Cedar Mountain
HERB SCHOOL

Introduction to Herbal Medicine:

A Guide to Self-Reliant Herbalism

By Suzanne Tabert

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The Foundations of Herbal Medicine

Herbal medicine is an ancient practice that harnesses the healing power of plants to promote health and wellness. For thousands of years, cultures around the world have relied on herbs to treat ailments, boost immunity, and maintain overall wellbeing. Today, as more people seek natural alternatives to conventional medicine, herbalism is experiencing a renaissance.

At its core, herbal medicine is about developing a deep connection with the natural world and understanding how plants can support our bodies' innate healing abilities. Unlike pharmaceutical drugs that often target specific symptoms, herbs can work holistically to address the root causes of imbalance and support multiple body systems simultaneously.

Some key principles of herbal medicine include:

- Using whole plant preparations to benefit from the synergistic effects of all plant compounds
- Tailoring herbal protocols to the individual's unique constitution and needs
- Focusing on prevention and building resilience, not just treating acute symptoms
- Empowering people to take an active role in their own health and healing

As you begin your journey into herbalism, it's important to approach plants with respect, reverence, and a commitment to ongoing learning. The world of herbs is vast, and there is always more to discover about their properties, preparations, and applications.

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Getting Started with Herbs

For those new to herbal medicine, the sheer number of plants and preparations can feel overwhelming. However, starting your herbal education doesn't have to be complicated. Here are some steps to begin building your herbal knowledge and confidence:

1. Start with common culinary herbs: Many everyday kitchen herbs like thyme, rosemary, and oregano have potent medicinal properties. Experiment with using these familiar plants in teas and cooking.
2. Learn 5-10 herbs in depth: Rather than trying to memorize hundreds of herbs at once, focus on really getting to know a small number of versatile, safe herbs. Good beginner herbs include dandelion, comfrey, chamomile, peppermint, elderberry, echinacea, and calendula.
3. Practice plant identification: Develop your ability to confidently identify herbs in the wild. Use field guides specific to your region and consider taking a local plant walk with an experienced herbalist.
4. Create an herb journal: Document your herbal experiments, including which herbs you use, how you prepare them, and their effects. This will help you track your progress and build your personal materia medica.
5. Make simple preparations: Start with easy herbal preparations like teas, decoctions, and poultices before moving on to more complex methods.
6. Connect with other herbalists: Join local herb groups or online forums to share knowledge and experiences with fellow plant enthusiasts.

Remember, herbalism is a lifelong learning journey. Be patient with yourself and enjoy the process of deepening your relationship with plants over time.

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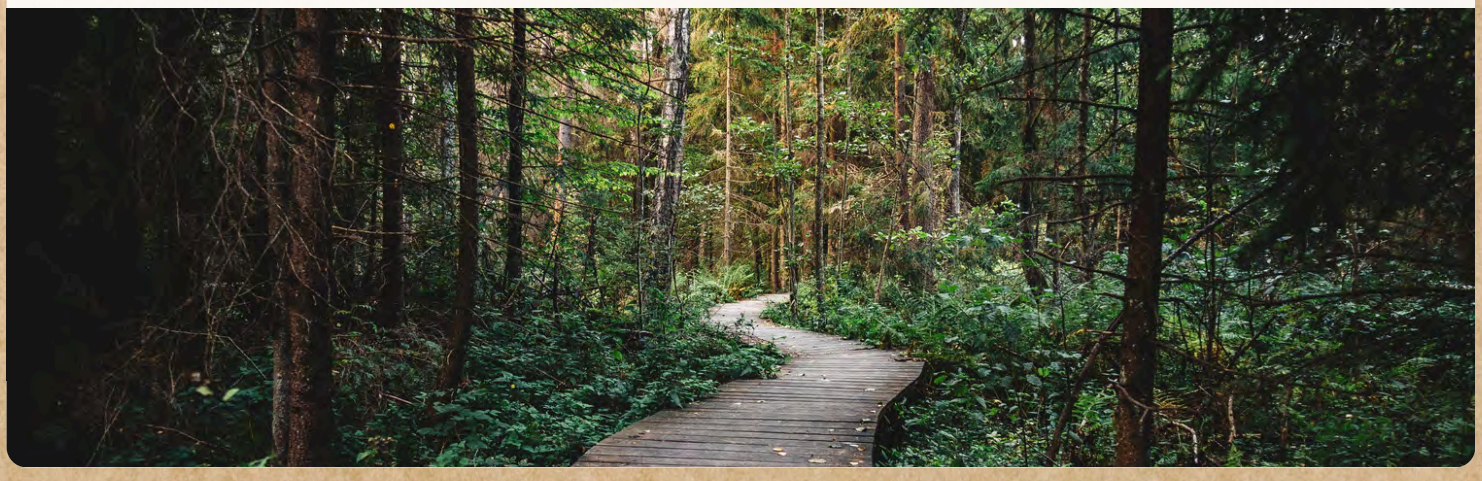
Ethical & Sustainable Herbalism

