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Kitchen Cabinet Herbs as Medicines

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The following are common culinary herbs that have been traditionally used to stimulate appetite, enhance digestion and preserve food in the days before refrigeration and chemicals. The herbs also may contain vitamins, minerals and other healing properties.

Anise (*Pimpinella anisum*)

Umbelliferae or Parsley family

Carminative (used to treat flatulence and colic), antispasmodic, tonic, liver antioxidant, alleviates cramps and nausea, improves digestion and breaks up mucus in hard dry coughs. The volatile oils in anise may be used as an insecticide in treating lice. A tablespoon of the crushed seeds may be added to a cup of water and steeped for 10-20 minutes. Fresh greens can be added to salads and seeds are harvested in late summer. Star Anise is from an evergreen tree *Illicium verum* (Magnoliaceae family) and has similar properties.

Basil (*Ocimum basilicum*)

Labiatae or Mint family

Basil may be used for indigestion, fevers, colds, flu, pain, headaches, vomiting, constipation, nervous conditions, nausea, mild antiseptic, as an antispasmodic breath freshener, hair rinse and insect repellent. Basil tea is often used to alleviate menstrual cramps, ease childbirth, bring on production of mother's milk and bring on menstrual flow. Basil may also be used to combat sadness.

A mild tea may be made by simmering 1 oz. dried basil in 2 cups boiling water for 20 minutes. For fevers, 3 black peppercorns may be added prior to simmering. Other seasonings such as nutmeg, honey or orange juice may be added.

Bay, Sweet Bay, Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*)

Lauraceae family

In ancient times bay was considered capable of increasing and maintaining health and happiness. Early Greeks used bay leaf crowns to protect and honor poets and scholars. Bay can be used as a carminative, hypoglycemic, and for topical pain relief.

Black pepper (*Piper nigrum*)

Piperaceae family

Pepper is a stimulant for the taste buds and a mild gastric irritant which stimulates secretions. It may also be a liver protectant similar to milk thistle. Yogis consider black pepper to be one of nature's most perfect foods as a preventative and cure for most diseases, especially cold mucous diseases and sore throat.

Caraway (*Carum carvi*)

Umbelliferae family

The seeds are used as a carminative to relieve intestinal and stomach gas. The oil may be used externally. Crush a heaping teaspoon of the seeds, add to 1 cup hot water and let steep for at least 5 minutes.

Cayenne or Chiles (*Capsicum frutescens, fastigiatum, minimum or annum*)

Solanaceae family

Cayenne is a systemic stimulant, particularly to heart and circulatory system, vasodilator, astringent, carminative, diaphoretic (causes sweating), antibacterial and antispasmodic. It has been used to treat heart conditions, headaches, indigestion, depression, arthritis, chills, alopecia, muscle spasms, and mouth sores. It reduces pain by depleting substance P (a pain transmitting substance.) It is also rich in vitamin C and carotenoids. It may be used internally and externally to stop bleeding by normalizing circulation. Care should be used to prevent burning. Vinegar and toothpaste may be used to remove capsaicin from fingers.

Celery (*Apium graveolens*)

Umbelliferae/Apiaceae family

Celery seeds have been used as a carminative and sedative. The juice can be used for rheumatoid arthritis and gout, as well as a urinary tract antiseptic and as a diuretic. The juice is high in sodium and should be used cautiously with hypertension.

Cinnamon (*Cinnamomum zeylanicum*)

Lauraceae family

Cinnamon bark is stimulating, astringent (dries/shrinks inflamed tissue), demulcent (cooling, soothing, mucilaginous), carminative and as a tincture to control uterine bleeding. The essential oil is antibacterial and antifungal. It has been used to treat colds, chronic diarrhea, dysentery, poor digestion, cramps, abdominal pains, coughing, wheezing, lower back pains, and as a mouthwash to strengthen gums.

