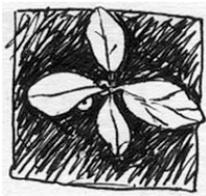


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Harvesting 101: Leaves, Flowers, Roots & Bark



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PLEASE READ: *The information in this handout has not been approved by the FDA and does not in any way intend to diagnose or prescribe. Always consult with your health practitioner before taking any remedy.*

Above this, I also recommend that you...

1. Research an herb in at least three good sources before ingesting it (see website for sources),
2. Listen to your body/intuition to determine if an herb resonates or doesn't resonate with you.
3. Take proper steps to ensure that any wildcrafted or cultivated plant is what you think it is
4. Check with your pharmacist for herb-drug interactions if you take prescriptions.

MAKING MEDICINE AT HOME:

When we begin to delve into the herbalism, there comes a point in our learning where we realize that there is a world of plants out there just waiting to help us feel better. All we have to do is harvest them. Sure, you can buy plenty of great remedies in the natural food store. However, it is empowering, educational, economical – and surprisingly easy – to make your own. You'll never get to "know" a plant better than you do when you harvest and make medicine from it yourself.

Correctly Identify Your Plant

This could be a whole class in and of itself, but I'm just going to give you the basics. It is ESSENTIAL that you ensure that the plant you're harvesting is the plant you think it is. Don't just assume you know what the plant is or take one person's word for it, especially for wild plants, but also for cultivated ones. Grab out the ID books and cross-reference, do Google image searches or go the USDA database site to confirm the species. I recommend watching a plant for one life-cycle (year) to learn it before you harvest, especially wild plants. Plants are easiest to identify when they flower, and the fruit/seed stage is helpful for follow-up; however, you often harvest a plant when these main identifiers aren't present. (Every now and then, someone dies when harvesting "mullein" or "comfrey" that turns out to be foxglove. Their early growth does look similar, but the flowers are *nothing* alike.) Once you know a plant for sure, take note of the more subtle aspects that differentiate its leaves, stems, etc. from similar plants. My favorite ID books are listed on my website. Newcomb's is my favorite, but it's good to have more than one.

Can You Harvest *this* Plant?

This can be interpreted in several ways, all of which are important, particularly for wild plants.

Plant & Wildlife Ethics: Make sure that you harvest in a way that will not be harmful for the plant's population, and also keep in mind wildlife that may rely on the plant for food or shelter.

People Ethics: Are you allowed to harvest from this site? Should you ask permission first? While it may not be *necessary* to ask, it's polite to ask first on land that is not your own.

Personal Use: How much do you actually *need*? Is this the right plant for you? Don't harvest a ton just because you can. If you're not sure, harvest just a little to try it out.

Quality: Is this a happy, healthy plant in an area that is relatively free of contamination? Be particularly cautious of roadsides, waterways, and abandoned lots.

Plant Spirit: Many herbalists believe you should ask the plant, directly, whether or not it is ok to harvest it. This gives respect for the plant and deepens your relationship with it. Some hear a definite "yes" or "no" while others just get a feeling. Some opt for using pendulums, though they aren't necessary. It's plant courtesy to say "Thank You" to the plant once you have harvested it. Some cultures offer it tobacco or you may consider helping it in other ways like spreading its seed or picking up trash in that area.

What Part to Harvest?

Leaves, flowers, stems, roots, barks, fruits, seeds...? This will depend entirely on the plant, and sometimes it also depends on your use. Sometimes many parts can be used interchangeably, or they may have different or varying effects. This is where your research (and intuition) comes in! Most herbals give this info on an herb-by-herb basis. Sharol Tilgner's *Herbal Medicine* book has a great chart.

