

HERBS: THE POWER OF MEDICINAL PLANTS



*All good things
come from nature*

On the wall of the house, facing south, hung large tufts of peppermint. It slinked into the kitchen through the cool, dark hallway. It smelled strongly of herbaceous tea, and there was always a pot on the old oven.

My great-grandmother was a simple country woman who grew up in Silesia and was expelled and stranded as a poor beggar in Thuringia. She made it her task as a community nurse to help others – she had a home remedy for every ailment, no matter how big or small. I remember homemade Swedish herbs, for both internal and external use. On skin they helped with aging spots, and drinking their tea balanced the digestive system. I always considered the ginseng root like an old garden gnome; she swore by the extract. It is futile to speculate about the many reasons why we have neglected our contact with nature, why knowledge of the natural world has been mostly lost, and why so many rely on the promises of the pharmaceutical industry.

Don't worry: this is no missionary work, nor is it a protest. My own experience of severe illness has made me humble and grateful for the progress and power of conventional medicine while at the same time appreciating the healing powers of nature. Complementary medicine, aromatherapy and therapy-supporting herbs worked for me. That does not mean it works for everyone. Nevertheless, our modern societies seem designed to act only when the balance is no longer right.

SO WHAT CAN WE DO TO BE IN BALANCE, TO BE ONE WITH OUR BODY, MIND AND SOUL?

The forces of nature, bundled together in medicinal plants, can offer many benefits. Old wisdom, often proven over several millennia, may find its way back into our everyday lives, lives that are more connection with nature and its riches. Our bodies often tell us what we need – we just have to re-learn to listen. Naturopathy and the effects of plants lend their support. At the same time we learn to recognize symptoms and to treat ourselves with care.

The following text does not claim to be complete, does not substitute a visit to a doctor or therapist, and does not compete with conventional medicine and research results. The recipes for balsam, tea, diets and the like should encourage you to discover the powers of herbs and medicinal plants. Not to mention, there is joy to be felt in producing a soothing balsam to give to others and to develop a feeling for what one's own self needs.

Harnessing the power of medicinal plants goes beyond just assuming that „if I ingest herbs anyway, it will yield the following results“. Rather, occupying oneself with the subject is a first step towards a holistic path. A deeper discussion leads to changes in other areas of life, such as nutrition, exercise, fostering healthy relationships, improving work and connecting with fellow humans and oneself.

Thus personal growth, the integrated perspective of body, mind and soul, and self-healing mechanisms are welcome side effects of this occupation. The most beautiful thing is to be one with yourself and your body.

Safety first



In general, there is nothing to worry about when you set out to discover medicinal plants. The most important thing is to listen to your body. Most medicinal plants are generally safe and have fewer side effects than traditional medicine. Of course, there are plants that are intolerable for some, even poisonous and deadly. As is often the case, this is due to improper dosage. Many plants are available in low doses or heavily diluted.

It is therefore recommended to be well-informed, especially if you are on your own in the fields and meadows, and to not consume anything that you are unfamiliar with. It is best to seek advice from herbalists, pharmacists, alternative medicine practitioners, etc.

The following tips are a helpful start:

1. GET ACCURATE INFORMATION – consulting several sources, talking to specialists and studying research results and user experience is a good first step.

2. TEST AND STUDY – besides studying plants, it is essential to listen to your body when trying herbs, at first in small doses. Not every herb is suitable for everyone. If there are mild side effects, the dose may have been too high. Touching the herb and trying it several times often helps.

3. KNOW EXACTLY WHAT YOU'RE GATHERING – if you're out and about in meadows and fields, you should learn a little about plants. There are also very precise plant identification apps. They should contain information on the size, shape, colour and structure of leaves. Apart from the fact that it usually makes sense to harvest the flowers, they also serve as a reliable means of identification. Start with small plants that are very safe to use, such as dandelions or marigolds, and offer plenty of applications.

