

# Herbs

## For Health And Happiness



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# 1. The History Of Herbs

What is a herb? The dictionary says: “a plant whose stem is not woody, which dies down to the ground after flowering; a plant whose leaves etc are used for food, medicine, scent or flavor.”

Herbs have been used since the dawn of the human race. Even before people began to cook on fires, herbs were probably being harvested and used raw for food or medicinal purposes.

Native Americans, Aboriginal Australians and many other peoples following an undeveloped way of life all use herbs extensively. There was a herb for almost every ailment or need. Sometimes they were used in witchcraft too, although the dividing line between witchcraft and medicine was often blurred, as in the example of the ‘witch doctor’. Originally, people had no understanding of the causes of disease such as bacteria, viruses, etc. They believed sickness was caused by supernatural forces, either evil spirits or spells placed by other people. Therefore, a person who knew how to cure sickness was believed to be dealing with evil spirits and practicing magic. This association persisted even after people began to understand the biological causes of disease.

In Europe many people who were branded as witches were probably simple herbal medicine practitioners. Herbal medicine was

outlawed in many of these countries by governments influenced by the new ‘scientific’ and male-dominated form of medicine.

Herbs, along with spices, were valuable commodities in trade in former times. From around 114 BC until 1400 AD, the ‘silk road’ was used to trade herbs and spices between Europe and Asia. Europeans imported ginger, cinnamon and other spices, and exported herbs like sage that were much in demand in Asia for their aromatic and medicinal properties. This kind of trading led to communication between civilizations that could be said to form the basis of the ‘world culture’ of today.

Chinese traditional medicine is still today based mainly on the use of herbs, but in Western culture they did not start to make a serious comeback for any purpose other than cooking until the 1960s and 1970s, when cultural and ecological movements started to consider adopting the best features of pre-industrial society in our post-industrial age.

Most of the well known herbs can easily be grown in a garden. Because they are mostly small plants, even a very small garden such as a roof garden is sufficient. Herbs are ancient, natural plants that grew wild, so they are hardy and resistant to disease when grown in a soil and climate that is similar to their native region. Many of them can also be grown indoors.

Of course they are also used to flavor dishes in cooking. Some dishes and sauces such as pesto and mint sauce are based around one particular herb. Others, like pumpkin pie and sausages, get most of their individual flavoring from the blend of herbs that is used.

Herbs have been in our lives, our homes, our gardens and especially in our kitchens, forever!

## 2. Your Own Herb Garden

Many of us have childhood memories of playing in a garden on a sunny day with the scent of lavender, rosemary and mint accompanying our every step. Just a whiff of these scents will bring a wave of nostalgia for childhood summers, fairy tales and times gone by.

The good news is that we can create our own fairy tale setting right here and now by planting a herb garden in even the smallest back yard.

Herbs are natural ‘weeds’ or wild plants and unlike many flowering plants they have not been bred or mutated into something more pleasing to the eye. They remain in their original state and as such they are most often hardy and easy to grow with a natural resistance to disease. You can avoid using chemical pesticides on them and if you can do the same with the rest of your garden, you will have ‘organic’ herbs that you can safely eat when any superficial dust and insect matter have been washed away.

The location of your herbs is important. They need to be close to the house where you will constantly see them. Under the kitchen window is great. This way, you will remember to water them and you will not have far to go when you need a little flavoring in the

middle of cooking dinner. Even if it is raining, just a step outside and you will have your herbs. If they are at the far end of the garden, on the other hand, they are more likely to be neglected and unused.

Many herbs are small plants that do not require much space, but beware of them spreading uncontrollably. Lavender can become huge hedges, mint can pop up all over your lawn, and many others will simply grow and grow if they are happy in your garden. Give them plenty of space and be prepared to control them firmly when necessary.

Your first decision will be whether to grow your herbs all together or mix them around the garden with other plants. There is a lot to be said for having all your herbs within easy reach in one bed, and if you do this be sure not to make the bed narrow enough that you can harvest the leaves you need without damaging other plants.

On the other hand, plants in the wild tend to grow with certain other ‘companion’ plants and if you mimic this by considering compatibility in planting your herbs, all of your garden may benefit. Here are some examples:

- Parsley, tomatoes and asparagus is a good combination. Parsley also grows well with lettuce.



