



Top 3

HERBS

for Your Health



Rosalee de la Forêt



Top Three Herbs for Your Health

Text and photos by Rosalee de la Forêt.

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HERBS
with ROSALEE

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Top Three Reasons to Use Herbs

I've been interested in natural health for most of my life. As a teenager I poured over my worn copy of Prescription for Nutritional Healing by Phyllis Balch. I'd look up remedies for myself and my friends, I even made flashcards of information so I could memorize which nutrients were good for what.

But I never really took herbs seriously until they saved my life.

When I was 23 years old I was diagnosed with a rare autoimmune disease. The team of specialists at the hospital told me that my only option was massive doses of steroids. They admitted that over time the medication would cease to work and I could expect a slow decline and a life expectancy of around 40.

After the initial shock of this diagnosis I began a more empowered health journey. I reached out to a variety of holistic health practitioners. I changed my diet, addressed nutritional deficiencies and

took a lot of herbs. After six months I was symptom free and have remained that way for over a decade.

Until I was really sick I had thought of "natural health" as a fun hobby or something for minor ailments. Western Medicine and Doctors were the obvious solution for more serious problems. But having my autoimmune disease cured using only "natural" solutions dramatically shifted my reality and I realized just how powerful herbs could be.

There's no question that western medicine has made amazing advances in particular areas. Surgeons can fix an astounding number of serious traumas that would otherwise be life threatening. If I break my arm, you can bet I'll be at the hospital, not at my local herbalist.

But in many ways western medicine has serious short-comings. Most drugs are created to suppress symptoms rather than address the underlying causes. For example, doctors often prescribe topical steroids to relieve eczema. While this can be temporarily effective, long term use has serious



negative consequences for the health of the skin. It also does nothing to address the underlying cause. The eczema isn't "cured" by steroids. The symptoms are simply suppressed while the problems continue.

Another example is using statins to lower cholesterol without addressing systemic inflammation and metabolic disorders that often cause the unhealthy cholesterol levels.

I could fill this ebook with examples of western medicine pharmaceuticals aimed at suppressing the symptoms instead of addressing the root cause.

But honestly, it's more fun to find a solution than spend all my time pointing at the problems.

Herbs, when used within a holistic context, can be a powerful ally towards better health. Here are three reasons why.

#1

Herbs address the underlying problem, not the symptom.

The goal of many herbal traditions, whether it's Chinese Medicine, Ayurveda or Western Herbalism, is to move towards health by creating balance where there is disharmony.

Let's take a practical look at how this differs from the dominant paradigm of western medicine.

Heartburn or GERD is a common painful problem. Western Medicine most commonly recommends taking proton pump inhibitors which decrease the amount of acids the stomach produces. In this view the problem is stomach acid escaping the stomach and causing pain. Taking pills that block the stomach acid therefore reduce the symptom of the pain.

Unfortunately while the short term effect may bring relief, there are negative effects of

blocking important digestive enzymes. Taken over time digestion is impaired. If you can't digest nutrients from your food, how can you be healthy?

As an herbalist I look at this differently. I want to work with the person to know WHY they are having GERD. WHY are the acids escaping the stomach?

There's no one answer to that question. Instead we have to look at the individual to assess what is out of balance? Where can we bring more harmony?

Many people experience heartburn because *they don't have enough* stomach acid! The reason for this is often dietary. Along with dietary changes, bitter and pungent herbs can be taken with food to increase gastric enzymes. The result is overall better digestion and no more heartburn.

Some people experience heartburn due to caffeine intake. Others may have issues with infections. The point is that we look to the underlying reasons for a problem, then use herbs to bring balance. When looking for truly good health we avoid taking pills that simply mask the symptoms of a greater problem.

Herbs are safe.

Herbs, especially when compared to pharmaceutical pills, are very safe. They do not kill hundreds of thousands of people every year (like iatrogenic effects) and the most serious adverse effects are short term nausea and headaches. Even these adverse effects are rare.

I want to be clear that I am talking about high-quality whole herbs.

I am not talking about poor-quality and often adulterated herbs that have been manufactured by XYZ company in a developing world. When choosing your herbs get them from a grassroots herbalist or a reliable herb company like [Mountain Rose Herbs](#).

#2



#3

Herbalism is a bridge to the natural world and truly holistic health.

Truly good health does not lie in a bottle. Even if that bottle contains herbs or other natural nutrients.

Vibrant health is the relationship of our body to the world we live in.

We live in strange times. We see humans as separate from the natural world. We live in cities lined in concrete, spend most of our time indoors and most of us seem to have forgotten we are only as healthy as the earth we live on.

Herbalism can be the bridge back to the natural world.

The first herb in this ebook is stinging nettle. In the following pages you'll read about how amazing this humble plant is for your health.

Nettle works best when taken in large quantities. This isn't something you can powder and take as a capsule and expect great results.

Nettles are often taken as a nourishing infusion (see the recipe in this ebook). At least an ounce of the dried leaf is taken each day.

Many people order dried nettle and drink their nourishing infusions and marvel at their stronger bones or their reduced seasonal allergies.

But oftentimes it doesn't stop there. People fall head over heels for stinging nettle. They are amazed that this prickly plant they knew as kids had so many health benefits. They remember where it grows and they visit it. They learn how to harvest it and make it into pesto, lasagna and soup.

Before long their forays to visit nettle rewards them with a variety of amazing medicinal plants. Elderberries are harvested in the fall to ward off colds and the flu. Wild roses are picked in the spring to make into a nourishing skin cream.

Watch out. It's addictive!

Pretty soon you'll be choosing to hike uneven trails rather than run on concrete sidewalks. You'll be choosing deliciously spiced meals for your family. The young ones in your life will beg to make herbal salves and syrups with you.

We are only as healthy as the world we live in. But the first step is connection to the world around us. Having a deep connection to the plants that we use as food and medicine is a powerful way to forge that bond.

Moving forward...

