

WORKING WITH WILD HERBS

Make sure you have identified the plant properly.

Never pick endangered, protected or threatened species.

Make an invocation, prayer or sing a song to the plant; give thanks and state your intentions for harvesting it. The closer you nurture your relationship with the plants, the more powerful their healing will be.

Leave the really big old looking prize specimens to seed for next year. They are called the “grandparent plants”. Leave the tallest one on top of a hill and let the wind scatter the seeds downwards.

Don’t over harvest! Choose herbs that grow in large clumps and only pick 10%-20% in a clump. Be mindful to the ecology of the place where you are gathering and also leave some for the next gatherer.

Leave the root of the plant intact. If it is the root of the plant you are after, make sure you only take what you need and leave enough root for the plant to continue.

Ensure species survival.

WHEN TO GATHER HERBS

ABOVE GROUND OR AERIAL PARTS

Gather in the morning between 6-10am on sunny and dry days after the dew has dried and before they wilt in the sun. Most aerial parts are gathered in the summer.

Pick the aerial parts on Waxing Moon to Full Moon.

Leaves: gather just before flowering, when the plants life force is at the fullest.

Flowers: gather when the buds are just about to open. But, if you are looking for a good pollen harvest from your flowers, as with elderflower, go gathering immediately after the flowers have opened.

ROOTS & RHIZOMES

Harvest after they have seeded in the autumn in the early morning before the sun hits.

Biennials: harvest in the autumn of the first year or in the spring of the second year.

Pick the roots on the New Moon.

SEEDS AND FRUITS

Harvest when they are ripe and mature.

BARKS

Harvest in the autumn or spring. Never ring tree, as it will die. If possible harvest a small branch or just cut a strip of the branch. Try to apply some clay paste on the wound where you have harvested, so that fungus won't get into the wood.

DRYING HERBS

Dry herbs in a place that is ventilated and in the shade.

ARIAL PARTS:

Never wash plants before drying. Shake off any creatures gently. Spread the herbs out in a single layer on paper (avoid printed newspapers because the ink can be toxic) or tie them into 2,5cm (1 inch) diameter bunches at the base of the stems and hang them on coat hangers or a string. Do this as soon as you return from collecting them so they won't go mouldy.

BARKS

Dry scrub the outside of the bark.

ROOTS

Remove all the soil immediately after harvesting with a scrubbing brush and cut into half inch pieces. Later on it will be nearly impossible. Cut length wise for large heavy roots without aromatic properties.

STORING HERBS

Store them once they are completely dry -this is when the leaves turn brittle.

Store your dried herbs in a cool, dry, dark place. Avoid light and excessive heat otherwise they will degrade much faster. I have found that the cocoa jars which are made of dark brown glass are ideal for storing herbs. Don't store your herbs in plastic containers. Glass is much better as, unlike plastic it is very inert and will not leach chemicals into your herbs; dry herbs will usually keep for a year so will be sitting in the container a long time. Paper bags are also fine for storage providing there is no dampness. Label your herbs.

Broken or crushed herbs lose their value much faster than whole herbs, so keep the herbs as whole as possible.

MAKING HERBAL PREPARATIONS

Many of the leaves, flowers and seeds can be eaten raw and that is the best way to use them. However most of the herbs are out only in certain times of the year so you will have to use the dried herbs you have stored or preserve them in one of the ways described below.

When you change the plant into another form of medicine it is important that you say prayers. Call upon it's spirit and meditate with it. This will turn it into true medicine.

INFUSIONS

Are made by immersing the herb in cold or hot (but never boiling) water. Always use an enamel, steel or earthenware pot or cup. Avoid aluminium or plastics as it leaches into the brews.

HOT INFUSIONS

Hot infusions are used for most plants and are made like a cup of tea with nearly boiling water. Never use boiling water, add a little cold water if you are using boiling water. Leave the infusion to brew for 15 minutes. But 3 hours or overnight infusions are also very good.

COLD INFUSIONS

Use a cold infusion with herbs that have delicate flower petals or with herbs that contain volatile oils (those that have a strong scent or perfume). Put the herb in cold spring or filtered water and leave overnight in a cool, dry place. Use the next day. Delicate flowers and anything with aromatic qualities will work well in a cold infusion.

