

Medicinal Honey and Syrups

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Elderberry syrup

When the temperatures drop and the nights grow longer, my attention is inevitably drawn to the impending cold and flu season. Herbal syrups are one of my favorite medicinal preparations for respiratory infections, especially in winter. Silky and sweet, golden with summer's nectar and sipped by the spoonful—medicinal honeys can be divinely flavorful.

I prefer honey-based syrups over sugar or glycerin syrups for many reasons. First and foremost, I love the alchemy of honey—the synergy of flowers and bees, the sacred geometry of the hive, the fanning of wings concentrating summer's goodness into a nourishing food that can miraculously withstand millennia. Honey also has its own medicinal virtues, imparting anti-microbial and anti-inflammatory benefits to the syrup. It helps to coat the throat, easing the spasms of dry hacking coughs and effectively taming nagging

nighttime coughs. As you can imagine, honey can be quite soothing for sore throats. And, children have a special affinity for honey—they are typically a good bit more excited about taking a medicinal syrup than straight tea or tincture.

Herbal Infused Honeys

You can prepare an herbal honey as a stand-alone medicine by following the process outlined in Step 2 below. The infused honey can then be used to sweeten teas or be taken by the spoonful for its medicinal virtues. Herbal infused honeys can also be used as a base sweetener and medicinal agent to dilute tinctures and make them more palatable. You'll find details on this combination in the section below, cryptically entitled "Honey/Tincture Formulation". Herbal infused honeys, made from dried herbs, have a very long shelf life—decades to perhaps centuries, or even millennia.



Garbling elderberries

Here is a list of Artemisia's favorite herbal infused honeys:

- **Hawthorn, berries** (*Crataegus* spp., Rosaceae)
- **Angelica, root** (*Angelica archangelica* and other *Angelica* species, Apiaceae)
- **Spikenard, root** (*Aralia racemosa* and *Aralia californica*, Araliaceae)
- **Elecampane, root** (*Inula helenium*, Asteraceae)
- **Elderberry, fruit** (*Sambucus nigra* var. *canadensis* and *Sambucus nigra*, Adoxaceae)

Note that these infused honeys are not the same as varietal honeys, such as sourwood or tupelo honey. Bees make varietal honeys by visiting one species of plant and exclusively gathering its nectar.

Artemisia DawnSong's Herbal Syrup Recipe:

This syrup recipe enhances the extraction of both alcohol-soluble and water-soluble constituents, and has a long shelf life due to its high alcohol content. You can use one herb in this recipe or combine multiple herbs in each step. Just remember to maintain the proper proportions of honey, water, and alcohol.

The Syrup contains equal parts, by volume:

- 1 part Herbal Honey Infusion
- 1 part Concentrated Herbal Water Infusion or Decoction
- 1 part Herbal Tincture

Step I: Preparing the herbal tincture(s).

If you want to use homemade tincture(s) in your syrup, you will need to make your tincture at least four weeks before making your syrup. You can always substitute store-bought tinctures for this step if you don't have time to prepare a tincture. Another option is substituting straight alcohol; this will make a weaker syrup medicinally, but will do in a bind. See the lesson on tincture making for preparing herbal tinctures.

Step 2: Preparing your herbal honey infusion.

If you are using home-dried herbs, grind the herbs to a coarse consistency (there is no need to further grind store bought herbs). Measure your dried herb, or combination of dried herbs, in a measuring cup.

Use equal proportions, by volume, of your herb(s) and honey. For example, if you have four ounces (120 ml) of herbs (by volume) use four ounces (120 ml) (again by volume) of honey. Place the herbal material and the honey in a double boiler and keep on low heat for six to eight hours, making sure that the honey doesn't exceed 110-115 degrees Fahrenheit (43-46 degrees Celsius). You can fashion a double boiler

by nesting a smaller pot inside a larger one, using Mason jar lid rings to keep the inner pot off the bottom of the larger pot. You should be able to touch the honey briefly without it burning your skin. Add more honey if needed to completely cover your herbs. Stir the honey periodically and replenish the water in the bottom pot of the double boiler as needed.

Strain the honey while it is still warm, using any of the following cloths: muslin cloth, tighter weave cheesecloth, cotton gauze fabric or a clean, old tee shirt. Press the honey from the herbal material by wringing out the sticky mass by hand or pressing with a potato ricer or similar kitchen implement.

