

# HEDGEROW HERBALS

The quarterly newsletter from your local herbalist - Julie Dore  
Articles, news, recipes and tips for a healthy you

**FREE**

Welcome to the winter edition which includes information on surviving the festive season, spring cleaning, osteoporosis and recipes for you to try

## Recovering from the Festive Season

So was Christmas and the New Year just too much? Well herbal help is at hand to help you recover your fizz –even if you received too many presents of socks!

If all the rich food and alcohol has taken its toll on your digestion, here is some advice to improve it. Before a heavy meal, prime your digestion to deal efficiently with your food by drinking a glass of grapefruit juice or a few drops of angostura bitters about 30 minutes before eating. If you are prone to heartburn, take soothing demulcent herbs, such as marshmallow or slippery elm, before eating to protect digestive tissues from acid burn. Meadowsweet tea acts as a natural antacid. Do not drink coffee, peppermint tea or alcohol, as these worsen heartburn. If you feel bloated, overfull or have indigestion after eating, then you will get relief from either peppermint or chamomile tea. For feelings of nausea make a tea a slice of fresh or a pinch of powdered ginger.



Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*

If you eat healthily throughout the year, a little overindulgence is not the end of the world, and some of the foods we traditionally eat at this time are positively good for us. Brussels sprouts are packed full of antioxidants, vitamin C, beta-carotene and cancer fighting substances called indoles. They help strengthen the immune system and improve the health of the skin, nervous system and mucous membranes. So go on, have another one!

Drinking to excess, even just one day a year, is harmful to your health and especially your liver. However, if you do intend to binge, try these to avoid a hangover

- always eat before you drink heavily
- take 4 evening primrose oil capsules beforehand and a couple after drinking
- drink equal amounts of water (NOT fizzy which allows alcohol to get into the bloodstream faster) to alcohol as dehydration is a cause of hangover symptoms
- take a B-complex supplement plus extra thiamine (B<sub>1</sub>) as these are depleted by alcohol
- avoid drinks that contain toxic impurities called congeners, e.g. rum, brandy, champagne and some sweet wines. Vodka is the cleanest alcohol.

Afterwards you can settle the digestion and enhance alcohol breakdown by drinking chamomile and ginseng tea respectively. Ginger can help alleviate nausea. You should avoid taking paracetamol for the headache - it causes more liver damage. Lavender essential oil rubbed into the temples (avoid the eyes) can help the throbbing headache and a relaxing bath with a couple of drops of

fennel and juniper can help detoxify the system. Milk thistle helps the liver restore itself from any damage if you have over-done the alcohol.

If you have a juicer make a detoxing drink using an apple, a large carrot, a small cooked beetroot in juice (or ½ a papaya), a handful of frozen raspberries and a small piece of fresh ginger root. The fruit sugar (fructose) helps speed up the rate your body gets rid of toxins and this combination helps to cleanse the liver.

### **Spring time, spring clean - your body as well as your house!**

In times BT (i.e. **Before Tesco** - and other supermarkets!), having spent the winter eating preserves, pickles and root vegetables, people ate a spring tonic of wild plants to cleanse and reinvigorate their bodies. Two of the plants they used are excellent to include in a spring clean regime.

**Dandelion leaves and roots** are packed full of vitamins and minerals (the roots contain more vitamin A than carrots!) as well as having elimination actions. The leaves are a diuretic, so drink plenty of water to assist in the removal of toxins via the kidneys. Use as a tea or add young leaves to salads. The roots, roasted to make caffeine free coffee substitute, or steamed, can be eaten like asparagus. They enhance liver detoxification functions so more toxins are eliminated via the bowel. (Do not use if you suffer from gallstones). Young **spring nettles** are rich in vitamins and minerals, especially iron and calcium, and were a traditional spring tonic and blood cleanser. Eat the young leaves like spinach - they don't sting if cooked for 10 minutes. Remember to only eat plants that have not been sprayed.

### **Recipe for French Salad –**

Fry bacon with garlic and onions until crisp. Add a tablespoon of white wine to the hot bacon and onion and then pour over tender young dandelion leaves.



