



Backyard Medicine ~ The Extended Version

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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.

HARVEST FLAVOR & MEDICINE FROM YOUR BACKYARD

Cultivate these useful, easy-to-grow herbs in your garden, and you will be rewarded with good health and delicious flavors. But first, some basics...

Harvesting Tips

- **Leaves (or Leaves & Flowers):** Look for “happy,” vibrant (perhaps strongly scented) leaves just before or just as the plant comes into flower. For bushy herbs and plants, prune the top 1/4 to 2/3 of the plant, being sure to leave at least a couple sets of leaves on the remaining stems. For more woody plants, prune a few branches here and there. Be sure to allow some of the plants to go to flower and seed. If wild, leave most plants in the population untouched. For example: Mint-family plants, blueberry leaves, raspberry leaves, yarrow aerial parts...
- **Flowers:** Look for “happy” flowers just as they are opening and preferably before they are pollinated. Pinch them off. It's usually ok if a leaf or two falls in. Harvest no more than half the flowers of a cultivated plant, less of a wild plant. For example: St. John's wort, chamomile, calendula...
- **Bark:** Preferably harvest in spring or fall when the sap is moving through the stems. Before the leaves come out or just after they turn color and begin to drop. Prune a few young branches up to a diameter of about 1.5 inches. Shave off the bark (young outer – usually brown or gray, and inner – usually green) with a sharp knife to use for medicine and discard/compost/use in crafts the woody inner pith. With these younger branches, you don't need to worry about the outer bark – it can be used in medicine. For twigs, there is no need shave the bark – simply chop them up. For example: black birch, wild cherry and chokecherry (fall only), witch hazel, oak, viburnum species...
- **Roots:** Preferably harvest in spring as soon as the ground softens and you can positively identify the plant or in the fall once the plant begins to die back. For biennials (burdock, yellow dock, mullein), don't harvest the roots after the plant has flowered. Dig up the roots with a fork, shovel, or digging stick. Remove tops (to use or compost) and scrub the roots clean with a potato scrubber in cold water. Except for very invasive species, be very careful not to harvest all the roots in a population. Some plants may require about four growing seasons before the roots are optimal – echinacea, most Chinese and Ayurvedic roots. For example: dandelion, valerian, elecampane, echinacea...
- **Fruits:** Harvest once they are fully ripe, in perfect color, sweetness, and flavor. Some are better/sweeter after a frost (autumn olive, rosehips, cranberries). You should remove the seeds of some before consuming, for safety – wild cherries, elderberries – by manual removal, food mills,

and/or pressing the pulp and juice through fine mesh. Don't harvest rotten or buggy fruits. For example: black elderberries, wild cherries, rosehips, grapes...

- **Seeds:** This can be the most difficult harvest since most seeds are too small to harvest abundantly by hand. Once the plant has gone to seed, pick the tops of the plants and hang the seedheads upside down in a brown paper bag until dry. Shake and pull out seeds. For example: Fennel, dill, coriander, plantain...

Basic Herbal Recipes

The reasons for making your own herbal remedies are simple: they're easy, inexpensive, and sometimes stronger than what you buy in the store. Once you know the basics, you can create unlimited remedies to help heal many common ailments. **Which Recipe or Method to Choose?** Each type of remedy has advantages and disadvantages. For example, tinctures are taken easily, have a long shelf life, and they work quickly. However, they would not be as appropriate for someone with alcohol issues. Teas are a mainstay because they are gentle and effective; however, they do not extract some constituents and may be less useful when you want a fresh plant constituent. For urinary issues, though, water is a superb delivery system. If your digestive system needs perking up or you are looking to extract minerals, go for vinegar. Honeys are great if taste is a concern, especially if they're being used for sore throats and coughs. Also consider cost, taste, ease of use, etc. For topical uses, oil-based remedies are usually preferred. You may also have your own preferences.

Drying & Storing

The low budget "paper bag method" for drying herbs works quickly and efficiently for summertime leaves and flowers. Loosely put the fresh herbs (on or off the stem) in a paper bag and then clip or fold it shut. (For flowers, place them in a single layer along a basket or box, covered.) Place the bag in the windshield of your car, in a sunny spot, for 1-3 days. Check daily to shake the bag, and test for dryness. When the herb crumbles easily between your fingertips, it's time to remove the bag. Strip the leaves off the stem (if you haven't already) and store in glass containers in a cool, dark place. A good dehydrator set at about 115°F also works well and is particularly handy for late and early-season harvests as well as hard-to-dry things like bark, seeds, and fruits. Aromatic herbs keep for about one year. Roots, seeds, bark, and non-aromatic herbs may keep for 2 or more years. If the color, fragrance, or flavor fades, it's time to replace them. Heat, light, oxygen, and moisture will cause herbs to lose potency or go bad more quickly.

How Do I Strain the Herbs?

Small batches can be strained through a fine mesh metal strainer by hand. For larger batches, you'll want to be able to squeeze as much liquid from the herbs: Place a fine mesh strainer over a bowl and line with cheesecloth or clean non-absorbent cloth (nylon jelly bags, muslin, and old cloth napkins work well). Pour the herb/remedy mixture through. Wring the liquid out of the cheesecloth and discard the herbal dregs. Optional: let the strained mixture sit, then 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 or refrigerator/freezer, depending on the stability of the recipe.

Tea Strength

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. *Super infusions* are steeped for 4 or more hours.

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 placed 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 refrigerate overnight.

Herbal Teas: Infusion (Steep)

The infusion 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.

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.

Herbal Soda

Shove three large sprigs of fresh herb into a 1 liter soda bottle (glass seltzer bottles work well). Carefully fill with plain carbonated water to the top. Cover, and let sit in the refrigerator for 30 minutes or more. Best drunk within 24 hours. You can add simple syrup (see cordial recipe), maple syrup, or honey to sweeten to taste – add before the bottle is full since it will increase fizzing. This is delicious for fennel fronds, apple mint, spearmint, lemongrass (esp frozen stalks). Feel free to combine herbs and fruit, traditional teas, etc.

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

Herbal Honey

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 Cordial

There are many variations on this. Make up some 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.

Herb-Infused Simple Syrup

Heat 2 cups of sugar and 1 cup of water, stirring frequently, until all the sugar is dissolved. If using leaves and flowers, remove the syrup from heat, add herbs, cover, and let steep 30 minutes before straining. If using roots, barks, and seeds, simmer gently for 15 to 30 minutes before straining. This will keep for about 1 week in the refrigerator, or you can freeze them into cubes for later use. Use simple syrup to make cocktails, desserts, soda, drizzle on desserts, sweeten iced tea, etc.

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 thyme varieties, tarragon, and Italian herbs for vinegars. Apple cider vinegar has its own healing properties and works particularly well for nutritive vinegars and fire cider.

Fresh Herb Tincture/Flavor Extract

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...

Dry Herb Tincture/Flavor Extract

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 glycerine 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...

Decoction Tincture/Flavor Extract

This is a variation on a dry tincture. Some herbs, especially roots, extract better with heat. Ginseng-family plants fall into this category. This is also better for extracts that do not need high alcohol percentage. For example, mucilaginous plants like comfrey, slippery elm, and marshmallow (notoriously hard to tincture) do well with this method. Echinacea, astragalus, and medicinal mushrooms—all rich in polysaccharides—are better with this method, too. Simmer your roots for 1-3 hours. When done, pour the hot mixture into a mason jar and add alcohol, cap, and let sit (macerate) for at least 1 month, shaking daily (once it has cooled). Ultimately you'll want at least 30% alcohol to prevent your formula from growing mold and bacteria. Keep this in your measurements. For example, per 1 ounce herb (weight), simmer in 3 ounces of water, then add 2 ounces of whole grain alcohol. Or, per 1 ounce herb (weight), simmer in 1 ounce of water, then add 4 ounces of high proof vodka.