Note: At this point you may want to put some of the medicinal honey aside and use it as a medicinal sweetener for tea or as a medicinal honey base for tinctures as described in the Honey/Tincture section below.

Step 3: Making the concentrated herbal water infusion or decoction.

In this step you are basically making a very concentrated tea. Measure your dried herb, or combination of dried herbs, in a measuring cup. If you are using home-dried herbs, grind the herbs to a coarse consistency; there is no need to grind store bought herbs.

Use 1 part herb(s) to 1 part water, by volume. For example, if you have four ounces of herb(s) (120 ml), use four ounces (120 ml) of water. Depending on the herb(s) you are working with, you will either make a concentrated decoction or a concentrated infusion. If you are using hard plant material such as bark, seeds, or roots you will want to make a decoction. For flowers and leaves, prepare an infusion.

To make a decoction: bring the herbs and the water to a boil with the lid on, turn down the heat so the mixture simmers at a low boil with the lid on, and strain after twenty minutes.



Elderberries infusing in honey in a homemade double boiler

To make an infusion: bring the desired amount of water to a boil, turn off the heat, add the herbs, and let it sit covered for twenty minutes. It is possible to first make a decoction and then an infusion with the same pot if necessary. Strain and let cool.

Step 4: Combine your honey infusion, water extract and herbal tincture.

Combine equal parts by volume. For example, four ounces (120 ml) of honey, four ounces (120 ml) of tincture, and four ounces (120 ml) of water extract (infusion or decoction). Depending on the alcohol percentage used to prepare your tincture, and whether you worked with fresh or dried herbs, the alcohol level in your finished syrup will be anywhere from 10 to 30%. Label your syrup with the herb(s), date, and alcohol percentage. Cover the label with clear packing tape.

Storing Syrup and Shelf life

If you are using a tincture that is lower than 75% alcohol, keep the syrup refrigerated. The shelf life for lower alcohol syrups will vary depending on the level of alcohol. The higher the level, the longer it will keep. Watch out for signs of

spoilage, such as bubbling, off smells or visible mold.

If the tincture used is 75% alcohol or higher, your syrup will have a final alcohol level of 25% or higher. Such high alcohol percentage syrups should keep unrefrigerated for 1-2 years.

When in doubt, keep refrigerated. If you have the room, refrigeration will enhance the syrup's freshness and longevity, regardless of its alcohol percentage.

Syrup Dosage

- Syrup dosage will vary by herb. A general dosage would be 1-2 teaspoons (5-10 ml) of syrup up to 3 times a day for a 150-pound (68 kilogram) adult.
- Note the alcohol level and make sure it is a safe level for the child's weight and age. (2 teaspoons of Artemisia's syrup {about 10 milliliters} contains about 3.3 milliliters, or droppers full, of tincture.)
- To evaporate 50-60% of the alcohol in the syrup, pour a little boiling water over the syrup and let sit uncovered for 10 minutes.

Determining dosage in children by weight:

Standard: To determine the child's dosage by weight, you can assume that the adult dosage is for a 150-pound adult. Divide the child's weight by 150. Take that number and multiply it by the recommended adult dosage.

For example, if your child weighs 50 pounds, she will need one-third the recommended dose for a 150-pound adult. If the adult dosage is two teaspoons of syrup (10 milliliters), she will need one third of that dose, which is 3.3 milliliters (one-third of 10 milliliters), or about $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon full. Note that one-third of that dosage is tincture, which means that a 3.3 milliliters dosage contains 1.1 milliliters of tincture.

Metric: To determine the child's dosage by weight, you can assume that the adult dosage is

for a 68-kilogram adult. Divide the child's weight by 68. Take that number and multiply it by the recommended adult dosage.

For example, if your child weighs 22.7 kilograms, she will need one-third the recommended dose for a 68-kilogram adult. If the adult dosage is 10 milliliters, she will need one third of that dose, which is 3.3 milliliters (one-third of 10 milliliters), or about $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon full. Note that one-third of that dosage is tincture, which means that a 3.3 milliliters dosage contains 1.1 milliliters of tincture.



