



Become an Herbalist Ebook

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INSIDE**

WHY HERBALISM?

Develop the ability to heal naturally....Build a stronger relationship to nature.... Feed your passion for plants & the earth.....Support non-toxic healing practices.....Security in being able to take care of yourself....and those you love
Self empowerment...

maryblueherbalist.com



ABOUT MARY BLUE

Mary Blue is a community herbalist, educator, and founder of Farmacy Herbs, established in Providence, Rhode Island in 2006. Over the past two decades, Farmacy Herbs has grown into a thriving hub for herbal education, farming, and community health, welcoming thousands of students, interns, and volunteers. Many of Mary's students have gone on to create their own herbal businesses.

Mary teaches Western Herbalism at Brown University Medical School and is the creator of the Herbal Foundations Certificate Program, which has trained over 1,000 students since 2006. Her teaching emphasizes accessible herbalism, nutrition, and health justice.

Rooted in a philosophy of personal and planetary healing, Mary's work blends herbal medicine, education, activism, and community care. She is also known for her role in the Fire Cider trademark case, her documentary *Herbal Aide*, and her continued efforts to make herbalism more inclusive and community-driven.

Mary has been featured in the *New York Times*, *Boston Globe*, *Bust Magazine*, and *Rhode Island Monthly*, and has received multiple awards for her contributions to the herbal community.

Follow Mary on Instagram: @maryblueherbalist

ABOUT THIS EBOOK

Become an Herbalist Ebook is designed as a practical and inspiring introduction to Western Herbalism. Start with Section 1, which lays the groundwork by exploring the core principles and philosophy of herbal medicine. Move through Sections 2–4 to learn the essential hands-on skills of herbal preparation—understanding solvency, crafting teas, infusions, decoctions, and making tinctures. In Section 5, you'll discover key herbal actions that explain how plants work in the body. Finally, *Next Steps* offers guidance on how to deepen your studies and connect with the wider herbal community. Take your time, make notes, and most importantly—start experimenting with the plants around you.



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SECTION 1

FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS OF WESTERN HERBALISM

Herbal Actions

The language of western herbalism. Herbal Actions refers to the way we describe how an herb acts on the body. The language can range from general like the action “tonic” or specific, like the action “astringent”.

Understanding this range helps herbalists describe both the overall influence of an herb and its precise actions within the body.

Solvency

In making herbal medicine, solvency is the process of using a liquid—such as water, alcohol, or oil—to dissolve and draw out the herb’s active, healing components. Understanding the basic herbal constituents—like vitamins, minerals, and plant chemicals—helps you choose the best liquid to extract them effectively.

Nutritional Healing

Using food to nourish and heal the body. Supporting gut microbiome, digestive system function, detoxification and anti-inflammatory nutrition.

Anatomy

Understanding how the body functions in order to effectively choose actions and herbs.

Materia Medica

The study of the origin and properties of a specific plants used in herbal medicine.





SECTION 2

SOLVENCY

Herbal solvents are liquids used to extract active plant constituents. These liquids are then absorbed through the digestive system and skin. Solvency is based on the polarity of the liquid and the specific plant. A basic understanding of solvency begins with knowing the main herbal constituents, like vitamins, minerals, alkaloids, tannins, and essential oils, and which solvents, such as water, alcohol, oil, or vinegar, work best to extract each one effectively.

Why Solvency?

Understanding solvency is key to making powerful and effective herbal medicine. When you know which liquid best dissolves an herb's active components, you can create stronger remedies that actually work. Good solvency also saves time and money by preventing weak or wasted extractions, ensuring you get the most healing power from every plant you use.

The Solvents:

Water

The “universal solvent”. Water is a polar molecule attracting many molecules and bonding them. In addition to vitamins and minerals, water attracts and binds plant sugars.

Vinegar

Vinegar has strong solvency for vitamins and minerals, especially from fresh plants, and it also helps preserve the preparation for long-term use.

Alcohol

Medium polarity. Alcohol attracts less molecules than water. Alcohol is used for tinctures, which are a percentage of alcohol and water.

Oil

Low polarity. Oil is a lipid with limited available bonds. Oil can melt with other lipids. Must use heat to preserve constituents into oil.

Sugar

Low polarity. Vegetable glycerin and honey can be used to preserve herbs that are high in volatile oils (lighter molecules) and to preserve fresh herbs. Must use heat to extract.



SECTION 3

TEAS, INFUSIONS & DECOCTIONS

Tea

Lightly Infused Herb for enjoyment and caffeine content

- Steep plant matter in hot water for 5-10 minutes
- Use aerial parts of the plant (leaves and flowers).
- Do not boil the plant matter!

Infusion

Strongly Infused Herb for Medicinal Purposes

- Steep plant matter in hot water for 30 minutes - 12 hours
- Use mostly aerial parts of the plant (leaves and flowers)
- Place a lid on infusion while it is steeping.
- Do not boil the plant matter!

