



Herbal tinctures

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What is a tincture?

A tincture is the active ingredients of a medicinal herb extracted into a solvent.

The active ingredients include alkaloids, glycosides, minerals, vitamins & essential oils, giving the tincture medicinal properties.

The solvent most commonly used is a high proof alcohol. Apple cider vinegar or a vegetable glycerin can also be used.

Tinctures can be made with fresh or dried herbs using any plant material that has a therapeutic benefit.

Why make a tincture

Because it's so incredibly easy to make your own and when you do, you capture the wealth of beneficial compounds in plant materials. Making tinctures ensures your medicine cupboard is well stocked with natural remedies.

It is less expensive to make your own than to buy ready made tinctures. If you grow your own herbs it is an excellent way to preserve the plant material.

When you start making tinctures some of the best herbs to use for a gentle therapeutic effect are chamomile, calendula, echinacea, fennel, lavender & rose.

Always seek the advice of a qualified medical herbalist (see resources) before taking tinctures.

If you are ill do not attempt to self-diagnose or self-medicate. Herbs have potent medicinal properties that can have different effects on those who take them, interact with allopathic medicine or cause allergic reaction. It is vital that you ensure that you know what it is you're treating before you take anything.

What you need

- ❖ One of the following -
high-proof (80%) alcohol,
organic, unpasteurised, apple cider vinegar, vegetable glycerin
- ❖ herb of your choice, either fresh or dried
- ❖ kilner jar or similar glass jar with a lid (not a metal lid)
- ❖ small, dark glass bottles (cobalt or amber)for storing the
tinctures with tight fitting lids – dropper bottles are best*
- ❖ a mesh strainer
- ❖ glass jug
- ❖ cheesecloth or muslin
- ❖ a small funnel
- ❖ labels

* *see resources*

Alcohol

Alcohol is not only a potent solvent for the herbal active components it is also a very effective preservative.

Herbal tinctures made with alcohol, if stored in a cool dark place, have a very long shelf life – 10 years or more.

It is possible to source 95% **pure ethanol** but **vodka** is a good choice (see resources) or you can use **brandy**.

Alcohol is much better than glycerine or ACV at extracting the herbal components from roots and woody or tough leaves.

How to make an alcohol tincture

Choose your plant material & roughly chop or grind

Place the material into your jar.

Fresh herbs: $\frac{2}{3}$ fill the jar

Dried herbs: $\frac{1}{2}$ fill the jar

Fresh and dried roots and berries: $\frac{1}{2}$ fill the jar

Fill the jar to within 1" of the top with your chosen alcohol ensuring the plant material is totally covered.

Securely fasten the jar top.

Place your jar in a cool, dry, dark place.

Shake the jar every couple of days. The herbs must stay submerged, so top up with more alcohol if necessary.

Leave the mixture to extract for 6 - 8 weeks.

To bottle, place a mesh strainer over a glass measuring jug and drape over muslin or cheesecloth. Pour the tincture into the cloth. To extract all of the tincture, gather up the cloth and squeeze the remaining liquid from the herbs.

Pour the tincture through a funnel into a dropper bottle.

Securely fasten the lid, label and store in a cool, dry, dark place.

How you use the tincture will be dependent on the herb & the strength of the tincture together with your individual body chemistry. As a rule of thumb place a few drops directly under your tongue making sure the dropper does not touch your mouth, or dilute a few drops in a glass of water.

Vegetable glycerin

When vegetable glycerin is used to make a tincture the tincture is known as a glycerite.

Vegetable glycerin is a clear, odourless, sweet tasting liquid produced from vegetable oils such as soy, palm or coconut. It is manufactured using high temperatures that split the glycerin molecule from the fatty acids. While sweet, it is not metabolised by the body like sugar.

Herbal tinctures made from glycerin have a shelf life of 2-3 years if kept in a cool, dark place.

Glycerites are a good choice for children or those that are unable to consume alcohol, however glycerin has half the solvent power of alcohol and is the weakest tincture of the three solvents.

Beware glycerin can also be made from animal fats so make sure you use a vegetable glycerin. Choose one that is organic and made from sustainably harvested material.

* Glycerin can be bought from a chemists.

**see resources*

How to make a glycerite

Choose your plant material & roughly chop or grind.