- Sage and tarragon are said to grow so well together that you will have a more intense flavor from both herbs if you mix them rather than keeping each separate.

- Dill does well with cucumbers. However, do not try to grow dill with potatoes or cabbage, as they are incompatible.

Many herbs have other helpful properties. Nasturtiums are good next to fruit trees to keep aphids away. Lavender does the same for roses. Thyme along the edge of a bed will help to deter snails. Marigold and borage provide saponins, important nutrients for the soil.

Herbs are not all leaf. Sage, lavender, borage, feverfew, chamomile and marigold are all examples of herbs which will flower beautifully in your garden. If you have plenty of space, you may want to plant more of these than you need, because they are so attractive.

Of course, you will want to plant smaller growing herbs at the front of any bed with larger plants behind, both for ease of reach and for a better display.

Most herbs enjoy a sunny spot although there are exceptions. However, it is better not to have them in full sun all day, or they

will mature and turn to seed very quickly. Once they are forming seeds, all of their goodness and energy goes into the seed so unless your aim is to produce seeds (e.g. with coriander or pepper) you should take your main harvest before that happens, while the flavor and nutrients are still in the leaf (or flowers, with chamomile).

Of course you can also grow herbs in containers. Many will thrive in a small container. Some, like mint, can be grown in pots buried into the soil to prevent them spreading uncontrollably. Others grow so well in pots that containers have been designed specifically for them - you can grow parsley in a special clay 'parsley pot', if you wish.

If you use wooden containers, be sure they have not been treated with any damaging chemicals. Anything used in the treatment will enter the soil, be taken into the plant and eventually end up in your stomach, so it is worth taking some care with this. If you want to grow your herbs organically you may prefer to use clay pots.

Be sure that the containers are well drained, because most herbs like a fairly dry environment. This means having drainage holes on the underside of the pot, and also placing a layer of large gravel or similar before you add any soil, to help with drainage. However, containers do need frequent watering because the soil will not hold

water as well as in a garden bed. Let them get a little dry right before harvest to keep the nutrients strong in the leaves.

The next question is which herbs to choose. If you are starting from zero, do not be tempted to plant too many different herbs. In the first year it is better just to choose four or five plants that you know you will use and enjoy. Later, you can add more with the benefit of experience.

If you are starting your plants from seed, most of them will be best in seed trays indoors at first. Use at least 2 inches depth of potting soil. Don't forget to label them! The trays need to be well watered and until the seeds have sprouted you can leave them covered to hold in the moisture. Once shoots appear, they will need light. However you can replace the lid at night at first, to keep them warm.

You will probably have a lot of tiny seedlings but do not start to thin them out until the first real leaves are fully formed. At that point you can see which are the weaker plants and remove these, to leave just the strongest ones, preferably about 2 inches apart. As they grow bigger you can transfer them into individual small containers.

Start your seeds in the late winter or early spring, and start putting them outside for a few hours every day before you transplant them into the garden. They need some warmth in the soil before they are planted, and they also need to acclimatize to the outside air and temperature.

Alternatively, if you do not want the trouble of starting your own seedlings, you can buy small plants that are ready to be planted outdoors. If they were kept indoors at the store, you will still need to leave them in their pots for a few days while you acclimatize them to your garden by putting them out during the day and bringing them in at night.

Fennel and cilantro are examples of plants that do not like to be transplanted, so with these it is best to plant the seeds directly outside.

Once outdoors, herbs will benefit from rich, fertile soil. This means adding fertilizer or compost at least once a year. Choose an organic fertilizer if you aim for organically-grown herbs. You can also collect fallen leaves and spread them over the earth as mulch during the winter, or dig them into the soil. Dead leaves make wonderful compost.

### 3. Harvesting And Storing Your Herbs

It is a marvelous experience to see your herbs growing in your own garden or even at the window of your apartment, and then pick them to use in food or teas. In the early summer, you can take a few leaves as you need them, but when the time comes for harvesting larger quantities of leaves you will want to consider how to keep them to use through the winter until next year's plants begin to grow.

