

BE YOUR OWN HERBAL EXPERT WITH SUSUN WEED

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Be Your Own Herbal Expert Part 1

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Herbal medicine is the medicine of the people. It is simple, safe, effective, and free. Our ancestors knew how to use an enormous variety of plants for health and well-being. Our neighbors around the world continue to use local plants for healing and health maintenance. You can too.

LEARNING ABOUT HERBS

Information on herbs and their uses has been passed down to us in many ways: through stories, in books, set to music, and incorporated into our everyday speech. Learning about herbs is fun, fascinating, and easy to do no matter where you live or what your circumstances. It is an adventure that makes use of all of your senses. Reading about herbal medicine is fascinating, and a great way to learn how others have used plants. But the real authorities are the plants themselves. They speak to us through their smells, tastes, forms, and colors.

Anyone who is willing to take the time to get to know the plants around them will discover a wealth of health-promoting green allies. What stops us? Fear. We fear that we will use the wrong plant. We fear poisoning ourselves. We fear the plants themselves.

These fears are wise. But they need not keep us from using the abundant remedies of nature. A few simple guidelines can protect you and help you make sense of herbal medicine. This series of short articles will offer you easy-to-remember rules for using herbs simply and safely. When you have completed all eight parts of

this series, you will be using herbs confidently and successfully to keep yourself and your loved ones whole/healthy/holy.

SURVIVAL IS A MATTER OF TASTE

Virtually all plants contain poisons. After all, they don't want to be eaten! Because we have evolved eating plants, we have the capacity to neutralize or remove (through preparation or digestion) their poisons. Not all poisons kill, and even poisons that are deadly often need to be taken in quantities far larger than can easily be obtained from foods. (Apple seeds contain a lethal poison but it takes a quart of them to cause death.)

Our senses of taste and smell are registered in the part of the brain that maintains respiration and circulation - in other words, the survival center. Plants (but not mushrooms) advertise their poisons by tasting bad or smelling foul. Of the four primary kinds of poisons found in plants - alkaloids, glycosides, resins, and essential oils - the first two always taste bitter or cause a variety of noxious reactions on the oral tissues, and the last two usually do, especially when removed from the plant or concentrated.

Sometimes the taste of the poison in a plant is hidden by large amounts of sweet-tasting starch. Fortunately, human saliva contains an enzyme that breaks down these carbohydrates, exposing the nasty taste of the poison. Since even tiny amounts of some poisons can have large effects, for safety sake, take your time when tasting.

SAFETY FIRST

Because our sense of taste protects us against poisonous plants, it is always best to take herbs in a form that allows one to taste them. **Consuming just one plant at a time, with as little preparation as possible, gives us the greatest opportunity to taste poisons and is therefore the safest way to use herbs.**

One herb at a time is a "simple." When we ingest a simple herb - raw, cooked as a vegetable, brewed fresh or dried in water as a tea or infusion, steeped in vinegar or honey, dried and used as a condiment - we bring into play several million years of plant wisdom collected in our genes. When we ingest many plants together, or concentrate their natural poisons by tincturing, distilling, or standardizing, we increase the possibility of harm. Powdering herbs and putting them in capsules is one of the most dangerous ways to use them, especially those containing poisons. For ultimate risk, play with essential oils; they are far removed from the plant, very concentrated, and as little as one-quarter ounce can kill.

SAFETY SECOND, TOO

In the next installments we will continue to learn how to use herbs simply and safely. We will explore nourishing and tonifying herbs, the difference between fixing disease and promoting health, how to apply the three traditions of healing, and how to take charge of your own health care with the six steps of healing.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER ONE

You will need the following plants, all of which contain poisons that you can taste: a head of lettuce (taste the leaves and the core separately), some black or green tea (unbrewed), a fresh dandelion leaf, strong chamomile tea (steep it overnight), a can of asparagus, some fresh mint, a spoonful of mustard seeds, and a bottle of vanilla extract.

Approach tasting a plant as you would tasting a wine. Begin by inhaling the aroma. Release the bouquet by squeezing the plant until your fingers are moist (or chew briefly and spit into your hand). Do you feel enticed,

repelled, or neutral? Does your mouth water? Does your throat clench? Observe how you react to the smell. Does it sting your eyes? Irritate your nasal tissues? Do you want to taste it?

We do not gulp our wine, nor do we merely wet our tongues; for best effect, taste and smell a reasonably large piece, but don't stuff your mouth. As you chew, move the plant material around in your mouth. Roll it around with your tongue. Make contact with it for a full minute but **DO NOT SWALLOW**. No, no, spit it upon the ground, or into your hand, or the sink, or wherever you can, but do not swallow. **SPIT IT OUT**.

What do you feel now? In your stomach? Your throat? Your head and nose? What is your gut feeling? What sensations accompany the taste of this plant?

It is best to wait until the previous taste is completely gone before going on to the next plant. If you are doing advanced work with wild plants, wait at least a day before you use or consume the plant in case you have a delayed reaction to some component.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER TWO

Taste as in experiment one, but use these inedible (poisonous) parts of common foods: lemon inner rind, apple seeds, rhubarb leaves, lettuce root, the inner soft pit of a peach.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER THREE

Taste as in experiment one, these poisonous plants (fresh or dried): wormwood leaf, goldenseal root, yellow dock root, Echinacea root, eucalyptus leaf, motherwort leaf.

EXPERIMENT FOUR

Aromatic plants are rich in essential oils. We often use them to season and preserve food. In small quantity, these oils are not harmful, but concentrated, they threaten the liver, kidneys, and life itself. Smell and taste, as in experiment one, as many aromatic plants as you can: thyme, rosemary, oregano, lavender, sage, orange peel, cloves, cinnamon, nutmeg. Brew strong teas (steep overnight) of these plants and taste. Can you see, smell, or taste more essential oils? Smell or taste one drop of the extracted essential oil of any of these plants.

FURTHER STUDY

1. What is an alkaloid? Medicinal plants often contain groups of alkaloids. Name seven plants rich in alkaloids (specify the part); then name at least three of the alkaloids in each plant.
2. What are glycosides? Name at least four glycosides and describe the effect each has. Name seven plants rich in glycosides; specify the part of the plant and the kind of glycoside.
3. What are resins? Name four or more plants (specify part) rich in resins.
4. What are essential oils? Name a dozen or more plants rich in essential oils (specify part).
5. What is the difference between a poison and a medicine? Are all drugs poisons?

ADVANCED WORK

- ❖ Give the botanical name (genus and species) for each plant you named in the further study section.
- ❖ Taste a variety of plants that grow around you. Warning: *It is possible to experience uncomfortable or*

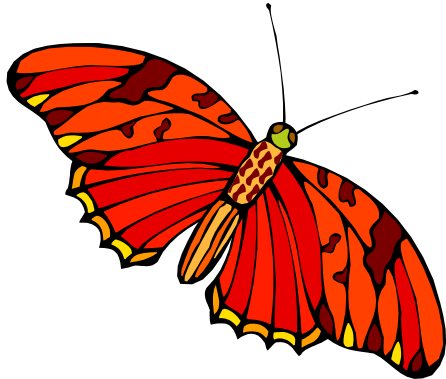
harmful effects from this experiment. A book on poisonous plants can reassure you that the plants you taste will not kill you. It is best not to put plants such as poison ivy or poison oak in your mouth. DO NOT TASTE HOUSEPLANTS.

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Vibrant, passionate, and involved, Susun Weed has garnered an international reputation for her groundbreaking lectures, teachings, and writings on health and nutrition. She challenges conventional medical approaches with humor, insight, and her vast encyclopedic knowledge of herbal medicine. Unabashedly pro-woman, her animated and enthusiastic lectures are engaging and often profoundly provocative.

Susun is one of America's best-known authorities on herbal medicine and natural approaches to women's health. Her four best-selling books are recommended by expert herbalists and well-known physicians and are used and cherished by millions of women around the world. Learn more at www.susunweed.com



Be Your Own Herbal Expert Part 2

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Herbal medicine is the medicine of the people. It is simple, safe, effective, and free. Our ancestors knew how to use an enormous variety of plants for health and well-being. Our neighbors around the world continue to use local plants for healing and health maintenance, and you can too.

In your first lesson, you learned how to "listen" to the messages of plant's tastes. And you discovered that using plants in water bases (teas, infusions, vinegars, soups) - and as simples - allows you to experiment with and explore herbal medicine safely.

In this lesson, we will learn how to make effective water-based herbal remedies and talk more about using simples.

