

Herbal Actions & Uses

By [Machelle Singleton-Littlefield](#) on Saturday, January 10, 2015 at 9:04am

Herbs are categorized by the effects they have on the body. The best way to learn to use herbs effectively is to understand the different therapeutic actions, and know the best herbs to use in each category. For each category, I have included a list of herbs, and marked my favorites in **GREEN** (more detailed info on pages 57-91 of green Butterfly Herbal book) .**This is meant as a guide to start your research. Once you identify which categories you should be working in, and have an idea of which herbs would be good, do a little more research on the specific herbs and categories to fine tune your choices. That's why a good herbal book is crucial. Eventually, you will have favorites in each category that you know and love. The advantage to using ready made formulas is that all the leg work has been done for you, and the formula contains herbs from several different categories!**

Adaptogen (immune regulator, stress response): Help the body adapt to stresses, and moderate the stress response. Helps keep blood sugar levels even and stimulates the liver to break down glycogen, increases the cells ability to absorb glucose; affects stress response in the pituitary and adrenal glands, moderates stress hormones, helps with cognitive function in times of stress. Does not block stress hormones, but does help modulate them and your response to them. Helps put the body into a state of heightened resistance in order to better resist stress and adapt to extraordinary challenges. Adaptogenic herbs also improve and regulate immune function. **When to use:** best used as a normalizer; I'd use when someone is recovering from a time of emotional or physical duress, or when they are gearing up for something they know is going to be a big stressor. When people are under stress for long periods of time, they can start to suffer from anxiety, depression, digestive issues, and insomnia, among other things. I would use adaptogenic herbs as a foundational part of therapy to recover from long term stress, or in autoimmune cases where immune function needs to be regulated and normalized, or when you want to stimulate and strengthen immune function over time. Also look at nervines to heal long term effects of prolonged stress; anxiety, insomnia, panic attacks

Astragalus-one of best researched immune stimulants. Good for chemo/radiation weakened immune systems; **Ashwagandha, Siberian Ginseng**, Gotu Kola, Reishi mushrooms, Schizandra, Shiitake, Suma, panax ginseng.

Alterative: (purifiers, improve organ function, *foundational*) Sometimes referred to as blood purifiers. Help organs maintain proper function. Should be the foundation of any long term herbal therapy. Can be preliminary to other protocols; often times all that is needed

Alfalfa, Burdock, nettles, Black Cohosh, Bloodroot, Blue Flag, Blue Violet, Boneset, Buckthorn, **Cleavers, Echinacea**, Fringetree, Golden Seal, Gotu Kola, Kelp, Licorice, **Oregon Grape**, Pau d'Arco, Pipsissewa, Poke Root, Prickly Ash, **Red Clover**, Sarsaparilla, Sheep Sorrel, Stillingia, Wahoo, Wild Indigo, **Yarrow, Yellow Dock, marshmallow, comfrey, uva ursi**.

Analgesic/Anodyne: (pain, internal and external) Analgesics or Anodynes are herbs that reduce pain. Most of these are also antispasmodic and nervines. Can be used internally, and externally, as a pack or liniment (herb soaked in oil or alcohol). I often use internally and externally simultaneously. They are non-narcotic, do not cause addiction, and help healing without harmful side effects. Although very effective, these are not as powerful as pharmaceutical painkillers. For severe trauma or surgical pain, you may need a prescription pain killer until the pain becomes more manageable, then you can manage it herbally. Lots of different mechanisms, so combining herbs in this category often yields best results.

[the young green bark of willow, poplar, aspen, birch](reduces pain and fever, anti inflammatory; precursor to aspirin), Spirea, clematis (esp for headaches, cluster headaches) Skullcap (esp nerve pain) black cohosh (good for deep, throbbing pain), Celandine, Chamomile, Hops, Passion Flower, Reishi, Valerian root (very good for nerve pain), Venus' Flytrap. Feverfew (esp for headaches, migraines) Chamomile (nerves)

Dental pain: yarrow root, clove essential oil or tincture (topical) willow bark internally for inflammation

Dental abscess: swish with equal parts calendula, cleavers, echinacea (works every time!) Also use antibiotic herbs internally

Anthelmintic: (worms) Herbs that work against parasitic worms which may be present in the digestive system. Works by varying modes of action, therefore may be good to combine a few of these in difficult cases. Often times not more effective than pharmaceuticals

Black Walnut hull, Helonias, Quassia, Sheep Sorrel, white sagebrush/Wormwood, **elecampane, pumpkin seed** (especially good for dogs, just sprinkle it over their food) , tansey, rue, **hyssop**, mullein (especially good for pinworms in small intestine)

Antibacterial: (broad spectrum antibiotic) Herbs with properties that can inhibit bacterial growth. Use for any suspected bacterial infection, or as a wound wash to keep infection out. If using long term, use with fermented foods and probiotics to maintain gut health.

