

# U.S. Army Field - Plants For Medicine

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## **PLANTS FOR MEDICINE:**

In using plants for medical treatment, positive identification of the plants involved is as critical as when using them for food. Proper use of these plants is equally important. Eat only those plants you can positively identify and you know are safe to eat.

## **TERMS AND DEFINITIONS:**

The following terms and their definitions are associated with medicinal plant use:

**Poultice:** This is crushed leaves or other plant parts, possibly heated, that are applied to a wound or sore either directly or wrapped in cloth or paper. Poultices, when hot, increase the circulation in the affected area and help healing through the chemicals present in the plants. As the poultice dries out, it draws the toxins out of a wound. A poultice should be prepared to a "mashed potatoes-like" consistency and applied as warm as the patient can stand.

**Infusion or tisane or tea:** This blend is the preparation of medicinal herbs for internal or external application. You place a small quantity of a herb in a container, pour hot water over it, and let it steep (covered or uncovered) before use. Care must always be taken to not drink too much of a tea in the beginning of treatment as it may have adverse reactions on an empty stomach.

**Decoction:** This is the extract of a boiled-down or simmered herb leaf or root. You add herb leaf or root to water. You bring them to a sustained boil or simmer them to draw their chemicals into the water. The average ratio is about 28 to 56 grams (1 to 2 ounces) of herb to 0.5 liter of water.

**Expressed juice:** These are liquids or saps squeezed from plant material and either applied to the wound or made into another medicine.

Many natural remedies work slower than the medicines you know. Therefore, start with smaller doses and allow more time for them to take effect. Naturally, some will act more rapidly than others. Many of these treatments are addressed in more detail in Chapter 4. (<http://rk19-bielefeld-mitte.de/survival/FM/09.htm>)

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## **SPECIFIC REMEDIES:**

The following remedies are for use only in a survival situation. Do not use them routinely as some can be potentially toxic and have serious long- term effects (for example, cancer).

**Antidiarrheals for diarrhea:** This can be one of the most debilitating illnesses for a survivor or prisoner of war. Drink tea made from the roots of blackberries and their relatives to stop diarrhea. White oak bark and other barks containing tannin are also effective when made into a strong tea. However, because of possible negative effects on the kidneys, use them with caution and only when nothing else is available. Clay, ashes, charcoal, powdered chalk, powdered bones, and pectin can be consumed or mixed in a tannic acid tea with good results. These powdered mixtures should be taken in a dose of two tablespoons every 2 hours. Clay and pectin can be mixed together to give a crude form of Kaopectate. Pectin is obtainable from the inner part of citrus fruit rinds or from apple pomace. Tea made from cowberry, cranberry, or hazel leaves works, too. Because of its inherent danger to an already under-nourished survivor, several of these methods may need to be tried simultaneously to stop debilitating diarrhea, which can quickly dehydrate even a healthy individual.

**Antihemorrhagics for bleedin:** Make medications to stop bleeding from plantain leaves, or, most effectively, from the leaves of the common yarrow or woundwort (*Achillea millefolium*). These mostly give a physical barrier to the bleeding. Prickly pear (the raw, peeled part) or witch hazel can be applied to wounds. Both are good for their astringent properties (they shrink blood vessels). For bleeding gums or mouth sores, sweet gum can be chewed or used as a toothpick. This provides some chemical and antiseptic properties as well.

**Antiseptics to clean infections:** Use antiseptics to cleanse wounds, snake bites, sores, or rashes. You can make antiseptics from the expressed juice of wild onion or garlic, the expressed juice from chickweed leaves, or the crushed leaves of dock. You can also make antiseptics from a decoction of burdock root, mallow leaves or roots, or white oak bark (tannic acid). Prickly pear, slippery elm, yarrow, and sweet gum are all good antiseptics as well. All these medications are for external use only. Two of the best antiseptics are sugar and honey. Sugar should be applied to the wound until it becomes syrupy, then washed off and reapplied. Honey should be applied three times daily (see Chapter 4). Honey is by far the best of the antiseptics for open wounds and burns, with sugar being second.

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**Antipyretics for fevers:** Treat a fever with a tea made from willow bark, an infusion of elder flowers or fruit, linden flower tea, and aspen or slippery elm bark decoction. Yarrow tea is also good. Peppermint tea is reportedly good for fevers.

