

# *Herbal Teas for Pleasure and Healing*

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"Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food".

Hippocrates (460 - 370 BCE)

Herbal teas are a perfect example of food/medicine - they can be pleasurable even while they are medicinal. Many herbs like Linden, Lemon balm, Peppermint and Chamomile are drunk for enjoyment but also have therapeutic effects. Roots, barks, leaves and flowers have been used for pleasure and medicine for millennia.

In horticulture therapy teas can be brought into many and varied activities. A great many herbs can be used dried or fresh as tasty and refreshing teas. This may be an incidental to the main activity but adds a level of feeling nurtured or cared for that is beneficial to the client.

Let's take the example of two simple teas everyone knows and enjoys (lemon balm and peppermint) and explore all the ways they can be used in HT:

## **Over view of project**

- Plant a patch of peppermint and a patch of lemon balm
- Grow the herbs, harvest them, dry them and make a tea
- Taste and enjoy a cup of herbal tea

Note: these herbs are chosen because they are easily recognized by clients, easy to grow and taste / smell good as well as having gentle effects and being entirely safe. If other herbs are used you need to research them carefully.

## **Benefits of growing your own herbal tea**

### Physical

- Exercise in building beds, making soil mix, adding soil amendments, seeding trays etc
- Coordination and dexterity required for pricking out and for transplanting and weeding
- Exercise in weeding, watering and later in harvesting
- Positive benefits of being outside (increased vitamin D, better mood, better sleep after working outdoors)

### Cognitive

- Researching best species for location / growing requirements
- Sourcing seeds and placing orders
- Imagining beds in bloom – making color charts or garden maps with cut out pictures of the plants ordered
- Learning how to harvest each plant differently
- Recognizing when they are ready
- Researching how and when to use the plants
- Describing the project to others

### Spiritual

- Being in nature, watching the miracle of plants growing
- Having bounty to share

## Mental / emotional

- Peppermint is stimulating and invigorating, uplifting and cheering – promotes concentration and focus
- Lemon balm is relaxing and sedative – a relaxing nervine for states of tension
- The plants can be used for their bio-chemical / physiological activities as described above, and the
- experience of growing these plants can also be used less specifically for improved mental / emotional health
- Sense of personal choice and control
- Enhanced self-esteem achieved by growing a successful crop and making a pleasant product from it
- sense of achievement and personal satisfaction
- Opportunity for discussion about situation or issues and use of metaphor for healing: weeding out unwanted plants, kitchen scraps to black gold, choosing beauty and abundance

## **Other possible projects related to teas:**

- Research the history of green / black teas and make a poster board to illustrate it
- Research health benefits of green tea and make a poster board to illustrate it
- Find out a traditional herbal tea or tisane in 5 different countries (e.g. yerba mate in Argentina, Linden in France, chai in India, genmaicha in Japan, tsampa in Tibet, cuppa in England, mint tea in North Africa)
- Make an iced herbal tea for a hot summer day
- Make a hot spiced tea for a cold winter day
- Grow a tea herb garden (bee balm, lemon balm, lemon verbena, spearmint, stevia)
- Package tea into ziplock bags inside pretty paper or cloth bags or small boxes; tie on a label; give as gifts or to sell for fundraising.
- Clients that successfully grow the herbs could host a tea party and invite people to come by and have tea
- Make other products from the herbs: peppermint tea as a spritzer for hot and bothered moments, lemon balm insect repellent with a herbal infused oil

## **WATER EXTRACTIONS**

This will extract only the water-soluble constituents eg. tannins and bitters and will not extract things like resins, oils or alkaloids which are not soluble in water. However they are easy to make and are perfectly acceptable in many cases.

### Making the tea

A herbal tea made with uses leaves, flowers or other soft parts of the plant is properly called an **infusion** or **tisane**. It is made by simply pouring boiling water over the fresh or dried plant material. The proportions are approximately 10 g of dried herbs or 30 g of fresh plant material per 300 – 400 mL boiling water.

Place the herbs in a china or glass pot, cover with the boiling water and steep for 1 – several hours. Usually best drunk warm so reheat gently on a stove top, with the lid on. Do not boil.

A herbal tea using roots, twigs, berries and other hard tissues is called a **Decoction**

The basic proportions are the same as for an infusion

The herb is put in a glass or stainless steel pan (never aluminium). It is covered and brought to the boil then simmered for 5 to 15 minutes.

The standard dose of infusion or decoction is 500 mls per day although this can change according to the condition being treated.

If making a water based preparation requiring that some herbs be decocted and some infused then you would make a decoction with the appropriate amount of herbs and the full 500 mls of water then use that hot decoction as the liquid to pour over the herbs to be infused. In other words you make a partial strength decoction and use it to make the infusion.

Note that volatile oils will readily evaporate so herbs rich in these oils should not be subjected to heat treatments (certainly not for very long or without being tightly covered). For such herbs it may be appropriate to make cold water extractions where the regular proportions of herbs are steeped for 6 to 8 hours in cold water.

Your water based extract will keep fresh for up to 24 – 36 hours in the fridge.

### **Pleasure Tea Blends**

#### Bright Eyes Blend

One part each Rosemary, Hibiscus and Gotu kola, ½ part each Ginger, Orange peel and ¼ part Cardamom. A fresh tasting tea that is awakening and uplifting to enliven the mind and the spirits. Rosemary and Gotu kola encourage the circulation to the head are considered to be mental stimulants.

#### Evening Blend

Equal parts of Lemon Verbena, Chamomile, Lavender, Spearmint, Borage and Cardamom. An aromatic tea that is calming and relaxing. The Lavender and Chamomile are especially relaxing to the nervous system and the Lemon Verbena and Spearmint settle the digestion. The perfect tea after a heavy meal or before bed.

#### Root Beer Tea

One part each of Sassafras, Saraparilla, Licorice, Cinnamon bark, Wintergreen and Fennel, 1/2 part each of Star Anise, Vanilla and crystal malt. Always a favourite with children, this tea can be drunk hot or cold. The Sarsaparilla and Licorice are considered to be energy tonics to add a little zip to the day!

#### Luscious Lemon Tea

One part each of Lemon Balm, Lemon Verbena and Lemongrass with 1/2 part of dried lemon peel. A light and refreshing tea, good hot or cold. Can be made extra strength then diluted after cooling with sparkling mineral water for extra zing. As a special treat try mixing it with agar (powdered seaweed thickening or gelling agent) to make aromatic lemon jelly! All the herbs are soothing and calming to the nervous system.

### Sweet Dreams Tea

Equal parts of Lemon Balm, St John's wort, Chamomile Lavender, Rose petals. A calming and soothing tea, formulated for children but suitable for anyone who is feeling stressed. All of the herbs are relaxing to the nerves.

### Flower Power Tea

Linden, Elderflower, Hibiscus, Chamomile, Lavender, Rose Petals, Jasmine, Passionflower, bee pollen. Light, sweet, aromatic and flowery, a perfect mid-morning refresher.

### **Precautions With Herbal Teas**

While most herbs are entirely safe, there are a few basic precautions to note:

Persons with hypertension should avoid the use of Licorice as it may cause water retention and raise the blood pressure in susceptible individuals.

Any adverse or allergic reaction should be discussed with a qualified herbalist.