What makes herbs especially effective is how they are used. When starting out with herbs it's easy to wonder what herb is good for _____. What herb is good for heartburn? What herb is good for insomnia? What herb is good for IBS?

But when we attempt to substitute herbs for pharmaceuticals we will most likely be disappointed in the results.

Instead, there is an art to using herbs. To be the most effective we want to match herbs to the person and not the disease. We always want to address why something is happening. We look for disharmony and seek to bring balance.

In the pages that follow I've written about three herbs I recommend frequently to people in my herbal health programs. I've also included foundational recipes for using these herbs in your life.

These herbs are a fun gateway to the herbal world. Enjoy!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rosalee". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Rosalee de la Forêt



Stinging Nettle

Botanical name: (*Urtica dioica*)

Family: *Urticaceae*

Parts Used: young leaves – before the plant flowers, seeds, roots

Energetics: salty, cooling, drying

Properties: nutritive, kidney/adrenal trophorestorative, adaptogen, diuretic, astringent, hemostatic

Used for: arthritis, eczema, to increase metabolism, hypothyroid, weak hair/teeth/bones, fatigue, to increase lactation, build blood, seasonal allergies, urinary tract infections, asthma, menstrual cramps

When in doubt, choose nettle.
-David Hoffman
herbalist, author

In the age of exotic miracle herbs imported from all over the globe, nettles remain an unsung champion for improving health in a myriad of ways.

According to Susun Weed, Nettle infusions are “recommended for those wanting to stabilize blood sugar, reset metabolic circuits to normalize weight, reduce fatigue and exhaustion, restore adrenal potency to lessen allergic and menopausal problems and eliminate chronic headaches.”

And she’s not exaggerating! Here’s a look at the many ways nettles can support your health.

Nettles for Healthy Bones

Nettle is full of nutrients that are important for healthy bones, teeth and hair. I can’t tell you how many stories I’ve heard from women who’ve improved their bone density levels after drinking nettle nourishing herbal infusions.



Nettle has approximately 2,900 mg of calcium for each 100 grams of the dried leaf. Unlike calcium supplements, the naturally occurring calcium found in nettle is easily absorbed by our bodies. Nettle is also high in magnesium, a critical nutrient for bone health.

Vitamins/Minerals	High	Very High
Calcium		X
Chromium	X	
Cobalt		X
Magnesium	X	
Manganese	X	
Phosphorus	X	
Potassium	X	
Protein	X	
Riboflavin	X	
Selenium	X	
Thiamine	X	
Vitamin A	X	
Vitamin C	X	
Zinc		X

Nettles Build Blood

Nettles help to build blood in the body. Many women have told me that they were able to avoid iron supplements during pregnancy by drinking a daily infusion of nettles. It is also used for amenorrhea or lack of menstrual cycles. Regular nettle infusions can help decrease menstrual cramping; this is probably due in part to its high magnesium content.

Taken over time nettles help to increase energy levels. This is probably due to a variety of mechanisms including the high nutrient content as well as over all support for the adrenals, liver and lungs.

For Decreasing Seasonal Allergies

Besides beautiful hair and increased energy, another common “side effect” of drinking nettles regularly is a decrease in seasonal allergy symptoms. For best results start drinking a daily nettle infusion at least a month before the allergy season starts. Freeze dried nettle can be taken to alleviate more acute seasonal allergy symptoms.

For Insulin Resistance and Type 2 Diabetes

In the Winter 2013-2014 edition of Medical Herbalism, herbalist and author Paul Bergner reports on an impressive clinical study using tincture extract for people with type 2 diabetes. The results showed significant improvements in fasting blood glucose levels bring the average from 129 to 112. There were also improvements seen in HA1C and inflammatory levels (CRP levels).

As a Detox Herb

Nettles strengthen the liver and support the natural metabolic cleansing of our body. It is often used for signs of poor elimination in the body such as eczema or constipation. It is also used to strengthen the lungs and is beneficial for people with asthma or shortness of breath.

Nettles are diuretic and they also seem to strengthen the urinary system in general. I often recommend daily nettle infusions for people who have recurring urinary tract infections.

Nettle Root for Prostate Health

Nettle root has long been used by herbalists to support prostate health. In one study using nettle root and saw palmetto the researchers concluded that the herbs were more effective and safer than the conventional drugs prescribed for BPH.

Nettles for Pain

Taken internally nettles relieve pain by relieving muscle spasms caused by nutrient deficiencies (e.g. leg cramps, menstrual cramps) and they also can relieve pain caused by inflammation.

Have you ever brushed up against fresh nettle? Tiny little hairs project formic acid into the skin causing a slightly uncomfortable rash. Turns out



this is also therapeutic! Urtication, or using fresh nettles topically, can reduce musculoskeletal pain. I've done this myself with a severely stiff neck and have heard many stories of this being helpful for painful joints caused by arthritis.

Special Considerations

Nettles are diuretic and therefore drying. If you tend to have dry skin, eyes, or other symptoms of dryness you may want to add a pinch of marshmallow root or slippery elm bark to your infusion. Nettles can also be somewhat cooling and for this reason some people put a slice or two of fresh ginger in their infusions. It is not recommended to eat nettle leaves after the plant has gone to flower/seed.

Summary

Stinging nettle is a humble plant that grows all over the northern hemisphere. Its high levels of nutrients, as well as a myriad of other beneficial constituents lends itself to being a powerfully ally for a variety of health challenges. I most often recommend it for improving the health of bones, teeth and hair, but as David Hoffman wisely recommends, "When in doubt, choose nettle."



Nourishing Herbal Infusion Recipe

"My daily cup of nourishing herbal infusion is my safeguard against cancer, my longevity tonic, and my beauty treatment – all in one cup."- Susun Weed

The preparation of Nourishing Herbal Infusions is similar to that of teas; however, the plant material used is greater than in teas, and the soaking time is much longer. While teas brewed for twenty minutes or less are great tasting beverages, the extended soaking time of Nourishing Herbal Infusions ensures our beverages are filled with nutrients and minerals for optimum health.

