

Self-Reliance in Health Course

Lesson 4 - Herbs for Medicine

“And there were some who died with fevers, which at some seasons of the year were very frequent in the land—but not so much so with fevers, because of the excellent qualities of the many plants and roots which God had prepared to remove the cause of diseases, to which men were subject by the nature of the climate.” Alma 46:40

The same God that created our bodies, created all living things, giving them life, intelligence, and uniqueness. No two plants are the same, even within the same species. Plant medicine is a living intelligence, they know exactly what to do when administered into the body and they work with the natural healing abilities of the body, not against it. Along those same lines they also know what not to do so as to never cause harm, when used with prudence. The body is filled with trillions of cells that communicate electrically through neurons (nervous system) and chemically with hormones (endocrine system). When a problem exists, messengers (symptoms) are sent out to let us know something needs fixing. Plant medicine works with the natural self-healing abilities of our bodies to return to a healthy, normal functioning state.

“And again, verily I say unto you, all wholesome herbs God hath ordained for the constitution, nature and use of man...to be used with prudence and thanksgiving.” D&C 89:10

Knowledge is key when using herbs as medicine. As stated above they are given for the constitution, which is the frame or temperament of the human body, to be used with prudence, which is wisdom applied to practice with caution and reserve. To me this all means we do not just grab some herbs and start taking them like prescribed medications. We study each herb out and learn what they do and how they work and then follow the spirit as to how much to take. Each body constitution is different, as we discussed in Lesson 1, so what amount works for me will be different than what works for you. Some need more and some less. Some herbs you can eat like food, to nourish the body. Some herbs have stronger properties and can only be used for a certain duration or in specific amounts. Some herbs have cautions when using, such as if pregnant, nursing, or on certain medications.

My hope is that the care taken in using herbs will not dissuade you from learning about and using them. I have plenty of resources for you and can walk you step by step on this path of herbal medicine.

Personal Herbal (book of plants and foods that have been studied and applied)

When I first began my herbal journey, I purchased a notebook and started to study all about one herb at a time. I already had a lavender plant growing in my yard because I love purple blossoms and it smelled wonderful. I purchased a couple of herb books (my [favorites list](#)) and looked up lavender in each of them. I found similar and different information in each and wrote everything I learned about lavender in my notebook. I then went outside and observed my plant, I took some cuttings and made a cup of tea (tisane actually). I then made a burn spray using the essential oil and tea. I then made a salve and so on, continuing to experiment and use the plant. Once I mastered the lavender plant, I moved on to learning all about another one. I continued this pattern until I had quite a collection in my notebook, and I continue to do the same thing today. There are so many plants, I do not think I could master them all in my lifetime. My [personal herbal](#) has turned into part of this blog, where I continue to post the herbs I have studied this way, including recipes I've tried or created along the way. Here is some key information you want to include in your study of each plant:

- Latin name: This ensures you find the correct plant when purchasing or growing.
- Family: Helpful to know for uses and cautions.
- Parts Used: Some plants you can use the entire plant but others you can only use certain parts, such as the berry or leaf only.
- Care and Harvesting: If you are planting in your garden you will need to know the how to. Foraging for "weeds" in your yard or community you will need to know how to identify the herb and for both ways how and when to gather.
- Properties: Knowing the properties and definitions will guide you to know what to use the plant for.
- Uses: This is the fun part, where you determine all the many things you can use the plant for. I have even been directed to use certain herbs for something that was on no list at all, but after using it with success, I added it to the list.
- How to Prepare: Heating some herbs can diminish the properties, while some need to be heated, others can only be extracted using alcohol or made into a tisane. You also want to find all the different ways you can use the herb.
- Cautions: Some herbs will have cautions when using, such as not during pregnancy and nursing or if using a certain medication, etc.

Preparing Herbs as Medicine:

There are many ways to prepare an herb for use as a medicine, in Lesson 1 we learned how to dry and store herbs and Lesson 3 how to make an herbal oil and herbal honey. By the time this course is through we will have covered each way an herb can be used. The most common and easiest way is to make a tisane. A tisane is the correct term for a medicinal drink or infusion. An infusion is extracting plant properties

by soaking leaves in a liquid. A decoction is the simmering of plant material, usually roots, bark and seeds to extract the properties. The common term used for all these definitions is simply, making a tea.

For clarification purposes tea is a tisane made only of plant materials from the actual tea plant; *Camellia sinensis*. This would include black tea, green tea, white tea, oolong tea, iced tea and chai tea (which is a tea blend that has black tea in it). These all come from the same plant but are processed with different methods, giving them different properties and taste. For those of my faith that follow the Word of Wisdom, these are teas on the do not consume list.

“And again, hot drinks are not for the body or belly.” D&C 89:9

“And again, ‘hot drinks are not for the body, or belly;’ there are many who wonder what this can mean; whether it refers to tea, or coffee, or not. I say it does refer to tea, and coffee.” (“*The Word of Wisdom,*” *Times and Seasons,* 1 June 1842, p. 800.)

