It has been stated that in ancient times, all people were born with an understanding regarding the use of herbs. Through time, people began to observe more closely the various colors, shapes, fragrances and tastes, along with their geographical location and season in relation to the healing and nutritional properties of plants. It was from these beginnings that the study of herbology evolved.

“Herbs Nudge the Body into Healing Itself” Aviva Romm

The first thing to emerge in the classification of herbs was a recognition of their cooling or heating properties. It was noted that everything was encompassed by a cycle of polarity of night and day, sun and moon, wet and dry, male and female. These characteristics were then related to various disease conditions of the human body. If an individual suffered from a high fever, they were treated with a cooling, detoxifying medicine such as a cool fruit or the tender leaves or petals of a flower such as hibiscus, elder, yarrow, red clover blossoms, or mint. Diseases characterized by coldness such as weak digestion or poor circulation, even childbirth, were treated with deep rooted herbs and plants or barks of certain trees that would affect the deeper organs and secretions of the body, such as ginseng, dandelion, prickly ash bark, bayberry bark, or burdock root. As basic as this was, it is still a fundamental principle in natural healing. Of course, we now understand a much more complex system, yet the herbalist must cultivate an attitude of balance with science and nature.

Specific to the complexity of herbology, I introduce the herbal properties as we understand them today. Keep in mind that herbs are considered holistic agents. Many pharmacologists attempt to identify the various constituents of herbs and categorize them according to pharmaceutical groups. However, botanicals are very complex in their characteristics. The list below is a compilation of the various actions and classes herbalists have utilized, as I know them, yet be reminded that herbalists have their preferences with regards to specific terminology they prefer to utilize or avoid.

**Alteratives** create a healthy change in the body, gradually. Most have blood purifying qualities that enhance the liver, kidney, spleen and bowel function by speeding tissue restoration. Echinacea, for example, is used to neutralize acid conditions in the blood associated with a stagnation of lymphatic fluids. Alteratives tend to be cooling and are used in treating toxicity of the blood, infections, arthritis, cancer and skin eruptions. They additionally help the body to assimilate nutrients and eliminate waste products of metabolism. Red clover, Oregon grape root, barberry, goldenseal, yellow dock, alfalfa, licorice, raspberry leaves, dandelion root, plantain, chickweed, cascara sagrada, elder flowers, comfrey, sassafras, uva ursi, marshmallow, nettles, chrysanthemum, dong quai, and burdock root are a few examples.

**Analgesics** relieve pain without loss of consciousness. Some are also antispasmodics, relieving pain by reducing cramps in muscles. These include cramp bark and dong quai, which are useful for menstrual cramps. Others such as, cloves and kava kava, affect nerves directly, reducing pain signals to the brain. These may be applied for toothaches. Other analgesics include wild yam, catnip, chamomile flowers, valerian root, skullcap, and lobelia.

**Antacids** are those herbs that neutralize excess acids in the stomach and intestines. In most cases, these also have demulcent properties to protect the stomach lining. Dandelion, fennel, slippery elm, Irish moss and kelp function as antacids.
Anthelminitics have the ability to destroy intestinal worms and parasites. There are two categories of anthelmintics: those that destroy worms without necessarily causing their expulsion from the bowels, and should be followed by or combined with a laxative or cathartic herb; and there are vermifuges, which are agents that expel worms from the bowels and are usually cathartic herbs. Wormwood, black walnut hulls, clove, garlic, tansy, thyme, cascara sagrada, gentian, senna, stevoria, and tuberostemonine are examples.

Antiabortion...
skunk cabbage, thyme, valerian, vervain, wild lettuce, wild yam, chamomile, cramp bark, hops, and passionflower.