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Cloves (*Syzygium aromaticum, Caryophyllus aromaticus or Eugenia carophyllata*) _____ *Myrtaceae* family

Clove buds warm the body, increase circulation, improve digestion, decrease gas, vomiting and nausea. The oil is antiseptic and has a slightly anesthetic action due to the high percentage of phenols. As a result, it has often been used to reduce toothache pain.

Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum, coriandri fructus*) _____ *Umbelliferae* family

Coriander seeds is a weak carminative and may be used as an antidote for excessive rhubarb, aspirin or senna intake. Crush two teaspoons of seeds and add to 1 cup water and let steep for at least 5 minutes.

Dill (*Anethum graveolens*) _____ *Umbelliferae/Apiaceae* family

The fruit of the dill is a weak carminative and galactagogue (stimulate or increase the secretion of milk.) and it used as a spice.

Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgarare*) _____ *Umbelliferae* family

Fennel is an antispasmodic, carminative, diuretic, expectorant (promotes the flow of secretions in the respiratory tract) and stimulant. Fennel root and seeds can be used to aid digestion and memory. The oil is antispasmodic and antibacterial and can be used topically for rheumatism. The tea can be used to treat colic, cramps, indigestion, gas, heartburn, and as an eyewash. One to two teaspoons of crushed seeds may be added to a cup of boiling water and steeped for twenty minutes.

Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*) _____ *Papilionaceae* family

The seeds are astringent, demulcent, emollient and expectorant. It is useful for all mucous conditions, lung congestion, ulcers, and inflamed conditions of stomach and intestines. It has also been used in the treatment of diabetes and gout. Traditionally fenugreek has been used to decrease menopausal sweating and depression and as a galactagogue and aphrodisiac. As a poultice can be applied to pimples, boils, carbuncles and rheumatic joints.

Garlic (*Allium sativum*) _____ *Liliaceae* family

The first reference to garlic as a medicinal plant date from the Stone Age. A garlic recipe dating from the year 3000BC was found written in cuneiform. Garlic is antimicrobial, reduces lipids and cholesterol, is a vasomotor depressant and inhibits platelet aggregation. It may be used as a gi stimulant, to treat various infections, arteriosclerotic diseases, and persistent respiratory conditions. Regular intake may prevent colds and infections.

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) _____ *Zingiberaceae* family

Ginger has been used as a medicinal herb for over 3,000years and is believed to increase Qi or spiritual life energy. It is warming, stimulating, promotes gastric secretions and aids in food absorption. It may be used for pain relief without inflammation by inhibiting substance P. It helps with digestion, flatulence, nausea and poor circulation. It is also considered a warming expectorant that is good for the lungs and dispelling mucus and phlegm. It is used as an antiseptic, diaphoretic, antispasmodic and circulatory stimulant. Ginger may also be used as a gargle for sore throats or added to bath for invigoration.

Horseradish (*Amaracia rusticana*) _____ *Cruciferae* family

Horseradish root is a good source of Vitamin C, is a stimulant, diuretic, and antibiotic. It can be used as a nasal decongestant for sinusitis, and as a urinary antiseptic.

Marjoram Sweet, or Wild (*Origanum majorana or Origanum vulgare*) _____ *Labiatae* family

Marjoram is an antioxidant, antispasmodic, diaphoretic, carminative, tonic, expectorant, stimulant and emmenagogue (promotes menstrual flow.) The tea may be used to settle an upset stomach, improve digestion, alleviate seasickness, headache, colic and nervous complaints. It can be used for cramps and nausea or added to bath for relaxation. The oil can be used externally for toothaches, or added to massage oil to stimulate circulation and reduce pain and swelling.

Mustard (*Brassica juncea*) _____ *Brassicaceae* family

Mustard seed is a rubefacient (reddens tissue), stimulant, diuretic, alterative (favorably alters health), and in large doses causes vomiting. Mustard seeds contain magnesium that can help regulate blood cholesterol levels and regulate blood sugar levels. Externally mustard may be used in a foot bath or in a poultice for a variety of conditions.

