

TEN ESSENTIAL HERBS

Guelph Organic Conference 2012

Presented by Kerry Hackett, MNIMH, AHG, OHA

The following is intended for those who have attended this lecture. Therefore it was written in 'note' form without elaboration as further data was supplied during the talk. This information was written in a general manner and is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified herbal practitioner. In addition, should you be on prescription drugs, are pregnant or breastfeeding, it is highly recommended that you consult a qualified herbal professional before embarking on any programme involving herbs or supplements.

Herbal Teas:

- **Infused teas:** leaves and flowers
- **Hot infusion:** 1-2 tsp. dried herb or 3-4 tsp. fresh herb to 1 cup boiling water. Cover and steep for 15 minutes. Strain.
- **Cold infusion:** 1-2 tsp. dried herb to 1 cup room temperature water. Cover and let sit overnight. Strain.
- **Decocted teas:** roots, fruit, bark
- **Decoction:** 1-2 tsp. dried herb to 1 cup cold water. Cover and bring to a boil. Let simmer 15 minutes. Strain.

Macerated Tinctures:

- 1 part dried herb, finely chopped (100g)
- 5 parts alcohol at desired concentration: 25 – 40%
- Place herb in a jar; pour prepared alcohol over top.
- Stir well and cover tightly. Be sure herb is completely covered with alcohol by at least one inch.
- Place in a cool, dark area for 14 days; shake the jar every 1 – 2 days.
- Strain through cheesecloth; wring out well or press.
- Store in dark bottles until ready to use. Label!

Infused Oils:

- 1 part dried herb to 5 parts oil
- Let sit 1 month or slow cook at 'warm' 3 days

Infused Oils to Salves:

- 1 part dried herb to 5 parts oil

- Let sit 1 month or slow cook at 'warm' 3 days or so

Althaea officinalis (Marshmallow)

- Malvaceae family
- Hardy perennial
- Hardy to Zone 3
- Easy to germinate or divide
- Height 2-4' (60-120 cm); spread 2' (60cm)
- Full sun
- Moist, moderately fertile soil
- Parts used: roots (2 year old) and leaves
- High in mucilage: root 35%; leaf 10%
- Demulcent, emollient, anti-inflammatory, expectorant
- Soothes, cools and protects
- Alimentary tract: inflammation
- Urinary tract: inflammation
- Respiratory tract: inflammation, dry coughs
- Drawing poultice: abscesses, boils, wounds

Tea: dried roots: cold decoction

- ½ - 1 tsp. root: 1 cup cold water (overnight)
- ½ - 1 cup tid

Tincture: 1:5/25% alcohol (5-15 ml tid)

Powder: mix with tincture or tea (poultice)

- 5% powder in salve base

Contraindications: none

Calendula officinalis (Calendula)

- Asteraceae family
- Hardy annual
- Hardy to Zone 2
- Easy to germinate
- Height 2' (60 cm); spread 2' (60 cm)
- Full sun
- Most soils
- Parts used: flowers
- Antibacterial, antiseptic and antifungal
- Skin: promotes tissue regeneration, anti-inflammatory, astringent
- Cuts, scrapes, burns, sunburn, insect bites, stings, rashes, acne, athlete's foot
- Base for many cosmetic creams
- Digestive system
- **Tea:** infuse 1-2 tsp: cup; < 5-6 cups/day
- Compress
- Eyewash
- **Tincture:** 1:5/25%; 1-4 ml tid

- **Infused oil:** cream, salve
- Poultice
- **Contraindications:** none

Capsicum minimum (Cayenne)

- Solanaceae family
- Annual
- Hardy to Zone 8
- Easy to germinate (start early - mid April; transplant: early - mid June)
- Spacing: 15 – 18”
- Full sun; warm, moist, fertile soil
- Parts used: fruit
- Stimulant, rubefacient, analgesic, antispasmodic, carminative, antiseptic, astringent
- Circulation: extremities, cardiovascular system, gastrointestinal system
- Stops bleeding
- Osteoarthritis
- **Tincture:** 1:10/60%; 10 drops tid
- Powder: external use or a pinch in tea
- **Infused oil:** 100g fruit: 500 ml oil
- Food
- **Contraindications:** gastric ulcers, chronic bowel irritation, a/coagulants

Hypericum perforatum (St. John's Wort)

- Hypericaceae family
- Hardy perennial
- Hardy to Zone 4
- Easy to germinate or divide
- Height 1-3' (30-90 cm); spread 1' (30 cm)
- Full sun to part shade; semi-dry soil
- Parts used: flowers and buds
- Nervous system: relaxing nervine, sedative: agitation, menopausal anxiety, insomnia, mild depression, nerve damage & pain
- Skin: astringent, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic: wounds, bruises, burns
- Antiviral: herpes virus
- **Tea:** infuse 1 tsp: cup; ½ cup tid
- Compress
- **Tincture:** 1:5/45%; 2-4 ml tid
- Infused oil
- **Contraindications:** severe depression, possible interaction with quite a number of pharmaceuticals

Lavandula angustifolia (Lavender)

- Lamiaceae family
- Hardy evergreen perennial
- Hardy to Zone 3
- Easy to germinate (true to type?)
- Cuttings or layering
- Height 18" (45 cm); spread 3' (80 cm)
- Hedge: plant at 12-16" (30-40 cm)
- Full sun; well-drained fertile soil
- Parts used: flowers
- Volatile oils (up to 3%)
- Relaxing nervine, anti-inflammatory, a/bacterial, antiseptic, carminative, a/spasmodic
- Insomnia, headaches, migraine, anxiety
- Cuts, insect bites, burns
- Osteoarthritis, muscle aches
- Indigestion, gas, bloating
- **Tea:** infuse 1 tsp: cup; ¼ - ½ cup tid
- Compress
- **Bath:** 1 oz (30g): 1 pt (500 ml) water
- **Tincture:** 1:5/60%; 2-4 ml tid
- Infused oil
- Salve
- Essential oil
- **Contraindications:** none

