

## **HOW TO COOK YOUR RAW HERB DECOCTION**

You will have one large packet or bag of herbs that may or not have a smaller bag(s) attached or included with it. One packet of herbs generally makes enough tea for two days. These directions will describe how to prepare your decoction (a tea made from boiled herbs). Please also read the document entitled General Guidelines for Taking Chinese Herbs.

### **THE DOUBLE-COOK METHOD**

1. Open one large packet of herbs and put them in a pot with a lid - you can use a ceramic herb pot or a regular stainless steel saucepan. Cover them with approximately three cups of water. The herbs should be completely covered - add more water if need be. If there is a stamp that says something like "Add \* pieces of fresh ginger," this is the time to add it. You do not have to peel the ginger - slice it into rounds about the thickness of a quarter and add them to the pot. You will have been given instructions as to how much to add - usually it's 3-5 slices. Let your herbs soak for a minimum of twenty minutes, longer if you can.

Some herbs have to be pre-cooked. These will be bagged separately with a stamp that says something like "Pre-cook for \* minutes" - it's usually an hour. If you don't have any herbs that require pre-cooking, skip ahead to Step 2. While the other herbs are soaking (use less soaking water - about two cups - in this instance), put the herbs that need pre-cooking into a pot and bring to a boil. Cover tightly and reduce to a simmer. Cook for the specified amount of time. When done, add the soaking herbs and their water to the pot, combining the two. Bring to a boil and continue cooking as described below.

2. After soaking, stir the herbs, put them on the stove, and bring them to a good boil. Once they've boiled, turn the temperature down and cover them with the lid partly ajar. You want the herbs to boil down, evaporate to about 1/3 or 1/2, so they need to stay at a good simmer with the lid cracked open enough. This will take a few times until you get a good sense of how much the lid needs to be propped open and how high you have to set the temperature. Cook for about 20-40 minutes until the tea has boiled down by 1/3 to 1/2, stirring occasionally.

3. If you have a packet that says "Add last 5-10 minutes," open the packet and pour the herbs

into the simmering decoction when they are almost reduced down. Continue to cook for another five minutes or so.

4. Once the herbs have reduced by  $\frac{1}{3}$  or  $\frac{1}{2}$ , strain the tea into a quart-sized container. Keep/return the herbs to the pot.

5. Do a second cook! Add more water - about three cups (more or less depending on how much tea you've gotten so far - we're aiming for four cups of tea at the end of the second cooking). Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, prop the lid, and reduce down by  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  again - it should take 20-40 minutes.

6. Strain the herbs and combine the two decoctions. You may have a packet that reads "Dissolve in strained decoction." If so, open it up and pour the contents into your big jar of tea. Stir until combined.

7. The ideal finished amount is 4 cups of tea. Regardless of how much or how little you have, divide the tea into four equal doses. Store in the refrigerator; it will keep for around four days.

#### THE SINGLE-COOK METHOD

The single-cook method is only for certain kinds of formulas. It is cooked like the double-cook method described above with these differences:

If it's a two-day formula: You will start with about five cups of water, soak the herbs, bring them to a boil, cover with the lid propped open, and reduce it down by  $\frac{1}{5}$ th - to 4 cups. This should take about 20 minutes. Do not overcook the decoction. Strain and divide into four doses.

If it's a one-day formula: You will start with about three cups and cook it down to two cups. Strain and divide into two doses.

## COOKING REN SHEN/GINSENG

If you are fortunate to have Ren Shen/Panax Ginseng in your formula, you will have to use a different cooking method. Ginseng is an expensive medicinal because it takes over seven years to mature. It is the most revered herb in Chinese medicine, and therefore it is given special handling when it's being prepared. Do not cook Ren Shen with the other herbs - instead choose one of these methods:

Put the slices of Ren Shen into a pint-sized Mason jar with a tight-fitting lid. Add one cup of water. Soak the Ren Shen for a minimum of 20 minutes. Put the sealed jar with the Ren Shen and water in a large pot of water, making a water bath. The level of the water in the Mason jar and the water in the large pot should be about equal. Cover the large pot and bring to a boil. Reduce the temperature to the lowest setting and simmer for as long as possible - one to four hours. In the meantime, cook the other herbs using slightly less water throughout the various steps. When your decoction is complete, the herbs are strained and in the jar, strain the Ren Shen decoction and add it, combining the two.

If you don't want to use a water bath, you can cook Ren Shen in a small saucepan using a little more water. Don't let the water dry up too much - add more water as it cooks if need be. Cook for one to four hours and add to the completed strained decoction.

You can reuse your Ren Shen slices the next time you cook your herbs. Store the cooked pieces in a jar in the refrigerator with enough water to cover. Don't store it like this for more than a few days. When it's time to cook again, top off the soaking water with fresh water to make a cup, add fresh Ren Shen if you have it, and cook like before. Many herb-lovers make an easy vodka-based Ren Shen tincture using their leftovers. If this interests you, ask me for instructions.