

A photograph of a glass teapot and a glass teacup filled with yellow tea, set on a white surface. Green leaves are scattered around the teapot and cup. The background is a soft-focus green. The text is overlaid on the image.

A Quick Cuppa Herbal

Fiann Ó Nualláin

The
Holistic
Gardener



Introduction

'Drinking a daily cup of tea will surely
starve the apothecary.'

Chinese Proverb

In the modern world of 'health consciousness', herbal teas are all the rage: as a low- or no-caffeine alternative to regular tea or coffee, as a beverage with benefits, or simply as a nod to the intention of being well and considerate of our bodies. But with so much choice in herbal teas do we actually know what we are drinking? Sure it's a healthy alternative to carbonated, caffeinated or sugar-loaded beverages, but it is also a herb and herbs carry medicinal weight. So what is the medicine in a cup of rosehip tea and what good might hibiscus or lemon balm tea do you? When should you avoid mint tea or reach for the nettle? What are we actually drinking? What are the pros and cons?

For some herbal tea drinkers, a glossy magazine article or morning TV show may have provided some basic information, so they reach for the peppermint tea to ease their digestive upset, while others may be on the valerian to combat a recent bout of insomnia. For these people, the herbal tea is not just a healthier beverage choice, it is the medicine for their current health problem. The issue with this, however, is that the basic information provided may not have included advice on important aspects, such as dosage or contraindications (reasons not to drink a certain tea). Most proprietary brands don't even list on the packaging what the properties or medicinal actions of the tea may be. This book aims to address that.

It explores sixty of the most popular and easily accessible herbal teas – those readily found on the shelves of supermarkets, local shops or the nearest health store, as well as a few you can harvest from the garden or spice rack. It explains some of their potential uses, or inherent medicinal chemistry, and is compiled similarly to a 'herbal' or *Materia Medica*. The book is called *A Quick Cuppa Herbal* because of this 'herbal' construct and because a quick cup of plant medicine is not

just a great way to gain the medicinal actions of the plant's chemistry, but is also the handiest method of home herbalism.

Increasingly people are turning to home herbalism to meet their health needs, and while snappy apps and Google searches may potentially enlighten, my background in medicinal botany means I approach this with a degree of expertise that can cut to the point and filter the accurate facts from those so-called 'health statements' reported as matter of fact. Extensive research has gone into honing this book to a correct, precise and accessible read, and all medical facts herein have been rigorously validated by scientific study – many of those studies are listed in the bibliography.

The goodness in these herbal teas is viewed through the lens of their traditional uses (some extending back hundreds of years, while others have been in use for thousands of years) and also with the insight of some modern science to explore exactly why they have stood the test of time and what actions they utilise to be all-round health promoting.

To address herbal tea in the context of its healing potential, and not just as a caffeine alternative, I have detailed the medicinal applications of each tea and also explored the potential of that tea as a therapeutic agent in illness treatment and health management, with dosage and cautions included. However, to be clear: this is not a self-medication manual, as no book can take your individual case history or any underlying conditions unique to you into consideration. What the book can do, in promoting a fuller understanding of the medicinal actions and consumption parameters of each tea listed, is help you make a more informed choice when next in the herbal tea aisle or selecting today's lunchtime brew. If you wish to apply the knowledge contained within these pages to an ongoing serious health issue, however, then I would advise that you also consult a health professional who can supervise and guide a holistic approach to resolving that issue. Thereafter, there will be plenty of time to starve the apothecary.





Blueberry Leaf Tea

*(Vaccinium corymbosum
and V. angustifolium)*

Botanical family

Ericaceae

Parts used

Leaf

Flavour profile

Sweet, grassy

Blueberry foliage tea has a long folk history. Contemporary teabag and loose blueberry foliage tea may be acquired from most local health stores. Some brands may be a green tea mixed with blueberry foliage – this will thus be caffeinated and hold many of the actions of green tea. Blueberry foliage can be collected from the garden and dried, as with standard herbs.

