

HERBALISM

GLOSSARY

Abortifacient: An herb that causes an abortion.

Active Constituent: A chemical molecule that can alter some biochemical process in the body. Most plants or herbs contain dozens, sometimes hundreds, of active chemicals that work together to alter functioning processes of the body, usually in a subtle way.

Adaptogen: A relatively safe and mild herb that helps the body adapt to stress or change. An adaptogen works to balance the activity of the nervous, hormonal, and immune systems.

Alkaloid: Highly active plant constituent containing nitrogen atoms, usually in a ring shaped molecule.

Allopathy: A medical practice that aims to combat disease through “conventional” means like drugs or surgery.

Alterative: An herb that slowly alters the activity of tissues or organs by enhancing nutrition, energy, and vitality.

Amendment: An addition of nutrients to soil, in which the soil is deficient, such as rock phosphate, kelp, compost, and manure.

Amino Acid: Any class of 20 molecules that are combined to form proteins in living organisms.

Analgesic: Relieves pain.

Annual: A plant that goes through a complete life cycle in one year, dying at the end.

Anodyne: A pain relieving herb.

Antibiotic: Destroys or inhibits the growth of bacteria.

Antiemetic: Counteracts or relieves nausea or vomiting.

Antihydrotic: Slows the production of excessive sweat.

Antimicrobial: Aids the body in destroying or resisting pathogens. A general term encompassing antibiotics, anti-fungals, and antivirals.

Antioxidant: A substance that inhibits oxidation and subsequent damage of important chemicals, enzymes, membranes, cells, and tissues in the body.

Antiparasitic: An herb that helps eliminate parasites.

Antiperiodic: An herb that helps relieve cyclic and intermittent diseases like malaria.

Antispasmodic: Reduces muscle spasm and tension.

Antitussive: An herb that reduces the urge to cough.

Aperient: A gentle stimulant to the digestion and a mild laxative.

Aphrodisiac: An herb that increases sexual desire.

Aquaretic: A mild herbal diuretic that doesn't deplete potassium.

Aerial Plant Parts: The aboveground parts of a plant – notably the leaves, stems, and flowers.

Aromatic: An herb high in volatile oils, often with a fragrant aroma. Medicinally, aromatics are used to as antimicrobials, to relieve flatulence, open nasal passages, and eliminate phlegm.

Aromatherapy: The use of fragrant plants or plant essence based on the theory that each different scent operates at a unique frequency. Specific aromas affect the body in different ways. These aromas, (essential oils in most cases) are inhaled or applied to the skin in small amounts using a carrier oil such as olive oil or sweet almond.

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Assimilation: the process of absorbing or incorporating substances into the body, usually nutrients or active constituents from plants.

Arteriosclerosis: The thickening, hardening, and loss of elasticity of the walls of arteries.

Atherosclerosis: The gradual build up of plaque on artery and blood vessel walls that leads to blockage.

Ayurveda: A 5,000-year- old East Indian system of healing.

Base: A substance that helps carry herbal extracts into the body, such as an oil or cream.

Biennial: A plant that grows for two years before dying.

Bile: A bitter secretion of the liver that aids digestion, chiefly by saponifying fats.

Bioflavonoids: A class of botanical secondary metabolites shown to have a wide range of biological and pharmacological activities in humans and animals.

Bionomial: The two-part scientific Latin name used to identify plants.

Bitter Tonic: An herb or blend of herbs that has a bitter taste and is used to stimulate and improve the digestive system

Botany: Plant sciences or plant biology.

Calmative: An herb that reduces nervous system hyperactivity and has a gentle calming effect on the mind, body, and emotions.

Cancer: A broad group of diseases in which cells undergo uncontrolled mitoses, sometimes with invasiveness and metastasis (migrating from the point of origin to other sites, usually by way of the lymphatic and/or blood vascular systems).

Carminative: Relieves flatulence, digestive colic, and gastric discomfort.

Carrier: An herb, herbal blend, or plant essence that helps carry active chemicals (active constituents) into the bloodstream, where they can act on the body's tissues and organs.

Cataplasm: A warm poultice or plaster placed on various parts of the body to help draw out infection and speed the healing process of boils, sores, cysts, and other lesions.

Catarrh: An inflammation of any mucous membrane, often resulting in swelling or thick mucous.

Chakra: Center point of spiritual power and energy in the body.

Cholagogue: An herb that increases the flow of bile.

Choleretic: An herb that stimulates production of bile.

Cold Conditions: Concept in TCM associated with chills, poor circulation, thirst for hot drinks, feeling cold, fatigue, sharp pain, frequent urination (yang deficiency).

