

Making Herbal Medicines

Each herb has one or more optimum methods of preparation; each method extracts different properties from the herb. The quality of an herbal preparation is dependent on the quality of the herb used.

Drying Herbs

- Pick when there is no moisture on the plant and do not wash the plant (roots are the exception)
- Dry the herbs immediately after picking, in small bunches or spread out so parts don't touch
- Dry them in a dark and well-ventilated area
- Keep the herbs as whole, cool, and dark as possible during storage. Stored well, dried herbs last about two years.

Infusions

An infusion is a strong, medicinal tea made from dried herbs.

- Place an ounce (a large handful) of dried herb into a quart mason jar. If you like, you may add some mint leaves or licorice root for added flavor.
- Fill the jar with boiling water, cap it, and let it steep for the following time:
 - Roots & Barks: Brew eight hours or more
 - Leaves: Brew four hours or more
 - Flowers: Brew two hours
 - Seeds: Brew thirty minutes
- Then strain out the plant material, compost it, and drink one or more cups of the liquid daily. Infusions are delicious warm or cold. They keep several days in the refrigerator.

Tinctures

Fresh plants make tinctures far superior to dried plants.

- Identify and pick the plant parts you desire to tincture
- Look through the plant material and discard any damaged parts.
- Do not wash any part of the plant except roots.
- Flowers, berries, and most leaves can be used whole. Tough leaves and stalks can be chopped coarsely. Roots can be chopped with a knife or blended with the alcohol.
- Fill a jar to the top with the plant material, packed down.
- Then fill the jar to the top again, with 100 proof vodka,
- Cap the jar tightly.
- Label the jar with the name of the plant, the part of the plant used, the type of spirit used, and the date. Example:
Violet leaves, 100 proof vodka, April 30 2002.
- Top off the liquid level the next day
- Allow plant and alcohol to mingle together for six weeks or more.
- Strain out the plant material, and it is ready to use.

Vinegars

Since vinegar is more acidic than alcohol or water it is the best instrument to extract iron, calcium, and the full range of micronutrients. Vinegar is also an excellent way to extract edible flowers and seasoning herbs.

Follow the instructions for tinctures, with these changes:

- Fill your jar to the top with room temperature vinegar.
- Use apple cider vinegar, wine vinegar, rice vinegar, but not white vinegar.
- Use cork or plastic to cap all your vinegars, because vinegar rusts metal. A piece of waxed paper or plastic between the jar and a metal lid works.
- Herbal vinegars are delicious in salad dressing, on cooked greens, or marinades. Some people prefer a tablespoon of vinegar in water as a daily tonic.

Infused Oils

- Pick the plant on a dry, sunny day.
- Discard any diseased or soiled parts.
- Do not wash the plant material, and use it when freshly picked, with the following exceptions:
 - Roots: Wash, chop, and dry for 4 hours in sun and/or good ventilation.
 - Plants that have high water content (such as comfrey and calendula): Wilt the fresh herbs for 12 hours.
- Chop the plant coarsely.
- Completely fill a clean, very dry jar with the chopped herb.
- Slowly pour oil into the jar, poking with a chopstick or knife to release air and make sure oil penetrates into all layers of the herb.
- Add enough oil to thoroughly cover all the plant material and fill the jar to the very rim. Cover with a lid.
- Label the jar with the name of the plant, the plant part used, the kind of oil used, and the date. Example: Plantain leaves, Greek olive oil, April 2002.
- Keep the jar of infusing oil at normal room temperature and on a surface that will not be ruined by seeping oil.
- Decant the infused oil in six weeks. The plants can be left in the oil longer, but have a tendency to mold and spoil if not kept very cool.
- Oil held in the plant material after the decanting can be extracted. Put small handfuls into a clean kitchen towel or cotton cloth; squeeze and wring out the oil.
- Allow the decanted oil to sit for several days while the water in it (from the fresh plant material) settles to the bottom of the jar. Then carefully pour off the oil, leaving the water behind.
- Store at cool room temperature or refrigerate.

Salves

- Pour one ounce of infused oil into a very small pan.
- Grate a tablespoon of beeswax and add it to the oil.
- Place the pan on low heat
- Stir constantly until the beeswax is totally melted. This rarely takes more than a minute or two.
- Pour the liquid into your salve jar and allow it to cool and solidify.
- If the consistency is too hard, remelt and add more infused oil.
- If the consistency is too soft, remelt and add more beeswax.