What you'll need...

- 1 ounce of dried nettle leaf
- 32 ounces of just boiled water
- Place your nettle leaf in a quart sized jar.

Fill the jar with just boiled water. Stir well to mix the leaves into the water.

Cover this and let it steep 4-8 hours. I like to cover mine with a thick towel to keep it warmer longer.

When fully steeped, strain off the plant material and drink the infusion throughout the day.

Optional additions

For taste: Add a pinch of peppermint or lemongrass for a different flavor

For moistening: Does your skin feel drier after drinking nettles? Try adding a pinch of marshmallow root or leaf.

For heat: Do you feel colder after drinking nettles? Try adding a slice or two of ginger.

For more nutrients: Add 3-5 grams of seaweed

Other Preparation Methods

A coffee press can be a convenient way to prepare this infusion.

Another method is to use a crockpot. This method is a nice way to apply heat for an extended period of time. Place the herbs and water in the crock pot and turn on the lowest setting for 4 - 8 hours or overnight.



Nettle Lasagna Recipe

This is a gluten free lasagna where the eggplant stands in for the noodles. I've been making this recipe for at least a decade and it is very adaptable to your own preferences.

If you don't have fresh nettle, substitute kale or other leafy greens and a big handful of dried nettle.

Experiment and enjoy!

Ingredients

- 1 diced onion
- 4 cloves of garlic, minced
- olive oil
- 2 16-ounce cans of crushed tomatoes or 2 lbs of fresh tomatoes (best to use your own preserved tomatoes or search out brands that do not contain harmful chemicals in the cans)
- 1 lb. of cooked ground meat or sausage
- 2 large eggplants
- 1 bunch of fresh basil
- 2 tablespoons dried oregano
- 1 lb. of fresh stinging nettle (Or a big bunch of kale and a handful of dried nettle)
- 2 cups grated mozzarella cheese
- 1/4 cup parmesan cheese
- salt and pepper to taste

Pre-heat oven to 325.

Slice eggplants lengthwise and lightly cover both sides with olive oil.

Place them on a cookie sheet. Do not overlap.

Bake them in the oven for 12 minutes and then flip over. Bake for ten minutes more or until they are translucent in the middle. Set them aside.

Raise the oven temperature to 350.

Fill a large pot with water. Bring to a boil and add the fresh stinging nettle leaves. Boil for about ten minutes and then strain well. Reserve the nettle water for drinking or for a rich fertilizer.

Meanwhile, in a large skillet or sauce pan, sauté onion in the olive oil until translucent. Add the garlic and sauté for a minute more (being careful not to overcook the garlic). Add the crushed tomatoes, the cooked meat, basil and boiled/strained stinging nettle. Let simmer for 15 minutes.

In a large casserole dish place a layer of the eggplant, followed by a thick layer of the tomato mixture and a sprinkling of the cheeses. Continue this until the ingredients are used up or there is no more room in the casserole dish.

Bake in the oven at 350 for 25-30 minutes or until it is slightly browned and heated through. Let cool before serving.



2

Turmeric

Botanical name: *Curcuma longa*

Plant family: *Zingiberaceae*

Plant Energetics: warming, drying, taste is pungent, spicy and bitter

Parts used: rhizome and tuber

Western herbalists mostly use the rhizome. Chinese medicine uses the rhizome as well as the tuber. These plant parts are used differently. This article focuses on the rhizome.

Plant properties: analgesic, blood mover, cholagogue, antioxidant, astringent, carminative, anti-inflammatory, hemostatic, vulnerary, antispasmodic

Used for: arthritis, digestion, eczema, bleeding, wounds, ulcers, diarrhea, liver problems, pain, Alzheimer's, colds/flu, cancer, heart health, diabetes

Plant preparations: culinary, powder, tincture, tea

My mentor, Karta Purkh Singh Khalsa, is sometimes called "Haldi Baba", which, in India, means "Sir Turmeric". Everyone who knows KP knows this is his favorite herb. And I can see why! This potent yellow root is helpful for so many different ailments it's no wonder he calls this "the medicine cabinet in a curry bowl."

Turmeric has been used for thousands of years for countless ailments. In recent years it has also caught the attention of western researchers and there are many studies touting its many benefits.

In this article we'll look at turmeric's benefits for:

- **Digestion and the liver** (Ulcers, diverticulitis, flatulence, leaky gut)
- **Heart health** (High blood pressure, unhealthy cholesterol)
- **Immune support** (Cancer, colds and flu, bronchitis)
- **Musculoskeletal strength and flexibility** (Joint disorders, arthritis, pain)
- **Nervous system** (Pain, Alzheimer's)



- **Wound healing and healthy skin** (Eczema, psoriasis)
- **Diabetes and Menstruation difficulties**

Turmeric is pretty astonishing! Let's take a closer look.

Digestion and the Liver

Turmeric is a warming herb that promotes digestive secretions. It helps to relieve gas and has strong anti-inflammatory abilities to soothe the inflammation in the digestive tract. These attributes explain why it is used for diverticulitis, colitis and irritable bowel syndrome.

Its astringent qualities tighten and tone the digestive tract, making it a great ally in cases of a leaky gut. Turmeric is often used for ulcers because it tones the surface of the ulceration, decreases inflammation, stops bleeding, and helps to prevent infection. These same qualities make this a great herb for inflammation and pain associated with hemorrhoids and anal fissures. It can be used externally and internally for this. Be warned that turmeric will stain everything it touches yellow!

Turmeric is a cholagogue, which is an herb that promotes bile secretion from the gallbladder and liver. Using turmeric regularly can help prevent gallstones although it is recommended by the German Commission E to avoid using turmeric if gallstones are present.

The doctrine of signatures tells us that yellow herbs benefit the liver and indeed turmeric has been used for thousands of years in Ayurveda and is one of their most highly used herbs for the liver. According to Ayurvedic herbalist David Frawley, combining turmeric with bayberry (*Myrica cerifera*) will move a stagnant liver in a similar way to the often used bupleurum (*Bupleurum chinense*) of China.