Matricaria recutita (Chamomile)

- Asteraceae family
- Annual
- Hardy to Zone 5
- Easy to germinate
- Height: 2-3' (60-90 cm)
- Spread: self-seeds easily
- Full sun; most well drained soils
- Parts used: flowers
- Volatile oils
- Relaxing nervine, a/inflammatory, a/spasmodic, carminative, a/microbial, mild bitter
- Indigestion, gas, bloating, IBS
- Insomnia, headaches, hyperactivity
- Fever, sinusitis, hayfever
- Inflamed skin, bruises, conjunctivitis
- **Tea:** infuse 1 tsp: cup; < 5-6 cups/day
- Compress
- Eyewash

- Bath
- **Tincture:** 1:5/45%; 5-10 ml tid
- Infused oil
- Essential oil
- **Contraindications:** none

Symphytum officinale (Comfrey)

- Boraginaceae family
- Hardy perennial
- Hardy to Zone 3
- Easy to germinate; division is easier
- Height: 3' (90 cm)
- Spread: 3' (90 cm)
- Full sun to part shade; moist soil
- Part used: leaves and roots
- Allantoin (4-7%), mucilage (29%)
- Demulcent, emollient, a/inflammatory, astringent, tissue regeneration
- Fractures, cuts, burns, ligament/tendon conditions, bruises
- Ulceration
- Poultice
- Compress
- Infused oil
- Salve
- **Contraindications** (internal use): compromised liver, drug use, pregnancy, lactation

The Comfrey Conundrum

- **Pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PA):** especially young leaves & roots
- Isolated constituents are not the same as the whole plant
- Non-representative animal models used (rats)
- Dosing too high
- Route of administration wrong (injection)
- Confounding factors in poisoning reports
- Extrapolation from other PA poisoning in humans not possible
- PA levels in comfrey vary widely from plant to plant
- Concurrent use of foods or drugs may increase or reduce risk
- Benefits and risks for internal use are not clear (?)
- <http://www.comfreycentral.com/>

Taraxacum officinale (Dandelion)

- Asteraceae family
- Perennial
- Hardy to Zone 2

- Easy to germinate
- Height 6-9" (15-23 cm)
- Full sun; all soils
- Parts used: leaves, roots (2 year old)
- **Root:** hepatic, mild laxative, bitter
- Digestive issues, detoxifier, stimulates bile production
- Skin: eczema, psoriasis, acne
- Osteoarthritis, gout
- **Leaf:** diuretic, nutritive
- Detoxification, fluid retention
- **Tea (dried root):** hot decoction: 1 tsp: cup; drink ½ - 1 cup tid
- **Tea (dried leaf):** hot infusion: 3-4 tsp: cup; drink ½ - 1 cup tid
- **Tincture:** 1:5/25%; 5-10 ml tid
- Food
- **Contraindications:** bile duct blockage, potassium supplements

Thymus vulgaris (Thyme)

- Lamiaceae family
- Hardy evergreen perennial
- Hardy to Zone 4
- Easy: germinate, divide, cutting, layering
- Height 12" (30 cm); spread 8" (20 cm)
- Full sun, well-drained poor soil
- Protect in winter
- Parts used: aerial parts
- Volatile oils
- Antiseptic, antibacterial, antifungal, carminative, a/spasmodic, relaxing expectorant, a/tussive
- Sore throats, dry cough, infected gums, respiratory infections, colds
- Cuts, insect bites, athlete's foot
- Osteoarthritis, muscle aches
- **Tea:** infuse ½ - 1 tsp: cup; ½ - 1 cup tid
- **Tincture:** 1:5/45%; 2-4 ml tid
- Infused oil
- **Syrup:** layer with onion and honey
- Food
- Essential oil
- **Contraindications:** pregnancy

Urtica dioica (Nettle)

- Hardy perennial
- Hardy to Zone 3
- Easy to germinate or divide
- Height 5' (1.5 m)

- Spread... endless
- Full sun to part shade
- Any soil
- Parts used: leaves, roots and seeds
- Nutritive, tonic, astringent, diuretic, anti-allergenic
- Leaf: anaemia (Fe), detoxification, gout, osteoarthritis, eczema, fluid retention, hayfever, hair loss
- Root: benign prostatic hypertrophy
- Seed: adaptogen
- **Tea:** infuse 1 tsp: cup; 1 cup tid
- **Tincture:** 1:5/25%; 2-6 ml tid
- Infused oil
- Food
- **Contraindications:** none

Resources:

- Byers, D. (1999) *Herbal Remedy Gardens* Vermont: Storey Books
- Chevallier, A. (1996) *The Encyclopedia of Medicinal Plants* Quebec: The Readers Digest Association (Canada) Ltd.
- Damrosch, B. (1988) *The Garden Primer* New York: workman Publishing Company, Inc.
- McVicar, J. (1994) *Herbs for the Home* New York: Penguin Books Canada Ltd.
- St. Clare, D. (1997) *The Herbal Medicine Cabinet* California: Celestial Arts Publishing
- **COG:** www.cog.ca/documents/SeedlistingWI06.pdf
- **Cottage Gardener:** www.cottagegardener.com
- **Richters Herbs:** www.richters.com
- **OMAFRA:** <http://www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/crops/facts/02-049.htm>