

The Pharmacy in Your Backyard

Harvesting Your Herbs

- Harvest before flowering. If you've been harvesting all season, your plants probably have not had a chance to flower. But non-hardy herbs will start to decline as the weather cools; so late summer is a good time to begin drying your herbs.
- Cut in mid-morning. Let the morning dew dry from the leaves, but pick before the plants are wilting in the afternoon sun.

Drying

- Cut healthy branches from your herb plants.
- Remove any dry or diseased leaves. Yellowed leaves and leaves spotted by disease are not worth drying. Their flavor has already been diminished by the stress of the season.
- Shake gently to remove any insects. There are always hitch hikers and since you won't be thoroughly washing these stems, you want to get rid of as many as you can now.
- If you've picked your herbs while the plants are dry, you should be able to simply shake off any excess soil. But if necessary, rinse with cool water and pat dry with paper towels.
- Give them plenty of air circulation, so they can dry out quickly. Wet herbs will mold and rot.
- Remove the lower leaves along the bottom inch or so of the branch.
- Bundle 4 - 6 branches together and tie as a bunch. You can use string or a rubber band. The bundles will shrink as they dry and the rubber band will loosen, so check periodically that the bundle is not slipping.
- Make small bundles if you are trying to dry herbs with high water content.
- Punch or cut several holes in a paper bag. Label the bag with the name of the herb you are drying.
- Place the herb bundle upside down into the bag. Gather the ends of the bag around the bundle and tie closed.
- Make sure the herbs are not crowded inside the bag.
- Hang the bag upside down in a warm, airy room.

- Check in about two weeks to see how things are progressing. Keep checking weekly until your herbs are dry and ready to store.

Storing

- Store your dried herbs in airtight containers. Zippered plastic bags will do. I like to use small canning jars.
- Be sure to label and date your containers.
- Your herbs will retain more flavor if you store the leaves whole and crush them when you are ready to use them.
- Discard any dried herbs that show the slightest sign of mold.
- Place containers in a cool, dry place away from sunlight.
- Dried herbs are best used within a year.
- As your herbs lose their color, they are also losing their flavor.
- Use about 1 teaspoon crumbled dried leaves in place of a tablespoon of fresh

Freezing

- Moisture dense herbs, like Basil Chives, Mint and Tarragon are best preserved in a dehydrator or by freezing.
- Herbs should be frozen on trays and later placed in bags.
- Another option is chopped or whole in ice cube trays with water.
- Lastly they can be frozen, for better flavor retention, in olive oil.

What is Herbal Tea?

An herbal tea is most often used with single herbs or a mixture of herbs for the purpose of simply enjoying a cup of tea or during times of illness.

Brewing

Combine 1-2 tsp. of dried herb per cup of boiling water. Once you have added the herbs to the water, remove from heat. Cover and steep for 5-10 minutes. Strain the herbs and drink.

What is an Infusion?

An herbal infusion is very much like a tea; only it is steeped longer and uses a larger amount of herb. The purpose of an herbal infusion is feeding your body a high dose of

vitamins and minerals. (According to Nature Skills, a cup of nettle tea has 5-10 mg. of calcium, while a cup of nettle infusion can contain up to 500 mg. of calcium.)

How to Make and Infusion

Add about a cup of dried herbs to a quart jar. Pour boiling water over the herbs to the top of the jar. Cover tightly with a lid. Let the herbs steep 4-10 hours and then strain. You can drink 1-4 cups of infusion a day. Keep any leftover infusion refrigerated, and discard after 36 hours.

What is herbal tincture?

A tincture is made by infusing herbs in alcohol. Tinctures have a long shelf life and are an easy way to get the herbs into your system. If you have an aversion to alcohol, glycerin can be used instead, but glycerin does not extract as many of the medicinal constituents and only has a shelf life of 6 months – 1 year. However a glycerin-based tincture may be a good option for children

How to Make a Tincture

- Making a tincture is best made with high quality vodka because it is colorless, odorless and fairly flavorless. It must be at least 80 proof in order to prevent mildewing. (It is also possible to make it with Apple Cider vinegar or Glycerin).
- The container for the tincture needs to be glass or ceramic.
- The tincture should be stored in small, dark glass bottles when finished.
- They should be airtight and sterilized prior to use.
- Add enough fresh chopped herbs to fill the glass container.
- Or add 7 ounces of dried herb material to 35 fl. Ounces of alcohol (or vinegar/glycerin)
- Using a butter knife, stir around the edge of the glass container to ensure that air bubbles are broken.
- Seal the container. Place it into a cool, dark area; a cupboard shelf works best.
- Shake the container regularly.
- After the month, strain the liquid through cheesecloth.
- Decant into the small glass bottles and store out of direct light.
- Has a shelf life of up to 5 years.

- Always consult a doctor or trained professional before using any herbals.

A Healthy Mixture Makes Healthful Tea

For the best results, you want your tea to consist of three kinds of ingredients:

HEALTHY GREENS For a full-bodied flavor, you might try steeping a combination of dandelion leaves, watercress, parsley, and birch leaves.

BEAUTIFUL BLOOMS Consider using a colorful mixture of rose petals, dandelion blossoms, pansies, and violets for good taste and appearance.

NOBLE FRAGRANCES Combine chives, thyme, rosemary, marjoram, verbena, oregano, and mint with flowers such as lemon blossoms and lilac.

EDIBLE (AND DRINKABLE) FLOWERS

Alliums (flowers and young shoots), bee balm, carnations, hibiscus blossoms, hollyhock, honeysuckle flowers (the berries are highly poisonous), Johnny-jump-ups (flowers and leaves), lavender (blossoms and leaves), nasturtiums (flowers, buds, leaves, seedpods), pansies (flowers and leaves), roses (petals, leaves, and rose hips), violets (flowers and leaves).

EDIBLE (AND DRINKABLE) KITCHEN HERBS

Basil, chamomile flowers, chives, dill, lemon balm, marjoram, mint, oregano, parsley, peppermint and other mints, rosemary, sage, thyme, verbena.

EDIBLE (AND DRINKABLE) BUSHES AND TREES

Birch leaves (especially when young), blackberry leaves, citrus blossoms (lemon, orange, grapefruit, etc.), elderberry flowers and ripe berries (the leaves and unripe berries are poisonous), gardenia, hibiscus flowers, honeysuckle flowers, pine needles (white and black), raspberry leaves.

EDIBLE (AND DRINKABLE) WEEDS

Chickweed, chicory (flowers and buds), dandelions (flowers and leaves), goldenrod, good King Henry, kudzu, lamb's quarters, plantain (or white man's footsteps, as the Native Americans called them), purslane, stinging nettle.