Oregon grape (my favorite for bladder infections), barberry, chamomile, chaparral, Blessed Thistle, Cloves, **Echinacea (excellent, but mild, take often; also excellent immune stimulator)**, Kelp, Licorice, **Lomatium (also excellent anti-viral)**, Osha, Pau d'Arco, Reishi, St. John's Wort, Usnea, **calendula (a favorite, internal or external), gumweed (excellent for UTI's, and respiratory infections, also anti-cataral), garlic, yarrow, uva ursi (another favorite for bladder infections), wormwood, cayenne (excellent as part of a blend, I love it for respiratory infections), st johns wort, elecampane (excellent for respiratory infections, also an expectorant), peppermint, plantain, usnea, gentian**

Antiviral: st johns wort, echinacea (much better as an antibacterial, but a good antiviral, and excellent immune stimulator), lemon balm (great for herpes virus), **elder berry or elder flower (influenza, colds; elderberry an excellent immune stimulator)**, licorice, garlic, **olive leaf**, chaparral, lemon balm (kills cold sore virus on contact), **grape leaf, lomatium**

****when I'm treating a viral or bacterial infection, I like to use herbal blends, for their broad spectrum activity. RC or IF (recipe in green butterfly book) are my very, very favorite formulas. But if I didn't have a formula on hand, I'd use whatever I had from these lists!!**

Antibilious: Herbs that help the body to remove excess bile. Barberry, Dandelion, Fringetree, Golden Seal, Wild Yam, Wormwood.

Anticatarrhal:(excess mucous) Herbs that help the body reduce excess mucous and phlegm. Great for getting gunk out of the lungs, but also of value with excess mucous in urinary tract (in the case of a UTI, for example), or in digestive system. If the mucous is really deep in the lungs, you will need an expectorant. **Cayenne**, hyssop, **Elecampane**, Peppermint, Sage, Goldenrod, **Elder**, Irish moss, **Mullein**, **Echinacea**, **Elderberry**, **Elder flower**, Golden Seal, **Marshmallow Root**, **Oregon Grape**, Poke Root, **Uva Ursi**, Wild Indigo, **Yarrow**.

Antifungal: use internally and/or topically to fight fungal infections

Tea tree essential oil (external), garlic, myrrh, **oregon grape**, **sage**, fireweed, white sage/wormwood, black walnut hull, chaparral, **sagebrush**, **usnea**,

Antiemetic: (nausea/vomiting) Herbs that reduce the feeling of nausea and can help to relieve or prevent vomiting. Barberry, Cloves, Fennel, Oregon Grape.

Anti-inflammatory: These herbs help the body to combat inflammation. As a result, they usually reduce pain as well. Ashwagandha, Blue Violet, **Calendula**, Cat's Claw, Chamomile, Cleavers, Devil's Claw, Licorice, Lomatium, Reishi, St. John's Wort, Wild Yam, yarrow, Wormwood, **gumweed**, plantain, **mallow**, **chickweed**, **comfrey**.

Antilithic (stones): Herbs that prevent the formation or help remove stones or gravel in the urinary tract or gallbladder.

Urinary: **gravel root**, **parsley root**, cleavers, dandelion, Sheep Sorrel, **Uva Ursi**, **juniper**

Gallstone: wild cherry bark, oregon grape, cascara sagrada, **turmeric**

Always use with lots of marshmallow (demulcent) to soothe and heal inflamed tissues, and keep things from drying out. For stones, I always use parsley root and gravel root or stone root, with marshmallow. Add turmeric if it is a gall stone.

Antimicrobial: Herbs that can help the body destroy or resist pathogenic micro-organisms. Calendula, Cat's Claw, Cloves, Echinacea, Licorice, Chinese Lovage, St. John's Wort, Usnea, Uva Ursi, Wild Indigo, Wormwood.

