

Design and Planting of a Medicine Garden



Planting and care of a community medicinal plant garden is an excellent way to engage youth with the traditional knowledge of their people. It also encourages outreach to the community and elders, as well as teaching garden design principles and health care, and once again, the inter-relationship our people have with the plant world.

Steps in Medicinal Garden Design

1. Determine what plants are appropriate for your garden
 - What plants are traditional medicinals?
 - Who still maintains knowledge of how to use these plants?
 - What other medicinals would be useful to plant?
 - Can you obtain cuttings, or identify where to find seeds?
Transplants?

2. When the types of plants are chosen, research their growing needs.

- How much water does each type of plant need?
- Are they 'nutrient-loving' plants, or can they grow on minimal nutrients?
- What is the height of the plants?
- How much space do they need?

When these are determined, then you can start planning your garden.

- Group plants with similar needs together, for example, water loving plants can occupy the same part of the garden.
- Consider the life cycle of the plant. Is the plant an annual (does it die every winter?) or a perennial (lasting more than one season).
- Identify where the irrigation source is coming from and plan accordingly
- Measure out the space each plant needs to grow well before planting – crowded plants will not flourish.
- Make sure you have planned the needs of the gardener into your layout. Garden beds should be no more than three feet wide in order for the gardener to reach across the whole length of the bed.
- Have fun planning a beautiful garden! Consider the harvesting needs, varying plant heights, and the complementary colors of your medicinal plants! It is always good to include some plants that are edible for children, such as lemon balm and mints.

Timing your Harvest of Medicinals

Flowers and flowering tops should be picked at the peak of flowering, in the early morning, after the dew has dried and before they are beginning to fade for the day.

Barks should be harvested in the fall when the energy and medicinal qualities in the plant are migrating towards the roots, or in the spring, when the sap is rising. Roots are harvested in the late fall and early winter when the plant tops have died back, or in the spring before too much foliage has developed.

Some examples of medicinal plants can be found in the Resources section of the Sustainable Nations website, www.sustainablenations.org

Recipes for Making Plant Medicines

Infusion:

An infusion is a basic tea. Boil water and add the fresh or dried herb. Let steep.

Decoction:

A decoction is a stronger version of a basic tea, made by boiling the water with the plant, then steeping. This is appropriate when using tough plants, roots, or barks.

Non-Alcoholic Tincture:

Use food grade vegetable glycerine. Thin it 1:1 with water. Place 1 part dried herb or 2 parts fresh herb to 3 parts glycerine/water mixture in a tight sealing jar. Place the herbs in a clear, sealed jar in a warm, sunny spot for over 2 weeks, or, set on low heat in a pot and simmer for 3-4 hours. If using the jar method, shake each day to mix the herbs in. Typical dosage: 5-15 drops.

Infused oil:

An infused oil is an oil in which the herb has been infused. Place dried/fresh herb (dried preferred) in a saucepan. Fill with oil until not quite covered, and simmer over low heat up to 4 hours.

Salve:

A salve is an ointment to be used externally. Per 1/2 C infused oil, add 1 oz beeswax, lanolin, or cocoa butter (or a combination of all 3). Add essential oils as desired, and pour into a sealed container. Let cool. A drop of benzoin or myrrh tincture will extend its life. If using tree resin, such as pine, fir, or spruce, no preservatives are necessary, as the antimicrobial characteristics of these will deter spoilage.

Poultice:

Mash or crush fresh plant parts and mix with a small amount of boiling water. Apply directly to skin, holding in place with a gauze bandage.

Syrup:

Boil slowly 2 1/2 C of infusion or decoction with 2-4 tbs honey, maple syrup, or sugar until it turns syrupy.

Lotion:

A word about lotions: Most store bought lotions are a whipped blend of oils and water. This causes them to have a relatively short shelf life.

- 3/4 cup of olive oil
- 1/3 cup of coconut oil or cocoa butter
- 1 teaspoon lanolin
- 1/2 oz grated beeswax
- 2/3 cup rosewater (or plain water)
- 1/3 cup aloe vera gel
- 1 to 2 drops rose oil (or other essential oil)
- 1 vitamin E capsule

Directions

Melt almond oil, coconut oil, lanolin and beeswax over low heat. Mix well and let cool.

Mix rosewater, aloe vera gel and rose oil. Add the contents of the vitamin E capsule. Whip this mixture into the beeswax mixture until well blended. Store in a jar with a tight lid.

Homemade Almond Rose Body Lotion

- 1/4 cup sweet almond oil
- Rose petals
- 3 tbsp vodka
- water
- 1 tbsp beeswax – grated
- 4 drops vitamin E oil.

Start by filling a clean Mason jar $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way with rose petals. Add the vodka then fill the jar up with water. Stir well and set it aside for 1 to 2 weeks. Strain and keep in an airtight jar.

Combine the almond oil and beeswax in a double boiler, or put them in a glass bowl and microwave in 30 sec. intervals. Stir gently until the beeswax is melted. Take the mixture off the heat and slowly add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of the rosewater, stirring

constantly. Let the mixture cool completely, then add the vitamin E oil.
Store the lotion in a clean container with a tight fitting lid.