

## [Seven Medicinal Herbs For Winter Health](#)

### Winter Health

By: *Cindy Mitchell*

Energy: Asian ginseng (*Panax ginseng*)

- In a 2,000-year-old herbal, Shen Nong wrote that ginseng is good for quieting the spirit, curbing the emotions, brightening the eyes, enlightening the mind, increasing wisdom, and, with continuous use, “longevity with light weight.”
- Since the 1960s, scientists have extensively studied Asian ginseng. At least seven European clinical studies show that standardized extracts increase respiratory performance, alertness, power of concentration, and grasp of abstract concepts. A controlled study in France that evaluated complaints of patients suffering from “functional fatigue,” such as being worn out or having an empty feeling, showed that people who took ginseng experienced less fatigue, anxiety, and poor concentration compared with people who took a placebo.
- Ginseng contains more than eighteen active chemicals called ginsenosides, whose behavior in lab tests matches the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) description of the effect the herb has on the body. In Germany, Asian ginseng products are allowed to be labeled as tonics to treat fatigue, reduced work capacity, and lack of concentration

Insomnia: Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*)

- Chamomile is the dried flower head of an annual member of the aster family. German chamomile, the species most often sold on the U.S. market, is grown in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Germany, Argentina, and Europe. It’s been used for centuries as a mild sleep aid, and scientists attribute its gentle sedative activity to alpha-bisabolol, a constituent found in its oil.
- Up to six capsules containing 300 to 400 mg of dried chamomile can be taken daily, or 10 to 40 drops of a tincture three times daily. A tea is made by steeping 1/2 to 1 teaspoon of dried flowers in a cup of hot water and taken three times daily.
- People who are allergic to other members of the aster family, including ragweed, may be allergic to chamomile.
- A recommended dose is up to four 500 to 600 mg capsules of the dried or steamed root daily; for standardized products, 100 mg one or two times a day. To make a tea, use 3 teaspoons of dried or sliced root per cup of water. Place the herb and water in a saucepan and simmer, covered, for 45 minutes. Strain. Drink a cup two or three times a day.
- Some people have experienced overstimulation or gastrointestinal upset when taking Asian ginseng, and some women have reported breast tenderness or menstrual problems after long-term use. Avoid ginseng if you have high blood pressure or if you’re pregnant.

Eye Strain: [Bilberry](#) (*Vaccinium myrtillus*)

- Bilberry is a relative of the blueberry. A small shrub with sweet black berries, it grows in northern Europe, western Asia, and the Rocky Mountains of North America.
- Bilberry was a popular medicine among sixteenth-century Europeans, who used the leaves to fight inflammation and infection. They also used the herb to treat diarrhea, prevent scurvy (a vitamin C deficiency), and disinfect mouth sores.
- During World War II, pilots in the British Royal Air Force reported improved night vision after eating bilberry jam. During the 1960s, Italian and French scientists investigated these reports to learn whether bilberries could improve vision. As a result, preparations of bilberry fruit are used in Europe today to enhance poor microcirculation and thus improve eye ailments such as night blindness and diabetic retinopathy. Research shows that pigments in bilberry called anthocyanosides strengthen capillaries by protecting them from free radical damage and stimulating the formation of healthy connective tissue. However, most studies on bilberry have involved animals or only a small number of people.
- A typical daily dose is two or three capsules standardized to contain 25 percent - anthocyanosides. No side effects or interactions with other drugs have been reported.

Circulation: [Ginkgo](#) (*Ginkgo biloba*)

- Ginkgo products come from the leaves of the only surviving member of the ginkgo family, a species that has existed for more than 200 million years. Most commercial leaf production is from plantations in South Carolina, France, and China.
- Ginkgo leaf has been cultivated since the fifteenth century in China, where the leaves were used to “benefit the brain” and treat lung disorders, cough and asthma symptoms, and diarrhea. Today, ginkgo is one of the best-selling herbal medicines in Europe.
- Most research focuses on using ginkgo to increase circulation to the extremities and the brain, and more than 400 scientific studies support its use for this. Scientists attribute ginkgo’s health benefits to unique compounds called flavone glycosides and ginkgolides, which inhibit development of cardiovascular, inflammatory, and respiratory disorders. Ginkgo is a strong antioxidant—it directs its free-radical scavenging activity to the brain, central nervous system, and cardiovascular system. This is what makes it promising in the treatment of age-related declines of brain function.
- A typical dose is three capsules containing at least 40 mg of standardized extract daily. It must be used for six to eight weeks to produce results.
- Ginkgo can cause gastrointestinal upset, headaches, or skin allergies.

