Growing, Harvesting, and Preparing Therapeutic Herbs for Self Care

1 September 2016

Donna Koczaja, MS

Therapeutic Herbalism
Prince George’s County Master Gardener

www.greenhavenliving.com

greenhavenliving@gmail.com

240-353-8754
Herbs for Self-Care

- Herbs are our partners in nudging the body back toward healthy balance
- Work best in the presence of good diet and lifestyle choices
- Effects may be subtle
- Often longer term administration to achieve desired outcome
- Generally very safe, with low-to-no side-effects
- Traditionally administered in multi-herb formulae

Herbal Medicine is the integration of herbs into everyday life filled with healthy choices
Outline

• Harvesting and drying
• Teas (hot and cold)
• Syrups/Honeys
• Infused Oils
• Salves/Balms
• Compresses & Poultices
• Aromatic Sachets
Honoring the Herbs

• Harvest in areas of plenty
• Free from pesticides and other toxins
• Do not take all – leave some to perpetuate
• Express gratitude
Harvesting - Leaves

- For best therapeutic value, harvest in spring just before flowering
- More frequent harvesting encourages bushier plants

**Air Dry:**
1. Cut stems from plant
2. Gather and tie in a bundle
   - Wash if desired, but ensure good air circulation for drying
3. Hang upside down in a dark, dry place for up to a few weeks

**Dehydrator:**
1. Depending on leaf size, may be desirable to pluck leaves off stems
2. Place in single layer on sheet
3. Dry for 8 – 10 hours on low heat

Herbs are dry when no condensation appears upon sealing in plastic bag overnight.
Harvesting – Flowers & Berries

• Pluck flowers when at their peak
  – More frequent harvesting encourages more flowers
• For medicine-making, pluck berries ‘just before’ fully ripe
• Lay out in single layer, dark dry place
Harvesting – Seeds

• Harvest seeds when fully mature and easily separated from the plant
  • Best in the afternoon of a very dry day

1. Try shaking plant – seeds may fall easily

2. Rub spent flower between fingers to coax seeds out

3. Remove seed head and dry – seeds will eventually fall out
Harvesting - Roots

1. For best therapeutic value, harvest in fall
2. Gently dig up the root
3. Scrub gently with soft brush to remove dirt
4. Wash with plain water
5. Chop into little pieces BEFORE drying
6. Spread in single layer in dark, dry place
   – Or use a dehydrator

Remember to harvest thoughtfully – you’re removing the whole plant!

http://www.eatweeds.co.uk/dandelion-root-coffee-recipe
Make Tea – Leaves & Flowers

1. Crumble dried herb into small pieces
2. Infuse a teaspoon (or to taste) in 2C boiling water for 10 – 15 minutes
3. Strain and enjoy!

*May also infuse fresh, but will need more herb for equivalent flavor
Make Tea – Roots & Berries

Best to DECOCT the tea:

1. Boil 2C water on stovetop
2. Add 1-2tsp (to taste) to boiling water
3. Continue to simmer over low heat for ~20 minutes
   • Be sure to cover the pot while boiling!
4. Strain and enjoy!
Scutellaria lateriflora (Scullcap)

- Growing pattern: Mint-family herbaceous perennial, 12-24” tall, with jagged, veined leaves and racemes with purplish ‘helmet-shaped flowers
- Soil: Fertile
- Light: Full sun to part shade
- Water: Keep moist
- Propagate: From seed; will reseed and send runners
- Therapeutic value: Calming to nervous system, reduces anxiety
- Format: Tea, tincture
Eschscholzia californica (California poppy)

- Growing pattern: Flowering annual, ~12” high, orange-to-yellow flowers, thin, wispy grey-green leaves
- Soil: Average to sandy
- Light: Full sun to part shade
- Water: Light
- Propagate: From seed; will reseed each year
- Therapeutic value: Relaxes muscle tension, calming
- Format: Tea, tincture

Use: whole plant
Althea officinalis (marshmallow)

- Growing pattern: Tall (up to 4’) perennial, with fuzzy gray-green leaves and pink flowers
- Soil: Loamy, moist
- Light: Full sun to part shade
- Water: Light to moderate
- Propagate: Buy plants, seeds harder to start - stratify
- Therapeutic value: Soothes irritated mucous membranes. Good for dry coughs or sore throats
- Format: Tea – hot or cold infusion