Compost: A complete fertilizer made up of decaying organic material, such as grass, leaves, and manure.

Compress: A cloth soaked in herbal tea and applied to wounds, rashes, sore muscles, or sprains.

Contraindication: A certain condition for which a particular herb is not recommended.

Damp Heat: An accumulation of dampness and heat in your tissues and organs. These substances can block the proper flow of nutrients and increase risk of infections.

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Dampness: An accumulation of excess water in the tissues of your body that can interfere with healthy cellular function. Dampness is often caused by a weak digestive system that cannot properly manage the water from food and drinks.

Decoction: A tea preparation for hardier plant material such as roots and bark, involving simmering the herb in water from 20 – 45 minutes or longer.

Demulcent: A mucilaginous herb that soothes irritated or inflamed tissue or mucous membranes.

Diaphoretic: An herb that promotes perspiration.

Dioscorides: A Greek physician of the first century A.D. His *De Materia Medica* was the leading text on pharmacology for sixteen centuries. The treatise details the properties of more than six hundred medicinally valuable plants and animal products.

Digestant: An herb that benefits the process of digestion.

Digestive: An herb that strengthens or supports good digestive function.

Doctrine of Signatures: A theory that the appearance and/or habitat of a plant indicates its inherent medicinal properties.

Dosha: Ayurvedic term to describe three bioenergies (vata, pitta, kapha) that circulate in the body and contribute to physical and emotional constitutional tendencies. Imbalance of the doshas contributes to disease.

Double-Ought (00) Capsule: A gelatin capsule or vegetable fiber capsule that holds about a half gram of powdered herb or herb extract.

Eclectic: System of herbal medicine developed in the U.S. in the 19th century. The Eclectics chose from Native American traditions as well as Europeans, choosing whatever they could find to benefit patients.

Electuary: An herbal treatment made from adding powdered herbs to honey until a thick paste is formed.

Elixir: A liquid herbal extract that contains alcohol and a sweet base to render it more pleasant to drink.

Emollient: An herb applied externally to soften and soothe skin.

Emmenagogue: A plant that stimulates menstruation.

Empirical Science: A source of knowledge acquired by observation or experimentation.

Enzymes: Any of various organic proteins secreted by the body that act as catalysts in inducing chemical changes in other substances, particularly in digestion. Enzymes are the communication particles of the body. They carry and sometimes are the nutrients traveling from one gland or organ to another. They are catalysts and not only allow intercommunications but also facilitate absorption.

Epsom Salts: Hydrated magnesium sulfate.

Essential Oil: An extremely light and volatile concentrated oil extracted from aromatic plants. These oils are used in aromatherapy and produced by distillation or chemical extraction. **Febrifuge:** An herb that reduces fever.

Flower Essence Therapy: Flower essences are specially prepared liquids used to improve psychological well-being through vibrational resonance. The treatment is not a biochemical one because flower essences contain little to no chemicals; instead treatment uses the flower's energetic or vibrational pattern.

Free Radicals: Unpaired oxygen molecules that cause cellular damage by stealing molecules from healthy cells. Many scientists believe that free radicals are a major cause of tissue degeneration and hardening of arteries as aging occurs.

Galactagogue: An herb that increases the flow of breast milk.

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Galenical: A traditional system of Western medicine using natural instead of synthetic compounds.

Glycerite: Liquid extract that contains glycerin rather than alcohol.

Glycoside: A glycoside is a compound that is created when a sugar binds to a non-sugar molecule.

Hepatic: An herb that affects the liver.

Herbaceous: A type of plant with little or no woody tissue, usually living a single season.

Herbal: A book of herb descriptions, recipes, and remedies.

Homeopathy: Using highly diluted solutions of herbs, minerals, and some animal products to stimulate the healing process of the body.

Homeostasis: The tendency of the internal environment of the body to remain constant in spite of varying external conditions.

Hot Conditions: A concept in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) associated with fevers, increased metabolic rate, thirst for cold drinks, increased heat sensitivity, irritability, burning pains, thick phlegm (yin deficiency).

Humors: Fluids in the system of humorism: black bile, yellow bile, phlegm, and blood.

Hypotensive: An herb that helps lower blood pressure.

Infusion: A preparation of plant parts steeped into a carrier such as water or oil.

Immuno-stimulant: Enhances and increases the body's immune mechanism.

Inhalant: A remedy or drug that is breathed in through the nose or mouth.

Jing: The essence of all life in the body, the life force that governs all creativity and reproduction.

Kapha: Ayurvedic constitution or dosha associated with dampness and phlegm. Kapha qualities are heavy, cold, oily, slow, slimy, dense, soft, static and sweet. Kapha is the heaviest of the doshas and is portrayed by yellow.