Generally, the part of the plant that is most commonly used as a herb is the leaf. Most plants will stop producing new leaves when they begin to flower, so to get the biggest crop you should pick plenty of leaves often, 'pruning' the plant to stop it from flowering early. However, if you do not need much from the plant and enjoy seeing its flowers, you may want to take a main harvest later, when it begins to flower.

Plants are either annual (they die each year, and you must start over from new seeds the next spring) or perennial (they live from year to year). Most perennials are herbaceous, which means that they die back in the winter and then have new growth in the spring. With annuals, you can harvest the whole plant as early as you like, unless you want to collect your own seeds. With perennials it is better to let some leaves remain on the plant so that it has the

power to photosynthesize (benefit from the sunlight) until it is ready to die back for winter.

Herbs are easy enough to collect, but when it comes to storing them, a little more thought is required. Of course you will use some fresh and they will keep in the refrigerator for around a week, but to store for the winter you have two main options: drying or freezing.

## **Drying Herbs**

If you plan to dry your herbs, don't take small cuttings because it is easier to deal with long stems or even whole plants. Cut stems that are up to 10 inches long, shake off any insects and remove any diseased leaves.

Most people dry herbs by hanging them upside down in a warm, dry, well-ventilated area so that as much of the nutrients as possible go to the leaves. It is best to hang them indoors so that you know they will stay clean, and do not hang them at a window where they will be in full sunlight.

To hang them, first remove any leaves that are attached to the bottom 2 inches of the stem, then tie your stems together with string or cotton sewing thread. Put each bundle into a brown paper

bag that you have cut ventilation holes into. Tie the top of the bag around the stems, so that the ends of the stems stick out of the bag, and use the end of the string to hang them upside down in your chosen spot.

They can take up to 2 weeks to dry completely. It is essential to wait until they are completely dry, because if you store them while any moisture remains in the leaves they will go moldy.

When they are dry, you can strip the leaves off the stems for easier storage and keep them in glass jars or whatever airtight container is convenient for you. If you are using glass jars, choose dark glass that will not allow the light to affect the herbs.

The second way to dry herbs is to spread them out on screens. For most people this is less convenient. You need to be sure the air is getting all around the leaves, and the best way to do this is to strip the leaves off before drying, and spread them individually. So unless you only have a tiny herb garden, you need a lot of space for this method.

Although the plants are very distinctive while they are growing, once they are dry it is much harder to tell one leaf from another. Be sure to keep the plants separate so that you do not risk mixing them up later.

While they do need to be dried in a warm environment, do not artificially heat them to try to dry them faster (e.g. by putting them in the oven). Even on the lowest heat setting, this will destroy some of the essential oils.

Dried herbs will have a stronger flavor than fresh because with the removal of water from the leaves, the essential oil becomes more concentrated.

## **Freezing Herbs**

Freezing is generally believed to be a better way to preserve the essential oil in herbs, so that you have more of their wonderful flavor and aroma.

Freezing fresh herbs is simple but unless you have a very large freezer it needs to be done in small batches. One method to strip the leaves off the stems and spread them out individually on a cookie sheet or on paper, as for the screen drying method above. This will not take long and as soon as they are frozen you can bag them and spread out the next batch to freeze.

When you thaw the herbs, they will not look like they did when fresh. This is because of the action of the water content inside the



leaves as it freezes and then thaws. But don't worry, they are still fine to use as if they were fresh.

You can also freeze them into 'herb ice cubes'. This involves chopping them and placing them in an ice cube tray to which you then add water. Save the cubes and use them one by one in cooking.

It is also possible to freeze herbs that have already been dried. This could be good if you want to keep them for a long time, if you are having trouble getting them completely dry, or if you do not have any dry place to store them. However, it makes the work of drying them a little pointless, so this is probably best used if you have bought or been given a large quantity of dried herbs.

## 4. Cooking With Herbs

If you cook at all, you know that most types of food taste better with seasoning of some kind. This may be simple salt and pepper or a complicated blend of herbs or spices. In fact, there is often not much difference between a herb and a spice. The herb cilantro is the leaves of the coriander plant whose seeds are considered a spice, used in curries. Pepper, which we think of as a spice, also comes from a herbal plant called *Piper Nigrum*, native to India. Black, white and green pepper are all made from its berries at different stages of ripeness.

