



The Ginkgo Tree

Herbal Preparations

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Long ago, wise women would only use a few faithful herbs. They knew that herbs had many uses, and a few was all one truly needed...

Thousands of years ago (before grocery stores and fast food restaurants), people used to consume all kinds of plants in their diets in the form of soups and teas. They were exposed only to the natural substances their bodies were specifically adapted to. Today, we still put plants in our foods (lettuce, fruits, culinary herbs, etc.), but many plants beneficial to health are no longer eaten routinely. Instead, much of what we eat is not found in nature. Our bodies can easily become saturated with substances that didn't even exist 150 years ago. Our diets have been narrowed largely to that which is most profitable, not necessarily to that which is most beneficial. Little by little we have been changing our food and separating ourselves more and more from the environment upon which our health depends. Just think how different our food is today than it was 2,000 years ago, or 200, or even 70 years ago.

In the 14th through 17th century, oppression occurred throughout the history of herbal practices. Witch hunts were common and the “witches” were burned at the stake for using herbs to promote health. Oppression continued as the medical establishments, racial and gender bias excluded aspiring healers for at least a century. Many natural healers were outcast from the medical establishment, and in the late 19th and early 20th century they learned from each other without any formal teaching.

Our goal today is to reintroduce you to some of these plants which our ancestors traditionally used. Who knows, perhaps you will start to slowly incorporate these back into your diet.

Four common solvents used to extract plant properties are: alcohol, olive oil, vinegar, and water

Water = tea or infusion

Alcohol = tincture

Olive oil = oil and ointment



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Vinegar = tincture or food

Tea/Infusion with flowers or leaves, (*example, Chamomile*)

When preparing Chamomile, the plant part used is the flower. The method used to extract the vitamins, mineral, tannins, mucilage and volatile oils is infusion. Depending on how strong you wish the infusion to be there are four methods of preparing an infusion:

1. Boil kettle. Place Chamomile flowers in a container with a tight fitting lid. Pour boiling water over flowers and quickly cover with lid. Steep for 10-20 minutes. The steeping time may vary according to the active plant constituents you wish to extract.
2. Place Chamomile flowers in a pot of cold water. Place tight fitting lid on the pan and slowly bring to a boil over low heat. Upon the boil, immediately remove from the heat. This method makes a stronger medicinal infusion.
3. To make an even stronger infusion follow either step 1 or 2 instructions and then allow to steep overnight.
4. Solar and Lunar infusions. For a solar infusion place Chamomile Flowers in a jar and cover with water. Fasten lid tightly. Place in direct sunlight for several hours. For a lunar infusions place Chamomile flowers in a jar and cover with water. Do not cover. Allow the herb to bath in the moonlight. Drink first thing in morning.

Decoction with roots, seeds or barks, (*example Dandelion Roots*)

When preparing Dandelion root the plant part used is the root only. The method used to extract more tenacious plant material, such as Dandelion roots, is a decoction. Depending on how strong you wish the decoction to be there are three methods of preparing a decoction:

1. Bring a pot of water to a boil. Add Dandelion roots, cover with a tight fitting lid. Simmer for 15-20 minutes. To prevent losing important nutrients, keep pot cover at all times. Remove from heat, strain and drink.
2. Add Dandelion roots to a pot of cold water cover with a tight fitting lid. On low heat bring to a slow boil. Simmer for 15-20 minutes. To prevent losing important nutrients, keep pot cover at all times. Remove from heat, strain and drink.
3. For a stronger decoction prepare step 1 or 2. After removing from heat let sit with the lid on overnight.



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If you wish you may use the same roots several times.

Tinctures

Fresh Herb

- Finely chop or grind herbs to release juice and expose surface area. Do not wash with water
- Fill jar $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ with herb. ~ OR ~ Fill jar $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ with roots.
- Pour alcohol over the herbs. Cover completely!
- Jar should appear full of herb, but herb should move freely when shaken.

Dried Herb

- Use finely cut herbal material.
- Fill jar $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ with herb ~ OR ~ Fill jar $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ with roots.
- Pour alcohol over the herbs. Cover completely!
- Roots will expand by $\frac{1}{2}$ their size when reconstituted!

40% – 50% (80-90 proof vodka)

- “Standard” percentage range for tinctures.
- Good for most dried herbs and fresh herbs that are not juicy.
- Good for extraction of water soluble properties.

67.5% - 70% ($\frac{1}{2}$ 80 proof vodka + $\frac{1}{2}$ 190 proof grain alcohol)

- Extracts most volatile aromatic properties.
- Good for fresh high-moisture herbs like lemon balm, berries, and aromatic roots.
- The higher alcohol percentage will draw out more of the plant juices.

85% – 95% (190 proof grain alcohol)

- Good for gums and resins.
- Extracts aromatics and essential oils that are bound in the plant and do not dissipate easily.
- The alcohol strength can produce a tincture that is not quite pleasant to take.
- Often used for drop dosage medicines.
- Will totally dehydrate herbs.

