



# **BASIC HERBAL PREPARATIONS, SIMPLY EXPLAINED**

**QUICK-REFERENCE PAGES  
FOR UNDERSTANDING  
COMMON HERBAL  
METHODS**

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**MoonWoven Sanctuary**

[mystickristin@moonwovensanctuary.com](mailto:mystickristin@moonwovensanctuary.com)

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# WELCOME

Herbal preparation is simply the practice of working with plants in different forms. Depending on the herb and the purpose, that might mean steeping it in hot water, simmering it slowly, infusing it into oil, or extracting it into alcohol or glycerin. Some preparations are made for sipping, while others are used only on the skin. Each method has its own rhythm, strengths, and practical uses.

This guide is here to make those differences feel a little clearer. It is designed as a starting place for beginners who want a simple overview of common herbal preparation methods without feeling overwhelmed by too much detail all at once.

You do not need a perfect apothecary to begin, nor every tool or every answer right away. In many cases, a basic understanding of a few common methods is enough to start building confidence. Learning herbal preparation can be slow, practical, and intuitive. It does not have to be complicated to be meaningful.

Part of what makes herbal preparation feel confusing at first is that many methods can sound similar on the surface while working quite differently in practice. A tea, an infusion, and a decoction all begin with water, yet they are usually chosen for different plant parts and prepared in different ways. The same is true for extracts made with alcohol, glycerin, vinegar, or oil. As you begin to notice those differences, the process often starts to feel more natural and easier to understand.

It can also help to remember that herbal preparation is not only about following steps. It is also about learning how different plants respond to heat, time, and the medium they are placed in. Some herbs release their qualities gently into hot water, while others need longer steeping, slow simmering, or a different base altogether. Over time, these patterns become easier to recognize, and what once felt technical can begin to feel practical and familiar.

This guide is meant to offer that kind of beginning: clear enough to be useful, simple enough to be approachable, and spacious enough that you do not have to learn everything at once. You may find that one or two methods feel especially accessible right away, while others make more sense later. That is a natural part of learning. Herbal practice often deepens through repetition, observation, and small acts of attention.

Inside this guide, you will find a simple introduction to tea, infusion, and decoction, along with a beginner-friendly look at tinctures, glycerites, oils, salves, vinegars, oxymels, and other external preparations. It also includes a few foundational notes on common ratios, when covering a cup may be helpful, how to store preparations, shelf-life basics, and the difference between internal and external use.

This is an educational guide meant to support early learning. It is not a dosing guide, and it is not a substitute for care from a qualified professional.

# How to Use This Guide

This guide is meant to be a gentle starting place and a steady companion as you begin learning common herbal preparation methods. You do not need to read it all at once, memorize every chart, or understand every method immediately. It can be used slowly, one section at a time, returning to the pages and quick-reference charts whenever you need a simple refresher.

A good place to begin is with the most accessible methods, such as tea or infusion. These water-based preparations are often the easiest for beginners to understand and practice, and they can help build confidence with basic ideas like plant parts, steeping time, and covering the cup. Starting simple can make the rest of the guide feel much more approachable.

As you move through the pages, let this guide be both an introduction and an invitation. The goal is not to turn you into an expert overnight, but to help you notice patterns, learn the language of preparation methods, and feel more grounded in the basics. You may find that one section speaks to your current season of learning more than another. That is enough. Follow your curiosity.

The charts and quick cheat sheets are designed to be useful at any level. Beginners can use them as simple reference tools, while more experienced herbal learners may find them helpful for refreshing the basics or comparing methods at a glance. Sometimes the most useful information is not the most complex, but the clearest.

This guide is meant to inspire and guide further study, not to diagnose, treat, or replace qualified care. Herbal practice grows through observation, reading, repetition, and thoughtful research. Let this be a first step—one that helps you begin simply, ask better questions, and continue learning with care.

## Matching Herbs to Preparation Methods

If you are working with...	A preparation often chosen is...	Why it may be used
Tender leaves or flowers	Tea or infusion	These plant parts often release their properties well in hot water
Roots or bark	Decoction	Tougher plant parts usually benefit from gentle simmering
Herbs for topical use	Infused oil or salve	These preparations are often used for external body care
A long-lasting liquid extract	Tincture	Alcohol-based extracts are often chosen for stability and concentration
An alcohol-free liquid extract	Glycerite	Glycerin is often chosen when an alcohol-free option is preferred

# TEAS, INFUSIONS, AND DECOCTIONS

## **Water: The Simplest Beginning**

Tea, infusion, and decoction are often grouped together because they all begin with water. Even so, they are not quite the same. Each method has its own rhythm, chosen for different plant parts and preparation goals.

Understanding the difference gives you a flexible foundation—no memorizing required, just a feel for what fits the herb in front of you.

## **Tea – Quick Steep**

A tea is the lightest and quickest of the three. You pour hot water over the herb and let it steep for a short time—usually just a few minutes.

**Best for:** Delicate leaves and flowers

Common examples: Chamomile, peppermint, lemon balm, lavender, rose

This method is perfect for simple everyday blends meant for gentle sipping. It's the herbal equivalent of a quick cup of comfort.

## **Infusion – Longer Steep**

An infusion also uses hot water, but it steeps longer—often fifteen to thirty minutes, sometimes more. Covering the cup or jar helps keep the heat in and captures the aromatic oils.

**Best for:** Leaves, flowers, and nourishing herbs that benefit from extra time

Common examples: Nettle, oatstraw, lemon balm, chamomile

Infusions are a step deeper than tea, pulling more from the plant without the heat of a simmer.

## **Decoction – Gentle Simmer**

A decoction is different. Instead of pouring water over the herb, you start with cold water, bring it to a gentle simmer, and let it cook for ten to twenty minutes. This method is used for plant parts that need more heat and time to release their properties.

**Best for:** Roots, bark, seeds, and dense berries

Common examples: Ginger, cinnamon, licorice root, roasted dandelion root

Think of it as the herbal version of making a broth—slow and steady.

**ONE SIMPLE WAY TO REMEMBER**

Method	What You Do
Tea	quick steep
Infusion	longer steep
Decoction	simmer

That small distinction can help beginners decide which approach may fit the herb they are working with.

**Covering Matters (Sometimes)**

Covering the cup or jar while your herbs steep helps hold heat in, which supports a fuller extraction. It also keeps aromatic compounds in the steam instead of letting them drift away.

**A simple rule of thumb:**

If the herb has a beautiful scent—like peppermint, lemon balm, lavender, or chamomile—covering helps keep more of that character in the cup.