Elderberry syrup

VERY IMPORTANT SAFETY NOTE:

Do not give honey to babies under one year as there is a possibility that botulism (*Clostridium botulinum*) endospores can be present. The risk is that these spores can grow into a potentially fatal botulism infection in a baby's immature digestive system.

Alcohol-Free Syrups: You can combine the tea

and the honey, in equal parts by volume and omit the alcohol for a slightly weaker alcohol-free syrup. You will need to refrigerate this syrup and it will inevitably have a shorter shelf life, typically one to two weeks, depending on the herbs. When it begins to ferment or grow mold, it is ready for the compost.

Honey/Tincture Formulations:

I like to use medicinal honeys to mask the strong flavors of certain herbs. Measure one-half volume medicinal honey with one-half volume of tincture to make a quick syrup. I frequently use elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis* or *S. nigra*) honey as my base because of its pleasant fruity flavor and medicinal versatility. Elder is a true ally in colds and flu, as it is anti-viral, anti-bacterial, immune-stimulating, expectorant and anti-inflammatory. If you don't have any medicinal honeys on hand and you don't have any time to make one, substitute plain honey instead.

For example, say I want to make a syrup for the common cold with a damp productive cough: I would pour one ounce (30 ml) medicinal honey in a two ounce (60 ml) bottle (heat the honey slightly so it is pourable) and then add equal parts tinctures of elecampane (*Inula helenium*), echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea* and *E. angustifolia*), usnea (*Usnea* spp.), and spikenard (*Aralia racemosa*). For every dropper full of medicine, there will be one half dropper full of the

*“My work is loving the world. Here the
sunflowers, there the hummingbird
—equal seekers of sweetness.”*

—Mary Oliver

combined tincture formula. The adult dosage would be five droppers full, three to five times a day. To determine the dosage for your child, use the method outlined above, and keep in mind that each dropper full contains one half dropper full of tincture (alcohol-based).

A sample cough formula for a dry spasmodic cough would be equal parts of the following tinctures: wild cherry (*Prunus serotina*), licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*), and echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea* and *E. angustifolia*). Combine with the same amount (by volume) of medicinal honey.

Artemisia's Cough Syrup for a Productive Cough

2 ounces (60 ml) elderberry honey infusion
(*Sambucus nigra* var. *canadensis*,
Adoxaceae)

½ ounce (15 ml) elecampane tincture
(*Inula helenium*, Asteraceae)

½ ounce (15 ml) spikenard tincture
(*Aralia racemosa*, Araliaceae)

½ ounce (15 ml) usnea tincture
(*Usnea* spp., Parmeliaceae)

½ ounce (15 ml) echinacea tincture (*Echinacea
purpurea* or *E. angustifolia*, Asteraceae)

Yields 4 ounces (120 ml)

Combine all ingredients into a four-ounce (120 ml) bottle. Dosage: 1 teaspoon (5 ml), 3 times a day, for a 150-pound (68 kilogram) adult.

Notes on Treating Coughs

I would like to share a few simple tips I have learned over the years about treating coughs with herbs:

- It is important to be vigilant with treating respiratory infections—as soon as you notice a cough, start treating it! When infection has a chance to retreat deeper into the lungs, it becomes much harder to eradicate, and the possibility of secondary infections greatly increases. Don't wait until a cough settles in or becomes a nuisance; it is much harder to eradicate respiratory infections using natural remedies at this point.

- Remember to treat coughs during the day, even if the person is not coughing. If you only treat coughs at night with herbs, it will be much

harder to get over the infection.

- Steam inhalations with aromatic herbs and/or essential oils help to deliver the medicinal virtues of the plants right to the tender tissues of the lungs. In my personal experience, this simple and elegant delivery method is quite effective at eradicating coughs. Herbal and essential oil inhalations help to break up tenacious mucus, relieve inflammation, and fight infection. Some of my favorite herbs for steam inhalations are thyme (*Thymus* spp. – leaves and flowers), bee balm (*Monarda didyma*, and *M. fistulosa* – leaves and flowers), and pine tops (*Pinus* spp. – young needles). Bring a medium pot of water to a boil, and then add handfuls of fresh herbs; use half the amount of herbs if using dried herbs. The exact proportions of the herbs are not essential, as they won't be ingested. Find a comfortable chair and lean over the pot with a towel draped over the head to hold in the steam. With the eyes closed, inhale the vapors for a few minutes, take a break, and inhale again. The same pot can be reheated for a few sessions. Aim for three to five sessions a day.