Place the material into your jar.

Fresh herbs: $\frac{2}{3}$ fill the jar

Dried herbs: $\frac{1}{2}$ fill the jar

Fresh and dried roots and berries: $\frac{1}{2}$ fill the jar

fresh plants

cover the plant material with glycerin to 1" of the top of the jar.

dried plants

dilute the glycerin with distilled water 3 parts glycerin to 1 part water and cover the plant material to 1" of the top with this mixture.

Securely fasten the jar top and place in a cool, dry dark place for 6 -8 weeks.

Shake the jar every couple of days.

The herbs must stay submerged so top up with glycerin if necessary.

Leave the mixture to extract for 6 - 8 weeks.

When you are ready to bottle place a mesh strainer over a glass measuring jug and drape over a piece of muslin or cheesecloth. Pour the tincture into the cloth. To extract all of the tincture, gather up the cloth and squeeze the remaining liquid from the herbs. Place a funnel into a dropper bottle and pour the tincture into the bottle. Securely fasten the lid, label and store in a cool, dry, dark place.

How you use will be dependent on the herb used and the strength of the tincture together with your individual body chemistry. As a rule of thumb place a few drops directly under your tongue making sure the dropper does not touch your mouth, or dilute a few drops in a glass of water.

Apple cider vinegar

For those wishing to avoid alcohol a tincture made from apple cider vinegar (ACV) is a good substitute.

The finished product will not be as strong as a tincture made from alcohol and the shelf life is much shorter. If kept in a cool dark place its potency will last for a year.

However tinctures made from ACV are particularly good because the ACV has many health giving qualities of its own. It is also has the benefit of costing considerably less than alcohol.

How to make a tincture using apple cider vinegar

Choose your plant material & roughly chop or grind

Place the material into your jar.

Fresh herbs: $\frac{2}{3}$ fill the jar

Dried herbs: $\frac{1}{2}$ fill the jar

Fresh and dried roots and berries: $\frac{1}{2}$ fill the jar

Fill the jar to within 1" of the top with ACV so as to completely cover the plant material. Securely fasten the jar top.

Place your jar in a cool, dry, dark place.

Shake the jar every couple of days. The herbs must stay submerged so top up with more ACV if necessary.

Leave the mixture to extract for 6 - 8 weeks.

When you are ready to bottle place a mesh strainer over a glass measuring jug and drape over a piece of muslin or cheesecloth.

Pour the tincture into the cloth. To extract more of the tincture, gather up the cloth and squeeze the remaining liquid from the herbs. Place a funnel into a dropper bottle and pour the tincture into the bottle.

Securely fasten the lid, label and store in a cool, dry, dark place.

How you use will be dependent on the herb used and the strength of the tincture together with your individual body chemistry. As a rule of thumb place a few drops directly under your tongue making sure the dropper does not touch your mouth, or dilute a few drops in a glass of water.

Benefits of unpasteurised apple cider vinegar

Traditionally, ACV is made through a long, slow fermentation process, leaving it rich in bioactive components like acetic acid, gallic acid, catechin, epicatechin, caffeic acid, and more, giving it potent antioxidant, antimicrobial, and many other beneficial properties.

The longer fermentation allowed the accumulation of a yeast and acetic acid bacteria mat known as the mother of vinegar.

Short fermentations do not necessarily produce a mat.

Many of the benefits of apple cider vinegar are anecdotal however it has been used medicinally since the time of Hippocrates. There are claims that ACV benefits a myriad of problems including heartburn, hair loss/growth, detoxing, acid reflux, colds, warts, candida, arthritis & gum disease, of course absence of scientific research does not mean it is not true. There have been a handful of studies in recent years that support the benefits of ACV in treating diabetes, heart health & weight loss.

How to make apple cider vinegar

Method 1 (first making your own cider)

Half fill a wide necked jar with chopped up apples cover with filtered water and for every pint of water add 1 tablespoon sugar. To speed the process you could at this stage add a little wine yeast. Secure a piece of muslin over the top of the jar and leave in a warm dark place to ferment for about 3 weeks. During this period it will bubble and foam as the sugars begin to ferment. Check from time to time and gently push down any pieces of apple that rise to the top.