Light Decoctions: Simmering herbs in water for 5 minutes, then steeping the brew in a covered pan for 15-30 minutes. This process extracts the active constituents from thicker leaves and other moderately dense herb parts, like seeds.

Liniment: A medicinal liquid rubbed into the skin as a local anesthetic or counter-irritant. Liniments typically have a lesser viscosity than balms and lotions.

Macerating: Soaking or steeping herbs in alcohol, oil or water. The actual preparation of the herbs soaking in liquid is called a maceration.

Marc: The waste herb material remaining after the tincture making process.

Materia Medica: A body of collected knowledge and description of remedies suggested in herbal therapy.

Menstruum: The solvent blend used to make a liquid extract, usually alcohol and water.

Meridian: In Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), a conduit that can be compared to an imaginary line (or channel) linking points on the body's surface with internal organs in which qi (pronounced chi) flows. TCM defines 14 main meridians and eight extra meridians. These designated surface points are used in acupuncture.

Microbe: A minute living organism, especially pathogenic bacteria.

Mother Tincture: In homeopathy or flower remedies, the source remedy is diluted to make the therapeutic dosages.

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Moxibustion: Burning a compacted stick of mugwort herb over areas of the skin to stimulate energy flow and facilitate healing. Moxibustion, also called moxa, is used by practitioners of TCM to treat arthritis, pain, and diseases involving hormone and immune weakness.

Naturalized: A plant that is originally from a foreign continent and escapes from cultivation, often wandering far and wide. Plantain, for example is originally from Europe, but is now a common “weed” in North America and on other continents.

Nervine: An herb that affects the nervous system: may be stimulating, sedating, or relaxing.

Nostrum: A favorite but untested and often ineffective remedy; a tonic or patent medicine. Nostrum often used to mean a cure-all.

Ointment: A semi-solid herbal preparation for external use that is often made up of olive oil, beeswax, and herbs.

Oleo Gum Resin: A natural exudation from trees and plants that consists mainly of essential oil, gum, and resin.

Pathogenic Heat: A disease-causing condition in the body that may occur after extended periods of stress and the consumption of caffeine and alcohol. Pathogenic, or disease promoting, heat often underlies infections like vaginal yeast infections, bladder infections, and acne. This condition is treated by herbalists with cooling herbs.

Percolation: The process of removing the active constituents from herb powders that are packed into a large funnel by allowing a menstruum (often alcohol or water) to slowly flow through the herbs. The menstruum flow is controlled at the bottom of the funnel stem with a valve so that only a few drops fall each minute.

Perennial: A plant that lives for more than two years. The aerial parts of perennial plants may die back at the end of the growing season but the roots often endure for many years.

Phenols aka Phenolics: Chemical compounds found naturally in plants that consist of a hydroxyl group bonded directly to an aromatic hydrocarbon group.

Physiomedicalism: A system of herbal medicine developed in the U. S. in the 19th century.

Phytochemical: A biologically active substance in plants (phyto) responsible for giving them their characteristics, such as color, flavor, and natural disease resistance. Our everyday food contains millions of phytochemicals including bioflavonoids, carotenoids, indoles, isoflavones, phytoestrogens, phytosterols, phenols, etc.

Phytoestrogen: Natural estrogens that occur in plants.

Pitta: An Ayurvedic dosha associated with fire or bile. Pitta qualities are light, hot, oily, sharp, liquid, sour, and pungent. Portrayed by the color red.

Pliny the Elder: (A.D. 23-79) Author of the Natural History, a work comprised of thirty seven volumes; books XX to XXXII deal with medicines derived from plants and from the humans and other animals.

Placebo: A pill or compound that is similar in appearance to an agent being tested in a clinical trial but has no direct physiological effect. A placebo is harmless and has no treatment value.

Placebo Response: When a person experiences either perceived healing, improvement of symptoms, or actual healing from a substance or experience that is a placebo. The improvement is generated from the psychological effect of taking the treatment or undergoing the experience, rather than any inherent healing ability of the treatment itself.

Poultice: A mass of fresh, ground-up herbs applied wet to an area of the body in order to encourage healing. A fresh plantain poultice is used to help reduce the inflammation and pain of cuts, stings, bites, and burns.

Prana: The vital energy that runs through our bodies according to Ayurvedic medicine. It is the vital life force.

Propagation: The process of creating a new plant from a part of a mother plant. New plants can be rooted from stems or shoots, or by dividing root masses.

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Qi: This is the body's vital force in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Qi is the essential energy of the universe which is fundamental to all elements of life.

