

# Introduction to Herbal Home Remedies

## INTRODUCTION

In this lesson, you'll be introduced to the world of herbs. You'll begin by getting to know each plant and ways to recognize it. Next, you'll learn to prepare the herbs using various methods and recipes, some more tasty than others. You'll also learn guidelines and formulas for using herbs for specific health issues. Finally, you'll have the opportunity to apply your new-found knowledge through practical learning activities. Before you proceed, be sure to acquaint yourself with the new terms that you'll be using. Pay special attention to the "Medicine Story" sections scattered throughout the text. These are beautiful, traditional Native American teaching stories about the plants you're studying.

## OBJECTIVES

When you complete this lesson, you'll be able to

- Identify the parts of plants used to make herbal products
- Discuss guidelines for gathering and storing herbs
- Recognize quality standards in herbs
- Discuss guidelines for gathering and storing herbs
- Discuss basic equipment needed for preparing herbal recipes at home
- Choose quality herbs and ingredients for herbal home remedies
- Inventory personal kitchen equipment needed to make herbal home remedies



# ASSIGNMENT 1: KNOWING THE PLANTS

**Read this introduction to Assignment 1. Then read Chapters 1–3, “Getting to Know the Plants,” “Selecting Quality Ingredients and Equipment,” and “Making a Simple Cup of Tea,” pages 1–44 in the textbook.**

In this assignment, you’ll read about recognizing herbal plants and following ethical methods of gathering plants from the wild. You’ll also learn how to purchase good-quality dried herbal products and how to avoid purchasing inferior ones. Pay special attention to the “Guide to Quality” on pages 18–22. The products and supplies listed are used over and over in the herbal recipes in the book. Pages 22–25 list the basic kitchen equipment needed to make most of the herbal recipes in the course. You’ll also explore methods of preparing herbal tea from various parts of the plant (flowers, leaves, stems, and roots) and become familiar with 25 simple herbs you’ll use in your kitchen.

## Getting to Know the Plants

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Before recorded history began, herbs were used for self-care, in medicine, and in rituals. Although you may be eager to begin concocting herbal recipes and remedies, first make sure you understand the reading material and become familiar with the herbs. It’s important to take the time to learn and recognize plants and understand the guidelines for responsible harvesting, which help protect future plants. It’s also necessary to understand the guidelines for gathering, so you’re picking the correct plant part from the correct plant. An exercise to help you learn about plants can be found on pages 6–7 in the textbook.

## Selecting Quality Ingredients and Equipment

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A good herbal home product begins with good ingredients. When purchasing dried herbs for tea, rely on your own senses to ascertain the quality of the herbs. In addition to expiration dates, visual cues, taste, and smell will help you determine the freshness of an herbal product. When buying supplies to make herbal tinctures, wines, vinegars, salves, and other home herbal products, you must purchase quality raw materials to yield a good finished product. It's also helpful to have the basic kitchen equipment needed to make the herbal remedies. See pages 22–25 for a list of basic equipment you should have in your kitchen.

## Making a Simple Cup of Tea

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Using a single herb, as a tea or remedy, is referred to as *simpling*. The four elements of simpling are as follows:

1. Use mild herbs.
2. Use the herb in large quantities.
3. Use herbs that grow in or near your area.
4. Be patient and committed to waiting for the full effect of the tea.

Climate plays a role in the type of chronic illnesses seen in an area. For example, colder climates may play host to more respiratory ailments than a warmer climate. By using local herbs that grow in your area, you're using herbs that are best adapted for the climate and the effect of the climate on your body.

## Twenty-Five Simple Herbs To Know and Use

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Here are the 25 herbs discussed in this assignment and their primary uses. Study the book's descriptions carefully, review them often, and memorize as many as you can.