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. Lasts 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.

Hydrosol/Flower Water

Use a large stainless steel pot. Fill with a few inches of water. Put a clean brick in the middle and a bowl on top (or use a bowl that will stay put and not float around in the water). Place several fistfuls of herb material in the water around the bowl. Put the pot lid on upside down and fill with ice to promote condensation (I freeze water in a metal mixing bowl and put this on top of the lid – it's less messy). Simmer until you have about 4 ounces of flower water in the bowl. This should keep for about one year on the shelf.

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 Oils (All Methods)

Place a fine mesh strainer over a bowl and line with cheesecloth. Pour the herb/oil mixture through. Wring the oil out of the cheesecloth and discard the herbal dregs. 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.

General herb dosages:

Tea:	1 teaspoon – 1 tablespoon per cup hot water, infused (steeped) or decocted (simmered)
Tincture:	<u>Fresh</u> 1:2 in 50-95% alcohol <u>Dry</u> 1:5 in 30-60% alcohol 2 squirts (60 drops, 1/2 tsp, 2 ml) 2-4x/day
Honey:	Spoonful
Cordial:	Cordial or shotglass (~1 oz)
Capsule:	500-1000 mg 2-3x/day
Or as directed on the label.	

LOCAL HERBS FOR MEDICINE & FLAVOR

General Cautions: Allergies can potentially occur with ANYTHING. Always use caution and do your research before taking an herb, particularly if you are pregnant, nursing, are on pharmaceutical medications, or have a serious health concern. If an herb produces side effects, stop using it.

Korean Licorice Mint & Anise Hyssop (*Agastache rugosa* & *A. foeniculum*)

Mint Family

& Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*)

Parsley Family

Anise hyssop brightens many home gardens with its long-lasting purple spikes. The leaves and flowers taste like licorice and can be snipped into salad as easily as they can be turned into sweet tea. It is nearly identical to Korean

mint, except that the latter has a mintier taste and grows taller. I prefer Korean licorice mint and find it has a more pleasant, mellow, fennel-honey scent and flavor. These beauties attract butterflies, hummingbirds, and bees. Though totally unrelated, fennel offers similar, brighter, sweeter flavor. It has a happy host for the Swallowtail butterfly caterpillar.

Medicinal Uses: The Agastaches are generally cooling and rich in antioxidants—perfect for a

summertime sipper. They are soothing to the digestive system and the respiratory tract. Fennel really shines as a soothing and tasty antispasmodic for the lower digestive tract, helping within minutes for gas, pain and bloating. Fennel seeds are strongest, followed by the fronds and bulbs.

Growing Conditions: This perennial is low-fuss. It will grow in rich or poor soil in full sun to partial shade. Grow from seed, seedling, cutting, or root division. Harvest the top two thirds of the plant, just above a node, every few weeks. Anise hyssop rarely suffers from disease or pests. However, it may seed itself throughout your garden. After three years, it will die off, so keep some of the “babies” around. Fennel is generally grown as an annual (especially if you harvest the bulbs), though some varieties (like bronze) may come back if you don’t harvest their bulbs. Technically fennel is a perennial in zones 6-9. Both plants can reach 4 to 5 feet tall and will grow in any type of soil but will get more lush in nice, rich soil in full sun with average or below-average water.

Flavor Attributes: The Agastaches and fennel will lighten and sweeten any tea with its licorice flavor. It blends well with mints, chamomile, lemon balm, and rose petals. A cordial made with equal parts dry Korean licorice mint, fennel seeds, and star anise (with simple syrup and quality vodka) is *delicious*!

Try It As: Tea, soda, herbal honey, cordial, for cooking as a fresh or dry seasoning. Fennel makes a great vinegar for dressings, and bronze fennel vinegar is red.

Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*)

Mint Family

Conventional basil (*O. basilicum*) is a valued herbal plant, but I’m especially a fan of the purple-hued holy basil which has an aromatic, sweet taste and is revered in Ayurvedic medicine in India. It’s one of the few stress-relieving “adaptogens” that grows easily in the garden.

Medicinal Uses: Holy basil appears to modulate stress hormone output and help the body adapt to stress (“adaptogen”). In particular it may help lower cortisol, the stress hormone implicated in diabetes and abdominal weight gain. Holy basil makes a lovely tea for modest blood sugar control and to reduce carbohydrate cravings

(great with jasmine green tea). The herb is calming and well-suited before meditation or a yoga class to promote a good mindset. It has many other uses, from colds and flu to ulcer protection to radiation protection. It’s a remarkable herb that is gaining ground in the U.S.

Growing Conditions: This herb thrives in a sunny location in well-drained rich soil. Basil species are well suited for containers, as seen throughout the Mediterranean neighborhoods, as well as in temples throughout Indian temples. Grow from seed, buy seedlings, or use a cutting. Harvest the top two thirds of the plant, just above a node, every few weeks. Basil will grow in all zones as an annual. Young basil plants are prone to “dampening off” due to fungus in wet soil. Water in the morning to help control this. I find holy basil to be more forgiving than conventional basil, though it will also not tolerate frost.

Tea Attributes: Enjoy basil on its own, with mints, lemon balm, or jasmine green tea.

Also Try: Herbal honey, fresh or dry tincture.

Thai Basil (*Ocimum basilicum* var *thyriflora*) Mint Family

I find a lot of inconsistency for Thai basil seedlings on the market. It’s easily mistaken for cinnamon basil, and I suspect that seed sources and garden centers often mismatch. Both have green leaves and purple stems and flowers. In my mind, Thai basil is a more delicate, shorter basil with smaller leaves compared to the robust cinnamon basil. Cinnamon basil has more purple tinges to the leaves and a stronger cinnamon flavor; get gets bigger, taller, and has tougher leaves. Although you can substitute traditional Italian basil for Thai basil, cinnamon basil for Thai basil, and vice versa, I find they’re all quite different. Thai basil is the “secret” ingredient for really delicious Thai-inspired dishes including Thai Basil Fried Rice and tropical curries. It’s also delicious scrambled with eggs, hash browns, and turmeric. Fry the leaves a bit first in the oil before adding other ingredients. I’m less of a fan of cinnamon basil, but it’s very nice infused in cream/milk destined for ice cream or crème brûlée, and it’s a lovely addition to garden bouquets.

Medicinal Uses: Although medicinal information for Thai basil is scarce, I imagine it's similar to regular basil: loaded with antioxidant and anti-inflammatory compounds and able to ward off infections while strengthening the body.

Growing Conditions: Grow like Holy basil and traditional basil (see below), but be sure to give some extra spacing for Thai basil. It's smaller and less vigorous than many other garden herbs and basil, and it can easily get shaded out.

Flavor Attributes: I'm much more apt to use this for cooking than anything else. Its flavors combine well with hot peppers, onions, garlic, turmeric, coconut, and pineapple.

Try: Fresh, cooked, fried, frozen (vacuum or paste), vinegar (note purple basil varieties make magenta vinegar)...

Bee Balm (*Monarda* spp) Mint Family

True to its name, bee balm is a favorite amongst bees and hummingbirds thanks to its sweet nectar and bright red, pink and purple blooms. Bee balsms great looks and low-maintenance care have earned it a place in many home gardens. However, few realize that the leaves and flowers make one of our best herbal teas, in spite of its other common names: Oswego tea and bergamont. wild or purple bergamont (*M. fistulosa*) and red bee balm (*M. didyma*) are the top tea favorites. Look for them in the perennial flower section of your nursery.

Medicinal Uses: Michael Moore instilled in me a love for thyme-y *Monarda* species. It makes a great tea or herbal honey for sore throats, colds and flues, etc. The warming, spicy quality may also stimulate the digestive system.