**Astringents** tone and tighten tissue by precipitating proteins and thus reducing secretions and discharges. They are also referred to as antiseptics, as they can be applied to the skin to prevent the growth of bacteria. They tend to be drying and are used for diarrhea, skin problems, burns, discharges, hemorrhoids and hemorrhages. The main herbal astringents contain tannins, which are found in most plants, especially the tree barks. Examples include agrimony, avens, bearberry, Beth root, bistort, black catechu, bugleweed, cranesbill, elecampane, eyebright, goldenrod, ground ivy, kola, lungwort, meadowsweet, mouse ear, mullein, oak bark, periwinkle, pilewort, plantain, ragwort, red raspberry leaf, goldenseal, chaparral, garlic, pine, uva ursi, horsetail, rhubarb root, slippery elm, rosemary, St. John’s Wort, tormentil, wild cherry, stoneroot, squawvine, juniper berries, sage, blackberry root, witch hazel, calendula, myrrh, bayberry bark, white oak bark, yarrow and yellow dock root.

**Antispasmodics** prevent or relax muscle spasms. They can be utilized externally or internally. One of the most important antispasmodics is lobelia, and is frequently added to herb formulas to help the body relax and use its full energy for healing. Other antispasmodics include dong quai, black cohosh, blue cohosh, skullcap, valerian, raspberry leaves and rue.

**Aphrodisiacs** improve sexual potency and include: damiana, false unicorn, ginseng, angelica, astragalus, kava kava and burdock.

**Carminatives** relieve gas and severe bowel cramps by stimulating peristalsis of the digestive system and relaxing the stomach. They are rich in volatile oils. Anise, balm, cardamon, cayenne, cinnamon, coriander, galangal, garlic, hyssop, juniper, mustard, sage, thyme, valerian, caraway, fennel, cumin, dill, ginger, peppermint, catnip, calamus and chamomile are examples.

**Cholagogues** promote flow and discharge of bile into the small intestine, which can be of marked benefit for gallbladder problems. These will also be laxatives, as the bile will stimulate elimination. Aloe vera, balmony, black root, blue flag, boldo, dandelion, fringetree, fumitory, gentian, barberry, Oregon grape root, culver’s root, mandrake, goldenseal, wild yam and licorice are cholagogues.

**Demulcents** are rich in mucilage and can soothe and relieve inflammation. Usually consumed for internal inflammation, such as coughs or kidney stones, but can be used externally as pastes to soothe dry or irritated skin. Helpful for constipation and to soothe urinary track infections. Marshmallow root, coltsfoot, corn silk, couchgrass, lungwort, marshmallow, mullein, oatmeal, parsley, comfrey root, licorice root, Irish moss, psyllium, chia seeds, aloe vera, burdock, fenugreek, slippery elm bark, plantain, chickweed and flaxseeds are all examples.

**Diaphoretics** make you sweat and can aid the skin in eliminating toxins from the body. Empty the stomach and bowels first by fasting and using an enema (avoid laxatives). Drink diaphoretics hot (they act as diuretics when cold). Especially useful for fevers, influenza and colds. These are either a relaxing or stimulating variety. Lemon balm and catnip are relaxing, while ginger root and cayenne are stimulating. Other examples are bayberry, black cohosh, boneset, buchu, elder, fennel, garlic, goldenrod, lime blossom, peppermint, prickly ash, thyme, horehound and yarrow.

**Diuretics** increase the secretion and elimination of urine. Can be used to treat water retention, obesity, lymphatic swelling, nerve inflammations such as sciatica, bladder infections, skin eruptions and kidney stones. When a diuretic is used, a less amount of a demulcent herb should be given to buffer the effect of the diuretic on the kidneys and to protect the tissues from the movement of the kidney stones. Diuretics include agrimony, bearberry, boneset, borage,
celery seed, corn silk, elder, lily of the valley, lime blossom, pumpkin seed, saw palmetto, sea holly, stone root, wild carrot, horsetail, parsley, uva ursi, cleavers, buchu, juniper, marshmallow, plantain, nettles, burdock, dandelion, hawthorn, yarrow and pai shu.

