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Top 25 Herbs



to Consider for Post-Disaster and Remote Environments




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There are thousands of medicinal herbs around the world, and the usage of many of them has been forgotten or lost over generations. Currently in North America, there are several hundred medicinal herbs that are widely available by ordering online through ethical herb suppliers such as Pacific Botanicals, Mountain Rose, Starwest Botanicals and others. Although it is very difficult to narrow down the number of herbs to a mere 25, it is a very good and realistic exercise to understand how to work with a limited number of herbs. Here is a list of herbs that I use a lot in clinical environments both here in the USA as well as abroad in remote locations. It should at least give you a good baseline reference to use and build on, that even by itself will cover a very broad spectrum of acute, chronic and even trauma-related health conditions. These medicinal herbs are widely available and very accessible for the beginning herbalist as they do not necessarily have to be identified in the wild (wildcrafted) and are not region-specific in that regard. – Sam Coffman




Herb	Preparation and Use	Contraindications
<p>Bilberry Leaf (<i>Vaccinium myrtillus</i>)</p> 	<p>Bilberry leaf and berry are extremely useful for urinary tract infections (UTIs) as well as injury healing. It is similar to cranberry in its effect on the bacteria in the urinary tract during an infection.</p> <p>It also increases microcirculation to damaged tissue – whether applied externally or taken internally – which helps speed healing, inhibits infection and inflammation.</p> <p>Berry is used for UTI’s and best prepared as a tea.</p> <p>Leaf can be prepared as a tea, decoction, tincture or dried and encapsulated for wound healing and together with berry for UTI’s.</p>	<p>Preferable use of leaf is always in formulas (not alone). Contains some medium-toxicity constituents and should never be taken more than 3 weeks in a row without taking a break from it for the same amount of time.</p> <p>Berry can be used alone and longer term (several months)</p>
<p>Black Cumin (<i>Nigella sativa</i>)</p> 	<p>Black Cumin seed is an excellent anti-inflammatory. This is useful internally for allergies (such as food allergies), auto-inflammatory illnesses, seasonal allergies (e.g. hay fever), tissue inflammation from injury.</p> <p>Additionally, this plant has been historically used for dyspepsia (difficulty with digestion), a mild immunity booster, skin issues (such as eczema – probably related somewhat to its anti-inflammatory potential as well as the fact that it is a mild liver stimulant and blood cleanser), galactagogue and relaxing respiratory expectorant/bronchodilator.</p>	<p>Can be harsh on the stomach lining if not heated prior to usage. 15-20 minutes at about 150 degrees F in an oven is usually sufficient.</p>




