

Simple Herbal Preparations: A Beginners Guide

Amanda Neufeld, Leonara Apothecary

Using Herbs Safely

- ★ Use simples - one herb at a time - instead of formulas with several herbs at once
- ★ Get to know one plant at a time, on a deep level - until you learn how it affects your unique body.
- ★ No more than 4 different herbs at a time for extra safety.
- ★ Begin with Nourishing or Tonifying herbs first - avoid toxic or potentially poisonous plants!
- ★ Build up a foundation of trust in the healing effectiveness of plants by using remedies for minor problems or first aid before you try dealing with a major sickness or more serious health problems.
- ★ Ask for advice from an elder herbalist if you are unsure.
- ★ What are some ways to build confidence in using plant medicine? Get to know the plants that grow in your yard! Work with teas and nourishing herbal infusions daily, and create your own ritual.
- ★ Respect the power of plants and strength of herbs.
- ★ Respect the unique individuality of every plant, person, and situation

Consider these Categories of Herbs:

Nourishing Herbs -these are great to start with when getting to know herbs

- Generally Safe
- Rarely Have Side Effects
- Can be taken in quantity and for an extended periods of time
- Nutritive “Food like” plants
- Can be drunk or eaten frequently - in teas or infusions, cooked into soups, and eaten in salads.
- Provide a lot of nutrients like vitamins, minerals, proteins.

Some Examples: Alfalfa, Chickweed, Dandelion Greens, Garlic, Nettle, Oatstraw/Oats, Red Clover, Raspberry Leaf

Tonifying Herbs

- Act Slowly and Cumulative - so they are beneficial when used consistently for longer periods of time
- Bland or soothing tasting herbs can be taken in larger amounts. Bitter herbs should be taken in smaller amounts.

Some Examples: Astragalus, Burdock, Dandelion root, Motherwort

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Stimulating/Sedating Herbs - best used for a specific need

- Increase activity in the body
- Could be herbs that stimulate the cleansing systems and disease fighting mechanisms
- Have stronger effects and could be more likely to have side effects
- Usually taken in SMALL amounts for a SHORT period of time
- Use with care, pay attention to how these types of herbs work in your unique body.

Some Examples: coffee/black tea, Kava, Valerian, Echinacea, Yarrow, Passionflower

Potentially Toxic/Poisonous

- Very potent medicine that stimulates powerful healing and releasing actions in the body. Overdose will almost always cause side effects ie: upset stomach, diarrhea, vomiting, dizziness.
- Taken for short periods of time in VERY small doses
- Consult an expert/elder before experimenting

Some Examples: Poke, Lobelia, Cayenne

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Basic Herbal Preparations *Always label your medicines!

- ◆ **Herbal Tea**- small amount of herb steeped in hot water for 5-10 Minutes
 - 1 tsp. Dry herb or 3 tsp fresh herb in 8 oz water, strain and drink
 - Try Catnip, Ginger, Lavender, Lemon Balm, Peppermint, Rose

- ◆ **Herbal Infusion**- large amounts of herb steeped in boiling water for 4-8 Hours.
 - 1 oz. nourishing herb in 32 oz boiling water - Place herb in quart jar, cover with boiling water, lid tightly, and let steep 4-8 hours. Strain and drink up to a quart a day, refrigerate leftovers 1-3 days(ish)
- ★ My favorite Nourishing Herbs for Infusion are:
 - ▶ Nettle -Has tons of vitamins and minerals, protein, strengthens adrenals and kidneys, nourishes the immune system, builds energy.
 - ▶ Oatstraw- Full of vitamins and minerals, Helps restore the nervous system, helps with mood, anxiety and stress.
 - ▶ Red Clover- said to be cancer preventative, herb of fertility,, high in protein, vitamins, phytosterols (hormone like substances)
 - ▶ Comfrey leaf-strengthens bones, tendons, ligaments, *Use of root has contradictory opinions - damage the liver, the leaves do not have the same compounds as the roots, please do not drink infusions of the root.
 - ▶ Other Nourishing Herbs: Linden, Mullein(strain well through a cloth to avoid hairs in throat)

- ◆ **Decoction** - Simmering harder plant material in water to extract medicinal properties - useful for Roots, Bark, Seeds, or dried berries
 - 1 oz dry herb (or 3 oz fresh) in 32 oz water - bring water to a boil, add dried herbs, simmer for 20-30 minutes. Strain and store refrigerated for up to one week.

