

HERBS IN YOUR HOME SUITABLE FOR YOU AND BABY – by Maxine White

A great number of our medicines, even those used on an almost daily basis, are derived in some way from plants. For example, aspirin, the active compounds (salicylates) of which were originally sourced from the herb willow bark. Interestingly, it's estimated that up to 10 per cent of all plant species (some 25,000 to 75,000) have now been used in traditional medicine, with about 1 per cent (250-750 species) being scientifically verified as therapeutically beneficial^[1]. Even today, about 25 per cent of prescription medicines source their compounds either directly or indirectly from plants.

So, while the West seems content to move health in the direction of pharmaceutical preparations, a large proportion of the world's population still relies primarily on plant medicines.

It's believed that the use of whole herbs over isolated compounds provides health benefits that our bodies can better use, and with fewer side effects. Herbal medicine is one of the most ancient forms of medicine; scientifically there is an increasing amount of well-documented evidence supporting its use. The World Health Organisation (WHO) supports the use of traditional medicines and has published directives to encourage the use of 'folk' and 'traditional' medicine and help mandate its safety². This makes sense from both an economical and health perspective.

Mother Nature stands supreme as a provider. So let's take a closer look at how herbs in our gardens and homes may nourish and nurture us.



Why use herbal teas?

Herbs from your garden (grown without pesticides) or cupboard are well suited to childrens' as well as family complaints and can help in the gentle effect of restoring temporary imbalances in health and wellness.

To aid their palatability – in a similar vein to Mary Poppins and her 'teaspoon of sugar' – herbal teas/tisanes may be sweetened with honey (though not in children under one). However, most children will happily drink unsweetened herbal teas if you start them early enough, and they will appreciate and recognise the pleasant aroma and taste of delicate tisanes, particularly the fragrant chai spice winter concoctions.

Are herbs safe?

Generally healthy people who incorporate the use of common herbs, are very unlikely to experience any adverse effects. The same applies to children, although it's important to remember that children are growing at a rapid rate, their bodies are still maturing and so too are many of their organs and systems, and as a consequence they will require much smaller amounts than an adult. The traditional use of herbs is considered to be safe and beneficial and, what's more, they can also be of good nutritional value.

Bubs 0-6 months old, those not yet on solids, or those still being exclusively breastfed should not be offered herbs unless directed by a suitably qualified practitioner. At this tender age babies are still developing their intestinal immunity and their healthy gut bacteria is under construction.

Children under a year old may be given herbs via mum's breastmilk: mum takes the herbs and then feeds the baby. This is very useful when using carminative herbs (herbs that help with flatulence and colic), such as fennel or ginger.

It is very important to note, that many herbs are contraindicated in pregnancy. Even culinary herbs should be used with caution; there is a list of herbs that should be avoided in Appendix 1.

If you have an existing illness or are on medication it is best to discuss any medicines, supplements or herbs with your qualified healthcare professional first.

There are many ways to prepare herbs and many ways they can be used. Other options include a tea bath or a compress of herbal tea applied to the tummy or affected area.

Is a tea better than a herb in cooking?

Sometimes. Any form of processing may result in a slight loss of some parts of the plant compounds. Herbs such as garlic lose some of their medicinal properties when we cook them. Herbs with strong aromas are particularly vulnerable, as the essential oils responsible for the lovely smell are heat sensitive. But... never fear, that doesn't mean that all of the therapeutic properties are lost. For example, the humble cup of tea, even after being well-brewed, still retains its tannins and polyphenoids, which act as antioxidants. However, it is important to note that herbs have been used traditionally in cooking to prevent bacterial contamination. Before antibiotics, spices such as cinnamon, cloves, pepper and nutmeg, were more valuable than gold^[3-5] for their therapeutic effects in providing protection against food contamination. Cooked herbs and spices in food retain many of their medicinal effects: measures such as adding fresh raw garlic into food after cooking can help to retain its full benefit as a food medicine. Natural yoghurt with fruit added will provide benefits to the intestinal canal, before the sugars of the fruit start to degrade the good bacteria.

