

Ten Herbs Everyone Should Know and Grow

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Ashwaganda, *Withania somnifera*, Solanaceae (Nightshade)

GROWING: Herbaceous annual in Southern Appalachians. Easy to start from seed. Full sun, average soil fertility, good drainage (like tomatoes). Subject to alternaria (early blight/leaf spot) and flea beetles.

PART USED: Root. Harvest in fall around the first frost.

USES: Tonic. Safe if used in prescribed dosage range. Tincture may irritate stomach.

- Primary herb for all negative conditions associated with aging.
- Calming. For stress induced symptoms such as hypertension, GI upset, insomnia, anxiety, etc.
- Liver protectant (similar to milk thistle *Silybum marianum*).
- Adjuvant therapy during cancer treatments (chemo, radiation and surgery) to modulate immune function, protect organs, reduce fatigue, suppress/inhibit tumor growth. Specific studies indicate it may inhibit breast cancer and enhance immune function in colon cancer.
- May slow the progression of Alzheimer's disease.
- Increases libido.

Tincture: 60 to 90 drops three times a day. Dry herb, in caps or in warm milk: 3 to 10 grams per day.

Boneset, *Eupatorium perforatum*, Asteraceae (Aster)

GROWING: Herbaceous perennial. Native to eastern North America. Easy to grow from seed or divided root cuttings in fall. Sun with adequate moisture.

PART USED: Aerial parts when in flower (late summer).

USES: Activator. Contraindicated in pregnancy. May cause nausea in high doses.

- Potent immune stimulant for viral and bacterial infections such as colds, influenza, bronchitis, pneumonia.
- Helps break up and eliminate mucus to relieve coughs and congestion.
- Reduces fever.
- Relieves joint and muscle pain related to respiratory infections.
- Stimulates digestion and elimination.

Tincture: 30 to 40 drops every hour in water. Infusion: One cup of hot infusion every hour, sweeten with honey if needed (it's bitter!) Consider boneset syrup?

Calendula, *Calendula officinalis*, Asteraceae (Aster)

GROWING: Annual. Direct seed, 40 days to maturity, freely reseeds. Full sun in average soil.

PART USED: Harvest flowers as they open. Frequent harvesting increases yield.

USES: Activator. Used internally and externally.

- High in carotinoids (good antioxidant for the eyes).
- Improves lymphatic drainage to reduce glandular swelling.
- Chronic hot, inflamed skin eruptions (take internally and apply externally).
- Promotes tissue healing (internal and external) or cuts, wounds, burns, scrapes, surgical incisions, diaper rash, radiation induced burns and dermatitis
- Eyewash for inflammation.
- Vaginal infections.
- Post-mastectomy lymphedema.

Tincture: 60 drops four times a day. Infusion: Drink 3 to 4 cups per day or use infusion topically as a fomentation, wash, douche or eyewash.

Chasteberry or Chastetree, *Vitex agnus castus*, *Verbenaceae* (Verbena)

GROWING: Deciduous bush, 15 to 20 feet high/wide. Full sun, dry open areas. Scarify seeds and start in pots, germination 18 days. Propagate from soft wood cuttings in spring or summer.

PART USED: Berries. Collect in the late summer/early autumn when they turn black.

USES: Tonic.

- Regulates hormones. For most menstrual and menopausal symptoms.
- Infertility in women.
- Acne in teenage boys and girls
- Promotes lactation.
- May reduce uterine fibroids.

Tincture: 40 drops, twice a day, with the first dose in the morning before eating. Capsules: Three 650 mg caps twice a day, with the first dose in the morning before eating.

Echinacea, *Echinacea spp.*, *Asteraceae* (Aster)

GROWING: Perennial. Germinates 2 to 3 weeks in warm soil, does need some stratification for best results. Plant about 2 feet apart. *E. angustifolia* Narrow Leaf Coneflower has a taproot, 30 days stratification. *E. purpureum* Purple Coneflower, no stratification needed. Propagate by root division in the fall. Note: Species cross-pollinate freely.

PART USED: Roots, leaves and flowers. Collect roots of 3 or 4 year old plants. Aerial parts when in flower.

USES: Activator. Internal and external.

- Acute viral and bacterial infections
- Common cold, influenza, upper respiratory infections, ear infections, sinusitis, bronchitis, tonsillitis, laryngitis and sore throat.
- Seasonal allergy symptoms: nasal congestion, itchy eyes, cough, scratchy throat and stuffy head.
- Slow healing wounds, ulcers, insect bites, burns, abrasions, etc.
- Lymphatic swelling.
- General systemic inflammation from trauma injuries, over exertion, muscle strain/sprain, etc.

Tincture: 60 to 90 drops every hour at onset of infections, then three to four times a day. Tea (decocted roots and infused leaf and flower): One cup every hour at onset of infection, then three to four cups per day. Topical in salves, washes, and poultices.

Elder, *Sambucus canadensis* (North American), *S. nigra* (European), *Caprifoliaceae* (Honeysuckle)

GROWING: Branching 20' shrub/small tree. Transition zones with partial shade or understory. Likes moist settings. Hardy to -30 degrees. Usually propagated with cuttings in spring and summer. Cut branch tips below and above leaf buds. Put in moisture retentive potting soil, one bud below and one above ground. Suckers may be removed from around bush and planted.

PARTS USED: Leaf, flower, berries. Collect leaf in spring/early summer. Flowers when in full bloom (late May into June). Berries when ripe in late summer.

USES: Activator (all parts). Considered safe.

Leaf:

- Wounds, skin irritation, itchy rashes, burns (topical)
- Soothing expectorant for coughs and sore throat (internal).

Flowers:

- Colds and flu with lung and sinus congestion and coughs.
- Itchy eyes, runny nose and throat irritation due to allergies or colds.
- Reduces fever.

