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“Backyard Medicine”

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## Storing Herbs & Remedies

Most remedies will keep best in a cool, dark, dry spot in a tightly sealed container (ie: mason jars with the metal lids, dark glass bottles with caps). For most things, a cool dark dry cabinet or pantry works well. These are the enemy of all herbal products: heat, light, moisture, oxygen, introduced bacteria/germs. Of course, more perishable items (fresh/frozen herbs/pastes, soda) need to be stored in the fridge or freezer.

## My Favorite Drying Method

Harvest herbs regularly, which will encourage new and bushier growth—plus more herbs for your kitchen! Loosely place recently harvested herbs—stems and all—in a brown paper bag. (It’s not necessary to wash, but do discard any dirty or damaged leaves and bugs first.) Fold shut and let sit in the windshield of your car for 1-3 days. Check daily for dryness. The leaves will crumble easily between your fingertips when ready. Immediately remove the leaves from the stems or “garble” the herb w/hands until cut and sifted. Compost stems and store leaves in glass in a cool, dark, dry place.

## Herbal Teas: Infusion (Steep)

This method is best for delicate parts of a plant, leaves and flowers. When you make tea from a teabag, you’re making an infusion. Use 1 tsp to 1 Tbsp of dried herb per cup of water. Cover and let steep for 5-20 minutes, strain, and drink. Larger amounts of herb and longer steeping times make stronger tasting teas, less herb and time makes a lighter tea. A **Super Infusion** is approximately 1 ounce herb steeped in a 32 ounce jar of hot water for 4+ hours or overnight. Use a French Press or squeeze through a cloth to get as much tea as possible.

## Herbal Teas: Decoction (Simmer)

The decoction method is best for harder parts of herbs, roots, bark and seeds. These parts of the plant often make a weak tea if only allowed to infuse; simmering/decocting gets their properties out faster. Use 1 tsp to 1 Tbsp of dried herb per cup of water. Simmer for 5 to 20 minutes, strain, and drink. Larger amounts of herb and longer steeping times make stronger tasting teas, less herb and time makes a lighter tea. Soup is a tea! Great for tonics, nutritives, mushrooms.

## Herbal Teas: Fresh Herb Infusions

Fresh herbs are not generally as medicinally potent in tea as dry. However, fresh herbs and sliced fresh fruit often taste much better than their dried counterparts — especially lemon balm, mints, citrus fruits, thyme, freshly sliced or grated ginger, and fresh evergreen needles. The solution? More time and more herbs. To make a fresh extract, bring water to a boil. Add a handful of herbs (or 1 Tbsp ginger) per 2 cups of water, cover, and let sit for 1-2 hours.

**Think Beyond the Teapot:** You can infuse or decoct herbs in other things than tea! Also use these basic methods for milk, cream, soup/broth, wet ingredients for recipes, etc.

## Freezing Herbs

Some herbs can simply be placed in a **freezer bag** and tucked into the freezer with good results: lemongrass stalks, chives, tarragon. It’s still good to try to remove as much air as you can. Herbs that bruise and blacken easily (basils, lemon balm) will do better if you **vacuum seal** them in individual serving size bags. Consider a Seal-A-Meal or Food-Saver machine or the Thifty Vac. For individual use, you can also try adding chopped herbs to **ice cube trays** and then covering with water or cooking oil. Baby food storage trays work well.

## Frozen Herbal Paste

Some herbs like parsley, cilantro and chives lose too much of their flavor once dried. For these you can puree them fresh with olive oil. Sweeter herbs like mint and lemon balm can be pureed with canola oil for future baking ventures. Put the mix in Ziploc bags and then pull chunks off as needed. Thank you to Susan Belsinger for this tip! [www.SusanBelsinger.com](http://www.SusanBelsinger.com)

## Herbal Honey - Cooked

Chop up your fresh or dry herb. If the herb is very juicy, you may want to wilt the herb in a hot location (out of direct sun) for a day. Per 1/2 cup of chopped herb (volume), add 2 cups of honey (volume). Bring to a gentle boil, shut off, and let cool. Repeat at least once and up to 3 times each day for 3 days. After the last heating, pour the warm mixture through a strainer and into jars. This works well for tasty and aromatic herbs, such as lemon balm, anise hyssop or mint, as well as those used as expectorants or cough/cold remedies such as bee balm, thyme, ginger, fresh spring pine branches.

## Herbal Honey – Raw

Alternate method – very easy! Chop up your herb and loosely pack it in a jar. Cover with honey to the top. Put on a tight lid. Every day (approximately), turn the jar. When it tastes good (few weeks or so), plunk the jar in warm water to get the honey runny, then strain it through a fine mesh strainer, pushing as much out as you can with a spoon. (Make tea with the dregs.) If it’s watery, store in the fridge and use within a few months. If it’s thick like honey, it should be shelf stable for a year or so.

## Herbal Vinegar

Chop up your fresh herbs. Loosely pack a jar and cover them with vinegar. Let it sit for at least one month, strain, and use as desired. You may opt to put a whole sprig of herb into a finished vinegar for visual appeal. White distilled and rice

vinegars have a somewhat neutral flavor and clear color that ultimately show off the individuality of the herbs in the finished product. Chive blossoms make a lovely and delicious pink vinegar. Also consider tarragon, fennel... Apple cider vinegar has its own healing properties and works particularly well for nutritive vinegars and fire cider. Use a PLASTIC cap/lid! Generally shelf stable for 1-2+ years.