Other herbs used frequently in cooking include oregano, sage, rosemary, basil and parsley. Some of these are used particularly in dishes from a certain country or region where the plant grows wild, and these culinary uses of herbs are probably many centuries old.

Herbs, like leafy vegetables, contain virtually no calories. Although essential oils can and are extracted from them, their fat content when eaten in leaf or dried form is virtually nil. They give their flavor to dishes and their medicinal properties to us in the form of extracts and oils, and nothing else.

Many people do not know that there is even a herb that can be used to sweeten dishes instead of sugar. It is called Stevia or Sweetleaf and it is native to South and Central America. You can buy this as a food supplement in many countries although the FDA has not yet accepted it as a food. Although it tastes sweet it has virtually no calories and does not affect blood glucose levels, making it very attractive for many diabetics as well as dieters and anyone who prefers to avoid consuming refined sugar.

Many of the popular commercial sauces and meat marinades take their flavor from natural herbs. Even many food additives are in fact herbal extracts. Often these are so highly processed that any nutritional or health properties are completely gone, but the taste is there.

Expert cooks have two rules for the use of herbs in the kitchen:

1. A little goes a long way
2. Experiment!

Using either too many different herbs in a dish, or putting in too much of one herb, can ruin the dish completely, resulting in either an unpalatable mixture of tastes or an overwhelming flavor that leaves us unable to taste the natural flavor of the food. A herb should complete and complement the main ingredients in your cooking, not dominate them.

Experimenting with herbs in cooking can open the door to a new world of culinary delights. Many people, when they see herbs mentioned in a recipe, add a pinch of the dried herb from a glass jar long past its ‘consume before’ date. Next time, why not try using the fresh herb? It may taste like a completely different recipe!

Of course herbs can also be used to make herbal teas. The leaves you use can be fresh, frozen or dried. Frozen leaves keep their flavor better than dried, so when you are harvesting a whole plant, freeze it for best preservation. Remember to divide the leaves into small quantities so that you can easily defrost a small amount each time.

When making herbal tea, use water that is not quite boiling. Either boil the water and leave it to stand a few minutes before pouring onto your leaves, or mix the boiling water with a little cold water before adding your leaves. This way the enzymes and other sources of goodness in the herbs are more likely to survive.

## 5. Medicinal Properties Of Herbs

As we have already seen, herbs have been used for medicinal purposes for as long as we can imagine. In 1991, two mountain walkers in the Alps in Europe discovered the well-preserved body of a man who turned out to be around 5,300 years old. Along with his weapons and tools, this neolithic man (nicknamed Ötzi) was carrying a plant that is known to have medicinal properties.

The question that springs to mind when we hear of stories like this, is how did these people know that a certain plant would cure a certain disease? They had no way of analyzing their scientific properties. Trial and error is often assumed to be the answer, but although it is easy to see how a tribe might discover poisonous plants by trial and error, finding cures is much more difficult. With all the plants that there are, and all the plants that would normally have been consumed in their diets, it seems much more likely that they had some instinctive knowledge of these matters which we, with all our technology, have lost. Animals seem to have an instinctive craving for certain plants when they are sick - perhaps people were once the same.

These days, more and more people are turning to natural forms of medicine as an alternative to commercially-produced drugs. Often

they experience effective treatment with fewer allergic reactions and side effects than with conventional drugs.

Other times, drug manufacturers are turning to herbs to isolate the ‘active ingredients’ that will help to treat a particular disease or condition. However, holistic herbal practitioners maintain that it is better to use the whole essential oil than to mess with nature’s balance by isolating ingredients and putting them into a factory-produced tablet.

We must include a second warning here. The information in this book is produced for your general interest and entertainment. It is not medical advice. Medical advice can only be given by a qualified practitioner who can assess you personally. The statements in this book are a matter of opinion rather than fact. Many of the described remedies are unproven and some could be dangerous for some people. No person should use any of the herbal remedies outlined in this book without first consulting a doctor or qualified herbal medicine practitioner. Pregnant or breastfeeding women and small children should not take any remedy unless it is expressly prescribed by their doctor.

