the individual herbs that have been studied over the years that becomes a valuable reference tool on its own. Draw pictures or include photographs, take notes, cite references. This is the research notebook par excellence to refer back to later. Use a format that includes a general profile for each herb, with an additional page (or pages) for uses, recipes featuring the herb, and miscellaneous notes. Once again, hard copy is king. Either keep a handwritten copy, or print any digital files on a regular basis. Three ring notebooks are great as personal herbals- they make it simple to alphabetize as new herbs are added so that everything is easy to find.

Keep An Herbal Workbook

If the personal herbal is like an encyclopedia, an herbal workbook is like a diary or journal. The herbal workbook is the ideal place to keep track of hands-on projects and personal experiences, where the research of the personal herbal gets applied and documented. Creating a new recipe? Developing a formula or preparation, or following someone else's? Write down the steps used, the date, and any notes on the process. Follow up with notes about how or when it was used. Jot down ideas for tweaking the formula in the future. Using a single herb to do some simplifying? Take notes on that as well. Add a section for the garden. Rather than focusing on historical uses and information on individual herbs, the workbook is a place to keep health records and a place to keep track of herbal projects. It can become a blend of cookbook, experiment log, health diary, and herbal household record.

The herbal workbook also lends itself to list making. Below are suggestions for three easy lists that can help independent herbalists keep track of what they've read and what they would like to learn next. The lists can become an invaluable tool to look back on and see just how much has been explored and mastered over the years.

The Reading List

Start with a reading list of two or three books that focus on a single style of traditional herbalism. Make reading a habit: decide when and where to make it part of a regular schedule. For best results, don't set hefty goals- keep things fun and interesting. Even something as simple as "I will Read One Page Everyday on my Lunch Break" keeps the herbalist learning and moving forward without much fuss.

The Herb List

Keep a list of herbs that seem interesting for further study. A reasonable goal for most people is to focus on one herb a month in addition to a non-stressful reading schedule. By the end of the year, that means twelve herbs have been explored fully. Keep notes as each herb is studied so it can be added to the personal herbal.

The Project List

Reading establishes a great foundation as an herbalist, but hands on time using herbs is just as important. Find ways to incorporate herbs into daily routines, diet, and self care. Try recipes, formulas, and herbal projects. Set small goals, and approach projects as the learning experience that they are. If they don't work out the first time, that's ok! Try to figure out what went wrong, and start over.

That's really all there is to being a perpetual student of herbalism: an idea of what interests the herbalist, some notebooks and lists to help stay organized, and a regular piece of time every day or week to enjoy exploring the art and science of herbalism.

But there's still more out there. Consider all the opportunities for other herbal learning adventures: Make it a new year's resolution to attend a conference; take a local class or attend an herb walk; start a study group with other herbalists in the area, or join an already established herbalist's club or guild; Volunteer at a botanical garden, or with the forestry service for trail work days. And of course, there are a wide variety of workshops and herbal schools available. Just remember that learning, at its core, begins and ends with the individual- independent herbalist, or otherwise.

Appendices

Appendix One: The Independent Herbalist's First Aid Kit

As a basic first aid kit, having each of the twelve herbs available in dried form as well as in extract is an excellent place to start. A good amount to plan for is to include one 4oz bottle of extract and one 4oz bag of dried herb per person. This should be more than enough to last one person through from one growing season to the next. Preferably, once the first aid kit is put together, a garden will also be planted to provide continued access to the plants in case of shortages or other supply problems. Besides having each of the dried herbs and the extracts on hand, the projects in Part One make up a serviceable first aid kit that can be used in conjunction with more modern support. Here's a brief overview of the projects and their potential first aid uses.

Hawthorn Elixir: Heart problems, support after blood loss, emotional support during emergency situations

Peppermint Vinegar: Sunburn, sore muscles, bug bites; one tsp in small glass of water for heart burn or indigestion

Rose and Elder Oil and/or Salve: Skin support for cuts and scrapes, burns, bug bites, bruises

Mullein Oil: Ear problems, chapped skin or other skin discomforts

Elderberry Syrup: immune support, iron source to help build the blood

Catnip Milk: (dried catnip and powdered milk should be stored separately until needed) insomnia, stress

Yarrow extract: fevers, wounds, bleeding

Elder, Mint and Yarrow Tea: a traditional cold and flu season tea to help promote immunity and promote sweating to break fevers.

The herbs can also be used to create other projects by substituting in the basic recipes outlined in part one. Here are a two excellent examples that would be welcome additions to the basic kit:

Rose Vinegar : follow the directions for peppermint vinegar, but substitute rose petals. The resulting project is excellent for burns, bug bites, and skin problems. Can also be made into an oxymel, which would be useful for stress, sore throats, or to boost mood.

Elderberry Oxymel: create an elderberry vinegar, and follow the instructions for making an oxymel. Elderberry oxymel would be useful for lung complaints or to boost the immune system.