The most precious gift we can offer others is our presence. When mindfulness embraces those we love, they will bloom like flowers.

—Thích Nhất Hạnh

Children can lean over a sink and inhale from the bowl when they are old enough to avoid scalding. But be very careful with children and steam inhalations!!! You may want to try using an aromatherapy diffuser instead. Alternately, you can get a bathroom steamy by running the shower and add some essential oils to the plugged bath tub. I typically recommend adding one to two drops each of eucalyptus (*Eucalyptus globulus*) and lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) essential oils, along with the herbs.

For more information on steam inhalations, see the Hydrotherapy lesson, found in Module 3.

Select Herbal Features



Angelica

(*Angelica archangelica* and other species, **Apiaceae**)
root

Angelica has been used as a spice, food and medicine for over ten centuries in Europe—the stout stems are candied and the seeds and roots used to flavor various liqueurs, spirits and elixirs. Angelica is an ingredient in Chartreuse and various incarnations of gin and vermouth. It is used as a digestive aid in many forms, including bitters, liqueurs and the candied stems. The root and seeds help to allay intestinal gas and spasms caused by infection, indigestion or chronic digestive conditions, such as irritable bowel syndrome. Additionally, as an aromatic bitter, angelica can be chewed upon, or ingested in moderation, as a digestive stimulant.

The root is used internally as a tonic anti-inflammatory for arthritic conditions. It is typically combined with other anti-inflammatory medic-

inals, such as willow (*Salix* spp.), meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) and turmeric (*Curcuma longa*). Angelica honey and syrup helps with coughs and colds, and is especially indicated in damp productive coughs (not dry hacking coughs). The root can be used in formula to treat stagnant or “cold” menstrual cramps—the kind that are relieved by heat or digestive movement. Angelica can also stimulate sluggish menses if the flow is scanty or tardy.



Elderberry

(*Sambucus nigra* var. *canadensis*, **Adoxaceae**)
fruit and flower

The clustered ebony-purple berries of this large shrub are both edible and medicinal. Elderberries are prepared into wine, jam, infused honey, tea, syrup and mead (honey wine). The syrup has become quite popular recently as a remedy for flus, but elderberry has been used medicinally for centuries in Europe and North America for a wide variety of ailments. The fruit is a tonic food and medicine for arthritic complaints. Additionally, elderberries are helpful in colds (as well as the flu) due to their antiviral, diaphoretic (helps

