

Drying Herbs and Blending Teas

With Monarda Thrasher

Harvesting for drying

Questions for when to harvest for drying:

Is the plant dry? Clean?

What part are you harvesting for? And where is the plant putting its' energy now?

What is the phase and sign of the moon?

What will conditions be like in a week?

How and how often does this plant need to be harvested to keep up?

Drying Herbs

Home dried herbs are superior to what you can buy in most stores. Utilizing careful drying techniques assures that the herbs retain more medicine and nutrients. You see, taste and smell the difference between home and commercially dried herbs.

Drying Conditions

Dark

Warm (below 110° F)

Good Air-flow

Dry air

Drying techniques

Screens or sheets- flip if needed

Paper Bags- shake daily

Food Dryer- low heat!

Room, closet or box with dehumidifier

Solar Dryer- concern about direct sunlight

Hanging in Bundles

Storing Dried Herbs

The herbs are fully dried when you bend the stem and it snaps.

The stem must be fully dried before you pack your herbs in an air-tight container.

After the leaves are fully dried, I pack the plants into a paper bag, fold the top, label the bag and store them somewhere cool and dry (basement) or somewhere warm with good airflow (second story). They will continue to dry here. When the air dries out in the fall, I then de-stem them and pack them into jars with rubber seals.

Blending Teas

When you blend your own teas, you get to know the herbs by seeing, smelling, touching and tasting them. This is a way to deepen your herbal wisdom and intuition. Never doubt your intuition, but follow it up with some research if you are working with an unfamiliar plant, or have any doubts about safety, especially if the person you are blending tea for uses prescription medications. Ask a naturopath or experienced clinical herbalist, rather than an MD, as the former will

have more experience working with herbs and are less likely to just say no to all of them. Get a couple herbalism books and read about the traditional and modern uses of single herbs.

Personally, I love to touch the herbs - and sing to them! For me, tea blending includes the creation of a peaceful time and space for an enjoyable sensory experience, and is a great way to care for someone, especially yourself. Brewing the tea is also a self-love ritual.

Harmony in Blending

Creating a tea blend is all about the harmony of the herbs. The herbs' flavors and actions in the body compliment one another (or don't).

Primary Herbs- Mineral rich
foundation for nourishing the body
Nettle
Red Clover
Oat Straw
Raspberry Leaf

Tertiary Herbs
Valerian
Yarrow
Licorice
St John's Wort
Lavender
Rose Petals
Damiana
Elderflower
Monarda
Mugwort
Rosemary
Skullcap
Calendula

Secondary Herbs- These may serve
as primary/base herbs or even as
tertiary/highlight herbs for a blend
Horsetail
Lemon Balm
Anise Hyssop
Tulsi
Mullein
Chamomile
Fennel
Elderberry
Rosehips
Hibiscus
Lemon Verbena
Lemongrass
Linden
Mint
Marshmallow Leaf/Flower or Root
Slippery Elm
Sumac
Violet
Dandelion Leaf
Dandelion Root (Raw or Roasted)
Burdock Root (Raw or Roasted)
Cinnamon
Ginger

Characteristics

Calming, sweet, grounding, uplifting, earthy, energizing, nourishing, flowery, fruity, soothing, cooling, warming, cleansing, purging

Ratios – these are rough guidelines

Base Herbs (total): 3-4 parts by weight

Background Herb (total): 2-3 parts by weight

Highlight Herbs (total): 1 part by weight

Blending Steps

- 1- Decide what kind of tea you want to make
- 2- Brainstorm ingredients and write them down or gather them
- 3- Go over your list and select 5-10 ingredients. What do you really need or want in this tea?
- 4- Gather ingredients
- 5- Start with Primary/Base Herbs
- 6- Add Secondary/Background Herbs
- 7- Add Tertiary/Highlight Herbs
- 8- Brew a test batch (1 heaping T in ~12 oz water)
- 9- Taste. With and without sweetener
- 10-Adjust. And document the adjustment.
- 11-Brew. Taste. Adjust until you love it.

Dosage: In general, after brewing a few cups you'll know what tastes right for you. And if it feels good with no side-effects, you aren't drinking it too often. However, it's not a bad idea to take a week or three off from any formula every so often to allow the body to integrate the medicine it has received.

Brewing Infusions

Simple ratio- 2g herb per 8oz water. Medicinal ratio- 25g herb per 1 pint water.

Hot. Place herbs in a jar. Add the hot water. Cover with a lid to keep all the Volatile Oils in. Let steep until it's cool enough to drink.

The oils come out in in the first few minutes, and the nutrients take longer to infuse. The longer you infuse, the more comes out.

The first infusion will be more flavorful. I usually steep the first infusion for 10+ minutes. I let the second infusion steep for 8-12 hours, as this long steeping pulls out most of the minerals.

Ratio of herbs to water?

Cold. Place herbs in a jar. Add cold water. Cover with a lid to keep other stuff out. Brew for 3-6 hours in the sun.

Brewing Decoctions

Simple ratio- 2g herb per 8oz water. Medicinal ratio- 25g herb per 1 pint water.

Place herbs and water in a pot. Simmer decoctions for 30-45 minutes. You can also brew roots and spices as long infusions (steeped for 3-24 hours), when you cannot or prefer not to simmer them.

Ratio of herbs to water?

