

Art of Tea & the Art of Formulation



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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, AND*
4. *Check with your pharmacist for herb-drug interactions if you take prescriptions.*

ART OF TEA ~ BASICS

To delve even more into the local herbs you can grow and harvest in your own backyard – including tea recipes, charts, and detailed information on growing and using my favorite herbs (including bee balm, gotu kola, mints, roses, elder, lemon balm, and more), check out my Backyard Medicine & Local Tea notes at <http://wintergreenbotanicals.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/BackyardMedicineLONG.pdf>

Drying & Storing Your Herbs

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.

Basic Tea Recipes

A beverage tea is often 1 tsp to 1 tbsp of dried herb per cup of water.

Steeped or simmered 2-5 minutes.

A medicinal or tonic tea often involves 1 tbsp or more of dried herb per cup of water.

Steeped or simmered 5-15 minutes.

A strong medicinal tea is 1 ounce of dried herb per quart of water.

Steeped or simmered 20 minutes or longer, sometimes hours or days.

A fresh tea is one handful of fresh herbs and/or fruit per two cups of hot water.

Steeped for 10-15 minutes.

A sun tea is the same as a “beverage tea” or “fresh tea” covered in lukewarm water.

Place in the sun for 1 hour to all day.

An iced tea is made by doubling the herb amount in any of the above techniques.

Follow the same steep/simmer directions, then pour it over a glass of ice.

OR Make any of the above teas at regular strength and then leave it in the fridge overnight.

Tea Preparations

Infusion (Steep)

Bring water to a gentle boil, then pour it over the herb and let it steep. Cover aromatic teas.

Use this method for leaves, flowers, delicate parts of plants. It can also be used for powders.

Super Infusion (Long Steep)

Place 1 ounce by weight of herb in a 32-ounce container (French press is ideal), cover with boiling water, and let steep 4 hours or overnight. Strain out, squeezing as much out as you can (in a cloth or jelly bag, if you're not using a press pot).

Use this method for very safe, food-like nutritious and tonic herbs like nettle and oat straw, or for mucilaginous herbs like marshmallow.

Note that there is a risk of increased bacterial content due to the long steeping time of a super infusion. You can put it in the fridge after the pot has cooled or opt to decoct instead if you are immuno-compromised or wish to limit the bacteria content.

Decoction (Simmer)

Place herb and water in a pot, bring to a near-boil, then simmer for 15 to 30 minutes or more. Many “decoction” herbs do ok ground and brewed in a coffee maker.

Use this method for roots, bark, seeds, and other tough parts.

ART OF FORMULATION

As an herbalist and intuitive home cook, creating a recipe from scratch usually means I stand in front of my options (ie: the herb closet, spice rack, or tincture apothecary) pondering, “Hmmm, what do I feel like? What flavors go well together?” Then I begin pulling jars, holding them, inhaling them, and then scooping this and that into the pot, seemingly at random, letting my senses and gut instinct guide me. This is how most herbalists work to create blends, and no two people will make quite the same thing, yet it often all works.

However, herbal newbies often approach jars of herbs or a ready-to-harvest garden with trepidation. They're afraid they'll screw things up or combine things that don't mix well. They want recipes! *Exact* recipes! Herbal medicine is generally more forgiving than you may think, but there *is* an art and science to blending great formulas. The ability to create your own custom blend allows you to make perfect healing remedies for you and your family and to craft creative blends to give as gifts or sell. Keep the following suggestions in mind, and then just start practicing! Make small batches at first – a cup of tea, tiny bottles of tinctures, cordials, etc. – until you know you have it the way you like it. Experimentation, trial and error are part of the experience of learning herbs. Don't let it hold you back.

Before You Blend: Ask Yourself...

What's Your Goal? Before you begin to craft your blend, first decide its purpose. Do you have a particular health concern you want to address? Is this a general tonic blend that addresses a variety of conditions for one person? Or are you simply making a tasty tea that features a particular herb or flavor profile? This will be the driving force behind your creation!

What Fits *You* Best? Before you get caught up in the fascinating yet overwhelming topics of what herbs extract best in which form and how to combine them, think about what work best for *you* (or the person you're creating the blend for). No matter how amazing a tea is, it won't do a darned thing if you hate tea and will never stick with the habit. Are tinctures perfectly convenient or too medicine-like? Are you stuck in that “just give me a pill, that's all I'll do” mentality? Do you need to avoid anything due to health such as alcohol or sugar and honey? Should you be aware of herb-drug interactions? Are you allergic or known to have negative reactions to specific herbs or foods? What flavors do you love and hate? Get to know the actions of each herb before you put it in your blend. Read up on them in a few good books or websites and then listen to your body to see if they agree with you. Some people might be surprised to find that licorice raises their

blood pressure, cinnamon gives them constipation, ginger is too warming, or peppermint aggravates acid reflux even though these herbs are otherwise extremely safe and don't cause these "side effects" in most people.

