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# MEDICINAL PLANT WORKSHOP

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## Earth Skills

1113 Cougar Court  
Frazier Park, CA 93225  
661-245-0318  
www.EarthSkills.com

prepared by Tanya Jenkins and Jim Lowery

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### Plants:

Fremontia inner bark (*Fremontodendron californicum*) – tea to soothe upset stomach and sore throats.

Yarrow leaves and flowers (*Achillea millefolium*) – tea for colds & fever; stops bleeding; antiseptic wash; pain-reducer.

Yerba Santa (*Eriodictyon spp.*) – leaves as tea. (locally, it's the wooly variety *Eriodictyon crassifolium*)

Elderberry Tree (*Sambucus mexicana*) – berries as elixir for immune boosting; flowers as tea for colds & fever.

Penstemon (*Pestemon spp.*) – used externally, the salve treats and prevents skin irritation on lips and other surfaces.

## **Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*):**

A California native, Yarrow has low-growing leaves, with straight flower stalks with a height up to 3 feet. The flowers are tight groups of tiny, ¼-inch white flowers, clustered in 3- to 3-inch umbels on stiff, upright stems. Leaves are very finely divided and feathery on stems to 8 inches long, becoming smaller toward the top of the plant. It blooms from June to August. Prefers well drained, fairly dry soil. Will tolerate poor soil and is very drought resistant.

Yarrow's leaves and flowers are a superb first aid plant for wounds, inflammation, infections. A poultice of dried or fresh yarrow can help stop the bleeding, and Yarrow is known to produce a partial or complete loss of nerve sensation. It is also anti-microbial (disinfects) and anti-inflammatory.

A strong tea of yarrow can disinfect, and help heal cuts and hard to clean wounds like puncture, road rash, animal bites. To prepare it for a wound soak, gather about 20-30 flowering stalk or a large handful of basal leaves and steep or cook them for approximately 15 minutes. Soak area for at least 10-20 minutes occasionally changing or reheating the soak water if needed.

### **~ Yarrow Infused Vinegar**

Vinegar (5% acidity or higher) is another solution to extracting and preserving a plant's healing compounds. It is also an astringent (contracts tissue and reduces discharge) and it inhibits bacteria growth which makes it desirable to have in the medicine cabinet for external uses.

Yarrow is an edible plant, you can also use this infused vinegar in your kitchen recipes, like salad dressings, for added minerals and vitamins from the plant.

Use the Yarrow infused vinegar for sunburns; bug bites and stings; and apply to all kinds of wounds after cleaning the wound with soap and water.

To make Yarrow infused vinegar:

Ingredients:

- Yarrow leaves, dried or fresh, chopped or muddled to start breaking down cellular structure.
- Distilled white vinegar

Process:

1. Fill a jar half way with the dried herb that has only been lightly pushed down; or when using fresh leaves, fill the jar with leaves lightly pushed down.
2. Pour vinegar over the herb to fill the jar, leaving ¼ inch from the top of jar. Stir to eliminate large air pockets and add more vinegar if needed.
3. If using a metal lid, put a baking paper square or plastic bag barrier between the metal and vinegar to avoid the vinegar corroding and rusting the metal.
4. Label the jar (name the ingredients, how to use, and date – I also put strain date).
5. Shake the jar every day.

6. Let infuse for at least two weeks, and up to four weeks.
7. When the vinegar and herb are ready, use a strainer and cloth to squeeze as much vinegar as possible from the herb. To remove any extra particles, pour into new jar through coffee filter.
8. Place the now infused vinegar in a labeled jar. Store in a cool, dark place or in refrigerator. This will last a year. Look for discoloration, bacteria growth and/or change of scent as clues when to discard.

### **~ Cold Care Remedy Tea**

Infusions are made from the light textured, or delicate, parts of the plant, for example flowers, leaves, buds. Below is the basic process and general guideline for a strong, medicinal infusion. If you come across a different process, do what feels right to you:

Drink this Cold Care Remedy tea to induce perspiration to help during a cold or flu, or as circulatory stimulant, promoting the removal of toxins from the body. The tea can also be used to treat allergies, hay fever, and sinus congestion.

#### Ingredients

- 6 Tbsp of dried herb, or 9 Tbsp of fresh herb
  - 1 part yarrow flower and leaf
  - 1 part elder flower
  - 1 part peppermint leaf
- 4 cups water

#### Preparation

1. Bring water to a boil.
2. Put herbs in a container that holds four cups, for example a quart mason jar or a French coffee press.
3. Pour boiled water over herbs in the container.
4. Immediately put the lid on to keep volatile oils from escaping.
5. Let steep for about 20-30 minutes and then strain.

Suggestion: Store the strained tea in the fridge, pouring out the cups when wanted. You may re-heat the tea, ice it, drink at room temperature, add sweetener and/or flavoring (i.e. lemon or mint). Drink within two days, with refrigeration.

Dosage is challenging since herbs are all different and every situation is different, yet here is a general guideline for those with short term and active symptoms, for example cold/flu, headache, fever: ½ cup of herbal tea every half hour to bring on a good sweat. Once you begin to sweat, reduce the amount of tea to ½ cup every hour and continue until the fever subsides. For child age seven to twelve: ½ tablespoon every half hour.

For those with chronic health problems: 3 cups of herbal tea per day. Allow a day or two without the herbal tea each week. For a child age seven to twelve: 8 tablespoons per day. Allow a day or two without the herbal tea each week.