As interest in herbal medicine grows, it's crucial to approach herbalism with a strong ethical foundation and commitment to sustainability. Here are some key considerations:

Wildcrafting Responsibly

Wildcrafting, or harvesting herbs from the wild, can be a powerful way to connect with plants in their natural habitat. However, it's essential to follow ethical guidelines:

- Only harvest abundant plants, never rare or endangered species
- Take no more than your needs
- Notice the connection between the plants growing in the same area and how your harvesting may affect the other plants
- Use proper harvesting techniques to ensure plant regeneration
- Obtain permission before harvesting on private or protected land
- Learn and respect Indigenous harvesting traditions in your area



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Growing Your Own Herbs

Cultivating an herb garden is one of the most sustainable ways to source medicinal plants. It allows you to:

- Ensure the quality and purity of your herbs
- Develop a deeper relationship with plant allies
- Reduce your environmental impact
- Have fresh herbs readily available

Start small with a few easy-to-grow herbs like calendula, oregano, lavender, mint, lemon balm, and sage. As your skills improve, expand your garden to include a wider variety of medicinal plants.

Supporting Ethical Herb Companies

When purchasing dried herbs or herbal products, seek out companies like **Mountain Rose Herbs** that prioritize sustainability, fair trade practices, and quality. Look for certifications like organic, fair wild, and B Corp.

Reducing Waste

Minimize waste in your herbal practice by:

- Using all parts of the plant when possible
- Composting spent plant material
- Choosing reusable or recyclable packaging for your preparations
- Making only what you need to avoid excess

By approaching herbalism with mindfulness and respect for the earth, we can ensure that plant medicine remains accessible for generations to come.

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Essential Herbal Preparations

Learning to make your own herbal preparations is a fundamental skill for any aspiring herbalist. Here are some basic methods to get you started:

Infusions and Decoctions

Infusions are made by steeping herbs in hot water, similar to making tea. They're ideal for delicate plant parts like leaves and flowers. To make an infusion:

1. Use 1-2 tablespoons of dried herb per cup of water
2. Pour boiling water over herbs in a heat-safe container
3. Cover and steep for 10-15 minutes
4. Strain and enjoy

Decoctions are used for tougher plant parts like roots, bark, and seeds.

To make a decoction:

1. Use 1-2 tablespoons of herb per cup of water. It's best to start with 2 cups of water and watch to make sure the water doesn't completely evaporate.
2. Simmer herbs in water for 15-20 minutes
3. Strain and drink

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Tinctures

Tinctures are concentrated herbal extracts made by soaking herbs in alcohol, glycerin, or vinegar. They have a long shelf life and are easy to dose. To make a basic alcohol tincture:

1. Fill a jar 2/3 full with chopped fresh herbs or 1/3 full with dried herbs
2. Cover completely with 80-100 proof vodka or brandy
3. Seal and store in a cool, dark place for 2 - 3 weeks.
4. Strain and bottle the liquid

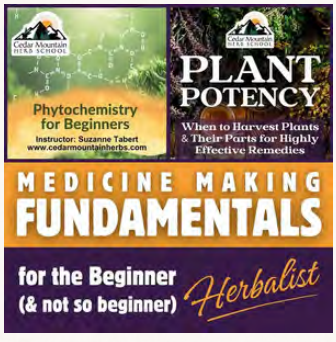
Herbal Oils and Salves

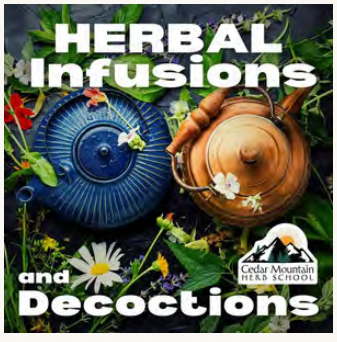
Herbal oils can be used topically or as a base for salves. To make an herbal oil:

