

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO THE world of the Artisan Herbalist! Mother Nature's abundant gifts are beneath our every footstep, from the neighborhood park to the deep forest, and throughout this book we will explore the endless possibilities that she so generously offers. Regardless of where you may live, city or countryside, the benefits of herbalism are everywhere and accessible to all.

It would be impossible to include the hundreds of useful plants available to the herbalist. The herbs covered in this volume were selected because they met a certain, simple set of criteria. First, each of the chosen plants is common enough to be foraged or grown in any geographic location. This ensures that anyone interested in exploring the beneficial flora of their region will gain insight from this book. Secondly, and most importantly, I have personally worked with every herb included in these pages. Developing a relationship with the plants that provide us with our food and medicine is paramount to the health and wellness of any practitioner, and I would be remiss in my responsibility to the reader if I included herbs with which I am not intimately familiar. The language throughout this book is intentionally offered in the style of formal academia, following the precedent set before me by the likes of Pliny the Elder, Pedanius Dioscorides, John Gerard, and Nicholas Culpeper, all whose works I reference within these pages.

The study of herbs and their uses is a lifelong endeavor, and experienced herbalists can use this book to deepen their knowledge, while those just first exploring the realm of herbal medicine will find the information to be an indispensable introduction and influence on their research. A majority of *The Artisan Herbalist* is focused on the practical application of herbal knowledge, offering tangible and useful formulas to assemble and produce a wide range of wellness products for personal or commercial purposes. Within the entries discussing the individual herbs and their uses, I've included historical references and etymological derivations as well as cultural phenomena relating to the plants, when applicable. Just as the herbalist must learn the botanical identity of each plant in the *apothecary*, or herbal medicine cabinet, the cultural identity of our herbs is just as valuable. These two identities are inseparable to those who truly wish to understand the qualities and benefits of the herbal allies with which we work.

While the practice of herbalism is certainly enjoyable, the practitioner must understand and accept the gravity and responsibility that comes with it—from harvesting and processing herbs to manufacturing and administering medicines. When gathering herbs from the wild, it's vitally important to avoid harvesting from areas exposed to environmental pollution, such as roadsides or waste sites. Additionally, the herbalist will wish to avoid areas that have been sprayed or treated with synthetic herbicides or pesticides. Only healthy, clean herbs should be chosen for use in medicine making. The responsible forager also understands the significance of sustainable harvesting practices. Only gather what is needed and never more than one-third of a plant's local population. When harvesting from a tree or large shrub, never take more than one-sixth of the plant's foliage or branches. Overharvesting an herb is irresponsible and unsustainable. We must remember to think not only of ourselves, but of future generations as well.

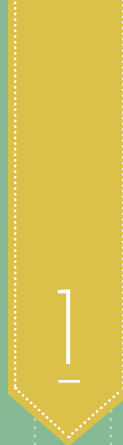
Great care must also be taken with the formulation and distribution of herbal wellness products. When developing recipes, it's

expected that the herbalist will choose the highest-quality ingredients whenever possible, whether the items being crafted are for personal or commercial use. In addition to this, the herbalist must remain committed to continuously developing their relationship with the plants that they work with, while simultaneously expanding their knowledge to guarantee the safety of their family, friends, and potential customers. We are never the master, always the student.

With this book in your hand, a bit of curiosity, and an interest in the herbal world, you are well on your way to making teas, tinctures, and oils at home. Let these pages inform and inspire as you continue your journey down the path of the Artisan Herbalist.



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MAKING TEAS, TINCTURES, AND OILS AT HOME



HERBAL TEAS

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WHEN CONTEMPLATING THE use of herbs in daily life, surely one of the first methods that will come to mind is the brewing of delicious herbal tea. Whether it's a mellow peppermint tea to soothe the stomach or a more invigorating rosemary and cinnamon blend to heighten the senses, herbal teas have become synonymous with wellness, self-care, and the many benefits of home-based herbalism. While the traditional beverage of "tea" is made by steeping the leaves of the Asian evergreen shrub *Camellia sinensis*, in these pages we will be discussing the herbal counterpart to this drink, crafted from various plants chosen for their flavor profiles and health benefits—plants that can be grown or harvested by any herbal enthusiast regardless of where they live or the amount of available space that can be dedicated to cultivating their own herbs.

With every pot of herbal tea brewed and every cup poured, the artisan herbalist comes closer to understanding the truest essence of the plant from which they imbibe. It is through this sacred ceremony of tea that the herb and herbalist become one.

Gathering Your Equipment

Getting started in the world of herbal teas requires minimal equipment. First, the herbalist will need a kettle and a source of heat for boiling water, whether that's the stovetop in their kitchen, the wood

stove of a cabin, a campfire in the woods, or even a barbecue grill at a neighborhood park. If the intention is to brew only a solitary cup, the herbalist will need just a teacup or mug, but if the plan is to brew multiple cups at a time, they will also need a ceramic teapot for steeping their beverage. If a teapot isn't handy, the resourceful tea maker can use a mason jar or any similar container to brew their herbal beverages.

There are a number of options on the market for reusable tea infusers that the herbalist can choose from based on their preferences and needs. The most common of these is likely the tea ball, a wire mesh sphere that holds the herbs during the steeping process; some of these hang from the lip of the tea mug via a hook and small stainless steel chain, and some have a handle that can be squeezed like a pincer to open the tea ball, which is hinged. These types of infusing tools are inexpensive and easy to clean, but after many uses the thin stainless steel parts can bend and will no longer be as effective at keeping plant matter out of the tea.

