

HERBOLOGY

“Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food.”

—Hippocrates

WHAT IS HERBOLOGY?

Every civilization on earth has made use of herbs to treat illnesses and disease as well as to maintain good health. Herbiology is the use of bark, berries, buds, flowers, fruit, gum, leaves, roots and seeds from plants. There are a number of different systems or approaches to the use of herbs. Many herbs have been clinically demonstrated to be highly effective when used appropriately.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HERBS USED AS SPICES AND THOSE AS NATURAL MEDICINES?

Herbs may be placed in categories:

1. **Culinary** – The use of herbs as spices for adding flavor or aroma to food.
2. **Nutritional** – The use of herbs from nonwoody, seed-producing plants as food.
3. **Pharmaceutical** – The use of herbs that have pharmaceutical actions.

These categories are sometimes difficult to separate, as they may have multiple uses depending on each situation. An example of this would be garlic, it can be used as a seasoning agent or a natural medicinal.

AREN'T ALL HERBS SAFE SINCE THEY ARE NATURAL?

While it is true that most herbs are indeed safe, there are certain herbs that should not be used in some circumstances. Just because something is natural does not necessarily mean that it is safe, morphine is natural but it certainly isn't safe. Certain herbal preparations interfere with medications, and others are never to be used by children, pregnant or lactating women. That is why it is important that you consult a knowledgeable healthcare provider that can help guide you. When used properly herbal preparations are extremely safe.

WHAT ARE SOME COMMON USES FOR HERBS?

Some of the more common uses for herbs are:

1. **Normalizing or improving body function** – herbs can influence glands, organs and tissues to produce hormones, digestive enzymes and other body secretions to improve function.
2. **Cleansing or detoxification** – herbs can aid the body in ridding itself of toxins and improving elimination.

3. **Energy** – there are a number of herbs that help revitalize and rejuvenate the body.
4. **Immune function** – herbs can help to improve and strengthen the immune system.
5. **Nutrition** – herbs are an excellent source of minerals, vitamins, phytochemicals and other necessary nutrients.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF HERBAL PREPARATIONS?

Herbs can be classified by their method of preparation:

1. **Decoction** – this is a concentrated liquid form whereby the herb root or bark is covered with water and slowly boiled until volume is half the original.
2. **Extracts** – the herb is boiled down to increase the strength.
3. **Infusion** – The process of steeping the herb with hot water, then drank as a tea. Boiling is generally too hot and will destroy some of the desired properties of the herb.
4. **Liniments** – this is accomplished by macerating or crushing the herb in an oil or alcohol and applied like salve.
5. **Poultice** – the herbs are finely ground, then moistened and applied to the affected area.
6. **Tincture** – A liquid is produced by macerating or crushing the herb to a powder, then put in alcohol for several days and filtered.

*A large number of prescription medicines come from herbs.
What are some of the properties of various herbs?
What are some of the common herbal systems?*