



Romany Herbal Remedies & Recipes

For the Cold & Flu Season

by

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Introduction

Natural Romany Herbal Remedies for the Cold and Flu Season is a compilation of nine herbal medicinal plants traditionally used by the Romany Gypsy folk for the purpose of treating the cold and flu. I have included within these articles descriptions, recipes and precautions.

Please note: This series of articles I am passing on traditional Romany Remedies and Recipes passed down through my family over the years and it is intended for general information only and is **NOT** intended to diagnose or treat any illness or disease. Before adding any herbal remedy or supplement to your diet I advise you to always seek the advice of a qualified professional, such as an herbalist or medical practitioner.

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Angelica (Angelica archangelica)



Angelica was used for bronchial problems, colds and coughs

Angelica: In years gone by it was believed to have magical qualities and used to ward off evil spirits and curses, the plant invariably blooms every May 8th which is the Feast of St Michael the Archangel and thus getting its name **Angelica**.

Whether Angelica has magical properties or not, isn't important. What is important are the properties of this herb. In fact, way back in 1629 in the English herbal, *Paradisus Terrestris*, it was called one of the most important medicinal herbs of the time.

This beautiful plant, not a tree, although it can grow between 6 and 8 feet tall. When in bloom, the flowers are starburst-like. They are quite lovely. The primary part of the plant used for medicinal purposes is the root but the leaves and seeds can be used as well, although more so in cooking than as a medicine. The roots should be dug up in autumn and kept in an air tight container so they will last longer until used. They don't keep well when exposed to air when they can become mouldy and musty. Leaves should be harvested in early summer. The long-stemmed flowers generally take several years to grow and are what produces the seeds. Once the plant flowers and seeds, its life cycle ends.

The dried herb root and rhizome offer essential oil, coumarin and coumarin derivatives. Coumarin is a phytochemical. As an interesting side note: it is what produces that smell of a freshly mown hay field, to some it's most unpleasant but our horses didn't seem to mind it at all and made every effort to break their tether to get into the field.

It is helpful during the cold and flu season in the form of a decoction (very strong tea) of the root, which can be used to treat bronchial problems, common colds and coughs. On the other hand, an infusion (steeped tea) can be used to relieve digestive problems, among other common ailments associated with digestion.

Angelica, a warming herb, can be taken internally or even applied externally for relief of rheumatic pains, cramps and muscle spasms. However, it is good to note that it can cause inflammation of the skin when exposed to UV radiation and prolonged sunlight.

To make Angelica Tea, add 4 ounces (125g) of fresh ground or dried angelica root to one cup (250mls) of boiled water and steep for 15 minutes or longer.

Taste: Angelica makes a pungent cup of tea that has a sweet yet bitter flavour not unlike a musky liquorice, if you can imagine that.

Precautions: Do not use this herb during pregnancy or lactation nor should you use in conjunction with blood thinners. Always seek the advice of a medical professional before adding any supplement, herb or medicine to your routine.

SPECIAL NOTE: I recommend you buy your herbs from a reputable Herbalist or Health Food Shop, as these days the hedgerows are frequently sprayed with week killers.

Astragalus (*Astragalus membranaceus*)



Boost Your Immune System with Astragalus

Astragalus: Among the many uses for this immune system boosting herb, researchers in many countries are definitely giving a nod to this herb's 2,000 year old reputation. The reason the herb is included in this "Cold and Flu Season Remedies" series is because it is often recommended for treating colds, upper respiratory infections and even asthma, among other things.

This herb is known as an adaptogen, meaning it *invigorates or strengthens your system*. Basically, it is used to make your immune system more active. Some people use this herb as an overall “general tonic” to protect their liver from damage, to fight bacteria and viruses. However, this particular herb is not for everyone. (See warning below.)

Considered a *demulcent*, meaning it has an oily or mucilaginous substance that soothes irritated tissue, especially mucous membranes.

The Astragalus plant is a small thorny shrub in the legume / bean family. The part used medicinally is the root harvested from four-year old plants.