*By Bernd Haynold - selbst fotografiert - own picture, CC BY 2.5 commons.wikimedia.org
Make great (tasting) teas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leaves</th>
<th>Flowers</th>
<th>Berries/Seeds</th>
<th>Roots</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sage</td>
<td>Chamomile</td>
<td>Elder</td>
<td>Dandelion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mint</td>
<td>Calendula</td>
<td>Hawthorn</td>
<td>Ginger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosemary</td>
<td>California Poppy</td>
<td>Fennel</td>
<td>Marshmallow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy Basil</td>
<td>Violet</td>
<td></td>
<td>Echinacea*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scullcap</td>
<td>Hibiscus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dandelion</td>
<td>Elder</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Violet</td>
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Try tea blending: Select up to 3 herbs:
- Primary action/effect
- Supporting effect
- Taste considerations

*Bitter
Herb Iced Tea/Cubes

• Add fresh mint leaves when brewing iced tea
  – Also lemon balm, lemon verbena, holy basil
• Alternately, make ice cubes
  – Freeze leaves in water, or brewed iced tea
  – Freeze herbal tea concentrate

• Add a few cubes to water or iced tea
Ocimum sanctum, O. tenuflorum (Holy basil, tulsi)

- Growing pattern: Mint-family, tall (up to 3’) annual with curved, textured leaves and small purple flowers on racemes
- Soil: Not picky
- Light: Full sun to part shade
- Water: Light to moderate
- Propagate: Start from seed, will reseed annually
- Therapeutic value: Adaptogen (for stress), overall tonic: cardiovascular, liver, kidney
- Format: Tea, powder, tincture

**CAUTION:** Do not use regularly if trying to get pregnant or lactating
Syrups & Honeys

Ingredients

- Fresh/dried herb
- Filtered/purified water
- Honey or sugar
- Sterile jars for storage

Suggested herbs

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thyme</td>
<td>Chamomile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violet</td>
<td>Ginger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mint</td>
<td>Elder berry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Create herbal concentrate by boiling 2-4oz of fresh herb in quart of water until liquid is reduced to ½
- Strain out (and compost) herb – should have 2C liquid
- Add 1C honey to warm liquid, stir until melted
- Will keep in clean jar in fridge 3-4 weeks
Thymus officinalis (thyme)

- Growing pattern: low-growing perennial ‘shrub’ with tiny leaves
- Soil: Well-drained, alkaline
- Light: Full sun
- Water: Overwatering can cause root rot
- Propagate: Start from cuttings or plants
- Therapeutic value: anti-microbial as a mouthwash or for upper respiratory infections; externally as a wash
- Format: tea, honey, syrup, throat spray

Use: aerial parts
Infused Oils

Cover dried herbs in clean jar with oil* then either:
1. Heat in water bath in crock pot for 4 hours (140°) OR
2. Place in warm, dark location for 2 weeks
3. Strain/press through muslin or cheesecloth

*Try a 1:3 herb/oil ratio (e.g., 1g herb for every 3ml oil)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oils</th>
<th>Herbs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Almond</td>
<td>Calendula</td>
<td>Olive</td>
<td>Ginger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jojoba</td>
<td>Plantain</td>
<td>Sesame</td>
<td>Rosemary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avocado</td>
<td>Mullein leaf (dried)</td>
<td>Almond</td>
<td>Thyme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>Mullein flower (fresh)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mild oil</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. John’s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Elder flower</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yarrow</td>
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Topical

Internal
Verbascum thapsis (mullein)

- Growing pattern: Biennial: low-to-ground rosette of fuzzy, grey-green leaves in 1st year, flowering stalks up to 8 feet high in 2nd year
- Soil: Poor quality
- Light: Full sun
- Water: Not fussy
- Propagate: self-seeding
- Therapeutic value: Demulcent (soothes mucous membranes), e.g., respiratory, digestive, ear
- Format: tea, tincture, flower-infused oil

Use: leaves and/or flowers
Salves/Balms

Salve = oil + wax
Balm = Salve + essential oil

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredients</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Herb infused) oil</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wax: Beeswax, carnauba*,</td>
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<tr>
<td>candellila</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essential oil (optional)</td>
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</table>

- Good rule of thumb: 4 parts oil to 1 part wax – by volume
- How-to:
  1. Put oil in pot (NOT non-stick) – LOW heat
  2. Add wax and melt, stirring continuously
  3. Remove from heat, add few drops essential oil
  4. Pour in containers and let cool

*Use half as much as you would beeswax
Calendula officinalis (calendula, pot marigold)

- Growing pattern: Re-seeding annual, orange-to-yellow daisy-like flowers on 2’ stems, light green elongated, rounded leaves
- Soil: Average
- Light: Full sun, maybe part shade in hot climates
- Water: Keep moist
- Propagate: Start from seed, will reseed if you let the flowers go to seed
- Therapeutic value: Mild lymphatic, moving immune cells around the body and eliminating “garbage”; tissue healing
- Format: Tea, topically as a poultice, infused oil in a salve or cream