Elder continued.

Berry:

- Viral infections (antiviral compounds/procyanidins interfere with viral replication).
- Soothes coughs and relieves lung and sinus congestion.
- Relieves constipation.
- Antioxidant.

Leaf: Infusion used as a skin wash, salve, poultice. Flowers: Hot infusion as needed. Berries: Syrup or tincture: 1 tsp. syrup or 60 drops tincture every hour to prevent and/or treat viral infection.

Holy Basil, *Ocimum sanctum*, Lamiaceae (Mint)

GROWING: Annual. Full sun in regular garden soil. Easy to grow from seed, direct seed or in pots. Reseeds freely and can be invasive. Do not fertilize or pamper too much, does best when slightly stressed (causes volatile oil content to increase).

PARTS USED: Aerial in flower. Harvest early in the day.

USES: Activator and Tonic. No known contraindications.

- Immune deficiency (poor immune response) and excess (auto-immune conditions).
- Adaptogen. Reduces cortisol and adrenalin levels, increases dopamine and serotonin levels to lift the spirits, clears and calms the mind, relieve brain fog, and dispel depression.
- Stimulates digestion.
- Relieves allergic rhinitis (runny nose) caused by seasonal allergies.

Tincture: 90 drops three to four times a day or as needed. Infusion: Drink two to three cups a day or as needed.

Motherwort, *Leonurus cardiaca*, Lamiaceae (Mint)

GROWING: Perennial. Partial or full sun, regular soil. Direct sow seeds in fall or early spring. Divide root crown in fall. Plant two feet apart. Freely reseeds and may be invasive.

PART USED: Aerial in flower. Harvest when in flower, will regrow to provide a second harvest.

USES: Activator and Tonic. Avoid in pregnancy.

- Stress induced cardiac symptoms (palpitations, mild hypertension, anxiety).
- Menstrual cramps, PMS, delayed suppressed menses.
- Menopausal hot flashes, insomnia and mood swings.
- Anxiety in general.
- Unresolved sorrow or suppressed grief.

Tincture: 60 to 90 drops three times a day or as needed. Infusion: One to three cups a day as needed. Caps: 3 caps as needed.

Rosemary, *Rosmarinus officinalis*, Lamiaceae (Mint)

GROWING: Woody perennial. Full sun, protected place (out of the wind). Well-drained soil with thick sand mulch at base. Upright forms better for harsh winters (above Zone 6). Easy to propagate by layering branches, or rooting stem cuttings using healed cuttings in moist sand, with plastic covering.

PARTS USED: Aerial. Collect anytime of the year, though always in the early morning.

USES: Activator and Tonic.

- Stimulates digestion: for gas, nausea, bloating, indigestion, and related headaches.
- Fevers, especially from respiratory congestion and stomach flu.

Rosemary continued.

- Improves circulation, reduces vascular inflammation, arteriosclerosis, and age related depression.
- Improves cognitive function & memory, relieves brain fog.
- Tonic for liver and gall bladder.
- May inhibit cancer to reduce tumor formation and growth.

Tincture: 60 drops three times a day or as needed. Infusion: One cup every two hours for acute symptoms, or two to three cups per day as a tonic.

Sage *Salvia officinalis*, Lamiaceae (Mint)

GROWING: Woody perennial. Full sun, likes a dry site with good drainage. Apply thick sand mulch at base. Needs little or no fertilization. Hardy to -20 degrees.

PART USED: Leaf/aerial parts in flower. Collect any time of the year, though always in the early morning.

USES: Activator and Tonic. Avoid in pregnancy and when nursing.

- Stomach flu, food poisoning, diarrhea, gas and indigestion.
- Relieves congestion in the upper and lower respiratory system.
- Soothes sore throat, relieved laryngitis.
- Reduces frequency and intensity of menopausal night sweats. (Drink tea near bedtime.)
- Improves memory and cognitive function (used with mild to moderate Alzheimer's disease).
- Sinus infections and post-nasal drip (dilute infusion in a neti pot).
- To dry up breast milk.

Tincture: 60 to 90 drops every 30 to 60 minutes or as needed. Infusion: One cup every 30 to 60 minutes as needed, or two to three cups per day as a tonic.

Herbal Teas for Seeds and Plants

Willow Tea: Make a willow branch "broom" by tying 8-inch tips from a willow tree into a bundle. Fill a bucket with water and stick the willow broom in, leave in the sun on a porch or greenhouse. Swirl the bundle around briskly (to oxygenate) every day. After about a week or so, use to water seedlings and cuttings.

Comfrey Leaf Tea: Fill a big bucket or barrel with fresh comfrey leaves. Cover with water, leave in a sunny place. Stir briskly clockwise and counter clock wise each day. After 10 days the leaves will have broken down and the tea is ready to use. Strain and use diluted with water (1:1). Use as a foliar feed or apply to soil. Let soil dry out a day or two before applying comfrey tea for best absorption.

Resources

The Medicinal Herb Grower: A Complete Guide for Cultivating Plants that Heal, Volume 1 by Richo Cech

The Organic Medicinal Herb Farmer: The Ultimate Guide to Producing High Quality Herbs on Market Scale by Melanie and Jeff Carpenter

Rosemary Gladstar's Growing Medicinal Herbs: A Beginners Guide, by Rosemary Gladstar

Making Plant Medicine, 4th Edition, by Richo Cech Publication date: March 2016.

The Herbal Medicine Maker's Handbook by James Green

Strictly Medicinal Seeds (formerly Horizon Herbs), www.strictlymedicinalherbs.com

541-846-6704

Richters Herb Seeds, www.richters.com

Medicinal Herbs for Commerce https://www.cals.ncsu.edu/specialty_crops//medherbs/