LEARNING HERBAL MEDICINE

Disclaimer: I am not a medical doctor and am just sharing some tips that work for my family. Please do your own research to find what works best for your family. If you are taking pharmaceutical drugs you will need to check for drug/plant medicine interactions.

These are some of my favorite books. As with all of these books I take bits and pieces from each book and leave some behind that doesn’t work for me or my beliefs. Everyone asks me to pick my one favorite book but I could never do that. They each have something the others don’t and I really do use all of them frequently. But if I had to pick 3 it would be the top 3 in this list.

Encyclopedia of Herbal Medicine - Andrew Chevallier (big sturdy book with beautiful pictures and descriptions/uses of a huge list of herbs. Especially helpful is the Ailment Index.)

The Way of Herbs - Michael Tierra (no pictures but fabulous information about the herbs, history and uses. This would probably would be my favorite if it had pictures. I use this one every single time I research herbal remedies)

Herbal Recipes for Vibrant Health - Rosemary Gladstar (you can’t go wrong with Rosemary Gladstar, wonderful picture book with recipes and information on how to use the herbs)

Medicinal Herbs - Rosemary Gladstar (smaller amount of herbs mentioned in this book but very detailed information on each herb and how to use them)

The Herbal Apothecary - JJ Pursell (pictures and descriptions on a smaller list of herbs, but very precise instructions on how to use them).

The Herbal Medicine-Marker’s Handbook - James Green No pictures but good instructions on Teas, infusions, decoctions, oils, tinctures, salves, ointments, balms and more.

Back to Eden - Jethro Kloss (this was written in 1939 so it’s lacking the shine and beautiful pictures of today’s books, but it has some interesting stories and information.

Healing Mushrooms - Richard Bray (I’ve had this book for awhile but have yet to dive into medicinal mushrooms due to lack of space. It’s on my list though!)

Good herbalists to follow online:

Homegrown Herbalist (Dr. Patrick Jones). This guy is one of my favorites. He’s a veterinarian in Idaho and actually uses medicinal herbs on the animals he treats, as well as his human friends and family. He has so many great stories and personal experience using herbs. -listen on Youtube, books, offers classes

Rosemary Gladstar. She grew up using herbs and has a wealth of knowledge. She’s also the most giving of her knowledge of any I’ve listened to. She has such a calming nature to her that comes out in her books as well as videos. -Youtube, many books

Barbara O’Neill. Long time herbalist with lots of hands on experience. She believes in teaching families how to take care of basic first aid and minor health issues at home vs running to the doctor for every ailment, thus freeing up hospitals to do more acute and serious emergencies. -Youtube, offers classes

Dr. John R. Christopher, 1909-1983. He is no longer on the earth but there are still some crackly old videos floating around on Youtube. His stories are great, even though it is sometimes hard to find the plants he mentions. I don’t know if that’s because of our Texas location, plants that aren’t common anymore, or because they called the plant by a different name back then. Youtube, books

Homesteading Family. I really enjoy listening to their videos on medicinal herbs and how to use them. Youtube, offers classes

Once again, take what you want, leave what you don’t behind with each of these herbalists.

A word on health. As much as we’d like it, there is no magic pill or cure-all prescription for the illnesses of life. Good health starts with living healthfully every day. Keeping our bodies actively moving, getting good sleep and eating a healthy diet are the first steps in overcoming illness, fatigue, pain, lack of focus and depression.

Before turning to any form of medicinal remedy, we first need to look at what we can do to improve exercise, sleep, diet, and eliminate any unnecessary stress (if possible). Many health complaints will be eliminated just by doing these 4 things.

I grew up eating healthy home cooked meals, but always followed by sugary desserts. Those healthy meals were undermined by the sugar overload and processed treats and sugary cereals we consumed. It wasn’t a problem until it was. In my mid 40s I became pre-diabetic and that’s when I started looking at ways to turn it around. I learned what I needed to do but it took several years to make the change. Change is hard and sugar/processed food are so addicting! I try to cook almost all of our meals from scratch, grow a lot of plants in the garden, and try to not eat any added sugar (other than what’s in fruit). It has made a world of difference in my mood, energy, pain level and ability to avoid sickness.

If you are just starting to learn about herbal remedies and are feeling apprehensive about using them on yourself or others; a good place to start is with GRAS herbs. (generally regarded as safe) A lot of these are also a food source and can very easily be grown in backyard gardens. But don’t underestimate these herbs just because they are common plants or backyard weeds. A lot of them are extremely strong while also being gentle on the body. If you are in doubt about an herb just look it up to see if it is GRAS.

And don’t feel overwhelmed with the hundreds of different medicinal plants out there. In the beginning I thought I had to have many different herbs on hand for all the different things they did. So I either planted or bought SO MANY herbs. I’m glad I have them on hand but truthfully I probably won’t use them all up before they pass their potency period. And almost all herbs are good for many different ailments, meaning you can probably get by with a good 10 -15 herbs growing in your backyard (or foraged in the wild). Maybe less.

I could never pick a favorite herb but I think every single household would avoid a lot of health complaints by just adding garlic into their diets. I plant a huge amount of garlic every year and we add it to most dishes we cook. If we are starting to feel any kind of sickness come on we will slice a raw garlic clove, mix it in some goat cheese and eat it just like that, 3 times a day. Raw garlic is a powerful medicine and kicks (or lessens) a lot of illnesses so fast. Onions, comfrey, thyme, mullein and lemon balm are next on the list.