Antineoplastic: Having the specific action of inhibiting and combating tumor development. Blue Violet, Cleavers, Red Clover, Reishi, Sheep Sorrel, Shiitake, Venus' Flytrap.

Antioxidant: An antioxidant is a substance capable of eliminating hydroxyl free radicals. Cat's Claw, Ginger, Ginkgo, Kelp, Schizandra.

Antirheumatic (joint pain, arthritis) Herbs used to relieve discomfort of arthritis or protect against rheumatism. Many of these plants have no direct action on the musculo-skeletal system, but decrease joint pain by some other mechanism. When you have herbs in a particular category that work by different mechanism, you may get better results by mixing 2 or 3 herbs together. **Burdock (excretory function)**, Angelica, uva Ursi (excretory function), **arnica (NOT internally; topical for bruises, inflammation)**, **cayenne (topical in salve or lotion; warms joint, increases circulation)**, Juniper, nettle (excretory function), **Ginger (topical; use with cayenne in a salve or lotion, flushes by increasing circulation)**, Blue Cohosh, Cat's Claw, Celery, Dandelion, Kelp, Poke Root, Sarsaparilla, Wild Yam.

Antiseptic: Herbs that can prevent, resist and counteract putrefaction. Black Walnut, Bloodroot, Chamomile, Cloves, Echinacea, Hops, Red Clover, Sheep Sorrel, Uva Ursi, Wild Indigo, Yarrow.

Antispasmodic (anywhere there is spasm or cramping) These herbs are great for diarrhea, as well as dilating and relaxing smooth muscle in an asthma attack. Use for muscle cramps/spasms, uterine cramps, intestinal cramps or bronchial constriction...anywhere that cramping, spasming muscles are the problem. Angelica (angelica seed is my favorite diarrhea remedy. I never need more than one dropperful), Black Cohosh, Baneberry, or St John's Wort (either one is particularly good for pain with spasms and cramps), Bloodroot, Blue Cohosh, Boneset, Celandine, Chamomile, Cramp Bark, Culver's Root, Fennel, Helonias, Licorice, lobelia (GREAT) Cramp bark (great for muscle or back pain, great at reducing bronchial spasms in a

cough syrup), Motherwort, Passion Flower, Red Clover, Skullcap, Stillingia, Valerian, Wild Yam, Wild Cherry bark (also a great expectorant).

Aphrodisiac: Herb used to stimulate sexual passion. Damiana, Muira Puama, Schizandra, Suma, Yohimbe.

Aromatic: Herbs that have a strong and often pleasant odor and can stimulate the digestive juices. Angelica, Celery, Chamomile, Cloves, Fennel, Ginger, Valerian.

Astringent: Astringents contract tissue and can reduce secretions and discharges. Blessed Thistle, Calendula, Cleavers, Cramp Bark, Golden Seal, Hops, Muira Puama, Pipsissewa, Red Root, Sheep Sorrel, Slippery Elm, Squawvine, Stillingia, St. John's Wort, Suma, Turkish Rhubarb, Uva Ursi, Yarrow, Yellow Dock.

Bitter: Herbs that taste bitter act as stimulating tonics for the digestive system. Barberry, Blessed Thistle, Buckthorn, Burdock, Cascara Sagrada, Chamomile, Golden Seal, Osha, Quassia, Wormwood.

Cardiac Tonic: Cardiac tonics are herbs that act beneficially on the heart. Cat's Claw, Hawthorn, Kelp, Motherwort, Reishi.

Carminative: Carminatives are rich in volatile oils and expel gas from the stomach and bowels. Angelica, Celery, Chamomile, Cloves, Fennel, Ginger, Hops, Prickly Ash, Sheep Sorrel, Valerian, Wormwood.

Cathartic: In large doses cathartics purge the bowels and stimulate glandular secretions.

Barberry, Bloodroot, Blue Flag, Buckthorn, Cascara Sagrada, Celandine, Culver's Root, Turkish Rhubarb.

Cholagogue: Herbs that stimulate the release and secretion of bile from the gall bladder. They also have a laxative effect on the digestive system. Barberry, Blue Flag, Calendula, Celandine, Culver's Root, Dandelion, Fringetree, Golden Seal, Milk Thistle, Oregon Grape, Wahoo, Wild Yam, Yellow Dock.