<p>Black Walnut (<i>Juglans nigra</i>)</p> 	<p>The Black Walnut leaf and (especially unripe) hull is very effective as an anti-fungal (internally and externally), an anti-parasitic for worm or parasite formulas, and an anti-bacterial for infections. It also assists healing in bruises, lacerations, soft-tissue and bone injuries. Black Walnut is also a mild lymph mover. It can be prepared as a tea, decoction, tincture or dried and encapsulated. Externally it could be applied directly in a poultice, or used in a soak or bath. Most conveniently it is used as an oil or salve (e.g. for ringworm). It is very bitter, and tincture form is easiest method to take, orally.</p>	<p>Avoid taking for more than 2-3 weeks in a row without an equivalent rest time. It is a medium-toxicity herb. It may exacerbate tinnitus (ringing in the ears). Use with caution during pregnancy.</p>
<p>Boneset (<i>Eupatorium perfoliatum</i>)</p> 	<p>Boneset leaf should be harvested at the start of the bloom of the flowers. This plant was named for its used for dengue fever which was at one time called “break bone fever” referring to the intense muscle aches and pains. Boneset raises the white blood cell (WBC) count and activity level in the body. It is a superb diaphoretic and is one of my first go-to herbs for a bad case of flu, as well as any situation where you need a stronger and more active immune system. Consider this for most viral (or protozoal) infections when fever is present.</p>	<p>Best to always use Boneset in a formula, rather than by itself. Limit use (even in a formula) to no more than 3 weeks, followed by at least as long of a period break.</p>
<p>Chamomile (<i>Matricaria recutita</i>)</p> 	<p>Chamomile is a very useful herb in so many ways. From mild pain relief, to anti-inflammation of the gut, to being a calming nervine and calming digestive upset, it is mild enough to be able to take long term, yet very effective as a short-term herb as well. As a mild pain reliever for everything from headache to PMS to urinary tract infection pain, musculoskeletal discomfort, minor sunburn, this is an herb that can be tinctured or made into a strong tea as it has a very pleasant flavor. Aerial parts are used (leaf, stem and flower).</p>	<p>Use with care if by itself during pregnancy, can be a uterine stimulant.</p>
<p>Chaparral (<i>Larrea spp.</i>)</p> 	<p>Internally & Externally – Chaparral is extremely effective at helping the body deal with any herpes family virus (chickenpox, shingles, HSV1 or 2, or cold sores). Externally – This plant is an amazing tissue healer, as well as being anti-microbial and anti-inflammatory and is a primary ingredient in many wound powders, salves or anti-bacterial formulas. Chaparral is very drying and can be used on non-healing diabetic ulcers and other infective sores. It is also very useful for dealing with sun or UV damage as well as being good in any burn remedy. The aerial parts are used (leaf, stem and flower).</p>	<p>Chaparral can be toxic in larger quantities or over time, avoid taking it internally for more than 2 or 3 weeks at a time without an equivalent period of rest. Some people are highly sensitive to it and will feel flushed or otherwise reactive to it, discontinue if that is the case.</p>





<p>Comfrey (<i>Symphytum officinale</i>)</p> 	<p>Comfrey is a superb mucosal and general tissue vulnerary. Externally, comfrey can be applied to minor abrasions, irritated skin, minor burns, closed-tissue injuries (sprains, strains, broken bones) and more. Comfrey is an excellent respiratory expectorant and mucosal vulnerary for the upper airway (dry, hacking cough, sinus infection, general sore throat), or anywhere that a mucosal vulnerary is needed (i.e. urinary tract during a UTI, stomach lining when working with an ulcer, esophageal mucosa when working with damage from acid reflux). The leaf is most commonly used internally, and the root externally.</p>	<p>Use with care internally, no more than 1 month without equivalent amount of time off. Externally, use with care on deep wounds as it can close a wound quickly and prevent drainage, trap infections, and cause potential for serious (anaerobic) infection to develop</p>
<p>Echinacea (<i>Echinacea angustifolia, purpurea and pallida</i>)</p> 	<p>Echinacea is, among other things, a superlative immune booster (raising WBC count) and tissue healer as well as a tissue detoxifier. Use Echinacea internally to help the body against onset of illness (especially upper respiratory), as an immune-booster and especially in formulas for bacterial infection.</p> <p>Use externally on the mucosa or skin itself to detoxify and heal infections of the mucosa or skin (e.g. infected or ulcerated wounds, infected insect or animal bites, strep throat, etc.).</p> <p>Most commonly the root of the <i>angustifolia</i> or <i>pallida</i>, and the flowers and leaves of the <i>purpurea</i> are what is used.</p>	<p>Excess use can cause nausea or dizziness, Recommended use is no longer than 3-4 weeks at a time</p>
<p>Feverfew (<i>Tanacetum parthenium</i>)</p> 	<p>Feverfew full herb (root, leaf and flower) is another potent anti-inflammatory. It is most commonly used for headaches and even migraines. A decent migraine formula that is successful for some (there is no such thing as an herb or a pharmaceutical that works for every migraine successfully) would consist of Feverfew, Skullcap and Black Cumin.</p> <p>Feverfew is also very useful for PMS, pain and cramping associated with menstruation and is anti-parasitic.</p>	<p>Contraindicated in pregnancy. If experiencing soreness of mouth or ulceration, reduce or discontinue usage.</p>