- *Alfalfa*—A restorative tonic
- *Blackberry*—Effective against diarrhea and dysentery
- *Borage*—Reduces fevers; leaves are used as food
- *Burdock*—A tonic herb; helps eliminate toxins
- *Catnip*—Calms nerves and digestion; reduces fever in children
- *Dandelion*—A mild diuretic; stimulates liver function; all parts are edible
- *Garlic*—Reduces cholesterol; lowers blood pressure; useful for lung ailments and as an antiseptic
- *Ginger*—General mild stimulant; effective against nausea
- *Lavender*—Insect repellent; calms nerves
- *Lemon balm*—Reduces fevers, calms nerves
- *Marsh mallow*—Soothes irritated mucous membranes
- *Mullein*—Sedative; relaxes bronchial passages
- *Oats*—Nourish nerve cells; ease irritated skin and mucous membranes
- *Peppermint, spearmint*—Aid digestion
- *Plantain*—Drawing herb; bulk laxative
- *Poplar and/or quaking aspen*—Relieve lung congestion
- *Raspberry*—Woman's herb; use fruit or fresh leaves
- *Red clover*—Anti-inflammatory; strengthens body
- *Rose*—Blood purifier
- *St. John's wort*—Relieves nerve pain; mild antidepressant

- *Strawberry*—Soothes diarrhea and upset stomach
- *Thyme*—Boosts immune system
- *Violet*—Spring tonic
- *Walnut*—Relieves eczema and constipation
- *White pine*—Antiseptic and pain relief for burns, scrapes, and wounds

## Learning Activities

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Now that you've completed your first reading assignment, use these activities to put what you've learned into immediate use.

### Equipment Review

Review the equipment listed on pages 22–25 of your textbook. How many of these items do you have on hand, and how many do you need to acquire? Gather the equipment and find a handy place to store it in your kitchen or workshop for use as you begin to make your own herbal remedies.

### Simple Tea

Select one of the 25 herbs discussed in the text. Purchase the dried herb and make a cup of tea using one of the methods in the text. Enjoy!

**After you've studied the assigned pages, complete *Self-Check 1*. Check your answers with those provided at the back of this study guide. When you're sure you understand the material from Assignment 1, move on to Assignment 2.**



# Self-Check 1

**At the end of each section of *Herbal Home Remedies*, you'll be asked to pause and check your understanding of what you've just read by completing a "Self-Check" exercise. Answering these questions will help you review what you've studied so far. Please complete *Self-Check 1* now.**

1. According to the author of *The Herbal Home Remedy Book*, what is the purpose of a plant name?

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2. Name the field guide the author recommends for beginners to use when identifying plants.

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3. What effect does the popularity of herbs in the marketplace have on plant populations in the wild?

- a. It causes the destruction of plant populations.
- b. It helps some plant populations to thrive by thinning out overgrowth.
- c. It helps keep some species of "weeds" from choking out young trees.
- d. It results in cycles of high and low plant populations.

4. When possible, gather the leaves, \_\_\_\_\_, and flowers of plants—the parts that are easily replenished by nature—instead of damaging bark and roots, which could be detrimental to the life of the plant.

5. List at least three areas where you should avoid gathering plants.

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6. List at least three factors that may affect the potency of stored herbs.

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7. How much time is needed to blanch an herb for freezing?

- a. 30 seconds
- b. 1 minute
- c. 2 minutes
- d. 3 minutes

*(Continued)*

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# Self-Check 1

8. According to Wardwell, when given the choice, it's best to use \_\_\_\_\_ herbs.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ is an oil-extraction process that doesn't use chemical solvents to increase the oil yield.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ is recommended for making children's tinctures, because of its sweet taste.
- a. Alcohol
  - b. Wine
  - c. Olive oil
  - d. Glycerin
11. Which method of extracting the liquid from spent plant material does the author feel is the *most* effective for the home kitchen?
- a. Home press from lid
  - b. Food mill
  - c. Wine press
  - d. Strainer
12. Name the four elements or principles of simpling.
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
13. Which extraction method yields the *greatest* amount of minerals and the *smallest* amount of tannins?
- a. Pour boiling water over the herb and let it sit for 20 minutes.
  - b. Put the herb in cold water and let sit it in the sun for several hours.
  - c. Put the herb in cold water and let it sit in the refrigerator for 24 hours.
  - d. Put the herb in cold water and bring it to a boil for 10 minutes.
14. Which one of the following herbs is helpful for children, nursing mothers, and the elderly?
- a. Alfalfa
  - b. Borage
  - c. Catnip
  - d. Garlic
15. \_\_\_\_\_ contains a substance that's related to the active ingredient in aspirin.
16. The sap of \_\_\_\_\_ makes a quick, antiseptic and pain-relieving bandage.

**Check your answers with those on page 57.**

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