**Oxymel:** Use a mix of honey and vinegar. Yum!

### **Herbal Cordial**

There are many variations on this. Make **Simple Syrup** by simmering 2 cups of sugar with 1 cup of water until clear. Loosely fill a jar (quart will usually do) with fresh herbs or fruit. Cover with the simple syrup and 1 1/2 cups or more of good quality, high proof vodka or other desired neutral alcohol. Cover, shake, and let sit for at least one month or until desired flavor is reached. Strain and store in the cupboard for special events and a delicious dessert! Great for vanilla (1 bean per 1-2 cups), licorice-y plants (anise hyssop, anise, fennel), lemony plants (balm, grass, mint, thyme, verbena), mints of all kinds, fruits of all kinds. Best w/in 1-2 years.

### **Herbal Soda**

Gently rub three large sprigs of herbs to release their scent and flavor. Place in a 1 liter bottle and fill to the top with plain seltzer. Let infuse in the fridge for 30 minutes or up to one day, and serve. Delicious with lemongrass, fennel, hibiscus (1 tablespoon dry), mint... use your imagination! Add 1/8 – 1/4 cup simple syrup, maple syrup, agave, or honey to sweeten, if desired, before adding seltzer. Best within 24 hours, refrigerate.

### **Herbal Oil (General)**

You have to be careful with culinary herbal oils because herbs may harbor botulism spores that naturally occur in soil and thrive in an anaerobic oil environment. While rare, it can happen. Most culinary oils are best made on the spot and consumed within one week. OR, consider making an herbal paste (above) and keeping it in the freezer. I am more apt to make oils for bodycare purposes, techniques below, although the same techniques could be used for culinary oils as well. Olive oil is the herbalist's choice for medicinal and most culinary oils. However, coconut, grapeseed and other oils may also be used. **To Make a Salve or Lip Balm:** Melt 1 oz beeswax in a double boiler. Add 4 oz oil(s). Stir to combine/melt, add 10-20 drops essential oils if desired, then pour into heat-safe containers. Usually 1-2 years in cool, dark, dry spot.

### **Herbal Oil (Maceration Method)**

For dry herb, per 1 oz of ground or cut/sifted herb add 4-8 oz of oil, mix in blender and pour in jar. For fresh herb, wilt to half its weight in water, loosely pack in a jar, and then cover with oil (at least one inch above or to the tip top of the jar). Place the jar in a warm spot—for example a sunny window, warm car, or oven with a pilot light—for 2 weeks. If the spot is sunny, cover the jar with cloth or a brown paper bag. Strain.

### **Herbal Oil (Double Boiler or Crock Pot Method)**

Use the same proportions mentioned above for dry or fresh herbs. Pour into double boiler or crock and let sit at the lowest

setting (ideally around 90-110 degrees, although the lowest setting may be warmer) overnight or up to three days. Strain.

### **Herbal Oil (Blender Method)**

For dry herbs only. Grind up herb in a blender. Per 1 oz of herb, mix in 1/2 oz of grain alcohol. Mix in to the herb, it will have a consistency similar to beach sand or potting soil. Cover and let sit overnight or as long as desired. Pour into blender, Per 1 oz of starting herb, add 7 oz of oil. Blend in blender until the blender gets warm, about 5-10 minutes. Strain.

### **Straining Herbal Remedies (All Methods)**

Place a fine mesh strainer over a bowl and line with cheesecloth or a clean, non-absorbent cloth/jelly bag. Pour the herb mixture through. Wring the oil/tincture/honey/vinegar/etc out of the cloth and discard the herbal dregs. If desired, let sit and decant for desired clarity and/or strain further through a coffee filter. Pour into dark glass bottles and store in a cool, dark, dry spot.

### **Fresh Herb Tincture**

Chop up fresh herbs or roots, and stuff them in a mason jar until you can't fit any more. Fill the jar to the brim with whole grain alcohol or high proof vodka or brandy. A day later, top the jar off again. Leave the jar in a dark place for at least one month (or as long as you like). Strain it out with a fine mesh strainer and muslin or cheesecloth to squeeze out the last bit. This method will give you approximately a 1:2 fresh herb extraction, meaning that for each ounce (weight, as shown on a kitchen scale) of herb, you add 2 ounces (volume, as shown on a glass measuring cup). Most herbs do well with a fresh tincture: lemon balm, echinacea, valerian... Most tinctures are shelf stable for up to 10 years, then lose potency.

### **Dry Herb Tincture**

Powder your herb in a food processor if it isn't already in powder form. Per 1 oz (weight on a kitchen scale) of herb, add 5 ounces of alcohol/water mix. (Do NOT use whole grain alcohol unless you dilute it with distilled water.) The ideal alcohol/water ratio will vary by herb, but 40-60% (80-120 proof vodka or brandy) works for most herbs. Add about 10% vegetable glycerin for high tannin herbs like cinnamon. Combine your ingredients in a mason jar and shake your mixture as often as possible, aiming for 2xs/day. After no less than one month (more is fine), strain the mixture through a coffee filter-lined strainer. This is a 1:5 dry tincture. It works well for some aromatic herbs such as lavender, but is most often used for herbs that are primarily available dry: cinnamon, chocolate, cardamom, astragalus...

### **Capsules**

Start with dry, powdered herb. If you have cut/sifted herb, grind it in a coffee grinder/bullet (then sift through a fine mesh strainer if you'd like). Using a capsule machine or your hands, fill the bottoms of empty capsules (I like "00" veg caps – make sure your machine matches). Snap on the top cap. Store in a glass container in a cool dark, dry spot for up to one year. One full "00" cap is about 500 mg.

**Take a Class!** Maria offers a wide range of remedy-making classes and series – online too! See the website for listings.