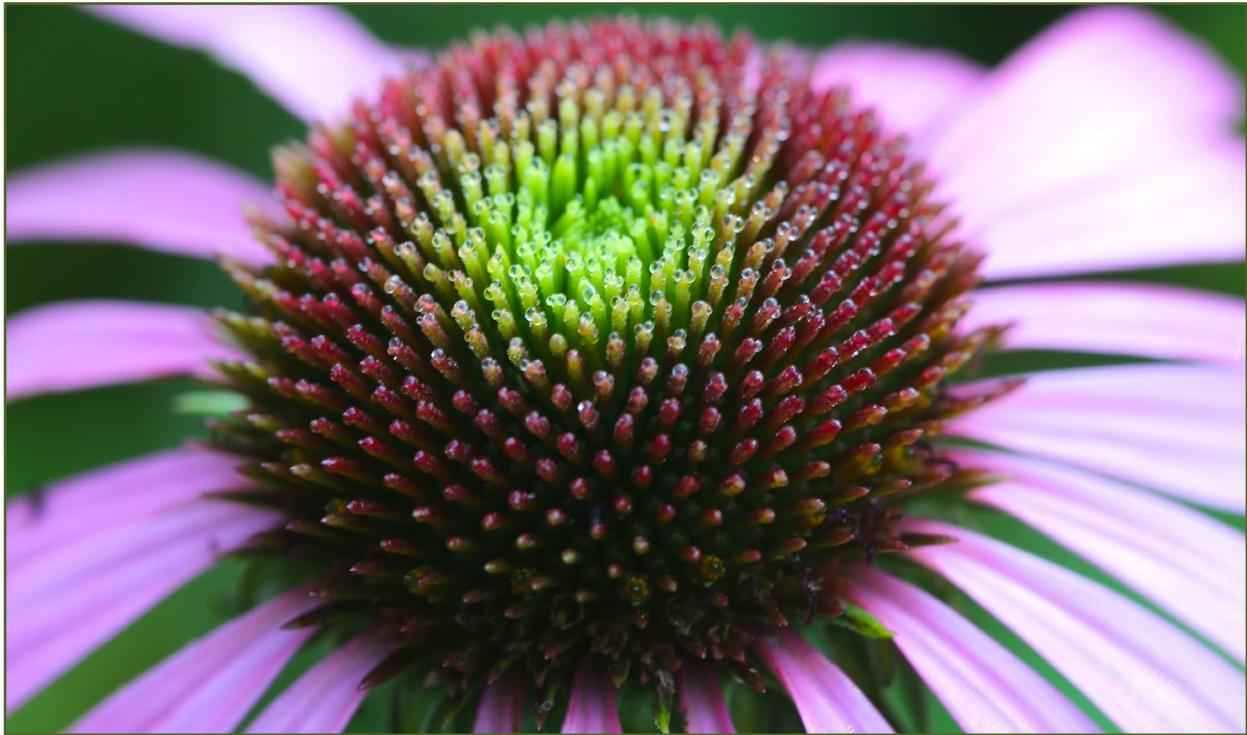
to break fevers), and anti-catarrhal (decongestant) qualities. The flowers are also edible and medicinal, and make a tasty tea, cordial or liquor. Elder’s creamy blooms are used as a diaphoretic and as a helpful remedy for sinus congestion from head colds, allergies or sinus infection. The wee flowers can be plucked from the stem and added to pancake batter, scones or banana bread. Topically, they are used as an anti-inflammatory in natural body care products and as an eyewash for conjunctivitis.



Usnea

(*Usnea* spp., **Parmeliaceae**)
lichen

Usnea is an important medicinal to have on hand in the medicine cabinet. Winter is a fine time to gather Usnea, as heavy winds during storms often knock down branches covered with this versatile medicinal. Lichens are symbiotic organisms, consisting of a fungi and algae. Usnea is fairly easy to recognize, with its thin string-like branching pattern. It can be differentiated from similar lichens by pulling one of the “strings”



Purple coneflower, or echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea*)

slowly apart and looking for a thin white strand at the core.

Usnea is especially helpful in treating respiratory congestion, as it is drying and anti-inflammatory, in addition to being antimicrobial. I primarily use Usnea in tincture form, and combine it with immune stimulants, such as Echinacea and Spilanthes, for upper and lower respiratory infections. It is also one of my treasured remedies for urinary tract infections, along with corn silk (*Zea mays*), uva-ursi (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) and marshmallow root (*Althaea officinalis*). Most urinary tract infections can be successfully treated with this protocol, along with unsweetened cranberry juice. Usnea is anti-viral, anti-bacterial, and anti-protozoan.

Usnea is more effective as a tincture rather than tea when treating infections, as its anti-microbial properties are more alcohol soluble. I tincture dried usnea with organic grain alcohol at 1:4 95%, and fresh usnea at 1:2 95%. I use a glass blender to create an usnea/alcohol slurry. The dosage is 2-3 droppers full diluted in water or tea, taken three times a day. Usnea should be used on

a short-term basis, and can be very drying to the sinuses.

Echinacea

(Echinacea purpurea or E. angustifolia,
Asteraceae)

root and seed

Purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*) is frequently cultivated as an ornamental and is the easiest species of Echinacea to grow. It attracts butterflies, moths, bees and other insects into the garden. The roots, seeds and fresh flowers are medicinal, and can be made into a tingly tasting, immune-stimulating tea or tincture. I use Echinacea as a short-term remedy for warding off colds and flu, particularly when a person has been exposed to infection or feels the initial stages of sickness. Some prime-time indications for Echinacea include flying on a plane, visiting with a sick friend or co-worker, or having someone sick in the home. Echinacea can also shorten the duration of an infectious illness. Many people stop taking it once they are sick, thinking it can't help anymore, but Echinacea stimulates many aspects of our immune system to help us fight the infection quicker.