Deep Immune Activator: Immuno-modulators that have a beneficial effect on the cellular foundations of the human immune response. Astragalus, Cat's Claw, Ligustrum, Chinese Lovage, Reishi, Schizandra, Shiitake, St. John's Wort, Venus' Flytrap.

Demulcent: Herbs that are usually rich in mucilage and can soothe and protect damaged or inflamed tissue. Fenugreek, Licorice, Marshmallow Root, Slippery Elm.

Depurative: Depuratives are herbs that remove impurities and cleanse the blood. Black Walnut, Blessed Thistle, Blue Flag, Blue Violet, Buckthorn, Burdock, Culver's Root, Dandelion, Elderberry, Gotu Kola, Oregon Grape, Pau d'Arco, Red Clover, Sarsaparilla, Stillingia, Watercress, Yarrow, Yellow Dock.

Diaphoretic: These herbs will aid the skin in the elimination of toxins through perspiration. Angelica, Blessed Thistle, Black Cohosh, Boneset, Calendula, Celandine, Chamomile, Culver's Root, Elderberry, Fennel, Ginger, Osha, Prickly Ash, Sarsaparilla, Stillingia, Yarrow.

Diuretic: Herbs that increase the flow of urine and help in the removal of toxins from the system. Angelica, Astragalus, Blue Flag, Blue Violet, Buckthorn, Burdock, Celery, Cleavers, Dandelion, Fringetree, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Helonias, Marshmallow Root, Pipsissewa, Sarsaparilla, Saw Palmetto, Sheep Sorrel, Squawvine, Uva Ursi, Wahoo, Yarrow.

Emetic: Emetics are herbs that cause vomiting when taken in specific doses (generally high doses). Bloodroot, Helonias, Poke Root.

Emmenagogue: Herbs that stimulate and normalize the menstrual flow. Black Cohosh, Blessed Thistle, Blue Cohosh, Calendula, Chamomile, Cramp Bark, Fenugreek, Ginger, Golden Seal, Helonias, Motherwort, Squawvine, St. John's Wort, Valerian, Vitex, Wormwood, Yarrow.

Expectorant: Herbs that assist the body in expelling excess mucous from the respiratory system. Angelica, Bloodroot, Blue Violet, Fennel, Fenugreek, Golden Seal, Licorice, Marshmallow Root, Osha, Red Clover, Red Root, Reishi, Stillingia, Usnea, Slippery elm

Febrifuge: (Fever Reducer) Also called antipyretics. Febrifuges help the body to bring down a fever. These are often good for pain too. These herbs do not override the immune response like Aspirin or ibuprofen does, but works with the immune system to keep the fever at an optimal level for healing. If the fever is accompanied by chills, I would use warming herbs (diaphoretic or sudorific) instead. If the person is very hot, but not sweating, I'd also use sudorific or diaphoretic herbs, as they induce a healing sweat. "A wet fever heals, a dry fever kills"

My favorite cooling **essential oils** are **peppermint, tea tree and/or eucalyptus**. Diluted with carrier oil and rubbed on the bottoms of the feet, neck and back. Helps with that hot, achy feeling, while being antimicrobial as well. Herbs to give internally: **Willow**, poplar, aspen or **birch**; skullcap, chickweed, alfalfa, boneset, Angelica, Blessed Thistle, **Calendula**, Prickly Ash, Wild Indigo.

Galactagogue: Herbs that help breast feeding mothers increase the flow of mothers milk.
Blessed Thistle, Fennel, Fenugreek, Milk Thistle.

Hemostatic-Stops bleeding (also called Antihemorrhagics) The terms hemostatic and antihemorrhagic are often used interchangeably, to refer to herbs that stop bleeding. The terms can apply to internal or external bleeding, although herbs that only work externally are generally referred to as styptics. I'm putting all the herbs that stop bleeding in this category to keep it simple! **Yarrow** (topical, or internal, as an essential oil or herb), **cayenne (topical or internal)**, **Shepherds's purse**, blackberry, yellow dock, cranesbill, **bearberry/uva ursi**. These are important herbs to have in your emergency prep supplies. Yarrow is my favorite, but I like to use both yarrow and shepherds purse together, as they have different mechanisms, and work wonderfully well together.