After 2 – 3 weeks the apple pieces will have fallen to the bottom of the jar, strain, discard the apple and return the liquid to the same jar and cover again. Return to a warm dark place and over the following 4 – 8 weeks it will transform into apple cider vinegar with an acetic mat on top known as the ‘mother’.

You can tell by the taste when the vinegar is ready – it should not taste alcoholic but be pleasantly acidic, or you can test with pH strips you are aiming for a pH of 4 or under. Remove the mother and save for your next batch. Store the ACV in flip top bottles in a cool dark place.

How to make apple cider vinegar

Method 2 (from bought cider)

Choose organic cider to convert to ACV and simply leave it in an open glass jar to ferment naturally.

Since the vinegar fermentation process is an aerobic one, you want to use a wide neck jar to make sure as much of the cider is exposed to the air as possible.

If you have a vinegar mother pop it into the jar, no worries if you don't it will still work. Add a couple of tablespoons of unpasteurised ACV to help the process but again it will work without.

Place muslin over the opening and fasten with a rubber band to protect from insects and debris whilst allowing sufficient air through for the vinegar to breathe.

Leave for around 6 weeks in a cool, dark place. When it reaches the acidity you like, test the acidity with pH strips (bought at a chemists). You want a pH of 4 or lower to ensure protection from harmful bacteria & mold.

Pour your vinegar into bottles, secure a lid (corks are really good) and store.

Easy to grow herbs for making tinctures

Marigold

calendula officinalis

Marigold are easy to grow they are tolerant of most soils but prefer moderately fertile well drained soil.

Sow from seed when danger from frost has passed.

The tincture, made from the petals, soothes indigestion and heartburn, it also stimulates the liver and gallbladder. Calendula has anti-inflammatory and antibacterial activity. The tincture is supportive for people with skin ailments & can be applied topically to minor cuts & grazes.

Rosemary

rosemarinus officinalis

Rosemary can be grown from cuttings but can also be propagated by seed. Grow in well drained soil in a sunny position. Rosemary grows well in a pot which can be taken indoors during the winter.

Rosemary tincture can be used as a general stimulant. It can be used to fight infection or bacteria Rosemary can help to improve circulation & help increase mental alertness.

Thyme

thymus

Propagate by seed, cuttings or root division. Thyme flourishes best in well drained sandy soil in a sunny position. Thyme has been used as a strengthening herb since ancient times.

Use thyme tincture as an expectorant & as a relaxant of the respiratory tract calming coughs and soothing sore throats. Also calms an irritable bowel.

Easy to grow herbs for making tinctures

Peppermint

mentha piperita

Peppermint grows easily in most places. Grow in pots to contain its quick spreading nature. Best propagated with pieces of rooting stem.

Peppermint tincture can be used to treat nausea, travel sickness, indigestion, flatulence & migraines.

Rose

rosa

Buy a potted rose from a reliable nursery, choose from a *R Gallica*, *R Canina* or *R Damascen* – these are the best medicinal varieties. Do not buy a hybrid for medicinal purposes.

Rose petal tincture is great for uplifting your mood or easing anxiety. It helps relieve inflammation & has traditionally been used for menstrual problems.

Sage

salvia officinalis

Salvia derives from the Latin ‘to save’ and has long been an important medicinal herb. Grows best from cuttings & thrives in well drained soil in a sunny position.

Use the tincture as a tonic and liver stimulant. Sage tincture improves digestion & can ease menopausal problems such as hot flushes.

Easy to grow herbs for making tinctures

Echinacea

echinacea purpurea

Grow indoors from seed and plant out in fertile well drained soil in full sunlight. The part used is generally the root, which can be harvested in the second or third year of growth.

Echinacea tincture is used for colds, flu, kidney infections and most types of inflammation.

Fennel

foeniculum vulgare

Grows easily from seed and often grows over 5ft tall. Best to sow in situ in warm soil in a sunny spot. Fennel grows wild in most temperate climates especially on limey soil by the sea.

Fennel tincture is made from the seeds & is particularly used to help alleviate colic, indigestion, heartburn & reflux.

Milk thistle

silybum marianum

Easy to propagate by seed in late autumn or early spring. Milk thistle is a biennial forming purple flower heads which will contain the seeds in the second year. Grows best in well drained sandy soil.