Let's get brewing!

Your local health food shop is likely to have a large array of dried herbs; most of the herbs mentioned in this fact sheet should be readily available. Chat to the staff about blends that go well together and any special indications or contraindications. Remember, like all new foods for a little one, you should trial your herbs for the first time one at a time to check for any reactions.

1. Infusions/tisanes are delicious and quick to make from fresh or dried herbs. What's more they are an easy way of extracting the flavour and healing properties from herbs.

A standard infusion can be made by adding 25g dried herb or 50g fresh to 600ml of boiling water. Pop the herbs in a warm pot, pour on the boiling water and cover immediately to prevent those lovely essential oils from escaping. See healing recipes at the end of this sheet.

Optional additions such as sweeteners, if you really feel they are needed, may include honey, licorice powder (check with your health practitioner before use if your child is on any medications), or slices of fresh ginger. Your tea will stay fresh in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours.

So, how much can you drink?

You and your family can enjoy your tea a number of times a day; just ensure it is cooled before offering to little ones. Generally, herbal teas don't contain caffeine, but it's still a good idea to check the packaging when using prepared tea mixes. If you want to take a more cautious

approach dilute the tea further, until there is only a faint aroma. While my children were toddlers they happily drank infusions in their water bottles and loved them. Another great option in the summer is to make icy poles with herbal mixes and diluted orange or lemon juice.

2. Decoctions are a great way to prepare coarse herbs. The hard plant material, such as root or bark, can be boiled for a period of time. Slippery elm is a good example; it's a very useful and safe herb and can be used in pregnancy to help with hemorrhoids or constipation.

A standard decoction can be made by using the same proportions as for a tea, but instead place the herbs in a large saucepan and cover with cold water. Bring to the boil and simmer for 10-15 minutes. Strain, then drink the same amounts as for an infusion.

3. Syrups are an ideal way to give herbs to children because they mask the taste of more unpleasant-tasting herbs, particularly bitter herbs. When honey* is used as the sweetener it makes a fantastic warming winter medicine.

Cough and cold syrup

Start with 50g of dried herbs, for example four parts peppermint (28g), two parts hyssop (14g) and one part thyme (7g). Next add one litre of water. Bring to a boil, let simmer for 30 minutes and then strain. This should leave you with about 600ml of liquid. Pour 1.2kg of brown sugar into the liquid, stir over a low heat until the sugar has dissolved and the solution just rises to the boil. Do not let the water evaporate. Bottle, label and refrigerate once cooled.

Syrups can last for three months if stored properly in the fridge. See below for more suggestions.^[6]

How much can we use?

- Children 3-4 tablespoons a day
- Adults: 6-10 tablespoons a day

Other ways to use your herbal blends

We have looked briefly at herbal teas as infusions (or tisanes) for wonderful simple kitchen tonics, however, there are dozens of other methods of applying herbs including ointments, creams, compresses, poultices, liniments and oils.

Herbal baths for baby and you

Never overlook the therapeutic benefit of a good soak, allowing the plant oils to be absorbed by the skin as well as being inhaled. It is believed that essential oils specifically send messages via the brain to help balance the body. Remedies don't have to take the conventional route to have an effect.

Most of us have heard of at least one of the reputed benefits of chamomile and lavender. Both are commonly used with children or adults to help with sleep, upset tummies and much more. Rosemary baths are used to help blood circulation; lime flower baths can be used to help children sleep; and clary sage is stocked in some maternity wards to help with labour contractions. Keep in mind that if you are using a pure essential oil you should use about one drop per 100ml of water.

Some simple ways to infuse a bath:

- Hang a muslin bag full of fresh herbs under the hot water tap when running a bath, then pop the bag into the bath. An easy and beautiful infusion.
- You can also make a strong herbal infusion and add some to the bath.
- A muslin ball full of porridge oats is fabulous for skin irritations and reputed to be wonderful for eczema; you can squeeze the oats through the ball and a wonderful creamy lather is

produced that can be directly applied to irritated skin. Porridge is also good to eat – specifically for nerves!