Depression: St.-John’s-Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)

- You may have heard the news: St.-John’s-wort can offer the benefits of prescription antidepressants without the side effects. It is the dried flowering top of a plant native to Europe; in some parts of the United States, it grows like a weed.
- During the Middle Ages, remarkable and even mystical properties were attributed to St.-John’s-wort. By the nineteenth century, U.S. physicians used it as a mild sedative and, in 1997, St.-

John's-wort was the focus of national attention after ABC's news program 20/20 reported on the herb's ability to quell depression.

- At least twenty-three controlled studies involving more than 1,800 outpatients show that it works. In one recent study of 105 outpatients with mild to moderate depression or temporary depressive moods, 67 percent of those taking St.-John's-wort improved, while only 28 percent of those taking a placebo did. Those taking the herb reported feeling less sad, hopeless, helpless, useless, and fearful.
- For capsules and other products standardized to 0.3 percent hypericin, the recommended dose is 300 mg three times daily. St.-John's-wort takes time to work, though—allow six weeks of continuous use. To make a tea, steep 1/2 to 1 teaspoon of the dried herb in a cup of hot water for 10 minutes, then drink. The recommended daily dose for a tincture is 3 to 4 droppersful twice daily.
- Hypericin from the flowers may cause people with fair skin to break out in hives or blisters upon exposure to sunlight. If you take St.-John's-wort, stay out of the sun and the tanning salon.

Colds: [Echinacea](#) (*Echinacea angustifolia*, *E. pallida*, *E. purpurea*)

- Few of us don't know this herb, which is now one of the foremost cold medicines on the market.
- Native Americans of the prairie used echinacea more than any other plant to cure ailments ranging from colds to cancer. It was the best-selling medicinal plant in the United States until the 1920s, when antibiotics began to replace it. But in Europe it has been used throughout the twentieth century; in 1993, German physicians prescribed echinacea more than 2.5 million times.
- Research shows that echinacea enhances the activity of white blood cells and other specialized immune system cells. It increases their ability to attack foreign invaders such as cold or flu viruses and helps accelerate healing if infection already exists.
- No single chemical component has been identified as causing echinacea's medicinal action. A 1997 controlled clinical study involving 120 volunteers in Sweden showed that daily treatment with the juice of fresh flowering *E. purpurea* at the first sign of cold symptoms inhibits development of colds, and, if a cold is in progress, cuts the duration of the illness in half.
- A typical dose is up to nine 300 to 400 mg capsules or 60 drops of a tincture three times daily. Use at the first sign of cold or flu; take continuously for two weeks.
- People allergic to members of the aster family, such as ragweed, may also be allergic to echinacea. The German government recommends that it not be used in cases of diseases of the immune system, including multiple sclerosis and HIV infection.

Flu: [Elderberry](#) (*Sambucus canadensis*, *S. nigra*)

- Elderberry comes from the honeysuckle family. Medicinally, elder fruit from the North American *S. canadensis* and elder flower from the European *S. nigra* are used. American herbalists combine the dried flowers of *S. canadensis* with peppermint to treat fevers and colds. Native

Americans used a tea made from the plant's inner bark to induce vomiting; Europeans used black elderberry to treat colds and fevers.

- Most of the chemical research on elderberry involves black elderberry. Current interest in this species stems from the research of Israeli scientist Dr. Madeleine Mumcuoglu, who, along with her colleagues at Hadassah University Medical Center in Jerusalem, developed an elderberry extract standardized to contain three flavonoids. In a 1993 clinical study performed during a flu outbreak in Israel, she found that the extract reduces the severity and duration of flu symptoms compared to a placebo. Apparently, the extract's compounds inhibit the ability of the flu virus to enter cells, and thus disarm the virus's ability to infect.
- The Germans prescribe elderberry flower to induce sweating in order to treat fevers and increase bronchial secretions associated with full-blown colds.
- A typical dose is up to six 500 to 600 mg capsules daily or 40 drops of tincture every four hours. To make a tea, simmer 2 to 3 teaspoons of dried flowers in hot water for 10 to 15 minutes and drink up to three times daily.
- Safe use of elder always relates to the dried or cooked fruits and flowers. When fresh, all plant parts can produce allergic or other adverse reactions.
- A typical dose is up to nine 300 to 400 mg capsules or 60 drops of a tincture three times daily. Use at the first sign of cold or flu; take continuously for two weeks.