It is now available in capsules, teas and tinctures at many health food stores, there have not been dangerous side effects made known from low to moderate doses for those in good overall health, except of course a temporary health condition such as a cold or flu. However, some have reported unpleasant symptoms, like bloating. In that case, try a lesser dose or stop using the herb altogether.

To make Astragalus tea, add about 2 1/2 ounces (75g) shredded root to per cup of boiled water and steep for 10-15 minutes. If using dried, shredded root, use 1 Tablespoon per cup.

Taste: It's sort of like a semi-sweet, velvety, buttery flavour. Some people love it, others not so much but my family have always used it as additional flavouring when making soups.

For dosage information, read the labels, ask your pharmacist, talk to your herbalist or ask your doctor. Dosage amounts vary depending on such things as age, health condition, etc.

Precautions and warning: Astragalus has been known to interact with other herbs and medications. Pregnant and nursing mothers should not use this herb, nor should anyone with any-auto immune disease or condition. It is strongly recommended to seek qualified medical guidance before considering using this herb under any of the mentioned conditions or if for any other reason.

Bee Balm (Monarda didyma)



Bee Balm Treats Colds and Flu Symptoms

Bee Balm: Historically used by the Gypsies mainly living in and around the Norfolk/Suffolk boarder. They treated colds and flu symptoms with this mint family herb in a tea form.

Bee Balm is also referred to as Wild Bergamot. The entire herb, including the roots is medicinal and the part of the plant that grows above-ground is edible.

More currently Dr. James Duke, PHD, who is a retired ethnobotanist, praised Bee Balm as rich in antioxidants and thymol and recommended drinking a cup of

tea with the herb daily to ensure the benefits of its source of antioxidants that are so important to our health.

Bee Balm is anti-microbial to boot! Not a bad thing to keep around for an assortment of uses.

It is a warming herb and also makes an effective and soothing compound for irritated and sore throats. Drink a cup of Bee Balm tea with honey for quick relief. Just don't forget, it's going to warm you up very well and just about as quickly!

With fragrant blossoms of red, pink or purple, this is a lovely plant to have in the garden.

To make Bee Balm tea, add 2 ounces (60g) of the leaves and flowers fresh, or 2 teaspoons dried, to a cup of boiled water and steep for 5 minutes or so. Serve it hot or cold.

You can also use its fresh flowers in salads and dried ones for flavouring meat. Due to its strong scent of mint and mixed with a lemony rose flavour, it goes well with most meats especially Lamb.

Mints can be quite invasive in a garden, but Bee Balm is not so much so but like other mint-family herbs, this plant is bushy with clumps of leaves that can grow up to 4 feet tall. Summer brings out the flowers which are lovely and nectar-rich. Depending on the variety, flowers are scarlet (like the picture above), pink, white, blue, violet or purple.

What's it taste like? I'm glad you asked because if you smell the flowers you'll note sweet and spicy but the taste is more like peppery oregano, and probably stronger than you might think! In fact, feel free to use Bee Balm in place of oregano in cooked or raw foods, such as spaghetti and salad. Yummy! Just use less than you would use oregano.

Precautions: As for side effects, they may exist but I'm not aware of them. Check with your herbalist or doctor if you have any concerns.

Chamomile (*M. chamomilla* or *C. noble*)



Chamomile: Good for what ails you!

Chamomile: With its long-standing reputation as good for what ails you, steamy chamomile vapours (in a cup of tea or humidifier, perhaps) not only impart a pleasant aroma, but help to relieve congestion in both the nose and lungs. It also is known to reduce fevers, ease nausea and even works as a mild sleep aid, which is often needed when you're battling a cold or the flu. What's really good about the tea is that it's believed to have cumulative effects, which is good since the herb's essential oils are not all that soluble in water.

Maybe you're probably familiar with the story (or your children are) where in Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* chamomile tea is used to relieve indigestion. That's actually its traditional use we always used it for but there's more to it than that. Components of Chamomile have antibacterial and

antifungal activity. It's also known to reduce fevers and can be used as a mild sleep aid. Even still, that's not all the herb is useful for, but we're sticking with Cold and Flu Season Remedies for now.