Hand and footbaths

Massage is a very ancient form of healing; the French herbalist Maurice Mességué used massage to assist poor circulation, as well as cold and damp illnesses. Baby massage has become very popular: it's reputed to improve sleep (who would say no to that), digestion, mood and much more. You're likely to find classes at your local community college and possibly your child health centre.

MAKING AND USING RECIPES

Winter herbs and remedies

Herbal remedies can ease the discomfort of colds and flu; they may reduce the unpleasant symptoms, speed up recovery and prevent recurring infections. So let's take a look at specific herbal tonics for common complaints.

Respiratory support

Combinations of herbs such as **echinacea**, **mullein**, **hyssop**, **horehound**, and **garlic** (provided there is no sensitivity) are commonly used where there is a respiratory condition. **Wild cherry bark** tea is useful to relieve a persistent cough that keeps you awake at night. Persistent long-term coughing, particularly when not associated with a cold or flu, should be investigated by a qualified physician.

To help build up immunity, particularly if there is a tendency for frequent colds and infections, **echinacea** can be a great support. In addition **garlic**, **onion** and **thyme** are examples of herbal foods that have anti-microbial qualities.

Simple Cough/Chest Syrup

1 big round brown juicy onion
100ml honey* or 50 ml brown sugar

1. Chop the onion up into small pieces.
2. Pour the honey over the top
3. Leave overnight in the fridge.
4. Strain the onion off in the morning (or leave in for a stronger concoction), put in a glass jar with tight lid.
5. Allow a spoonful of the mix whenever necessary.

Other syrups may be made using licorice root, aniseed, thyme leaves, flaxseed, lemon and lime. Flaxseed syrup is particularly good for sore throats as well as stomach problems. Honey*, is effective in relieving the symptoms of a dry, non-productive cough.

*** SAFETY ALERT: DO NOT GIVE HONEY TO CHILDREN UNDER ONE YEAR OLD**

Fever

A hot infusion of **yarrow** and **boneset**, particularly in the case of a fever and flu, can be very helpful; don't forget that adding honey* will make any bitter tea sweeter. Or try adding **elderflower** and **linden** to create a more pleasant taste and have a stronger effect.

Coriander seed and ginger tea

1 tbs fresh grated ginger
1 tsp coriander seeds
1 tsp broken licorice sticks* (your health food shop will have these, please do not use confectionary red or black licorice)

1. Bring all ingredients to the boil in 40fl oz of water, cover and simmer for 10 minutes.

2. Children over two may have, on average, one cupful every two hours, sweetened with honey if required.
3. Dilute with half water for one-to-two year olds.
4. Incorporate any of the following: basil, boneset, chamomile, catnip, coriander seeds, echinacea, elderflower, hyssop, lavender, lemon balm, limeflowers, meadowsweet, peppermint, rosemary, vervain and yarrow.

Colds

Turmeric at first sign of a cold or sore throat can prove a great help. Mix a teaspoon into some honey (preferably Manuka) and let the child lick a teaspoon every two hours or ¼ - ½ tsp of powder two to three times a day or dissolve in hot water and honey and drink between meals ^[10]. For adults, drink two to three cupfuls of tea mixed with chai and honey in between meals.

Stuffy nose tea

½ oz fresh sliced ginger root
 1 stick cinnamon or ½ tsp good quality ground cinnamon
 2 cloves
 1 tsp coriander seeds or ½ tsp good quality ground coriander

1. Bring all ingredients to the boil, cover and simmer for 10-15 minutes and then strain, sweeten with honey and add lemon.
2. Adding your choice of relevant herbs to this and drinking it while it is hot is the best way for this mix to be taken.

Hot blackcurrant (*Ribes nigrum*) tea with elderflower is great for catarrh (runny nose), infections and fever. Fresh tea or tea bags can be obtained from most health food shops.

Blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus*) recovery syrup

500g blackberries
 60ml water
 500g sugar

1. Place blackberries, water and half the sugar into a covered bowl and place in a saucepan of water.
2. Boil and then simmer for two hours.
3. Strain and press the liquid through some clean muslin cloth into a different pan.
4. Add the rest of the sugar and heat slowly until the sugar is dissolved.
5. Boil for 5 minutes.
6. Skim, cool and then pour into bottles with screw tops or corks.
7. This will keep, refrigerated, for up to six months.

Anxiety and stress

For anxious, stressed and upset children, lemon balm, chamomile, linden, lavender and skullcap can be helpful. Lavender and chamomile make a wonderful relaxing bath that may be used before bed to help with sleep, colic or panic attacks.

Lemon and mint tea

½ tsp chopped lemongrass
 ½ tsp crushed mint

1. Put the herbs in a teapot.
2. Fill with hot water, cover and steep for 10 minutes.

Tummy upsets

For mild tummy pain and discomfort **chamomile, lemon balm, dill, fennel, peppermint and aniseed** often work well (individually and in combinations of two or three), plus they also taste pleasant.

Constipation, of course, should be addressed at its causative level, however, if needed try the following preparations. Psyllium seeds may also be added to breakfast cereal. All health food shops carry a range of psyllium and pre-ground products are easy to use; just sprinkle a teaspoon or two over cereal or into smoothies.

Slippery elm gruel

1 tbs slippery elm powder
¾ cup water
1 teaspoon lemon juice (optional)

1. Combine powder and water in saucepan and heat until warm, stirring the mixture to prevent clumping.
2. Add optional lemon juice for flavour, or you can sweeten the gruel with your child's favorite herbal or fruit-based drink.
3. Drink before it cools – as gruel cools down, it thickens and the thicker it gets, the more likely your child is to give it the thumbs down.^[11]

Constipation tea

1 cup boiling water
½ teaspoon licorice root
¼ teaspoon ginger root (or fennel seeds)
¼ cup apple juice (optional)
¼ cup prune juice (optional)

Steep first 3 ingredients; strain; add juices.

Recommended intake is roughly ¼ cup every two hours for a 50 lb / 23kg child, "until a change for the better becomes apparent".^[8]

Colic

Colic can sometimes be improved when a breastfeeding mum includes chamomile, basil, dill and fennel in her diet.

Gas and colic tea

1 tsp each fennel, cramp bark and peppermint

1. Boil the fennel seed and cramp bark in about 1¼ cups of water.
2. Simmer for 10 minutes, ensuring you keep the lid on the pot to reduce evaporation.
3. Add dried peppermint.
4. Steep for 10 minutes.
5. Strain and drink.

Skin

Childhood eczema may be helped by infusion of cleavers, nettles and red clover, chamomile or linden flowers. Chickweed gels can also be found in many health food shops and may be useful topically.

Nappy rash

Diluted herbal infusions of lavender, chamomile or marigold may help. Make sure baby's skin has dried properly – allow time out of nappies. Before popping a nappy back on, use a cream made up of chamomile, chickweed or marigold (calendula).

Cradle cap

Olive or sesame oil can be very effective. Consider adding some lavender oil (just a drop or two, it should be well diluted). Massage in and wash off in warm bath water.

Sticky eye

Put bubs in a warm bath made up with a weak infusion of chamomile, marigold, elderflower and mullein tea. Don't forget that breastmilk has very strong antimicrobial properties; while not a herb, it's still a natural remedy. However, colostrum has been shown to have a much more powerful effect than mature milk against various staph infections[12]. Breastmilk is a traditional method for sticky eye, **NOTE: ONLY USE FRESH BREASTMILK**. Older children may have their eyes bathed in herbal infusions consisting of herbs such as chamomile, chickweed, elderflowers, eyebright and goldenseal three times a day. Pour gently over the child's eye while they are in the bath (they can hold their head back a little) and try not to wipe off. Maybe dab with a muslin wrap. Appropriate herbal teabags (ie. chamomile) can be used: soak in boiling water, allow to cool to lukewarm and place over the eye for 5-10 minutes.[10]

Leanne's final word

As a nutritionist I spend my time talking about diet and how to optimise your eating habits to improve your health and vitality. You will have seen me mention 'variety' at least once a tip sheet. A variety of herbs and their various derivations can, and dare I say should, be part of a healthy diet. We know with certainty that plant compounds are some of the most potent health-giving aids we have and herbs, I believe, should be included in this group. Using a variety of herbs in your healthy family meals is a wonderful way of nourishing the body and soul.