### **Recipe for Nettle Beer**

A bucketful of nettle leaves  
3-4 handfuls of dandelion tops  
3-5 handfuls of cleavers  
25g of ginger root

Boil everything together with 2 gallons of water for 15 minutes and then strain. Add

450g of brown sugar and, while warm, float on the top a piece of toast spread with yeast and a teaspoon of sugar. Keep in a warm place for 6-7 hours. Remove the scum and add 1 teaspoon of cream of tartar and bottle in sterilised containers. Use for gout and rheumatic pain.

It is also important to preserve the correct environment for healthy bowel bacteria which perform many vital functions including vitamin synthesis, preventing growth of unhealthy bacteria, digesting fibrous food, preventing the formation of carcinogenic substances and reducing allergies and food intolerances. Ensure you create the ideal environment by eating foods that promote healthy bacteria (known as prebiotics). These include garlic, onions, barley, linseed, wheat, banana, slippery elm, marshmallow root and tomatoes. Avoid simple sugars and carbohydrates as these encourage growth of unhealthy bacteria. After a course of antibiotics or any colon cleansing treatment, repopulation of the bowel fauna is helped by taking probiotics, foods containing *lactobacillus acidophilus*, i.e. some live bio yoghurts. Your bowel and your body will love you for it.



### **Osteoporosis - what it is and how to prevent it**

Osteoporosis is not a disease or something solely affecting older women. And it is not, as drug companies promoting HRT would have us believe, caused by the menopause. It can be a complication of many endocrine, anti-inflammatory and neoplastic conditions, e.g rheumatoid arthritis, ankylosing spondylitis and chronic liver disease. It is not a disease but a risk factor due to reduced bone density meaning you are at a greater risk of bone



fracture. Bone density increases until our late twenties, but from our forties, in both men and women, it starts to decline. For women, that decline increases during the menopause. As women have thinner bones and generally live longer than men, they are more at risk of osteoporosis. However, an 85-year-old man has the same risk as an 80-year-old woman.

The risk factors for osteoporosis include genetics, poor diet, smoking, lack of exercise, steroids (including asthma inhalers), high coffee or alcohol consumption and stress. Of particular concern are young people who have suffered from anorexia or very restricted diets in order to be pencil thin. They are at a very high risk of developing osteoporosis at an early age because their bones have been starved of vital nutrients at a time when they should be building bone for the future.

Your bones are living tissue composed of protein fibres for flexibility and a mineral matrix for strength. They are constantly being broken down and renewed, a process that is regulated by oestrogen in women and testosterone in men. As we age, and as hormone levels drop, the balance of renewal and breakdown alters so more bone is broken down than is replaced leading to a loss in overall density. One drug used to combat osteoporosis, called biphosphonates, stop old bone from being recycled. This has a positive effect in the short term but, as old bone is stronger than new bone, in the longer term is less effective. All bones suffer from density loss but fractures or crumbling occur in the shock absorbing bones found in the vertebra forming the spine, tops of the long bones (e.g. the hip) and the bones of feet and wrists. This is because this type of bone has a fine honeycomb structure, a bit like that of a Crunchie bar. Having such a fine structure means it is very vulnerable to losses in density hence most fractures occur in the thigh bones or osteoporosis sufferers develop a dowager's hump as the bones of the spine crumble away.

So what can you do to improve your bone density and prevent the on-set of osteoporosis? The good news from many different studies is that you can boost bone renewal by stressing the bones because they respond by increasing their density. Various studies all come to the same conclusion that **WEIGHT BEARING EXERCISE** is **even more** important than improving your diet or taking supplements. This exercise includes walking,

dancing, gardening, jogging, impact sports like tennis or netball, yoga, Pilates, aqua aerobics and gym work. Choose something you enjoy and do it regularly! While stress is bad for the rest of you it is definitely good for the bones!