<p>Goldenseal/Barberry/Algerita /Oregon Grape (<i>Berberis spp. and/or Hydrastis canadensis</i>)</p> 	<p>These plants are not completely interchangeable in every way. However, they have in common that they contain the alkaloid berberine. This (and other constituents in these plants) found mostly in the roots, make all the plants very anti-bacterial against particularly gram positive bacteria such as staph and strep. They are all particularly good in one way or another for infections and other issues of the gut as well as any mucosal surface they come into contact with, or even externally on a staph or strep infection of the skin.</p> <p>They are also all useful as bitters for the digestive system and what would be called “liver decongestants” in the case of digestive issues ranging from GERD to IBS when it is related to a sluggish (or overworked) liver. One important to note is that the addition of MHC (5'-methoxyhydrnocarpin) into a formula with berberine, can increase its antibacterial efficiency by 16x, in anti-bacterial action against staph and MRSA infections. MHC is usually contained in the leaf of the same plant. For this reason, both root and leaf should usually be used.</p> <p>While berberine is water soluble and all of these plants would be fine in a tea, they are too bitter for this. Better to use as a tincture or even encapsulated if taken internally.</p>	<p>Pregnancy, hypertension. Avoid taking internally for more than 2 or 3 weeks at a time without an equivalent period of rest.</p>
<p>Horsetail (<i>Equisetum arvense</i>)</p> 	<p>This is a wonderful herb for anything related to bone, connective tissue, hair, nails and tooth enamel healing and regrowth. The above-ground herb is used. Superlative tissue healer especially for broken bones.</p> <p>Internally – Horsetail is useful for osteoporosis, broken bones in the healing stage, torn or damaged connective tissue, healthier hair and nails and regrowing tooth enamel as part of cavity repair.</p> <p>Externally - Horsetail works very well as a poultice or plaster for bone and soft-tissue healing.</p>	<p>Do not take Horsetail longer than approximately 3 weeks at a time, without a break of 2 – 3 weeks in between dosages. Large amounts of this herb over time can cause kidney irritation.</p>
<p>Licorice (<i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i>)</p> 	<p>The root of Licorice is a highly useful mucosal vulnerary for the upper airway, esophageal and stomach mucosa. This makes it extremely effective in helping recover from acid reflux, stomach ulcers, dry coughs, canker sores and sore throats.</p> <p>Licorice is highly restorative and is also an anti-inflammatory and helps to promote absorption of nutrients through the gut. It is can also be effective with auto-immune disorders, such as rheumatoid arthritis.</p>	<p>Should be avoided by those with chronic high blood pressure (hypertension). Can exacerbate hyperglycemic conditions.</p>

<p>Lobelia (<i>Lobelia inflata</i>)</p> 	<p>Internally – Leaf and flower (and more potently, the seed) are commonly known as a respiratory expectorant (both relaxing and stimulating) and is also a very effective smooth muscle relaxant. This applies to respiratory tissue, in the case of bronchial spasms, asthma, etc., but also to the urinary tract, in the case of urinary stones, as well as the gut, in cases of intestinal colic and cramping, and the heart, for angina.</p> <p>Externally – Can be a useful anti-infective and anti-inflammatory in wound treatment, but is even more useful as a pain reliever for external injuries and burns.</p>	<p>Contraindicated during pregnancy. Watch for signs of overdose – nausea, mental confusion, weakness, salivation, diarrhea</p>
<p>Marshmallow root (<i>Althea officinalis</i>)</p> 	<p>Marshmallow root (and also leaf, although not used as often) is a superlative mucosal vulnerary for restoring mucosal and submucosal tissue that is suffering from infection, inflammation, or any type of irritation. An ideal herb for upper respiratory issues, such as sinus infection, sore throat, mouth and gum sores, dry cough and irritation to any upper respiratory mucosa.</p> <p>Externally- Marshmallow is also useful in helping draw out infection while softening skin and soft tissue around an infection and sooth inflammation.</p>	<p>May lower blood pressure in some people.</p>
<p>Meadowsweet (<i>Filipendula ulmaria</i>)</p> 	<p>Meadowsweet is a superlative anti-inflammatory for pain relief. It is the plant that aspirin was originally derived from (salicylic acid) and is effective in most contexts where a pain reliever is needed.</p> <p>The whole plant can be used, but normally it is the leaf and flowers. Internally, as a cold and flu herb because of its diaphoretic properties, it works well. It also is useful for most types of headaches, pain from injury and arthritic pain. Meadowsweet is a mild diuretic as well and in this regard it is useful for UTI pain. It is gentle on the digestive system (unlike the willows) and works well for inflammation, gastritis, chronic ulcers and even GERD in the digestive tract. Externally, it can be used for inflammation, swelling and pain and is also a tissue healer.</p>	<p>Can cause nausea or vomiting in large doses.</p>