Turmeric will stimulate bile flow in the liver. Bile is an important part of the digestive process and



notably helps with the digestion of fats. It has hepatoprotective properties that can help to prevent cirrhosis and other harmful processes in the liver.

Turmeric is an amazing antioxidant. One of the ways we benefit from taking turmeric regularly is that it acts against harmful carcinogens like cigarette smoke and other environmental toxins. Using turmeric regularly can help our liver to efficiently process metabolic wastes.

Turmeric supports healthy intestinal flora, aiding healthy digestion and a healthy immune system. It is used by some herbalists in cases of yeast infections or candida overgrowth.

Heart health

Turmeric can help to normalize cholesterol levels. It prevents cholesterol from oxidizing, which is a



process that can damage blood vessels. Scientific studies say that turmeric reduces blood clotting, increases circulation and decreases high blood pressure. My mentors recommend it following heart surgery such as angioplasty and bypass surgery.

Immune support

There are countless studies showing that turmeric can prevent cancer as well as stop cancer from metastasizing. I recently saw a TED talk where angiogenesis researcher William Li explained how we can eat to starve cancer. Angiogenesis is the growth of blood vessels, something that happens normally in humans. However, sometimes this process is too little (resulting in wounds that won't heal for example) while too much angiogenesis can result in many chronic diseases, notably cancer.



Li highlighted turmeric as a substance that beneficially effected angiogenesis by inhibiting the growth of cancers. Like so many herbs, turmeric has the ability to normalize function. While it can stop excessive angiogenesis it can also promote angiogenesis when necessary! Besides regulating the growth of blood vessels, turmeric can also promote the growth of blood cells, making it a good therapy for anemia.

Turmeric is also used for many symptoms of the cold and flu, bronchitis and sore throats, including prevention. KP Khalsa says that turmeric provides broad immune system support.

Musculoskeletal health, strength and flexibility

Turmeric is an exceptional herb for the musculoskeletal system. It is commonly used for chronic joint conditions such as arthritis.

Turmeric is a strong anti-inflammatory herb. It can rebuild joints and even decrease pain. It can be used in acute injuries as well to improve circulation to the area, reduce any excessive inflammation and reduce pain.

For those with chronic arthritis and other joint problems who also have a lot of dryness, it is recommended to combine turmeric with ghee or marshmallow root to offset its inherent drying qualities.

Turmeric can be taken preventively to keep the musculoskeletal system healthy. Yogis take turmeric to support tendons and ligaments and promote flexibility.

Turmeric really does stand out as a pain remedy. Besides reducing inflammation it also depletes nerve endings of substance P, which communicates the pain signal. Besides being taken internally it also has been used externally for sore joints and sprains. Be warned though, it will temporarily stain your skin yellow.



Turmeric can also be used to heal from surgery. It can stabilize connective tissue and promote the healing of tissues while lessening scars and adhesions.

Nervous system

Like rosemary, turmeric has been in the research spotlight recently, showing its propensity to prevent Alzheimer's. Some theorize this is why India has significantly lower rates of Alzheimer's.

Wound healing and healthy skin

Turmeric can be used internally and externally to promote healthy skin. It's regularly used for acne, eczema, psoriasis, and to heal wounds.

The powdered root can stop bleeding fast; simply apply it to the wound.

Turmeric can heal fungal infections like ringworm and athlete's foot. To do this a paste is made from the powder and apply externally. And, by now, hopefully you know the warning... it will temporarily stain your skin and anything else it comes into contact with.

In India turmeric is frequently used for toothaches and to heal gums.

Diabetes (type 2)

Turmeric is frequently used in Ayurvedic herbalism for people with diabetes. Its strong anti-inflammatory properties are important in this inflammatory disease. It further helps by lowering blood sugar and increasing glucose metabolism.

Menstrual pain

Turmeric is used to treat a variety of symptoms associated with menstruation. As a blood mover it moves stagnant blood and reduces clots. It also works as an antispasmodic on smooth muscle tissue, helping to relieve pain associated with cramping.

It does all that AND...

Remember all those warnings about turmeric staining your skin and everything else it comes in contact with? Well it turns out turmeric is a great dye, although it generally needs a mordant to maintain the color.





Turmeric used to be employed to detect alkalinity. Chemists in the 1870's found out that the root changed color when exposed to alkaline chemicals. For many years turmeric paper was used to test for alkalinity. Eventually it was replaced by litmus paper.

Botanically speaking...

Turmeric grows in the warm tropics. India grows 80% of the world's turmeric. The United States is the largest importer of turmeric, most of which is used to make commercial mustard yellow.

Turmeric is a perennial plant. Its flowers grow on a spike and range from white to yellow to pink. Turmeric can be 3-5 feet tall. The leaves are long and smooth and taper at the end. If you live in a warm area where turmeric is grown the leaves can be picked fresh and used to wrap food while cooking. Herbalist Susan Marynowski tells me it's possible to grow turmeric in Florida.

The rhizomes have a tough brown sheath covering the bright orange yellow flesh. The rhizomes are harvested in the fall and propagated through root cuttings. Most rhizomes are dried and then powdered for use.

Using turmeric

Turmeric is most easily found as a powder. The best quality turmeric will be a very bright orange in color. If it has turned to browner shades then you know it is not very fresh.

You can use turmeric liberally when cooking or as part of a curry mix. We eat a lot of Indian food at our house and turmeric is in practically every dish.

Turmeric powder can be taken as capsules or it can be mixed into honey, nut butters, ghee or drunk in milk.

I have seen whole fresh turmeric for sale in health food stores around the country. You might try

asking your local stores if they can carry it fresh. Besides being able to work with this plant in its whole form you can also use this for tincturing or simply adding it to meals.

Turmeric can also be taken as a tincture. I recommend making it from the fresh rhizome rather than the powder.

