



Alcohol-Free Herbal Preparations

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An Exploration into the Wide World of potent, Non Alcohol-Based Herbal Preparations Based on the Wisdom of the Traditional Method As well as the Functionality of Clinical Herbalism

The Traditional or Folk Method of Herbal Practice

Much of the knowledge herbalists rely on today comes from traditions and wisdom passed down from many generations of medicine making. Herbal medicine, from a scientific view, is only so valid, if at all, yet traditional wisdom validates plant usage through generations of observations. The preparations in this handout are based on this method: accessible, common sense, intuitive, easy to do at home.

There Are So Many Ways to Make Medicine:

- Water Preparations: Infusions and Decoctions
- Water with Sweeteners: Syrups
- Infused Oils: Infusing Herbs into Oils for Internal and Topical Use
- Consuming Herbs: Fresh in foods, Dried in Pills, Capsules, Condiments

Solvents:

- Water – Pure Spring or Well Water, or Distilled
 - Make hot or cold Infusions, Decoctions, Flower Essences, Herbal Baths
- Honey – Raw and Treatment-Free is Best!!
 - Make a Melita
 - Water + Honey = Syrup
- Vinegar – Apple Cider Vinegar (ACV)
 - Acetum (sometimes called a “Vinegar Tincture”)

- Oil – Olive, Sesame, Coconut, Almond, Avocado, etc.
 - Infused Oils, which can make Salves, Balms, Creams, Serums, Body Butters

Making Medicinal Strength Teas

- Medicinal Tea differs from beverage tea due to strength:
 - Much stronger + Uses higher amounts of herbs to water ratio

Infusions – For Leaves, Flowers, Delicate Plant Parts

- Hot Infusion
 - Herbs coarsely ground/chopped

To Make:

Dry: 1 part herb: 20 parts just boiled water

Fresh: 2 parts herb: 20 parts just boiled water

Cover with lid to capture delicate compounds

Let sit to steep 20-30 mins, several hours or overnight

Strain out **marc** (spent plant material), and drink up! 3-4 cups per day is a typical dose

Cold Infusions – Best for herbs that are high in polysaccharides, tannins, mucilage, or other constituents which are damaged by heat

- Not as commonly used as Hot Infusion, specific plants use this method, such as:
 - Marshmallow Root (high in mucilage and polys.), Slippery Elm (high in mucilage), Uva Ursi – (high in tannins), Chamomile (also great hot)(just plain yummy!)

To Make:

Use 1 pt herb: 20 pt cool/room temp water

Put herb in canning jar, pour water over herbs

Let sit overnight to steep (takes quite a while)

Strain the next day and enjoy!

I also commonly use just a hefty handful, or about a quarter cup of herbs per qt of water (not quite as strong, but still makes a great cold infusion)

Decoctions – Use with Roots, Woody Mushrooms, Barks – Dense Plant Parts

- Decoction comes from the Latin *decoquere* – To boil down or away
 - It is a tea made by boiling fresh or dried herbs + water
 - Used with plants that don't extract well at lower temps

To Make:

Place approx. 1 oz (or 1/2-3/4 this amount if you want weaker strength) herbs in a saucepan, pour 1 pint cool water over herbs

If possible, soak herbs for several hours

Cover with lid, slowly bring up to a gentle boil

Simmer on lowest possible boil for 15-20mins

Denser herbs can be simmered 1-2+ hours

Strain and enjoy once cooled to drinking temp

How to Make an Herbal Syrup

1. **To make a syrup**, use roughly *2-3 ounces (weight) of herb per quart (4 cups) of water* as a guide. A little more or a little less will be just fine.

2. **Place herbs and water in a saucepan**, and simmer over low heat, making a decoction. *Reduce the liquid by roughly half, until it is about 1 pint (2 cups)*, which will take between 30 minutes and an hour. This will create a very concentrated, thick tea. Let tea cool to body temperature before proceeding.

- *For roots, barks, berries and fungus: simmer 45 minutes - 1 hour*
- *For more delicate leaves and flowers: simmer 20 – 30 minutes (or make a very strong infusion by pouring boiled water over herbs and letting stand several hours or over night)*

3. **Strain out the herbs**, using a wire mesh strainer and/or cheese cloth, pressing out the juice of berries (as with making elderberry syrup), and compost the herbs. Measure the liquid you have on hand, and return it to the saucepan. Reduce further if desired.

- It can be nice to end up with ½ – 1 cup of tea, as the resulting syrup will be at least double the amount of tea

4. **Add the honey or other sweetener to the concentrated tea** in a ratio of 1:1 or 1:2 (1 part tea : 1 or 2 parts sweetener; for example, if you have 1 cup of tea, you would use 1 or 2 cups of sweetener such as raw honey.)