**Emetics** promote vomiting and thereby empty the stomach, usually only when taken in large quantities. Lobelia, balm, bloodroot, boneset, catnip, elder flowers, lobelia, squill, black mustard seed, elecampane, blessed thistle, bayberry bark, and ipecacuanha are examples.

**Emmenagogues** promote menstruation, usually causing it to occur earlier, and sometimes increases flow. None of these should be taken when a woman wants to become pregnant. Herbs with strong emmenagogue properties include Beth root, black haw, blessed thistle, blue cohosh, carline thistle, chamomile, chaste tree, cramp bark, false unicorn root, fenugreek, gentian, ginger, goldenseal, juniper berry, lime, marigold, motherwort, mugwort, parsley, peppermint, raspberry, rosemary, sage, shepherd’s purse, squaw vine, St. John’s Wort, tansy, thyme, valerian, vervain, yarrow, pennyroyal, juniper berries, myrrh, black cohosh, rue, angelica, and wild ginger.

**Emollients** soothe, soften, and protect the skin (similar to how demulcents act internally). Almond oil, olive oil, and other vegetable oils are examples, as well as apricot kernel, wheat germ, sesame, linseed and flaxseed, marshmallow root, borage, coltsfoot, fenugreek, licorice, plantain, rose petals, comfrey root, slippery elm, and chickweed.

**Expectorants** are those that help clear mucus from the lungs and throat. Frequently these are combined with demulcents to relieve irritation associated with the cough. Anise seed, bloodroot, coltsfoot, comfrey, elder flower, garlic, goldenseal, hyssop, licorice, lungwort, marshmallow, thyme, vervain, mullein, coltsfoot, wild cherry bark, yerba santa, elecampane, sage, lobelia, and horehound are examples of expectorants. Inhale steam from boiled water with eucalyptus, bay leaves and sage to loosen mucus.

**Galactogogues** are those substances that increase secretion of milk. Anise seed, blessed thistle, cumin, fennel raspberry and vervain are galactogogues.

**Hemostatics** are those herbs that stop hemorrhage. These include astringents and those agents that affect the coagulation of blood. Yarrow, bayberry bark, blackberry, cayenne, cranesbill, mullein, goldenseal, horsetail, uva ursi, tienchi shepherd’s purse, witch hazel, white oak bark, yellow dock, and nettles are within this class of herbs.

**Hypnotic** will induce sleep (not a hypnotic trance). Hops, Jamaican dogwood, mistletoe, passion flower, skullcap, valerian and wild lettuce are examples.

**Laxatives** promote bowel movements. These range from mild (aperients) to very strong (cathartis or other times called, purgatives). Gentle laxatives include licorice root, slippery elm, carob, yellow dock, dandelion, Irish moss, flaxseeds, and psyllium seeds. A large enough quantity of any warm beverage will generally act as a laxative. Cathartics are not used for children.

**Mucilage** herbs contain gelatinous constituents and will often be demulcent and emollient. Comfrey, fenugreek, flaxseed, Iceland moss, Irish moss, mallow, marshmallow, quince seed and slippery elm are examples.

**Nervines** can calm and tone the nerves in small doses and offer strong sedation in larger doses. Chamomile, black cohosh, black haw, blue cohosh, bugleweed, chamomile, cramp bark, ginseng, hops, lady’s slippers, lime, lobelia, mistletoe, motherwort, oats,
peppermint, red clover, tansey, thyme, vervain, wild lettuce, skullcap, valerian, catnip, lemon balm, lavender and passionflower are within this class.

**Oxytocics** are substances that stimulate the uterus to contract, which might be appropriate for induction or augmentation of labor. Oxytocics include angelica, black cohosh, blue cohosh, juniper berries, raspberry, rue, squawvine, uva ursi, and wild ginger.

**Parasiticides** destroy parasites in the digestive tract and on the skin. Garlic, rue, cinnamon oil, chaparral, black walnut, thyme, and pumpkin seeds are examples.