Any other plant material infused or decocted should be called a tisane, not tea, but the term tea has come to be known as any plant material infused in water and so that is what term will be used throughout the course. A tea is the best way to get the properties of herbs into the body, they are easily absorbed and can start taking immediate action. There are other ways you can use tea besides just drinking it; herbal baths, foot soaks and compresses are other great ways to use an herbal tea.

Harvesting Plants

There is not a one size fits all way to harvest plants, but these are general guidelines for most plants. You still want to study out each plant to see if there are specific guidelines for harvesting. For example, blossoms are usually harvested right before opening before or after the heat of the day, but *Calendula* are harvested when they are wide open during the day. This is another area you can use your light of Christ to direct the when and how and do not get too caught up in the details.

- **Roots:** Generally, roots are harvested in the fall after the plant has died back and sent all its energy back into the roots. This is not an absolute and can also be harvested in the spring or really, anytime of the year. The most potent plant material is in the fall. Plants like common mallow and dandelion can be harvested as you pull them from your yard and garden throughout the year as you "weed". Some plants you can merely pull up and out of the ground, but most will need to be dug up with a shovel or spade. Brush the dirt off the root, wash under running water and then pat dry. Chop roots before drying.
- **Bark:** Bark should be harvested from the twigs and branches not the main trunk of the tree. “Prune” off a branch of the tree or shrub and then peel the outer bark off. This can be composted or discarded. Peel the next layer, which is the inner

bark and where the living medicine is located. You can tell it is living because of the moist, sticky feel to it. This can be done by hand or with a vegetable peeler.

- **Leaves:** Leaves can be harvested anytime of the growing season but are most potent before flowering. They should be gathered in the morning, after the dew has dried or the evening after the heat of the day where the plant is not “depleted”. Aromatic herbs such as basil, thyme, rosemary, etc. should be harvested in the hottest part of the day since the oils are at their strongest. Simply cut what leaves you want off the plant, leaving two thirds of the plant. Once the plant blossoms it will work on developing the "fruit" and not on foliage, so it is best to keep a plant trimmed until the end of the season if you want to have continual growth for harvesting.
- **Flowers:** Flowers are best harvested right before they open. If harvesting from a plant that will give you both blossoms and fruit, leave enough blossoms to turn into fruit for a fall harvest. Some plants will continue to give blossoms as you continually harvest, such as calendula and some only blossom once, like lavender. Leaves and blossoms can be harvested at the same time if desired for plants like alfalfa, thyme, rosemary, etc.
- **Seeds:** Most seeds are harvested by allowing them to dry on the plant. Once brown and “crisp” they can be placed in a paper bag or container. Shake the container to disperse the seeds. Some may need to be "rubbed" out of their coverings. Seeds come in many shapes, sizes and forms so you will need to learn how each plant's seeds are collected.
- **Sap/Pitch:** Best harvested in early spring by drilling a hole in the bark, slightly angled toward the ground about two inches deep. Insert a straw or similar tube and put the other end in a collectible container. After a week remove the straw and plug with a fitted twig so the sap stops leaking. For pitch you can snap off a twig and the pitch will ooze from the broken end. You can also collect the sap crystals that form on the bark.

Projects:

- How to make a tisane (herbal tea): <http://www.anniesplacetolearn.com/tea-infusiondecoction.html>
- Herbal bath <http://www.anniesplacetolearn.com/baths-and-foot-baths.html>
- Compress/fomentation <http://www.anniesplacetolearn.com/poultice-compress--fomentations.html>

Today we will learn about five common herbs in four different categories; what you have in your kitchen, commonly grown in gardens, “weeds” you may encounter in your yard and community and medicinal trees. This is just a small list of what is easily found and grown around my home in Northern Utah, Rocky Mountain area. I know there are amazing medicinal herbs found in Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine, but I love to use

what I can grow and find around me. It is also a good emergency preparation skill to identify medicinal and edible plants in the area you come from.

Common Herbs in the Kitchen:

- Cinnamon
 - Antiviral and antibacterial
 - Use during cold and flu season to fight infection and boost the immune system.
 - Digestive aid that also kills off harmful bacteria, useful for gut health.
- Oregano
 - Antiviral, antibacterial, antifungal
 - Useful for fungal and bacterial infections and sores.
 - Will kill parasites and harmful bacteria, making it a great herb for gut and digestive system.
 - Cold and flu season to fight illness and treat fever and congestion.
- Rosemary
 - Antibacterial, antifungal, antiseptic
 - Brain tonic for memory, concentration, calming and lifting spirits.
 - Improves circulation which aids cardiovascular system and boosts energy.
 - Respiratory support for lung and sinus congestion.
- Sage
 - Antibacterial, antifungal, antioxidant, antiviral, anti-inflammatory
 - Can help prevent and treat any type of illness, use for cough, cold, fever, flu, and digestive issues.
 - Balances hormones so great for use during menstruation, menopause and women concerns.
 - Mouth care such as cankers, sores, inflamed gums, and infection.
- Thyme
 - Antibacterial, antibiotic, antifungal, antiviral
 - Supports and strengthens respiratory system, useful for sore throat, cough, cold, chest congestion, asthma, etc.
 - Fights infection of all kinds including fungal, viral and bacterial and will kill parasites.