Here are some common herbs to get you started. (M = mint family, R = rose family)

Plant	Primary Part Used	Other Parts Used	Similar or Different Uses?
Aralia nudicaulis	Root		(aka: American Sarsaparilla)
Bee Balm (M)	Leaves	Flowers/Herb in Flower	Similar
Blackberry (R)	Roots	Leaves	Varying strength (fruits = different)
Blueberry	Berries	Leaves, flowers	Slightly different
Boneset	Flowering herb		
Burdock	Root	Seeds	Slightly different
Calendula	Flowers		
California Poppy	Flowering herb		
Catnip (M)	Leaves	Leaves in Flower	Similar
Chamomile	Flowers		
Chickweed	Flowering Herb		
Chicory	Root (oft roasted)	Young Leaves*	Different (*grown in dark = endive)
Comfrey	Leaves, Flwrg Hrb Root		Similar
Corn	Golden silk	Ripe kernels	Different
Crampbark/Viburnum	Bark	Fruits (some species)	Different
Dandelion	Root	Leaves	Similar but different
Echinacea	Root	Lf/Flwr/Bud/Seed	Varying strength
Elder, Black	Berries	Flowers	Different (& leaves & red sp=toxic)
Elecampane	Root		
Fennel	Seeds	Bulb & greens	Varying strength
Ginseng	Roots	Leaves	Varying strength
Goldenseal	Root	Leaves	Varying strength
Goldenrod	Budding tops w/leaves		
Hawthorn (R)	Berry	Spring Fwr/Lf/Stem	Slightly different but similar
Horsetail	"Tail"		(best before it "falls")
Jewelweed	Herb	Herb in Flower	Similar
Juniper	Berries	Needles	Slightly different, varying strength
Lavender (M)	Flowers	Sometimes Leaves	Varying strength
Lemon balm (M)	Leaves	Leaves in Flower	Varying strength
Marshmallow	Root	Leaves & Flowers	Varying strength
Mint (M)	Leaves	Leaves w/Flowers	Varying strength
Motherwort (M)	Leaves	Leaves in Flower	Varying strength
Mullein	Leaves	Flowers, Root	Different
Nettles	Leaves (before flower)	Seeds	Different
Oregano (M)	Leaves	Leaves in Flower	Varying strength
Lamb's Quarters	Young leaves	Older leaves	Palatability
Pine	Needles	Twigs, Pitch	Slightly different
Plantain	Leaf	Seeds	Different
Raspberry (R)	Leaves (1 st yr)	Fruit	Different
Red Clover	Flowers		
Rose (R)	Hips/Fruit	Flowers	Different
Sage (M)	Leaves		
St. John's Wort	Buds	Flowers	Similar (leaves = much weaker)
Sassafras	Root	Leaves	Varying strength, slightly different
Strawberry (R)	Leaf	Fruit	Different

Thyme (M)	Leaves	Leaves in Flower	Varying strength
Valerian	Root		
Violet	Flowers	Leaves	Slightly different, varying strengths
Wild Cherry	Bark (after flowering)	Fruits	Different
Witch Hazel	Bark	Leaves	Varying strength
Yarrow	Flowering Tops	Leaves	Varying strength, slightly different

When & How to Harvest?

Once you know what part of the plant to harvest your next question is when to harvest.

Rule of Thumb: Harvest when that part of the plant appears the “happiest” and most vibrant.

Do your research and follow your instinct. But, generally speaking....

Roots:

- *Fall*, once the top of the plant has begun to die back (energy returning to roots)
- Sometimes in Spring
- Biennials: Fall of first year, spring of second year
- If you must, you can harvest many roots mid-summer as long as....
- Generally, you don’t want to harvest roots when a plant is in the glory of flowering. All the energy is in that flower.
- Most plants are dug nicely with a garden fork. You can also use a “digging stick” (slower, but easier to carry on foraging trips and for working around twisted roots).
- Scrub off dirt with a good scrub brush (ie: the kind for potatoes) under cold water.

Leaves:

- *Spring and/or summer*, when the leaves look most vital
- Usually just before the plant flowers
- You can harvest many herbs (esp mint-family) when they are in flower, as long as...
- Leaves shouldn’t look sickly, dried out, covered in mildew. Some leaves (like motherwort) will change dramatically from big and vital to thin and dry once the plant flowers.
- Time of Day: Ideally, after the dew is dry but before the plant wilts in a hot sun.
- For most plants (esp mint-family), leave a few sets of leaves to grow back and harvest above a node.
- You can take or leave the stems for tincturing, making vinegar, honey, etc.
- For tea, generally dry leaves on the stem (better air flow), then pull the leaves off once they’re dried.