CAUTION: to those who are allergic to Asteraceae (daisy) family
Compresses/Poultices

Applied topically to affected area:

Compress = cloth soaked in an herbal infusion (e.g., tea)

Poultice = sack filled with fresh herbs soaked in hot water*

**Simple poultice:**
1. Place powdered or chopped fresh herb into clean, white cotton sock
2. Tie at top
3. Place in a shallow bowl
4. Pour enough hot water over sock to soak
5. Knead the sock until it’s hot
6. Apply to affected area
7. Reheat/replace as necessary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Herb</th>
<th>Therapeutic Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chamomile</td>
<td>Anti-inflammatory, calming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calendula</td>
<td>Wound Healing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plantain</td>
<td>Soothes bites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flaxseed</td>
<td>Emmolient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfrey</td>
<td>Tissue healing, incl cartilage, tendon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

May also make eye and ear poultices

*sack optional – may just be a paste
Plantago major (broadleaf plantain)

- Growing pattern: perennial, basal rosette with central stalks
- Soil: common garden weed, not fussy!
- Light: ditto
- Water: ditto
- Propagate: common weed!
- Therapeutic value: topically for bee stings, bug bites, small cuts
  - Draws out toxins, stops bleeding
- Format: poultice made from chopped-leaf tea, ‘spit poultice’, tea

Use: Leaves
Symphytum officinale (comfrey)

- Growing pattern: perennial, large, lanceolate, roughly hairy leaves. Flowers drooping on central stalk
- Soil: Rich, but not fussy
- Light: Sun or shade
- Water: Do not let dry out
- Propagate: root division – spreads easily, but hard to start from seed
- Therapeutic value: topically on unbroken skin for “trauma to the skin and bones”
  - Burns, stings, strains, sprains
- Format: poultice made from crushed leaf and root; also use as infused oil in homemade creams

*Franz Xaver - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, commons.wikimedia.org

CAUTION: Only use internally under care of a trained professional
Aromatic sachets

- Essential oils of many herbs provide pleasing and therapeutic aromas
- Place dried herbs in cloth or paper sachets, or loose in a bowl
- Many of the mint-family:
  - Peppermint
  - Lavender
  - Rosemary
  - Sage
Lavandula angustifolia (lavender)

• Growing pattern: mid-size shrub, perennial in warm climates
• Soil: Well-drained, gravelly soil
• Light: Full sun
• Water: Overwatering can cause root rot
• Propagate: Start from cuttings or plants, prune to above woody stems in early spring
• Therapeutic value: Topically anti-fungal, anti-bacterial, anti-septic
• Format: poultice or a wash, tea, essential oil*, sachet

*need extensive distillation equipment to extract oil
Matricaria recutita [(German) chamomile]

- Growing pattern: Mid-height (6-24”) annual that can reseed year after year
- Soil: Less-rich soils will produce more flowers
- Light: Full sun; prefers cooler weather
- Water: Keep moist
- Propagate: Start from seed in early spring to ‘beat the heat’
- Therapeutic value: Calms irritated digestion, nausea, and nervous system
- Format: Tea; use warm steeped bags as calming eye treatment, sachet

**CAUTION:** to those who are allergic to Asteraceae (daisy) family

Use: flowers
Eat fresh!

• Any of the mint family
  – Use as flavorings in recipes
• Garlic: great raw or cooked
• Dandelion leaves, violet leaves and flowers are great in salads
• Stinging nettles are really tasty – BUT you must steam or blanch them first to remove the sting
  – DO NOT EAT RAW!!!!!!
Urtica dioica (Stinging nettles)

- Growing pattern: Bushy perennial, 12-24” tall, with jagged leaves and tiny flowers on drooping stems
- Soil: Fertile, rich
- Light: Part shade
- Water: Keep moist
- Propagate: Start from plants; will send out runners and reseed
- Therapeutic value: Anti-histamine activity provides allergy relief; high mineral content; some detoxifying and kidney support
- Format: Tea, blanch fresh herb and eat, tincture

**CAUTION:** Use gloves when harvesting and DO NOT eat raw leaves!

Use: aerial parts
References

• Cech, R. “Making Plant Medicine” (2000)
• Hobbs, C & Gardner, L (2013) “Grow It Heal It: Natural and Effective Herbal Remedies from Your Garden or Windowsill”
• Medicine-making supplies: mountainroseherbs.com