How to make

Some recipes call for a decoction but as protracted exposure to heat impacts upon the phytochemistry, I prefer an infusion of 3–7 minutes, utilising 1–2 teaspoons of chopped herb (fresh or dried) per cup. Longer brews can attain a stronger astringency, but can be sweetened with stevia, honey or a fruit juice. Pleasant hot or iced.

Health benefits

We know that the blueberry fruit is a 'superfood' but it turns out that the foliage may be a superior beverage. This has nothing to do with taste and everything to do with its higher percentage of health-

conferring constituents. The foliage is filled with roughly thirty times more anthocyanins and antioxidants than the berries. That's thirty times more scavenging of free radicals and thirty times more strengthening of capillaries and nerve endings.

The capillary strengthening action is of great benefit to slow the progression of diabetic neuropathy and retinopathy. The anthocyanins leached from the leaf can also help to lower excess blood glucose by improving insulin resistance and are protective of β -cells that make-up the pancreas. Those same agents help reduce triglycerides (fats left over from excess calorie consumption found in the bloodstream and stored in fatty tissue) and so support cleaner arteries and promote cardiovascular health.

The high ratio of anthocyanins relates to a wide range of beneficial biological activities, including the inhibition of pro-inflammatory mediators connected not just to inflammation and pain perception/signalling, but those that are also implicated in the initiation of degenerative diseases.

Blueberry tea also has an application in balancing gut flora post antibiotics and in treating candida (a fungal infection that can arise in the mouth, stomach or vagina). Its antimicrobial nature makes it of use against urinary tract infections and it also contains ellagic acid, which undermines the capacity of bacteria to adhere to the walls of the bladder. Meanwhile, its content of ellagic and hippuric acids raise the acidity of urine, further diminishing bacteria's chances of surviving and replicating. Topical applications of the cooled tea also have a history in addressing eczema, psoriasis and other inflammatory skin diseases.

Main medicinal actions: Anti-carcinogenic, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, blood tonic, nervine, neuroprotective, vaso-protective.

Dosage

Therapeutic dosages are in the range of 1–2 cups daily – do not exceed 3–4 cups per day.

Caution

Over-consumption can potentially trigger hypoglycemia (a drop in blood sugar levels to below normal range).



Echinacea Leaf and Cone Tea

(Echinacea angustifolia, E. purpurea, E. pallida)

Botanical family

Asteraceae

Parts used

Foliage and cones

Flavour profile

Bitter

Echinacea is sometimes referred to by the name 'cone flower'– a nod to the central cone of its flower, which develops into the seed head. The root is popularly employed in herbalism but a tea of its foliage and seed heads is a less bitter brew with many similar attributes.

How to make

Harvested from the garden or purchased ready dried from select health stores. The leaf and seed tea is best via a standard 3–5 minutes infusion of 1–2 teaspoons of dried herbage per cup or double if utilising fresh parts. Longer steeping may increase bitterness. Sweeten to taste.

Health benefits

The foliage and seed heads of echinacea contain compounds that exert potent immunological properties. Some in particular (glycosides and polysaccharides) encourage macrophage activation and phagocytosis – that's where white blood cells gobble up invading microorganisms. This munching up is how our immune system breaks them down and removes them from our system. The tea may take 4–7 days to kick in and some colds are over before activation happens, but with longer flu and other viral complaints this type of powerful immune system stimulation will be beneficial in reducing illness duration.

The presence of echinacein and cichoric acid also makes it quite effective against herpes simplex and influenza, as these agents work by disrupting the integrase enzymes that facilitate how viruses invade cells. Echinacea's thermogenic (temperature raising) nature and the hot beverage delivery increases the body's core temperature and facilitates the body's other innate means of dealing with invading organisms – i.e. heat and sweating.

Echinacea tea stimulates an increased production of hyaluronic acid, which is not only a component of cartilage and synovial fluid, but is utilised to effect repairs at sites damaged by excessive inflammation markers or standard injury. Topically, the cooled tea is a great antimicrobial wound cleaner and healer.