Does the Solvent or Extraction Method Matter? Perhaps you know you want to make a winter wellness blend, but you're not sure if you should make it as a tea, tincture, cordial, herbed vinegar, herb-infused honey, or something else. Once you've established any personal preferences (see above) that may take precedence, ponder what remedy form suits the condition and herbs best.

- **Tea (Water):** Pros – inexpensive, gentle, hydrating, easily absorbed, normal, and the ritual alone of making and sipping hot tea is healing. Cons – inconvenient for some, generally limited to dry plants (some herbs lose potency once dry), some herbs may be unpalatable, hard to blend herbs that don't mix flavor-wise or require different steeping times and methods (ie: roots and leaves).
- **Tincture (Alcohol):** Pros – extract most herbs well, convenient to travel and take, shelf stable for years, easily absorbed. Cons – alcohol issues (addiction, allergy, religion), takes 2-4 weeks to make (unless you do a percolation tincture, which is ready in 24 hours, see my website for a video and directions), doesn't extract minerals (ie: nettles) and mucilage (marshmallow, slippery elm) well. While 100-proof vodka works for most plants, fresh or dry, high-proof alcohol is more effective for resins (myrrh, boswellia) and fat-soluble constituents (turmeric). Low-alcohol decoction method preferred for mushrooms and polysaccharide-rich herbs like astragalus.
- **Syrups, Honeys & Cordials:** Pros – taste good, easy to incorporate into daily routine, gentle, syrups and honeys quell coughs. Cons – not always potent, high-sugar (and alcohol for cordials), shorter shelf life than tinctures.
- **Powders & Capsules:** Pros – convenient to take, homemade is inexpensive (but time-consuming to make), minimal taste, powders can be mixed in honey, nut butter, drinks (better absorption than pills). Cons – need to be digested, pills often not as effective as tea or tincture, store-bought products can be expensive, powders can be unpalatable, only dry material can be used, powders quickly degrade and are often adulterated or low quality in commerce.
- **Vinegars & Oxymels:** Pros – vinegar base enhances digestion/absorption, superior to alcohol for extracting minerals, alcohol-free alternative to tinctures, shelf stable for a few months to one year, honey in oxymels (a vinegar-honey extract) improves flavor of vinegar. Cons – vinegar base aggravates ulcers and some cases of reflux, honey in oxymels may be too much sugar, vinegar flavor may not be palatable, shorter shelf life than tinctures, not as potent for most plants compared to water and alcohol.

Ingredient Categories: Primary, Supportive, Synergist... and some Good Vibrations

I learned this method of formulation from the well-known herbalist Rosemary Gladstar. I love its simplicity, and you can use it to craft an easy blend of three herbs or complex formulas. Choose one or more ingredients in each category: Primary, Supportive, and Synergist. This basic concept works whether you're creating a tea, tincture, or other form of remedy.

1. Primary Herbs:

The herbs that have the primary medicinal action (for a health condition) or primary flavor (for a tasty blend of tea). These can take up a small or large percentage of a formula.

It's difficult to give general examples of primary herbs because they can be almost anything! Usually, though, they are relatively potent and direct in terms of action or flavor.

2. Supportive Herbs: These herbs support the primary herb and whole body vitality. For example herbs that are tonic, nutritious, adaptogen, soothing. Flavor-wise, they might provide a nice base note to offset or compliment the primary herbs. Or, they might buffer a strong activity or potential side effect of a primary herb. Often these take up a large percentage of a formula.

3. Synergists: These herbs help put synergy to work. Movers and shakers are often spices (cayenne, black pepper, cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, peppermint) that increase circulation and improve digestion to enhance the absorption/action of the other herbs. This isn't just herbal voodoo! Just a pinch of black pepper improves turmeric's absorption by 2,000 times, and a pinch of cayenne boosts green tea's cancer-killing ability 100 times that of either ingredient alone. Ginger enhances echinacea's anti-cold activity. Harmonizers (licorice, honey) tend to be sweeter bring flavors and actions together. In both cases they often improve the flavor of a formula. Often, just a small amount of a synergist is used. Cayenne, black pepper, and cardamom are so potent they easily overpower other herbs in your blend if you overdo it.