Growing Conditions: Bee balsms prefer rich soil in full sun to partial shade. Water needs vary by species. Grow it by seeds, seedlings, or root division. Divide roots after three years. Harvest the top two thirds of the plant, just above a node, every few weeks. Powdery mildew can be a problem, but regular harvesting should keep it under control.

Tea Attributes: Bee balm became a popular beverage tea after the Boston Tea Party for its similarity to black tea. Some liken it to Earl Grey. Its citrus-oregano-thyme flavor will change slightly from mild to spicy depending on the species, variety, and climate. It blends well

with mild, sweet mints like apple mint, pineapple mint, and spearmint.

Also Try: Herbal honey, fresh or dry tincture, steam.

German Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) Sunflower Family

The tiny daisy-like chamomiles cheer up any garden and give it a meadow feel. The flowers and foliage have a light pineapple-apple scent to them. Also consider the hardy perennial & Roman chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*), which can be used similarly.

Medicinal Uses: Chamomile is best known as a relaxing herb. Many folks enjoy a cup of it before bed or to soothe frayed nerves. Bitter, aromatic properties also make it a great relaxing digestive remedy. It is a premiere children's herb for digestion, colic, irritability, and teething (weak tea, chamomile popsicles or soak a cloth in tea, freeze, and let the baby chew on it.)

Studies suggest that chamomile can even protect the stomach from ulcers.

Growing Conditions: Chamomile will thrive in most soils and conditions, though it prefers a sunny spot. Grow both types of chamomile by seed. Roman chamomile can also be grown by cuttings and root divisions. Dedicate a few leisurely mornings or afternoons throughout the growing season to collect the small flowers for tea. While it may take a while to harvest an adequate amount, their flavor will surpass any store-bought chamomile. German chamomile is an annual that often reseeds. Roman chamomile is a perennial.

Tea Attributes: Often enjoyed solo, fresh and dry chamomile flowers also provide a light pineapple-y flavor to tea. Consider blending chamomile with mints, alfalfa, and lemon balm.

Also Try: Herbal honey, fresh or dry tincture.

Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) Mint Family

Lemon balm masquerades as its relative *Menthas* until you rub its leaves to release its intense lemon fragrance. It is loved by bees and other winged pollinators as well as herbalists, who turn to the tea for a relaxing beverage.

Medicinal Uses: Lemon balm is easy to grow and multi-purpose. The citrus-y essential oil is

believed to be a mild antidepressant. The herb is used for anxiety and insomnia. Its bitter aromatic properties make it great for digestion (particularly nervous indigestion). Topically, lemon balm is an antiviral herb for herpes including cold sores, genital herpes, chicken pox, and shingles. It appears to block cell receptor sites to prevent the virus from spreading and is best used at the first sign of a flare-up.

Cautions: Theoretically may reduce thyroid, which is contraindicated for regular use with hypothyroid.

Growing Conditions: True to its mint genes, lemon balm is tolerant of most soil types, full sun to partial shade. You can purchase seedlings, grow it from seed, use a cutting, or root division. Harvest the top two thirds of the plant, just above a node, every few weeks. Lemon balm's root runners can get invasive. Keep it container-bound or dig out the plant if it spreads too far. Also be sure to cut it back before it goes to seed to prevent rampant reseeding.

Tea Attributes: This herb's bright lemon flavor is prized by tea blenders; however, it is also slightly bitter. Mints, anise hyssop, tarragon, chamomile, and other lemony herbs like lemon verbena, lemon grass, and lemon thyme will all lighten lemon balm's flavor.

Also Try: Fresh tincture, herbal honey, cordial with other lemon-y herbs. Dried lemon balm loses most of its flavor and properties within six months.

Lemon Verbena (*Aloysia triphylla*, syn *A. citriodora*) & Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citrates*) Verbena & Grass Families

These two delightful tender perennials bring tropical citrus flavor into the New England garden. You can grow it outdoors during the green season and then either harvest it all to plant anew in spring or bring it indoors before frost. Lemon verbena is deciduous, so it'll lose its leaves in winter and look dead before putting forth new growth in spring. Their flavor surpasses our perennial lemon balm and lemon thyme, and they dry relatively well but will eventually lose their lemon flavor after six months to a year. Homegrown, dried herbs will taste significantly better than store-bought for this reason.

Medicinal Uses: Citrus scents have mild mood lifting and antidepressant properties. These plants also have a tendency to improve digestion. They are generally antioxidant and healing. The essential oils have bug-repellent and antimicrobial properties. But, generally they are used just for their good flavor.

Cautions: The citrus-y oils can upset sensitive tummies and may not agree with everyone.

Growing Conditions: These tropical plants do best in rich soil that is well watered with good drainage and reasonable sunlight. Too much sun (especially indoors) can be a problem for lemongrass.

Tea Attributes: The bright lemon flavor perks up almost any blend. Lemon verbena has a perfumey candy-like flavor and scent while lemongrass reminds me of fruit loops and the Thai curries in which it is so often used. It blends well with oat straw, green tea, and other mild flavors. Stevia, agave, sugar, or honey sweeten them nicely.

Also Try: Herbal honey, cordial. Freeze the thick stems of lemongrass for Thai recipes and dry (then snip into small pieces) the grassier tops for tea. Both herbs are delightful added to plain seltzer to make a posh herbal soda.

Lemon Thyme (*Thymus citriodorus*)

Mint Family

This shrubby evergreen herb will wind around rocks and along walkways, or hold its own in a formal garden bunch. It is less pungent than common thyme (*T. vulgaris*) and has a citrus flavor enjoyed by both herbalists and chefs. The tiny lavender blooms attract bees and other winged pollinators.

Medicinal Uses: Lemon thyme is a nice tea for singers, sore throats, and mild colds. Turn to *T. vulgaris* for tough colds and many respiratory complaints. It is even a nice adjunct therapy for asthma.

Growing Conditions: Thyme likes poor, well-drained soil in full sun to partial shade. Thyme can be grown by seedling, seed, cuttings, root division, or layering. Harvest the leaves and flowers at any time. Shear it up to two thirds down the stem. May rot during a cold, wet season.

Tea Attributes: Lemon thyme adds a warm, slightly spicy lemon taste to tea. It blends well

with fresh lemon wedges, freshly grated ginger, cinnamon, lemon balm, lemon verbena, common thyme, bee balm, and mints.

Also Try: Fresh tincture, honey, steam.

The Mints (*Mentha* spp) Mint Family

No tea garden is complete without at least one mint. Beyond peppermint (*M. x piperita*) and spearmint (*M. spicata*), consider species and variety with other subtle flavors including apple, pineapple, chocolate, orange, ginger, and lemon. Do be careful when planting mints as they can be aggressive spreaders.

Medicinal Uses: Peppermint is our primary medicinal mint. It is antispasmodic and useful for most digestive ailments—indigestion, gas, intestinal pain, bloating, IBS, but NOT acid reflux (it can make this worse). Also helps to clear the sinuses and is a mild diaphoretic for fevers. Enteric-coated pills are particularly helpful for IBS and intestinal pain. Other mints are milder.

Cautions: Generally very safe, but peppermint can irritate acid reflux and ulcers.

Growing Conditions: Mints are readily available in nurseries and can also be grown from cuttings and root divisions. They do not grow well by seed—flavor will be lost. Mint grows in a variety of soils and conditions. Some species, including spearmint, thrive in damp soil. Harvest the top two thirds of the plant, just above a node, every few weeks. Help control mint from spreading by keeping it sparsely watered. Also consider keeping it container-bound to control the roots. It may occasionally get powdery mildew, but this can be discouraged with regular harvesting.

Tea Attributes: Mint is the most recognized herbal tea. It blends well with other *Mentha* species and mint family relatives including anise hyssop, bee balm, lemon balm, basil, thyme, and rosemary. It also combines nicely with chamomile, rose petals, cinnamon or bland herbs like nettle and alfalfa.

Also Try: Tincture, cordial, steam.