At their simplest level, herbal remedies have been used by most every person on this earth. Who has not used plant leaves to help relieve poison ivy or nettle rashes, taken chamomile tea to aid

sleep, or something similar? Even a morning cup of tea to help us wake up could be described as a herbal remedy.

The effectiveness of any herbal remedy varies from person to person depending on many individual factors including their age, fitness, diet and general levels of health. Herbal medicine is not ‘one size fits all’.

Plants have effects, and if they are taken in certain forms they have stronger effects. However, there is always the possibility of an allergic reaction. This can happen with natural herbs just as it can with foods or with certain drugstore medications. This is another reason why it is important to see a qualified practitioner before trying any self medication using herbs.

Having said that, herbal medicines are now immensely popular and there are many qualified herbalists that you can consult if you are interested in this form of treatment. Most herbal medicines are available to buy as capsules, oils, or creams depending on their application.

## Preparation Of Remedies

It is also possible to create remedies at home from herbs that are grown in the yard. Be aware that in this case, as there is no way to analyze the finished preparation, you cannot know how strong it is. Unless something is safe for virtually unlimited use, this is risky. However, where this is done, there are four main ways:

**Infusion** - this basically means creating a tea from your herb, where you use the flowers or leaves. Take 1 oz of dried herbs or 2.5 oz fresh for each pint of water. Use water that is recently boiled but not actually boiling. Cover it so that the essential oils do not evaporate. Leave it to stand for 10-20 minutes, then strain. Drink warm.

**Decoction** – this is a way to extract herbal remedies from seeds, roots, barks and berries. Take 1 oz of dried herb or 2 oz of fresh for each 1.5 pints of water. Put the herb directly in cold water in a saucepan. Bring to boiling, cover and leave simmering for one hour. Strain and drink warm or cold.

In most cases the dose of either an infusion or a decoction would be one cup, three times a day. Sweeten with honey if desired. The liquids will keep in a cool place for up to 12 hours, and can be gently reheated to be drunk warm.



**Poultice** - the poultice is a traditional way of applying herbal remedies that allows the ingredients to be absorbed through the skin. Mix 1 tablespoon of the herb in powdered form with a little hot water (or a little infusion of the same or a compatible herb) to make a paste. Put the paste between two pieces of sterile lint or bandage and apply to the affected area, as hot as possible without burning.

**Compress** - here the lint or bandage is soaked in a lotion or tincture containing the herb or a mixture of herbs, before being applied to the affected area. It is difficult to regulate the dosage and this form of application is mainly used by qualified practitioners.

## Remedial Properties Of Each Herb

Now let us look at the best known medical properties of individual herbs.

### **Agnus Castus**

Helps regulate progesterone levels in women, easing menopausal symptoms plus some menstrual problems such as breast tenderness and menstrually-related migraines and acne. Do not use if taking HRT. Can be combined with Black Cohosh, Sage and Feverfew as appropriate.

### **Aloe Vera**

Aloe gel is a wonderful skin treatment. Can be used on burns, scars, wounds, acne, sunburn, varicose veins and ulcerated skin. Internally, can ease gastritis, peptic ulcers and irritable bowel syndrome.

### **Arnica**

Arnica cream helps with bruising. Can also restore hair loss. Do not use the cream on broken skin, do not take arnica internally (except in tiny homeopathic doses), and never use undiluted arnica as it can be toxic.

### **Anise**

Decoction of seeds with honey to relieve a cough.

### **Basil**

Infusion to drink for migraines. Douche with it for yeast infection.

Pregnant women should not have any basil.

### **Black Cohosh**

Regulates oestrogen production in women, helping with menstrual problems such as cramps, and useful during the menopause for reducing hot flashes and menopausal depression. Also helps with rheumatoid arthritis, some types of headache, osteoporosis, high blood pressure and tinnitus.

### **Borage**

Stimulates the adrenal glands, useful in dangerous or stressful situations and for anxiety, depression and grief, giving us the courage to go on. Also helps with rheumatoid arthritis and acts as a diuretic and cleanser of the kidneys.