Main medicinal actions: antibiotic, anti-catarrhal, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antioxidant, anti-tumour, decongestant, depurative, diaphoretic, immunostimulant, lymphatic, peripheral vasodilator, vulnerary.

Dosage

Not a long-term use tea and more reserved for treatment blocks – with 'on/off' periods of 5 days on and 5 off in order to maintain its potency. Generally 1–2 cups per day.

Caution

Avoid if allergic to ragweed. Avoid with autoimmune diseases, as raised white blood count is not beneficial. Echinacea can potentially interfere with immunosuppressant medication, steroids and other prescription medications.



Goji Berry Tea

(Lycium barbarum and Lycium chinense)

Botanical family

Solanaceae

Parts used

Berry

Flavour profile

Tart

Originally Gou Qi Zi, the red Goji fruits are traditionally employed in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) to strengthen liver and kidney channels and to nourish blood and Jing (the essence of life) and add potency to male libido and function. You can make a tea from dried berries or find teabag-type 'goji tea' that is generally a blend of the dried berry with white or green tea.

How to make

Older traditions are of a 5-minute simmering decoction. Contemporarily, a tablespoon of dried berries can be hydrated in a cup of boiling water – allow to sit for 5–10 minutes, then the plumped-up berries can be eaten

rather than discarded and thus add some of their additional non water-soluble ingredients to the system. Otherwise drain and sweeten to taste.

Goji have that thing where some berries are tangy with a sweet aftertaste and others may be tart. So 2 cups in the same day may have a slightly different nuance. A dot of honey or stevia takes the sour edge off.

Health benefits

Gojis have all the antioxidant punch of 'superfoods' and so have a well-earned reputation as a restorative and anti-aging herb. They are packed with a set of particularly potent plant chemicals known as proteoglycans and referred to as Lycium barbarum polysaccharides (LBPs), which have been studied for their positive pharmacological effects on age-related illness, neurodegenerative complaints and conditions such as atherosclerosis, macular degeneration, glaucoma and diabetes. LBPs support improved blood flow and arterial cleansing, and regulate efficient glucose metabolism.

Goji tea is a brilliant detox. It contains ample betaine – an amino acid which actively reduces fatty deposits in the liver. Betaine also promotes protein synthesis in the body, is involved in both muscle gain and fat loss, and has connections to increased physical performance/ endurance. In TCM, goji berry is lauded to enhance both male fertility and sexual performance – the energising betaine and those LBPs validate that somewhat.

Main medicinal actions: Adaptive, anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antiviral, cardioprotective, circulatory tonic, hypoglycaemic, hypolipidemic, immunostimulant, probiotic, sexual system tonic.

Dosage

1–3 cups daily for specific treatment duration is within the therapeutic range.

Caution

Avoid if allergic to plants in the nightshade family. May interact with blood-thinning medications and potentially in higher doses affect how quickly the liver breaks down other prescription medications. Not advised for use with a spleen deficiency.



Lavender Tea

(Lavandula officinalis)

Botanical family

Lamiaceae

Parts used

Flowers

Flavour profile

Floral bitter

There are forty-plus species and hundreds of hybrids all with the same healing potential – so *L. angustifolia* intermedia, latifolia, stoechas, vera, etc., are all good to go. It is listed here as *L. officinalis*, the use of *officinalis* denoting its official status in herbal heritage as an internal remedy.

How to make

As the bulk of its healing potential is via its volatile oils, a covered infusion is best practice. Either a saucer over the cup or a lidded teapot will do. Allow the water to boil, then rest to below boiling point before adding 1 teaspoon of herb (dried or fresh) per cup. I find that the often recommended steepage time of 10 minutes plus can taste a bit soapy, so I suggest you try 3–7 minutes.