Store jar in a cool, dry, dark cabinet. Shake several times a week and check your alcohol levels. If the alcohol has evaporated a bit and the herb is not totally submerged, be sure



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to top off the jar with more alcohol. Herbs exposed to air can introduce mold and bacteria into your tincture. Allow the mixture to extract for 6-8 weeks.

Now it's time to squeeze. Drape a damp cheesecloth over a funnel. Pour contents of tincture into an amber glass bottle. Allow to drip, then squeeze and twist until you can twist no more! Optional: Blend herbs into a mush and strain remaining liquid.

The last step is perhaps the most important of all! Once you've strained and bottled your tincture, be sure to label each bottle with as much detail as possible. You will be so happy to have this information to play with next time you tincture the same herb. Don't plan to lean on your sense of taste or smell alone – regardless of how well-honed your organoleptic skills may be. Skipping this step will surely lead to a dusty collection of unused mystery extracts.

Dosage - The general adult dosage of a tincture for a chronic problem is ¼ teaspoon 3x daily. Dosage for acute situations is 1/8 – ¼ teaspoon every half hour to an hour. The dosage of a medicinal tincture for a four year old – Young's Rule = ¼ of adult dosage, Cowling's Rule 1/6 of adult dosage, Dosage chart when adult dose is one teacupful = 3 teaspoons, when adult dose is one teaspoonful = 12 grains.

According to some herbalist an alcohol tincture could be good up to 40 years. You can tell by effect, colour, smell and taste.

Advantages of using herbal tinctures over other types of preparations: Longevity and stability, ease of administering, ease of preparation, storage, cost efficient and almost all herbs tincture well.

The main disadvantages of using herbal tinctures over other types of preparations are people wishing to stay away from alcohol (alcoholics, children).

Oils

Extra Virgin Olive oil is highly recommended for Medicinal Preparations. Olive oil is nutritious and medicinal on its own. Extra Virgin signifies the highest quality of oil and is the first extraction. Medicinal Oils can be used alone, or can form the basis of salves and balms. The general principle is simple: Oil + heat + herbs = Herbal Oil. The most versatile and easy system for measurements is the simpler's method, because it is based on ratios, measurements are referred to as "parts", for instance 1 parts dried herb to 5 parts oil is very common ratio used in herbal oils. The quality and strength of your



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homemade herbal oils depends not so much on exact measurements, as it does on making sure you cover all the plant matter, so no spoilage occurs. There can so much variation in the strength of herbs (due to growing and harvesting conditions, fresh or dried, etc.) that each batch will still be slightly different. In my experience, the length of time the oil macerates, and the amount of heat applied are the biggest determining factors in how strong your oil becomes.

Method:

Solar infusion: Using the 'simples' measure, place the herbs and oil in a glass jar and cover tightly. Place in a warm, sunny window and let infuse for about 2 weeks.

Oven Extraction: Place the herbs and oil in a canning jar, or a container with a tight fitting lid. Put them in a pan with enough water to cover the bottom half of the jar. Turn the oven on the lowest temperature possible and heat for several hours. This is a good method for those days when you are going to be around the house all day. We have better luck with this than the faster double boiler method, because the oil doesn't tend to overheat, and you don't have to watch it so carefully.

Double boiler method: Place herbs and oil in a double boiler, covered with a tightly fitting lid and bring to a slow simmer. SLOWLY heat for 1/2 hour to an hour, checking frequently to make sure oil is not overheating. The lower the heat and longer the infusion time the better quality of oil.

Crockpot method: Place herbs and oils in crockpot and set on lowest possible heat. You will have to experiment with your own crockpot as the strength of the heating element can vary quite a bit, but as a general rule 2 to 4 hours will do it. (my crockpot is just too hot for this method) Electric roasters have an even lower heat source and herbal oils can be left too steep for 2 weeks.

Once the herbs have been infused into the oil, strain the mixture, bring to room temperature. You may then add a few drops of essential oils such as lemon, or rosemary for even more stimulating properties as well as a nice fresh scent. Rebottle and enjoy.

Ointment or salve

A salve is recommended when a soothing emollient is required for a skin problem such as: eczema, cuts diaper rashes, scratches, bed sores, wounds, burns etc. To make an herbal ointment or salve you first need to make an infused oil as above with the herb and strain through muslin cloth.

Measure the oil and return to a clean stainless pot.



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Add 14gr beeswax per 100ml infused oil.

Heat until beeswax has melted.

Stir well with a clean teaspoon or bamboo skewer

Pour into sterilised jars and seal.

Store in a cool dark place.

Herbs commonly used for making ointments include Calendula Flowers, Comfrey (leaf and root), Chickweed and Sage.

Vinegar

Vinegar can be used as a solvent for tinctures used in a preventive and nutritious nature. We think of the vinegar tincture as a food which could be used in salads and as daily tonics. Great for children's formulas and for alcoholics (who should never be given alcohol). A vinegar tincture has a short shelf life, only a year or so. While an alcohol tincture has up to 40 years.