### **Buchu Leaf**

Works as an antiseptic in the urinary system, relieving cystitis, thrush, prostate problems and all urinary tract diseases. Also reduces catarrh and intestinal wind and bloating.

### **Caraway**

Regulates menstruation and helps with cramps.

### **Cayenne**

Relieves arthritis pain. Helps regulate blood sugar.

### **Celery**

Sedative. Relieves hypertension. Helps the kidneys to detoxify the body.

### **Celery Seed**

Eases arthritis pain, including osteoarthritis, and relieves gout with regular use. Helps with urinary tract infections such as cystitis. Can also ease chest problems such as asthma and bronchitis.

### **Chamomile Flowers**

Mildly sedative, helping with sleep problems. It also has anti-inflammatory properties and is very useful for digestive problems including gastro-intestinal irritation, ulcers, colitis and irritable bowel. It can relieve cramps either related to indigestion or menstrual cramps. It also makes the body more receptive to other remedies, working well in combination.

### **Chickweed**

It may come as a surprise to many gardeners to hear that this well-known and rampant weed has some good qualities! Chickweed cream can be very effective for eczema and other dry, irritated skin, as well as minor burns, stings and scars. It also helps relieve rheumatism.

### **Chicory**

Dissolves gallstones. Cleans the liver.

### **Cilantro**

Antibacterial. Relieves stomach upsets of bacterial origin. Helps to preserve meat.

### **Cinnamon**

Helpful for bronchitis. For persistent coughs, use 4 drops of the essential oil in a bowl of boiling water and inhale the steam.

### **Clove**

Clove oil is a wonderful remedy for toothache. Cloves also help against alcoholism.

### **Comfrey**

This herb contains allantoin, which aids growth and healing in cartilage, bone and muscle. It has been used to help heal fractures and sprains for centuries. Reduces swelling. For external use only - apply as a poultice. Comfrey can also help with acne and scars - mix a teaspoonful of powdered comfrey root with water to make a paste and apply it as a face pack, leaving on for as long as possible.

### **Cramp Bark**

Useful for any kind of cramps. In the case of menstrual cramps, start taking it a few days before menstruation is due. Also helps with menopausal aches and pains. Can also be used to help control the bladder in cases of incontinence or bedwetting, and for irritable bowel syndrome.

### **Damiana**

This Mexican herb was prized as an aphrodisiac and traditionally is mainly used for male sexual problems including impotence and premature ejaculation. It can also be helpful in stimulating the reproductive organs in women and relieving menstrual pains. Also used for depression linked to nervous exhaustion, and urinary infections.

### **Dandelion**

Dandelion leaves are used in salad in many countries. It is a great detoxifier, helping the liver, kidneys and gallbladder to eliminate waste. For warts, rub the wart with the white juice from a dandelion leaf or stem twice a day for a few weeks.

### **Devil's Claw**

Eases the pain of arthritis and rheumatism, and persistent back pain. Works as an anti-inflammatory, also useful for fevers. Stimulates the digestion.

### **Dill**

Insomnia.

### **Echinacea Root**

Boosts the immune system, with anti-viral and anti-bacterial effects. Good for flu, colds, throat infections, tonsillitis, and even ME (myalgic encephalomyelitis). Also for boils, tooth abscess and acne where body toxicity is the cause.

### **Fennel**

Bad breath.

### **Fenugreek**

Soothing for the digestive system, relieving problems such as colitis, ulcers, irritable bowel, gastro-enteritis and diarrhea. Fenugreek also has a reputation as an aphrodisiac and the seeds are used for male impotence in China.

### **Feverfew**

Anti-inflammatory. Take small doses as a preventive treatment for migraine, especially menstruation-related migraines. Also effective for minor headaches, hangovers, and arthritic and rheumatic pain.

### **Garlic**

Antibiotic, especially effective for bronchitis and other chest infections. Reduces blood cholesterol levels, reducing the risk of heart attacks. Thins the blood, helping to prevent strokes. Antiseptic and antifungal, helpful for athlete's foot, infectious rashes and warts. Contraindications: may irritate the digestive tract in some people; not to be taken by nursing mothers as it can cause colic in the baby.