**Where to Start**

These methods are simple, but they are also foundational. You do not need to memorize everything at once. Even a basic understanding of how water works with different plant parts can offer a steady and practical beginning.

Pick one herb you enjoy. Try it as a quick tea one day, then as a longer infusion the next. Taste the difference, and let your own experience guide you.

## TEA, INFUSION, AND DECOCTION

### TEA

A simple tea is usually the lightest, quickest preparation. It is often made by pouring hot water over herbs and letting them steep for a short time.

**This is often used for:**

- tender leaves
- flowers
- everyday sipping blends

**Common examples:**

chamomile, peppermint, lemon balm, lavender, rose

### DECOCTION

A decoction is made by simmering herbs in water instead of simply steeping them. This is usually chosen for tougher plant parts that need more time and heat.

**This is often used for:**

- roots
- bark
- seeds
- dense berries

**Common examples:**

ginger, cinnamon, licorice root, roasted dandelion root

### INFUSION

An infusion is usually a longer steep. The word is sometimes used loosely, but in practice it often means herbs steeped longer than an everyday cup of tea, sometimes covered for 15–30 minutes or even longer, depending on the plant and purpose.

**This is often used for:**

- leaves
- flowers
- nourishing mineral-rich herbs

**Common examples:**

oatstraw, nettle, lemon balm, chamomile

### WHEN TO COVER

If the herb smells lovely, covering the cup often helps keep more of that in the cup

**Cover the cup or jar when you want to:**

- keep heat in
- hold aromatic compounds in the steam
- make a stronger steep from leaves or flowers

This is especially helpful for fragrant herbs such as peppermint, lemon balm, lavender, and chamomile.

## Tea - Infusion - Decoction Quick Reference

### Tea vs Infusion vs Decoction

Method	What It Is	How It Is Made	Often Used For	Common Plant Parts	Examples
<b>Tea</b>	Usually the lightest and quickest water-based preparation	Hot water is poured over herbs and steeped for a short time	Everyday sipping, gentle enjoyment, and simple herbal blends	Tender leaves and flowers	Chamomile, peppermint, lemon balm, lavender, rose
<b>Infusion</b>	A longer steep that draws more from the herb than a quick tea	Herbs are covered with hot water and steeped longer, often 15–30 minutes or more	Stronger cups, nourishing herbs, and deeper extraction from leaves and flowers	Leaves, flowers, and some mineral-rich herbs	Oatstraw, nettle, lemon balm, chamomile
<b>Decoction</b>	A stronger water-based preparation made with simmering	Herbs are gently simmered in water instead of only steeped	Tougher herbs that need more heat and time	Roots, bark, seeds, and dense berries	Ginger, cinnamon, licorice root, roasted dandelion root

### Choosing a Water-Based Preparation

If you are working with...	Tea May Be Preferred	Infusion May Be Preferred	Decoction May Be Preferred
Tender leaves or flowers	Yes	Sometimes	No
A gentle everyday cup	Yes	Sometimes	No
A longer steep for deeper extraction	No	Yes	No
Nourishing leafy herbs	Sometimes	Yes	No
Tough roots, bark, or seeds	No	No	Yes
Herbs that need simmering	No	No	Yes

## Tea - Infusion - Decoction Quick Reference

### Tea / Infusion / Decoction at a Glance

Method	Plant Part	Dried Herb Amount	Water	Time	Cover?
Tea	Leaves, flowers	1 tsp per cup	Pour hot water	3-10 min	Optional; recommended for aromatics
Infusion	Leaves, flowers, nourishing herbs	1 tbsp per cup	Pour hot water	15-30 min	Yes
Decoction	Roots, bark, seeds	1 tbsp per cup	Start cold, bring to simmer	10-20 min	Optional

### Some Herbs & Their Common Water Method

Herb	Common Method	Notes
Chamomile	Tea or infusion	Cover to retain delicate oils
Peppermint	Tea or infusion	Cover to keep volatile oils in
Nettle	Infusion	Longer steep extracts minerals
Oatstraw	Infusion	Long steep for nourishing qualities
Ginger	Decoction	Fresh root simmers 10-15 min
Cinnamon bark	Decoction	Simmer 15-20 min
Licorice root	Decoction	Simmer 10-15 min
Dandelion root (roasted)	Decoction	Simmer 15-20 min

# TINCTURES - ALCOHOL / GLYCERIN

## **Not Every Liquid Extract Is the Same**

Even when the herb is the same, the solvent changes the preparation. Alcohol and vegetable glycerin each create a different kind of extract, with different strengths, shelf-life patterns, and practical uses.

## **Tinctures (Alcohol-Based)**

A tincture is an herbal extract made with alcohol.

Why alcohol?

It extracts a wide range of plant constituents well, preserves the extract for a long time, and is easy to store.

Typical strength:

Usually 40–50% alcohol (80–100 proof vodka) for fresh or dried herbs; sometimes higher proof (95% grain alcohol) for resinous herbs.

Uses:

Concentrated, taken in small doses (often drops to a teaspoon). Good for long-term storage and for herbs that need a strong solvent.

## **Glycerites (Glycerin-Based)**

A glycerite is an herbal extract made with vegetable glycerin.

Why glycerin?

Alcohol-free, naturally sweet, and gentle-tasting. Often chosen for children, those avoiding alcohol, or when a milder flavor is desired.

Typical strength:

Usually 1 part herb : 2–4 parts glycerin and water mix (often 60–70% glycerin, 30–40% water). Less preserving power than alcohol.

Uses:

Good for herbs that are sweet-friendly, for people who cannot have alcohol, or when you want a preparation that tastes pleasant.

**They Are Not Interchangeable**

Alcohol and glycerin do not extract the same compounds in the same way. Some herbs (especially resinous or rooty ones) extract better in alcohol. Glycerin tends to pull out different constituents and often yields a milder, sweeter extract.

# TINCTURES - ALCOHOL / GLYCERIN

## **Shelf life also differs:**

- Tinctures (alcohol) can last 3–5 years or more if stored properly.
- Glycerites often last 1–2 years, and because they are less antimicrobial, they may need refrigeration after opening.

## **Choosing Between Them**

No single solvent is “better.” The right choice depends on the herb, the intended use, and the person.

### **Ask yourself:**

#### **What plant am I working with?**

- Some herbs (like echinacea root, myrrh, or ginger) extract well in alcohol.
- Others (like marshmallow root or licorice) may be pleasant in glycerin.

#### **How will this be used?**

- Long-term storage? Alcohol is more stable.
- Short-term, small batches? Glycerin can work well.

#### **Does the person want or need alcohol-free?**

- Children, people in recovery, or those with certain health conditions often prefer glycerites.