Appendix Two: Five More Plants

Here are five other herbs that no household should be without. They will all grow happily in the garden, and two of them (nettles and violets) are often naturalized and easy to find growing wild.

1. Soapwort *Saponaria officinalis*.

Soap that grows in the garden! This herb contains high levels of saponins, a class of compounds known for their sudsing or cleaning ability. It has traditional internal uses but they aren't supported by modern research; in fact, the herb is considered toxic by modern standards. Use it to wash hands, bodies, clothes, etc. Just keep it away from water sources, or else you will inadvertently poison the fish!

2. Wormwood *Artemesia absinthium*

Useful for its antiparasitic uses, and also for its properties as an herbal bitter to aid digestion.

3. Violets *Viola odorata*

Violets are a wonderfully tonic and nutritive herb that has unfortunately fallen to the side in many modern herbal practices. They are gentle and mild enough to be used with children, and have many wonderful applications for adults as well. Also, they are quite weedy and abundant in most areas. The purple flowers that appear in the spring rarely, if ever, set seed, so feel free to harvest liberally. The plant sends up a second flower in the fall that looks nothing like the first but produces an amount of seeds that allow violet to spread like wild fire. Violet flowers make a beautiful purple oxymels, syrups, and confectionaries, and the leaves and fresh flowers are delicious salad additions. Violets can be used to support healthy bowel movements and also make a good addition to herbal syrups for respiratory health. Stay away from the root, however, as they can upset the stomach.

4. Calendula *Calendula officinalis*

Calendula flowers make a very useful oil for skin problems, and the petals can also be added to soups and stews as a condiment. They are especially good for this if dried and kept for winter use, as the petals help support healthy lymph drainage and the immune system.

5. Stinging Nettles *Urtica dioica*

Nettles are incredibly rich in minerals and make a wonderful addition to the diet. The new growth from the tops of the plant can be used as a spring time green, and nettle also makes chlorophyll and mineral rich infusions. Many herbalists prefer to let nettle infuse over night to maximize the amount of nutrients pulled from the leaves. Nettle has a host of traditional uses, and seems to help the body rid itself of excessive uric acid if used on a regular basis- so it can be a great gout support herb. Beware of brushing up against fresh nettles plants while harvesting, though- stinging nettles hurt!

Appendix Three: Five Tips and Tricks for Healthy Herbal Living

There are five simple things everyone can do to add herbs into a healthy lifestyle. In no particular order of importance, they are:

Start using Herbal Bitters before meals.

These herbs or herbal formulas help promote good digestion, which means the body can use the food it's given to the best advantage. Stay clear from formulas or recipes containing senna or cascara, as these herbs are laxative, habit forming, and give no benefit for long term digestive health.

Enjoy a daily cup of herbal tea.

Tailor it to support certain health challenges, focus on herbs rich in minerals, or use it to add variety to the daily diet.

Add a daily adaptogen.

Adaptogenic herbs are tonics that support immune health and promote a healthy response to stress. Adaptogens can help boost energy levels without caffeine and increase stamina and endurance.

Do a yearly parasite cleanse. Traditionally, an herbal parasite cleanse was done once a year in the fall. Garlic, wormwood, and black walnut extract are old herbal standbys for fall cleanses.

Schedule a spring cleanse.

Before modern grocery stores, people relied heavily on food they could store at home to see them through the winter. Fresh produce year round wasn't feasible, so the winter diet was usually heavy on dried and salted meat, stored grains, and root cellar vegetables. Spring was an ideal time to gently cleanse the bowels and provide a liver tune up in preparation for warmer weather and the seasonal changes.

Appendix Four: A Glossary of Historical Herbal Actions

alterative: an herb that helps the body rebalance and return to normal health

anodyne: an herb traditionally used for relieving pain.

anti-inflammatory: an herb that promotes a healthy inflammatory response.

antibacterial: herbs that support immune response beneficial to the body in fighting bacterial invaders.

anticatarrhal: helps the body eliminate too much mucus build up in the lungs or head.

antirheumatic: any herb used to help promote healthy inflammatory response, reduce swelling or pain; traditionally used to relieve the inflammation, swelling and pain associated with rheumatoid arthritis or similar conditions.

antispasmodic: relieves spasms or muscular tension

antitussive: an herb that helps to eliminate coughing.

antiviral: an herb with immune system supporting properties, especially one that helps the body fight off viruses.

aperient: a gentle laxative.

astringent: an herb that promotes the constriction of body tissues, such as the skin or mucus membranes.

bronchodilator: an herb that promotes relaxation and opening of the airways.

cardiac: an herb with heart related actions.

carminative: an herb that helps with flatulence.

cholagogue: an herb that promotes production and secretion of healthy bile levels from the gallbladder.

demulcent: an herb that helps the body cope with irritation or inflammation, especially of a mucus membrane.

diaphoretic: an herb that encourages sweating.

diuretic: an herb that supports or stimulates the flow of urine.

emmenagogue: an herb that stimulates pelvic blood flow to support healthy menstruation.

emollient: an herb that softens the skin, or soothes the skin.

expectorant: an herb that supports the body's ability to cough up phlegm or mucus from the lungs.

hemostatic: an herb that supports the suppression of bleeding from cuts or wounds.

hypnotic: an herb that promotes sleep.

immunomodulator: an herb that can influence the immune system.

laxative: an herb that encourages the evacuation of the bowels.

nervine: an herb with a calming influence on the nerves, but that also helps to rebalance the nervous system over all.

relaxant: an herb that is used to balance excessive tension in the body.

sedative: an herb with a calming influence on the body or mind.

stimulant: an herb that increases activity of the body or of the nervous system.

tonic: an herb used to increase well being of the body as a whole, or the health of a particular organ.

vulnerary: an herb used for wound care.

