

RX IN THE GARDEN: Oregano

Lainey Mahaffey

For those inquiring minds that would like to know more about medicinal herbs that can be grown at home for the benefit of health and pocketbook, read on! The topic of today's article is oregano. It's not just for pizza anymore.

This simple and well-known herb is rich in iron, manganese, and vitamin K, which means it is good for building blood and bones! Used externally it is good for a variety of skin conditions, including acne and dandruff. Taken internally, it is an excellent source of antioxidants, which help protect your cells from free radicals and boosts your immune system. It is very helpful with respiratory, digestive, and urinary issues. One research team even found it helpful in fighting breast cancer by actually causing the cancer cells to die.

Oregano is also a strong antibacterial/antimicrobial. Studies have shown it can kill MRSA – which is one of those bugs that is becoming resistant to pharmaceutical antibiotics. Research also shows that it kills food pathogens that cause food poisoning. So, it really is powerful and not to be dismissed out of hand. Oil of Oregano is one of the first herbs I reach for when I feel any kind of sickness trying to take hold in my body.

With such a lengthy list of “super-powers”, it is no wonder that an ounce can set you back anywhere from \$15-30. But what if you could make your own? You can. Here is a quick how-to:

Gather fresh oregano in a zip lock bag and begin crushing the leaves inside the bag (fingers on the outside of the bag) to release the oils. (Of course you can use a mortar and pestle instead of the ziplock bag if you have one). Keep crushing. Once you deem the leaves are crushed enough (as they are crushed and bruised, they turn darker from the oil being released), pour some olive oil into the zip lock bag, gently swishing it around to gather up all of the medicinal goodness. Next pour the oil and the bruised oregano into a crock pot that has been warmed up on high and then turned to low. Keep adding crushed oregano leaves, but make sure there is a layer of olive oil completely covering the leaves. For a good, strong oil, use a 1:1 ratio. It is best to let it sit in the crock pot for awhile (overnight if possible) so the oil absorbs more of the oregano. Stir it occasionally. Wipe down any moisture from the sides and lid of the crock pot. Finally strain or use cheesecloth to separate the oil from the crushed leaves. Pour into bottles and keep handy! If you are like me, you’ll want to label the bottle and date it. Otherwise, I end up with all kinds of bottles and a herbal guessing game.

If you don't have any fresh oregano, you can use dried oregano. But you'll need to let it steep longer – preferably for a month. Some experts contend that for best results, prepare on the new moon and let it steep until the full moon.

There you go, with just a little effort, you've made a very powerful aid to your health. It should taste quite strong – in fact, for the uninitiated, expect it to burn. Your taste buds will not question its ability to annihilate all germs within reach. You'll want to measure the dosage with an eyedropper. If you are fighting an infection, I suggest you make fresh garlic bread (remember the article extolling the powers of garlic?) and add a dropperful of oil of oregano to each slice of bread! It is potent. Or you can attempt to disguise the flavor a bit by slugging it down in a shot-glass of grape juice. One could say it is an acquired taste. However, you can take great comfort in knowing that this type of “antibiotic” only wipes out the bad germs, leaving the good intestinal bacteria intact to do their job. Amazing, isn't it?

So, plant some oregano – your pizza and your health will thank you.

Lainey Mahaffey is amazed and astounded to live in Flagstaff as an adult. She always thought it magical and delightful as a child. She is currently enrolled in the Master Gardener's class and wants to conquer the challenges of gardening in Flagstaff.

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