#### **What about taste?**

- Glycerin is naturally sweet; alcohol can be sharp. Sometimes a blend (“glycer-tincture”) offers a balance.

#### **A Note on Strength & Safety**

Alcohol-free does not mean milder. Herbal extracts are still concentrated preparations. Herbal does not automatically mean risk-free. Not every herb belongs in every solvent. The best preparation depends on the plant, the purpose, and the person.

## Alcohol vs Glycerin

Preparation	What It Is	Why It Is Often Chosen	Things to Keep in Mind	Often Best Suited For
<b>Tincture</b>	An herbal extract made with alcohol	Concentrated, long shelf life, easy to store, often used in small amounts	Not suitable for everyone, may not be preferred by those avoiding alcohol, not automatically safe just because it is herbal	Herbs commonly prepared as concentrated liquid extracts, especially when longer storage is desired
<b>Glycerite</b>	An herbal extract made with vegetable glycerin	Alcohol-free, naturally sweet, often preferred when alcohol is not wanted	Shelf life is usually shorter than alcohol tinctures, extraction strength can vary, sweet does not always mean mild	Herbs chosen for alcohol-free extracts or for those who prefer a sweeter preparation

## Basic Comparison

Simple comparison	Tincture	Glycerite
Solvent	Alcohol	Vegetable glycerin
Flavor	Stronger, less sweet	Naturally sweet
Shelf life	Usually longer	Usually shorter
Common reason chosen	Concentration and stability	Alcohol-free option

## Choosing an Extract Base: Alcohol or Glycerin

If you are looking for...	Alcohol Tincture May Be Preferred	Glycerite May Be Preferred
A longer shelf life	Often yes	Usually shorter-lived
A more concentrated traditional extract	Often yes	Sometimes, depending on the herb
An alcohol-free option	No	Yes
A naturally sweet taste	No	Yes
A preparation for someone avoiding alcohol	Not usually	Often yes
A sweeter, more approachable flavor	Not usually	Often yes

## Tincture vs. Glycerite at a Glance

Feature	Tincture (Alcohol)	Glycerite (Glycerin)
Solvent	40–95% alcohol (often 40–50% vodka)	Vegetable glycerin + water (usually 60–70% glycerin)
Taste	Sharp, bitter, or herbal; can be diluted	Naturally sweet, mild
Extraction	Broad; good for resins, roots, many alkaloids	Better for some mucilage, tannins; sweeter taste
Shelf life	3–5+ years (stable at room temperature)	1–2 years (refrigerate after opening for best life)
Alcohol-free	No	Yes
Best for	Long-term storage, concentrated dosing, resinous/rooty herbs	Children, alcohol-sensitive individuals, pleasant-tasting extracts

## Common Ratios & Menstruum

Preparation	Ratio (herb : menstruum)	Menstruum
Fresh herb tincture	1 : 2 (by weight or volume)	40–50% alcohol (e.g., 80–100 proof vodka)
Dried herb tincture	1 : 5 (by weight or volume)	40–50% alcohol (higher proof for some roots)
Glycerite (dried herb)	1 : 4 to 1 : 5	60–70% glycerin, 30–40% water
Glycerite (fresh herb)	1 : 2 to 1 : 3	60–70% glycerin, 30–40% water

# HERBAL VINEGARS AND OXYMELS

## Alcohol-Free Extracts with a Kitchen Heritage

Herbal vinegars and oxymels are traditional preparations often used as alcohol-free extracts for daily wellness support. Instead of alcohol or glycerin, they rely on vinegar—or vinegar combined with honey—to carry the herb.

They are often chosen by people who want an herbal preparation that feels both practical and accessible while still offering a meaningful place in home herbalism.

## Herbal Vinegar (Plain)

- **What it is:** An herbal extract made by infusing herbs in vinegar.
- **Why use it:** Vinegar is a familiar kitchen ingredient, bridging the gap between medicinal herbal practice and food-based herbalism.
- It extracts minerals, some alkaloids, and many bitter compounds well.
- Often prepared for nourishment, mineral support, or seasonal use.
- **Taste:** Sharp, bright, and direct.

## Oxymel (Vinegar + Honey)

- **What it is:** A related preparation made by infusing herbs in a blend of vinegar and honey. (The name comes from the Greek oxos – vinegar, and meli – honey.)
- **Why use it:** The honey rounds out the sharpness of vinegar, creating a sweeter, more soothing preparation.
- Often used for throat comfort, seasonal support, and tonic-style use in small amounts.
- More approachable for those who find plain vinegar too intense.
- **Taste:** Sweet, rounded, and gentler.

### How They Differ

Difference	Herbal Vinegar	Oxymel
Base	Vinegar only	Vinegar + honey
Taste	Sharp, bright	Sweet, rounded
Common uses	Mineral support, culinary, bitter tonics	Throat soothing, seasonal wellness, gentle tonics
Shelf life	6–12 months (refrigerated)	6–12 months (refrigerated; honey adds some preservation)

## Where Fire Cider Fits

Fire cider, a spicy, warming infusion of herbs like horseradish, garlic, onion, ginger, cayenne, and raw apple cider vinegar with the mother, is a well-known example within the vinegar and oxymel family. Though recipes vary, it is typically made as a plain herbal vinegar (sometimes with honey added later to create an oxymel).

## HERBAL VINEGARS AND OXYMELS

### A Thoughtful Approach

Vinegar is acidic, which may not be suitable for everyone (those with significant acid reflux, sensitive stomachs, or certain medications). Honey changes both the flavor and the character of the preparation, and it is not suitable for infants under one year.

As with any herbal extract, the plant, the purpose, and the person all matter. A thoughtful choice begins with asking not only what sounds appealing, but what actually fits the herb and the reason it is being prepared.

### Note:

Herbal vinegars and oxymels are often used in traditional herbal practice, but herbal does not automatically mean risk-free. Alcohol-free does not always mean appropriate for everyone, and even simple home preparations deserve clear labeling, thoughtful ingredient choices, and care in use.

### Storage Tips

- **Bottles:** Dark glass (amber, cobalt) is ideal to protect from light.
- **Refrigeration:** Always store vinegars and oxymels in the refrigerator after straining to maintain freshness and prevent spoilage.
- **Shelf life:** Generally 6–12 months. Discard if you see mold, off-odor, or significant change in color or taste.
- **Labeling:** Include herb(s), base (vinegar or oxymel), date made, and date strained.