1. Fill a crockpot with fresh minced herbs
2. Cover completely with a carrier oil like olive or jojoba
3. Turn on low and with the lid off, infuse the medicine into the oil for 2 days.
4. Strain and bottle

To turn your herbal oil into a salve, simply melt it with beeswax (about 1 oz beeswax per 1 cup oil) and pour into containers to solidify.

As you gain confidence, you can explore more advanced preparations like syrups, elixirs, and herbal honeys. For a deeper dive into plant medicine making, check out our library of webinars!





Building Your Herbal Apothecary

Creating a well-stocked home apothecary allows you to have herbs on hand for everyday wellness support and minor ailments. Here are some tips for building your herbal medicine chest:

Essential Herbs to Include

Start with versatile, safe herbs that address common health concerns:

- Elderberry: Immune support
- Chamomile: Digestive aid and nervine
- Peppermint: Digestive support and headache relief
- Echinacea: Immune stimulant
- Calendula: Skin healing and lymphatic support
- Nettle: Nutritive and allergy support
- Lemon balm: Nervine and antiviral
- Ginger: Digestive aid and anti-inflammatory
- Yarrow: First aid and fever support
- Lavender: Calming and skin healing

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Storage and Organization

Proper storage is crucial for maintaining the potency of your herbs:

- Store dried herbs in airtight glass jars away from light and heat
- Label everything clearly with the herb name and date. It's always a good idea to add the actions of the remedy on the label.
- Keep tinctures in dark glass bottles with dropper tops
- Organize herbs alphabetically or by category (e.g., respiratory, digestive)

Quality Control

Ensure the quality and safety of your herbal preparations:

- Source herbs from reputable suppliers or grow your own
- Keep preparation areas clean and sanitary
- Use clean, sterilized jars and bottles for storage
- Check herbs regularly for signs of mold or degradation

Record Keeping

Maintain detailed records of your herbal preparations:

- Note the source of herbs used
- Record preparation methods and dates
- Keep track of expiration dates
- Document any modifications to recipes

By building a thoughtful, well-organized apothecary, you'll have the tools you need to support your health naturally and share herbal remedies with loved ones.

Developing Your Herbal Practice

As you deepen your herbal knowledge, you may feel called to share your skills with others or even pursue herbalism as a career. Here are some ways to develop your practice:

Self-Study and Experimentation - Continual learning is key to becoming a skilled herbalist:

- Keep a detailed herb journal documenting your experiences
- Conduct safe self-experiments with single herbs to understand their effects
- Read widely from reputable herbal texts and current research
- Attend herb walks, workshops, and conferences to expand your knowledge

Formal Education - While not required, formal herbal education can provide structure and depth to your studies:

- Consider online courses or in-person programs from respected herb schools. The Cedar Mountain Herb School has many informative ebooks, Materia Medica Monthly subscription and recorded webinars.
- Look for programs that offer hands-on experience and clinical training
- Explore specializations like clinical herbalism, herbal product making, or herb farming
- Attend in-person apprenticeship programs at the Cedar Mountain Herb School

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Developing Clinical Skills - If you're interested in working with clients, focus on building these essential skills:

- Active listening and compassionate communication
- Holistic assessment techniques
- Safe and effective formulation
- Ethical considerations and scope of practice
- Record-keeping and follow-up protocols

Legal and Ethical Considerations - Understand the legal landscape for herbal practice in your area:

- Research any licensing or certification requirements
- Consider professional liability insurance
- Be clear about your scope of practice and know when to refer to other practitioners
- Stay informed about regulations regarding herbal products and claims

Building Community - Connect with other herbalists and plant enthusiasts:

- Join local or online herb groups
- Attend herbal conferences and gatherings
- Collaborate with other holistic practitioners
- Consider mentoring newer students as you gain experience

Remember that becoming a proficient herbalist is a lifelong journey. Stay curious, remain open to new information, and always approach your practice with humility and respect for the plants.