**Rubefacients** increase the flow of blood at the surface of the skin and produce redness where they are applied. Their function is to draw inflammation and congestions from deeper areas. They are useful for arthritis, rheumatism and other joint problems and for sprains. Rubefacients include mustard seed oil, cayenne, black pepper, pine oil, thyme oil, cloves, garlic, ginger, horseradish, nettle, peppermint, rosemary, rue, eucalyptus, cinnamon and cubeb oil.

**Sedatives** strongly quiet the nervous system. Antispasmodics and nervines are part of this group. Valerian, hops, chamomile, kava kava, bloodroot, cowslip, cramp bark, hops, lady’s slipper, lobelia, motherwort, red clover, red poppy, saw palmetto, St. John’s Wort, valerian, wild cherry, wild lettuce, wild yam, passionflower, wood betony, catnip and skullcap are useful sedatives.

**Sialagogues** are substances that stimulate the flow of saliva and thus aid in the digestion of starches. Echinacea, bloodroot, gentian, prickly ash, black pepper, cayenne, ginger, licorice and yerba santa are sialagogues.

**Stimulants** enhance energy, stimulate circulation, break up obstruction and create warmth in the body. These are often added in small amounts to other formulas to hasten the activity of herbs to circulate herbs in the body. Ginger root, balmony, caraway, cardamon, eucalyptus, gentian, ground ivy, horseradish, marigold, mustard, peppermint, prickly ash, rosemary, tansy, wild yam, yarrow, cinnamon, anise seed, garlic, cayenne, black pepper, echinacea, ginseng, sarsaparilla, dandelion, elecampane, ginger, yarrow, rosemary, onion, juniper berries, sage, pennyroyal, astragalus, bayberry bark, and angelica are all stimulants.

**Tonics** have a general strengthening effect on the whole person, and many herbs are tonics to specific organ systems. For example, catnip and lemon balm are tonics to the nerves, hawthorn berries to the heart, dandelion root to the liver, and licorice root is more general, while ginseng offer vitality. Many herbs belong to this group.

**Vermifuges** expel intestinal parasites. Garlic, wormwood, fennel, chaparral, mugwort, and cayenne belong to this group. Most however, are too strong-tasting to be palatable for children and can be toxic in large doses, and therefore are not frequently utilized.

**Vulneraries** help heal wounds by promoting cell growth and repair. Calendula, chickweed, daisy, elder, witch hazel, yarrow, myrrh, flaxseed, fenugreek, goldenseal, horsetail, marigold, poke root, shepherd’s purse, St. John’s Wort, comfrey, cayenne, fenugreek, garlic, thyme, marshmallow, aloe vera, slippery elm, and plantain are included in this class of herbs.

**Understanding Basic Herbal Chemistry**

Understanding the chemistry of plants is not an absolute necessity for utilizing herbs, but it certainly assists the user in maximizing their benefit. This list below is a brief discussion of the active constitutes in medicinal plants and how they affect the body.
Alkaloids are powerful, potent and potentially toxic. Commonly known alkaloids are found in such plants as coffee (caffeine), tobacco (nicotine), ephedra, and deadly night-shade (atropine).

Bitters exert their action through taste and their direct stimulation on digestive juice production, bile secretion, and elimination. They enhance the flow of salivary enzymes, improve slow digestion and nutrient absorption, enhance appetite, treat constipation, and help stabilize blood sugar. Dandelion, yellow dock root, gentian and hops are common examples.

Flavonoids are responsible for the beautiful yellow, oranges, and reds found in leaves, flowers, stems and fruits of plants. Oranges, lemons, carrots, strawberries, and melons are rich in flavonoids, and antioxidants. Flavonoids strengthen the blood vessel walls and are particularly useful when there is a tendency towards nosebleeds, bruising, or cardiovascular problems.

Mucilage form a slippery, viscous substance in water. These are soothing to inflamed tissue, both when consumed and when applied locally. Flax, psyllium and slippery elm are examples useful for the GI, while comfrey root, marshmallow root, and plantain are effective as topical applications for burns, irritations, and dry skin.