TEA FOR YOU?

Teas are a favorite way to consume herbs. Made by brewing a small amount of herbs (typically a teaspoonful to a cup of water) for a short time (generally 1-2 minutes), teas are flavorful, colorful drinks.

Herbs rich in coloring compounds - such as hibiscus, rose hips, calendula, and black tea - make enticing and tasty teas. They may also contain polyphenols, phytochemicals known to help prevent cancer. Since coloring compounds and polyphenols are fairly stable, dried herbs are considered best for teas rich in these.

Herbs rich in volatile oils - such as ginger, chamomile, cinnamon, catnip, mint, lemon balm, lemon grass, lavender, bergamot, and fennel, anise, and cumin seeds - make lovely teas, which are effective in easing spasms, stimulating digestion, eliminating pain, and inducing sleep. Since much of the volatile oils are lost when herbs are dried, fresh herbs are considered best for teas rich in these, but dried herbs can be used with good results.

I enjoy a cup of hot tea with honey. But teas fail to deliver the mineral richness locked into many common herbs. A cup of nettle tea, for instance, contains only 5-10 mg of calcium, while a cup of nettle infusion contains up to 500 mg of calcium. For optimum nutrition, I drink nourishing herbal infusions every day.

INFUSION FOR ME!

An infusion is a large amount of herb brewed for a long time. Typically, one ounce by weight (about a cup by volume) of dried herb is placed in a quart jar, which is then filled to the top with boiling water, tightly lidded and allowed to steep for 4-10 hours. After straining, a cup or more is consumed, and the remainder chilled to slow spoilage. Drinking 2-4 cups a day is usual. Since the minerals and other phytochemicals in nourishing herbs are made more accessible by drying, dried herbs are considered best for infusions. (See experiment 2.)

I make my infusions at night before I go to bed and they are ready in the morning. I put my herb in my jar and my water in the pot, and the pot on the fire, then brush my teeth (or sweep the floor) until the kettle whistles. I pour the boiling water up to the rim of the jar, screw on a tight lid, turn off the stove and the light, and go to bed. In the morning, I strain the plant material out, squeezing it well, and drink the liquid. I prefer it iced, unless the morning is frosty. I drink the quart of infusion within 36 hours or until it spoils. Then I use it to water my houseplants, or pour it over my hair after washing as a final rinse, which can be left on.

My favorite herbs for infusion are nettle, oatstraw, red clover, and comfrey leaf, but only one at a time. The tannins in red clover and comfrey make me pucker my lips, so I add a little mint, or bergamot, when I infuse them, just enough to flavor the brew slightly. A little salt in your infusion may make it taste better than honey will.

Having trouble finding herbs in bulk at your local health food store? Try ordering online:

- ✧ Mountain Rose Herbs - <http://www.mountainroseherbs.com/>
- ✧ Pacific Botanicals - <http://www.pacificbotanicals.com/>
- ✧ Frontier Herbs - <http://www.frontierherb.com/>
- ✧ Garden Medicinals - <http://www.gardenmedicinals.com/>

SIMPLE MESSAGES

When we use simples (one plant at a time), we allow ourselves an intimacy that deepens and strengthens our

connections to plants and their green magic. There are lots of interesting plants, and lots of herbalists who maintain that herbal medicine means formulae and combinations of herbs. But I consider herbs as lovers, preferring to have only one in bed with me at a time.

When I use one plant at a time it is much easier for me to discern the effect of that plant. When I use one plant at a time and someone has a bad reaction to the remedy, it is obvious what the source of the distress is, and usually easy to remedy. When I use one plant at a time, I make it easy for my body to communicate with me and tell me what plants it needs for optimum health.

I even go so far as to ally with one plant at a time, usually for at least a year. By narrowing my focus, I actually find that I learn more.

COMING UP

In our next lesson we will learn more about the difference between nourishing, tonifying, stimulating/sedating, and potentially-poisonous plants; how to prepare them; and how to use them. In the following installments we will explore the difference between fixing disease and promoting health, how to apply the three traditions of healing, and how to take charge of your own health care with the six steps of healing.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER ONE

Make and drink a quart of nourishing herbal infusion made with stinging nettle, oatstraw, red clover, raspberry leaf, or comfrey leaf. If you wish, flavor it with mint. On the same day, make a tea from the same herb, using dried herb. Compare and contrast the colors, flavors, and sensations.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER TWO

Make an infusion of stinging nettle, oatstraw, red clover, raspberry leaf, or comfrey leaf, using one ounce of dried herb as usual. At the same time, make a quart of "brew" using the same herb, but fresh, not dried. To make it fair, use 4 ounces of fresh herb. After one hour of steeping, look at both jars, taste and compare/contrast. Repeat three more times at hourly intervals.

Minerals are released slowly into water. They darken the color of the water and give it a dense, rich taste. Oil-soluble vitamins float to the top and make a thin glaze of swirls.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER THREE

Buy, or grow, a tasty, aromatic herb, like ginger, peppermint, or rosemary. For this experiment you will need one tablespoon of fresh herb, and one teaspoon of the same herb dried. Place the fresh herb in a cup or mug and the dried herb in another. Fill both to the top with boiling water. After one minute, taste, smell, compare the teas. Wait another minute and compare again. Then wait five minutes and try each one again.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER FOUR

Make a tea with aromatic seeds - anise, caraway, coriander, cumin, fennel, or fenugreek. Use a teaspoon of seeds in a cup of water. At the same time, brew some using a tablespoon of seeds per cup. After a minute,

taste, smell, contrast. Repeat in five minutes, then in thirty minutes, then after an hour, then after four hours. Teas and infusions of dried seeds are almost the same.

FURTHER STUDY

1. Drink 2-4 cups of nourishing herbal infusion for a month and see if your health changes in any way. Best if you don't drink coffee or tea during this month.
2. Choose a green ally to focus on this year.
3. Read *Healing Power of Minerals* by Paul Bergner.
4. Read about stinging nettle and oatstraw in my book *Healing Wise*.
5. Write out the botanical names of the herbs you used in making your teas and your infusions.

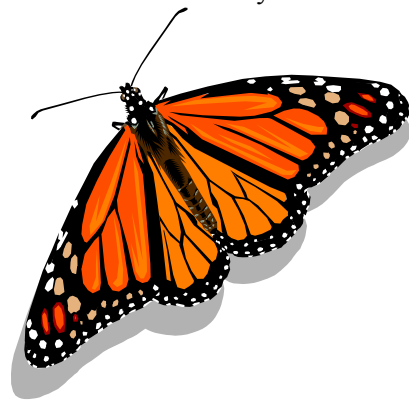
ADVANCED WORK

- ✧ Learn more about essential oils in plants. Grow several plants rich in essential oils.
- ✧ Learn more about tannins. Make an oakbark infusion.

If you want to be your own herbal expert then you may want to start a correspondence course! See www.susunweed.com for information on courses available.

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Susun is one of America's best-known authorities on herbal medicine and natural approaches to women's health. Her four best-selling books are recommended by expert herbalists and well-known physicians and are used and cherished by millions of women around the world. Learn more at www.susunweed.com



Be Your Own Herbal Expert Part 3

Herbal medicine is the medicine of the people. It is simple, safe, effective, and free. Our ancestors knew how to use an enormous variety of plants for health and well-being. Our neighbors around the world continue to use local plants for healing and health maintenance, and you can too.

In your first lesson, you learned how to "listen" to the messages of plant's tastes. And you discovered that using plants in water bases (as teas, infusions, vinegars, and soups) - and as simples - allows you to experiment with and explore herbal medicine safely.

In your second lesson, you learned about herbs for teas and how to preserve and use their volatile oils. You learned about vitamin- and mineral-rich herbal infusions, and how to use them to promote health and longevity. And you continued to think about using herbs simply.

In this lesson you will explore the differences between nourishing, tonifying, stimulating/sedating, and potentially-poisonous plants. You will learn how to prepare and use them for greatest effect and most safety.

ALL HERBS ARE NOT EQUAL

All herbs are not equal: some contain poisons, some don't; some of the poisons are not so bad, some can kill you dead. I divide herbs into four categories for ease in remembering how (and how much) to use. Some herbs nourish us, some tonify, some bring us up or ease us down, and some are frighteningly strong.

✧ **Nourishing herbs** are the safest of all herbs. They contain few or no alkaloids, glycosides, resins, or essential oils (poisons).