<p>Mullein (<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>)</p> 	<p>Root: Internally, Mullein is useful for UTI's – especially in a formula. It is a diuretic. Mullein root also helps soften connective tissue and ease pain, especially lower back.</p> <p>Leaf: Internally, Mullein leaf is very useful as a respiratory expectorant and mucosal vulnerary during upper respiratory infections. Externally, Mullein leaf is very good at drawing out infection from abscesses, splinters, etc., as heated poultice</p> <p>Flower: Infuse in oil and apply as an ear oil for ear infections. Can be formulated with Garlic for this purpose. Also useful as a respiratory herb for upper and lower respiratory infections.</p>	<p>None known</p>
<p>Nettles (<i>Urtica dioica</i>)</p> 	<p>A “power food” and nutrient dense herb that is very useful in support and regeneration for a myriad of nutritional deficiencies – to include anemia, sugar addictions, lack of energy, convalescence. Nettles leaf (best tinctured fresh) is extremely useful in the case of allergies – especially respiratory symptoms – as an anti-inflammatory and decongestant. Nettles seeds are useful in herbal formulas for UTI and urinary stones, as a mild diuretic and urinary tract vulnerary.</p> <p>The root is also useful as a soothing anti-inflammatory in the urinary tract and for men who suffer from prostate inflammation and/or benign prostatic hypertrophy (BHP). This also makes it a useful herb in UTI and cystitis (bladder infection) formulas.</p>	<p>None known</p>
<p>Plantain (<i>Plantago spp.</i>)</p> 	<p>Leaf: Plantain has a wide variety of medicinal uses. It is probably first and foremost an excellent vulnerary both on the skin as well as the mucosal tract. This makes it useful internally for upper respiratory illness and injury, stomach ulcers, acid reflux, sore throat, and infections of the upper respiratory system (to include sinus and throat). Plantain is also a decent relaxing expectorant. Additionally, Plantain contains baicalin which makes it an excellent adjuvant herb in staph and strep anti-bacterial herb formulas. Externally, Plantain is famous for insect and animal sting and bite relief. It works well in salve formulas with herbs like Gumweed for poison ivy/oak relief.</p>	<p>None known</p>

<p>Prickly Ash (<i>Zanthoxylum spp.</i>)</p> 	<p>Bark, Berry, Root Bark are all extremely (and for the most part equivalently) good medicine. Internally, Prickly ash is an excellent diaphoretic (cold and flu, fevers, chills), diuretic (UTI's), antimicrobial (esp. anti-viral), analgesic (esp. back and nerve pain, sciatica, etc.), peripheral vaso-dilator, analgesia and healing for gum and mouth sores, lymph mover and "carrier herb" in a formula – especially for the upper respiratory tract. Externally, Prickly Ash is a superb carrier herb for soft-tissue injury formulas as well as a counter-irritant for non-healing wounds/ulcers.</p>	<p>High doses can cause a "feeling" of mouth or throat swelling, numbness, excessive tingling. Use dropwise dosages if using it along. Otherwise, best used internally in a formula, not alone.</p>
<p>Skullcap (<i>Scutellaria spp.</i>)</p> 	<p>Root, Leaf and flower: Skullcap is a very effective nervine – having a calming and relaxing effect on the body and mind. Although not a strong analgesic by itself per se, it is very useful in cases of shock (after trauma), lessening anxiety from drug or other addiction, insomnia and depression. It is useful for anxiety or stress related cardiovascular issues such as hypertension, palpitations and spasmodic angina. Skullcap also mildly stimulates digestion and is a mild diuretic. It is effective alone but also works very well in formulas. Skullcap (especially Baikal Skullcap - <i>Scutellaria baicalensis</i>) also contains baicalin which makes it a useful adjuvant herb in anti-bacterial formulas.</p>	<p>Root only: Avoid use during pregnancy. If buying Skullcap online, ensure that the supplier has not adulterated the herb with Germander (which can build up toxicity over time). Know your supplier.</p>
<p>Sweet Annie (<i>Artemisia annua</i>)</p> 	<p>Sweet Annie has been used, probably for thousands of years, by Chinese Medicine to treat a number of ailments, most notably malaria. More recently it is being talked about and used for Lyme disease and bacterial co-infections.</p> <p>Internally – A very effective anti-bacterial, fever reducer, and cold & flu herb.</p> <p>Externally – useful for tissue healing, wound healing and as an anti-infective.</p>	<p>Strongly contraindicated in the case of pregnancy and breastfeeding. Best if used in formulas, and should only be used for 2 -3 weeks at a time with a rest for at least that long in between</p>