A word on foraging for herbs. Be very sure that what you are picking is indeed the plant you seek. The very best way to be sure is to actually plant seeds and grow that plant in your garden. You will learn what it looks like from seedling to flowering stage and know it like the back of your hand. Growing them also ensures that you are getting a pesticide, heavy metal, pollution free herb. If you do see a plant in the wild that you are sure of (dandelions, mullein, echinacea) make sure it’s in a field that’s not sprayed, and far from a road where there might be gas fumes and pollutants. This is especially important with liver detoxifying herbs like milk thistle. Herbs that pull toxins from the body also pull toxins from the soil. I recently saw milk thistle growing wild in the ditch beside my neighborhood. But I knew that the landscapers put all kinds of chemicals in the grass and when it rains it all drains into that ditch. So that beautiful milk thistle is off limits.

**These are some fun recipes you can try with easy to come by ingredients, with the exception of mullein but pick up some free seeds at my booth and you’ll have mullein soon!**

**Honey/Onion Cough Syrup**

**Ingredients-**

1 raw onion (white, yellow, red, or purple)

1 jar of local honey

1 large mason jars with lids

**Instructions:**

***Chop*** and dice onion.

***Place*** 1/4 c of onion in the bottom of 1 mason jar.

***Then*** drizzle 1/4 c of honey over.

***Repeat*** onion, honey layers, until you have used up all your onion; typically 4-5 layers will be made.

***Secure*** lid, turn upside down until all onion has been covered by the honey and then back to right side up.

***Let*** sit for 24 hours at room temperature.

***Next,*** place another mason jar under a small mesh strainer and gently pour to separate the onion from the syrup. Set onions and strainer aside.

***Place*** lid on honey onion syrup and place in the refrigerator and use as needed.

Keeps indefinitely (if it lasts that long).

**Instructions for use:**

At first sign of cough or sickness:

Adults 1 tsp 3 times a day.

Children 1/2 tsp 3 times a day.

Toddlers 1/8 tsp 3 times a day.

Infants not recommended.

**Mullein Tea**

Ingredients:

3-4 cups water

1 large leaf torn up

2” piece of ginger chopped

1 lemon squeezed

Honey to taste (my husband gets honey, I use stevia to keep blood sugar low)

(This is great for allergies or just general congestion. If we’re feeling like a cold or flu is coming on I’ll add a sprig of thyme, a few sprigs of lemon balm, a few torn up sage leaves and a small handful of yarrow leaves or flowers)

Steep the ingredients in hot water for 15-20 minutes. This can be for one person, 3-4 cups a day, or for several people one cup each.

**Golden Milk for 2 to 3 people**

Ingredients:

3 cups any kind of milk

1-2 tsp turmeric (more is better but it’s not super delicious with more)

2 tsp cinnamon

1 tsp ginger

½ tsp cardamom

¼ tsp cloves

¼ tsp nutmeg

Honey to taste (I usually do about ¼ cup plus a tiny bit of stevia)

This is a great immune booster for cold and flu season.

**Garlic Mullein Earache Oil**

### **Materials**

* **6 garlic cloves peeled and crushed or chopped**
* **⅓ cup dried mullein flowers**
* **carrier oil to cover about 1 cup, I like to use olive oil**

### **Instructions**

* **In a clean jar, combine the garlic and mullein flowers.**
* **Pour the oil into the jar until the garlic and mullein are just covered, ensuring you leave at least one inch of space at the top of the jar to allow for expansion.**
* **Put a lid on the jar and leave it to infuse for at least two weeks (and up to 3 months). Give the jar a shake or stir every few days or so.**
* **When ready, strain the garlic and mullein flowers from the oil and funnel the oil into dropper bottles and screw the lid(s) on tightly.**
* **Store in a cool, dry place for up to one year.**
* **To use: use the dropper bulb to dispense 3-4 drops into each outer ear canal. It is necessary to do both since they are connected. Do not stick the dropper into your ear or dispense internally.**

**Immune Booster Tincture**

Get one clean quart jar and chop equal amounts of fresh ginger and turmeric, filling the jar about halfway up. Pour glycerine over the ginger and turmeric to cover by about an inch. Cover jar with lid and shake. Let it sit for about 6-8 weeks, shaking occasionally to make sure the ginger and turmeric are still covered. At the end of the 6-8 weeks strain out the liquid and put in amber dropper bottles. Dosage is 2-3 dropperfuls. This will be good for about a year.

**Sleep Tea**

1 ounce catnip herb

1 ounce skullcap herb

1 ounce passionflower herb

1 ounce lemon balm herb

½ ounce chamomile flowers

½ ounce lavender flowers

½ ounce hops flowers

Mix herbs in a jar. Use 2 tsp per cup, step 5-8 minutes covered. Drink 1 hour before bedtime.

If you are interested in making oil infusions and balms or salves, two good resources are The Herbal Apothecary by JJ Pursell and The Herbal Medicine Maker’s Handbook by James Green. You have to make an oil infusion before you can make a salve and those books will give you good instructions on both. Rosemary Gladstar’s books are good as well.

At age 53 (me) and 60 (husband), we have found wonderful herbs that help keep us in good health at our age. For each health complaint there’s probably 10-15 different plants that could be used so lots of options out there.

I love the opportunity to help others with herbal remedies and often take mullein tea to an elderly neighbor with breathing issues. It has helped him overcome pneumonia twice.

The people I am overly cautious with are pregnant women (there’s very few herbs I would give to a pregnant woman) and anyone on pharmaceutical drugs or with life threatening illnesses.

If there’s ever a time when access to a hospital is not available, then I will definitely do all I can to help someone with the things I have learned. But right now my goal is to keep my family in the best health possible with diet, exercise, sunlight and naturopathic medicine, while continuing to learn more about the world of healing plants.

If you have any questions feel free to message me at [pbrookp@gmail.com](mailto:pbrookp@gmail.com). I’ll still be learning until the day I die but would love to share the things I have learned.