Nourishing herbs are eaten as foods, cooked into soups, dried and infused, or, occasionally, made into vinegars. They provide high-level nutrients, including vitamins, minerals, trace minerals, proteins, phytoestrogens and phytosterols, starches, simple and complex sugars, bioflavonoids, carotenes, and essential fatty acids (EFAs).

Nourishing herbs in water bases (infusions, soups, vinegars) may generally be taken in any quantity for any period of time. Side-effects - even from excessive use - are quite rare. Nourishing herbs are rarely used as tinctures (in alcohol), but when they are, their effects may be quite different.

It is generally considered safe to use nourishing herbs in water bases with prescription drugs. They may also be taken even if you are using tonifying, stimulating/sedating, or potentially poisonous herbs.

Some examples of nourishing herbs include:

- burdock roots
- chickweed herb; tincture dissolves cysts
- comfrey leaf
- elder blossoms and berries
- fenugreek seeds
- garlic
- mallow leaves and roots
- mushrooms
- nettle leaves and seeds
- oatstraw
- plantain leaves and seeds

- red clover blossoms
- seaweeds
- rose hips
- slippery elm bark
- violet leaves and blossoms.

✧ **Tonifying herbs** are generally considered safe when used in moderation. They may contain alkaloids or glycosides or essential oils, but rarely in quantities sufficient to harm us.

Tonifying herbs act slowly in the body and have a cumulative, rather than immediate, effect. They are most beneficial when used for extended periods of time. Tonifying herbs may be used regularly (but usually not daily) for decades if desired.

Tonifying herbs are prepared in water and alcohol bases: tinctures and wines, as well as infusions, vinegars, and soups.

The more bitter the tonic tastes, the less you need to take of it. The more bland the tonic tastes, the more you can use of it.

Side effects from overuse and misuse of tonics is uncommon but quite possible. The dividing line between what is tonifying and what is stimulating differs from person to person. Ginseng is tonifying to my sweetheart, but stimulating to me. Even herbal authorities disagree on which herbs are tonifying and which stimulating.

Take care to counter any tendency to overuse tonifying herbs or you may experience unwanted side effects.

It is generally considered safe to use tonifying herbs in water bases if you are taking prescription drugs. You may also use tonifying herbs while using nourishing, stimulating/sedating, and even potentially poisonous herbs. Tonifying herbs in alcohol bases are considered safe to use with nourishing herbs, but may produce unexpected results if combined with drugs or strong herbs.

Some examples of tonifying herbs include:

- burdock seeds, especially in an oil base
- chasteberry
- mug/cronewort herb, especially in vinegar
- dandelion leaf, root and flowers
- echinacea root
- ginseng root
- hawthorn berries, leaves, and flowers
- horsetail herb
- lady's mantle
- motherwort leaves and flowers
- sarsaparilla root
- yellow dock leaves, roots, and seeds

✧ **Stimulating/sedating herbs** frequently contain essential oils, alkaloids, glycosides, or resins. Because these substances cause strong physical reactions, stimulating/sedating herbs are known from their rapid and pronounced effects, some of which may be unwanted.

Stimulating/sedating herbs are most often prepared as tinctures (and wines), vinegars, teas, and infusions. Many stimulating/sedating herbs are used as seasonings in cooking as well. Despite my cookbook's injunction to use only a little, I long ago learned that more aromatic herbs in my soups gave a "livelier" result.

Because long-term use of stimulating/sedating herbs can lead to dependency, dose and duration of use must be carefully watched. A moderate to large dose, taken infrequently will produce better results than a small dose taken over a longer period.

Side effects from the use of stimulating/sedating herbs in water bases are not common but possible. Side effects from use in alcohol bases are frequent. Whenever stimulating/sedating herbs are used regularly, health is compromised.

It is not safe to take prescription drugs with stimulating/sedating herbs, but they may be taken even if you are using nourishing and/or tonifying herbs.

Some examples of stimulating/sedating herbs include:

- leaves of aromatic mints such as catnip, lemon balm, lavender, sage, skullcap
- cinnamon bark
- coffee beans
- ginger root
- kava kava root
- licorice root
- passion flower
- tobacco leaves
- uva ursi leaves
- valerian root
- willow bark and leaves

❖ **Potentially poisonous herbs** always contain alkaloids, glycosides, resins, or essential oils. And they contain large quantities of those poisons, or in very potent forms.

Potentially poisonous plants can cause death directly, through the actions of their poisons on their targets (such as cardiac glycosides which stop the heart) or indirectly, by causing the liver and/or the kidneys to fail (as they attempt to cope with and clear the poison from the system).

Potentially poisonous herbs are usually extracted into alcohol (tinctures) and used in minute doses (1-3 drops). For safety sake use potentially poisonous herbs as infrequently as possible and for the shortest possible time.

Powdering and encapsulating increases the risk of side effects from any herb, but when we take stimulating/sedating and potentially poisonous herbs in capsules, the side effects can be deadly.

Homeopathic pharmacy uses many potentially poisonous plants, but in such dilute doses that death is impossible. Side effects can occur, even with homeopathically tiny doses, however.

Potentially poisonous herbs activate intense effort on the part of the body and spirit and may cause nausea, visual disturbances, digestive woes, and allergic reactions even when used correctly.

Always be extremely cautious when using potentially poisonous herbs. Consult with at least three other knowledgeable herbalists who have used the plant in question before proceeding.

In general it is not considered safe to take potentially poisonous herbs while taking prescription drugs, other potentially poisonous herbs, or stimulating/sedating herbs. It is generally safe to use potentially poisonous herbs while using nourishing and tonifying herbs.

Some examples of potentially poisonous herbs:

- belladonna
- castor beans
- cayenne
- cotton root
- goldenseal
- liferoot/groundsel
- nutmeg
- poke root
- rue leaves and flowers
- tansy leaves and flowers
- wormwood

EXPERIMENT NUMBER ONE

Spend some time alone quietly breathing. Tune into your body piece by piece (toes, feet, calves, knees, thighs, and so on). Use colors to draw yourself. Don't worry about making art.

For the next month include some nourishing herb in your diet. Example: on Monday include seaweed as a vegetable for dinner, on Tuesday drink a quart of nettle infusion, on Wednesday make a soup with burdock and other roots, on Thursday drink a quart of red clover infusion, on Friday make garlic bread with at least one clove of freshly chopped garlic per slice, on Saturday drink a quart of oatstraw infusion, on Sunday drink a quart of comfrey/mint infusion. And so on.

One month later, sit alone and breathe quietly. Tune into your body piece by piece. Use colors to draw yourself. Has anything changed? You can continue this experiment for as long as you like.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER TWO

Repeat experiment number one, but instead use any one tonic (preferably one that lives where you do) at least four times a week for one month. Again, note any changes in how you feel, how much energy and stamina you have, how much curiosity and delight you experience in life. You can continue this experiment for as long as you like also.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER THREE

What stimulants and sedatives do you use regularly? What happens if you give up one or more of them for a week? For a month? Try - on different days - at least one herbal stimulant and one herbal sedative and keep notes of your reactions.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER FOUR

Choose one potentially poisonous plant that grows near you and cultivate a relationship with it. Read about it. Talk about it with others who have a relationship with it. Keep a special book for writing about your poisonous ally.

FURTHER STUDY

1. Name five more nourishing herbs. Specify part used, preparation, and dosage.
2. Name five more tonifying herbs. Specify part used, preparation, and dosage.
3. Name five more stimulating/sedating herbs. Specify part used, preparation, and dosage.
4. Name five more potentially poisonous herbs. Specify part used, preparation, and dosage. In what case and how would you use each?
5. What is the difference between a tonic and a stimulant?

ADVANCED WORK

- ✧ Give the botanical name (genus and species) for each plant listed.
- ✧ List five nourishing herbs commonly sold in tincture form and describe what they are used for in that form.
- ✧ Learn more about homeopathy.

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Be Your Own Herbal Expert

PART 4

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Herbal medicine is the medicine of the people. It is simple, safe, effective, and free. Our ancestors used - and our neighbors around the world still use - plant medicines for healing and health maintenance. It's easy. You can do it too.

In your first lessons, you learned how to "listen" to the messages of plant's tastes, how to make effective water-based herbal remedies, and how to distinguish safe nourishing and tonifying herbs from the more dangerous stimulating and sedating herbs.

In this lesson, you will learn how to how make herbal tinctures. You will make tinctures from fresh and dried roots as well as from fresh flowers and leaves.

