



## Focus on Wellness:

### Stay Healthy This Winter: Natural Cold & Flu Support

by Maria Noël Groves, Clinical Herbalist & Wellness Educator

This year, with H1N1 flu concerns, health officials predict a particularly terrible flu season.

Conventional medicine advocates the flu vaccine to prevent wintertime illness; however, many home remedies and lifestyle changes can also help to bolster your immune system against infections and to help recuperate quickly if you do get sick.

#### Prevention Tips

You know it already, but it's worth repeating: Get enough sleep. Eat healthy, whole foods. Wash your hands frequently. Also consider...

**Green Tea:** Components of green tea have been shown to boost immune function, fight bacteria, favorably alter gut bacteria (which helps the body's immunity), and help prevent the flu. If you're sensitive to caffeine, consider decaf.

**Astragalus & Medicinal Mushrooms:** Astragalus (*Astragalus membranaceus*) root, as well as medicinal mushrooms like reishi, maitake and shiitake help strengthen the immune system when they're taken throughout the winter. You can use them as capsules, tinctures, teas, or in food. I simmer them in soup broth, or I'll simmer astragalus with ginger for tea and cook up mushrooms with dinner. Look for maitake and shiitake in the produce aisle; choose

mushrooms with an earthy (not ammonia or bleach) scent and cook them in soups or sautés.

**General Immune Tonics:** Eat and drink plenty of garlic, ginger, onions, hot peppers and cayenne, chicken soup or broth, miso, fermented foods, and antimicrobial mint family herbs including oregano, thyme, savory, rosemary, sage, and bee balm. I love to make a tea of a half inch of fresh ginger grated with two lemon wedges, and honey.

#### If You Get Sick

As soon as you notice that tickle in the throat, congestion, or run-down feeling, it's best to stay home, sleep as much as possible, and drink plenty of fluids including tea and chicken or miso soup. You'll recover more quickly and will be less likely to pass germs to others. Also consider...

**Elderberry:** Several clinical and lab studies support the traditional use of elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*)

to prevent viruses (including influenza "flu," H1N1 "swine flu," and rhinovirus "cold") from replicating and spreading throughout the body. This helps prevent or reduce the severity of an infection if taken at the onset of the infection. Try elder syrup (i.e.: Sambucol), tea, tincture, capsules, or lozenges.

**Echinacea:** Several compounds in echinacea (*Echinacea* spp) work in a variety of ways, from boosting white blood cells and helping move lymph along, to numbing sore throats and decreasing inflammatory immune compounds that cause many of our annoying symptoms. Echinacea is best taken at the onset in high doses – 4 "squirts" (about 1 teaspoon) of tincture taken every waking hour or two – until the infection passes. If you're tempted to take echinacea throughout the winter as a preventative, don't. It's not dangerous, but it's not likely to be effective either. Fresh root tincture of *Echinacea angustifolia* is the strongest form; however, tea and capsules as well as other echinacea species, leaves, flowers, buds, and seeds are also helpful.

Echinacea is generally safe; however, it may aggravate autoimmune diseases as well as allergies in some sensitive individuals.

Also consume ample amounts of the "General Immune Tonics" listed above.

If you take pharmaceuticals, first check with your pharmacist and doctor for herb-drug interactions. If an herb does not seem to agree with you, stop taking it. ■

Maria runs Wintergreen Botanicals, LLC in Allentown. For information and recipes, visit [www.wintergreenbotanicals.com](http://www.wintergreenbotanicals.com) or call 268-0548.