<p>Usnea (<i>Usnea spp.</i>)</p> 	<p>Highly effective against gram positive bacteria (strep, staph, tuberculosis), especially in the respiratory and urinary tract, as well as in and around infected wounds or skin infections. Usnea is a relaxing expectorant and can be useful for most respiratory ailments. It is also a nutritive and restorative herb for immune modulation and chronic conditions that create fatigue, and also stimulates appetite and digestion.</p> <p>Externally - it is also a decent anti-fungal (e.g. ringworm). On the skin, aside from being an anti-infective, Usnea stimulates tissue healing,</p>	<p>Usnea should not be taken longer than 3-4 weeks at a time, without a break equal time in between dosages. It can build toxicity in the liver over time.</p>
<p>Wormwood (<i>Artemisia absinthium</i>)</p> 	<p>A very good anti-parasitic herb, especially for roundworms and pinworms (can take approx. 2 weeks to expel), arguably effective against protozoan as well (such as Giardia). Can be a very powerful sweat inducer/fever reducer, and can help with nausea, food poisoning and digestive stimulation for chronic gut problems related to leaky gut syndrome and small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (often diagnosed as IBS).</p> <p>Externally – Wormwood is an anti-inflammatory and can help with bruises, contusions, insects stings and other inflammations and abscesses.</p>	<p>Strongly contraindicated in the case of pregnancy and breastfeeding and should only be used for short periods of time.</p>
<p>Yarrow (<i>Achillea spp.</i>)</p> 	<p>Root, leaf, seed and flower: Yarrow is superlative in its effect on the body in a number of ways: Internally, it is a hemostatic and astringent (internal bleeding, diarrhea), diaphoretic (excellent cold & flu herb, fever and chills), tones and relieves irritation and congestion in the genito-urinary tract (diuretic, urinary incontinence due to UTI or inflammation, urinary stones, congestive dysmenorrhea, PMS, fibroids) and other mucous membrane (mouth and gum infections). Externally it is a superior wound and tissue healer, hemostatic and breaks up congested or congealed blood (bruises, sprains, strains, inflammation around soft tissue injury).</p>	<p>Can cause skin sensitivity (photosensitivity, etc.) in a small percentage of people. Avoid use during first trimester of pregnancy.</p>
<p>Yerba Mansa (<i>Anemopsis californica</i>)</p> 	<p>The whole plant can be used and is an amazing anti-infective for many organ systems in the body. Most commonly, Yerba Mansa is used for respiratory issues such as acute or chronic illness of the upper and/or lower respiratory tract whether bacterial or viral: Bronchitis, sinus infection, pleuritis, pneumonia, strep throat, cold and flu, asthma. However, it is an excellent wound healer externally as well, and probably stimulates lymph and immune reaction anywhere that it comes into contact with tissue.</p>	<p>Use with care in the case of pregnancy and breastfeeding.</p>