### Making a Quick Oxymel

1. **Choose your herb.**
2. **Combine 1 part honey with 1–2 parts raw apple cider vinegar** in a jar; warm gently (do not boil) to dissolve honey if needed.
3. **Add herb** (fresh or dried), filling jar  $\frac{1}{3}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$  full.
4. **Cap and shake.** Let infuse 2–4 weeks, shaking occasionally.
5. **Strain** into clean bottle.
6. **Label and refrigerate.**

### AT A GLANCE

Feature	Herbal Vinegar	Oxymel
Base liquid	Vinegar (raw apple cider vinegar is common)	Vinegar + honey (often 1:1 or 2:1 vinegar to honey)
Herb ratio (folk)	Fill jar $\frac{1}{3}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ with herb, cover with vinegar	Same; adjust honey after infusion or include from start
Infusion time	2–6 weeks (shake occasionally)	2–6 weeks
Strain & finish	Strain; ready to use	If honey not added during infusion, add after straining
Shelf life	6–12 months refrigerated	6–12 months refrigerated
Common uses	Mineral-rich tonics, salad dressings, digestive bitters	Throat syrups, cough soothers, seasonal wellness blends

## HERBAL VINEGARS AND OXYMELS

### COMMON RATIOS

Preparation	Ratio (herb : menstruum)	Notes
Herbal vinegar (dried herb)	1 : 5 to 1 : 10 (by volume)	1 part dried herb to 5–10 parts vinegar
Herbal vinegar (fresh herb)	1 : 2 to 1 : 4 (by volume)	Fresh herbs contain water; use more herb
Oxymel base	1 part honey : 1–2 parts vinegar	Mix honey and vinegar first, then add herbs; or infuse herbs in vinegar, then add honey after straining
Quick oxymel	Equal parts vinegar and honey	Warm gently to combine, then add herbs (or infuse herbs in vinegar, then add honey)

### Herbs Commonly Used in Vinegars & Oxymels

Herb	Common Use in Vinegar	Common Use in Oxymel
Nettle	Mineral-rich tonic, spring support	Soothing spring tonic
Calendula	Gentle digestive support	Throat comfort, soothing
Thyme	Respiratory support, culinary	Cough-soothing oxymel
Garlic	Immune support, fire cider base	Milder oxymel (honey rounds the bite)
Ginger	Digestive, warming	Warming oxymel for colds
Lemon balm	Bright, calming vinegar	Gentle, sweet oxymel
Rose	Mineral support, skin	Soothing oxymel
Rosemary	Culinary, circulation	Warming oxymel
Elderberry	(less common)	Immune-support oxymel (honey balances)

## HERBAL VINEGARS AND OXYMELS

### Vinegars vs Oxymels

Preparation	What It Is	Why It Is Often Chosen	Things to Keep in Mind	Common Uses
<b>Herbal Vinegar</b>	Herbs infused into vinegar as an alcohol-free extract	Often chosen for traditional wellness support, tonic-style use, mineral-rich preparations, and kitchen-friendly herbalism	Vinegar is acidic, may not suit sensitive digestion, and should be labeled and stored with care	Daily tonic-style use, mineral vinegars, seasonal support blends, culinary herbalism, dressings and marinades
<b>Oxymel</b>	A preparation made with vinegar and honey, often infused with herbs	Often chosen for traditional wellness use when a sweeter, more soothing, and more palatable preparation is desired	Still acidic, includes honey, not suitable for every person or situation, and should be chosen with care	Seasonal support, throat-soothing blends, daily tonic-style use, fire cider style preparations, spoonable herbal blends

### Basic Comparison

Simple comparison	Herbal Vinegar	Oxymel
<b>Base</b>	Vinegar	Vinegar + honey
<b>Taste</b>	Sharp or sour	Sweet and sour
<b>Why chosen</b>	Alcohol-free, versatile extract	Sweeter, easier-to-take preparation
<b>Style</b>	Simple extract	Sweetened extract

### Choosing a Vinegar-Based Preparation

If you are looking for...	Herbal Vinegar May Be Preferred	Oxymel May Be Preferred
A simple alcohol-free extract	Yes	Yes
A more traditional unsweetened preparation	Yes	No
A sweeter, more pleasant taste	No	Yes
A preparation for throat comfort or seasonal support	Sometimes	Often
Something easy to work into culinary use	Often yes	Sometimes
A honey-based herbal preparation	No	Yes

# HERBAL SYRUPS

## What Is an Herbal Syrup?

An herbal syrup is a sweetened preparation made by combining a strong infusion or decoction with a sweetener—typically honey, sugar, or maple syrup. Syrups are an effective way to deliver herbs, especially for children or anyone who prefers a pleasant taste. They are most often used internally for soothing coughs, sore throats, or as a vehicle for herbs that are otherwise bitter.

**Remember:** Syrups are a preparation method, not a medicine. The herb(s) you choose determine the intended use. Always research the herb's safety and interactions before using.

## Basic Method

**Prepare a strong infusion or decoction** using the herb(s) of your choice.

- Use about 1 tablespoon dried herb (or 2–3 tablespoons fresh) per cup of water.
- Infuse or decoct as usual, then strain thoroughly.

**Measure the liquid.**

- After straining, you should have roughly 1 cup of liquid (adjust if needed).

**Add sweetener.**

- Combine 1 part liquid with 1 to 2 parts sweetener by volume.
- Heat gently (do not boil honey, as high heat can degrade its beneficial properties).
- Stir until the sweetener is fully dissolved.

**Preserve (optional).**

- Adding a small amount of alcohol (e.g., 10–20% of the total volume) or vegetable glycerin can extend shelf life.
- Without a preservative, syrups must be refrigerated and used within a few weeks.

**Bottle.**

- Pour into a sterilized glass bottle. Label with ingredients and date.

## Safety & Storage Notes

**Sweetener choice matters:**

- Honey should not be given to infants under one year due to the risk of botulism.
- Sugar and maple syrup are alternatives for very young children or those avoiding honey.

**Dosage:**

- Syrups are concentrated. A typical dose for adults is 1–2 teaspoons, taken up to several times a day as appropriate for the herb.
- For children, reduce according to age and body weight; consult a qualified herbalist or pediatrician when dosing herbs for children.

**Shelf life:**

- Refrigerated syrups with no preservative last about 2–4 weeks.
- Syrups with added alcohol (10–20% final concentration) or glycerin can last 3–6 months in the refrigerator.
- Discard if you see mold, fermentation, or an off smell.

**Blood sugar considerations:**

Syrups are high in sugar. If you or the person using them have diabetes, blood sugar issues, or are watching sugar intake, consider using a low-glycemic sweetener like xylitol (toxic to dogs, safe for humans in moderation) or stevia, though these may not preserve as well. Alternatively, choose a different preparation.

