

# HEDGEROW HERBALS

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

**FREE**

Welcome to the summer edition which includes information on holiday health, how to use herbs to get in shape plus lots of ideas for making your own herbal remedies

## Happy Holidays



Holidays are the one time you definitely don't want to feel ill. But with travelling, foreign food, biting bugs and too much sun things do not always work out that way – however herbal help is at hand!

Ginger is very effective for travel sickness. Take ginger tablets for severe attacks or suck on pieces of crystallised ginger for milder problems, starting half an hour before, and then during, your journey. Sipping chamomile tea also helps and is calming if you have pre-flight nerves. Avoid fizzy drinks & heavy or fried foods. Instead eat something bland and easily digestible beforehand to settle the stomach.

Garlic has anti-biotic properties so capsules or fresh cloves daily can help to fight off those nasty tummy bugs. Prevention is always better than cure so avoid uncooked food and fly-attracting buffets. Always peel fruit and refuse ice in your cocktails unless you know the tap water is OK to drink. (If it's really hot, very cold drinks will cause stomach cramps and diarrhoea so save those until evening).

You can make your own insect repellent to rub onto exposed areas by adding 5 drops each of rosemary, citronella (or lemongrass) and geranium essential oils to 6 tablespoons of carrier oil (e.g. almond, sunflower). Eating lots of garlic repels insects and humans! If you do get bitten, lavender essential oil neat on the bite will relieve the itching, so will fresh slices of onion or a crushed plantain leaf.



A platter for your holiday - ginger, garlic, rosemary, chamomile and marigold

Lavender oil is also great for relieving sunburn. Alternatively, try bathing the area in a cool infusion of either elderflowers, chamomile, marigold or nettles. Either St John's Wort oil (see below for recipe) or Aloe Vera juice, fresh from the leaf or as a gel, will ease pain and aid healing. Have a healthy holiday!

## Losing Weight Safely

Unfortunately I can't tell you about a herb that will help you miraculously lose weight & get you in shape for the beach. Sensible eating, following the GI diet, and regular,

moderate exercise are the only healthy ways to do that. However, there are unsafe herbal combinations for sale that do promise weight loss and should be avoided. These often contain a potent mix of laxative and diuretic herbs. Your body is forced to lose water (the weight loss!) and vital nutrients. Some mixes contain Ephedra, a herb which speeds up metabolism so you burn more fat. It is actually banned from direct sale and should only be given on prescription from a medical herbalist as, if used inappropriately, it can cause high blood pressure and damage liver and kidneys.

If sugar cravings are your weakness, you could try Gymnema leaf tincture to help cut down on the biscuits and chocolate. If you put a few drops of this herb on your tongue it blocks the sweet taste buds for a couple of hours – eating a biscuit will seem like chewing chipboard! Another herb, Stevia, is 10 times sweeter than sugar and has no calories. Chaste berry is good for helping you overcome cravings of any sort, hence its name! A study in the US showed that taking green tea extract increased energy needs and encouraged the burning of fat without harmful side effects. As green tea is also a source of healthy antioxidants, why not try a couple of cups a day as part of your diet?



Artichoke *Cynara scolymus*

During dieting your body starts to breakdown fat which contains stored toxins not previously eliminated. Processing these puts a strain on the liver and contributes to the feelings of fatigue and headaches, so common when dieting. Herbs such as Milk Thistle and Artichoke leaf help protect and aid the liver in eliminating them effectively. Together, with a sensible diet, these herbs can help safe weight loss.

## Using Herbs

Summer is a great time to harvest herbs and make your own remedies. However, don't forget the golden rules of wild crafting plants:

- ✓ Ensure you can positively identify the plant
- ✓ Don't harvest all of a plant, especially if using the root. Allow some to remain for regeneration (OK so I know that dandelions are not endangered but it's the principle that counts!)
- ✓ Do not use the plants if there is any possibility they have been treated with chemicals or if they have been growing close to roads
- ✓ Always get the landowner's permission to collect wild harvest

## Preserving and storing Herbs

Plants comprise 60-80% water and drying preserves them. The gentler the method the more of the valuable ingredients of the herb are preserved. Hang the herbs in bunches in dark, dry, well-ventilated areas or spread on fine wire mesh trays to ensure a good air supply. A paper bag tied around seed heads will catch the seeds as they dry. Ideal locations for drying would be a barn or garage in summer or a cool attic or spare room. An airing cupboard is too hot especially for aromatic herbs containing volatile oils which evaporate easily.

Roots and bark can be cleaned and sliced and put in the oven at 40-60°C for 2-3 hours. Alternatively, dry in an airing cupboard turning occasionally for 2-5 days. Test by breaking thicker pieces to ensure they are completely dry before storage. Herbs can also be frozen, preferably as quickly as possible after collection.

Once dry, the material needs protecting from insects, light, mould etc. The ideal container should be air and water tight, dark, glass not plastic and kept in a cool (below 15°C) dry place. If collected, dried and stored carefully, the herbs should keep well for between 6-12 months. And DON'T FORGET to label your containers - a lot of dried leaves look very similar!

## Herbal teas



Any part of a plant can be used, dried or fresh - leaves, stems, bark, flowers, fruits, roots, nuts & seeds! A tea, infusion or decoction are methods of extracting the water-soluble active ingredients from the

herbs.