Stinging Nettle (*Urtica* spp)

Nettle Family

Yes, this is stinging nettles, a plant much hated by gardeners and hikers because it will sting you

much like a fire and or bee sting. However, it also is a delicious herb for tea or food, and it's one of the most nutrient-dense foods you'll find! Harvest the leaves in spring, before they go to flower. (See cautions.)

Medicinal Uses: Nettle is rich in vitamins, minerals, and chlorophyll. It's one of the most concentrated and bioavailable forms of calcium available. A regular infusion of nettles is somewhat weak on minerals (it's not easy to pull minerals out of a plant). However, try Susun Weed's "Super Infusion" method, which reportedly has 500 mg calcium per cup! Steep 1 ounce of dried nettles in 1 quart of near-boiling water. Let sit for FOUR hours, then strain. Nettles is a diuretic and may have some antihistamine benefits to boot. Note: Alfalfa has similar nutritive benefits and flavor; however, I generally prefer nettles.

Cautions: If you don't want to be stung, wear long sleeves, pants, and gloves while harvesting nettles. Once it's cooked, dried, or blended, the sting will disappear. It is generally not recommended to pick nettles once they have flowered and produce seeds (possible kidney/urinary irritation). They also taste much better in the early, spring, non-flowering state. Make sure you have real nettles, as there are some imposters. The main look-alike is deadnettles (*Lamium* spp), which resembled nettles without the sting before it flowers. Once the plants flower, they look quite different. Nettles has greenish seedy flowers whereas deadnettles has mint-family pink or white flowers.

Growing Conditions: Nettles is a stinging weed, so think carefully before you plant it. It likes rich soil (compost, former cow pastures) and will grow in full sun, part sun, or shade. Nettles is a perennial as well as a rampant self-sower. "Deadhead" the flowers before they seed to reduce spreading. It can grow to 2-4 feet tall.

Tea Attributes: In a typical tea, nettles has a mild, green flavor that can be very pleasant on its own, and it provides a good "base note" for more flavorful herbs. (The "Super Infusion" is much stronger and will take some getting used to.)

Also Try: Fresh or dried nettles in place of spinach (cooked). Fresh leaves in smoothies.

Oat Straw (*Avena sativa*)

Grass Family

Along with nettle, oat straw is a premier nutritious herb with some perks for the nervous system especially. It's also better behaved in the garden and (debatably) better tasting.

Medicinal Uses: Oat straw offers a milder tasting tea rich in calcium, magnesium, and silica, with three to four times more mineral density compared to oatmeal. The milky oat seedheads/latex is harvested midsummer and tintured fresh as a nervine, nervous system tonic, calming herb, a useful herb to quell addictive tendencies. Once dried, it lacks the sedative alkaloid and more like oatstraw but it still nice for tea.

Cautions: Generally very safe, especially if you harvest your own. Oats don't contain gluten, but they may be contaminated with it. It's not appropriate if you have a general grass/grain allergy.

Growing Conditions: This common annual cover crop will grow in many soil types but will probably accumulate the most nutrients in good soil. Like most grasses, it prefers open, sunny spaces. It reaches 4-5 feet tall.

Tea Attributes: Mild, slightly sweet, and grassy. Great base to show off and mellow flavorful garden herbs like Korean licorice mint, mint, lemongrass, holy basil, and rose petals, or in nutritive blends and super infusions.

Also Try: Vinegar, glycerine, or alcohol extract for milky oat seeds. Add straw to soup broths but strain before serving – grass is too tough for humans to eat.

Burdock (*Arctium lappa. A. minor*)

Sunflower Family

This friend of dandelion is a common weed and has similar, complimentary flavors and medicinal properties. You know burdock because the round burrs stick to your clothes and inspired the creation of Velcro.

Medicinal Uses: It is delicious sliced thinly or into matchsticks and sautéed with sesame seeds, soy sauce, and a little honey. It also makes a pleasant earthy tea (just dry chopped root slices). You can buy the fresh root in natural food stores, or in Asian markets as “gobo.” Like dandelion root, burdock is diuretic and a mild

liver and digestive stimulant. It is often used for skin conditions including chronic skin eruptions, acne, psoriasis, eczema, boils, and sties. Many herbalists and systems of traditional medicine consider the liver and the skin to be closely linked; work on the liver, and skin conditions are expected to first break out and then clear up. Burdock root is also used to regulate lymphatic fluid (the “back alley” garbage system for sorting toxins, immune system trash, and fat) and improve excretion of toxins.

Cautions: Not recommended during pregnancy. To be safe, it should not be used in gallbladder disease or bile duct obstruction unless under the guidance of a practitioner.

Identification & Harvesting: Burdock grows in yards and disturbed soil, often on the edges of sunny/shady spaces. It has broad leaves that resemble rhubarb. In the summer, they put up tall flower stalks with thistle-like purple flowers. The flowers turn to velcro-like, round, brown burrs. In spring, you can harvest the second-year plants that are popping up with big rhubarb-like leaves but have not yet put up the flower stalk. Dig and clean like dandelion (above). Be warned, it's a bugger to dig.

Tea Attributes: Slightly bitter, slightly sweet, earthy, mild.

Also Try: Tincture, capsules, vinegar, in food...

Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*)

Sunflower Family

This scraggly weed puts out surprisingly beautiful cornflower blue blossoms in the morning, which shut around noon on sunny days. You'll see them growing in the median strips and in fields. The roots have historically been used as a (caffeine-free) coffee substitute. Endive is from the chicory plant: lop off the leaves to the ground, put a bucket over it, let it grow in the dark, then harvest the light green bundles of leaves as a gourmet green (less bitter than the regular chicory leaves).

Medicinal Uses: Similar to burdock and dandelion, but more mild. Most often used as a gentle liver cleanser and diuretic.

Cautions: See burdock and dandelion.

Identification & Harvesting: The flowers are distinctive, so identify in the morning. Look for it in fields, and don't harvest near the road or in “dirty” areas. Use a fork or digging stick to get

to the roots. Be warned: they like compact, rocky soil! You can grow it in your garden, but it will probably take over and is very difficult to remove. Scrub, chop, dry, and then dry roast.

Tea Attributes: Bitter, earthy, roasted.

Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinalis*)

Sunflower Family

This is perhaps the most recognized weed in America. It's also a medicinal and nutritional powerhouse.

Medicinal Uses: The leaves can be eaten, cooked, or made into tea. They're bitter (less so in the spring, particularly before they flower), stimulate digestion, are rich in vitamins and minerals (especially potassium), and they're also diuretic (make you pee). The roots can be harvested, chopped up, and dried for tea. (Or used fresh for tinctures and other extracts.) The roots have similar properties as the leaves except that they are particularly good at encouraging the liver to remove and eliminate waste in the form of bile. And, as a diuretic, the roots are more sodium-leaching whereas the leaves are more of a general volume diuretic. The roots may also have the ability to reduce inflammation in the body and even stop the histamine response in seasonal and more serious allergies (ie: fresh tintured roots slurry). As a tea, enjoy the roots dry or dry roasted... roasting may reduce some medicinal properties, but it gives the tea a more coffee-like flavor. The flowers can be eaten as well, most commonly as in dandelion wine or as fritters.

Cautions: Generally very safe. Don't use in a bowel or gallbladder obstruction (but, if you have these issues, you aren't lolling around making a cup of tea!).

Identification & Harvesting: Dandelions grow abundantly in disturbed areas and lawns. There are other common weeds (ie: hawkweeds) that resemble dandelion. Dandelions have jagged leaves at the base (dent-de-lion, or lion's teeth), and a single, hollow stalk that goes up to one flower. If it doesn't have jagged leaves, has branches, or has leaves anywhere but the base of the plant, it's not a dandelion. Don't bother growing dandelions. Seek them out in areas that are not sprayed, have clean soil, and are away from the road. Dig with a fork or a stick to get at the root. The roots are best harvested in the fall

after they've been hit by a few frosts. Leaves are best in the spring. But, you can harvest both at any time.

