

☞ Herbal Recipes for Winter Health

Remember that, when using herbs for healing and wellness, it is important to bring their powers into your life from many different angles – use a tea, tincture, and/or an aromatherapy steam to reinvigorate a weak constitution, and think preventatively to strengthen immunity during times of good health.

Immune ‘soup’:

This simple blend can serve as a base for any soup, or can be taken ‘as is’. It strengthens the immune system and can help prevent weakness during the winter months. It is quite powerful, but as with any herbal **tonics** (blends designed to strengthen over the long term) it is best used on a regular, daily basis.

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| Astragalus (<i>Astragalus membranaceus</i>) root | 1 cup of dry root |
| Ashwagandha (<i>Withania somnifera</i>) root | ½ cup dry root |
| Red Reishi (<i>Ganoderma lucidum</i>) mushroom | ½ cup dry mushrooms |
| Burdock (<i>Actium lappa</i>) root | ½ cup dry or fresh root |
| Garlic (<i>Allium sativum</i>) bulb | 4 minced cloves |

Take the above ingredients, and simmer them, covered, in a pot with 2 quarts of spring or well water (this process is called a *decoction*). Simmer on very, very low heat for at least one hour (in China, these types of tonics are often simmered for a whole day – a crock pot can be helpful. Be sure to keep an eye on the soup, and add water as needed. Don’t scorch the pot!). Strain and serve, perhaps with a little honey, or freeze for storage. The daily dose is 8 fluid ounces (1 cup). Get creative with this soup! Add onions, carrots, seaweed (dulse, arame for example) and salt to taste. You can also add cabbage, potatoes, and cooked beans to make it more of a hearty meal. Or herbs and spices like Cayenne, Thyme, and Parsley. These soups remind us that our daily food is our best medicine!

Tea #1 – For lung congestion

Sometimes a cold can ‘go down’ into the lungs, making it difficult to breathe and producing a deep and sometimes painful cough. In these cases, this blend can help.

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| Mullein (<i>Verbascum thapsus</i>) leaves | 3 Tablespoons dry leaves |
| Thyme (<i>Thymus vulgaris</i>) leaves | 1 Tablespoon dry leaves |
| Licorice (<i>Glycyrrhiza glabra</i>) root | 1 Tablespoon dry root |
| Ginger (<i>Zingiber officinalis</i>) root powder | 2 Teaspoons dry powder |

Place all the ingredients in a teapot or mason jar, add 1 Quart of boiling-hot water, cover, and steep for 15 to 20 minutes (this process is called an *infusion*), then strain. Drink the whole quart over the course of a day. You can prepare this tea the night before, and let it steep all night if you’d like, but I have found that teas for colds and flus work better if you drink them hot. Add honey to taste.

Tea #2 – For nose and sinus congestion

Often times the worst part of a cold is a stuffy nose. This blend can help relieve that congestion, drying up the nasal passages a bit. It is also useful, I've found, after the worst of a cold or flu is done, to help relieve lingering symptoms of congestion.

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| Elder (<i>Sambucus nigra</i>) flowers | 2 Tablespoons dry flowers |
| Red Clover (<i>Trifolium praetense</i>) flowers | 2 Tablespoons dry flowers |
| Catnip (<i>Nepeta cataria</i>) leaves | 1 Teaspoon dry leaves |
| Ginger (<i>Zingiber officinalis</i>) dry root powder | 1 Teaspoon dry powder |

Place all the ingredients in a teapot or mason jar, add 1 Quart of boiling-hot water, cover, and steep for 15 to 20 minutes (this process is called an *infusion*), then strain. Drink this quart of tea over the course of 4 hours, then repeat if necessary. You can add a little honey to taste if desired, although I've found too much sweetness can make nasal congestion worse.

Tincture – Echinacea purpurea

Tinctures are alcohol-based extracts of herbs. Usually quite potent and concentrated, they require a *solvent* such as Vodka to create. The dose is usually much, much smaller than that of a tea.

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| Echinacea (<i>Echinacea purpurea</i>) root | 2 or 3 Tablespoons fresh or dry |
| Vodka (100 proof) | 8 fluid ounces (1 cup) |

Chop the root as finely as is possible, and place it in a jar you can close securely (mason jars work well, I've found). Pour the vodka over the chopped root, close the jar, and shake it really well for at least 30 seconds. Label your tincture (name of herb and date are the minimum requirements) and put it in a cool, dark place. Shake it well at least every other day.

After two weeks (better yet, wait four weeks if you can), strain your tincture, discard the spent roots, wash out the jar, and put the tincture back in. It should have turned a nice reddish-brown color, and is ready to use!

Echinacea tincture is taken 1 teaspoon at a time, in a little water, once every hour when you feel the first signs of a cold or a sore throat.

Aromatherapy steam

This process is very useful to help relieve congestion in the nose and lungs. Usually best to do at night, before bed, to clear the breathing passages and encourage restful sleep.

1. Boil a pot of water. When the water is hot, remove from heat and place it on a safe surface (a stone or trivet works well).
2. Add 2 drops each of these *essential oils* (highly concentrated plant essences – use only a few drops, never internally, and be careful because, undiluted, they can irritate the skin):
 - a. **Rosemary**
 - b. **Thyme**
 - c. **Eucalyptus**
3. Cover your head with a towel and breathe in the steam for 5-10 minutes.