Nutmeg (*Myristica fragrans*) _____ *Myristicaceae* family

The nutmeg seed is an aromatic, carminative, hallucinogenic and stimulant. In small quantities nutmeg acts on the stomach to improve appetite, digestion and reduce diarrhea. Nutmeg oil is sometimes used to dispel flatulence. Some of the constituents in nutmeg (eugenol and isoeugenol) prevent platelet aggregation and inhibit COX enzymes (like NSAIDS) However, eating nutmegs may produce stomach pain, double vision, delirium and other symptoms of poisoning.

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum/sativum*)

Umbelliferae family

Parsley is an herbal multi-vitamin. It contains Vitamin A, C, iron, manganese, calcium and phosphorus. It is a diuretic and has been used to treat urinary tract infections, kidney stones, prostate problems, hypertension and fluid retention. It has also been used to treat gout and as a galactagogue and emmenagogue. The seeds are antispasmodic, carminative and expectorating. Parsley tea can also be used as a hair rinse and deodorant bath additive. However, more than two handfuls of leaves per day may irritate kidneys.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)

Labiatae family

Rosemary is a nervine, astringent, diaphoretic, diuretic, carminative, emmenagogue, abortifacient, cholagogue, antispasmodic, expectorant and stomachic. It is used for depression, as a circulatory and vasomotor tonic, for muscle spasms and insomnia. It also works as a stomach tonic for gas and gastric headaches, to support liver function and is used to treat hypotension after stress or illness. It is used externally for rheumatism, sores, eczema, bruises and wounds. Its volatile oils are antibacterial. May be added to bath for invigoration or relief of sore muscles.

Sage (*Salvia officinalis*)

Labiatae family

Sage is a carminative, astringent, antibacterial, antiseptic, antispasmodic, tonic, and vulnerary (soothe tissue and promote wound healing.) It is particularly useful for mucous membrane irritations such as mouth sores and sore throats. It is used for hot flashes, night sweats, galactorrhea, gastric symptoms involving gas and burping, and painful menstruation. It has also been used to reduce the pain of coronary thrombosis and angina. It may be added to bathwater for invigoration, cleansing, or relief of sore muscles. It is recommended that tea should be taken for no longer than a week. Sage leaves should not be boiled but may be steeped in water that has just been boiled. It is also possible to steep leaves in water overnight.

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)

Labiatae family

Thyme is used as an expectorant, spasmolytic, bronchodilator, carminative, antioxidant, antibacterial, antifungal, diuretic, vermifuge. It is used specifically for whooping cough, bronchitis and other upper respiratory tract conditions. It is effective against urinary tract infections. The volatile oils are both antifungal and antibacterial and they expel hookworms. It may be added to bath for invigoration.

Tumeric (*Curcuma longa*)

Zingiberaceae family

Tumeric is an antiinflammatory (depletes substance P), antimutagenic in smokers, hypcholesterolemic, hypoglycemic and hepatoprotective. It may be used as an NSAID substitute to treat inflammatory conditions of joints, muscles and liver. It may be used to treat symptoms of bloating after meals or flatulence.

Sources: Andrews-Miller, Shar, **Northwest Herbs Class Handout**, June, 1995, Lust, John, **The Herb Book**, Benedict Lust Publications, 1974, Mitchell, William A., Jr., **Plant Medicine in Practice**, Churchill Livingstone, 2003, Weiss, R.F and Fintelmann, V., **Herbal Medicine**, Thieme, 2000

Homemade Chai Tea (or buy a box of the Tazo Chai tea!)

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|--|---------------------------------|
| 1 oz. fresh ginger | Whole nutmeg (ground, optional) |
| 7 peppercorns | vanilla extract (optional) |
| 1 cinnamon stick | honey (optional) |
| 5 cloves | |
| 15 cardamom seeds | |
| ½ cup milk of your choice (soy, 1%, 2% etc.) | |

Heat these ingredients in 2 cups of water and simmer for 10 minutes. Add one-half cup of whatever type of milk you prefer and simmer for another 10 minutes. Add a sprinkle of nutmeg and a few drops of vanilla extract. Add a little honey for sweetness.