Considerations when using turmeric

Although turmeric comes from distant lands, it is widely available for an affordable price. To get the most out of your turmeric add 3% black pepper to the mix. Black pepper improves the bioavailability of turmeric, making smaller doses more effective.

It's impossible to read about the plant turmeric without also hearing about one of its constituents, curcumin. If you walk into any health food store you will see many different options for the standardized extract of curcumin.

Here's what my mentors KP Khalsa and Michael Tierra have to say about curcumin in their book *The Way of Ayurveda Herbs*:

Curcumin is the compound that makes turmeric yellow. It is the most researched constituent of the herb and is mainly responsible for turmeric's anti-inflammatory properties. It is unlikely, however, that curcumin accounts for the totality of the broad spectrum action of the herb. Subjectively, herbalists say that for many conditions, they have seen better results with the whole herb than with the curcumin alone.

Turmeric can be taken at various doses. KP Khalsa recommends 1 gram to 30 grams of the powder depending on the person and the situation. It's always best to use the smallest dose necessary so it's best to start low and work up. If a person takes too much turmeric nausea will result.



Keep in mind that turmeric is warming and drying and may exacerbate hot and dry conditions. It is often combined with ghee or demulcent herbs to offset this effect.

Turmeric used in curries and cooking is probably safe for everyone. However, there are some considerations for using turmeric in therapeutic doses.

The following people should avoid turmeric:

- people who are currently taking blood thinners
- people who have blood clotting disorders
- people who have known gallstones (although this is controversial)
- women who are pregnant or breastfeeding (also controversial)

Turmeric will also stain everything it touches a golden yellow (your hands, cutting board, counters, etc).

Summary

Turmeric is an incredible herb that has inspired hundreds of scientific studies. Its ability to address serious health problems from Alzheimer's to cancer is astonishing. I have seen it help countless people with their arthritic pain. It is definitely an herb I wouldn't want to be without! I highly recommend enjoying turmeric daily in your meals as a way of getting its myriad of benefits.





Sweet Potato Curry

This is a delicious curry dish created by husband, Xavier. It's a yummy way to get lots of herbs and spices, including turmeric, into your diet.

Ingredients

- 2 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 2 bay leaves
- 3 tablespoons fresh ginger
- 6 cloves garlic
- 3 tablespoons turmeric powder
- 2 tablespoons coriander powder
- 1 tablespoon ginger powder
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 large sweet potato
- 1 13.5 oz can of organic coconut milk
- 2 lbs cooked ground beef
- 2 bunches fresh chopped cilantro

Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium high heat. Add the ground beef and cook until browned. Move the beef to the edges of the pan. Add additional oil in the center of the skillet and add the herbs and spices. Stir the herbs and spices constantly for one minute.

Stir the ground beef into the herbs and spices mixing well. Cook for an additional minute, stirring frequently.

Add the coconut milk and the sweet potatoes to the skillet. Cover and continue to cook over medium high heat until the sweet potatoes are tender.

Remove from heat. Add two bunches of fresh chopped cilantro and additional salt and pepper to taste.

Serve immediately. Makes approximately 6 servings.



Garam Masala Recipe

This traditional Indian spiced blend works well in curries and on meats and veggies. We cook a lot of Indian-inspired cuisine and this mix goes in practically every dish.

- 2 teaspoons cumin powder
- 2 teaspoons coriander powder
- 1 teaspoon turmeric powder
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon powder
- 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/4 part ground cardamom

If you want to make this in larger amounts then choose your “part” amount (above the part is a teaspoon, you could choose a tablespoon or a cup).

- 2 parts cumin powder
- 2 parts coriander powder
- 1 part turmeric powder
- 1/2 part cinnamon powder
- 1/4 part ground cloves
- 1/4 part ground cardamom

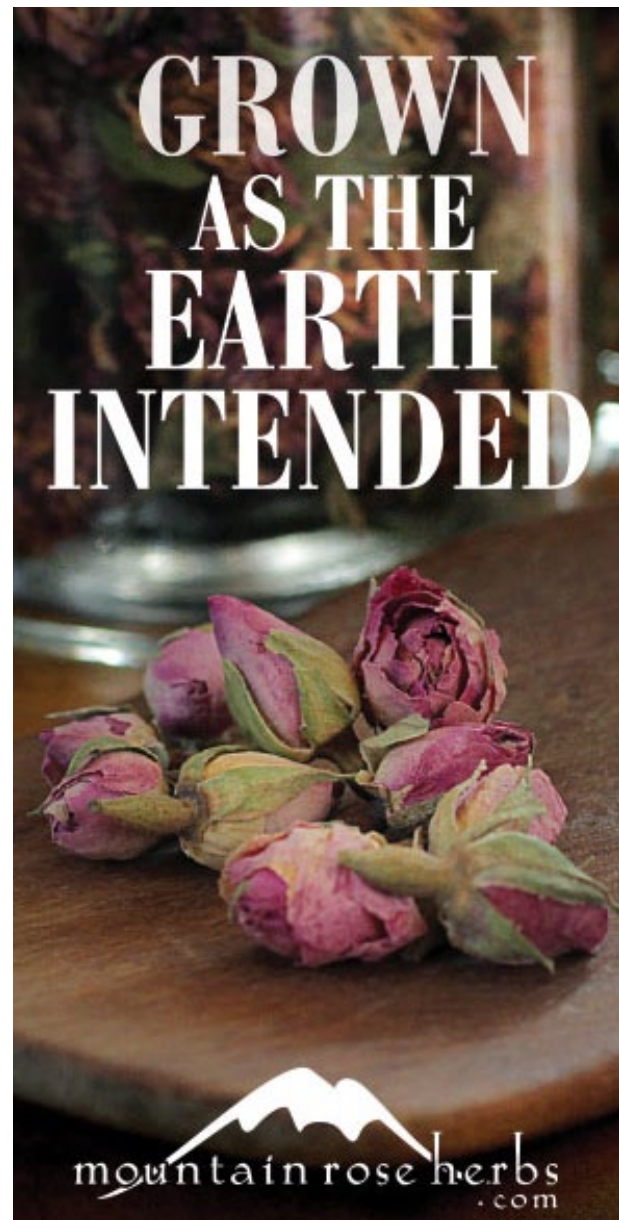
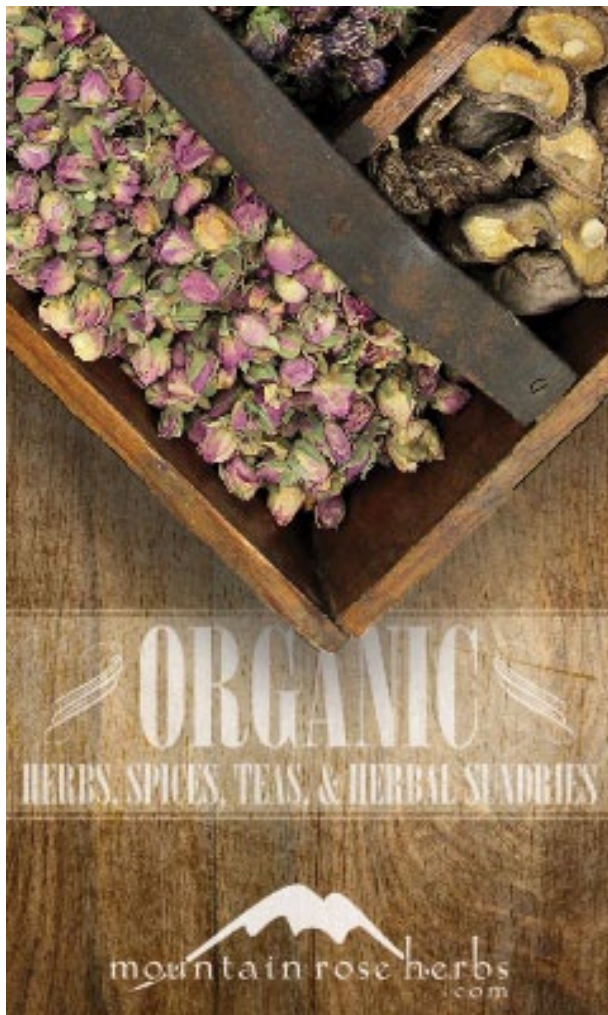