Then you will collect your tinctures into an Herbal Medicine Chest and begin to use them. Shall we begin?

Tinctures Act Fast

Tinctures are alcohol-based plant medicines. Alcohol extracts and concentrates many properties from plants, including their poisons. Alcohol does not extract significant amounts of nutrients, so tinctures are used when we want to stimulate, sedate, or make use of a poison. (Remember that nourishing herbs are best used in water bases such as infusions and vinegars.)

The concentrated nature of tinctures allows them to act quickly. It also makes them perfect for a first-aid kit or herbal medicine chest: a little goes a long way.

I have dozens of tinctures in my cabinet. But these are the ones I carry with me when I travel; they are the ones I don't leave home without. This is my traveling herbal medicine chest.

Echinacea tincture

Motherwort tincture

Skullcap tincture

Ginseng tincture

Dandelion root tincture

Wormwood tincture

St Joan's Wort tincture

Poke root tincture(danger)

Yarrow tincture

MAKING DRIED ROOT TINCTURES

I strongly prefer to make tinctures from fresh plants. But many people have a hard time getting fresh plants. Most books therefore ignore fresh plant tinctures and focus on making tinctures only from dried plants. *The only dried plant parts I use to make tinctures are roots and seeds.* All other plant parts I use fresh when making a tincture. And I actually prefer to use fresh roots too.

To make a tincture from dried roots:

- ☼ Buy an ounce of dried *Echinacea augustifolia* or *Panax ginseng* root.
- ☼ Put the whole ounce in a pint jar.
- ☼ The dried root should fill the jar about a third full. If not, use a smaller jar.
- ☼ Fill the jar to the top with the alcohol. Cap tightly and label.

Almost any alcohol can be used to make a tincture. My preference is 100 proof vodka. A lower proof, such as 80 proof, does not work nearly as well. Higher proofs, such as 198 proof or Everclear, can damage the liver and kidneys, so I don't use them to make medicine.

The tincture is ready in six weeks, but gets stronger the longer it sits. I like to wait about six months before using my ginseng tincture and a year before using my echinacea tincture.

MAKING FRESH ROOT TINCTURES

Roots generally hold their properties even when dried. But two of my favorite root tinctures must be made from fresh roots are the dried ones have lost much of their effect.

Making a tincture with a fresh root is similar to making one with a dried root.

- ☼ With great respect for the plant, dig up its root.
- ☼ Gently rinse mud away. (For more about digging dandelion root, see *Healing Wise*.)
- ☼ Chop root into small pieces and fill a jar to the top with the chopped root.
- ☼ Fill jar to the top with alcohol. Cap tightly. Label.
- ☼ Fresh root tinctures are ready to use in six weeks.

MAKING FRESH LEAF AND FLOWER TINCTURES

I use only fresh flowers and leaves in my tinctures. These delicate plant parts lose aroma and medicinal qualities when dried.

Tinctures *can* be made from dried herbs, but I find them inferior in both effect (how well they work) and energetics (how many fairies are in it), not to mention taste (how many volatile substances remain) and somatics (how something makes you "feel").

What if the plants you need to make all the tinctures in your medicine chest don't grow where you live or you can't find them? Try one or more of these solutions.

- ☼ Take a vacation to a place where the plant you need does grow. And make sure to go at the best time to gather it.
- ☼ Find an herbal pen-pal who lives in the area where the plant you want to tincture grows. Have your pen-pal make a tincture of the fresh plant for you. You could make a tincture of something you have lots of to give to her too.

Even if the plants do grow where you live, it may take a year or longer for you to find them, harvest them and make tinctures. While you are "in limbo," it's fine to buy tinctures to use in your herbal medicine chest.

When you finally find the plants you want, don't be afraid to make several quarts of tincture. Tinctures last for hundreds of years if protected from heat and light.

St. Joan's wort tincture: Eases muscles spasms, anti-viral, pain-relieving.

- ☼ Pick yellow *Hypericum perforatum* flowers in the summer's heat.
- ☼ Fill - don't stuff - a jar with the blossoms and leaves.
- ☼ Fill jar to the top with alcohol. Cap tightly. Label. (It will turn bright red.)
- ☼ Your fresh St. Joan's wort tincture is ready to use in six weeks.

Motherwort tincture: Eases menstrual cramps, mood swings, stress.

- ☼ Pick *Leonurus cardiaca* flowering tops (leaves and flowers) in early fall or late summer.

- ☼ Fill - don't stuff - a jar with coarsely chopped blossoms and leaves.
- ☼ Fill jar to the top with alcohol. Cap tightly. Label.
- ☼ Your fresh motherwort tincture is ready to use in six weeks.

Skullcap tincture: Pain-relief, headache remedy

- ☼ Pick *Scutellaria lateriflora* flowering tops when there are seeds as well as flowers.
- ☼ Fill - don't stuff - a jar with the blossoms and leaves.
- ☼ Fill jar to the top with alcohol. Cap tightly. Label.
- ☼ Your fresh skullcap tincture is ready to use in six weeks.

Wormwood tincture: Counters food poisoning and parasites.

- ☼ Pick *Artemisia absinthium* leaves in the late summer or early fall, when mature.
- ☼ Fill - don't stuff - a jar, with the coarsely chopped leaves.
- ☼ Fill jar to the top with alcohol. Cap tightly. Label.
- ☼ Your fresh wormwood tincture is ready to use in six weeks.

Yarrow tincture: Counters all bacteria internally and externally, repels insects.

- ☼ Pick *Achillea millefolium* flowing tops, white ones only, when in bloom.
- ☼ Fill - don't stuff - a jar, with the coarsely chopped herb.
- ☼ Fill jar to the top with alcohol. Cap tightly. Label.
- ☼ Your fresh yarrow tincture is ready to use in six weeks.

DOUBLE AND TRIPLE TINCTURES

An herbalist in Austin Texas shared her special way of preparing a tincture that helps her keep her cool in stressful situations. She tinctures fresh lemon balm, gathered before it flowers, for six weeks, in 100 proof vodka. She pours that tincture over a new jar of fresh lemon balm leaves. After that sits for six more weeks, it's a double tincture. She then pours the double tincture over another new jarful of fresh lemon balm and lets that sit for six weeks. After which she has a triple tincture. She uses: "A dropperful sublingually - works absolute wonders for me when I'm stressed out and ready to scream."

PLANT POISONS

You remember that there are four types of poisons in plants: alkaloids, glycosides, essential oils, and resins. The first three are fairly easy to move from plants to a tincture.

Resins, because they "fear" water (hydrophobic) are difficult to tincture. *When I want to tincture a resin I do use high proof alcohol.* Some examples would be: pine resin tincture, balsam bud tincture, calendula flower tincture.

TAKING TINCTURES

I see many people put herbal tinctures under their tongues. I prefer to protect my oral tissues from the harsh,

possibly cancer-causing, effects of the alcohol.

I dilute my tinctures in a little water or juice or even herbal infusion and drink them.

USING YOUR TINCTURES

Here are a few of the ways I use the tinctures in my herbal medicine chest. For more information on using these tincture, see my books and my website.

Acid indigestion: 5-10 drops of Dandelion root or Wormwood tincture every ten minutes until relieved. I use a dose of Dandelion before meals to prevent heartburn.

Bacterial Infections (including boils, carbuncles, insect bites, snake bite, spider bite, staph): 30-50 drops Echinacea or Yarrow tincture up to 5 times daily. For severe infections, add one drop of Poke tincture to each dose.

Colds: to prevent them I use Yarrow tincture 5-10 drops daily; to treat them, I rely on Yarrow, but in larger quantity, say a dropperful every 3-4 hours at the worst of the cold and tapering off.

Cramps during menstruation: 10 drops Motherwort every 20 minutes or as needed. Used also as a tonic, 10 drops daily, for the week before.

Cramps in muscle: 25 drops St Joan's every 25-30 minutes for as long as needed.

Cramps in gut: 5-10 drops Wormwood, once.

Diarrhea: 3 drops Wormwood hourly for up to four hours.

Energy lack: 10 drops of Dandelion or Ginseng tincture in the morning.

Fever: 1 drop Echinacea for every 2 pounds of body weight; taken every two hours to begin, decreasing as symptoms remiss. Or a dropperful of Yarrow tincture every four hours.

Headache: 25 drops St Joan's plus 3-5 drops Skullcap every 10-15 minutes for up to two hours. 5 drops of Skullcap may prevent some headaches.

High blood pressure: 25 drops of Motherwort or Ginseng tincture 2-4 times a day.