To Make Herbal Vinegar:

Good quality vinegar of 5% or greater acidity.

Fresh cut herbs.

Clean bottles and cap

Imagination.

* Any size or shape bottle will do as long as you have a cork that will fit it. Sterilize the bottles before use, cool and then stuff them with herbs.

You can devise the herbal combinations according to your own cooking needs, taste, and herbs available. Then pour the vinegar over the herbs. Do not heat the vinegar. Any vinegar may be used including:

White or Red wine vinegar

Cider vinegar

White vinegar

Rice wine vinegar

White vinegar is generally used with opal basil, bronze fennel, and chive blossoms because the vinegar will take on a pink tinge from these herbs. Cork the bottles and let stand for several weeks before using.

If the herbal vinegars are intended to be used as gifts, strain off the vinegar and discard the old herbs. If desired, replace with sprigs of new herbs for decoration and re-cork.



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The bottles may be sealed by dipping the cork and lip of the bottle into plain or colored paraffin.

Suggested herb combinations:

Lemon grass/thyme/garlic/orange peel

Chile peppers/garlic

Parsley/sage/rosemary/thyme

Rosemary/orange peel/cloves

Chive blossoms/salad burnet

Raspberries/mint/garlic

Oregano/thyme/parsley/basil

Do not limit yourself to these combinations (this is where your imagination comes in).

They are only suggestions and should not limit the combinations that can be created.

Children

Five common and safe ways to administer herbs to children are – 1. Herbal teas. 2. Herb Candy. 3. Syrups 4. Herbal Baths 5. Mother's milk.

Other useful information on herbs

Wild crafted or certified organic fresh herbs are our first and only pick. The best time to wild craft or pick herbs is the “fresh” hours of the day; those morning hours when the dew has evaporated from the leaves, but the energy is still fresh and new. In the early evening, that hushed time, after the sun has waned but before the evening moisture has settle on the leaves.

It is a good idea to learn to ethically wildcraft. Never take a plant on the “at risk” or “endangered plant” list no matter how much it grows in your location. There is something magical about going outside on a beautiful day to be with nature and bring home some beautiful herbs to help strengthen and heal your family and friends.

Wild crafted or certified organic Dried herbs

The best storage conditions for dried herbs are, a cool temperature, a shaded or dark area out of direct light and as little air as possible in the storage container.



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When purchasing herbs you can be assured of the best quality if you always shop from a reputable supplier or grower. Once you have a supplier, choose the healthiest, freshest and tenderest of fresh herbs. If you are purchasing dried herbs they should look, tasted and smell almost the same as fresh.

There are four ways to test if an herb still retains its potency:

1. Colour – The dried herbs you purchase should be almost the same colour as they were fresh. If you are buying dried green leaves such as spearmint or peppermint they should look as fresh as if they were just picked, never wilted. Colour should be vivid and bright. The dried flowers you purchase should be almost the same colour as fresh. Roots are not as colourful as flowers and leaves but should be their true colours. Roots can range in colours from bright golden green (Golden Seal) grey brown (Echinacea), yellowish brown (Yellow Dock root).
2. Smell – Always smell your herbs before purchasing. All herbs have their own distinctive odour which will help you to determine quality. Remember that not all herbs smell good. Some herbs can even bring tears to your eyes. You will become accustomed to each distinct odour and appreciate the herbs freshness.
3. Taste – Remember that not all herbs taste good. They should be judged on potency of flavour. Are they fresh, strong, vital and distinctive in flavour? Does the taste bring to mind nature? Always taste your herbs before purchasing
4. Effect – All individual herbs in your remedies must be effective. When herbal remedies are made with care and quality of herbs and taken properly they are very effective. If you are finding a remedy not to be working look first to the quality of the herbs.

When working with herbs use, glass, or stainless steel pots. Aluminum and/or copper pots or utensils should never be used in the preparation of herbs. These metals are harmful to humans and the property of the herbs.

Spring

Harvesting roots, flowers and herb

Fiddle heads – vegetable

Coltsfoot flowers – colds, respiratory

Chives – herb for cooking

Dandelion – detox, water retention and wine! Yummy

Violet flowers – edible

Lamb's quarters - edible



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Summer

Harvesting, flowers and herb...making pesto

Tiger lily – edible

Red Clover – edible, menopausal women, blood purifier

Alfalfa – edible, very nutritious

Purslane – edible

Ginkgo leaves – recommended for anyone over 40 – circulatory, memory

Elder flowers – syrup and fritters

Fall

What can't you make in the fall... We get the gift of a repeat of springs flowers – dandelion for example

Harvesting roots flowers and herb

Echinacea – colds, builds immune system

Dandelion – detox

Garlic – immune

Tubers – Jerusalem artichoke

Winter

Enjoying the bounties of spring, summer and fall!

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If you wish to broaden your herbal knowledge, please ask us about our herbal workshops, herb courses and herbwalks! For a digital copy of this information;

e-mail penelopebeaudrow@gmail.com