To see more spice blends and download labels see this article I wrote for LearningHerbs.



Need Herbs?

Mountain Rose Herbs offers organic, high quality herbs. Using [*this link*](#) to buy your herbs helps supports my work, thank you!





3

Astragalus

Other common names: milk vetch, huang qi

Botanical name: *Astragalus membranaceus*

Family: Fabaceae (pea)

Plant Taste: sweet

Parts used: root

Properties: warming and moist, immunomodulator, antioxidant, hepatoprotective, cardioprotective, adaptogen, diuretic,

Used for: immune system dysfunction (from frequent colds and flu, to HIV, to cancer), angina, hypertension, hepatitis, fatigue, asthma, prolapsed organs, weak limbs, hepatitis, anemia

Plant preparations: decoctions, cooked with food, powdered, capsules, tincture

Astragalus originally comes to us from China but it has quickly integrated itself into western herbalism. In a recent poll of practicing herbalists it placed as 16th in the top 50 herbs commonly used by western herbalists.

It's important to note that the plant we use for medicine is a specific genus and species. There are over 2,000 different species in the Astragalus genus. Some of these plants are toxic and none are known to have the same qualities as *Astragalus membranaceus*, although a few are used medicinally.

From a Traditional Chinese Medicine Perspective

Since this herb comes to us from China let's begin by exploring how it is used in the Traditional Chinese Medicine tradition.



Astragalus is considered to be a sweet tonic herb that is slightly warming. It has an ascending energy (which is important; we'll get to that later).

It is specifically a Spleen Qi Tonic and a Lung Qi Tonic. Therefore, it is used when there is Spleen Qi Deficiency and Lung Qi Deficiency. I realize that if you are a western herbalist you might be scratching your head at this point! Let's try to break this down for better understanding.

When organ systems are mentioned in TCM it doesn't exactly correlate to our own organ systems. So the Liver in TCM isn't exactly the liver of our western anatomical or physiological understanding. Generally, the organs are capitalized when referring to the TCM organ. The Spleen in TCM is more closely related to our understanding of the pancreas in that it is strongly tied to digestive function.

The Spleen is responsible for transforming food and drink into Qi (energy) and Blood. If someone is lacking Qi or energy, we look for dysfunction of the Spleen first and foremost. This way of thinking is directly related to western herbalism in that we almost always address digestion first. If a person isn't assimilating food correctly, how can they achieve good health?



After the Spleen transforms food and drink into Qi, the Qi ascends to the Lungs where it is combined with the Lung Qi and transformed into the Zhen Qi, or energy that supports our entire body.

When the Spleen is lacking Qi the person may experience fatigue and sluggishness, loose stools or diarrhea, poor appetite, phlegm and dampness, weak arms and legs and prolapsed organs (such as hemorrhoids).

Astragalus is a Spleen Qi tonic. It brings energy, increases appetite and improve digestion and can lift prolapsed organs.

Astragalus is also a Lung Qi tonic. The Lungs in TCM are more closely related to our western understanding of the lungs, although there are some differences. The Lungs take in air and create Qi. Lungs house what is called the Wei Qi (pronounced "way"), sometimes referred to as the defensive Qi. The Wei Qi is like a force field for our body, protecting us from invading pathogens (bacteria, virus, etc). When the Lungs or the Wei Qi is weak we are more prone to illness, may have dull skin, and difficulty with breathing.

As a Lung Qi tonic, Astragalus root is useful for those who are frequently coming down with colds and the flu, have difficulty breathing (such as asthma) or those who sweat too much or not enough.

In Chinese medical terms, astragalus builds up the protective chi. Imagine that there is a protective shield around your body, just below the surface of the skin, that keep out cold and other external influences. It vitalizes the non-specific immune defenses and wards off infections. This is the protective chi, and astragalus is the premier herb in Chinese herbalism to strengthen it.