Common Herbs in the Garden:

- Calendula
 - Antifungal, antimicrobial, antiviral, antiseptic, anti-inflammatory
 - Skin care support for any skin condition including inflammation, acne, wrinkles, dry, cracked, ulcer, burn, cold sores, wounds, bug bites, etc.
 - Lymph care, cleanses and aids the flow. Use for swollen glands,
 - Soothes inflammation in any area of the body, great for gut health.
 - Liver and gall bladder tonic.

- Coneflower (echinacea root)
 - Antimicrobial, antiviral, antifungal, antiseptic
 - Boosts immune system to aid the body in fighting off viruses, bacteria, and any type of infection, including fungal, ear, throat, intestinal, breast, sinus, respiratory, skin, wound, yeast, bladder, etc.
 - Aids the body in treating vaccination reactions.
- Lavender
 - Antibacterial, antifungal, anti-inflammatory
 - Mild pain reliver for use with headache, cramps, muscle, joints, etc.
 - First aid care, wounds, burns, infection, sprains, insect bites, etc.
 - Supports and strengthens nervous system, calming, sedative, sleep aid.
- Rose
 - Antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, astringent
 - Cooling for fevers, skin inflammation, burns, rash, acne, any type of inflammation.
 - Female tonic with hormone balancing that can ease PMS and menopause symptoms, depression, mood swings, etc.
 - Hips support the immune system and help with cold, flu, cough, congestion, infection, etc.
- Yarrow
 - Antimicrobial, antiviral, antiseptic
 - Wound care herb for cleansing, disinfecting, aid in healing and stops bleeding both internal and external.
 - Aids body in fighting off illness, respiratory system, digestive system, cold and flu, best fever care herb in my opinion.

Common “Weeds” in the Yard:

- Chickweed
 - Lung strength and support, useful for any and all respiratory issues.
 - Cooling and emollient properties for sore throat, canker and mouth sores, eye inflammation, skin inflammation, burns, digestive and gut issues, ulcers, sores, or any inflammation within the body.
- Dandelion
 - Liver and kidney strength and support. Aids in cleansing and detoxing the liver and kidney, helpful for any conditions in these areas.
 - Chronic skin problems
 - Blood purifier
- Plantain
 - Antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic
 - Draws toxins from the body internally and externally, insect bites, stings, snake bites, splinters, boils, acne, skin eruptions, etc.
 - Stops bleeding, aids in healing wounds, and treating infections of all kinds.

- Can kill and detox parasites and harmful bacteria. Great for gut health.
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- Purslane
 - Antibiotic, antifungal, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant
 - Nutrient rich food with omega-3 fatty acids that support the brain and heart.
 - Soothes and heals inflammation, wounds, burns, skin condition, bites, etc.
 - Urinary tract and lung support.
- Wild Lettuce
 - Antibacterial
 - Pain relieving properties can aid with cramps, muscle and joint pain, headache, etc.
 - Milky sap can disinfect wounds and dissolve warts.

Common Medicinal Trees:

- Birch
 - Antiviral, astringent, antiseptic
 - Detoxifier that cleanses and supports urinary systems, dissolves kidney and bladder stones, reduces fluid retention and swellings, which can clear up skin problems.
 - Pain reliever
- Linden
 - Supports and strengthens the nerves and heart which results in calming of anxiety and depression, lifts the moods and aids in sleeping.
 - Aids in lower blood pressure.
- Pine Family (pine, juniper, firs, spruce)
 - Antibacterial, antiseptic, antiviral, antioxidant
 - Immune booster for cold and flu season, respiratory and sinus conditions, etc.
 - Relieves muscle pain and soreness.
- Sagebrush
 - Antibacterial, antifungal, antiviral, anti-inflammatory, anti-parasitic
 - This can be used for about every issue you may encounter with the body. So powerful! Infection of all kinds including those that are antibiotic resistant, parasites, liver and kidney issues, pain reliever, respiratory issues, digestive issues, wound care, hygiene, even radiation poisoning.
- Wild Cherry
 - Best cough “medicine” around. Calms an irritating cough and assists the body in a productive cough to release mucus.
 - Calms indigestion and upset stomach and mild pain reliever.

Assignment:

Start your own “herbal” and study out one herb this week. Try to find it, plant it, or if you already have it available start experimenting with it. Smell, touch, taste and make an herbal tea or other herbal preparation. Maybe start with some culinary herbs in your kitchen cupboard.

Resources for Further Learning:

- Medicinal Herbs A Beginner’s Guide by Rosemary Gladstar
- Herbs to Know in the Garden – PDF copy from website
- Herbs to Know in the Wild – PDF copy from website
- <http://www.anniesplacetolearn.com/herbs.html> booklist of my favorite herb books and websites.