Flowers:

- *Spring, summer*, or whenever the flower is at its peak
- Just as the flowers are opening and look most vital
- Sometimes in bud (lavender) or early flowering stage (goldenrod)
- Time of Day: Ideally, after the dew is dry but before the plant wilts in a hot sun.
- Most flowers are best dried on a single layer in a wide basket or paperboard box (ie: the kind that soda cans come on, or cut a cereal box the long way around). Or use a dehydrator. (Best to protect from direct sun.)
- Or bundle the flowers on stems, dry by hanging in a warm, dry space, and then strip the flowers off.
- Lavender can be left in bundles as a decoration.

Berries & Fruit

- *Summer or Fall*, in most cases – when the berries have reached optimal ripeness.
- Some berries are best after a few frosts sweeten them, such as rosehips and autumn olives.
- Pull berries off the branch. For clusters of small berries, you can remove the whole cluster and then pull them off the stem at home. Be aware that some fruit stems (ie: elder) are poisonous.
- Berries are best dried in a single layer in a dehydrator at the setting for fruit (higher temp than other herb parts). Some are better frozen or cooked to enhance pigments (grapes, blueberries, autumn olives). Elderberries should be dried or cooked before processed further; straining seeds is also recommended.

Bark

- *Fall*, in most cases
- Spring works for many plants as well
- If you must, most plants can be “barked” at any time of year but may not be as potent (this is also a more invasive time to harvest for the plant itself)
- In most cases, small twigs can be used (no need to strip bark), just chop them up.
- It’s best to “prune” the tree and harvest twigs and branches that fit within your thumb and index finger
- Strip the bark with a knife
- Although the “inner bark” is often the medicinal part, twigs and young branches usually do not require you to remove the top layer, or the top layer comes off very easily.
- Some plants are finicky. Wild cherry bark is best harvested after it’s flowered and should always be dried before you process it further into medicine (to reduce cyanide-like compounds).

Fresh or Dried? Rules of Thumb

Tea: Dried

Exceptions: Lemon-y herbs (lemon balm, thyme, verbena, grass) tastes better fresh, most aromatic mint-family plants make nice fresh teas.

Tincture: Fresh

Exceptions: Plants that are unavailable fresh (spices, exotic herbs), elder, cherry bark, strong laxatives, iris, uva ursi, cayenne, ginseng, bloodroot

Many plants are ok fresh or dried.

Honey: Fresh

Dried is usually ok, too.

Vinegar: Fresh

Dried is usually ok, too.

Drying & Storing Herbs

Many herbs, particularly those in the mint family, prefer to be trimmed regularly with clean, sharp snips. This keeps them healthy, bushier, and gives you an abundance of herbs for fresh and dry teas. Most herbal experts will tell you to harvest herbs in the morning, after the dew has evaporated but before the summer sun has lessened the essential oil content of your herbs. However, if this is not convenient, you can harvest any time.

To dry your herbs, simply place them loosely in a brown paper bag or a medium-weave basket. Baskets or paperboard boxes (cut into short, wide/long “baskets”) are handy if you have a lot of herbs to dry because they can be stacked to save space yet allow good air flow. Place them in a warm, dry spot with good airflow and ideally out of direct sunlight. For example you may stack baskets on a sheltered porch or place the bag in a warm car with cracked windows. The paper bag/car method is my personal favorite.

Check the herbs daily for dryness by crumbling it between your fingers to feel if the plant is still moist. Once dry, immediately strip the leaves and flowers from the stems and store them in a glass jar in a cool, dark, dry place, like a pantry or kitchen cupboard. They should keep their color and flavor for six months to a year or longer.

Quality dried herbs should have close to the color, scent, and flavor of fresh.

Visit the Links page of www.WintergreenBotanicals.com for Local & Online sources for *bottles, jars, herb supplies...* as well as *recommended books & links to informative websites.*
