

Plants for healing - 2 ©

By far the easiest use for foragers is to take the plant leaves or berries and make an infusion, as opposed to tinctures or oils. Some hedgerow or garden plants lend themselves to other uses though. Fresh comfrey leaves, for example, can be pulped and used as a poultice against sprains or bruises. This text continues the theme of common plants for healing, i.e. plants that can be grown in your gardens, allotments, in balcony pots or even on your window-sills.

Important **safety tip** though. If you're not experienced in making up herbal remedies, you do need to ask for professional advice: <http://www.nimh.org.uk>. I'm not talking about sticking a few (washed) wild strawberry leaves in hot water for an infusion, but making your own cream or concentrated oil unless you know what the plant is actually going to do to you.

Vervain

Verbena is a correspondence plant for January. Vervain (*verbena officinalis*) is also known as the enchanter's plant, herb of grace and Juno's tears. It is not the same as lemon verbena. Any part of the plant can be used above the soil, but the roots should be avoided. Vervain has been used for many centuries for different ailments – it was used in Ancient Greece, also by the Aztecs and by First Nation tribes too.

Most commonly, vervain is taken as an infusion or as a tincture, but it should be avoided by those who are lactating or pregnant. It's a common herb for altars and I keep a supply of vervain in my herb cupboard, to make into teabags. Here are some of the **ailments** that can be treated with vervain.

- Jaundice.
- Gout.
- Kidney stones – vervain acts a diuretic and digestive tonic.
- Headaches.
- Painful menstruation, although I'd suggest raspberry leaf and hibiscus – it's gentler.
- Depression, stress and anxiety.
- Insomnia.



Mullein

Mullein (*verbascum thapsus*) is a common plant that grows just about everywhere and has been used in herbal medicine for centuries. With mullein, both the leaves and the flowers are used for healing the following ailments.

- Mullein is brilliant as a remedy for earache – either as a tincture or a macerated oil. It is better than anaesthetic ear drops and can be used on both humans and dogs. Most commonly, the ear drops contain a blend of mullein, lavender, calendula and garlic. Sometimes, a blend may include St John's Wort too.
- Mullein can be applied directly to the skin to help treat burns or inflammatory skin conditions.
- Sometimes, mullein is added to alcoholic drinks for flavouring.

Clinical studies have found that mullein flowers and leaves are good to combat respiratory dis-eases, such as flu, coughs, asthma and bronchitis, by calming inflammations or irritations.

In lab tests (published in 2002), it was shown that mullein helped kill certain types of bacteria, including *Staphylococcus aureus* (the most common cause of staph infections) and *Escherichia coli* (or *E. coli*).

Mullein is a very safe herb and can be found in chemists or health food places as tinctures, capsules, powders, tablets and, of course, ear drops.



Violets

The violet is a **correspondence plant for February**. It falls under the viola family (*Violaceae*) and the most common example in Europe is the sweet violet (*Viola odorata*) – this is an edible plant and can be used with salads or other such meals (not the roots). It is also known as the wood violet or English violet.

Healers use the leaves or flowers to make medicines, but the roots can cause vomiting. Here are some of the **ailments** that can be treated with sweet violet.

- Coughs and sore throats (as a tea or syrup)
- Cleansing of the blood – the leaves have high Vitamin A and C content
- Decreasing high cholesterol levels
- Bronchitis, COPD and whooping cough
- Dis-eases of the lymphatic system, where violet is usually applied as a tincture or essential oil
- Haemorrhoids
- Varicose veins
- Dry or rough skin (used as a poultice, macerated oil or ointment)
- As a salve or cream, it's also good for insect bites or eczema as an anti-inflammatory and soothing agent.

Another good use for violets is the **feng shui effect**, particularly for those with depression or high levels of mental stress. By placing a bowl of sweet violets in a room, any negative effects will be dispersed – through a combination of the natural fragrance, the calming colour and the peaceful nature of the plant. In folklore, violet was known as hearts-ease, to restore a broken or dis-eased heart – in such cases, violet tea is the best remedy.



Lemon balm

Lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) is a very ubiquitous plant for healing and it's attractive to bees (*Melissa* is Greek for honeybee). Sometimes, people refer to lemon balm as sweet balm or honey plant and it is the leaves that are used for healing for these ailments.

- Lemon balm is good for skin problems, eg acne or cold sores.
- The leaves have a sedative property against insomnia or stress issues.
- As a digestive aid – the plant contains chemicals that relieve wind and help with liver or gall bladder problems.
- Anti-migraine or headache treatment.
- As a treatment for stomach cramps or UTI.

Clinical studies have found that lemon balm blocks the attachment of antibodies to the thyroid cells that cause Grave's disease (hyperthyroidism). **How to use the lemon balm leaves** is often the question, but the best ways are shown below. It should be noted that lemon balm remedies should not be used by pregnant women, those who take medicines for mental health or those using thyroid remedies.