**Colds and sore throats:** Treat these illnesses with a decoction made from either plantain leaves or willow bark. You can also use a tea made from burdock roots, mallow or mullein flowers or roots, and yarrow or mint leaves.

**Analgesics for aches, pains, and sprains:** Treat these conditions with externally applied poultices of dock, plantain, chickweed, willow bark, garlic, or sorrel. Sweet gum has some analgesic (pain relief) properties. Chewing the willow bark or making a tea from it is the best for pain relief as it contains the raw component of aspirin. You can also use salves made by mixing the expressed juices of these plants in animal fat or vegetable oils.

**Antihistamines and astringents for itching or contact dermatitis:** Relieve the itch from insect bites, sunburn, or plant poisoning rashes by applying a poultice of jewelweed (*Impatiens biflora*) or witch hazel, which give a cooling relief and dry out the weeping (*Hamamelis virginiana*) leaves. The jewelweed juice will help when applied to poison ivy, rashes, or insect stings. Jewelweed and aloe vera help relieve sunburn. In addition, dandelion sap, crushed cloves of garlic, and sweet gum have been used. Crushed leaves of burdock have received only so-so reports of success, but crushed, green plantain leaves show relief over a few days. Jewelweed is probably the best of these plants. Tobacco will deaden the nerve endings and can also be used to treat toothaches.

**Sedatives:** Get help in falling asleep by brewing a tea made from mint leaves or passionflower leaves.

**Hemorrhoids:** Treat them with external washes from elm bark or oak bark tea, from the expressed juice of plantain leaves, or from a Solomon's seal root decoction. Tannic acid or witch hazel will provide soothing relief because of their astringent properties.

**Heat rash:** Tannic acid or witch hazel will provide soothing relief because of their astringent properties but cornstarch or any crushed and powdered, nonpoisonous plant should help to dry out the rash after a thorough cleansing.

**Constipation:** Relieve constipation by drinking decoctions from dandelion leaves, rose hips, or walnut bark. Eating raw daylily flowers will also help. Large amounts of water in any form are critical to relieving constipation.

**Anthelmintics for worms or intestinal parasites:** Most treatment for worms or parasites

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are toxic—just more so for the worms or parasites than for humans. Therefore, all treatments should be used in moderation. Treatments include tea made from tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*) or from wild carrot (poisonous) leaves. Very strong tannic acid can also be used with caution as it is very hard on the liver. See Chapter 4 for more deworming techniques.

**Antiflatulents for gas and cramps:** Use a tea made from carrot seeds; use tea made from mint leaves to settle the stomach.

**Antifungal washes:** Make a decoction of walnut leaves, oak bark, or acorns to treat ringworm and athlete's foot. Apply it frequently to the site, alternating with exposure to direct sunlight. Broad-leaf plantain has also been used with success but any treatment should be used in addition to sunlight if possible. Jewelweed and vinegar make excellent washes but are sometimes difficult to find.

**Burns:** Tannic acid, sugar, and honey can be used as explained in Chapter 4.

**Dentifrices for teeth:** See Chapter 4 for other techniques in addition to using twigs of sweet gum for its anti-inflammatory, analgesic, and antiseptic properties.

**Insect repellents:** Garlic and onions can be eaten and the raw plant juice rubbed on the skin to repel some insects. Sassafras leaves can be rubbed on the skin. Cedar chips may help repel insects around your shelter.

**Tannic acid:** Because tannic acid is used for so many treatments (burns, antihemorrhagics, antihelminthics, antiseptics, antidiarrheals, antifungals, bronchitis, skin inflammation, lice), a note as to its preparation is in order. All thready plants, especially trees, contain tannic acid. Hardwood trees generally contain more than softwood trees. Of the hardwoods, oak—especially red and chestnut—contain the highest amount. The warty looking knots in oak trees can contain as much as 28 percent tannic acid. This knot, the inner bark of trees, and pine needles (cut into 2-centimeter [1-inch] strips), can all be boiled down to extract tannic acid. Boiling can be done in as little as 15 minutes (very weak), to 2 hours (moderate), through 12 hours to 3 days (very strong). The stronger concoctions will have a dark color that will vary depending on the type of tree. All will have an increasingly vile taste in relation to their concentration.

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