Recipes

Mineral Base

8 parts Nettle Leaf
8 parts Red Raspberry Leaf
8 parts Oat Straw
4 parts Red Clover
add: Alfalfa, Horsetail, Lemon Balm, Violet

Digestive Tea

4 parts Raspberry Leaf
4 parts Chamomile
2 parts Marshmallow Leaf and Flower
2 parts Anise Hyssop
add: Lavender, Licorice, Slippery Elm, Catnip, Lemon Balm

Nervous System Support

4 parts Oat Straw and Milky Seed
4 parts Chamomile
4 parts Lemon Balm
2 parts Nettle
2 parts Linden
add: Lavender, Rose, Hawthorne, Catnip, Borage, California Poppy, Valerian, Passionflower, Elderflower, Skullcap

Uplifting

4 parts Nettle
4 parts Red Raspberry
4 parts Tulsi
2 parts Red Clover
2 parts Linden
1 part Rose
1 part Cinnamon
add: Damiana, Anise Hyssop, Elderflower, Elderberry, Hibiscus, Sumac, Monarda, Calendula, Mugwort,

Grounding and Warming Chai

2 parts Roasted Dandelion
2 parts Roasted Chickory
2 parts Roasted Burdock
4 parts Star Anise
2 parts Cinnamon
4 parts Ginger
add: fennel, clove, peppercorn, allspice, fenugreek, cardamom, coriander

Wisdom

- * Create an intention and be clear about what your tea will be used for.
- * Spend some time dreaming and planning before you start
- * Get to know each of your ingredients; use your senses AND your references
- * Keep track of what you put in and how much. Write it down
- * Fresher, better-quality herbs taste better, and you can use less
- * Be mindful during the entire process - don't rush.
- * Make a small batch the first time.
- * Be sparing; it's easier to add more of something than take some of it out
- * In general, make separate blends for infusing vs. decocting
- * Garble whole-leaf herbs before you add them; don't attempt to get a uniform particle size in the final mixing
- * Add powdered herbs last (like cinnamon)
- * Do it together: it's fun to take turns adding and mixing, and have others to taste
- * Variations are natural and fun, but be aware the same herb from a new source might really change your recipe.
- * It's okay to copy other people's recipes

Resources

Sourcing Herbs & Local Medicine

The best herbs for you are the ones that are growing in your community! Look around your yard and see who is already there. Lots of Creeping Charlie? Maybe you have a high heavy metal load. Dandelions? Could your liver use some support?

Fresh or Dried herbs:

Best quality herbs are available from Driftless Herbal Exchange Network (WI), Zack Woods Herb Farm (VT), Healing Spirits Herb Farm (NY).
Ask your coop to source local herbs!

Local Coops and Natural Food stores carry bulk, dried herbs, many of which are imported. These are good sources for roots, seeds and berries, but the leaves and flowers are often not dried with the care of the aforementioned farms, resulting in lower medicinal and nutrient content.

North Country Herbal Exchange- Facebook page for exchange herbs and info.

Books:

Herbal Healing- Gladstar, Rosemary

A book with lots of general wellness recipes.

Homegrown Herbs- Hartung, Tammi

A complete guide to growing, using and enjoying more than 100 herbs

Making Plant Medicine- Cech, Richo

Medicine making formulas specific to individual herbs and how to use them

The Herbal Medicine-Maker's Handbook: A Home Manual- Green, James
An in-depth guide on making different types of plant medicines and how to use them

Online:

North Country Herbal Exchange- exchange of information, resources and herbs. See Facebook page

United Plant Savers- <https://www.unitedplantsavers.org/> Organization with the mission to protect native medicinal plants and their habitats.

Mountain Rose Blog- <http://mountainroseblog.com/> Recipes, articles and more.

A Modern Herbal by Maude Grieve- www.botanical.com Recipes, plant & herb info and more.

Susan Weed's Ezine- <http://www.susunweed.com/>

Minnesota Herbalist- <http://minnesotaherbalist.com/> Articles, resources and blog

Drying Room Design- https://www.ces.ncsu.edu/fletcher/programs/herbs/pdf/herb_dryer_leaflet.pdf

There are many herbal medicine Facebook pages.

Future Classes, Workshops, Plant Walks

Every year I teach classes in the cities and beyond on making herbal medicine, growing herbs, fermentation, permaculture medicine, and more!

For updates on classes, plant walks, community herbalism projects, join my email list dancingmonarda@gmail.com or join the Community Facebook Page: Dancing Monarda.

Join Herbalists Without Borders Twin Cities chapter

Send me an email. Dancingmonarda@gmail.com

Gift Economy

I offer many classes, consultations, holistic birth and post partum support and medicines in the Gift Economy. The Gift Economy is an economic system, in which people exchange gifts freely, and without expectation. You decide what gifts you offer, based on your resources and how it feels good to give. This economy works if there is a continuous, free flow of gifts. I choose to use this economy of exchange because I feel more joy when I give and receive freely.

Monarda's Projects

Tea for the People www.teaforthepeople.net

Producing hand-crafted, highest-quality herbal tea blends using as many locally grown and wildcrafted ingredients as possible.

Driftless Herbal Exchange Network <http://teaforthepeople.net/bulk-herbs/>

A network of regional herb-growers, seeking to increase supply of locally grown and wildcrafted medicinal, culinary and tea herbs.