Tea Attributes: Bitter, nutritious, earthy (roots).

Also Try: Tincture, vinegar, pesto...

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*)

Sunflower Family

This is one of our most ornamental garden herbs, and it's also incredible multipurpose as food, medicine, and a topical remedy.

Medicinal Uses: Calendula is most famous as a skin care herb – when infused in water or oil and applied topically (as a poultice, bath, cream, salve...) it has a potent yet gentle soothing, healing effect. It's the primary anti-itch and rash herb and cal also be used for hemorrhoids, cuts and scrapes, dry skin, conjunctivitis, baby skin issues, and more. The flowers are almost equally famous as a pot herb, hence the name Pot Marigold. The orange-yellow hued blooms have 100 times the carotenoids of a sweet potato by weight! You can add the mild-tasting petals fresh like confetti to almost anything or a handful of the whole blooms (slightly bitter) to soups and tea. Feeding calendula to chickens makes their yolk brighter orange-yellow.

Calendula is lesser known but also very useful as a tincture or tea to move the lymph and assist with detoxification. The sticky resin is responsible for calendula's topical and medicinal properties; the color for the nutritive.

Cautions: Generally very safe, but use caution if you have an allergy to daisy-family plants.

Growing Conditions: This annual will sometimes self seed (though it's prone to mold that inhibits it) and is more often available as seed than seedling. Plant in spring or fall in good soil, full sun, with regular water. Clip the blossoms as needed – it stimulates more growth, too. Happy calendula will bloom from June through November.

Tea Attributes: Vitamin-y and slightly bitter especially if using the middles of the flowers. Nice color for dry blends.

Try It As: Oil/salve/cream, bath/wash, soup, tea.

Red Raspberry Leaf (*Rubus idaeus*)

Rose Family

Wild red raspberries are not always prolific bearers of fruit; however, they are a great source for free tea! Harvest the leaves of first year wild raspberry in the spring and summer. First year plants will have green stems and a vibrancy unlike second-year plants (which have woody stems from the previous year, less prolific leaves, and later will produce flowers and fruit). The stems of raspberry have hairy thorns rather than the sharp thorns of a blackberry; however, you still may want to wear gloves. Note: Raspberry's relative, wild strawberry (*Fragaria* spp) leaves can be harvested and used in much the same way as raspberry leaves. Of course, you can also harvest and dry the fruits of raspberry and/or strawberry for tea, but that's a lot of work!

Medicinal Uses: Red raspberry leaves can be used at almost any time in a woman's lifespan to tonify the reproductive tissues, particularly the uterus. It appears to improve tone and blood supply. Many women drink a cup or two of a tea a day during the last trimester or two of pregnancy to facilitate easy, swift birth. It is an astringent, slightly diuretic, and relatively tasty tea that may also be helpful for canker sores, boggy digestive tissue, UTIs, and wound healing. It is mildly helpful as a hemostatic and for diarrhea.

Growing Conditions: Wild raspberry is better for tea and medicine than its cultivars, but it's not the most obedient garden plant, nor a great producer of berries. Your better off wildcrafting it than trying to grow it.

Tea Attributes: Pleasantly mild and astringent on its own. It also provides a nice "base note" for other ingredients. Blends well with rose petals, lady's mantle, anise hyssop/licorice mint, nettles, mints, rosehips, lemony herbs, etc.

Lady's Mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*)

Rose Family

Many gardeners prize lady's mantle for its crinkly, dew-kissed foliage even more than its subtle golden flowers. Lady's mantle is steeped in lore: Dewdrops collected from its leaves were believed to hold magical powers and keep women young.

Medicinal Uses: As its name suggests, lady's mantle is an herb for the feminine reproductive organs. It is astringent and believed to tonify the uterus. It may also be used in formulas for boggy, irritated intestines. It is primarily used as a tea.

Cautions: Use with caution in pregnancy.

Growing Conditions: Lady's mantle likes full sun to partial shade in dry or slightly moist soil. Grow this perennial from seed, seedling, or root division. Harvest the young leaves for tea. Lady's mantle is low maintenance, but cut it back after it flowers to prevent it from reseeding all over the garden.

Tea Attributes: Lady's mantle tea has a mild, astringent flavor that resembles Chinese tea. It blends well with mints, lemon balm, hibiscus flowers, and raspberry leaves.

Rose (*Rosa* spp) Rose Family

There are hundreds of types of roses out there. While any unsprayed rose could theoretically be used medicinally, we generally turn to older and wild varieties, generally pink and fragrant. You'll want an extremely fragrant rose if you're harvesting buds and petals for flavorful tea. Harvest the hips from any rose that makes nice, fully formed hips with good flavor. Popular species include apothecary rose (*R. gallica officinalis*), dog rose (*R. canina*), cabbage rose (*R. centifolia*), Damask rose (*R. damascena*), or Japanese rose (*R. rugosa*), which has naturalized along the seacoast.

Medicinal Uses: Rose petals are used in tea mostly for their light, aromatic, and slightly astringent properties, which become more pleasantly fragrant with a longer steeping time. The astringency is helpful internally for bleeding, diarrhea, or boggy digestive tissue. Externally for aging, irritated, or inflamed skin. Rosehips are among the more universally-known herbal nutritives. Many vitamin C supplements include them as a source of extra vitamin C and bioflavonoids (and to look good to passers by—generally the amount of rosehips added to these supplements is minimal). The red fruits of many types of roses (*Rugosa* & *Dog*) are harvested in autumn, generally just after the first frost. Crushed and/or whole rosehips are also widely available in commerce by almost any store or supplier that sells loose tea herbs. It'll give you a

modest dose of vitamin C along with many other complementary flavanoids and antioxidants.

Cautions: Strain rosehips well; the little hairs and irritate the throat. If you're harvesting your own, make sure the roses have not been sprayed with chemicals.

Growing Conditions: Roses have a reputation for being finicky perennials. *R. rugosa* is more hardy. Most of the roses mentioned will become shrubby over time. You'll want to make sure they have good soil in a sunny or partially sunny spot, and be sure to prune regularly to enhance airflow and reduce disease.

Tea Attributes: Fragrant flowers and buds will give a pleasant flowerly taste to teas, especially if allowed to steep for 30 minutes or more. They blend well with mints, nettles, and other rose family astringents (red raspberry, lady's mantle, etc.). Rosehips are sweet, tart, and fruity. They blend well with hibiscus, rooibos, and dried fruits.

Also Try: Syrup, honey, cordial. Delicious rose petals can be used as a garnish or candied.

Gotu Kola (*Centella asiatica*)

Parsley Family (debatably)

Even though this is one of my favorite medicinal herbs, which I grow easily most years, I rarely discuss it in gardening classes because it's so difficult to find as a seedling (Warner River Organics is one of the few sources) and difficult to propagate from seed (which you'll find at Horizon Herbs). Once you have a seedling, it grows easily with the right conditions – it is a tad fussy and wants to pretend its in India.

Medicinal Uses: Gotu kola is one of those “all that and a bag of chips” herbs. It's a calm-energy adaptogen used for anxiety and stress that also acts as a nootropic and circulation enhancer to boost memory, focus, and brain function. It's circulation-enhancing, capillary/vein-strengthening properties make it a useful cardiovascular tonic and remedy (topically and internally) for varicocities, varicose veins, hemorrhoids. It also improves collagen synthesis and wound repair (again, on contact and systemic – internal and/or external). And, you can eat it! Cooked, raw, powdered, in dishes with garlic and onions, in smoothies, as a leafy green akin to watercress.