Comfrey *Symphytum officinalis*

Herbs such as nettles, mentioned above, and comfrey leaf can be used to provide bone enhancing minerals. I make a mineral rich vinegar for my patients using cider vinegar and add dried nettles, comfrey and cuttle fish bone (a sterile source of all the bone building minerals). A tablespoon per day ensures a regular and digestible source of minerals and vitamins for healthy bones.

To maintain strong bones your body needs calcium, magnesium and vitamin D. The latter is only a problem if you never expose some skin to the sun as Vitamin D made in the summer months is stored in our bodies. The body can only utilise calcium in the ratio of 2:1 with magnesium (check supplements contain this ratio). Dairy foods are high in calcium but contain little magnesium (the ratio in milk is about 12:1, cheese 22:1). More balanced sources of both are fish (especially the soft bones found in tinned varieties), seeds, (in particular sesame), beans, green leafy vegetables like spring greens and broccoli, dried figs and whole grains. Eating large quantities of protein rich foods raises blood acidity resulting in calcium being leached from bones to compensate. Therefore **reduce** meat and cheese and **increase** fruits and vegetables which lower blood acidity. Bran, coffee and tannins all reduce calcium absorption by the digestive system. High dietary sugar or phosphorus causes calcium to be excreted so avoid refined sugars, instant soups, ready meals and fizzy drinks. If you decide to take mineral supplements, take them at night as that's when the body is building bone. Some cheaper supplements

use minerals that are not readily digestible (that's why they are cheap). Look for Calcium and Magnesium Citrates as these are better assimilated - and remember calcium carbonate is chalk!

### **Hot Fish on Toast** - a tasty snack to boost your bones

For one

1-2 slices of multigrain bread

1 small can of sardines, pilchards or mackerel in olive oil

1 large chopped tomato

1 dessertspoon of sesame seeds

Dried chilli flakes

Fresh chopped parsley and freshly ground black pepper

Toast the bread on one side only. Drain the sardines and arrange them on the untoasted side. Top with chopped tomato and a few dried chilli flakes, sesame seeds and freshly ground black pepper. Grill for three minutes or until golden. Sprinkle with parsley before serving. Bon appetit!

### **And to make good herbal use of excess socks (clean of course!).....**

- ❖ Fill with hops, lavender or chamomile and tie the neck tightly for a sleep huggy
- ❖ Fill with thyme, rosemary, mint, cloves and southernwood, tie as above and place in clothes drawers to repel moths
- ❖ Mix oats with red clover, marigold flowers and heartsease and tie under the tap when running a bath to make a soothing milk for itchy skin conditions
- ❖ use a tightly knitted sock to filter homemade tinctures and herb vinegars

### **DIARY DATES**

Meet me on one of my plant safaris this spring and summer when I will be telling you about the medicinal uses and folklore of plants growing at these beautiful nature reserves.

- **Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> April & 9<sup>th</sup> September** (2pm) at **Sandy RSPB HQ** Tickets include entry to reserve – phone 01767 680541 to reserve a place
- **Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April & 24<sup>th</sup> June** (2pm) **Milton Country Park** Tickets £5 adults, £3 children – phone 01223 420060 to reserve a place
- **Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> May** (2pm) **West Stow Country Park**, Bury St Edmunds Tickets £5 adults, £3 children phone 01284 728718 (as the park contains a reconstruction of an Anglo Saxon village, herbs used in this period will feature prominently)
- **Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> June** (11pm) **RSPB Reserve Lakenheath** (ticket price & contact details to follow)
- **Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> June** 10am-4pm **Wicken Fen** - morning walk and afternoon workshop using plants from the Fen to make medicines. Contact 01353 720274 – booking is essential



Last year at Wicken Fen – me in the ditch - again!

Visit the Hedgerow Herbals website [www.hedgerow-herbals.co.uk](http://www.hedgerow-herbals.co.uk).

For advice, comments or topics you would like to see in future newsletters contact **Julie Dore** at **Physic** Oakington Therapy Centre Oakington Road, Girton, CB3 0QH. Telephone 01223 237459, or email [reception@physic.co.uk](mailto:reception@physic.co.uk) or see [www.physic.co.uk](http://www.physic.co.uk)

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