### **Elderberry Tree (*Sambucus mexicana*)**

California's native Elder is a shrub or small tree (6-10 feet tall), often with rounded crown, grows in open flats, valleys and canyon slopes below 4500 feet, preferring moist soil. The opposite leaves are divided into 3, 5 or 7 or more leaflets. The leaflets have tiny teeth and are bright green, long, usually uniformly wide, and pointed at tip. Flowers are cream-colored in umbrella-like clusters at the end of branches, blooming from March through September. The small berries follow and range from purple to white and all have a white powdery-covering (a natural yeast) and grow in clusters, like grapes. For medicinal purposes, use the blossoms and the darker colored berries, the white berries can be used for Elderberry wine ☺

The blossoms and berries are edible, and are used for medicinal purposes. Collect the blossoms or berries in clusters (when ripe and juicy), where abundant (many varieties of birds eat the berries as well, so be sure to leave behind enough to fill bird bellies).

### **~ Elderberry Elixir (*Sambucus mexicana* or if order online *S. nigra*)**

**Source:** Kiva Rose, <http://bearmedicineherbals.com/another-gratuitous-elderberry-post.html>

**Elderberry Elixir is used as a cold and flu remedy that stimulates the immune system and inhibits viral growth.**

#### **Ingredients and equipment**

- Fresh elderberries to fill 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the jar, or for dried berries use about a third of the amount (about 2.5 oz if using 1 pint mason jar ).
- Appr. 1/3 pint of honey (or to taste, as you prefer)
- Brandy to fill jar - amount depends on whether you're using fresh or dried berries (and the better the brandy, the better your elixir will taste).
- A pint canning jar (or other glass jar that seals well)
- A good stirring spoon

#### **Preparation**

1. First, fill your jar 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the jar with fresh elderberries.
2. Now, pour the honey in slowly, stirring as necessary, until the berries are well coated.

3. Next, fill the remaining space of the jar with brandy, stirring as you go, until all air bubbles are released.
4. Now cover the jar with a tight fitting lid, and shake carefully to finish the mixing process.
5. Let macerate in a cool, dark place for four to six weeks (or as long as you can stand to wait).
6. Strain, reserving liquid. Store in an airtight container in a cool, dark place. Shelf-life is 2 years or more.

Medicinal Dosage for adults: Take 1/8 tsp – 1/4 tsp Elixir every two to three hours when feeling ill. It's absolutely best to take the Elixir frequently rather than having a bigger dose further apart. For a general preventative dose 1/4 tsp every four hours or so.

### **Fremontia (*Fremontodendron californicum*):**

This shrub or tree usually occurs from 3500 to 7000 feet elevation in chaparral or woodland with gravelly or otherwise well drained soil. In the spring it displays large showy yellow flowers, made up of five sepals that appear like petals. Leaves are evergreen, 3-lobed either palmately or pinnately, with hairy capsules up to 1 ½ inches long.

Fremontia's inner bark is one of the best possible remedies for sore throats and irritated stomachs, it's our local equivalent to slippery elm.

The inner bark, achieved by peeling long strips off of live branches, scraping away the outer bark, and used right away or else dried in small strips or pieces for later use.

The inner bark is steeped in hot water and drunk for these ailments. The tea also brings up dry mucous from the bronchials.

### **Yerba Santa (*Eriodictyon crassifolium*, *Eriodictyon spp.*)**

Yerba Santa (*Eriodictyon crassifolium*) is a perennial evergreen shrub native to California that can grow to 5'. The shrubs look grey-green to silvery in color, and grows in Chaparral and Pinyon-Juniper Woodland communities. Flowers are tubular, ½" in length, a pale blue to lavender in color that bloom in clusters. The thick leaves are oval or elongated, flattened, irregularly toothed edges and are covered in fur on both sides with a distinctive, pleasant scent.

Yerba Santa opens up the lungs and removes and dissolves accumulated phlegm which is excellent for laryngitis, sore throat, bronchitis, colds, chest congestion. This effect is felt up in the sinuses as well, thus its use in hay fever and sinusitis. Whenever the lungs feel encumbered by excessive moisture Yerba Santa is indicated. It stimulates and irritates the mucous membranes of the pleural lining to loosen up and "sweat out" the phlegm accumulated. The accumulated phlegm first needs to be liquefied before it can be excreted. Irritating the lungs without first liquefying can prove ineffective for clearing the mucous. Yerba Santa does both. It is both mucolytic and expectorant. Any congestion from

the upper to lower respiratory tract is improved with Yerba Santa. Here the tea works best, particularly of the more wooly species (E. crassifolium is a good example) as they are more drying. - Source: John Slattery, Desert Tortoise Botanicals

### **Penstemon (*Penstemon spp.*)**

Penstemon is a widespread genus of wildflowers in the snapdragon (Scrophylariaceae) family. Flowers are five-petaled, the two upper petals fused as a hood over the stamens. In our mountain area there are several species: P. rostriflorus (red blossom), P. grinnelli (lavender), and P. centranthifolus (red).

Penstemon makes an excellent salve for external treatment of irritation on the lips and other surfaces.

## Preparation

1. Collect the green plant.
2. Chop finely or grind in a food mill.
3. Place the ground herb in an equal part of oil (preferably an oil without much taste or odor, such as almond or apricot, but you could use olive oil). Let stand in a warm place, but out of the sun, for at least a week.
4. Strain the mixture through a colander, lined with cheesecloth. Heat the mixture and add beeswax in the proportion of 30% wax to 70% herbal mixture. As soon as the wax has melted, pour the mixture into containers. Stir once while it sets.