Another option is reusable tea bags, which are usually made from cotton, muslin, or silk. While these may prove to be a bit more difficult to clean between uses, with proper care they can be used multiple times. Many of these reusable bags will hold a significantly larger amount of herbs than their tea ball-style counterparts, which the herbalist will find quite useful when making larger infusions. When infusing herbs or spices that have been powdered, reusable tea bags are the best choice because they will prevent the plant material from escaping into the brew.

A third choice is a basket-style infuser, which is essentially a fine mesh filter, normally made from stainless steel, that settles into the top of the cup or teapot as the water is poured over the herbs. This can be limiting because the infuser is only effective when the vessel is full enough for the water level to reach the basket and its contents. This style of infuser is also a bit more bulky and difficult to store in comparison with reusable bags, but there are models available that fold up for ease of storage and portability.

Regardless of the type of reusable infuser you choose, once you have one in hand, you are ready to begin creating your own herbal tea blends.

Single-Herb Tea

Oftentimes, a single herb is all that is needed for a successful and enjoyable tea. This is particularly true for the new herbalist; working with each herb as an individual ingredient will help the student fully explore the flavor profile and aroma of the herb as well as its effect on the body and mind.

As the herbalist moves through their studies of the various herbs in their apothecary, perhaps one of the most powerful opportunities to enhance their education is joining their herbal ally in the ceremony of tea. From selecting the herb, to filling the infuser, boiling the water, and then pouring it into the cup, the act of brewing tea can be seen as a moving meditation. Keep your herbal journal handy so you can take notes of what you experience as you spend time with each plant. How does the herb smell as you fill the tea bag or when you inhale the steam from your cup of brewing infusion? Make note of how the aroma makes you feel and what thoughts it may bring to your mind. Upon taking the first sips of the tea, again make notes in your journal of the flavor and the impression the tea makes in your mind. Are you feeling more relaxed? Is the tea warming and spicy, or crisp and refreshing? Whatever your impressions may be, taking the time to document these experiences in your journal is an excellent way to build your herbal knowledge base and develop a deeper relationship with the plants you will be working with.

Creating Tea Blends

Before sitting down to sip and savor a delicious herbal tea, the herbalist must first decide which herbs they will be preparing for their infusion. This decision will certainly be influenced by the intended purpose of the tea; while there are no specific rules to dictate the process, it's a common practice for blends to follow a formula that



▲ Studying a single herb, such as sage, is both productive and enjoyable.

includes a central herb that is complemented by additional ingredients chosen for flavor, balance, and benefit.

This is a perfect opportunity for the herbalist to use the information in their journal. Not only will their single-herb studies come in handy for creating blends, but the herb journal can also be used to make notes and record recipes.

Choosing the central herb of your tea is the first step to creating your blend. Depending upon the purpose of your tea, be it for flavor and enjoyment or for a medicinal brew, this herb will constitute the main bulk of the recipe and should be chosen accordingly.

The additional ingredients will then be selected for their ability to support this main ingredient. Herbs can be chosen for their flavor, to complement the tea's profile or to mask the taste of the first ingredient. If it is a medicinal tea, other herbs can be added to the blend that accentuate the benefits or attributes of the original herbal base.

Additional ingredients can be added at this point to bring balance to the tea. Most commonly, herbs with citrus or floral notes are used in this manner, although any herb that supports the overall flavor of the tea is acceptable.

Steeping and Pouring

Once the artisan herbalist has gathered their equipment and selected the ingredients for their infusion, they are ready to participate in the ancient ceremony of steeping their herbal tea. This is as simple as bringing the water to a boil and then pouring it over the herbs to steep in a cup, teapot, or other heatproof container. It is not wise to use soft plastics for brewing herbal teas.

Typically, when brewing tea with dried herbs, the amount of plant material used is approximately one tablespoon per cup of tea. If the herbalist is using fresh herbs for their tea, they should plan to use three to four times as much plant material.

The length of time that the herbs are allowed to brew depends upon the intended purpose of the herbal infusion. For a simple and

delicious beverage, the tea can steep for as little as three to five minutes. For a more medicinal drink, the tea can be left to brew much longer, giving the water more time to extract the chemical constituents from the plant matter. For a significantly more potent beverage, the herbalist can even infuse their herbs in a mason jar that is covered and placed in the refrigerator to brew overnight.

Infusion or Decoction

Many herbal tea blends are crafted from leaves, stems, flowers, and buds, and sometimes from small, thinly coated seeds. With these parts of the plant, the chemical constituents can easily be extracted using the infusion methods just described. Other parts, such as bark, roots, thickly coated seeds, and woody stems, may be more difficult to break down due to their thicker cell walls; in order to properly extract the flavor and medicinal benefits from these parts, the herbalist will use a process known as *decoction*.

Simply put, decoction is the process of boiling the plant material in order to break down the cell walls, which encourages the release of the plant's chemical constituents in a form we can use. This is a longer, slower process than a simple water infusion and can take anywhere from ten minutes to an hour—or even multiple hours—depending on the particular plant in the decoction.

Enjoying Your Herbal Tea

Now that you've brewed the perfect cup of herbal tea—whether for its medicinal benefits or as a simple and delicious beverage—it's time to sit back, sip, savor, and enjoy. Consider complementing your brew with a squeeze of lemon juice, a splash of cream, or a spoonful of local, raw honey while you partake in the time-honored tradition of herbal tea.