Infusions are a very simple and popular way to make a remedy from medicinal plants for specific ailments or general health maintenance.

Therapeutic dose of infusions is 4 cups daily (1 tbsp. plant matter per cup water).

Decoction

Infusion of Roots or Seeds

- Simmer roots or seeds lightly on low heat for 15- 45 minutes
- Place a lid on pot while simmering
- Turn off heat, let steep for 30 min-2 hours.



Mary's Favorite Herbs for Infusions



Nettle

Nettle is very high in iron and other vitamins and minerals - a nettle tea is a liquid multivitamin! It is also very high in silica which helps maintain healthy hair, nails and builds cartilage in the joints (therefore effective for arthritis and for athletes). Nettle is also well known for its ability to relieve seasonal allergies.

Herbal Actions: Tonic, Alterative, Adaptogen



Red Clover

Red Clover is well known as a blood cleanser and therefore supports healthy skin. It is also great for the female reproductive system because it produces estrogen, and will help a woman conceive and throughout her pregnancy.

Herbal Actions: Alterative, Tonic, Nervine



Lemon Balm

Lemon Balm is a very calming herb that tastes great! Among many other uses, it is good for hyperactive children and in cases of hyperthyroidism. Take Lemon Balm daily to reduce stress and aid digestion!

Herbal Actions: Nervine, Anti-microbial, Digestive Aid



Chamomile

Chamomile is another calming herb that reduces stress, aids sleep and calms the mind. It is very well known for its ability to aid digestion as well! Take chamomile daily to reduce stomach acid and reduce gas and bloating.

Herbal Actions: Aromatic, Digestive Aid, Nervine



Mary's Favorite Herbs for Decoctions

Burdock root

Burdock root is a traditional Asian food and medicine and grows prolifically in the US. One of the top adrenal and liver support herb, Burdock can help manage the damaging effects of stress, & clear up rashes, acne and psoriasis.

Herbal Actions: Tonic, Adaptogen, Alterative

Dandelion root

Dandelion root contains sugars that are known as "pre-biotic". They help create healthy digestive flora. Dandelion root is also well known for its ability to heal and nourish the liver.

Herbal Actions: Hepatic, Bitter, Digestive Aid, Tonic

Astragalus Root

Astragalus is another herb used in Traditional Chinese Medicine. It is well known for it's ability to strengthen the immune system and reduce blood pressure.

Herbal Actions: Adaptogen, Immunogenic, Tonic

Ginger Root

Ginger root is another root that is used as food and medicine. It has an anodyne effect (pain relieving) effect on the body, reducing muscle cramps and spasms. Don't forget about its effects on the digestive system and respiratory system. It can break up mucous and congestion and relieve a sore throat.

Herbal Actions: Tonic, Digestive Aid, Anodyne, Nerve

Want to learn more? Learn how to be use herbs successfully!



Herbal Foundations Online is NOW enrolling!

SECTION 4

Tincture

A **tincture** is a concentrated herbal preparation made by soaking plant material in a mixture of alcohol and water. This process dissolves/ extracts and preserves the plant's medicinal properties into liquid form. Tinctures are one of the most effective and long-lasting ways to preserve herbs, often staying potent for up to twenty years when stored in tightly sealed, dark glass containers. They are easy to use, and several herbs can be combined into one formula to create a balanced, synergistic blend tailored to specific needs.

Vinegar-based extracts are also referred to as tinctures, although technically they differ because they use vinegar instead of alcohol. Vinegar is especially good at drawing out vitamins and minerals from fresh herbs and also acts as a natural preservative. These extracts can vary widely depending on the ingredients used. For example, an herbal vinegar mixed with honey is called an oxymel, while one infused with spicy, warming ingredients like garlic, horseradish, and cayenne is known as fire cider. Many vinegar-based preparations double as flavorful and nutritious salad dressings or tonics that support digestion and immunity.

A **glycerite (or glycerin extract)** is another type of tincture made using vegetable glycerin instead of alcohol. This method offers a sweet, alcohol-free alternative that's especially suitable for children, those sensitive to alcohol. Glycerin captures the properties of aromatic plants like peppermint, rose, and lavender. Glycerin cannot be used in place of alcohol for many plants and is only suitable for some herbs.



Herbs that are great for Tinctures



Licorice

Licorice root is very versatile! From its ability to aid the body in managing stress, to its ability to ease sore throats and aid digestion. You really can't go wrong with this herb! It does increase blood pressure, so don't take this one before bed!

Herbal Actions: Adaptogen, Nervine, Anodyne



Echinacea

Echinacea is the superstar of herbs!! One of the most well known immune stimulants, Echinacea works excellent to help fight off colds and coughs! It is also a fabulous antiseptic and analgesic for the upper respiratory system. I use it as a sore throat spray and a first aid spray!