Hepatic: Hepatics strengthen and tone the liver as well as stimulate the flow of bile. Barberry, Blue Flag, Buckthorn, Cascara Sagrada, Celery, Cleavers, Culver's Root, Dandelion, Fennel, Fringetree, Golden Seal, Milk Thistle, Motherwort, Oregon Grape, Poke Root, Prickly Ash, Wahoo, Wild Indigo, Wild Yam, Wormwood, Yarrow, Yellow Dock.

Hypnotic: Hypnotic herbs will help induce sleep (not a hypnotic trance). Hops, Passion Flower, Skullcap, Valerian.

Hypotensive: Remedies that reduce elevated blood pressure. Astragalus, Cat's Claw, Hawthorn, Chinese Lovage, Reishi, Valerian, Yarrow.

Laxative: Herbs that promote the evacuation of the bowels. Barberry, Boneset, Buckthorn, Burdock, Cascara Sagrada, Cleavers, Culver's Root, Dandelion, Fringetree, Golden Seal, Licorice, Oregon Grape, Turkish Rhubarb, Wahoo, Yellow Dock.

Lymphagogue: Herbs or other agents that promote or increases lymph production or lymph flow.

Mucilage: Mucilaginous herbs contain gelatinous constituents and will often be demulcent. Fenugreek, Marshmallow Root, Slippery Elm.

Nervine: Herbs that strengthen and tone the nervous system, easing anxiety and stress. Black Cohosh, Blue Cohosh, Chamomile, Cramp Bark, Damiana, Hops, Chinese Lovage, Motherwort, Passion Flower, Red Clover, Skullcap, Valerian, Wormwood.

Parasiticide: Herbs that can kill parasites in the digestive tract and on the skin. Black Walnut, Cloves, Quassia, Sheep Sorrel, Wormwood.

Pectoral: Herbs that have a general strengthening and healing effect on the respiratory system. Angelica, Bloodroot, Golden Seal, Licorice, Marshmallow Root.

Purgative: Can produce very strong laxative effects and watery evacuations. Buckthorn, Celandine, Poke Root, Turkish Rhubarb, Wild Indigo, Yellow Dock.

Rubefacient: Herbs that simulate circulation locally when applied to the skin. Cloves, Fennel, Ginger.

Sedative: Herbs that can strongly quiet the nervous system. Black Cohosh, Celery, Chamomile, Cramp Bark, Hops, Motherwort, Passion Flower, Red Clover, Saw Palmetto, Skullcap, St. John's Wort, Valerian, Wild Yam.

Sialagogue: Herbs that stimulate the secretion of saliva from the salivary glands. Bloodroot, Blue Flag, Ginger, Prickly Ash, Quassia, Stillingia.

Stimulant: (quicken and enliven) Herbs that quicken and enliven the physiological function of the body. Brings up energy levels, increase circulation, increase pressure and power of pulse.

Angelica, Astragalus, bayberry, **cayenne**, cinnamon, cloves, Calendula, Celandine, Cloves, Dandelion, echinacea (gentle, but powerful; take frequently), elderflower, juniper, peppermint, rosemary, sage, nettles, Fennel, **Ginger**, Muira Puama, Poke Root, Prickly Ash, Red Root, Sarsaparilla, Schizandra, Stillingia, Valerian, Watercress, Wild Yam, Wormwood, shepherds purse, ginseng, Yarrow.

Stomachic: Herbs that promote digestion and strengthen the stomach. Chamomile, Cloves, Fennel, Ginger, Sheep Sorrel, Turkish Rhubarb.

Tonic: The tonic herbs strengthen and tone either specific organs or the whole body through nutritional stimulation. Angelica, Ashwagandha, Astragalus, Black Cohosh, Black Walnut, Boneset, Buckthorn, Burdock, Calendula, Cat's Claw, Chamomile, Cleavers, Culver's Root, Damiana, Dandelion, Echinacea, Fenugreek, Fringetree, Siberian Ginseng, Golden Seal, Gotu Kola, Hawthorn, Helonias, Licorice, Chinese Lovage, Milk Thistle, Motherwort, Muira Puama, Oregon Grape, Pipsissewa, Poke Root, Prickly Ash, Red Clover, Sarsaparilla, Saw Palmetto, Schizandra, Sheep Sorrel, Skullcap, Squawvine, Suma, Uva Ursi, Watercress, Wild Yam, Wormwood, Yarrow, Yellow Dock, Yohimbe.--Thanks to nature's Alternatives.com for this great info!