-Paul Bergner



Using Astragalus in TCM

Typically, astragalus is used as a decoction of the root or it is cooked into food like stew or rice (the root will need to be removed before eating). Most of my TCM texts recommend simmering it for a minimum of a half hour to a full hour. This is a mild, food-like herb that can be taken in larger quantities with recommendations anywhere from 10 - 30 grams (1/3 of an ounce to 1 ounce).

Herbs are almost always formulated in TCM and rarely used as simples (simples = using just one herb at a time). Astragalus is a part of many formulas and is often paired with Ligusticum and Ginseng. One classic formula that includes astragalus is Bu Zhong Yi Qi Tang.

Astragalus has similar Qi-strengthening properties to ginseng but is less heating and stimulating. It is often said that those younger in years will benefit most from astragalus while those more seasoned with years may find ginseng more beneficial.

You'll often hear that it is best to take astragalus to prevent colds and the flu but it should be avoided during acute illness. While I would say that is generally true, it is much more complicated. If someone is sick and with a lot of deficiency symptoms, astragalus might be used to strengthen the person's reserves to boost them towards wellness.

I frequently combine astragalus with reishi mushroom to improve immunity and instruct patients who easily get sick to drink a daily dose of the two throughout fall and winter. Similarly, it may be included in soups or cooked with grains and eaten on a weekly basis to help the whole family get through the winter without a single cold (people are always impressed with how well they feel and avoid colds and flu.)

*-Lesley Tierra
Healing with the Herbs of Life*



Astragalus in Western Herbalism

As I mentioned before, astragalus root has firmly made its way into western herbalism. The root can be bought as an import from China, can be grown in a person's garden or can be purchased from herb farmers growing it in North America.

Astragalus root, as well as specific constituents of astragalus, have been studied extensively here in the west and in China for applications against cancer, heart disease, blood sugar imbalances and even longevity.

Immune System and Cancer

Astragalus root has been studied extensively for its effect on the immune system. It has been shown to reduce the occurrence of common respiratory illnesses, inhibit tumor growth and bolster immune system activity in general.

The studies of its use in cancer patients is astounding. It is frequently being used alongside chemotherapy to alleviate the side effects of the chemotherapy treatments. It has also been shown to inhibit the growth of tumors and bolster the immune system¹.



Research shows Astragalus root stimulates the immune system in many ways. It increases the number of stem cells in bone marrow and lymph tissue and encourages their development into active immune cells. It appears to help trigger immune cells from a "resting" state into heightened activity. One study showed Astragalus root helps promote and maintain respiratory health. It also enhances the body's production of immunoglobulin and stimulates macrophages. Astragalus can help activate T-cells and natural killer (NK) cells.

-Thorne Research^{1a}

Adaptogen

Astragalus root is considered an adaptogen. It helps to build and restore general health to the body. It is used for those with adrenal fatigue,² which may manifest as fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome.

Longevity

Astragalus seems to prolong the life of cancer patients by supporting the immune system and inhibiting cancer growth. Scientific studies have also shown that specific constituents within astragalus are highly anti-oxidant, which slows the rate of aging.

A telomere is a structure found at the end of a chromosome and is a region of repetitive DNA. Its job is to prevent deterioration of the chromosome. Shortened telomeres are associated with poor health and aging. Astragalus has also shown that it can slow telomere shortening, giving us further clues as to how to promote longevity.

For the heart...

Astragalus has been studied extensively for its effects on improving heart function, even in

patients with extreme cases such as congestive heart failure. It can also inhibit the formation of lipid peroxides and decrease blood coagulation. Another study shows that it can strengthen left ventricular function^{3,4}.

As a hepatoprotective

Astragalus root has been scientifically shown to decrease the replication of the hepatitis B virus⁵. It has also been shown to prevent damage to the kidneys and liver that has been caused by either medications or virus infections.

For the Blood and Kidneys...

Astragalus is also a blood tonic. It helps to regulate fluid metabolism, and those who consume it regularly are said to rarely suffer from fluid retention and bloating.

*-Ron Teeguarden
Chinese Tonic Herbs*

Astragalus regulates fluid metabolism. We see this not only in its diuretic properties but also in its ability to stop profuse sweating. It is also used for night sweats and for edema.

It has been used to treat nephritis caused by complications from Lupus, especially when used in conjunction with pharmaceutical drugs⁶.

It is also used to build blood and can be considered for those with anemia, especially anemia related to poor digestion.

Healing topical infections

Astragalus can be taken internally and applied as a poultice to address infections from wounds.



Botanically Speaking

Astragalus is a perennial member of the pea family.

It grows from 3 to 5 feet in height with sprawling stems. It likes to grow in sandy soils that drain well.

The flowers appear in racemes of yellowish whitish pea flowers.

The roots can be dug in the spring or fall after four years of growth. The taproots grow 3 - 4 feet into the ground. One healthy plants yields about 3/4 of a pound of root.

Using Astragalus

Think of astragalus as an herb that slowly builds the system. Don't expect immediate results. Because it is a food-like herb it is recommended to take it daily, in large amounts for an extended period of time.

While astragalus is traditionally used as a decoction or cooked with foods, western herbalists have started tincturing the root as well. Herbalist David Winston recommends 40-80 drops of a 1:5 extract three times per day.

In the past, high quality astragalus was believed to be the large flat tongue depressor looking roots, the more yellow in color the better. I've since learned from Roy Upton that these roots are often manipulated with yellow dyes.

I like to buy the sliced roots for my soups (since they are easy to remove) or the cut and sifted roots for use in tea blends.

When I recommend astragalus to people I use the standard dosages as put forth by TCM (10-30 grams). It is difficult to get this dose using a tincture or capsules.



Special Considerations

Astragalus interacts with recombinant interleukin 2 and recombinant alpha interferon 1 and 2. It is speculated that astragalus would interfere with those on immunosuppressive drugs.