Milk thistle tincture made from the seeds is anti-inflammatory and anti-oxidant. Milk thistle is widely used to support the liver. It can help repair liver cells damaged by alcohol and other toxins.

Wild gatherings

Elder

sambucas nigra

Elder is a native deciduous tree found almost throughout the UK, growing in woodland, fields, hedges, waste ground and road sides. The creamy white flowers appear in May and clusters of deep purple berries in September.

Elderflower

A tincture made from the flowers has an anti-viral action and can be used to treat colds, flu, sinus infections and bronchitis. Elderflowers also have diuretic and laxative properties.

Elderberry

A tincture made from the berries is rich in flavinoids including anthocyanins. Elderberries have anti-oxidant & anti-inflammatory properties. Elderberries are a powerful immune stimulant.

Hawthorn

crataegus monogyna

The native tree hawthorn is found throughout most of the British Isles. Green glossy leaves appear early in the spring followed by white blossoms in May & red berries known as 'haws' in September.

Hawthorn leaves, flowers & berries are used medicinally to uplift & strengthen the heart. The berries in particular contain potent chemical compounds that improve heart function and help reduce high blood pressure.

Wild gatherings

Blackberry

Rubus

The scrambling shrub blackberry can be found on woodland, waste ground & hedgerows throughout the UK. The berries appear from July through to October.

A tincture made from blackberries is very high in anti-oxidants. The tincture can be used to reduce inflammation, fight infection and boost immunity.

A tincture made from the root-bark and the leaves is strongly astringent and makes an excellent remedy for dysentery, diarrhoea, haemorrhoids & cystitis.

Nettle

Urtica dioica

Nettles grow all over the British Isles, on waste ground, woods, pasture, river banks, roadsides and footpaths. The leaves are best harvested whilst young between March & the end of May.

Nettle tincture helps detoxify the blood, support the liver, remove toxins, stimulate the circulation and provide a general toning effect on the whole body.

Skin conditions like eczema and psoriasis benefit from the intake of a nettle tincture. It can also be of benefit for people who suffer from hay fever.

Wild gatherings

Dandelion

taraxacum officinale

A perennial herb that can be found growing in pastures, lawns, meadows and waysides throughout the UK. Leaves can be harvested spring through to autumn and the roots are harvested in the spring before flowering or in the autumn.

Tincture from the whole plant (root & leaf) is used for reducing congestion of the liver. Used together they help people with arthritis. The root is used to eliminate uric acid which causes joint pain and gout. The leaf is given to people experiencing water retention.

Meadowsweet

Filipendula ulmaria

Meadowsweet is perennial & found in wet meadows, marshes, ditches and by rivers throughout the UK. It flowers from June through to October.

A tincture is made from the flowers and has traditionally been used to treat stomach ulcers & arthritic joint pain. Meadowsweet is used wherever there is acidity or inflammation.

Note:

When wild harvesting make sure you harvest away from pollutants like car exhausts or animal droppings. You may need landowners permission to wild harvest.

Tincture blends

Tincture blends make very useful remedies. Below are some simple blends that can be made up according to the ratios and stored in dropper jars.

cleansing tincture

- 2 parts nettle leaf
- 1 part dandelion root
- 1 part lemon balm leaf

sleep tincture

- 1 part chamomile flower
- 1 part lavender flower

digestive tincture

- 2 parts peppermint leaf
- 1 part ginger root
- 1 part fennel seeds

uplifting the mood tincture

- 2 parts rose flower
- 1 part lemon balm leaf

Tincture blends

immune strength

- 3 parts sage leaf
- 1 part yarrow herb & flower
- 1 part rosemary leaf
- 1 part echinacea root

For all these blends a standard dosing suggestion for adults is two droppers full two or three times a day.

Tinctures are quickly assimilated by the body and it is generally recommended you take them between meals so assimilation is not hindered by food. There are exceptions tinctures to improve digestion are best just before food. Tinctures to promote peaceful sleep before going to bed.

If you are pregnant or nursing always consult a medical herbalist before using tinctures.

Oxymel

The oxymel - from the Latin oxymeli meaning ‘acid & honey’ is an ancient Greek drink made from herb vinegar & honey. Traditionally, an Oxymel recipe would have been used to administer beneficial herbs that might not be so pleasant to take on their own. Different herbs can be used for personal taste or to meet your health needs.

