



Topical Herbal Medicine - Wound and Bruise Healing, and more

With Robin Rose Bennett

FOR AN IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE

Feel free to bring any or all of the following items to class (all are optional):

an herbal oil or ointment (of choice)

6-10 inches of fresh ginger root

cutting board

knife or grater

cheesecloth

boiled water (only if it's easy and safe to have accessible)

A tub you can put both your feet into up to ankle bones

There are many situations that call for external treatments as part of a person's herbal healthcare, but nowhere are hands-on-healing treatments more primary than in first aid for injuries. Here is some general information to start with:

Fresh herbs for poultices can be mashed or cut up, or sometimes chewed (depending on the herb) and then applied directly to skin. Or the herb(s) can be steeped in boiled water for just a few minutes before applying to the skin. Generally speaking, depending on where a wound is located on the body, and how large an area is being covered, you can either leave it at that or, if that's impractical, wrap a piece of clean, comfortable material such as soft cotton flannel or a thin towel over the area, and secure it in place with a tie or safety pins.

You can also cover the herb(s) with gauze, and use surgical tape to hold them in place. I prefer the first method because sometimes the

adhesive in surgical tape or band-aids can be a mild-to-severe skin irritant, which can complicate the healing process.

Dried herbs for poultices need to be steeped in boiled water to release their healing properties, unless they are powdered (see below). For a poultice, use just enough boiling water to cover the dried herb(s), and steep them for anywhere from 3–10 minutes. Any leftover liquid can be used to rinse the wounded area after removing the poultice or, if the herb(s) being used are suitable for internal use, you can simply drink it. If the dried herbs are applied as powder, they don't necessarily need boiling water. But they do need to be moistened before being applied to the skin, with water, aloe gel, an herbal oil, or saliva.

Tinctures can be applied topically for healing injuries and bruises. I tend to not use tinctures on open wounds because they hurt like crazy when applied, and the alcohol can increase bleeding. However, in an emergency situation, always use the best option available. A folk herbalist I met recently told me he applied yarrow tincture straight onto a fresh chainsaw wound. Though the poor man yelped with the stinging pain of alcohol in a gaping wound, the yarrow tincture actually stopped the bleeding, and they were able to bring the skin together; the man healed without infection.

Infused oils and ointments work well on bruises, and I use them frequently. I keep them handy in my first-aid and travel kits. Every situation is unique and can be evaluated on its own; however, generally speaking, the herbs themselves applied to the body as a poultice, bath/soak, or compress are my first choice. I often follow up poultices (or soaks and baths) by applying oils in-between.

I also find that adding tincture into oil can be an excellent way to enhance the healing properties of the oil. I do this in small batches, so that the oil won't spoil. I share examples of this in other chapters, such as adding arnica and/or lobelia tincture into the Ease Oil recipe, and I've mixed echinacea tincture into infused violet leaf oil to heal precancerous spots that were on the skin. I use infused oils and ointments on injured tissue that is closed or scraped, but don't recommend starting with oil on deep wounds, as there is a risk of infection. It's better to use the oil to aid healing after the risk of infection has passed.

Some of my favorite herbal allies for healing wounds, bruises and injuries are: violet leaves, grape leaves, plantain leaves, yarrow leaves and flowers, witch hazel leaves, St. J's leaves and flowers, elder blossoms, motherwort leaves and flowers, goldenrod leaves and flowers, calendula blossoms, chickweed (aerial parts), lobelia (gathered in flower and seedpod stages), comfrey leaves, mullein leaves, chamomile flowers, agrimony leaves, coltsfoot leaves, mint leaves, lavender flowers, burdock leaves, prunella leaves and flowers, ginger roots, onions, maple-leaved cramp bark leaves, and hyssop leaves and flowers.

Excerpt from [*The Gift of Healing Herbs*](#).

THYME STEAM

½ cup dried thyme leaves (or one cup fresh thyme)

1½ quarts water

Soup pot

One or two large towels

Put the thyme leaves and stalks into a 3–4 quart pot. Add cold water.

Turn off the flame and let steep for another 5–10 minutes with the cover still on. You could pour off a cup to drink before sitting down to the steam.

Arrange things so you can set the hot pot down safely where it won't slide, or burn the surface it's on. A kitchen or dining table with a mat or one of the thick towels on it will work well. You want to be able to sit down in a comfortable place that's a good height for you to be able to relax as you lean over the steaming pot.

Set the pot down and remove the cover. In a couple of minutes or so, when the thyme preparation is still steaming hot but not hot enough to burn you, sit down in front of it and drape the other big towel over your shoulders. Pull the towel up over your head, pull the corners around your neck from behind and hold it closed snugly in front, letting the rest of the towel drape over the outside of the open pot to catch the steam. Lean forward and wrap your arms around the towel-enclosed pot to make a snug tent for yourself.

The more airtight you make the towel tent, the hotter it will be, and the more helpful. However, if it's uncomfortably hot at first, leave some air space between the towel and your neck, or loosen your arms from around the pot. As soon as you are good and comfortable, relax and breathe deeply in and out for 10 minutes or more, or until the liquid cools. You can reheat it and repeat this process 2–3 times in a row for maximum benefit.

The thyme steam feels so good; besides being lovely for your skin and circulation, this steam will quiet your coughing, open your bronchia, and ease chest pain. At the same time, you'll be breathing thyme's healing oils deep into your sinuses, and down into your windpipe, bronchial tubes, and lungs, facilitating symptom relief and more. This warming spice plant, used as an anti-infective steam and also as a simple tea, will help your respiratory healing, calm you, and gently lift your spirits too.

Excerpt from [*The Gift of Healing Herbs*](#).

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