### **Ginger**

Calms the gastro-intestinal tract, preventing travel sickness and nausea. May be useful for morning sickness in pregnancy (check with your doctor). Eases symptoms of colds, flu, bronchitis and whooping cough. Also thins the blood to reduce stroke risk.



### **Ginkgo Leaf**

Aids memory and concentration by helping circulation in the brain, particularly for seniors. Is used to treat dementia. Antidepressant, helps to prevent strokes and thrombus, and relieves tinnitus. Taken by many multiple sclerosis sufferers.

### **Ginseng (Korean)**

Relieves stress. Although generally a stimulant (including reputed aphrodisiac qualities for men) it will not prevent sleep if the body needs it. Improves health and spirits generally, especially in old age. Do not take with caffeine or alcohol, and do not use if you have hypertension. Siberian Ginseng is a milder form, but still should not be taken in these circumstances.

### **Golden Seal**

Helpful for any problems with mucous membranes including respiratory ailments. Eases thrush in women, and athlete's foot. Helps with peptic ulcers, liver problems and urinary infections, and stimulates the appetite.

### **Hawthorn Berry**

Used under medical supervision for coronary heart disease and angina. Regulates blood pressure and helps stabilize irregular heartbeat. Not to be taken without medical advice.

### **Horseradish**

Eases chest congestion. Relieves muscular aches.

### **Hyssop**

Anti-inflammatory, widely used by asthma sufferers. Also helpful for hay fever and for colds (at the early stages). Relieves the nerves, preventing nervous diarrhea, and helps with nervous exhaustion, anxiety, depression, grief and guilt.

### **Lavender**

Lavender oil can help relieve chilblains. Add a pinch of lavender flower to other mild herbal teas as a tonic, and to lime flower tea for migraine.

### **Lemon Balm (Melissa)**

Calming and cheering, lemon balm can relieve mild depression, irritability, anxiety and panic. Can calm palpitations. Good for digestive problems caused by stress or anxiety. Externally, helps with herpes sores including cold sores.

### **Licorice**

Balances the nervous system. Not to be used long term as it can damage the liver.

### **Lime Flower**

For restlessness and nausea. Also helps with insomnia and migraine.

### **Marigold (Calendula)**

Relieves skin problems including acne, rashes, cuts and sunburn. Essential oil can help relieve cold sores. Also helps with fungal infections including athlete's foot, thrush and ringworm. Can be used for liver problems, including hepatitis.

### **Milk Thistle**

For liver disorders, including all types of hepatitis, problems resulting from alcohol abuse, or to assist and protect the liver during chemotherapy (as always, discuss with your doctor). Also useful against melancholic depression which is associated with the liver.

### **Mint**

There are many different species of mint. Garden mint tends to be milder than peppermint in its effects. Relieves heartburn and flatulence, helps stomach aches, nausea and travel sickness. Useful for head colds and flu, sore throats, headaches and eye infections. Antibacterial. Can help to lower a high temperature by provoking sweating.

### **Mustard**

Relieves some types of heartburn. Helps with muscle sprains.

### **Nutmeg**

Helps with indigestion.

### **Oregano**

Reduces fever. Relieves indigestion, flatulence and bloating. Helps to regulate menstruation.

### **Parsley**

High in vitamin C, but only if eaten raw. Also aids digestion, acts as a decongestant and diuretic, helps with bad breath, and cleans the blood.

### **Passiflora**

A natural, non-addictive tranquilizer for anxiety, irritability, insomnia, excitability and panic. Antispasmodic, sometimes prescribed for convulsions, useful for hypertension, menstrual cramps and asthma.

### **Raspberry Leaf**

High in calcium, useful for preventing osteoporosis. Heals wounds, relieves sore throats, canker sores and gingivitis (gum disease). For women, can control heavy menstrual bleeding and traditionally used

in pregnancy to prevent nausea and miscarriage and relax the cervix in preparation for childbirth (as always, discuss with your doctor). Also good for post-natal depression.

### **Red Clover**

Relieves eczema and psoriasis. Used in treatment of some cancers.