4. Maybe Also Add Some Good Vibrations? This is my own take and gives your blends a little something special. Rose petals have physical healing properties (ie: tightening and toning tissues), but they also gladdened the heart. Consider them when you're feeling hopeless, full of rage, or have a broken heart. Flowers are often a welcome addition, even if they simply make you happy to see them in your loose blend. Flower essences are highly dilute remedies akin to homeopathics that target emotional, spiritual, and physical wellbeing. You can easily add a few drops of a flower essence to tincture blends or your teacup. Highly scented herbs and spices bring in aromatherapy, especially for tea blends. In fact, any herbs can be viewed as having more esoteric healing properties. Generally speaking, roots ground us while flowers activate our emotions and spices light our fire. "Good Vibrations" are totally optional, but this is where the art and magic of herbs comes in.

Don't Get Too Hung Up on the Details! Herbs don't really like to be put in a box, so don't be surprised if the same herb pops up in multiple categories in one or separate blends. They're complex entities, and *we* put them into categories to help us understand them better. For example, cinnamon may be a synergist, but if you're creating a blood sugar blend, it may also be a primary herb. Nettle is a classic supportive herb, but if you're creating a nutritious blend, it's the star player. A stress-relieving adaptogen might be the primary herb in a stress blend, but it will play second fiddle to hormone-balancing vitex in a PMS blend.

But How Do I Choose?

As you begin to study herbal medicine, you'll realize that herbs are like the English language: There are many synonyms. While some may have a slightly different tone or meaning, you can often use several words (or herbs) interchangeably based on availability and still relay the same message. First, what herbs do you have on hand to choose from? If cost is a factor, rule in or out your herbs based on price point. Now, each herb has multiple healing benefits – does one have any "side benefits" that you'd prefer? Any side effects you want to avoid? And, lastly, how does it taste or harmonize with the other ingredients in your blend – this is especially important when you make a tea. Creating a blend is a lot like arranging a flower bouquet or writing a poem, finding that perfect balance and beauty that works for you.

Constructing a Formula ~ Chart with Examples

	Primary Herb	Supportive Herb	Synergist Herb	Good Vibrations Herb
Amount	Small to large percentage, depending on strength and side effect potential	Moderate to large percentage	Often a small percentage or pinch	Usually a small percentage
What It Does	Addresses your main goal(s) or core flavor(s)	Supports or buffers the primary herb's actions or provides general support for the person and constitution. May also provide a base/bland flavor.	Makes the formula work or taste better. Movers and shakers tend to improve circulation or digestion or otherwise increase the activity of other herbs. Harmonizers balance the formula's ingredients.	Optional. Provides other aspects of therapy, such as flower energetics, homeopathic action, color therapy, aromatherapy.
General Herb Category or Action	Anything! Depends on the goal.	Depending on your needs, a supportive herb may be an adaptogen, nutritive, demulcent, vulnerary, astringent, antispasmodic, nervine, etc.	Movers and shakers include most spices (cayenne, black pepper, cinnamon, cardamom, prickly ash), peppermint, and sometimes stimulants (think: kick in the pants!). Harmonizers tend to be sweet (e.g., licorice, vanilla, and honey).	Flower petals, colorful herbs, pleasantly scented herbs, flower essences, drop-dose herbs, herbs that gladden the heart
Example: Laxative Tea	Senna (harsh laxative)	Slippery elm (soothes gut)	Cardamom (improves digestion, relieves spasms)	None
Example: Heart Tonic Elixir	Hawthorn leaf and berry (heart tonic) and hibiscus (hypotensive, antioxidant)	Rooibos (mild flavor, antioxidant) and linden (heart-centered nervine)	Vanilla and honey (harmonizers)	Rose petals (gladden the heart)
Example: Nutri-Energy Chai	Nettle (nutrition-rich) and ashwagandha (adaptogen)	Oatmeal (demulcent, mild) and oat straw (gentle nutrition and nerve support)	Chai spices: cinnamon, ginger, nutmeg, cardamom, star anise (flavoring agents, movers and shakers)	Chai spices (stimulating aroma)
Example: Pain-Relief Tincture	Turmeric (potent anti-inflammatory)	Ashwagandha and holy basil (adaptogens and gentle anti-inflammatories)	Black pepper (improves turmeric's absorption up to 2,000 times!)	Comfrey flower essence (for deep healing)

Maria Noël Groves, RH (AHG), registered clinical herbalist, runs Wintergreen Botanicals, LLC, an herbal clinic and education center nestled in the pine forests of Bear Brook State Park in Allenstown, NH. She is certified by Michael Moore's Southwest School of Botanical Medicine, a registered professional herbalist with the American Herbalists Guild, and has also completed Rosemary Gladstar's advanced training program and Lichenwood Herbals' flower essence practitioner training. Her business is devoted to education and empowerment via classes, health consultations, and writing with the foundational belief that good health grows in nature. She is the author of Body into Balance: An Herbal Guide to Holistic Self Care, a 300+ page, full color herbal organized by western body systems. Learn more about Maria and herbs at www.WintergreenBotanicals.com.

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