Health benefits

The aromatherapy and phytochemistry of lavender is helpful with combating daily stresses, mild depression, generalised anxiety disorder and, according to recent research, with mother/baby bonding and post-partum fatigue. Its volatile oils are recognised as sedative, nervine, anti-inflammatory and antispasmodic. In recent years it has become popular as a remedy for tension headaches, muscular tensions and abdominal cramps associated with both digestive and menstrual issues.

Lauded as a carminative and digestive tea, its antibacterial and antispasmodic nature certainly improves stomach upset, including candida, cramps, abdominal distension and food poisoning. Its cholagogic action promotes the flow of bile and supports healthy digestion. The tea yields blood-thinning coumarins, antioxidant flavonoids and cholesterol-lowering phytosterols that support arterial health. Its potent antioxidant potential is beneficial for cognitive function and mood via enhanced blood flow and nerve and cellular signalling.

Its supply of ursolic acid actively inhibits elastase, a pancreatic enzyme which is implicated in pancreatitis and atherosclerosis, and impacts upon flare-ups of psoriasis and other inflammatory conditions. The cooled tea makes a great skin wash.

Main medicinal actions: Analgesic, antibacterial, anticoagulant, anticonvulsant, antidepressant, antifungal, anti-rheumatic, antispasmodic, antiviral, anxiolytic, carminative, cholagogue, cholinergic, diaphoretic, diuretic, emmenagogue, hypotensive, muscle relaxant, nervous system relaxant, sedative, uterine stimulant.

Dosage

A daily cup is supportive of health; therapeutically the upper limit is 3 cups per day for treatment duration.

Caution

Not recommended in pregnancy due to uterine stimulation. Recurrent or overuse of the tea can cause increased photosensitivity in some. Can potentially interact with conventional anticoagulant and cholesterol medications.



Lemon Grass Tea

(*Cymbopogon citratus* and *C. flexuosus*)

Botanical family

Poaceae

Parts used

Leaf and stem

Flavour profile

Lemony

Both the common name and scientific epithet – *citratus* – reminds us of its citrus flavour and fragrance. There are around fifty-five species native to Asia and many of those are cultivated around the world. The two most utilised for spice and tea are West-Indian lemon grass (*C. citratus*) and East-Indian lemon grass (*C. flexuosus*).

How to make

Tea can be made from the fresh or dried herb; lemon grass may also be a component of other herbal teas. Older traditions call for a 5-minute boil and an equal length simmer, but I prefer a standard infusion of 3–7 minutes. There are a lot of volatile oils contributing to flavour and taste, so it is best to make it in a teapot or cover the cup with a saucer. Boiling water can destroy some of these healing agents so let it rest for 30–40

seconds before applying. Fresh lemon grass can be stronger (acting and tasting) than dried, but ratios tend to remain in the region of 1–2 teaspoons of chopped herbage per cup. Served hot or as iced tea.

Health benefits

Lemon grass is also referred to as 'fevergrass' – a reference to its diaphoretic and febrifuge (fever-reducing) effects. It is also used in Ayurvedic and Chinese medical systems to treat fevers and viral infections. The immune boost of its constituents and its uplifting nature makes it an ideal convalescence tea.

The chemicals responsible for that lemony component are citral, citronellol and limonene, all bearing strong antimicrobial and antifungal properties to quell gastric upset, remedy skin complaints and also to deter insects. Citral in the human system acts as a detox device to stimulate lymph and circulation, and an aid in the removal of fats, toxins and uric acid from the body, making it of benefit to the tackling of arthritis and gout.

Limonene stimulates white blood cell production and inhibits the growth of cancer cells. Citral induces apoptosis (self-destruction) in breast and several haematopoietic cancer cell lines. Citral is oestrogenic and lemongrass tea has a history in treating PMS and menopause. The tea also helps activate the release of serotonin (the happy hormone) and contains a whole plethora of vitamins and minerals conducive to soothing nerve endings and signalling.

Main medicinal actions: Analgesic, anticlastogenic, antidepressant, antifungal, antiproliferative, antitussive, carminative, depurative, detox, diaphoretic, digestive, diuretic, emmenagogue, febrifuge, galactagogue, immune-stimulant, nervine, oestrogenic.