Hot Flashes: 20-30 drops Motherwort as flash begins and/or 10-20 drops once or twice daily.

Insect: prevent bites from black flies, mosquitoes, and ticks with a spray of Yarrow tincture; treat bites you do get with Yarrow tincture to prevent infection.

Nervousness, hysteria, hyper behavior: 15 drops Motherwort every 15-20 minutes.

Premenstrual distress: 10 drops Motherwort twice a day for 7-10 days preceding menstruation or 10 drops daily all month.

Sore throat: Gargle with Yarrow tincture.

Swollen glands: 1 drop Poke root tincture each 12 hours for 2-5 days.

Viral infections (including colds and the flu): 25 drops of St. Joan's wort tincture every two hours. Add one drop of poke root tincture 2-4 times a day for severe cases.

Wounds: I wash with Yarrow tincture, then wet the dressing with Yarrow tincture, too.

In the next installment of *Be Your Own Herbal Expert*, you will learn about herbal oils, including infused and essential oils. Future lessons will explore the difference between fixing disease and promoting health, applications of the three traditions of healing, and using the six steps of healing to take charge of your own health and make sense of medicine.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER ONE

Choose one plant and make several small tinctures of it using different types of alcohol. Taste and smell each tincture every week or so for 6-8 weeks.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER TWO

Buy or make different tinctures of the same plant: dried herb, fresh herb, timed with the moon, in different menstrums, made by different people, harvested in different places. Can you taste differences? Are the effects different? What else do you notice?

EXPERIMENT NUMBER THREE

Make a double or triple tincture of motherwort, skullcap, or lemon balm. See if it relieves anxiety, hyperactivity, emotional distress, headaches. I use a dose of 5-30 drops. Remember skullcap can induce sleepiness.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER FOUR

Tincture four plants that are common to your area. Learn at least three things they can each be used for and if at all possible, use them.

Further study

1. What is osmosis? Why does 100 proof vodka make stronger tinctures than 80 proof?
2. What is a menstrum? What other menstrums are used to make tinctures?
3. Of the four plant poisons, which are present in each of plants used in the medicine chest?
4. Why don't I consider vinegars tinctures?
5. How is a glyceride different from a tincture?

ADVANCED WORK

- ☼ Make a tincture from a resinous plant.
- ☼ Make a glyceride.
- ☼ How is a standardized tincture made?

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Vibrant, passionate, and involved, Susun Weed has garnered an international reputation for her groundbreaking lectures, teachings, and writings on health and nutrition. She challenges conventional medical approaches with humor, insight, and her vast encyclopedic knowledge of herbal medicine. Unabashedly pro-woman, her animated and enthusiastic lectures are engaging and often profoundly provocative.

Susun is one of America's best-known authorities on herbal medicine and natural approaches to women's health. Her four best-selling books are recommended by expert herbalists and well-known physicians and are used and cherished by millions of women around the world. Learn more at www.susunweed.com



Be Your Own Herbal Expert

PART 5

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Herbal medicine is the medicine of the people. It is simple, safe, effective, and free. Our ancestors used - and our neighbours around the world still use - plant medicines for healing and health maintenance. It's easy. You can do it too, and you don't need a degree or any special training. Ancient memories arise in you when you begin to use herbal medicine - memories which keep you safe and fill you with delight. These lessons are designed to nourish and activate your inner herbalist so you can be your own herbal expert.

In our first session, we learned how to "listen" to the messages of plant's tastes. In session two, we learned about simples and how to make effective water-based herbal remedies. The third session helped us distinguish safe nourishing and tonifying herbs from the more dangerous stimulating and sedating herbs. Our fourth session focused on poisons in herbs and herbal tinctures, which we made and then collected into an Herbal Medicine Chest.

In this, our fifth session, we will find out how to help ourselves and our families with herbal vinegars, one of the green blessings of the Wise Woman Way.

Why Use Herbal Vinegars?

Herbal vinegars are an unstoppable combination: they marry the healing and nutritional properties of apple cider vinegar with the mineral and antioxidant richness of health-protective green herbs and wild roots. Herbal vinegars are tasty medicine, enriching and enlivening our food while building health from the inside out.

Herbal vinegars are far better for the bones and the heart than soy beverages. They have a reputation for banishing grey hair and wrinkles. Sprayed in the armpits, herbal vinegars are highly effective deodorants. As a hair rinse (try rosemary or lavender vinegar) they add luster and eliminate split ends.

Anything vinegar can do, including clean the kitchen, herbal vinegars can do better.

VINEGARS SEEK MINERALS

Minerals are important for the health and proper functioning of our bones, our heart and blood vessels, our nerves, our brain (especially memory), our immune system, and our hormonal glands. No wonder lack of minerals can lead to chronic problems and getting more can make a big difference in health in a few weeks. One of the best ways to get more minerals - besides drinking nourishing herbal infusions and eating well-cooked leafy greens - is to use herbal vinegars.

VINEGAR & YOUR BONES

It is not true that ingesting vinegar will erode your bones. Adding vinegar to your food actually helps build bones because it frees up minerals from the vegetables you eat and increases the ability of the stomach to digest minerals. Adding a splash of vinegar to cooked greens is a classic trick of old ladies who want to be spry and flexible when they're ancient old ladies. (Maybe your granny already taught you this?) In fact, a spoonful of vinegar on your broccoli or kale or dandelion greens increases the calcium you get by one-third. All by itself, apple cider vinegar is said to help build bones; when enriched with minerals from herbs, I think of it as better than calcium pills.

VINEGAR & CANDIDA

Some people worry that eating vinegar will upset the balance of gut flora and contribute to an overgrowth of candida yeast in the intestines. Some people have been told to avoid vinegar altogether. My experience has led me to believe that herbal vinegars help heal those with candida overgrowth, perhaps because they're so mineral rich. I've worked with women who have suffered for years and kept to a strict "anti-candida" diet with little improvement, and seen them get better fast when they add nourishing herbal vinegars (and fermented foods such as sauerkraut, miso, and yogurt) to their diets.

MAKING HERBAL VINEGARS

Fill any size jar with fresh-cut aromatic herbs: leaves, stalks, flowers, fruits, roots, and even nuts can be used. For best results and highest mineral content, be sure the jar is well filled and chop the herb finely.

Pour room-temperature vinegar into the jar until it is full. Cover jar: A plastic screw-on lid, several layers of plastic or wax paper held on with a rubber band, or a cork are the best covers. Avoid metal lids - or protect them well with plastic - as vinegar will corrode them.

Label the jar with the name of the herb and the date. Put it some place away from direct sunlight, though it doesn't have to be in the dark, and someplace that isn't too hot, but not too cold either. A kitchen cupboard is fine, but choose one that you open a lot so you remember to use your vinegar, which will be ready in six weeks.

You can decant your vinegar into a beautiful serving container, or use it right from the jar you made it in.

Which Vinegar?

I use regular pasteurized apple cider vinegar from the supermarket as the menstrum for my herbal vinegars. I avoid white vinegar. Malt vinegar, rice vinegar, and wine vinegar can be used but they are more expensive and may overpower the flavor of the herbs.

Apple cider vinegar has been used as a health-giving agent for centuries. Hippocrates, father of medicine, is said to have used only two remedies: honey and apple cider vinegar. Some of the many benefits of apple cider vinegar include: better digestion, reduction of cholesterol, improvements in blood pressure, prevention/care of osteoporosis, normalization of thyroid/metabolic functioning, possible reduction of cancer risk, and lessening of wrinkles and grey hair.

Notes for Herbal Vinegar Makers

- ☼ Collect jars of different sizes for your vinegars. I especially like baby food jars, mustard jars, olive jars, peanut butter jars and individual juice jars. Look for plastic lids.
- ☼ The wider the mouth of the jar, the easier it will be to remove the plant material when you're done.
- ☼ Always fill jar to the top with plant material and vinegar; never fill a jar only part way.
- ☼ Really fill the jar. This will take far more herb or root than you would think. How much? With leaves and stems, make a comfortable mattress for a fairy: not too tight; not too loose. With roots, fill your jar to within a thumb's width of the top.
- ☼ After decanting your vinegar into a beautiful jar, add a spring of whole herb. Pretty.

MY FAVORITE HERBAL VINEGAR

Pick the needles of white pine on a sunny day. Make herbal vinegar with them. Inhale deeply the scent of the forest. I call this my "homemade balsamic vinegar."