5. **Heat the mixture gently, just enough so the honey will melt.** Raw honey should not be heated to more than about 100 degrees, as the enzymes will start to break down, thereby losing some of the medicine.

- If using sugar, or other sweeteners, the mixture can be heated for 20-30 minutes to thicken the syrup. Use med-high heat, and stir often (don't walk away and let the syrup burn!!).

6. Remove from the heat, cool, and strain through cheesecloth to remove any other plant particles before bottling. Straining through cheesecloth will help the syrup last longer, as particles may contribute to spoilage.

How to Make an Infused Oil

Using Fresh vs. Dried Herbs

- Typically for the beginner, dried herbs are preferred for making infused oils, as there is no water in the herb to make the oil go rancid: dried herb oils infuse easily
- Fresh plants can be used, but need to have some of the water removed via fresh-wilting: harvest the plant and let it wilt in a warm place out of direct sunlight for 3-12 hours, then proceed with making an infused oil

Other Considerations

- Always use very clean, dry equipment to make infused oils
 - Any microbes or added moisture can spoil an oil
- If using fresh-wilted herbs, cover jar with cloth to allow water to evaporate
 - Otherwise, condensation can form under lid of jar and cause spoilage

Infused Oil Maceration Method – Directions

1. Grind herbs in a grinder, or chop them if using fresh.
2. Place herbs in a wide-mouth mason jar.
3. Cover herbs with oil of choice, leaving 2-3 inches of oil over the top of the herbs
4. Stir using a clean chopstick, or spoon of choice.
5. With dried herbs, they will absorb some of the oil within the first 24 hours, so it may be necessary to top your jar off with oil after a day.
6. Cover the jar with a tight-fitting lid (or cloth if using fresh herbs), and place it in a paper bag to protect it from light.
7. Place in a sunny window, near (but not on top of) a wood stove, in a box filled with sand out in a sunny spot in the yard, or any other warm (not hot) place.
8. Let your oil infuse in the warm spot for about 2 weeks, up to 1 month.
9. If you have a solid lid, shake your oil daily, or as often as you think of it (with the

cloth lid, remove and stir) to infuse the herbs into the oil.

10. Use your intention or prayers and think about what you will be using this medicine for while you shake it to potentize it with your own energy.
11. After 2 weeks, strain with a strainer and fine cheesecloth, then squeeze all oil out of herbs by using your hands, a potato ricer, or a tincture press.
12. If you used a fresh-wilted plant, after initial straining, let the oil sit to settle for 2-3 days, and any residual water will settle to the bottom. Carefully pour or use a turkey baster to separate the clear oil from the sludge at the bottom. Repeat this process once more to ensure you have gotten all of the moisture out.
13. Bottle into very clean glass jars, and store in a cool, dry, dark place (a cupboard).

The Crock-Pot Method

1. Follow steps 1-6, but make sure to cover the jar with a solid lid. You may need to “burp” your oil once per day to release moisture if using fresh-wilted plants.
2. Place capped jar into a crock pot, or yogurt maker filled half-way with water. You will need to place the jar on top of something setting on the floor of the pot-- a metal mason jar lid, or larger 1-gallon jar metal lid, can work well. This prevents the bottom of the jar from breaking due to being overheated.
3. Set the heat to the lowest possible setting, 100° max. Most crock pots will need to be modified (carefully by someone who knows what they are doing!) by adding a dimmer switch in order to get it this low.
4. Keep heated for 10 days, removing the jar carefully to shake it 2-3 times per day.
5. Follow steps 9-13 above.

The Stove-Top Method

1. Using a double-boiler, place herbs in the pan and cover with oil by 2-3 inches.
2. Heat oil very slowly up to barely a simmer, and keep it there for 30 minutes – 1 hour, until the mixture smells “herby,” looks greenish, or golden.
3. Do not overheat your oil, as this will ruin your preparation! Let the simmer be only a few bubbles worth. Deep fried herbs are not what we're going for!
4. Let the mixture cool, then strain and bottle as described above.
 - A note about this method: this is the easiest method to “mess-up” so just proceed with caution. Keep your heat on the lowest possible, or barely higher, and don't walk away from the kitchen. Stir it often to keep the heat distributed.
 - An advantage of this method is that you can have an infused oil in an afternoon instead of waiting 2 weeks – 1 month! It's pretty satisfying!

Resources

1. Green, James. *The Herbal Medicine Maker's Handbook: A Home Manual*. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2000.
2. Cech, Richo. *Making Plant Medicine*. Williams, OR: Herbal Reads, 2016.
3. Gladstar, Rosemary. *Medicinal Herbs: A Beginner's Guide*. North Adams, MA: Storey Publishing, 2012.