

HOW TO MAKE AND USE HERB PREPARATIONS

Making your own herbal concoctions for medicinal purposes is really not that difficult. And since the best herbal preparations are those made when the plants are fresh, the better off you are to grow your own herbs and make your own preparations.

But even the best plants can be ruined if you use the wrong kind of process in preparing your remedies. Your choice depends on the parts of the plant to be used, the form in which the remedy will be taken, and the desired result.

Remember that herbal remedies are not one-shot wonder cures. Their effectiveness is based largely on a gradual cure.

The following ways of preparing your fresh herbs are those most commonly used in herbal medicine. Always use an enamel or non-metallic pot.

Infusion - this is a beverage made like tea, combining boiled water with the plants and steeping it to extract the active ingredients. The normal amounts are about 1/2 to 1 ounce of the plant to one pint of boiled water. You should let the mixture steep for five to ten minutes, covered, and strain the infusion into a cup.

Cold Extract - preparing herbs with cold water preserves the most volatile ingredients, while extracting only minor amounts of mineral salts and bitter principles. Add about double the amount of plant material used for an infusion to cold water and let sit for about 8 to 12 hours, strain and drink.

Decoction - this method or preparation allows you to extract primarily the mineral salts and bitter principles rather than vitamins and volatile ingredients. Boil about half an ounces of plant parts per cup of water for up to 4 minutes. Steep the mixture with the cover on the pot for a few minutes.

Juice - chop and press fresh plant parts to make juice, then add a bit of water and press again. This is excellent for getting vitamins and minerals from the plant. Drink the juice right away for the best results.

Syrup - make a basic syrup to which you will add medicinal ingredients by boiling 3 pounds of raw, brown sugar in a pint of water until it reaches the right consistency.

Powder - grind your dried plant parts until you have a powder.

the powder can be taken with water, milk, soup, or swallowed in gelatin capsules.

Ointment - quick method: combine well one part of your powdered remedy with four parts hot petroleum jelly or lard. For purists: Add the decoction of the desired herb to olive oil and simmer until the water has completely evaporated. Add beeswax as needed to get a firm consistency. A little gum benzoin or a drop of tincture of benzoin per ounce of fat will help preserve the ointment.

Essence - dissolve 1 ounce of the herb's essential oil in a pint of alcohol; this method preserves the volatile oils of many plants which are not water-soluble.

Poultice - to make a poultice, you just crush the medicinal parts of the plant to a pulpy mass and heat. Mix with a hot, sticky substance such as moist flour or corn meal. Apply the pasty mixture directly to the skin. Wrap a hot towel around and moisten the towel periodically. A poultice will draw impurities from the body.

Herb Bath - herbal baths include the use of various herbal additives to enhance the natural healing power of the water. They are baths to which plant decoctions or infusions have been added. There are full and partial herbal baths. For a full bath some of the medicinal plant parts should be sewn into a cloth bag and then boiled in a quart of water; the strained mixture is then added to the bath. Sometimes you can put the bag right into the tub for a more thorough extraction of the herbal properties.