USING YOUR VINEGARS

Herbal vinegars taste so good, you'll want to use them frequently. Regular use boosts the nutrient level of your diet with very little effort and virtually no expense.

- ☼ Pour a spoonful or more on beans and grains as a condiment.

- ☼ Use them in salad dressings.
- ☼ Add them to cooked greens.
- ☼ Season stir-fries with them.
- ☼ Look for soups that are vinegar friendly, like borscht.
- ☼ Substitute herbal vinegar for plain vinegar in any recipe.
- ☼ Put a big spoonful in a glass of water and drink it. Try it sweetened with blackstrap molasses for a real mineral jolt. Many older women swear this "coffee substitute" prevents and eases their arthritic pains.

COMING UP

In our next sessions we will learn more about herbal medicine making, with a focus on oils, explore the difference between fixing disease and promoting health, learn how to apply the three traditions of healing, and how to take charge of our own health care with the six steps of healing.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER ONE

Test vinegar's ability to absorb minerals. Put a fresh bone in a jar and completely cover it with vinegar. What happens? Does the bone become pliable and rubbery? How long does it take? Will eating vinegar dissolve your bones? Only if you take off your skin and sit in it for weeks!

EXPERIMENT NUMBER TWO

Make eggshell vinegar. Fill a jar one-quarter full of vinegar. Drop crushed eggshell into it. What happens? Does the vinegar foam? How long does it take? Eggshells are exceptionally rich in bone-building minerals. Can you taste the calcium in this vinegar? Add some eggshell to your other vinegars if you wish to increase their ability to keep your bones strong.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER THREE

Make four or more vinegars with the same plant, using different types of vinegar, including both pasteurized and unpasteurized apple cider vinegar. (For the others, use rice vinegar, malt vinegar, wine vinegar, or even white vinegar, but not umeboshi vinegar.)

Taste your vinegars daily for a week, then weekly for five more weeks. You may, if you wish, decant some of your vinegars for use after six weeks. But you may also wish to keep observing them as they age (for years, if you wish). I have some vinegars which are more than thirty years old and still in good shape. Note which stay edible the longest, and what happens to those that become inedible.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER FOUR

Buy a quart or more of unpasteurized apple cider vinegar. Use two cups to make several small herbal vinegars: one with roots, one with leaves, and one with flowers. Boil the other two cups. Make one herbal vinegar with the boiling hot vinegar. Make another with the boiled vinegar after it has cooled. Continue as in experiment number three.

Further study

6. Redo experiment number two using different kinds of eggshells - white ones and brown ones, store-bought and farm-bought, from caged birds and free-range birds. Can you see any differences? Taste or smell any differences?
7. Make vinegars at different times of the year and compare them.

ADVANCED WORK

- ☼ Unpasteurized vinegar can form a "mother." In a jar filled with herb and vinegar, the vinegar mother usually grows across the top of the herb, and looking rather like a damp, thin pancake. Kombucha is a vinegar mother. Does your local health food store sell mothers? Kombucha? What is a vinegar mother? Is it harmful?
- ☼ What is an ionic form of a mineral?
- ☼ What is a mineral salt?
- ☼ How do our bodies take up and utilize minerals?

Plants That Make Exceptionally Good-Tasting Herbal Vinegars

Apple mint (*Mentha sp.*) leaves, stalks
Bee balm (*Monarda didyma*) flowers, leaves, stalks
Bergamot (*Monarda sp.*) flowers, leaves, stalks
Burdock (*Arctium lappa*) roots
Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*) leaves, stalks
Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*) leaves, roots
Chives and especially chive blossoms
Dandelion (*Taraxacum off.*) flower buds, leaves, roots
Dill (*Anethum graveolens*) herb, seeds
Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) herb, seeds
Garlic (*Allium sativum*) bulbs, greens, flowers
Garlic mustard (*Alliaria officinalis*) leaves and roots
Goldenrod (*Solidago sp.*) flowers
Ginger (*Zingiber off.*) and Wild ginger (*Asarum canadensis*) roots
Lavender (*Lavendula sp.*) flowers, leaves
Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) new growth leaves and roots
Orange mint (*Mentha sp.*) leaves, stalks
Orange peel, organic only
Peppermint (*Mentha piperata and etc.*) leaves, stalks
Perilla (Shiso) (*Agastache*) leaves, stalks
Rosemary (*Rosmarinus off.*) leaves, stalks
Spearmint (*Mentha spicata*) leaves, stalks
Thyme (*Thymus sp.*) leaves, stalks
White pine (*Pinus strobus*) needles
Yarrow (*Achillea millifolium*) flowers and leaves

Weedy Herbal Calcium Supplement

Use one or more of the following plants to make an herbal vinegar that can reverse and counter osteoporosis. Dose is 2-4 tablespoons daily.

Amaranth (*Amaranthus retroflexus*) leaves
Cabbage leaves
Chickweed (*Stellaria media*) whole herb
Comfrey (*Symphytum officinalis*) leaves
Cronewort/Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*) young leaves
Dandelion (*Taraxacum off.*) leaves and root
Kale leaves
Lambsquarter (*Chenopodium album*) leaves
Mallow (*Malva neglecta*) leaves
Mint leaves of all sorts, especially sage, motherwort, lemon balm, lavender, peppermint
Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) leaves
Parsley (*Petroselinum sativum*) leaves
Plantain (*Plantago majus*) leaves
Raspberry (*Rubus species*) leaves
Red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) blossoms
Violet (*Viola odorata*) leaves
Yellow dock (*Rumex crispus* and other species) roots

Herbal Vinegars Where You Eat the Pickled Plants Too

Burdock
Chicory
Dandelion
Purslane
Yellow Dock
Rosehips
Raspberries/blackberries

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Vibrant, passionate, and involved, Susun Weed has garnered an international reputation for her groundbreaking lectures, teachings, and writings on health and nutrition. She challenges conventional medical approaches with humor, insight, and her vast encyclopedic knowledge of herbal medicine. Unabashedly pro-woman, her animated and enthusiastic lectures are engaging and often profoundly provocative.

Susun is one of America's best-known authorities on herbal medicine and natural approaches to women's health. Her four best-selling books are recommended by expert herbalists and well-known physicians and are

used and cherished by millions of women around the world. Learn more at www.susunweed.com



Be Your Own Herbal Expert Part 6

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Herbal medicine is the medicine of the people. It is simple, safe, effective, and free. Our ancestors used - and our neighbors around the world still use - plant medicines for healing and health maintenance. It's easy. You can do it too, and you don't need a degree or any special training. Ancient memories arise in you when you begin to use herbal medicine - memories which keep you safe and fill you with delight. These lessons are designed to nourish and activate your inner herbalist so you can be your own herbal expert.

In our first session we learned how to "listen" to the messages of plant's tastes. In session two we learned about simples and how to make effective water-based herbal remedies. The third session helped us distinguish safe nourishing and tonifying herbs from the more dangerous stimulating and sedating herbs. Our fourth session focused on poisons in herbs and entered the herbal pharmacy to herbal tinctures, which we collected into an Herbal Medicine Chest. Our fifth session found us still in the pharmacy, learning how to make and use herbal vinegars for strong bones and healthy hearts.

In this, our sixth session, we remain in the herbal pharmacy and turn our attention to herbs in fat bases. We'll explore fresh infused oils, ointments, salves, and lip balms, essential oils, and even herbal pestos.

HERBAL OILS: INFUSED VS. ESSENTIAL

I make and use many infused herbal oils. I use little or no essential oils. Why?

Infused herbal oils use a small amount of plant material; essential oils require tons of plant material. Infused herbal oils are safe to use internally or externally; essential oils are poisonous internally and problematic externally. Infused herbal oils are good for the skin; essential oils can cause rashes, burns, and other skin reactions. Infused oils are used full strength; essential oils are diluted before use. Infused herbal oils have subtle scents; essential oils have powerful scents.

The scent of an essential oil can kill gut flora just like antibiotics do, according to Paul Bergner, director of the clinical studies program at the Rocky Mountain Center for Botanical Studies. He told me that breathing the oils puts them into the blood stream very quickly and can be a major disturber of intestinal health and contributor to poor immune functioning.

Massage therapists are embracing Natural Scent Therapies such as growing live aromatic plants in their

treatment rooms and using pillows of dried aromatic herbs instead of essential oils. Their skin and their immune systems are thanking them for the switch.