## HERBAL SYRUP QUICK REFERENCE

Sweetener	Ratio (liquid : sweetener)	Shelf Life (refrigerated)	Notes
Honey	1 : 1 to 1 : 2	2-4 weeks without preservative; 3-6 months with 10-20%	Do not boil honey; avoid in infants under 1 year.
White or brown sugar	1 : 1 to 1 : 2	2-4 weeks without preservative; 3-6 months with alcohol	Simmer to dissolve; creates a classic simple syrup base.
Maple syrup	1 : 1 (use as both sweetener and base)	2-4 weeks without preservative; up to 3 months with alcohol	Can be used alone or combined with water.
Vegetable glycerin	1 : 1 (glycerin + water)	Up to 6 months	Non-alcohol alternative; sweetness is mild. Often used in

## COMMON ADDITIONS FOR PRESERVATION & FLAVOR

Ingredient	Purpose	Typical Amount
Brandy, vodka, or Everclear	Preservative, adds shelf stability	10-20% of total final volume
Vegetable glycerin	Preservative (mild), adds sweetness	10-20% of total final volume
Lemon juice or citric acid	Flavor, mild preservative	1-2 teaspoons per cup of liquid

## TROUBLESHOOTING & TIPS

Issue	Likely Cause	Fix
Syrup is too thin	Not enough sweetener; insufficient cooking	Reheat and add more sweetener; simmer to reduce slightly
Syrup crystallizes	Too much sugar; stored too cold	Use a mix of sugar types (e.g., add a little corn syrup) or store at cool room temperature
Mold appears after a few days	Insufficient preservative; contamination	Discard; next time use sterilized bottles and add a preservative or refrigerate
Taste too strong or too weak	Herb strength or ratio off	Adjust herb amount or sweetener level in the next batch

# Infused Oils, Salves, and Balms

## What Are Infused Oils?

Infused oils are simply oils (olive, sunflower, etc.) that have been steeped with herbs to extract their beneficial constituents. They are used topically only—never internally—for massage, skin care, or as the base for salves and balms.

Salves are infused oils thickened with beeswax (or a vegan wax) to create a semi-solid preparation that stays on the skin longer. Balms are similar but often firmer and may include butters (shea, cocoa) or essential oils.

## Basic Method: Infused Oil

### 1. Choose your oil.

- Olive oil (stable, classic), sunflower (light), jojoba (long shelf life), or fractionated coconut (stays liquid).

### 2. Choose your herb.

- Dried herbs are strongly preferred to reduce the risk of mold. If using fresh herbs, allow them to wilt for several hours to reduce moisture.

### 3. Combine.

- Folk method: Fill a clean, dry jar about  $\frac{2}{3}$  full with herb. Pour oil over until the herb is fully covered by at least an inch. Stir to release air bubbles.
- Measured method: Use a ratio of 1 part dried herb : 3–5 parts oil by volume.

### 4. Infuse.

- Slow method: Cap tightly, place in a sunny window or warm spot for 2–6 weeks. Shake gently every few days.
- Quick method (gentle heat): Place the jar in a saucepan with water (a double-boiler setup) and warm on the lowest possible heat for 2–4 hours. Do not simmer or boil.

### 5. Strain.

- Pour through a fine-mesh strainer or cheesecloth into a clean container. Press or squeeze to extract as much oil as possible, but avoid forcing plant particles through.

### 6. Store.

- Pour into sterilized bottles. Label with herb, oil, and date.

## Turning Infused Oil into a Salve or Balm

### 1. Measure your infused oil.

- For a soft salve, use 1 oz beeswax per 8 oz oil (1:8 ratio).
- For a firmer balm, use 1 oz beeswax per 4–6 oz oil (1:4 or 1:6 ratio).

### 2. Melt and combine.

- Gently heat the oil and beeswax together in a double boiler until the wax is fully melted. Stir thoroughly.

### 3. Test consistency.

- Place a small spoonful in the refrigerator for a minute. If it's too soft, add more wax; if too hard, add more oil.

### 4. Pour and cool.

- Pour into clean tins or jars. Let cool completely before capping.

## Safety & Storage Notes

- **Topical use only.** Infused oils and salves are for external use. Never take them internally.
- **Moisture** = mold. If any water gets into the oil during preparation, it can spoil. Using dried herbs and ensuring all tools are dry minimizes this risk.
- **Shelf life.**
  - Infused oils typically last 6–12 months in a cool, dark place.
  - Salves last longer (1–2 years) because the wax acts as a preservative.
  - Discard if you see mold, an off smell, or a rancid (paint-like) odor.
- **Skin sensitivity.** Always test a small amount on a patch of skin before using widely, especially with herbs known to cause contact dermatitis (e.g., arnica, cayenne, some essential oils).
- **Herbs to avoid in oils.** Certain herbs are not safe for topical use or can be irritating. Research each herb before infusing.

## Common Carrier Oils

Oil	Characteristics	Shelf Life
Olive oil	Stable, classic choice; mild scent	1-2 years
Sunflower oil	Light, absorbs well; high in vitamin E	6-12 months
Joboba oil	Actually a wax; very stable, mimics skin's sebum	Indefinite
Fractionated coconut oil	Liquid, odorless, very stable	1-2 years
Sweet almond oil	Light, good for skin; moderate shelf life	6-12 months

## Herb-to-Oil Ratios

Method	Ratio (by volume)	Notes
Folk (slow)	Fill jar $\frac{2}{3}$ with herb, cover with oil	Easy, but strength varies
Measured (dried herb)	1 part herb : 3-5 parts oil	More consistent strength
Measured (fresh herb)	1 part herb : 2-3 parts oil	Use fresh herbs only after wilting to reduce moisture

## Beeswax Ratios for Salves & Balms

\*Note: 1 oz beeswax = about 2 tablespoons (by volume), but weight is more accurate.\*

Consistency	Oil : Beeswax (by weight)	Use
Soft salve	8 : 1	Easy to scoop; melts on skin contact
Medium salve	6 : 1	Good all-purpose texture
Firm balm	4 : 1	Solid, ideal for lip balms or twist-up tubes

## Troubleshooting

Issue	Likely Cause	Fix
Oil went rancid quickly	Moisture present; stored in warm or light place	Start with dried herbs; store in dark, cool spot
Mold appears	Water got into the oil (fresh herbs, wet jar)	Discard; next time use fully dried herbs and dry equipment
Salve is too soft	Not enough beeswax	Remelt and add more wax
Salve is too hard / crumbly	Too much beeswax	Remelt and add more oil
Oil separates after cooling	Not stirred enough while cooling	Remelt and stir thoroughly before pouring

## Herbs Commonly Used in Oils & Salves

Herb	Common Use
Calendula	Soothing, healing for skin
Plantain	Calming for minor skin irritations
Lavender	Relaxing, mild antiseptic
Comfrey leaf	Tissue support (avoid on deep wounds; use externally only)
Arnica	Bruises and sore muscles (do not use on broken skin)
St. John's Wort	Nerve pain, mild burns (can cause photosensitivity)

Remember: Infused oils and salves are beautiful, gentle ways to work with herbs, but they are external preparations. Always label clearly, keep out of reach of children, and when in doubt about a herb's safety, do your research first.