Qi Ni: Rebellious qi, which moves in the wrong direction.

Qi Xian: Sinking qi, which is too deficient to perform its holding function.

Qi Zhi: Stagnant qi that is sluggish and not moving efficiently.

Refrigerant: A medical term referring to plants that cool the blood and reduce fever.

Resin: A semi-solid plant substance with antibacterial properties that is soluble in alcohol, but not in water. Amber and pine pitch are examples.

Restorative: An herb that restores balance and strength to the body and its systems.

Rhizome: An underground stem from which roots and shoots grow. The rhizomes of ginger, turmeric, and valerian are all collected for medicine.

Rubifacient: Stimulates blood flow to the skin, causing local redness.

Saponins: Active plant constituents that produce a soap-like lather in water.

Salve: A medicinal preparation made from an herb, such as calendula, or St. John's wort, soaked in vegetable oil and combined with beeswax for application to your skin.

Sialogogue: An herb that increase the secretion of saliva.

Simple: A single herb used on its own.

Single-ought Capsule: A small gelatin or vegetable-based capsule that holds about one-third of a gram (300 mg) of an herb powder or extract.

Solvent: A liquid capable of dissolving and removing chemicals from plants and carrying them in a liquid solution, like dissolving salt in water to form a salty solution.

Spp.: A botanical term that is short for species, signifying any one of a number of species in a plant group called a genus. For instance, instead of writing out all the species of the genus Valeriana, the short hand is written as Valeriana spp.

Standardized Extract: A type of herbal extract in which a known chemical that is specific to each herb is identified and adjusted to a specified level to make a finished standardized extract. The potency of that compound (if it is known to have a biological activity) or group of compounds is then listed guaranteed minimum on the label. Herbalists feel those highly purified standardized extracts, like ginkgo 24 percent, are not as nature intended and perhaps going too far towards pharmaceutical drugs. Instead herbalists prefer whole plant extracts, in which very little is removed from the original herb during the extraction process, except inert (non-active) cellulose and starch. This discussion between herbal pharmacy companies, scientists, and herbalists is ongoing, but both approaches have their benefits.

Systemic: Affecting the entire body.

Taproot: A somewhat straight tapering root that grows vertically downward. It forms a center from which other roots sprout laterally.

Tannin: An active plant constituent that combines with proteins; originally derived from plants used for tanning leather; astringent.

Terpene: Complex active plant constituents with a carbon ring structure, generally highly aromatic and included in essential oils.

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Tincture: A concentrated herbal extract made by soaking ground up herbs in solvents like alcohol and water and then pressing the liquid out.

Tonic: Restoring, nourishing and supporting for the whole body.

Taxonomy: Is the science of classifying living organisms by assigning each organism to a category depending on the degree of similarities or relatedness to another. These similarities may be present in structure, biochemical, or physiological functions, evolutionary history, and development. Many characteristics are used to make the classification determination such as anatomy, biochemistry, embryology, molecular biology, and behavior. The taxonomic system still used today was introduced by Carolus Linneaus, a Swedish botanist, in 1753. He conceived of the living world as sets and subsets of organisms which could be classified in a seven-tier tree style hierarchy according to their degree of physical similarity.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM): An ancient system of holistic medicine and healing that developed over five thousand years in China.

Tuber: A swollen part of an underground plant stem of one year's duration, capable of new growth.

Variety: A level of classification in the plant kingdom below species and subspecies noting minor differences within a species, such as variations in flower color; designated following the species and the subspecies name by the abbreviation var.

Vata: An Ayurvedic dosha associated with wind or air. Vata qualities are light, cold, dry, rough, subtle, mobile, clear, dispersing, erratic, and astringent. Portrayed by the color blue.

Vibrational Medicine: Any medicine which treats the body on a vibrational or "energetic" level such as homeopathy or flower essence therapy, based on the theory that we are all dense bodies of energy, and by taking substances that adjust that energy, or the rate at which our energy fields vibrate, we can effect a cure.

Vulnerary: Heals wounds.

Wei Qi: Concept in Chinese Medicine of defense energy, comparable to the immune system.

Whorled: the leaves of this type of plant form the spokes of a wheel around one point on a stem. Cleavers is a good example.

Wildcrafting: Harvesting uncultivated herbs from the wild. Wildcrafting is done in woods, yards, waste-lots, fields, and pastures. Most herbalists feel that wildcrafting also implies harvesting the herbs with reverence and ecological awareness.

Yang: Aspect of being equated with masculine energy: dry, hot, ascending, exterior.

Yin: Aspect of being equated with feminine energy: damp, cold, descending, interior.