MAKING INFUSED HERBAL OILS

To make an infused herbal oil you will need the following supplies:

- Fresh plant material
- Scissors or a knife
- A clean dry jar with a tight lid
- Some olive oil
- A label and pen; a small bowl

Harvest your plant material in the heat of the day, after the sun has dried the dew. It is best to wait at least 36 hours after the last rain before harvesting plants for infused oils. Wet plant materials will make moldy oils. To prevent this, some people dry their herbs and then put them in oil. I find this gives an inferior quality product in most cases.

Coarsely chop the roots, leaves, or flowers of your chosen plant. Fill your jar completely full of the chopped plant material. Add olive oil until the jar is completely full. (Patience and a chopstick are useful tools at this point.)

Tightly lid the jar. Label it. Put it in a small bowl (to collect seepage and over-runs). Your infused oil is ready to use in six weeks.

Fresh Plants That I Use to Make Infused Oils

Arnica flowers (*Arnica montana*)
Burdock seeds (*Arctium lappa*)
Calendula flowers (*Calendula off.*)
Comfrey leaves or roots (*Symphytum uplandica*)
Dandelion flowers (*Taraxacum off.*)
Plantain leaves (*Plantago majus*)
Poke roots (*Phytolacca americana*)
Spruce needles
St. Joan's wort flowers (*Hypericum perforatum*)
Yarrow blossoms (*Achillea millefolium*)
Yellow dock roots (*Rumex crispus*)

USING YOUR INFUSED HERBAL OILS

I use my infused herbal oils to heal and ease the pain of wounds, bruises, scrapes, sprains, burns, rashes, sore muscles, insect bites, and aching joints. I make my infused oils into ointments, salves, and lip balms. I use my infused oils in rituals, to anoint. I use my infused oils after bathing, to moisturize. I use my infused oils as stunning salad dressings. I use my infused oils as sexual lubricants. I use my infused oils to nourish my scalp and hair.

I apply my infused herbal oils directly to the body. I rarely take infused herbal oils as internal medicines although it would be safe to do so. I use my infused oils to make salves, ointments, and lip balms.

MAKING SALVES, OINTMENTS AND LIP BALMS

When herbs are infused into animal fat, they form a natural salve, without need of thickening. But herbs infused into oils are drippy and leaky and messy. They need a little beeswax melted into them to make them solid. The more beeswax added, the firmer the oil will be. A little beeswax will make a soft salve. A medium amount will make a firm ointment. And a lot will make a stiff lip balm.

- Pour one or more ounces of infused herbal oil into a saucepan or double boiler.
- Grate several ounces of beeswax.
- Put a small fire under your oil.
- When it is slightly warm, add one tablespoon (more or less) of grated beeswax.
- Stir, preferably with your finger, until the beeswax melts.
- Test the firmness by dropping a drop on a china plate. It will solidify instantly.
 - Too soft? Add more beeswax, a little at a time.
 - Too hard? Add more infused oil (if possible) or plain oil.
- Pour your finished salve or ointment into wide-mouthed jar.
- Pour lip balms into little pots or twist tubes.

PESTOS

The simplest pesto is green leaves pounded with salt and garlic. I don't put cheese or nuts into my pestos when I make them, as these ingredients spoil rapidly.

I use a mini-size food prep machine for the "pounding". A blender will work too, but watch that you don't burn out the motor.

The oil in a pesto both preserves the antioxidant vitamins in the fresh green herbs and also softens the cell walls so minerals become more available. With the added health-benefits of garlic, herbal pestos are great medicine as well as superb eating.

Basic Herbal Pesto

Stays good for up to two years in a cool refrigerator; up to five years in the freezer.

- Start with half a cup of extra virgin olive oil.
- Add 2-4 coarsely chopped cloves of garlic.
- Add a good sprinkle of sea salt.
- Add a large handful of prepared herb leaves and blend.
- Continue adding leaves and oil as needed. Perhaps more garlic and salt? Blend.
- When all is blended to a fare thee well, pack your pesto into a skinny jar.
- Leave some space between the pesto and the top of the jar and fill this with olive oil.
- Cap, label, and refrigerate.

Green Herbs for Pesto

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*)
Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*)
Garlic mustard (*Alliaria officinalis*)
Sheep sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*)
Violet (*Viola* species)
Yellow dock (*Rumex crispus*)

COMING UP

In our next sessions we will learn how to make herbal honeys and syrups, how to apply the three traditions of healing, and how to take charge of our own health care with the six steps of healing.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER ONE

Make three or more infused herbal oils from different plant parts, such as leaves, roots, and flowering tops. (See list for suggestions of plants to use.)

EXPERIMENT NUMBER TWO

Make several infused oils from the same plant at the same time using at least three different kinds of oils and animal fats, including ghee. Label carefully. After six weeks, decant and compare.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER THREE

Make a salve, ointment, or lip balm. Beeswax is sold at farmer's markets, health food stores, and craft shops.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER FOUR

Treat at least three injuries with an herbal oil or ointment that you have made. Record your observations. Plantain, yarrow, calendula, or comfrey are good choices for this experiment.

Experiment Number Five

Make an herbal pesto. (See list for suggestions.)

FURTHER STUDY

1. Buy a small bottle of essential oil. Also buy the plant the oil is made from. Lavender and mint are good choices for this experiment. Smell the plant, then smell the essential oil. How do you feel afterwards? Taste the plant, then taste a drop of the essential oil? What do you perceive? Put a drop of the essential oil on your skin; rub the plant vigorously on your skin. Are there differences?

Extra credit: Make an infused oil of the same plant and repeat this experiment using your infused oil in addition to the essential oil and the plant.

2. Use organic animal fat to make an herbal preparation. Keep the fat barely warm - in the sun or by a pilot light - until it is infused. No need to add beeswax. The fat will solidify at room temperature.

ADVANCED WORK

- Read about the production of essential oils.
- How is a hydrosol different from an essential oil?
- Can you make a hydrosol? (Jeanne Rose is a good resource on this.)

Study with Susun Weed in the convenience of your home! Choose from three Correspondence Courses: *Green Allies*, *Spirit & Practice of the Wise Woman Tradition*, and *Green Witch* - includes audio/video tapes, books, assignments, special mailings, plus personal time. Learn more at www.susunweed.com or write to:

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Be Your Own Herbal Expert Part 7

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Herbal medicine is the medicine of the people. It is simple, safe, effective, and free. Our ancestors used - and our neighbors around the world still use - plant medicines for healing and health maintenance. It's easy. You can do it too, and you don't need a degree or any special training.

Ancient memories arise in you when you begin to use herbal medicine. These lessons are designed to nourish and activate those memories and your inner herbalist so you can be your own herbal expert.

In our first session, we learned how to "listen" to the messages of plant's tastes. In lesson two, about simples and water-based herbal remedies. In the third, I distinguished safe (nourishing and tonifying) herbs from more dangerous (stimulating and sedating) herbs. Our fourth lesson focused on poisons; we made tinctures and an Herbal Medicine Chest. Our fifth dealt with herbal vinegars, and the sixth with herbal oils.

In this, our seventh session, we will think about how we think about healing.

THE THREE TRADITIONS OF HEALING

There are many ways to use herbs to improve and maintain health. Modern medicine uses highly refined herbal products known as drugs. Many alternative or holistic practitioners recommend herbs, usually in less-refined (and less dangerous) forms such as tinctures or homeopathic remedies. And then there are the yarb women, the wise women, such as myself, who integrate herbs into their daily diet and claim far-reaching results for simple remedies.

I call these three different approaches the Scientific, Heroic, and Wise Woman traditions.

These three traditions are ways of thinking, not ways of acting. And they are not limited to herbs. Any technique, any substance can be used by a healer in the Scientific, Heroic, and Wise Woman traditions. There are, for instance, naturopaths, midwives, and MDs in each tradition, as well as herbalists, educators, therapists, even politicians.

Each of these traditions lives within you, too.

As I define the characteristics of each tradition, identify the part of yourself that thinks that way.

SCIENTIFIC TRADITION

Modern, western medicine is an excellent example of the Scientific tradition, where healing is fixing. The line is its symbol: linear thought, linear time. Truth is fixed and measurable. Truth is that which repeats. Good and bad, health and sickness are put at opposite ends of the line, where they do battle with each other. Food and medicine are quite different.

Newton's universal laws and the mechanization of nature are the foundation of the Scientific tradition. Bodies are understood to be like machines. When machines run well (stay healthy) they don't deviate. Anything that deviates from normal needs to be fixed or repaired. The Scientific tradition is excellent for fixing broken things. Measurements must be taken to determine deviation and insure normalcy. Regular diagnostic tests are critical to maintaining proper functioning and ensuring utmost longevity in the body/machine.