Saponins offer a wide range of effects, ranging from expectorants to anti-inflammatory to steroidal. The steroidal component allows saponins to support the sex hormones and adrenal glands, preventing the deleterious effects of stress and benefitting the immune system. Saponins in particular have drawn the attention of pharmaceutical chemists around the world. Licorice, Siberian ginseng, golden rod, chickweed, figwort, violet, daisy, and black cohosh are examples.

Tannins are astringents, toning tissue and forming a protective layer, and making tissue less permeable to invasive organisms. They act on proteins and other chemicals to protect skin and mucous membranes. They can decrease diarrhea and stop internal bleeding, or be used externally on burns, wounds, or inflammation. Tannins can also be used to treat eye infections like conjunctivitis or infections in the mouth, vagina, cervix or rectum. White oak, plantain, witch hazel, and raspberry leaf are used to treat a variety of conditions, including diarrhea, burns, ulcers, inflammation, sore throats, hemorrhoids, and weepy rashes. Tannins however, should not be taken internally for an extended amount of time as they can inhibit absorption of various nutrients.

Preparing Home Remedies

Herbs can be gathered from the wild, cultivated in your own garden, or purchased dried from a bulk herb store or mail-order catalog. The Red Raspberry Boutique may have available the specific herbs you might desire for making herbal teas, tinctures, salves, and other preparations in your own home, and little is more enjoyable and rewarding. Essential oils however, require integrate distillation processes that are beyond the capability of simple home concoction.

A large bulk of the necessary equipment for creating your own remedies can be found in the common kitchen, such as glass jars, stainless steel pots, a sharp knife, measuring spoons, wooden and stainless steel spoons, a small funnel, cutting board, mesh strainer or cheesecloth, vegetable oil, vodka or brandy, and beeswax - even your own children and spouse for sampling!
Infusing herbs in alcohol creates a tincture. These take weeks to prepare, so some planning ahead is necessary. Most herbal preparations such as oils and tinctures will keep for up to a few years (oils must be kept refrigerated). There are many ways to extract the elements from plants to prepare herbal remedies. Water, alcohol, and oil are the most common bases used.

**Water-based preparations** include teas, infusions, decoctions, and syrups. Infusions and decoctions are used for baths, washes, and compresses, as well as internal use.

**Alcohol** is used for making tinctures, preferably with fresh herbs. It is a valuable solvent because certain plant substances can be extracted only by alcohol, over a two to six week period. Tinctures are long-lasting and potent, yet are not the mode for maximizing on the nutritional aspects of the herb. 100 proof vodka is required, or brandy is nice for children due to its sweeter taste.

Liniments are tinctures prepared for external use in the treatment of muscles and ligament trauma. They contain herbs that act as local stimulants in order to bring warmth to the affected area and disperse blood congestion to reduce bruising. Apply by rubbing enough into the skin to cover the sore or bruised area. Do not use on broken skin.

**Oil-based preparations** include herbal oils, salves, and ointments. Arnica oil is one that every home should not be without. Salves are used for healing skin injuries, such as wounds, burns, stings, rashes, and sores.

Mountain Rose Herbs offers a tutorial for making the herbal tincture, Valerian root (*Valeriana officinalis*). Valerian tincture is a calming herb and a good herbal insomnia remedy.

**Using herbs as your primary medicines requires forethought. Keep your personal apothecary well stocked with herbs and have a few remedies made before illnesses arise.** Basic herbs for your cabinet include: Anise seed, burdock root, calendula, catnip, chamomile, cinnamon, comfrey, echinacea, elder flowers, garlic, ginger, goldenseal, lemon balm, licorice, lobelia, marshmallow root, mullein, nettle, peppermint, red clover, red raspberry leaf, skullcap, slippery elm bark, sea salts, thyme, valerian, and wild cherry bark.