As per TCM astragalus is avoided when there are heat signs or yin deficiency signs.

Summary

Astragalus is one of my most used herbs. It is safe for most people to use yet it has powerful health benefits from preventing cancer, strengthening the immune system and protecting the liver.



Astragalus Immune Building Chai

This chai blend is spicy! It warms the body and supports your immune system. This can be drunk daily, especially during the colder months of the year. If there's too much spice for your taste decrease the ginger or try using fresh ginger instead of dried.

In the wintertime I cook my chai teas on the wood stove to conserve energy. Another method is to put it in the crock pot on low overnight. That way you wake up to an evocative smell throughout the house and a warm chai for breakfast.

What you'll need...

- 1 tablespoon of dried ginger root
- 2 tablespoons of dried orange peel
- 1 tablespoon of cinnamon chips
- 1 teaspoon of peppercorns
- 1/2 teaspoon of hulled cardamom or two crushed cardamom pods
- 1/4 teaspoon of cloves (about 3-5 cloves)
- 10-20 grams of astragalus
- 6-9 grams of sliced reishi
- 1 and 1/2 quarts of water

Place all the ingredients in a pan. Bring to a boil, then lower heat. Cover and simmer for one hour. Strain. Add milk and honey if desired.

Bulk blend

Measuring out all those individual spices can be tedious after awhile so I make up a large batch of the spices. I add astragalus and reishi separately since they are oddly shaped and don't blend well.

Here's a bulk recipe:

- 1 cup dried ginger root
- 2 cups dried orange peel
- 1 cup cinnamon chips
- 1/3 cup peppercorns
- 5.5 tablespoons cardamom
- 3 tablespoons cloves

Use about a 1/4 cup of the bulk chai mix per serving. Add the astragalus and reishi separately.



Nourishing Bone Broth with Astragalus

Bone broth stock is both the secret of delicious soups and a wonderful way to get immunomodulating herbs as food.

It's high in calcium, magnesium, phosphorus, silicon, sulphur, trace minerals, chondroitin sulphates and glucosamine. Boiling the bones releases gelatin into the broth. (Which is why it hardens slightly when cooled.)

This recipe is more of a general guideline as there are many ways to make bone broth soup. This can also be made in whatever quantity you like. I like to make big batches and freeze what I don't need immediately.

I fill a pan about 1/3 of the way with bones, then add in the herbs and vegetables and finally fill the pot with water.

This broth can then be the base for soups or can simply be drunk as is, perhaps with a bit of miso added to it. Yum!

If you're a vegetarian consider making a similar broth and use lots of mushrooms (shitake are a good choice) and lots of veggies as your base.

What you'll need...

- several bones from poultry or beef (preferably bones that have marrow)
- 1 tablespoon apple cider vinegar (helps to draw out the calcium from the bones)

- 1 onion coarsely chopped (skin too)
- 2 carrots coarsely chopped
- one big handful of dried stinging nettle leaf
- several dandelion roots coarsely chopped or a handful of dried root
- couple large handfuls of sliced dried astragalus root
- 2 celery ribs coarsely chopped (or any other vegetable chicken scraps)
- water to fill the pot
- handful of herbs such as rosemary, thyme, or oregano

Place everything in a large pot except for the handful of aromatic herbs.

Fill the pot with water and bring to a boil slowly.

Once it is boiling, reduce to a simmer.

After awhile you will see some foam forming at the top. Gently skim this off every couple of minutes until the broth runs clear.

Add the handful of herbs and simmer for 8-24 hours.

When ready, strain off all materials and discard.

Store the broth in the fridge or freezer until ready to use for soups, roasts, chili, etc.

This can also be cooked in a crock pot.



Further Resources

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Looking for herbs?

I buy most of my herbs from my affiliate partners at [Mountain Rose Herbs](#).

[Pacific Botanicals](#) has high quality herbs and you can also order fresh herbs.

[Banyan Botanicals](#) specializes in organic Ayurveda herbs.

Herbalist Jim McDonald [has a listing of grassroots growers and wildcrafters](#).

Citations

Nettle

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Astragalus

1. Astragalus injection supplemented with chemotherapy could inhibit the development of tumor, decrease the toxic-adverse effect of chemotherapy, elevate the immune function of organism and improve the quality of life in patients. <http://www.greenmedinfo.com/article/astragalus-may-provide-ideal-complementary-treatment-chemotherapy>
 - 1a. [PDF from Thorne Research](#)
2. [Astragalus contains compounds which slow cell aging through reduced telomere shortening rate, oxidative stress and increasing DNA repair ability.](#)
3. <http://www.greenmedinfo.com/article/astragalus-has-significant-effect-improving-heart-function-patients-congestive-heart-failure>
4. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0FDN/is_1_8/ai_98540126/pg_3/?tag=content;col1
5. [Astragalus may promote recovery from viral hepatitis and inhibit hepatitis B virus replication.](#)
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About Rosalee

I am passionate about helping people explore the natural world through medicinal plants and healthy living.

I spend my time as an herbal educator and a clinical herbalist. As the Education Director for LearningHerbs I create Remedies and Recipe articles, write original lessons, moderate the forums, and curate the educational content on HerbMentor.

Besides my work with LearningHerbs, I teach internationally at conferences and private retreats. I also have a popular [mentorship program](#) to help herbal students grow their herbal knowledge.

I am a practicing [clinical herbalist](#) who is passionate about helping people find natural solutions for chronic disease, so they can live healthy lives. I am a professional member of the American Herbalist Guild, RH (AHG).

It's been my honor to have had wise elders guiding me along the way. I have learned a lot about herbs (and life) from Karen Sherwood, Michael Tierra, Paul Bergner, K.P. Khalsa, jim mcdonald, and so many others.

When I am not immersed in the herbal world, I carve out a lot of time to spend with my husband and my honorary nieces. You can also frequently find me curled up with a good book in my hammock, swimming and kayaking in our lakes and rivers, hiking and taking way too many photos of plants.