4. BE AWARE OF DRUG INTERACTIONS – of course, there is no 100% certainty, but there is relatively little evidence of very strong interactions between plants and pharmaceutical medicine. Usually there is a medicinal herb that can be used as an alternative. Some interactions are known and can be learned from experts or are disclosed in the plant descriptions.



*harvest,
buy
and store
yourself*

It is a great pleasure to open yourself up to collecting and processing herbs. A good wicker basket and gardening scissors are a minimal investment. To give plants an opportunity to keep growing, **do not harvest more than 10%**. In some places collecting may be forbidden, so informing yourself beforehand is the way to go. Guided herbal walks are great for learning and exchanging knowledge.

Fresh herbs or plants in pots are another way of getting food. It is important to pay attention to **sustainable cultivation** and to buy plants exclusively in organic quality. If you buy plants and then move them around in your own garden or on the balcony, the same applies: only take plants that look healthy and inform yourself about optimal growing conditions.

It is often recommended to consume **dried plants**. This makes it much easier to obtain them. Well stocked pharmacies and naturopathy shops offer not only products, but also consultation. If you order online, pay attention to the origin of the plants and recognize seals of approval from trusted sources. If you are uncertain, ask the shop owner about quality standards, that plants are not contaminated with pollutants and clarify identity and origin.

Of course, nowadays there are plenty of suppliers from whom finished products such as tinctures, oils and balsams can be purchased. This is a good alternative when you are just starting to immerse yourself in medicinal plants. Here, too, attention should be paid to ingredients, quality and reliable origin. Some providers even offer online courses on medicinal herbs.

- a small forey -

MAKING TINCTURES AND EXTRACTS WITH ALCOHOL



Alcohol is the base ingredient for the recipes presented here and for the production of tinctures and extracts in general. **Apple cider vinegar** is also a **solvent** that dissolves the ingredients from the plants, though it is not as potent as alcohol. Furthermore, alcohol helps keep the quality of plant substances stable over a longer period of time.

Vodka (40-50% by volume) is suitable for most plants and has a **neutral taste**. The relatively low percentage of alcohol gives the tincture less bite. **Spirits with 75% alcohol by volume (ABV)** are particularly suitable for tinctures which have **less water-soluble substances**, like **turmeric** and other medicinal plants.

Higher ABV is very difficult to obtain. The odd pharmacy might be able to supply you with something above 90% ABV.

TINCTURES

The following procedure applies for the production of almost all tinctures

Recipe: **SANDY NEUMANN**

FOR FRESH HERBS

- 30 g Herbs for 60 ml alcohol, so a 1:2 ratio
- STEP 1** Cut the herbs or chop them coarsely and place them into a glass. Compress until full.
- STEP 2** Fill with alcohol until all is covered. Close the glass. Fill with alcohol the next day, if necessary, when some of the liquid has decreased.
- STEP 3** Leave in a dark place for about 4 weeks. Shake daily.
- STEP 4** Pass through a sieve or fine cloth and wring out well. Store in a brown glass container.

FOR DRIED HERBS

Herbs to alcohol ratio of 1:5

- STEP 1** Cut the herbs or roots or grind them in a mortar. Pour into a glass and fill with alcohol.
- STEP 2** Leave in a dark place for about 4 weeks. Shake daily.
- STEP 3** Pass through a sieve or fine cloth and wring out well. Keep in a brown glass container.

UTENSILS

- Sharp knives and scissors to harvest and cut medicinal plants
- Brown glass bottles and jars are reusable and also protect the products from sunlight
- Preserving jars for the extraction process and to store dried herbs
- Bar measure and scale to accurately measure all ingredients
- Stainless steel sieve to sift herbs after extraction
- Pots and bowls for heating liquids
- Notebook to document steps and recipes
- Labels to identify content and dates
- Small pan to roast seeds
- Funnel for filling
- Mortar to finely grind seeds