

Q&A

How can I make my own tincture?

You can make any herbal tincture with the following directions: Place the dried herb in a jar and cover with two to three times the amount of alcohol (vodka, brandy, or rum—*not* rubbing alcohol). Cover with a tight-fitting lid. Place the jar in the dark, and shake it once a day for two to eight weeks. (The longer it sits, the stronger the tincture, of course.) Strain through cheesecloth. Pour into a sterile glass container, close, and store in a dark cupboard.

What's a poultice?

A poultice is an herbal mixture that's applied directly to the skin, often with the purpose of drawing out impurities. To make a poultice, boil or steam the herb so that it releases its oils, then squeeze it into a shape that will fit the area you want to treat. If you like you can apply a bandage or a compress on top to hold it in place. Sometimes poultices are made using alcohol, vinegar, or witch hazel instead of water.

How can I make a salve?

Place herbs in a double boiler or crock pot and cover with oil; the oil should sit about an inch over the herbs. Heat over low heat for about 3 hours (roots for about 5 or 6 hours). Remove from the heat and cool to room temperature. Strain through cheesecloth, and then pour back into the pan or pot. Add essential oils, if desired. Add beeswax to the oil until it has reached the desired consistency. You can use this recipe for making a eucalyptus rub for respiratory ease or an elder salve to soothe aches and pains.

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19 THE THREE
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Easing through Winter with the Three "E" Herbs

» Eucalyptus

» Echinacea

» Elder

... and suggestions for use!

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The 3 “E” Herbs

Eucalyptus, echinacea, and elder are powerful winter allies. Befriend these herbs, and they’ll help keep your immune system strong and provide relief for ailments once the cold winds blow maladies in your direction.

Eucalyptus

Think about recuperating from a cold or the flu, and the fresh, penetrating aroma of eucalyptus is bound to come to mind. One whiff confirms that it’s a stimulating herb, thanks to its main constituent, eucalyptol—found in the leaves, roots, and bark of the tree.



Throughout history and across continents, eucalyptus has been used for teas, chest rubs, and inhalations. When included in ointments, liniments, and poultices, the cleansing properties of eucalyptus benefit skin problems (like eczema, boils, and skin infections), while the warmth is soothing to muscles, joints, and bruised or strained areas.

Note: Consult an experienced practitioner before using eucalyptus for babies and young children, or for those with digestive or liver problems.

Suggestions for use:

- » Add dried eucalyptus leaves to your bathwater when your muscles are feeling achy. (You can put them in a tea infuser or a muslin bag first, if you like.) Or just soak your feet in a basin of hot water to which you’ve add a very strong eucalyptus tea. Wrap yourself in a blanket and relax as the eucalyptus aroma envelops you.
- » Sip a strong tea of eucalyptus once or twice a day to soothe sore throats and respiratory ailments. (Simply pour 1 cup of boiling water over 2 teaspoons eucalyptus leaves. Steep 10 to 15 minutes, strain and drink.)
- » Apply a poultice of eucalyptus to boils and skin eruptions.
- » To loosen phlegm and enhance breathing, enjoy a eucalyptus steam. Place a handful of eucalyptus leaves in a large bowl. Cover with boiling water. Lean over the bowl, with a towel draped over your head to capture the steam. Stay in a warm place for about half an hour after your steam, to maximize its effectiveness.
- » Apply externally for coughs and sore throat. Make a strong eucalyptus infusion, dip in a clean cloth, wring, and drape around your neck.

Echinacea

Dubbed “the herbalists herb,” echinacea has enjoyed the spotlight for many years—and for good reason. The most researched plant in the world, echinacea has a long history of use as a powerful tonic for the immune system. The herb is used to help the body fight all kinds of bacteria and viruses—from staph and strep to the flu and gum disease—by encouraging the production of white blood cells, which fight infection.

The root is the most medicinal part of the plant. Both *E. purpurea* and *E. angustifolia* are used, though *E. purpurea* is more plentiful. (You’ll want to purchase only cultivated echinacea, or echinacea you grow yourself—purple coneflower—to protect the species.)

Note: If you have an autoimmune disorder (such as rheumatoid arthritis) you’ll want to avoid taking echinacea without the advice of an experienced practitioner.

Suggestions for use:

- » Make a tonic tea by simmering a couple of teaspoons of echinacea in a cup of water for about 15 minutes. Ginger, slippery elm bark, wild cherry bark, sage, and/or licorice root are good additions if you have a sore throat or cough. Take every two or three hours when you first feel an illness coming on.
- » Use an echinacea tincture as a sore-throat gargle. It will stimulate healthy tissue production and soothe and cleanse your throat.
- » Place an infusion of echinacea flowers in a footbath and soak for about 15 minutes. Bundle up while you soak.
- » Make an echinacea tincture to have on hand when colds and the flu are making their rounds. At first sign of symptoms take several droppers of echinacea every hour or two and then taper off to every 8 hours. For children, you can mix the tincture with cranberry juice or grape juice.



Elder

From Roman times, when it was used in drinks, poultices and ointments, to the modern *British Pharmacopoeia*, where it still appears today, elder (*Sambucus nigra*) has been respected for its wide-ranging power to heal.

Like many healing herbs, elder is useful both internally and externally. The flowers are recommended for their antiviral and anti-inflammatory properties, while the fruits, high in vitamin C, are considered antioxidant. A tea of elder flowers has long been used to treat cold symptoms and soothe the respiratory system. It induces perspiration (and so aids in lowering fevers), and serves as an expectorant.

Elder berries—made into wine or infusions (the raw seeds are toxic)—are an age-old remedy for influenza, sore throat, fever, a cold, asthma, and bronchitis. Retiring to bed with a cup of sweetened elder berry tea is an old, dependable treatment for a cold. Recent studies show that the berries may short circuit colds and the flu by preventing the viruses from replicating. Of course, the earlier in the illness you start taking elder, the better.

Suggestions for use:

- » Sip a strong tea of elder flowers when you first feel a cold coming on to help with both achiness and congestion (Use about 2 tablespoons of flowers to 1 cup of boiling water.)
- » Dip a clean cloth in an infusion (strong tea) of elder flowers and apply to your temples or forehead when your cold or flu symptoms have given you a headache.
- » To treat a sore throat, sip or gargle with elder tea. For added astringency, add a little apple cider vinegar.
- » Apply a poultice of elder flowers to skin inflammations.