Dosage

Generally kept within 1–2 cups per day for treatment duration. Iced tea can be sipped throughout the day or at each meal.

Caution

Avoid in pregnancy. May intensify the action of medications for diabetes and anxiety.



Rose Petal/Rosebud Tea

(Rosa rugosa and select species)

Botanical family

Rosaceae

Parts used

Petals/flower buds

Flavour profile

Floral, fruity

Rosa rugosa is most commonly utilised as a source of rose tea but other species include *R. canina*, *R. damascene*, *R. laevigata* and *R. gallica* var. *centifolia*. As rose petals and rose buds have the same healing action, the details here are interchangeable.

How to make

To maximise the Vitamin C and other antioxidant agents it is best to rest boiled water for 30–60 seconds before making an infusion. Fresh petals will need the bitter white portion at the base of the petal removed; dried petals are good to go. The standard ratio is 1–2 teaspoons per cup required. As roses contain many favorable and bioactive volatile oils, it is good to make in a teapot or covered cup. Infusion duration is 3–5 minutes. Can be sweetened with some honey or stevia. Suitable cooled and served over ice.

Health benefits

Rose tea has a history of use as a cooling beverage to remedy menopausal hot flashes and night sweats and in its sedative and nervine actions to address irritability, mental and physical fatigue, and also mild depression. Its oldest tradition is to relieve uterine and menstrual irregularities and to attenuate PMS. Certainly its supply of calcium, iron, manganese, magnesium and B vitamins are of benefit and also the flavonoids that contribute to improved blood flow.

Rose petals store a good quantity of vitamin C, making it immune boosting and system cleansing. It has a good reputation in supporting viral illness recovery and for general pick-me-up applications. It also contains significant amounts of polyphenols that actively repair cellular damage and act as free-radical scavengers, contributing to its association as a rejuvenating tonic. Polyphenols also exert an influence on gut bacteria and on the chemistry of inflammation, and further help reduce the effect of bacterial and viral infection.

Rose stimulates bile and is viewed as a detox and digestive. Its antimicrobial nature is beneficial to gut health and to urinary tract health. Rose tea shows some antimicrobial activity against *Staphylococcus epidermidis*, *S. aureus*, *Escherichia coli*, *Bacillus subtilis*, *Micrococcus luteus*, *Klebsiella pneumoniae*, *Pseudomonas aeruginosa*, *Proteus mirabilis* and also against two significant yeast strains: *Candida albicans* and *C. parapsilosis*.

Main medicinal actions: Antibacterial, antidepressant, anti-inflammatory, antiseptic, antispasmodic, antiviral, aphrodisiac, astringent, blood tonic, detox, digestive, diuretic, emmenagogue, expectorant, febrifuge, nervine, sedative, uterine.

Dosage

The standard range is 1–2 cups daily over therapeutic duration. Over-consumption can cause nausea or headache.

Caution

Avoid in pregnancy due to uterine activity. Avoid recurrent use if on blood-thinning medication.



In recent years, increasing numbers of herbal teas have been hitting the supermarket shelves, and the headlines, all proclaiming their health credentials, but not many explain their actual benefits on the side of the box. With the current surge in consumption of herbal teas and the growing interest in their medicinal and health-promoting properties, this book aims to answer two questions – *how do I make the perfect cup of herbal tea and what good will it do me?*

Detailing sixty different herbal teas, *A Quick Cuppa Herbal* gives you all the answers you need, including how to make your tea from the fresh or dried herbs, the health pros and cons, and how much you should be drinking. So, whether you are looking for a tea to alleviate a particular health problem or just to deliver the perfect pick-me-up, this is the book for you.

Fiann Ó Nualláin is the author of the hugely popular *Holistic Gardener* series of books that explore practical herbalism from the garden and kitchen pantry to address both first aid and beauty needs, and to help resolve the most common ailments that we all occasionally suffer from.

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