There are different ways to make an oxymel but the simplest method is to take an apple cider vinegar tincture and mix with honey, I use 1/3 honey, 2/3 tincture – experiment and see what works for you. Both honey and vinegar act as preservatives, so you’re not going to ruin the mixture by altering the ratios. Bottle and store in a cool place.

Blackberry & thyme oxymel

- 1 part blackberry ACV tincture
- 1 part thyme ACV tincture
- 1 part raw honey

Using a funnel pour the tinctures and honey into a bottle, fix the lid securely and shake well to mix.
Store in a cool dry place.

Drink it straight up in a shot glass to support the immune system.

Mix with hot water to make a soothing drink for colds & flu.
Top up with sparkling water for a refreshing summer drink.

Apple cider vinegar morning drink

Even though vinegar is acidic, when we take ACV it has an alkalising effect, this is especially beneficial for those people that have an over acid forming diet/lifestyle. ACV also reacts to some toxins in our bodies, converting them into less toxic substances.

Starting each day with a tablespoon of ACV in warm water can help maintain alkalinity which plays a large part in its curative properties. Turning the ACV into different herbal tinctures gives you have a whole new level of healing properties to choose from each morning.

- ♥ *basil* – anti-inflammatory, mental agility
- ♥ *sage* – liver stimulant, reduces blood sugar
- ♥ *rosemary* – stimulating, improves memory
- ♥ *chamomile flowers* – anxiety & stress
- ♥ *thyme* – soothes colds, flu, lung infections
- ♥ *yarrow* – upper respiratory catarrh
- ♥ *hawthorn* – improves circulation
- ♥ *meadowsweet flower* – rheumatic pain
- ♥ *lemon balm* – depression, nervous exhaustion

Rosa mundi cocktail

1 tablespoon crushed ice
10 ml rose tincture (alcohol)
Prosecco - chilled
borage flowers
rose petals
twist of lime peel

serves 1

Put the crushed ice into a glass, pour over the rose tincture and top up with Prosecco, finish with a flourish of borage flowers, rose petals & a twist of lime peel.

Glossary

anti-oxidant ~ *compound that protects the body from free radical activity*

A.C.V ~ *apple cider vinegar*

anti-inflammatory ~ *compound known to reduce inflammation*

flavinoid ~ *molecules found in plants that provide us with health benefits*

glycerite ~ *herbal extract using glycerin*

glycerol ~ *A sweet, liquid obtained from fats & oils by the fermentation of glucose*

menstruum ~ *a solvent*

solvent ~ *the liquid used for extraction*

tincture ~ *a herbal extract*

oxymel ~ *herbal vinegar & honey drink*

Resources

amber glass dropper bottle

www.glassbottles.co.uk/product/10ml-amber-glass-dropper-bottle/

kilner jars

www.kilnerjar.co.uk

500ml storage bottle

www.baldwins.co.uk/baldwins-syrup-bottles-500ml-3

organic vegetable glycerine

www.baldwins.co.uk/baldwins-vegetable-glycerine

organic vodka

www.vinceremos.co.uk/product/uk5-vodka-organic/

organic ACV

www.realfoods.co.uk/product/10522/organic-raw-apple-cider-vinegar-unpasteurised

find a herbalist

<https://thecpp.uk/find-your-local-herbalist/>

herbs

www.nealsyardremedies.com/wellbeing/herbal-remedies/dried-herbs/

www.baldwins.co.uk/herbs

books

Medical Herbalism: The Science and Practice of Herbal Medicine: Principles and Practices - David Hoffmann - Healing Arts Press

Encyclopedia of Herbal Medicine - Andrew Chevallier - DK

Herbal Remedies Handbook - Andrew Chevallier - DK

Greencuisine Trust

Through inspiring projects, courses and consultancy Greencuisine Trust encourages ways of growing and eating that nourish people without harming the environment.

Everyday we make decisions about the food we eat. These choices shape our world and influence not only our individual health but also the wellbeing of all with whom we share planet earth

The Trust is part of a global food movement driving change in our food systems. We believe that through the widespread sharing of both indigenous & scientific knowledge we can maintain the integrity of the planet and all eat nutritious food.

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greencuisinetrust.org

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