### Tea/infusion for leaves and flowers

Add 600ml (1 pint) of just boiled water to 25g (1oz) of dried, or 50g (2oz) of fresh herbs, alternatively 1 teaspoon to a cup (approx. 250ml/8 fl ozs.). You can make your own tea bag by putting the herbs in a square of muslin and tying the corners together with cotton or string. As soon as you have added the water, cover the tea to trap all the volatile ingredients. The length of time you leave it to infuse depends on the herbal material used and personal taste. As a guide, allow 1-3 minutes for flowers and 2-4 minutes for leaves. Strain and drink, adding honey or lemon juice to taste rather than sugar as this can impede absorption of some of the active ingredients. You can drink it hot, cold or iced and unused tea will keep fresh in the fridge for up to two days. Adults can drink 3-4 cups per day, 6 for acute conditions e.g. cold or hay fever relief.

### Decoction For tougher materials i.e. roots, whole seeds, nuts and bark,

It is advisable to break down the hard woody material first using a pestle and mortar or a coffee grinder. You need to add a little extra water to the same quantity of herbs as above to allow for losses during boiling. Using a non-aluminium saucepan, add cold water to the crushed herbs and bring to the boil. Cover the pan and simmer gently for 15-20 minutes. Strain and use as for teas above. The mix will keep refrigerated for 2 days so you can make up a batch.

Try some of the following:

- Dandelion leaf – a gentle diuretic
- Nettle – a mineral rich tonic
- Yarrow – for mild cystitis
- Hawthorn – a heart tonic
- Lime flowers – stress reducing

## Making Infused Oils

The herbs are infused in fat, which traditionally could have been anything from goose grease to olive oil but nowadays is usually any light oil such as sunflower, almond, olive or wheatgerm. There are two basic methods for making your own infused oil.

### Hot infusion

This is used for all herbs except flower oils. Use 300 mls (½ pint) of oil and either 50-75 gm (2-3 oz) of fresh herbs or 75-100 gm (3-4 oz) of dried herbs. Roughly chop the herb and put half with the oil into an ovenproof dish. Put the dish in a saucepan. Add water to the saucepan until it comes up to 2.5cm (1 inch) below the rim of the dish. Simmer slowly for 2 hours, ensuring the water does not boil away or the oil will burn and be useless. Once the oil has cooled slightly, strain through a fine sieve or muslin. At this strength the oil can safely be used for babies. Repeat the process with the remaining herbs. Strain and bottle. If you use fresh herbs there may be a watery liquid at the bottom, do not use this but separate out or it will spoil the oil. The infused oil is best kept in the fridge for up to a year but the addition of 10% by volume of wheatgerm oil extends its life.

### Sun Infusion

This is used for flowers and petals. Pick flowers when just open ensuring they are clean and free from insects. Place in a clear glass jar and cover with oil of your choice. Cover with an airtight lid and place in a sunny position for about 2 weeks, gently shaking occasionally. Strain the oil and compost the flowers and repeat the process with more fresh flowers to get double strength oil. Store the final oil in a dark glass jar.

### **A Basic Ointment Recipe**

300ml (½ pt) of home made infused oil  
25g (1oz) of chopped beeswax

Put all the ingredients in a heatproof bowl and place in a saucepan of water. Heat and allow water to simmer gently until the wax has melted (do not allow it to dry out or the oil will burn). Remove from heat and allow to cool slightly before adding any essential



oils. Pour into sterilised jars and leave uncovered until set.

### **Suggested oils and ointments**

Marigold (*Calendula officinalis*) infused oil makes a healing ointment. Use for cracked nipples when breast-feeding and for nappy rash.

St John's Wort flowers (*Hypericum perforatum*) infused oil as an ointment for burns and to ease neuralgia or the pain of shingles.



Plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) infused oil makes an antibiotic ointment for treating wounds and burns. You can add Tea Tree or Lavender essential oils to enhance antiseptic properties and aid healing.

Comfrey (*Symphytum officinalis*) infused oil as a base for joints, aches and muscle pains etc. Add to 50g of ointment 10 drops each of essential oils of Lavender, Rosemary, or if you don't mind the smell, Wintergreen.

Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) infused oil will make an ointment for treating cold sores or to repel insects (add Rosemary and Geranium essential oils for the latter).



Self-heal (*Prunella vulgaris*) infused oil can be used to make an ointment to stop bleeding, e.g. apply to bleeding haemorrhoids

### **Natural Beauty**

Herbs are not just for health but can be used as natural, additive-free beauty products.

A facial steam is an easy way to deep clean the skin, opening pores allowing the skin to absorb the beneficial properties of the herbs. Add 3 tablespoons of dried herb to 3 pints of boiling water in a heatproof bowl. Make a tent with a towel and hold your face about 30 cm from the bowl eyes closed, for 10-15mins. Do this once a week for normal skin, twice for greasy but every two weeks for dry skin. (*Do not steam if you suffer from breathing difficulties or thread veins.*) For dry skin, try marsh mallow or elderflowers and for greasy use astringent herbs like yarrow, mint or marigold. Nettle and rosemary boost circulation and deep cleanse, but for a gentler effect use lemon balm, rose petals or chamomile.

A hair rinse using cider vinegar will add shine and lustre and relieve an itchy scalp. Make a tea using 1 tablespoon of herb to 1 pint of boiling water and allow to cool. Strain and add 1 tablespoon of cider vinegar. Pour through the hair, massaging the scalp. Use chamomile to lighten, sage to darken, rosemary or nettle for body and parsley for dandruff. You can also mix a strong herb tea with a mild baby shampoo (2 tablespoons of teas to a normal application).

You can also make herbal creams, massage oils, lip balms, toners and cleansers. See my website for more recipes and ideas ([www.hedgerow-herbals.co.uk](http://www.hedgerow-herbals.co.uk))

### **DIARY DATES**

Meet me on another of my plant safaris this autumn when I will be telling you about the medicinal uses and folklore of plants growing in this lovely bird reserve.

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> September** 2-4pm RSPB HQ @ Sandy (entrance fee will apply) Phone 01767 680541 to reserve a place

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).

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