The part of this plant that is used medicinally is the flower. With its daisy-like flowers and bright yellow centre, the general name of Chamomile actually covers two plants: 1. *M. chamomilla*, aka Genuine, German or Hungarian Chamomile; or 2. *C. nobile*, aka English or Roman Chamomile. Both are popular and can be used the same way. The main difference is in the percent of volatile oil with *M. chamomilla* contain 0.5% and *C. nobile* with .05 to 25%.

No single ingredient has been identified as responsible for the benefits of chamomile.

To make Chamomile tea, pour about 2/3 cup boiling water over 1 to 2 teaspoons of dried chamomile flowers, cover and steep for five to ten minutes. To help with your cold, don't forget to breathe in the vapours! Feel free to have as many cups as you like but it's recommended to have more than one and to drink a few cups or so spread throughout the day, but it's always good to keep moderation in mind!

Note: Over steeping or brewing can bring out the bitter taste. Experimenting between the 5 and 10 minutes previously stated can help you figure out the best taste for you.

Chamomile flowers can also be used as flavouring in foods and drinks and they make a lovely garnish!

Taste: The flavour is flowery (it's a bit hard to describe) but with a taste of a fresh apple. It tastes good but most people like to add honey.

Precautions: Reported side effects or potential issues are drowsiness, potential allergic reactions (if you are prone to flowers and such) and a likely possibility of interactions with anaesthetics. If you're expecting to have surgery or dental work requiring the use of anaesthetics within a few weeks, check with your doctor. Due to the drowsiness factor, do not take this herb before driving or operating machinery. One more precaution, Chamomile does contain a very small amount of coumarin. Coumarin can have a small effect as a blood thinner. For further information about interactions and side effects, it's always recommended to speak to your doctor anyway.

Echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea* or *E. angustifolia*)



Echinacea: Increased Resistance to Colds and Flu

Important Note: Echinacea should be taken on an as-needed basis or at the change of a season. **Not continually.** Maximum time to take the herb has been suggested at six to eight weeks. Echinacea boosts the immune system but continual use may actually lessen the effectiveness of your own immune system.

Echinacea: Herbal preparations that contain Echinacea have been one of the top selling herbs over the past few decades in Europe and are touted as having the capability to modify or regulate one or more immune system functions.

The results are in and many clinical trials suggest that products containing Echinacea may improve symptoms and shorten the duration of colds and upper respiratory infections. Not all trials have reported positively for some products brands, this is due to the amount of active ingredient in the tablet or capsule.

Most of us know and believe Echinacea is a "**preventative**" herb used seasonally to strengthen the body's tissues and protect from invasive germs.

Although this is all about Colds and Flu, I must tell you this, Echinacea is excellent for various skin conditions, we once had a goat that suffered with a skin complaint and lost all its hair, two Vets. Told us to put the animal down bit as it was our only source of milk we could not do that. Grandfather decided to try giving it Echinacea mixed with its feed and miraculously within two week hair started to grow and we had that animal a further 7 years.

While it's not used in any modern commercial drugs now, it is believed by many herbalists as being one of the best blood purifiers, and an effective antibiotic. The herb contains a natural antibiotic that makes it an effective, broad-based infection fighter. Echinacea also considered an immune system stimulant, which increases production of infection fighting cells.

The chemistry of Echinacea is complex, and there is not one single ingredient that has been identified as primarily responsible for the therapeutic activity.

Taste: I would describe the flavour as mild, minty with a citrus twist.

To make Echinacea tea, Add ½ cup fresh flowers or ¼ cup dried to a full cup of boiled water and steep for about 5 minutes. Add honey for sweetness, if desired.

Precautions: Echinacea is generally a very safe herb with side effects being very rare even when taken in large doses. With that being said, always seek the advice of a qualified medical doctor, especially before treating children under 12 years of age, are pregnant or nursing, or under medical care for an existing condition.

Elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*)



Elderberry: “The Wonderful Blood Purifier” for colds and flu

Thought you might like to know the Elder tree was the one Gypsies made Clothes Pegs, Wooden Flowers to sell and also for making ‘Bender Tents’ usually for the kids to sleep in.

Elderberry: Evidence suggests that chemicals in the European elder flower and berries may help reduce swelling in mucous membranes, such as sinuses, help relieve nasal congestion and respiratory ailments. It is also considered an excellent treatment for the flu, perhaps even the “bird flu.” Best used when symptoms first appear and may not help if you've been suffering a few days.

Elderberry has been tested. As reported that 93% of flu patients given Sambucol [the most important component in Elderberries] were completely symptom-free within two days; those taking a placebo recovered in about six days."

Sambucus nigra, or European elder (aka black elder) is the one to use medicinally. **Avoid dwarf elder** (*Sambucus ebulus*) completely. It can be toxic.

Though it is reported to have benefit for other ailments, the most common use of elderberry is to treat colds and flu. Overall, traditional herbalists consider it a "wonderful blood purifier."

While not being proven, Elderberry has been touted by some staunch herbalists that this particular herb would probably work better than any medication when it came to treating the bird flu.

To make an elderberry tea, pour about 6 ounces (200mls) of boiling water over 2 teaspoons of the dried flowers, steep for five minutes and strain into a cup. You can drink up to five cups per day and continue until you're feeling well.

Elderberry supplements purchased at a reputable source are recommended. Often Elderberry is combined with zinc and reportedly lessens the duration and symptoms of a cold even better than Elderberry alone.

Taste: Also known in wine-making circles, both the flowers and the berries have been used to produce wine According to Dr. James Duke, ethnobotanist, "Elder Blow wine is something special, delicious, with a beautiful pale yellow colour." However, drinking Elderberry wine will not help treat any symptoms of a cold or flu. Since we're on the subject, it won't help to eat Elderberry jam either.

Precautions: Keep away from children and pets. Avoid any use of the stems and leaves and be extremely careful in handling elderberry because improper handling can result in poisoning. The cyanogenic compounds are concentrated in the leaves.

SPECIAL NOTE: Not recommended for pregnant or nursing mothers. As always, seek the advice of a qualified medical professional before adding any supplement to your routine.

Marshmallow Plant - *Althea officinalis*



Marshmallow has been used by the Romany Gypsy for centuries to treat dry coughs and sore throats

Marshmallow(the plant, not the sugary treat) has been used by Gypsies to treat asthma, the common cold, sore throat and cough. It is also used to treat a variety of other health ailments to include Crohn's disease, diarrhea, IBS, gastritis, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), indigestion, abnormal pap smear, peptic ulcer, and ulcerative colitis.

Believed to first be used by the Egyptians, then the French, then the use spread throughout the world.

Marshmallow is soothing to inflamed mucous membranes. Because of its active constituent of high mucilage content (carbohydrate molecules), this plant is also used for chapped skin, minor wounds and sores caused by exposure to cold.

Considered an anti-inflammatory, as well as an antibacterial agent, this herb is also a naturally occurring amino acid. It's really quite amazing stuff!

Marshmallow has a smooth, slippery (some say slimy) substance and is traditionally used to soothe conditions of the respiratory and digestive tracts more than any other of its variety of uses.

The herb can be used internally, as previously stated, as well as externally to protect and soothe skin sores, burns, eczema and other similar conditions.

To make Marshmallow tea (hot or cold), use two to three teaspoons of the root and/or leaves per cup of water. The combination of the root and leaves together is thought to be more effective than either on their own. Drink it cold or hot, whichever way you prefer.

Taste: Marshmallow root tea has a very nice and slightly sweet flavour combined with a bit of a cinnamon taste. It's rather pleasant actually and not too thick compared with other mucilaginous herbs.

Precautions: Marshmallow is generally safe with only rare allergic reactions reported. There are no well-known drug interactions reported to date.