# Poultices, Compresses, and Other Topical Applications

## What Are Poultices and Compresses?

Poultices and compresses are simple, time-honored ways to apply herbs directly to the skin. They are used for soothing sore muscles, drawing out splinters, reducing inflammation, or supporting minor wounds.

- **Poultice:** A soft, moist mass of fresh or rehydrated dried herbs applied directly to the skin. It is often held in place with a cloth. Poultices are wet and usually warm or room temperature.
- **Compress:** A cloth (such as cotton or flannel) soaked in a strong herbal infusion or decoction, then applied to the skin. Compresses can be used warm or cold, depending on the desired effect.
- **Fomentation:** A type of compress where the cloth is repeatedly rewarmed and reapplied, often used for deeper muscle or joint issues.

Other related topical applications include **herbal washes** (a diluted infusion used to rinse skin), **soaks** (immersing a body part in a strong infusion), and **herbal baths** (adding an infusion to a bath).

## Basic Methods

### Poultice

#### 1. Prepare the herb.

- **Fresh herbs:** Chop or crush them into a paste. A mortar and pestle, food processor, or even chewing (for personal use) works.
- **Dried herbs:** Mix with a small amount of hot water to form a thick paste. Let it sit for a few minutes to soften.

#### 2. Apply.

- Spread the paste directly onto the affected area about 1/4–1/2 inch thick.

#### 3. Cover.

- Wrap with a clean cloth (cotton, gauze, or muslin) to hold the poultice in place. You can also place the herb paste inside a cloth first, like a “poultice bag.”

#### 4. Leave on.

- Typically 15–30 minutes, or until the poultice cools and dries. Remove and discard the used herb (do not reuse).

#### 5. Repeat as needed.

- Fresh poultices can be applied several times a day.

## Compress / Fomentation

### 1. Make a strong infusion or decoction.

- Use about 2–3 tablespoons dried herb per cup of water, or a handful of fresh herb per cup. Steep or decoct as usual, then strain.

### 2. Soak a cloth.

- Fold a clean cotton cloth to fit the area. Dip it into the liquid, then wring it out so it's damp but not dripping.

### 3. Apply.

- Place the cloth on the skin. For a **warm compress**, use liquid that is comfortably hot. For a **cold compress**, cool the liquid or add ice.

### 4. Cover and hold.

- Wrap with a towel or dry cloth to retain heat or cold. Leave on for 15–30 minutes.

### 5. Reapply (for fomentation).

- If using a fomentation, rewarm the cloth in the liquid and reapply several times over a 20–30 minute session.
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## Safety & Storage Notes

- **Never apply a poultice to an open wound** unless using a sterile preparation and under professional guidance. Herbs and plant matter can introduce infection.
- **Allergy test.** Before using a new herb topically, test a small area of skin, especially with herbs known to cause contact dermatitis (e.g., arnica, cayenne, tea tree, yarrow).
- **Heat caution.** For warm compresses, test the temperature on your inner wrist before applying. Burns are a risk, especially for those with reduced skin sensitivity.
- **Don't reuse.** Used poultices and compress cloths should be discarded (or washed thoroughly) because they can grow bacteria.
- **When to stop.** If the area becomes more red, irritated, or painful, discontinue use.
- **Not for internal use.** These are external preparations; never eat the herbs or drink the liquid used for a compress unless it was prepared separately as an internal preparation.

### Comparison of Methods

Method	Preparation	Application	Duration	Best For
<b>Poultice</b>	Fresh or rehydrated herbs made into a paste	Applied directly to skin, covered with cloth	15–30 min	Drawings (splinters), local inflammation, bruises
<b>Warm compress</b>	Cloth soaked in hot herbal infusion	Placed on skin, covered to retain heat	15–30 min	Muscle aches, joint stiffness, menstrual cramps
<b>Cold compress</b>	Cloth soaked in cool infusion, sometimes with ice	Placed on skin	15–20 min	Acute swelling, sprains, headaches, fever
<b>Fomentation</b>	Cloth repeatedly rewarmed and reapplied	Alternating warm applications	20–30 min	Chronic pain, deep muscle tension
<b>Herbal wash</b>	Diluted infusion (1 tbsp herb per cup water)	Gently poured or dabbed over skin	As needed	Cleansing, soothing rashes, minor skin irritations
<b>Soak / foot bath</b>	Strong infusion (handful herb per gallon)	Body part immersed	15–20 min	Foot fatigue, localized swelling, mild fungal issues

### Quick Ratio Reference

Preparation	Approximate Ratio
<b>Poultice</b>	Fresh herbs: as needed to form paste Dried herbs: 1 part herb + 1–2 parts hot water
<b>Compress / fomentation liquid</b>	2–3 tbsp dried herb per 1 cup water, or generous handful fresh herb per 1 cup water
<b>Herbal wash</b>	1 tbsp dried herb per 1 cup water (infusion)
<b>Soak / foot bath</b>	½–1 cup dried herb per 1 gallon water, or 2–3 handfuls fresh

## Common Herbs for Topical Use

Herb	Common Use	Form	Notes
<b>Plantain</b> (Plantago spp.)	Insect bites, minor cuts, splinters	Fresh poultice or compress	Widely available; gentle and soothing
<b>Calendula</b>	Healing, soothing rashes, minor wounds	Compress, wash, or infused oil	Anti-inflammatory; safe for most skin types
<b>Comfrey leaf</b>	Bruises, sprains, mild fractures	Poultice or compress	Do not use on deep or infected wounds; may speed healing of superficial injuries
<b>Arnica</b>	Bruises, sore muscles, sprains	Compress or fomentation	Do not apply to broken skin; can cause irritation
<b>Chamomile</b>	Inflammation, skin irritation, eye compresses	Compress, wash	Gentle; good for sensitive skin
<b>Yarrow</b>	Bleeding, bruises, slow-healing wounds	Compress or fresh poultice	Astringent; test for sensitivity
<b>Lavender</b>	Muscle tension, mild burns	Compress, soak	Calming scent; mild antiseptic
<b>Epsom salts</b> (magnesium sulfate)	Sore muscles, swelling	Soak	Often added to herbal foot baths or full baths