Written and compiled by medical herbalist Maxine White from Health Action, with commentary from nutritionist Leanne Cooper (Sneakys)

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WANT TO LEARN MORE? MEDICINE from the KITCHEN 1 (TERM 3 2008) Maxine White

'Let your foods be your medicines and your medicines be food' Hippocrates. Beat the flu blues and build up your family's immunity with natural medicine that can be easily sourced and kept in the kitchen for use with aches, pains, colds and flu. This workshop will cover fresh and dried herbs, spices, useful supplements and herbal teas that may be used to treat all kinds of infections, skin problems and other disorders. Participants will learn to make their own cough syrups, herbal infusions and tisanes.

- August 8

MEDICINE from the KITCHEN 2 (TERM 3) Maxine White

This workshop will cover how juice, soup and broth making can provide therapeutic health benefits and aid the healing process. It will also cover the rationale and use of organic, non-organic and GM foods. This is an easy to understand and fun look at how your kitchen can be a feast of good health!

- Aug 29th

THE NATURAL MEDICINE CABINET (TERM 3) Maxine White

This workshop will focus on putting together a first aid kit of natural remedies for everyday use. Using a combination of oils and supplements you will make your own liniments and ointments that can be kept on

hand for all conditions and for emergency use. An excellent course for mums as topics include effective and safe head lice treatment for children.

- Saturday starting 26 Sep 2009, ends 26 Sep 2009
- Classes 1 Session
- Time 10.00 am - 3.00 pm

APPENDIX 1: MANY HERBS AND OILS ARE CONTRAINDICATED IN PREGANCY, THEY INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING^[2, 13]:

HERB	OILS	CULINARY HERBS IN LARGE AMOUNTS
Angelica, Autumn crocus, Barberry, Bloodroot, Cottonroot, Feverfew, Golden seal, Greater celandine, Juniper, Life root, Male fern, Mistletoe, Mugwort, Nutmeg, Pennyroyal, Pokeweed, Rosemary, Rue, Sage, Sassafras, Southernwood, Sweet flag, Tansy, Thuja, Thyme, Wormwood	Aniseed, Mugwort, Basil, Birch, Cedarwood, Cinnamon bark, Clary sage, Clove, Fennel, Hyssop, Jasmine, Juniper, Marjoram, Myrrh, Nutmeg, Origanum, Pennyroyal, Rosemary, Sage, Savory, Thyme, Wintergreen	Cinnamon, Fennel, Fenugreek, Oregano, Parsley, Rosemary, Saffron, Sage