- ◆ **Herbal Syrup** - An herbal decoction sweetened with honey or sugar
 - Very useful for those not-so-palatable herbs
 - I personally prefer using honey for added health benefits
 - General ratio for a shelf stable syrup is equal parts herbal decoction to sweetener (1:1)
 - Can reduce the ratio 2:1 or 3:1 but will need to be refrigerated.
 - Experiment with your personal taste.

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- ◆ **Tinctures** - herbs steeped in alcohol to extract medicinal properties
 - Taken in small amounts. Faster access in some cases
 - Can remain potent for long periods of time - even years
 - Fresh plant material is usually best
 - To make a Basic herbal tincture: Fill a jar with chopped fresh plant material (or if using dried herbs fill jar 1/3-1/2 full of plant material) Cover with 100 proof alcohol, Lid tightly, **label and date**. Let sit for 6-8 weeks (or longer!) shake daily
 - ▶ Some herbs I work with in tincture form: Echinacea, Elderberry, Lemon Balm, Motherwort, St. John's Wort, Yarrow

- ◆ **Oxymels** - Herbs extracted in Apple Cider Vinegar and Honey
 - To make a Basic Oxymel: Fill a jar with herbs and add equal parts vinegar and honey. Stir and cap with a PLASTIC lid (or use wax paper between metal lid to avoid rust) Steep 4-6 weeks, shaking frequently.
 - Fresh plant material is what I prefer but can use dried - if using dried only fill your jar halfway

- ◆ **Herbal infused Oil** - usually for topical applications
 - Best results with dry herbs or atleast wilted a day if freshly gathered
 - Start with small batches to avoid rancid oils. (A pint of oil goes a LONG way!)
 - To make a herbal oil :
Fill a clean DRY jar with finely chopped dried plant material
Add oil of choice to the top, lid tightly and sit 4-6 weeks.
Check often/shake. Store in a COOL, DRY, DARK place
 - Many different Oils can be used - Organic Olive, Apricot, Coconut, Sunflower etc.
 - Add beeswax to infused oil to make ointments/salves/lip balms.
 - Oils can go rancid if exposed to too much moisture. Sun or heat could create condensation in your jar - I personally don't recommend heating oils.

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Recipes and Fun Remedies:

Mullein Chai - respiratory and immune system support tea

Ingredients:

2 quarts water
1c. Dried Mullein
1/4c. Astragalus Root
1-2" ginger root, grated
2 sticks cinnamon
10 cloves
1-2 TB. Cardamom pods, slightly crushed
½ -1 tsp. whole black peppercorn

Directions:

Put all ingredients into a large pot. Bring to a simmer and decoct for 20-30 minutes.
Strain through a cheesecloth to catch any fine hairs from the mullein.
Add sweetener to taste and a splash of coconut milk (optional)
Makes ~ 4c. of Chai. Refrigerate leftovers

Elderberry Syrup

Ingredients:

1 ounce of dried elderberries:
1 Quart Filtered Water
½-1 inch piece grated Fresh Ginger,
5-8 Dried Cloves
1 Cinnamon Stick
1-2 C. Honey

Directions:

Make a Decoction - Add ingredients except honey into the pan.
Simmer, uncovered, on low/medium heat but do not bring to a boil
Leave to steep for about 30-45 minutes or until decocted down by half.
Remove from heat and allow to cool slightly, strain, squeezing out ALL the juices you can.
Your Decoction is ready to sweeten into syrup. Add your Honey 1 cup at a time to sweeten. I like mine less sweet for my personal taste.
Refrigerate your syrup. It will stay good for about a month.

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- ★ Garlic Honey is simple and Yummy- simply put some garlic in a jar and cover with honey-wait a day and it will turn syrupy, take a tablespoon for sore throat/cough. Lasts practically forever
- ★ Slippery Elm Balls- Mix Slippery Elm Bark Powder with honey to make small lozenges for sore throats, coughs, helping avoid excess mucus production, aiding the digestive system and soothing upset stomachs
- ★ Fire Cider – Add to a jar - equal parts of grated horseradish, garlic, and onion, ½ part ginger, and a few hot peppers and lemon slices. Fill half the jar with Apple cider Vinegar and the rest of the way up with honey. Cover, shake well, and sit for 4-6 weeks. Then strain and store in a clean jar. Take a sip when needing to boost the immune system and fight off the crud, soothe a sore throat, or add to salad dressing and cooked greens.