- As an essential oil in a diffuser, it helps with good sleep – lemon balm can be blended with valerian. The oil can also be dabbed onto the neck to combat stress.
- Put the leaves in an infusion after a meal for digestive benefits.
- Place some leaves in a small muslin bag and add it to a hot bath – the aroma helps with anxiety.



Cowslip

Cowslips (*primula veris*) are part of the same family as primroses and other primulas, growing wild in the spring in meadows and shady areas too. It is beloved of birds and cowslip seeds often turn up in wild bird seed mixes. For the healing witches among us, it is the cowslip flowers, leaves and roots that can be used for [these ailments](#).

- The flowers are good for skin problems, eg acne or eczema.
- The leaves have a sedative property against insomnia.
- Hyperactivity or nervous anxiety in children.
- As an expectorant against colds, coughs or phlegm in colds.
- As a treatment for kidney problems or UTI.

[How to use a cowslip](#) is often the question, but the best ways are shown below. It should be noted that cowslip remedies should not be used by pregnant women or those using anti-coagulative medications.

- A salve or cream, derived from its flowers, is good for the skin.
- Put the leaves in an infusion for better rest or sleep.
- Put the flowers in an infusion for younger folk – it's a milder sedative than the leaves.
- The roots are used to make an expectorant or tincture against colds, flu, asthma or, even, whooping-cough.
- A poultice of the flowers helps with bruises.



Rosemary

Rosemary (*salvia rosmarinus*) is a [correspondence plant for November](#) and is a common garden herb. It is known by the needle-like leaves, distinctive smell and blue or purple flowers.

Botanically, it is part of the mint family, along with basil, oregano and thyme. Many people know about the use of rosemary in cooking and that it is full of iron and calcium, but there are other ways in which rosemary is [medically](#) good for you.

- Teas or infusions can be made from the fresh or dried leaves.
- The flowers and leaves are the parts used for medicines.
- Rosemary essential oil can be used against arthritis.
- Rosemary relieves muscular aches and pains if made into a poultice or massage oil.
- It improves the concentration and memory.
- It is a booster for the immune and digestive systems.
- Rosemary also boosts the circulation.
- It is good for hair problems and growth – a tincture of equal parts of rosemary, lavender and lemon grass oil in vodka combats nits and head lice.

Note: too much rosemary in a single dose may cause coma or heart problems.



Hibiscus

Hibiscus is a common garden plant and has a wide variety of health benefits. This tea is rich in vitamin C, minerals, and antioxidants. It is a very popular medicinal drink and can be drunk either hot or cold – it is low in calories and caffeine-free.

OK, so, we're really considering the [good things here that derive from hibiscus tea/infusion](#).

- It reduces high blood pressure.
- It reduces high cholesterol and inflammatory problems.
- It relieves period pains or menstrual cramps – I suggest to users that they combine hibiscus with raspberry leaves for maximum benefits.
- It helps relieve problems in the digestive system.
- It boosts the immune system.
- Potentially, the anti-oxidant properties of hibiscus help treat diseases of the liver.
- It can speed up the metabolism aiding in healthy, gradual weight loss.
- Hibiscus is linked with better mental health.

A research study conducted on patients with **type 2 diabetes** suggests that consumption of hibiscus and sour tea lowers cholesterol, triglycerides, and low-density lipoprotein cholesterol and increases (good) high-density lipoprotein cholesterol.

Hibiscus tea is also used as a **sports drink** in order to satiate thirst. For this purpose, hibiscus tea is typically consumed cold, as an iced tea. Many people include it in their diets, as hibiscus can cool down the body very fast.



Dill

Dill or dill weed (*anethum graveolens*) comes from the Saxon word, *dilla* (to lull), but the herb was also used widely in Ancient Egypt and is listed in the Bible.

It is a good source of iron, manganese, calcium and dietary fibre. One tablespoon of dill seed has the calcium equivalent of one-third cup of milk. Although dill has no known danger warnings associated with its use, there is a possibility that [oil of dill](#) should be avoided during pregnancy.

Many people use dill as a key flavouring for cakes, fish dishes and pickles, but it also has lots of [healing properties](#) – using the leaves and seeds.

- The seeds can be made into cakes that help people digest rich food.
- Actually, talking about digestion, dill is used widely for loss of appetite, liver problems and gall bladder issues.
- It's also good for UTI and kidney problems.
- Dill and fennel leaves can be chewed together to relieve headaches.
- Fevers and colds, coughs and respiratory illness respond well to dill.
- Any neurological complaints or spasms can be treated with dill.
- Dill seed mouthwash or dill water can help with swellings in the mouth or throat.
- For new mothers, a tea made of dill seeds enriches the breast milk and helps the baby to overcome windy pains.
- Other complaints that can be treated by dill tea include insomnia and menstrual pain.
- It's also worth noting that there is current research on the potential of dill in cancer prevention. Dill contains a substance that minimises the effects of some carcinogens.