### **Rosemary**

Stimulant for the heart and nervous system. Improves blood circulation to the brain and scalp, helping with migraines, hair loss, and to improve memory, especially for examinations. Helps with convalescence after a serious illness and increases optimism.

### **Sage**

For all throat and gum infections. Also for menopausal hot flashes. Helps with irritable bowel and diarrhea. Relieves insect bites and stings. Is said to help with failing memory in old age. A versatile herb!

### **Slippery Elm**

Good for digestive problems and disorders of the colon including constipation, colitis and hemorrhoids. Also for chest infections - colds, flu, bronchitis, pleurisy and even tuberculosis. Not to be taken in pregnancy.

### **St John's Wort**

Well known as an antidepressant. Also antiviral, used to treat flu, hepatitis and HIV. Can have side effects - only to be taken under medical supervision.

### **Tarragon**

Helps with insomnia and depression.

### **Tea Tree**

Tea tree oil is extracted from the leaves of a plant native to Australia. It has wonderful antiseptic powers and is also antifungal and rejuvenating. Helps with all surface problems of the body whether internal or external - problems of the skin including acne, mouth, sinus, bronchial passages, plus ear infections and dandruff.

### **Thyme**

Antibiotic. Helps with asthma and respiratory tract infections.

### **Tumeric**

Antioxidant.

### **Valerian**

Tranquilizer and sleep remedy. Helpful in panic attacks. However, can have the side effect of causing headaches in some people.

### **Vervain**

Relieves depression, especially after a viral illness like flu.

### **Willow Bark**

The active ingredient in willow bark was extracted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and found to be a very effective pain reliever. It is now produced synthetically as aspirin. Willow bark has the pain relieving and anti-inflammatory properties of aspirin, but does not thin the blood. Good for relieving arthritic pain.

### **Witch Hazel**

Astringent, for external use on skin wounds, bruises and sprains. Helps rejuvenate sagging skin.

### **Yarrow**

Aids blood clotting, helpful for wounds and nose bleeds. Used for some cardio-vascular conditions under medical supervision. Relieves catarrh and other symptoms of colds and flu.

## 6. In Conclusion

Herbs grow all over the world. They are simply a category of wild plants: the most natural form of food and medicine that we have. They may be valued for their beauty, flavor or health-giving properties, or they may be reviled as weeds, but we can always appreciate their presence and their role in our natural world.

Understanding herbs can allow us to appreciate the value of having things naturally growing all around us all of the time. We do not think about it much, but even if we cannot eat or use it, every little plant growing from a crack in a wall is providing us with a tiny portion of oxygen. If we learn to be grateful for this, we can put aside the stress of our modern world for a moment and enter another dimension.

In the same way, having our own herb garden, or even a few plants growing in a window, can be enlightening and calming. When you are taking care of your plants, watering them, pruning them and harvesting them with love and appreciation, all anxiety and stress can melt away. The sight and scent of the natural herbs seems to flick a relaxation switch in our mind.

Starting with a small number of herbs and gradually increasing the size and variety of the herb garden, we can build up a beautiful,



healthy and heart-warming aspect to our homes. Mixed in with flower beds and vegetables they bring blossom and scent to the whole garden. As you get to know the herbs that thrive in your own soil, and which ones you can use most of in the kitchen or for teas, your garden will evolve and grow to give you more of the best. It is a wonderful feeling to know that you can make fresh pesto any time you want from basil leaves that you have grown yourself.

Once you have a stock of dried herbs, you will find yourself using them more and more. Be inventive: while certain herbs are well known for certain dishes, that does not stop you trying others or experimenting by adding a small quantity of another complementary herb or spice. You can also look out for new recipes that include the herbs that you grow, and extend your tastes and culinary abilities that way.

If you find yourself with a bumper crop, you can also use both fresh and dried herbs as inexpensive gifts. Put some thought into the selection and add pretty packaging and you will have a gift that anyone who cooks will adore.

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## **Websites For Further Reading**

The Herb Society of America:

<http://www.herbsociety.org/>

US National Institutes of Health, herbal medicine section:

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/herbalmedicine.html>

National Herb Garden:

<http://www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/collections/herb.html>