DECOCTIONS

Put the herbs into some water and boil for 15 minutes. This is good for barks and berries as it takes a long time for these to impart their healing properties.

TINCTURES

In a tincture the properties of the herb are extracted and preserved in alcohol.

Tinctures for home use are made by immersing herbs in strong alcohol, such as 50% (100° proof) brandy or vodka.

With dried herbs:

Ratio 1:5

Use five parts alcohol to one part dried & chopped herb (so 1 ounce of dried herbs to 5 fluid ounces of alcohol).

With fresh herbs:

Ratio 1:4

Use one part of fresh herb to five parts of alcohol

or 2 handful of fresh herb on a litre of alcohol.

Put the herbs into a glass container with an airtight lid. Place out of sunlight (except walnuts & pine tops) and shake many times daily for two weeks. After two weeks, strain off the liquid through a cheese cloth, squeeze out the last liquid in the herb and store the tincture in amber jars in a cool, dark place. Tinctures will keep indefinitely if stored correctly out of sunlight.

General Dosage:

Tonic: 1 teaspoon 1 times daily

Standard treatment: 1 teaspoon 3 times daily

Acute conditions: 1 teaspoon 6 times daily

Diluted: 1 teaspoon of tincture to 1 cup of water to make a gargle, wash or compress

MEDICINAL VINEGAR TINCTURES

These are made in the same way and the same proportions as tinctures. Same dosages apply.

OIL INFUSIONS

Infused oils are used as massage oil, skin lotion, can be added to baths and can be used as a base for an ointment.

COLD INFUSED OILS WITH FRESH HERBS:

Place the fresh herbs in a glass jar and cover with just enough oil to make sure that no part of the plant is exposed to air. Leave to macerate in a sunny place for two weeks to a month. Press herbs through a cloth and let the oil sit. After a day the water that was present in the fresh herbs will settle on the bottom. Pour off the oil and discard the water.

HOT INFUSED OILS WITH DRIED HERBS:

Grind the dried herbs into a powder with a pestal and mortar. Add enough sunflower or olive oil so they are well saturated with the oil and top up with just enough oil again so no part of the plant is exposed to air (about ½ inch or 1 cm).

Place the mixture in a bain marie and simmer for 2-4 hours. Let it cool before straining the oil through a strong cloth with a good weave (not a cheese cloth).

OINTMENTS OR SALVES

Beeswax is added to oil infusions to make them thicker and easier to apply to the body.

To make an ointment, take half a cup of infused oil and add ½ oz or 14g of chopped bees wax. Put the ingredients into a bain marie and heat gently until wax is fully dissolved. Now test the consistency. Place a few drops on a plate and let it cool. Touch it and if it's too soft add more wax if too hard add a little more oil. When you are happy with the result pour into a jar and let it harden uncovered. Cover it only when it's fully hard.

FLOWER ESSENCES

When you feel a certain herb calls you, make a flower essence so you can explore your relationship with that plant further. Here's how to make a flower essence:

Pick the flowers gently or cut them straight into a glass dish with a little spring water (or filtered water). The petals or flowers should lie face down in the water, if possible.

Stand the dish next to the plant or tree and leave it there in the sunshine for at least three hours. Cover the dish with a thin gauze or cheese cloth that lets in air, but keeps insects and dust out if it's a windy day.

When you feel that the essence or Spirit of the plant has entered the water gently scoop out the flowers with a leaf or stalk from the same plant.

Mix the water with an equal amount of brandy (1:1) to preserve it and bottle into an amber glass bottle. This is the mother essence. Stand it next to the plant again for three days.

Now the mother essence is ready to dilute into a usable form. Take 7 drops of mother essence and add it to a 10 ml glass bottle containing a mixture of half brandy and half spring water. Use bottles that contain a pipette for easy dispensing. Stand these finished essences next to the mother essence for a few days and then they are ready to use.

Take 4 drops of your finished essence 3 times daily in a little water or straight on to the tongue. Essences will keep for years. Explore the subtle effects of the flower essences on your emotions, perceptions and spiritual self.