APPENDIX 2: HERBS FOR COMMON CHILDHOOD CONDITIONS

Condition	Actions	Herbs
Anxiety	Relaxant	Chamomile, Lemon Balm, Valerian, Hyssop, Motherwort, Skullcap ^[14] ^[15]
Allergic reaction	Anti allergy	Chamomile, Centaury, Dandelion, Limeflowers, Elderflowers, Eyebright, Lavender, Calendula, Nettle, Thyme, Garlic, Agrimony ^[15]
Bruises		Arnica (not to be taken internally or on open wounds) ^[16]
Bronchial Infection	Relaxing expectorant Relieve congestion Immune/Infection Anti asthmatic Antibiotic Demulcent	Aniseed Caraway Thyme, Echinacea Euphorbia, Garlic Mullein, Marshmallow, Licorice, White Horehound Others: Elderflower, Slippery Elm, Iceland Moss ^[14, 15]
Bites and Stings	Soothe Antiseptic	Topically: Aloe, Marigold Topically: Garlic, Comfrey, Onion, Sage, Lavender Ti-Tree, Cider vinegar – wasp bites ^[15]
Colds	Relieve chest Immune Support Fevers/diaphoretic Antipathogenic	Caraway, Catmint Echinacea Elderflower, Myrrh, Yarrow Garlic, Thyme Others: Vitamin C. Vitamin D ^[15]
Colic	Carminative	Aniseed, Caraway, Dill, Fennel, Ginger
Catarrhal conditions (Sinusitis)	Anti-catarrhal	Ribwort, Elderflower ^[14] , Myrrh, Eyebright ^[14] , Echinacea
Cuts, wounds, burns, blisters	Antiseptic/healing	Calendula, Tea Tree, Aloe Vera, Lavender
Cradlecap	Softening agents, astringents	Olive oil, Wheatgerm oil, Calendula tea
Constipation	Demulcent, bulk laxative, cholagogue, alterative	Dandelion, Yellow Dock, Psyllium ^[14] Slippery Elm ^[15]
Conjunctivitis If red eye persists after two-three days please see your physician	Astringents	Topically: Calendula, Eyebright, Fennel, rosewater ^[15]
Diarrhoea of less than 1 day		Cinnamon, Calendula, Psyllium,

duration		Rosehip, Thyme[14, 15]
Digestive upset	Digestive tonic Carminative Antipathogenic Relaxant	Catmint, Peppermint, Cinnamon, Fennel Dill Garlic Lemon Balm
Eczema	Anti Inflammatory Circ Stim Alteratives/Depuratives	Heartsease Nettle Cleavers, Nettle, Red Clover Calendula[14]
Fever	Reduce body temp Regulators Immune support Diaphoretic	Catmint, Chamomile, Lemon balm Yarrow, Echinacea Echinacea Linden, Verbena[14]
Flatulence	Carminative/digestive tonic Diaphoretic	Caraway, Dill, Fennel Ginger Cinnamon, Peppermint[14]
Throat Inflammation	Anti Inflammatory	Elderflower, Eyebright, Fennel, Myrrh, Thyme, Fenugreek
Gastro	Anti-microbial, demulcent, astringent.	Cinnamon, Golden Seal, Slippery Elm[14], Thyme[15]
Headaches	Relieve tension	Catnip, Lavender, Passiflora, Rosemary [14]Chamomile
Influenza	Immune support Diaphoretic Demulcent, Expectorant	Echinacea Elderflower[14], Ginger Garlic, Verbascum[14]
Nausea	Carminative	Cinnamon, Parsley, Iceland Moss[14] Ginger
Nervous Exhaustion	Relaxant	Oats, Vervain, Angelica, Chamomile, Lemon Balm, Linden, Valerian[15]
Nappy Rash	Anti inflammatory, anti infective, soothing	Topically: Calendula, Aloe, Comfrey, Chickweed, Slippery Elm Paste[15]
Respiratory conditions	Relieve congestion Circ stim Expectorant Anti Inflammatory Antispasmodic	Eyebright, catnip Ginger Licorice Thyme Other: Garlic, Sage, Vitamin C, Rosehip, Cod Liver oil
Sleeplessness/restlessness	Relaxant	Lemon Balm, Chamomile, Linden, Valerian
Spasmodic cough	Relaxing expectorant Demulcent	Aniseed, Hyssop, Elderflowers/Elderberry, Licorice Mullein, Ribwort, Plantain
Nervous Tension	Relaxant	Chamomile, Lemon balm, Linden, Lavender, Passiflora, Valerian[15]
Teething	Relaxant/Astringent	Chamomile, Lemon Balm, Slippery elm paste.
Tonsillitis	Immune support, demulcent, astringent, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, anti-microbial	Echinacea, Mullein, Chamomile, Sage, Poke Root, Thyme.[14] Chlorella mouth wash. Myrrh mouth wash
Travel sickness		Chamomile, ginger[14]

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