In the Scientific tradition, plants are valued as repositories of poisons/alkaloids. They are seen as potential drugs, and capable of killing you in their unpredictable crude states. They are helpful and safe only when refined into drugs and used by highly-trained experts.

In the Scientific tradition the whole is the same as its most active part, and machines are more trustworthy than people.

HEROIC TRADITION

There is not one unified Heroic tradition, but many similar traditions collectively called the Heroic tradition. Alternative health care practitioners generally represent the Heroic thought pattern, symbolized by a circle.

This circle defines the rules, which, we are told, must be followed in order to save ourselves from disease and death. Healing in the Heroic tradition focuses on cleansing. According to this tradition, disease arises when toxins (dirt, filth, anger, negativity) accumulate. When we are bad, when we

eat the wrong food, think the wrong thought, commit a sin, we sicken and the healer is the savior, offering purification, punishment, and redemption.

In the Heroic traditions, the whole is the sum of its parts. We are body, mind, and spirit. The spirit is high and worthy; the body is low and gross; the mind is in between. In the Heroic traditions, we are personally responsible for everything that happens to us.

Religious beliefs frequently accompany herb use in the Heroic tradition. The Heroic healer uses rare substances, exotic herbs, and complicated formulae. Drug-like herbs in capsules are the favored in this tradition. Most books on herbal medicine are written by men whose thought patterns are those of the Heroic tradition.

WISE WOMAN TRADITION

The Wise Woman tradition is the world's oldest healing tradition. It envisions good health as openness to change, flexibility, availability to transformation, and groundedness. Its symbol is the spiral. In the Wise Woman tradition we do not seek to cure, but focus instead on integrating and nourishing the unique individual's wholeness/holiness. The Wise Woman tradition relies on compassion, simple ritual, and common dooryard herbs and garden weeds as primary nourishers, but appreciates (and uses) any treatment appropriate to the specific self-healing in process.

The Wise Woman tradition sees each life as a spiraling, ever-changing completeness. Disease and injury are seen as doorways of transformation, and each person is recognized as a self-healer, earth healer: inherently whole, resonant to the whole, and vital to the whole. Substance, thought, feeling, and spirit are inseparable in the Wise Woman tradition. The whole is more than the sum of its parts.

Spiralic and amazing, the Wise Woman tradition offers self-healing options as diverse as the human imagination and as complex as the human psyche. The Wise Woman tradition has no rules, no texts, no rites; it is constantly changing, constantly being re-invented. It is mostly invisible, hard to see, but easier and easier to find. It is a give-away dance of nourishment, change, and self-love. An invitation to honor yourself and the earth. An admonishment to trust yourself.

COMING UP

In our next sessions we will learn how to make herbal honeys and syrups, and how to take charge of our own health care with the six steps of healing.

I also invite you to study with me in the convenience of your home via correspondence course! Choose from one of my four courses: *Green Allies*, *Spirit & Practice of the Wise Woman Tradition*, *Green Witch*, and *ABC of Herbalism with Susun Weed*. Learn more at www.susunweed.com or write to me at susunweed@herbshealing.com

EXPERIMENT NUMBER ONE

The next time you start to feel unwell, ask yourself what each one of the three traditions would advise you to do - e.g. You feel a headache coming on. The Scientific tradition says take a pain killer. The Heroic tradition says give yourself an enema. The Wise Woman tradition says take a nap. (For more information on the three traditions, see the chart in my book *Healing Wise*.)

EXPERIMENT NUMBER TWO

Instead of doing what you usually do for some problem (e.g. headache), do something different. Choose something from the same tradition you usually use, or from a different tradition.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER THREE

Become more aware of the "nourishment of your senses" as Gurdieff put it. What do you look at? Listen to? Smell? Touch with your skin? Taste?

EXPERIMENT NUMBER FOUR

Nourish yourself in a new or different way. You might: eat something - or eat somewhere - that you've wanted to try but never dared. Go to a museum, or the opera, or the ballet, or a Broadway show. Visit with a cherished friend. Listen to music that touches your soul. Sit in meditation and burn subtle incense.

EXPERIMENT NUMBER FIVE

Make a list of ten things that nourish you that are now in your life.
Make a list of ten things that could nourish you if they were in your life.

FURTHER STUDY

1. Become more familiar with the Scientific tradition: Read one or more issues of *Scientific American* and/or *Science News*.
2. Become more familiar with the Heroic tradition: Skim through *Back to Eden* or any current book on detoxification.
3. Become more familiar with the Wise Woman tradition. Read:

Healing Wise, the Wise Woman Herbal. Susun Weed. 1987, Ash Tree Publishing.

Herbal Rituals. Judith Berger. 1998, St. Martin's Press.

Healing Magic, A Green Witch Guidebook. Robin Rose Bennett. 2004, Sterling.

The Secret Teachings of Plants. Stephen Buhner. 2004, Inner Traditions.

The Village Herbalist, Sharing Plant Medicines with Family and Community. Nancy and Michael Phillips. 2001, Chelsea Green Publishing.

ADVANCED WORK

- The three traditions of healing are not restricted to healing of course. You might have recognized these three attitudes in your profession. Wonderful articles have been written on the "Three Traditions of Teaching" (the Scientific relies on tests, the Heroic on punishment and reward, the Wise Woman on freedom to experience and express) and the "Three Traditions of Therapy" (the Scientific refers to manuals and prescribes drugs, the Heroic blames the unconscious, the Wise Woman nourishes the spirit and builds wholeness) and even the "Three Traditions of Cooking" (the Scientific uses a thermometer and a recipe, the Heroic blackens and heavily spices everything, and the Wise Woman uses what is in season where she lives).

- Apply the three traditions to your profession.
- Read about the history of herbal medicine. Suggested books:

~ *Green Pharmacy, the History and Evolution of Western Herbal Medicine*. Barbara Griggs. 1997, Healing Arts.
~ *The Magical Staff, the Vitalist Tradition in Western Medicine*. Matthew Wood. 1992, North Atlantic Books.
~ *Witches, Midwives, and Nurses, A History of Women Healers*. Barbara Ehrenrich and Deirdre English. 1973, Feminist Press.

I see the wise woman. She carries a blanket of compassion. She wears robes of wisdom. Around her throat flutters a veil of shifting shapes. From her shoulders, a mantle of power flows. A story band encircles her forehead. She stitches a quilt; she spins fibers into yarn; she knits; she sews; she weaves. She ties the threads of our lives together. She forms a web of spiraling threads: our lives invented and shared.

I see the wise woman at her loom: a loom warped with days of light and nights of dark. White threads, black threads receive the flying shuttle. A shuttle filled with threads of many colors. Threads the colors of the earth, the common ground; threads the colors of the people of the earth. Some threads are short; some threads are long; each thread is different, each perfect and splendid. The threads are alive with sound and color. The threads are mutable; they change at a touch. The threads are crystal antennae; they respond at a thought.

And intertwined with each thread, a thread blood red, a thread of such sensitivity, it seems invisible, a thread of such vitality, it can never be hidden. As our blood flows over and under the days and nights of our lives and binds each moment to the whole, so the red thread of the wise woman binds us in the tapestried, cosmic web, holds us in our variety, spirals lovingly around us, claims us again at death.

I see the wise woman. And she sees me.

(Excerpt from *Healing Wise*, c. 1987 Susun S Weed. Available thru www.AshTreePublishing.com)

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Vibrant, passionate, and involved, Susun Weed has garnered an international reputation for her groundbreaking lectures, teachings, and writings on health and nutrition. She challenges conventional medical approaches with humor, insight, and her vast encyclopedic knowledge of herbal medicine. Unabashedly pro-woman, her animated and enthusiastic lectures are engaging and often profoundly provocative.

Susun is one of America's best-known authorities on herbal medicine and natural approaches to women's health. Her four best-selling books are recommended by expert herbalists and well-known physicians and are used and cherished by millions of women around the world. Learn more at www.susunweed.com

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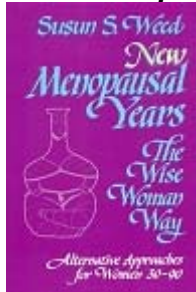
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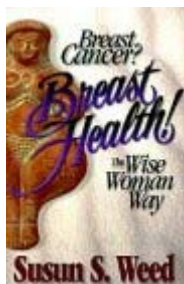


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