Herbal Wisdom from Cedar Mountain Herb School

Cedar Mountain Herb School, led by bioregional herbalist Suzanne Tabert, offers valuable insights for aspiring herbalists. Here are some key teachings from their approach:

Bioregional Herbalism - Cedar Mountain emphasizes the importance of working with plants native to your local ecosystem:

- Develop deep relationships with plants in your area
- Learn the traditional uses of local herbs right where you live
- Understand how local plants adapt to and reflect the needs of your region

Hands-On Learning - Cedar Mountain prioritizes experiential education:

- Participate in plant walks to hone identification skills
- Practice wildcrafting techniques in the field
- Make a variety of herbal preparations in hands-on workshops

Holistic Approach - Cedar Mountain teaches herbalism within a broader context of holistic health:

- Explore the connections between herbs, nutrition, and lifestyle
- Learn how to address the root causes of imbalance, not just symptoms
- Integrate herbal knowledge with other healing modalities

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Sustainable and Ethical Practices - Cedar Mountain emphasizes responsible herbalism:

- Learn sustainable wildcrafting and cultivation methods
- Explore alternatives to at-risk herbs
- Understand the importance of giving back to plant communities

Business Skills for Herbalists - For those interested in professional herbalism, Cedar Mountain Herb School offers guidance on:

- Developing a unique herbal business model
- Creating and marketing herbal products ethically
- Building a client base and managing a practice

By incorporating these principles into your herbal journey, you'll develop a well-rounded, ethical, and effective approach to plant medicine.

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Final Thoughts

Embarking on the path of herbalism is a transformative journey that connects us deeply with the natural world and our own innate healing abilities. As you explore the rich traditions of plant medicine, remember to approach herbs with respect, curiosity, and a commitment to ongoing learning.

Whether you're cultivating herbs in your backyard, crafting remedies in your kitchen, or working with clients as a professional herbalist, the world of plants offers endless opportunities for growth and healing. By embracing sustainable practices, honoring traditional wisdom, and staying open to new discoveries, you can develop a fulfilling and impactful herbal practice.

As you continue your herbal education, consider exploring the resources and programs offered by schools like Cedar Mountain Herb School to deepen your knowledge and connect with a community of like-minded plant enthusiasts. Remember that every herbalist's journey is unique - trust your intuition, listen to the plants, and enjoy the lifelong adventure of herbal medicine!

♥

- Suzanne

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About CMHS

Nature has the solution...at Cedar Mountain Herb School, we'll teach you how to FIND those solutions!

Transform your life in powerful, positive ways by deepening your connection with the earth, your community, and—most importantly—yourself. At the Cedar Mountain Herb School, we empower you to tap into the healing nature of plants and awaken your own innate ability to heal and thrive. Our curriculum blends traditional herbal knowledge with modern science, fostering a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness between plants, people, and the environment. Beyond herbal remedies, we provide guidance on nutrition, mindfulness, and sustainable living practices, empowering you to cultivate a truly healthy and balanced lifestyle. Join us and embark on a transformative journey towards a healthier, more sustainable way of living, becoming an active participant in your own well-being.

Bio

Suzanne Tabert is a bioregional herbalist, educator, speaker, and author with over 38 years of experience in sustainable herbal medicine. As Director of Herbal Education at Cedar Mountain Herb School, she has trained thousands in wildcrafting, herbal medicine, and holistic wellness. She has also served for 12 years as an adjunct professor at Bastyr University. A sought-after speaker at major herbal conferences, Suzanne mentors apprentices who have built their own herbal businesses. She shares her knowledge through apprenticeship programs, an Herbal Materia Medica Monthly subscription, webinars, and podcasts. Suzanne lives at the edge of town on a 4 acre homestead; her expansive herb and veggie gardens, along with two orchards, provide for her apothecary and home.

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Cedar Mountain Herb School is one of the longest-running herbal schools in the Pacific Northwest, nestled in the beautiful landscapes of North Idaho. For over 38 years, we have been dedicated to providing the highest quality herbal medicine education, rooted in holistic health practices, natural living, and a vitalistic approach to healing.

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