## Troubleshooting & Tips

Issue	Likely Cause	Fix
Poultice dries out too quickly	Not enough moisture; cloth too thin	Use more liquid; cover with plastic wrap under the cloth
Skin becomes red or itchy	Sensitivity or allergy to the herb	Remove immediately; rinse area with cool water; discontinue use
Compress cools too fast	Thin cloth; no insulating layer	Use a thicker cloth or cover with a towel; for fomentation, reapply warm liquid often
Herbal wash stings	Concentration too strong; herb too stimulating	Dilute further; choose a gentler herb like calendula or chamomile
Difficulty keeping poultice in place	Movement or awkward body part	Use a stretchy bandage or tape; consider using a "poultice bag" (herbs sewn into a cloth)

# External vs Internal Preparations

One of the simplest ways to understand herbal preparations is to notice whether they are meant for internal or external use. Internal preparations are taken into the body, while external preparations are used on the outside of the body. This distinction can help beginners sort methods more clearly, especially when so many preparation names are new at first.

Internal preparations often include methods such as tea, infusion, decoction, tincture, glycerite, syrup, and capsules. These are usually chosen when the herb is meant to be taken by mouth in some form. Because they are entering the body directly, internal preparations often ask for extra care around herb choice, strength, interactions, personal sensitivity, and special considerations such as pregnancy, children, and medications. Even simple preparations can deserve thoughtful use.

External preparations include infused oils, salves, compresses, washes, baths, sachets, and aromatic methods. These are used on the skin, around the body, or in the surrounding space rather than taken internally. They are often chosen for body care, ritual use, soothing topical support, or other non-ingested applications. Even so, external use is not automatically risk-free. Skin can react, fragrance can be overwhelming for some people, and strong herbs, heat, or certain methods may still cause irritation or discomfort.

It can also be helpful to remember that some preparation types are defined not only by what they contain, but by how they are used. An infused oil, for example, is often prepared for massage, skin comfort, or as the base for a salve. A salve is usually a thicker topical preparation made from infused oil and wax. A compress or wash is often a simple water-based preparation used externally with a cloth or as a rinse. These methods may seem gentle, but they still benefit from care, observation, and a good match between the plant, the preparation, and the intended purpose.

This distinction is not about deciding that one kind of preparation is “stronger” or “better” than another. Internal does not always mean stronger, and external does not always mean safer. The most suitable preparation depends on the herb, the person, and the reason it is being used. Learning that difference is part of what helps herbal practice feel more clear, grounded, and intentional.

## Gentle note

This section is meant to offer a beginner-friendly framework for understanding how herbal preparations are commonly grouped. It is here to inspire thoughtful learning and practical comparison, not to diagnose, treat, or replace qualified care.

# External vs Internal Preparations

This chart offers a simple overview of internal and external herbal preparations. It shows how each method is generally used, includes common examples, and gently highlights a few basic care considerations. It is meant as an easy visual guide for beginners learning the difference between preparations taken into the body and those used on the outside of the body.

Internal Preparations Taken into the body Common examples	External Preparations. Used on the outside of the body
Tea	Infused oil
Infusion	Salve
Decoction	Compress
Tincture	Wash
Glycerite	Bath
Syrup	Sachet
Capsules	Aromatic use
Need extra care around	Still deserve care around
Herb choice	Skin sensitivity
Strength	Fragrance sensitivity
Interactions	Heat or irritation
Body sensitivity	Herb suitability
Pregnancy, children, medications	Method of use

Preparation	What It Is	Often Used For
<b>Infused Oil</b>	An infused oil is made by steeping herbs into oil for external use.	Massage, skin comfort, ritual body care, and as the base for salves and other topical preparations
<b>Salve</b>	A salve is usually an infused oil thickened with wax to create a simple topical balm.	Dry skin care, protective herbal balms, and other external applications where a thicker preparation is helpful
<b>Compress or Wash</b>	A compress or wash is usually a tea or infusion applied externally with a cloth or used as a gentle rinse.	Simple water-based external preparations

External does not always mean risk-free. Internal does not always mean stronger. The best method depends on the plant, the person, and the purpose.

## External vs Internal Preparations

### Common External Methods at a Glance

Method	Type of Preparation	Common Use
Infused Oil	Oil-based	Massage, skin comfort, salve base
Salve	Oil-and-wax based	Topical balm, dry skin care
Compress or Wash	Water-based	Gentle external application or rinse
Bath	Water-based	Full-body external use
Sachet	Dry herbal preparation	Aromatic or ritual use
Aromatic Use	Scent-based	Environmental or sensory use

### External and Internal Safety

Safety Consideration	Internal Preparations	External Preparations
<b>Herb choice</b>	Not every herb is appropriate to take internally	Not every herb is appropriate for skin or external use
<b>Strength</b>	Concentration and amount matter	Strong preparations may still irritate skin or senses
<b>Body sensitivity</b>	Digestion, constitution, and personal response may vary	Skin, scent, and sensory response may vary
<b>Interactions</b>	May need extra care with medications, pregnancy, children, or health conditions	May still require care with sensitive skin, allergies, or scent sensitivity
<b>Method of use</b>	Taken into the body, so preparation choice matters carefully	Applied to the body or surrounding space, so method still matters
<b>Irritation or discomfort</b>	Some herbs or preparations may feel too strong internally	Heat, fragrance, or direct contact may cause irritation
<b>General reminder</b>	Internal does not automatically mean stronger or better	External does not automatically mean gentler or risk-free

# Tools, Storage, and Shelf Life Basics

This page offers a simple overview of the basic tools often used in beginner herbal preparation, along with gentle storage habits and broad shelf-life guidance. It is meant to help readers build simple, clear practices around making, labeling, storing, and caring for herbal preparations.