Appendix Five: How Much To Use?

Just like the rest of herbalism, determining how much of a tea or extract to use isn't rocket science. However, there are a few simple rules to follow.

The Rule of Frequency

In an acute setting, most herbs can be taken every hour if needed.

For chronic imbalances, herbs are usually taken three times a day, and the time frame of use is a month for every year the imbalance has been a problem.

The Rule of Quantity

Herbal extracts are most often measured in drops. 15-30 drops is usually considered to be the amount for adults or children weighing up to 150 lbs. In other words, 1-2 drops for ten lbs of body weight. To determine how much of an extract should be given to children, plan on 1 drop per 10lbs of body weight, and adjust from there.

Homemade extracts can have higher levels of sediment than store bought ones, which can make the use of the dropper style dispensers difficult as they may clog. One option is to use a screw cap on the extracts, but store a clean drop measure separately. That can be a good plan especially if there are children or pets in the household that will be given herbs, but it is still useful to know how to measure herbal extracts with a measuring spoon.

To do this, use the smallest size measuring spoon- the $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon size. $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon= approximately 30 drops. To measure smaller than 30 drops, pour $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of herbal extract into a cup (8 oz) of water and divide accordingly. So to get 15 drops, put the $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon into a small glass of water and divide the water in half, to get approximately seven drops divide the water in half again.

Teas are usually measured in cups, where one cup equals 8 oz. One cup of tea is one serving for a person weighing approximately 150 pounds. Since there are 16 tablespoons in a cup, it often makes the most sense to translate this as one tablespoon of tea for every ten pounds of body weight, and adjust upward as needed.

These measurements are considered safe and traditional for most herbs. A good herbal reference will confirm whether the desired herb falls into this category, or is a low dose botanical that requires more caution. All of the herbs in this book fall into the first category of 15-30 drop extracts and 1 cup tea serving sizes.

Resources and Further Reading

In creating this book, the herbalist drew on many resources from historical and modern herbalism, ethnobotanical resources, plus her own personal experience in working with each herb.

The main sources of information for the profiles of the twelve herbs were digital editions of the following historical works:

1. *The Dispensatory of the United States of America, 1918* edited by Joseph P. Remington and Horatio C. Wood, et al
2. *King's American Dispensatory*, by John Uri Lloyd, Harvey Wickes Felter, MD 1898
3. *American Materia medica, Therapeutics and Pharmacognosy: developing the latest acquired Knowledge of Drugs, and especially of the direct Action of single Drugs upon exact Conditions of Disease, with especial Reference to the Therapeutics of the Plant Drugs of the Plant Drugs of the Americas*, by Finley Ellingwood, MD 1919
4. *A Modern Herbal*, by Maude Grieve, 1931
5. *The Complete Herbal*, by Nicholas Culpeper, 1693

A few of the many modern titles in the herbalist's personal library that have influenced her development as an herbalist over the years include the following:

- Cech, Richo. *Making Plant Medicine*. Horizon Herbs, 2000
- Fischer-Rizzi, Susanne. *Medicines of the Earth: Legends, Recipes, Remedies, and Cultivation of Healing Plants*. Rudra Press, 1996
- Green, James. *The Herbal Medicine-Maker's Handbook*. Crossing Press, 2000.
- Phillips, Nancy and Phillips, Michael. *The Herbalist's Way: The Art and Practice of Healing with Plant Medicines*. Chelsea Green Publishing, 2005
- Tierra, Lesley. *Healing with the Herbs of Life*. Crossing Press, 2003
- Tierra, Michael. *Planetary Herbology*. Lotus Press, 1992
- Wood, Matthew. *The Book of Herbal Wisdom: Using Plants as Medicines*. North Atlantic Books, 1997
- Wood, Matthew. *The Practice of Traditional Western Herbalism: Basic Doctrine, Energetics, and Classification*. North Atlantic Books, 2004

About the Author:

Agatha Noveille lives in the Appalachian mountains of northwest Georgia. She believes that plants should have a place of honor in everyday life and also that they are an important resource in long term emergency preparedness planning. She hopes to help bridge the gap between the esoteric and the commonsense aspects of historical, modern, and practical herbalism for modern readers. Agatha is available for educational classes and workshops and she can be reached by email at indieherbalist@gmail.com.

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