

Midsouth Women's Herbal Conference

Herbal Medicine Terminology and References

Herbal Preparation Methods Simplified

Menstruum: The solvent or medium used in an herbal extraction, such as water or alcohol

Tea: herb steeped in hot water for several minutes

Decoction: herb simmered in water for several minutes; simmering is often needed for “tougher” forms or parts of herbs, such as roots, barks, and woody stems

Hot Infusion: dried herbs soaked in hot water for several hours

Cold Infusion: herbs soaked in cool water for several hours

Tincture: herbs extracted into alcohol, typically for several weeks

Bitters: most often used to describe herbal remedies that support the digestive system and the functions of the gallbladder, liver, bowels and kidneys; usually taken before meals

Glycerites: herbs extracted into vegetable glycerine; alternative to alcohol-based tinctures

Oxymel: herbs extracted into vinegar and raw honey, typically soaked for 2-4 weeks

Salve: herbal infused oil and beeswax that creates an herbal cream for external use

Poultice: ground herb mixed with oil, water, or spit to make a paste, often for first aid

Common Terms

Adaptogen: herb that helps the body adapt to stress and return to a state of equilibrium

Anti-bacterial: herbs that kill bacteria and/or prevent infection

Anti-emetic: herb that aids nausea and/or prevents vomiting

Anti-septic: herb that prevents the growth of bacteria

Anti-viral: herb that are active against viral infections

Astringent: herb that tightens, dries, or binds tissue

Constituents: active “parts” of an herb, sometimes categorized by their chemical structure (acids, alcohols, volatile oils, glycosides, alkaloids, saponins, etc.)

Fire Cider: Apple cider vinegar infused with warming nourishing herbs such as garlic, ginger, horseradish root, onion, and cayenne with honey added to taste. Fire Cider is a folk remedy found worldwide.

Mucilagen: herb that contains mucilage (a sticky, gooey, slippery carbohydrate that internally lubricates tissues, eases dryness, and relieves irritation, and externally moisturizes the skin.

Nervine: herb that stimulates or supports the nervous system

Nutrative: herb taken on a regular basis to support the body; contains many vitamins and nourishing minerals

Pungent: word commonly used to describe strong-tasting herbs that are warming and drying such as diaphoretics, circulatory stimulants, or digestive stimulants. Examples: garlic and horseradish

Salve: herbal ointment applied to the skin

Sedative: calming herb that induces sleep

Stimulant: herb that increases a specific body function or increases metabolism

Styptic: herb that stops external bleeding

Tonic: herbal medicine that nourishes or “tones” the body

Volatile Oil: a rapidly evaporating oil of a plant, such as (but not limited to) an essential oil; often found in aromatic herbs