Herbal Actions: Immune Stimulant, Anti-microbial, Analgesic



White willow bark

White Willow Bark is one of the top ANODYNE pain relieving herbs! Its main component was the inspiration and main ingredient in aspirin! Take 2-3 dropperful of tincture every 1/2 hour until the pain is reduced.

Herbal Actions: Anodyne, Nervine, Anti-spasmodic



Passion Flower

Rose is one of my top herbs for calming stress and anxiety and aiding sleep. Works great in a tincture because of its alkaloids (not safe for pregnancy) and because its taste is not great!

Herbal Actions: Nervine, Anti-spasmodic, Sedative





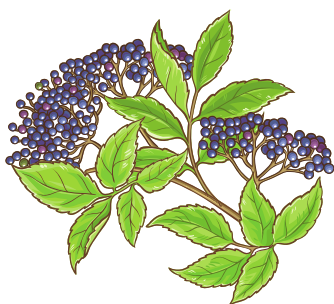
SECTION 5

HERBAL ACTIONS

"Understanding herbal actions is like learning the herbal alphabet. It is hard to learn how to read without knowing the letters!!" ~Mary Blue~

Herbal Actions :

- Describe what ACTION or effect the herb has on the body.
- These action terms can be borrowed from western medicine. Terms like "diuretic" or "analgesic" are used in hospitals, but many terms, like adaptogen, are specific to herbalism.



- Actions can indicate specific dosage and uses of the herb. Actions like "tonic" indicate that the herb needs to be taken daily to be effective
- Many actions can be correlated with specific extraction methods. The action term DEMULCENT indicates that that herb needs cold water to extract its therapeutic properties.



FOUNDATIONAL ACTIONS

Mary's foundational herbal actions are gentle and safe to take every day; they work best with consistent use, helping to balance overall health, lower stress, support detoxification, and heal the body from the harmful effects of stress.

Tonic

Normalize and restore body functions. Increase the body's nonspecific resistance to stress. Tonics need to be taken daily to be effective. Many tonics are high in vitamin and minerals.

Nervine

Affect the nervous system by calming, stimulating, or nourishing. Can relieve pain and aid digestion. Nervines are used daily to reduce stress or enhance energy, or can be used every once in a while to aid sleep or stop muscle cramps.

Adaptogen

Normalize and restore body functions and increase the body's nonspecific resistance to stress. Adaptogens have a big effect on adrenal gland function, the nervous system and many have specific effects on the endocrine system. Adaptogens need to be taken daily to be effective.

Alterative

These are herbs that gently cleanse and restore balance in the body by supporting the natural processes of elimination and detoxification. Often called depuratives, they help the liver, kidneys, skin, and lymphatic system remove waste and toxins, promoting clearer skin, better energy, and overall vitality.



SECTION 5



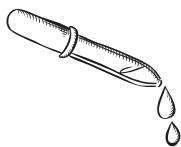
NEXT STEPS

So you wanna become an herbalist? Start with small steps every day, and before you know it... you are a confidence herbalist helping your friends and family or building a fulfilling career!

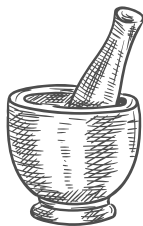
Daily Practices



- Drink a daily tonic infusion.
- Pick three-4 herbs in your infusion. One nervine, one tonic, one adaptogen, and alterative. Many herbs have more than one action. This is one of the best way to understand how herbs work.. by taking them!



- Take a daily tincture
- Pick one nervine herb to reduce stress or increase mental focus, or aid sleep.



- Find a local herb shop or herbalist to connect with. Sign up for a class.
- Talk to your friends about your passion for herbs.
- Try out new remedies for minor issues.
- Pick one plant and study it
- Make an herbal remedy



EDUCATE

Herbal Foundations Online Immersion

with Mary Blue

- Under an hour of weekly videos & detailed notes for six months.
- Watch videos on your own schedule!
- Understand Herbal Actions and Medicine Making concepts.
- 4 Sections of in-depth Western Herbalism content
- Receive a Certificate of Herbal Education!
- Feel confident in using and recommending herbs!

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<https://www.maryblueherbalist.com/herbal-foundations-online/>

This program offers the student:

IN-DEPTH coverage of herbal actions and herbal terminology, regulatory and legal guidelines, herbal first aid, and herbal body system support

HOW-TO of solvency and medicine-making, formulating decoctions/infusions, tincturing, syrups, salves, liniments, creams, poultices, infused oils and more!

PROTOCOLS for immune health, endocrine health, digestive health, reproductive health, respiratory health and more!

MEDICINAL USES of over 50 plants

INTRODUCTION to concepts of nutritional healing with herbal protocols