Growing Conditions: This tender perennial hails from India in hot, moist climates with rich sludgy soil. It won't survive our winters but can be grown as an annual or brought in as a potted plant. It prefers 100% compost, regular (ie: daily) watering, and part shade or dappled sun. It gets cranky in full sun, even indoors, with browning leaves and a loss of its happy green glow. You can grow it on the ground as a creeping groundcover or in pots (it looks a lot like ground ivy or Swedish ivy). Once you have it, it grows easily and will spread if given the space as a small creeping vine and via root division. It also puts out frequent seeds but they may not germinate and are unlikely to come back outside.

Flavor Attributes: The flavor ranges from seaweed-y salty and slightly bitter to pungent and celery-like (a food to which it is loosely related). In spite of its strong flavor that may not be loved by all, it's easy to cover up in blends. You can mix it with any aromatic tasty herb in tea, toss it in soup broths, etc.

Try It As: Tea, food, broth, tincture, capsule, powder in smoothies etc.

Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*)

Honeysuckle Family

This shrubby tree can be cultivated and found in the wild (our local American *S. canadensis* has recently been renamed as a subspecies of the European *S. nigra* rather than a separate species). The “Adams” cultivar does particularly well. Much medicine and lore sprouts from the elderberry, which is supposedly a favorite of the fairy king and queen. Across the pond, it's considered bad luck to cut down an elder (or hawthorn, for that matter), lest you draw the fury of the fairies.

Medicinal Uses: Like most berries, the deep blue-black elderberries are rich with antioxidant pigments; however, it's their antiviral activity that draws the most attention. Compounds in elder help block viruses (including the flu, cold, and herpes) from the cells, making it difficult for them to break into the body, spread, and wreak havoc. This is most useful as a preventative or the early onset of viral symptoms. The flowers have slight antihistamine action that can relieve both cold/flu and allergy symptoms, and they

acts a diaphoretic (make you sweat) to help you break a fever and get over illness more quickly. **Cautions:** Properly identified and prepared elder is very safe, even for the very young and very old. Elderberry contains cyanide-like compounds that can be nauseating and possibly toxic (this seems to be a bigger issue with wild American rather than cultivated European elder). Therefore, stick only to the flowers and ripe berries, dry (my preference) or cooked, although some people do eat fresh berries without issue. Because elder seeds cause nausea for sensitive people, you may prefer recipes in which you strain the out the berries (tea, syrup, tincture, cordial, oxymel) rather than eat them whole (pie, whole fruit spread). Don't use the root, leaves, or stems internally, but you can use the leaves topically as an arnica substitute for bumps and bruises. Note that red elder (*S. racemosa*) berries and flowers are more toxic and nauseating than black elder and should not be used; however, it's relatively easy to distinguish (different shape flower cluster, blooms and fruits 1+ month earlier, bright red berries, more common up north).

Growing Conditions: This is a robust shrub once it really takes hold. Key identifying features: opposite and divided leaves, flat-ish clusters of small creamy white flowers in June, dark blue-purple-black berries in September. Wild elderberry prefers damp partly shady spots with rich soil like drainage ditches along the road, damp edges of the yard, and alongside swamps and waterways. It's easiest to find and identify when it blooms in June. Cultivated, it tolerates drier, sunnier spots. Birds loooove the berries, and you may have a hard time beating them to the harvest. In my yard, the moose and deer munch on whole branches, too.

Tea Attributes: Dried berries and flowers both work well in teas. Add the berries to formulas for immune health as well as red berry-antioxidant formulas. I personally enjoy the berries in a tea with hibiscus and schizandra berries (also good w/o schiz) and a good dollop of honey. The flowers are often blended with peppermint and other diaphoretics as a fever tea, which is particularly popular for kids since it's gentle and tastes good.

Also Try: Syrup, oxymel, tincture, cordial... I love Darcey Blue's elderberry syrup recipe (you

can find it online). For an alcohol-free format, try elderberries and rosehips as an oxymel – quite delish! It does seem to lose potency and hue after a few months.

Garlic Chives (*Allium tuberosum*)

Garlic/Lily Family

Garlic chives have flat “leaves” and white clusters of flowers that bloom in late summer alongside the earthy pink sedums (a lovely ornamental combination for when the rest of the garden is looking drab). Use them fresh chopped in dishes much like you would onion-y chives, just expect a garlic flavor instead. The white blossoms have stronger flavor, and the black seeds can also be used as a seasoning; their texture isn't always as popular. Regular chives (*A. schoenoprasum*) are quite similar but have pretty pink flowers that bloom in early/mid June, hollow round blades, and an onion-y flavor.

Medicinal Uses: Garlic chives have similar but milder health benefits as garlic and onions: heart tonic, immune support, circulation enhancer. The seeds are used in Traditional Chinese Medicine to tonify the liver and kidney, supplement the yang, and consolidate the jing – making it useful for weakness, coldness, impotence, frequent urination, etc.

Growing Conditions: Long-lived perennial, hardy in zones 5-11. Along with traditional pink-blossomed chives, it's a common sight in gardens as an ornamental culinary herb and pest-repellent edging. It's also an even more *prolific self seeder.* (Regular chives aren't as ill-behaved.) Be sure to trim the spent blossoms before they go to seed to help control this so you don't end up with a “lawn” of chives (they're not easy to pull out) – perfect excuse to harvest blossoms for garlic chive blossom vinegar (which tastes like garlic pickles and is great for salad dressings and marinades)! Regular chives' pink blossoms make a magenta/pink vinegar, though the color fades after a while.

Flavor Attributes: Blends well whenever mild garlic is nice. Consider it combined with chives, dill, marjoram, thyme, oregano, basil.

Try It As: Fresh seasoning (most flavor is lost on drying, though the seeds can be used), frozen (any way), dried (so so), vinegar. Garlic chive blossom vinegar has exceptional flavor but unexceptional color. Regular chive blossoms

make a pink/magenta vinegar, and regular garlic cloves sometimes turn white vinegar bright teal blue.

Stevia (*Stevia rebaudiana*)

Sunflower Family

This exotic sweetening herb is becoming more available during the height of seedling season. One or two plants will likely supply you with all you need for the year.

Medicinal Uses: The primary benefit to stevia is that it sweetens without calories or carbohydrates and is safe for diabetics.

Growing Conditions: This tender perennial wants to be in Paraguay. Give it rich soil in a warm spot with regular/heavy watering. I grow it in the sun, but it will tolerate partial and full shade – rich soil, warmth, and water are most important. It's very difficult to grow from seed but easily propagated via cutting. I think it tastes better (sweeter, less bitter) if harvested earlier in the growing season when the leaves are “happy” looking. Good indoor growers can bring pots of stevia inside in winter.

Flavor Attributes: Insanely sweet with hint of bitterness reminiscent of licorice's sweetness without the licorice flavor. Just a pinch will do for teas, a leaf for a whole recipe.

Try It As: Fresh or dry flavoring for tea and other recipes (just a pinch!), vinegar (tastes like sweet pickles), to sweeten salad dressings, etc.

Other great wild & cultivated teas...

Blueberry (*Vaccinium spp*) – Leaves are astringent, lower blood sugar, and help ease UTIs. Berries are fruity, sweet, rich in antioxidants, and

helpful for eyesight and capillary health. Wild is best. Home cultivated is ok. Likes acidic soil.

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*) – Leaves and flowers are useful as a sedative, bitter digestive for colic, and as a diaphoretic for fevers. (And, of course, for driving kitties crazy!) Bitter, but blends well with mints. Self-seeding garden perennial.

Horsetail (*Equisetum spp*) – The “tails” of this ancient plant can be harvested and dried for a nutritious tea rich in the mineral silica. More potent if you allow it to simmer and/or infuse for several hours. Also diuretic. Be sure to harvest from “clean” areas as it will concentrate agrobusiness waste in runoff. Wild, near water.

Pineapple Sage (*Salvia elegans*) – Leaves have a fresh pineapple scent when crushed and can be used fresh or dry in a pleasant, slightly astringent tea. Blends nicely with peach. Tender garden perennial.

Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) – Leaves and flowers are a useful sedative for sleep, anxiety, and general relaxation. Bitter, but blends well with mints. Perennial, also wild.

Wintergreen (*Gaultharia procumbens*) Leaves & Black Birch (*Betula lenta*) Bark – These two wild herbs have a pleasant wintergreeny flavor. Aspirin-like compounds in them help relieve pain and reduce fevers. Wintergreen leaves can be tricky to dry without molding. Prune birch branches up to about 1 inch thick and scrape off the bark with a knife. Smaller twigs can just be chopped up. These plants should not be used in high doses or long term; not recommended with kidney disease. (The essential oils of these plants are quite toxic, but modest use as tea is fine for most people.) Wild.

Keep reading... more on the next page!

CREATING BLENDS

Blends can be as complicated or simple as you like. There is very little you can do “wrong.” I strive to choose plants with harmonious actions and flavors that will work together to address a person’s health concern or strengthen their overall wellbeing. Here are some basic rules of thumb, but feel free to improvise:

Primary Herbs: Your formula will feature one or more primary herbs chosen for their ability to address the primary health concern. (Or perhaps you just decided that you want to make a tea with “x” herb today.) If they’re relatively gentle and safe herbs, the primary herbs may make up the majority of your formula. If they’re particularly strong or have safety concerns, you may use just a little bit.

Supportive Herbs: From a medicinal perspective, your supportive herbs will support overall health and/or soften some of the edge of primary herbs. Common categories of supportive herbs include adaptogens (stress support), nutritious plants, tonic plants, antioxidant-rich plants, and antispasmodic or calming plants. Or they may have similar yet gentler activities as the primary plants. From a flavor perspective, your supportive herb might soften, sweeten, or perk up a harsh flavor from the primary herb. For example, peppermint eases the bitterness of chamomile, burdock softens the bitterness of dandelion, nettle brings down the peppery edge of peppermint. Some of my favorite supportive herbs include nettle, oatstraw, mints, astragalus, codonopsis, burdock, rosehips, rose petals, and red raspberry leaf. These herbs often make up the bulk of a formula.

Synergists (aka Movers, Shakers & Harmonizers): Medicinally, these plants kick the formula into gear. They often have a warming quality that helps the other herbs circulate throughout the body and enhance their absorption. Some have the proven ability to enhance formulas so that the whole formula is greater than the sum of its parts. For example, black pepper improves the absorption of turmeric by 2,000! Cayenne increases the anticancer properties of green tea 100 fold. I try to choose synergists that compliment the person and activity of the rest of the formula. Other favorites include ginger (especially when warming, digestive, and anti-inflammatory action are needed), cinnamon (especially when blood sugar balance seems important), nutmeg (often used in mood formulas), cardamom (digestion), green tea/mate/chocolate (energize), etc. Honey and licorice are also believed to synergize and harmonize formulas. Although I rarely use them, lobelia is believed to “tell the other herbs what to do” and prickly ash has circulation-enhancing properties. From a flavor perspective, these herbs may also give punch, flavor, or sweetness to a formula to make it palatable and familiar tasting. These herbs usually make up a small percentage of a formula because they are so strong.

If you’re creating a tea blend, keep in mind the steeping times and purposes of various ingredients. Delicate flavors of leaves or flowers get lost if you steep them too long. Barks and roots may not be sufficiently extracted in a quick infusion. If you’re making a laxative formula, you probably don’t want to use cinnamon (which is used for diarrhea to bind you up) as your synergist. If you have a “hot” person, a lot of ginger probably won’t do. Etc.

Listen to your body and intuition when making and trying out formulas. What are you drawn to include? (Some people even dowse or meditate on this.) When you take it, how does it make you feel? Do you like it? I usually use a blend of analytical “research” to choose a bunch of herbs for a potential formula, then I use my intuition to make the final decision of what does/doesn’t go in and make a small batch. Then I see how the formula works to determine if it should be tweaked.

Tannins & Alkaloids: For tinctures and similar extracts that will sit for a while, you can do whatever you want; however, be aware that alkaloids and tannins can bind together and precipitate out over time. If this is a concern, add 5-10% or more of glycerine, simple syrup, or honey to the formula, which can help prevent the precipitation. Make a small batch because it may eventually precipitate. Cinnamon is a good example of a single herb that is best extracted with glycerine in the formula to prevent “cinnamon sludge.”

- **Common high-tannin plants:** many barks (birch, alder, cinnamon, witch hazel, oak, cherry), vaccinium species (blueberries, cranberries, etc.), most astringent herbs (rose family, blackberry leaf/bark, raspberry leaf, agrimony), rhubarb root, sumach, red root, walnut, bayberry.
- **Common high-alkaloid plants:** many poisonous and drug-like plants (aconite, datura, gelsemium, henbane, peyote, tobacco, blood root, Solanum spp.), bitter berberines (goldenseal, Oregon grape root, goldthread, barberry), coltsfoot, lobelia, ephedra, California poppy, passionflower.

Sources & Resources

Seed Sources:

- Horizon Herbs, (OR) – www.horizonherbs.com (best selection of herb seeds anywhere!)
- High Mowing Seeds (VT) – www.highmowingseeds.com
- FedCo (ME) – www.fedcoseeds.com (also great for trees and other plants/seeds)

Seedling Sources:

- **NH Herbal Network's Spring Herb & Garden Day**
Happens on a Saturday in June every year – Canterbury Shaker Village, Concord, NH
We have a HUGE selection of organic and local herbs for sale by a variety of growers as part of the vendor fair/plant sale. nhherbalnetwork.wordpress.com/herbday
- **Also see spring plant sales** from Rockingham Herb Society (Chester), Herb Society NE Seacoast Unit (Portsmouth/Newington), etc.
- **Warner River Organics, Webster, NH** - Organic! Great selection of the classic culinary and medicinals in spring. One of the few sources of Korean licorice mint and gotu kola seedlings. Order: warnerriverorganics@tds.net
- **Found Well Farm, Pembroke, NH** - Organic! Specialty in native plants. Great source for bee balm www.foundwellfarm.com
- **Langford Homestead Farm, Candia, NH** – Organic and/or Wildcrafted! Though informal, they grow a wide range of plants and can often grow-to-order or dig-as-needed for most of your easily grown cultivated and wild medicinals. www.facebook.com/LangfordHomesteadHerbs
- **Red Fox Farm, Gilmanton, NH** – Organic! Wonderful organic herb & vegetable seedlings. The BEST holy basil seedlings! Hard-to-find herbs. www.redfoxfarm.org
- **Good Earth Farm, Weare, NH** – Organic! Excellent herb and veg seedlings www.goodearthfarmnh.com
- **Pickity Place, Mason, NH**: Herbal seedlings, restaurant, and beautiful herby spot! pickityplace.org
- **Gilberties Herb Gardens, Westport, CT**: Huge selection of wholesale culinary, medicinal, and less common herbs. Sold at garden centers and online. www.gilbertiesherbs.com
- **Rockingham Acres, Derry, NH**: Some really lovely herbs and inspired garden design – it's like walking into a fairy kingdom of flowers. www.rockinghamacres.com
- **Zack Woods Herb Farm, VT**: Pricey but OUTSTANDING quality. Organic herb grower, sells fresh, dry, and potted plants by mail. Hard to find herbs. www.zackwoodsherbs.com
- **New England Wildflower Society (Massachusetts)**: www.newfs.org
- **United Plant Savers**: www.unitedplantsavers.org
- **Chinese Herbs**: <http://mountaingardensherbs.com/index.php/products/bare-root-plants/>

Books on Herbal Gardening:

- My 2019 book, *Grow Your Own Herbal Remedies*, of course!
- Jekka McVicar, *The Complete Herb Book*
- Tammi Hartung, *Growing 101 Herbs that Heal & Homegrown Herbs*
- Peg Schafer, *Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm*
- Richo Chech, *Grow At-Risk Medicinal Herbs*
- Lima, *Herbs: Complete Gardener's Guide*
- Sharol Tilgner, *Herbal Medicine*
- Patricia Turcotte, *New England Herb Gardener*

Books on Cooking with Herbs:

- Jekka McVicar, *Jekka's Herb Cookbook*
- Jerry Traunfeld, *The Herbfarm Cookbook* and *The Herbal Kitchen*
- Susan Belsinger, www.SusanBelsinger.com
- Jim Long, www.LongCreekHerbs.com
- *The Herb Society of America's Essential Guide to Growing and Cooking with Herbs*

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*.

