

Bioregional “At-Risk” Herbs and Their Analogs

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### **Northeast Grassroots Community Herbal Convergence**

**American Ginseng** (*Panax quinquefolius*) is native to the Appalachian mountain region, where it prefers steep, shady slopes with rich soil. Exported to China for 300 years, ginseng was a major source of cash in colonial/revolutionary times. Current popularity for vitality and potency sure doesn't help. Because it is a small plant, long lived and slow growing, constant harvest is more than the species can bear. Ginseng harvest is currently controlled, but poaching continues to be a problem.

Sustainable use: Source woods-cultivated ginseng root. Commercial growing is chemical-intensive factory farming. Harvested after the plant sets fruit, the leaf can be used in tea as a mild adaptogen. Save ginseng for someone whose vitality is wasted or in danger of being so by catastrophic life circumstances beyond their control.

Analogs:

Oats milky seed – restorative nervine tonic - cultivated

Wild Sarsaparilla root (*Aralia nudicaulis*) – common native also in the Araliaceae family. A milder adaptogen and lung tonic.

Eleuthero root – adaptogen and adrenal tonic – cultivated

Ashwagandha – relaxing adaptogen – cultivated

**Black Cohosh** (*Actaea racemosa*) is a larger forest plant which has not been exploited as much, or for as long. Currently the market demand is high, for menopausal formulas, etc. There is organic cultivation and population monitoring happening, fortunately, for black cohosh.

Sustainable use: Easily grown, the farther north it seems the more sunlight it enjoys. Or purchase products sourced from organically cultivated roots. The dose is rather small – ten to twenty drops 2-3 times per day, definitely not a “more is better” herb.

Analogs:

Motherwort or Vitex for menopausal symptoms

Scullcap or Kava (cultivated) for muscle spasm, anxiety

**Bloodroot** (*Sanguinaria canadense*) is also a small, perennial forest plant. Some market pressure for cancer and oral health products. Nursery grown plants are easy to come by, and bloodroot is not difficult to grow.

Sustainable use: Use small amounts of cultivated root, again this is not a large-dose herb.

Analogs:

Celandine – topical anti-microbial

Turmeric – skin cancer

Rosemary – respiratory expectorant

Spilanthes – antimicrobial, oral health

**Blue Cohosh** (*Caulophyllum thalictroides*) prefers wilder areas. It's at risk again because it is a perennial plant and the root is used for medicine. Midwives have used it extensively as a stimulant, and I suspect it is also much used as an emmenagogue.

Sustainable use: Use organically cultivated roots – a few plants will yield a lot of medicine because the roots are large for the size of the plant. Use small doses in formulas for labor, ovarian pain and arthritis in fingers.

Analogs:

Cotton root – oxytocic

Pennyroyal – emmenagogue

Raspberry leaf – astringent tonic

Motherwort – reproductive tonic

Prickly Ash – stimulant

**Eyebright** (*Euphrasia officinalis*) is a little plant with a limited range in the grasses along the Maine coast. It has a relationship with the grasses, and although no one is growing it here, other *Euphrasia* species are cultivated organically in Eastern Europe.

Sustainable use: Purchase organically cultivated herb, or use an analog.

Analogs:

Plantain – soothes red, irritated eyes in allergy sufferers

Ragweed leaf – may be helpful for allergies

Sage – sore throats and drippy sinuses

Chamomile – poultice for inflamed eyes

Self Heal – soothing to irritated eyes

**Goldenseal** (*Hydrastis canadensis*) is much overused as an herbal “antibiotic”. Another very small forest perennial, it takes about 227 plants to make up a dried pound of root. Goldenseal is one of our native medicinals on the CITES list, but fortunately large scale cultivation is happening.

Sustainable use: Goldenseal's ability to both tone mucus membrane tissue and fend off a wide variety of pathogens is rather unique. For simple infections, use an analog. When you really need goldenseal, use cultivated. Use other herbs for colds and flu.

Analogs:

Barberry – especially the invasive Japanese barberry as an anti-microbial

Thyme – respiratory expectorant and anti-microbial

Garlic – broad spectrum antibacterial and antifungal

Usnea – cold, dry respiratory anti-microbial

**Helonias** (*Chamaelirium luteum*) is not yet cultivated on a commercial scale, and roots don't seem to grow larger after they reach maturity. Has been used as a reproductive tonic especially for fertility.

Sustainable use: Save helonias for when all else fails.

Analogs:

Vitex – hormonal balance

Raspberry leaf – uterine tonic

Ladies Mantle – uterine tonic

Tiger Lily – (cultivated) for relieving pelvic congestion

Calendula – pelvic congestion

Motherwort – reproductive tonic

**Ladies Slipper** (*Cypripedium* spp.) is also officially listed on CITES. The herb industry agreed not to trade ladies slippers a few decades ago, but one does still find it available as a bulk herb. Given that its propagation is a very recent discovery, and nursery grown plants sell for about \$99.95, it is unlikely that any bulk ladies slipper sold is organically cultivated. These orchids have specific relationships with the soil microrrhiza and pollinators, and are not easily grown. Habitat destruction continues to be a problem for ladies slippers, particularly because relocation isn't easy.

Sustainable use: Only as a flower essence, otherwise use analogs.

Analogs:

Oats milky seed – restorative nervine

Lavender – relaxing, healing nervine

Lemon balm – antispasmodic nervine

Scullcap – sedative, anodyne, nervine

California poppy – same plus insomnia

Passiflora – same plus insomnia

**Slippery Elm** (*Ulmus rubra*) is at risk due to Dutch Elm disease as well as market demand. Once much used as a restorative gruel as well as demulcent.

Sustainable use: Harvest dying trees, or simply prune healthy ones to get a small amount of inner bark.

Analogs:

Marshmallow root – demulcent, the leaves & flowers are milder

Comfrey – demulcent, again the leaves can be used but are less emollient

Mullein leaf – respiratory demulcent

**Sundew** (*Drosera rotundifolia*) is a little carnivorous wetland plant. It is at risk more because of its tiny size and habitat destruction than market pressures.

Sustainable use: Better to use analogs or save it as a last resort.

Analogs:

Elecampane – respiratory expectorant and antimicrobial

Mullein – demulcent expectorant

Wild Cherry bark – antispasmodic to respiratory

Wild Lettuce – antispasmodic to respiratory

Thyme – anti-microbial and expectorant

Sage – anti-microbial and expectorant

**Trillium or Beth Root** (*Trillium erectum*) is a very long-lived plant that takes at least 7 years to be reproductively mature. Seeds are planted by ants, so again we have biological interdependence. Another forest dweller, trillium is at risk from habitat destruction.

Sustainable use: Better to use analogs, Trillium isn't cultivated widely as a crop.

Analogs:

Raspberry leaf – astringent tonic

Shepherd's Purse – uterine bleeding

Yarrow – uterine bleeding

Ladies Mantle – astringent tonic