

UNIT 2, LESSON 2:

MAKING BITTERS VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

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So, welcome. We've talked a lot about bitters, but I'd like to just show you really quick some of the steps. It's so easy. If you know how to make a tincture, you can make your own digestive bitters. It's really, really straightforward.

For example, there's a couple ways of doing it. One way, you could start with some linden flowers (*Tilia* spp.) for example. And what I have here are some flowers of *Centaurea*, right? *Centaurea* is actually really, really bitter stuff and if you don't want to use a root, makes a good sort of classic, basic bitter.

So, the way you can, you know, make a bitter blend, if you want to just use herbs straight up, is by putting them together in an empty tincture jar, just like you would to make your own tincture. You can dry them and then crush or chop them and put them right into the jar.

Usually, the bitter component will be a relatively small amount, so I don't want the *Centaurea* to be more than just about a quarter of the jar.

Then you can fill the jar up with whatever personality herbs you might like. You know, those flavor-enhancing ones or the ones that might have a medicinal effect that you're after. In this particular case, I'm going to use some of the linden blossoms. This is from *Tilia tomentosa*, so many of them grow here around Burlington and they're one of my most favorite, fantastic aromatic herbs to support cardiovascular and nervous system health.

So, you want to crush them a little bit to kind of break those trichomes, right? Those aromatic herbs need to have a little crushing, even if they're dry. And where we were about 25% of the blend in the form of the bitter, I'm going to make the other 75 in this case linden. And this is just very, very simple infusion together in a jar.

And so, you'll take the herbs and you put them together and then you apply the menstruum, or the solvent. And in this case, we're dealing with about an 8-ounce jar, so I'm going to use 50% pure grain alcohol and 50% water to make a sort of 100-proof solvent. You can certainly use 100-proof vodka as well.

This is about 4 ounces of ethanol and with the simplers method, it's really nice because the complete accuracy of our measurements isn't crucial. We want to make sure that we have at least 30% alcohol for shelf stability, but 50% is a good middle of the road.

And then you know this, it's simple, just pour the alcohol onto the herbs, right? And leave them there to steep for three to four weeks, typically, okay? So, we'll set that aside and let that steep three to four weeks and then we'll have like a very simple, granted, you know, very down and dirty, but it's going to be an effective bitter with a lovely linden floral aromatic profile to it.

When this is strained, we'll want to mix it with just a little bit of honey or something again to add that sweet element to it and round out the flavor overall.

So, you know, this is what linden looks like after having steeped for about three or four weeks. So, now we can take it and we can just strain it right out. All of the goodness and aromatic qualities of that plant have gone into this fluid.

But, what I like to do when I make my bitters is not necessarily blend them all together in the same jar. I like to try and extract each herb individually. And this is because different chemistry extracts at different percentages of alcohol more effectively. It's a bit more advanced than your simpler method of tincture making, but a lot of your bitters can extract at 40% ethanol or about 80-proof, but many of your aromatics want something higher, something around 150-proof, believe it or not, or like 75% alcohol. That higher percentage of ethanol allows for greater extraction of the volatile oils, which are really the zing and the personality of your bitters. So, if you have the luxury of having grain alcohol and being able to alter the percentages of alcohol, save the high percentages of alcohol for your aromatic personality plants and use those 30, 40% ethanol vodkas for your bitter roots. And you'll find that there's a lot more pop and zing and personality and flavor from those aromatic plants that you've extracted up at the 70, 75% alcohol range.

So, that's what I did with this linden, so it's ready to strain now and I would love to really blend it with a couple of other ingredients to make a final bitter. So, I have as my sort of foundational bitters a couple of different choices. We have dandelion and you can see that dandelion is actually a pretty starchy tincture, too, especially when it's harvested in the fall. That's where we get all that milky quality. So, dandelion, while bitter, also has a lot of those starches we were talking about being important for rounding things out. So, we could use dandelion.

But one of the herbs that I was really interested in trying for a digestive bitters blend is actually black walnut hull. So, these are fresh *Juglans nigra*, or black walnut hulls, that actually come from the trees, you know, right back there. You can see these ones with the divided leaves and they let out black walnuts every fall. A fantastic bitter, actually, and a fragrant bitter because of the sort of interesting citrusy, walnutty quality. So, it's bitter, it's somewhat nutty, and it's also super fragrant.

So, I wanted to use this as the base. We want to make about 20% of this into our sort of digestive bitters blend.

And then other things that I think would blend well with it are certainly a little bit of the linden, which will add a floral element and liven up the black walnut even more.

And then we could either think about going in a citrus direction with orange peel tincture or we could think about going in a more clove direction with holy basil tincture. And all of those I think will blend well with the slight citrusy notes of the black walnut, the bitterness and fragrant bitterness of the black walnut, okay? And those floral notes of the linden.

So, what I think I'm going to do is strain out the black walnut tincture and again, aim for about 20-30% of the formula with this. So, let's see what we can do. Get about 4 ounces. Brown, green, rich, and intense. Okay.

Next, I'm going to strain out some of the linden tincture. And again, linden is a little gentler and in order for its flavor to really come through, you know, if black walnut is 30% of the formula, we're going to need the linden to be at least 50% of the formula. Okay? So, I'm going to strain this out.

So, a totally different color from the linden, right? None of that darkness and blackness that comes from the bitter components that are found in the black walnut. And if necessary, you can press or squeeze the herb a little bit.

There we are. And now, you know, we've got a little room to play with. I'd like to complement the linden's flavor, either with a little citrus from the orange peel, or with a little clove from the tulsii. You could put both in there, but I'm really feeling that the floral and warming quality of the tulsii is probably going to be the best marriage with the floral nature of the linden and that light fragrant quality of the black walnut as the bitter.

So, that's what I'm going to use now, but not nearly as much as the linden because I don't want to overwhelm it. I want that subtle floral quality of the linden to still be able to emerge.

So, in it goes. Just fill this right up to 10 ounces total. There we go.

So, the last component now is to add just a little bit of honey. We don't need a ton of honey, we just want it to round out the overall flavor, so this, I am lucky enough to have some basswood honey. Basswood is *Tilia americana*, so a close cousin to the *Tilia europaea*, the linden that we used for tincture from my friend, Sarah's hives. Really amazing, fragrant, floral stuff, so I think it's going to be the perfect sweetener for this particular blend.

We don't need a lot and this is something you can do to taste, but typically, I've seen that a couple of teaspoons is more than adequate, so we'll get a nice amount right here. It represents close to a couple of teaspoons and we'll add that right into the mix.

Now, this needs to get stirred well to fully incorporate the honey, but honey dissolves pretty nicely in tinctures usually, although it can take a little bit of time. There we go.

This also is a great step for sort of blending everything up.

And so, the last step now would be to blend this into bottles. And my feeling is that I would probably put this in a big stock bottle and dispense it as needed, but if you have 1 ounce bottles, you can just pour those into the 1 ounce dropper bottles. It's a great and convenient way to dose and dispense your bitters.

Before I do that, I just have to have a little taste.

Wow, that's good. The linden is the dominant flavor note, but it's grounded by this very interesting, though subtle, bitterness from the black walnut that takes that aromaticity and reinforces it with something that's difficult to describe, but is definitely fragrant.

And then because we didn't overwhelm with the tulsi, we're only getting a slight hint of that basil-bubblegum-clove at the end. Really a great bitters blend that will certainly help with digestive complaints, but also has that aromatic uplifting quality for the spirit.