Fabulous Tea Herbs

(ital = not usually locally grown)

The Flavorful Mints:

Apple Mint
Catnip (slightly bitter)
Chocolate Mint
Peppermint
Pineapple Mint
Spearmint

Licorice-y Herbs:

Anise (seeds)
Anise Hyssop
Fennel (all parts)
Licorice (root)
Star Anise (pods)
Tarragon

Citrus-y Herbs:

Citrus wedges
Lemon Balm (slightly bitter)
Lemon Grass
Lemon Thyme
Lemon Verbena
Orange Mint
Orange Thyme

Sweet Herbs

All Licorice-y Herbs
Cinnamon (bark)
(longer steep time)
Fenugreek (seeds)
(maple-y, slightly bitter)
Stevia (just a pinch!)
Vanilla bean

Nutritive Herbs:

Alfalfa
Hibiscus
Calendula
Dandelion leaf (bitter!)
Gotu kola
Horsetail
Nettle
Oat (straw, meal)
Red Clover
Rose (hips)

Calming Herbs:

Ashwagandha (root)
Catnip
Chamomile
Gotu Kola
Holy Basil
Lavender
Lemon Balm
Passionflower
Skullcap

Spicy Herbs

Bay Leaf
Bee Balm
Cardamom (pods)
Cayenne (fruit) (just a pinch!)
Cinnamon (bark)
Cloves (buds)
Garam masala (spice blend)
Ginger (root)
Nutmeg (seeds)
Thyme

Astringent “Tea-ish” Herbs

Green & White Tea (C)
Black Tea (C+)
Yerba Mate (C+)
Blackberry (leaf)
Blueberry (leaf)
Lady’s Mantle
Raspberry (leaf)
Strawberry (leaf)
Rooibos

Floral (Flowers)

Chamomile
Jasmine
(loses flavor quickly)
Jasmine Green Tea
Lavender
Neroli/Citrus Blossom
(loses flavor quickly)
Roses

Fruity

Bilberry/Blueberry
Elderberry
Hibiscus (flowers)
Lychii/Gogi Berry
Rooibos
Rose (hips)
Citrus wedges
Fruit juice
Dehydrated berries

Energizing Herbs

Green & White Tea (C)
Black Tea (C+)
Yerba Mate (C+)
Coffee (C++)
Ashwagandha (root)
Eleuthero (root)
Ginseng (root)
Holy Basil
Maca (root)

Earthy, Bitter

Coffee (C++)
Yerba Mate (C+)
Ashwagandha (root)
Astragalus (root)
Eleuthero (root)
Ginseng (root)
Barley (grain, roasted)
Burdock (root)
Chicory (root, roasted)
Dandelion (root, esp roasted)

Aromatic

Basil
Bee Balm
Holy Basil
Hyssop
Marjoram
Rosemary
Oregano
Sage
Savory
Thyme
White Pine Needles

C = contains low caffeine, C+ = contains caffeine, C++ = contains high caffeine

Assume all plants are leaves unless specified or the name contains “berry” (which are fruits unless otherwise specified) or it’s in the “floral” category (flowers).

~ Specific (Mostly) Local Tea Blends For Different Uses ~

Relaxing Tea

Nice for insomnia, anxiety, or just to chill out. For daytime, increase the lemon balm and reduce the skullcap. Infuse 1 tsp-1 tbsp/cup, 15 min.

- 1 part lemon balm
- 1 part skullcap
- 1 part spearmint

Calm Alert Tea

Great for morning energy, high in antioxidants, some caffeine. May help stabilize blood sugar. Infuse 1 tsp-1 tbsp/cup, 5 min.

- 1 part gotu kola
- 1 part holy basil
- 1 part jasmine green tea

Spicy Mint Tea

Features two great garden herbs (hard to find in commerce). Nice warming beverage tea and for sore throats and colds. Infuse 1 tsp-1 tbsp/cup, 15 min.

- 1 part bee balm
- 1 part apple mint or spearmint

Lemon Drop Tea

Feel free to experiment with different lemon-y herbs. Infuse 1 tsp-1 tbsp/cup, 15 min.

- 1 part lemongrass
- 1 part lemon verbena
- 1 pinch stevia

Sweet Romance

Pleasant and light nutritious and antioxidant properties. Infuse 1 tsp-1 tbsp/cup, 15 min.

- 1 part oat straw
- 1 part Korean licorice mint
- 1 part rose petals
- maybe 1 pinch stevia

Brisk Winter Forest Tea

Delicious during or after a xc ski! Opens the lungs and helps fight infection. Infuse in a quart jar, 20 min.

- 1 handful fresh or dry black birch bark and twigs
- Several sprigs pine needle branches
- 1 tablespoon peppermint

Digestive Relaxer

Great combo for the tummy. Infuse 1 tsp-1 tbsp/cup, 5 min.

- 1 part peppermint
- 1 part chamomile

Minty Nutritive

Great basic, uplifting & nutritious tea. Infuse 1 tsp-1 tbsp/cup, 5-15 min.

- 1 part nettles or alfalfa
- 1 part pepper/spearmint

Nutri-Tea

Delicious & nutritious! Infuse 1 tbsp/cup, 15-30 min.

- 2 parts nettles
- 2 parts alfalfa
- 1 part peppermint
- 1 part spearmint
- 1 part horsetail
- 1 part oatstraw
- 1 part red clover
- 1/4 part calendula

Whimsical Tea

Tastes like a craft shop! Mild digestive tea. Infuse 1 tsp-1 tbsp/cup, 5-15 minutes.

- 2 parts spearmint
- 1 part nettle
- 1 part lady's mantle (opt)
- 1/4 part rose petals
- Shake of cinnamon powder or cinn. sugar

“Earl Grey” Tea

Simple & delicious!

- 1 sprig fresh lemon verbena or lemon balm
- 1 bag of green/black tea

Heart Calm

Cardio tonic & may help stress-hypertension. Infuse 1 tsp-1 tbsp/cup, 15 min.

- 1 part hawthorn berries
- 1 part hawthorn lf/flwr
- 1 part linden

Bitter Brew

This tea has coffee-ish flavors when cream or milk is added. The herbs are very nice for liver detoxification (particularly w/o the dairy). Decoct or brew 1 tsp-1 tbsp/cup, 10-15 min.

- 2 parts burdock
- 1 part dandelion root
- 1 part roasted chicory

Blueberry Blood Sugar Tea

Great after meals to help lower blood sugar. Infuse 1 tsp-1 tbsp/cup, 15 min.

- 1 part blueberry leaves
- 1 part dried blueberries
- 1 part holy basil

Antioxidant Berry Tea

Loaded with antioxidants, vitamin C, bioflavonoids. Infuse 1 tbsp/cup, 15 min.

- 1 part rosehips
- 1 part dried blueberries
- 1 part dried elderberries
- can also add nonlocal rooibos, hibiscus, etc

Lady Tea

Light astringent, tissue toner. Infuse 1 tsp-1 tbsp/cup, 15 m.

- 1 part raspberry leaf
- 1 part lady's mantle
- 1 part rose petal