## SIMPLE TOOLS NEEDED

Basic Tools	Optional but Helpful
Kettle or saucepan	Cheesecloth
Heat-safe mug or jar	Funnel
Fine mesh strainer	Kitchen scale
Measuring spoons	Dropper bottles
Clean glass jars	
Labels or masking tape	
Spoon	
Dark glass bottles for some extracts or oils	

## STORAGE BASICS

Storage Habit	Why It Matters
Keep preparations clean	Helps reduce spoilage and contamination
Label clearly	Makes it easier to identify what you made
Date each preparation	Helps you track freshness and shelf life
Store in the right place	Supports stability and quality
Include herb name	Helps avoid confusion later
Include preparation type	Clarifies how it was made and used
Include date made	Gives a simple timeline for use
Include solvent used, if relevant	Helpful for tinctures, glycerites, oils, and vinegars

## SHELF LIFE BASICS

Preparation Type	Shelf Life Basics
Tea / infusion / decoction	Best used fairly soon after making; often same day or within a short refrigerated
Syrups	Usually shorter-lived; often refrigerated
Tinctures	Often long-lasting when properly made and stored
Glycerites	Usually shorter-lived than alcohol tinctures
Oils and salves	Shelf life depends on oil used, cleanliness, moisture exposure, and storage

## STORAGE CARE REMINDERS

What to Watch For	Why It Matters
Heat	Can shorten shelf life
Light	Can degrade quality
Moisture	Can invite spoilage
Missing labels	Unlabeled jars become confusing very quickly

# COMMON RATIOS

Ratios help bring a little consistency to your preparations. You do not need to become rigid about them. They are simply a helpful starting place.

Preparation	Common Ratio / Method
Tea or light infusion	About 1 teaspoon dried herb per cup of water, or about 1 tablespoon fresh herb per cup of water
Stronger infusion	About 1 tablespoon dried herb per cup of water
Decoction (roots, bark, seeds)	About 1 tablespoon dried herb per cup of water; simmer gently, then strain
Fresh herb tincture	1 part herb : 2 parts menstruum (by weight or volume)
Dried herb tincture	1 part herb : 5 parts menstruum (by weight or volume)
Fluid extract	1 part herb : 1 part menstruum (by weight to volume). Much stronger than a standard tincture; use in smaller doses.
Folk (Simpler's) method	Fill a jar with herbs, cover fully with the chosen liquid (alcohol, vinegar, or oil), infuse for several weeks, then strain. Intuitive, but beginners are safer starting with measured ratios.
Dried herb powder / capsules	Dried herb ground to powder. Capsule size varies; 00 size holds about 500–700 mg. Follow herb-specific dosage guidelines.
Infused oil	1 part dried herb : 3–5 parts oil (olive, sunflower, etc.). Fill jar, cover with oil, infuse 2–6 weeks (or use gentle heat), then strain.
Salve / ointment	Infused oil + beeswax (or candelilla wax for vegan). Typical ratio: 1 oz beeswax per 8 oz infused oil. Adjust for desired firmness.
Poultice	Fresh or rehydrated dried herbs crushed into a thick paste (add warm water if needed). Apply directly to skin, often wrapped in cloth.
Compress	Cloth soaked in a strong infusion or decoction (about 3 tablespoons herb per cup of water). Apply warm or cold to the affected area.
Syrup	1 part decoction or strong infusion : 1–2 parts honey or sugar (by volume). Warm gently until dissolved; a small amount of brandy or glycerin can be added as a preservative.
Vinegar extract / oxymel	1 part herb : 3–5 parts raw apple cider vinegar (or vinegar + honey for oxymel). Same method as tinctures, using vinegar as the menstruum.

Menstruum is the liquid used for extraction. Commonly 40–50% alcohol (80–100 proof vodka), 95% grain alcohol (190 proof Everclear) diluted as needed, vinegar, or oil.

### A note on strength

More herbs are not always better. A preparation can be too strong for someone's body—too stimulating, too drying, too fragrant, or simply not the right fit. Start simple. Do your research. Let your practice grow slow

# HERBAL PREPARATIONS: SAFETY AT A GLANCE

Herbal preparations can be a gentle way to support health, but they are not risk-free. Like conventional medicines, herbs contain active compounds that can interact with prescriptions, affect existing conditions, or cause side effects. This chart highlights common safety considerations. It is not a complete medical review.

If you take medications, have a medical condition, or are pregnant or nursing, please consult a qualified healthcare provider before using herbs regularly.

Herb	Precautions / Interactions
Ashwagandha	May increase sedation. Use caution with autoimmune conditions. Avoid in pregnancy unless guided by a qualified professional.
Black Cohosh	Use caution with hormone-sensitive conditions, liver concerns, and some medications.
Chamomile	Avoid with ragweed-family allergies. May increase bleeding risk with blood thinners; may add to sedation.
Cinnamon	Large amounts may not be suitable with liver concerns. Use caution with diabetes medications.
Echinacea	Use caution with autoimmune conditions, immunosuppressants, and daisy-family allergies.
Fenugreek	May affect blood sugar. Use caution with blood thinners and some diabetes medications.
Feverfew	May increase bleeding risk with blood thinners. Avoid with ragweed-family allergies.
Garlic	May increase bleeding risk with blood thinners; may interact with some HIV or transplant medications.
Ginger	May increase bleeding risk. Use caution with blood thinners, diabetes medications, and gallbladder concerns.
Ginkgo	May increase bleeding risk. Use caution with seizure disorders and medications that affect clotting.

## HERBAL PREPARATIONS: SAFETY AT A GLANCE

Herb	Precautions / Interactions
Goldenseal	High interaction potential with many medications. Avoid in pregnancy. Use caution with liver-metabolized drugs. Often used in short courses; avoid prolonged use without supervision.
Ginseng	May affect blood sugar and bleeding risk. Use caution with stimulants, blood thinners, and diabetes medications.
Kava	May increase sedation. Avoid with alcohol, sedatives, and liver concerns.
Licorice Root	May raise blood pressure and lower potassium. Use caution with heart, kidney, and blood pressure medications. <i>Note: Deglycyrrhizinated licorice (DGL) does not carry the same blood pressure risk.</i>
Milk Thistle	May affect how some medications are processed. Use caution with liver-metabolized drugs.
Peppermint	May worsen reflux in some people. Use caution with gallbladder concerns and certain medications.
Saw Palmetto	May increase bleeding risk. Use caution with blood thinners and hormone-related conditions.
St. John's Wort	<b>Major interaction herb.</b> Can speed up how the liver breaks down many drugs, making them less effective. May reduce effectiveness of birth control, antidepressants, transplant drugs, statins, and more.
Turmeric / Curcumin	May increase bleeding risk. Use caution with blood thinners, gallbladder issues, and some medications. Culinary amounts are generally safe.
Valerian	May increase sedation. Avoid combining with alcohol, sleep aids, and sedative medications.

### A FEW NOTES ON USING THIS CHART

“Natural” does not mean “always safe.” Herbs are bioactive substances. Respecting their potential risks is part of using them wisely.

**Culinary vs. therapeutic use:** Small amounts used in cooking are generally safe unless otherwise noted. The precautions above apply mainly to therapeutic use (teas, capsules, tinctures, etc.).

**When in doubt, ask.** A pharmacist or clinician knowledgeable about herbs can help you avoid unintended interactions.

This chart is a starting point for awareness, not a substitute for professional medical advice.