

astringents such as butcher's broom root and yarrow leaf are also used internally for vascular health.

Antidiarrheals: Varying degrees of astringents are often employed in loose stools and diarrhea. Keep in mind that diarrhea is important for fighting acute infections, can pose a risk for lethal dehydration and may warrant a trip to the doctor for diagnosis first. That said, cinnamon bark, carob bean, alder bark, and blackberry root are popular modest astringents for acute or chronic diarrhea of known origin. Triphala and yellow dock contain an interesting mix of tannins alongside low levels of laxative anthraquinone glycosides, which gives them a reputation as a colon tonic in both diarrhea and constipation.

Antimicrobials: Different astringent herbs have an affinity for different body systems and types of infections. For example, uva ursi can be used short-term in acute

urinary tract infection, whereas blueberry leaf is a little gentler (and a bit safer but also quite hypoglycemic). Black walnut hulls are classic for fighting parasites, bacteria, and fungi. Alder bark offers broad-spectrum antimicrobial activity. Oak bark or leaf is occasionally used very short-term for acute gastrointestinal infection.

Medicine Making Tips and Tricks

Tannins extract best in alcohol and hot water. Decoctions (simmered water extracts) tend to be the strongest. They extract much less in cold water, sugar, honey, and glycerine. This is helpful to know when making medicine to emphasize or de-emphasize the tannins and astringency of an herb.

Tannins often precipitate out of extracts over time, especially if



green tea

they come in contact with the types of constituents they like to bind to (proteins, amino acids, alkaloids, minerals). Depending on the concentrations, this might happen in front

of your eyes in a glass of combined extracts or slowly over months. Herbalists will see this happen in tannin-rich tinctures that get clumpy over time or in certain formula combinations—the “clumpiness” might indicate reduced potency if the tannin (or what it’s binding to) was part of the medicine you hoped to get from the plant.

When making a high-tannin tincture, adding 10 percent glycerine or honey to your alcohol or combining herbs that don’t play well together can help slow down the precipitation process and may also decrease tannin extraction. I notice a huge difference in shelf life (from a few months to a year or longer) with cinnamon, cherry bark, alder bark, as well as other high-tannin plants such as bacopa and yellow dock.