Mullien - *Verbascum thapsus*



Mullien used by us for centuries finally gained a reputation as a respiratory remedy

Mullien: (pronounce Mullen) With a tremendously long medicinal herbal history (about 2000 years), this herb treats respiratory problems, bronchitis, sore throat and coughs. Also has demulcent, expectorant and suppressant properties. With its combination of expectorant saponins and emollient mucilage this plant is particularly effective for cough. It also has antiviral activity.

Research shows that it soothes not just the respiratory tract but also the digestive system.



Mullien is an emollient and astringent. The herb can be used internally, topically or inhaled. Native Americans used to inhale smoking leaves to relieve congestion. Additionally, the root of mullien can be boiled and used to treat croup and the oil derived from the flowers can be used to treat earaches. However, the leaves and flowers are the primary parts used for medicinal purposes.

Topical use is suggested in the event of being stung or having scraped your skin, have skin sores or infection, or rash. Simply crush leaves or use the powdered root to apply as a poultice. It has a topical soothing

effect and helps protect the skin.

As an interesting side note, folk lore around this plant includes warding off such insidious things as curses and evil spirits!

It grows almost everywhere but is native to Europe, Northern Africa and Asia.

Mullien has velvety leaves and produce beautiful yellow flowers, which makes it a lovely ornamental plant for gardens.

To make the tea use one to two teaspoons of dried leaves per cup of boiling water and steep for about ten minutes.

Taste: Some say the taste is like wild flowers and honey and that tea made from the flowers, instead of the leaves, is the best.

Suggestion: add honey and/or lemon for flavour. It is recommended to drink no more than three cups per day.

Some of us like to breathe in the steam from a piping hot cup of Mullien tea, particularly rather than smoking it!

Slippery Elm - *Ulmus rubra*



Slippery Elm soothes coughs, colds and sore throats and is an ingredient of some cough lozenges and cough syrups

Slippery Elm: Like Marshmallow, the mucilage is what gives this herb the soothing affect for irritated throats and some of the symptoms of a cold. It is actually the fragrant inner bark that offers all the medicinal benefits of this tree, although there is a host of other constituents as well. However, it is the carbohydrates that make up the mucilage that mostly contribute to its effectiveness.

This tree is native to the eastern regions of North America and was traditionally used by Native Americans who discovered many uses for it. In fact, it can also be made into a paste to cover and protect wounds or into a poultice to treat

them. Other uses supply materials for baskets and other household goods as well as canoes.

While slippery elm is often used to treat inflamed digestive conditions such as colitis, diarrhea, duodenal ulcers, enteritis and gastritis it is also commonly prescribed to soothe coughs, colds and sore throats.

To make the tea, add one to two heaped teaspoons of finely ground inner bark to a cup or more of boiling water. The mucilage will swell a lot. Some recommend making a paste of the bark powder by mixing it with a bit of water and then add it to your cup. Either way you go, steep for about five minutes. If you choose to use the bark itself and not a powder, slice about one ounce into very thin strips, add to two cups of boiling water and steep for 25 minutes.

Taste: Slippery elm bark has a sweet flavour but you may want to add honey and/or cinnamon or nutmeg to your tea.

This tea, broth or soup also has very good nutritional value and is likened in that value to oatmeal.

Note: It is said that the inner bark should be harvested from ten year old, or older, trees when being used for medicinal purposes.

Precautions: Taking slippery elm internally, such as tea, use care. It's recommended to drink no more than three cups in one day. However, slippery elm is considered safe although it may interfere with the absorption of medicine taken at the same time due to its gelatinous properties

Note from the author:

I hope you have found this booklet about the old Romany Herbal Remedies and Recipes handed down through my family for hundreds of years. I have made every effort to bring any new information regarding these old remedies to your notice, especially any recently discovered side effects. Please don't forget these are given only as interesting information, as I am not a Doctor I must advise you to seek professional help either through a registered herbalist or medical practitioner especially if your are taking conventional medication for any complaint.

Kooshti Santi (Good Health)

Gypsy Paul Petulengro