

Understanding Herbal Formulas

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Why Herbal Formulas?



Rifle or Shotgun?

Single Herbs

- Have deep and subtle actions, affecting multiple systems and processes
- When matched correctly to a person's symptoms have powerful targeted action (like a rifle)
- Require a lot of knowledge and skill to use effectively

Herbal Formulas

- Subtle actions tend to balance out, creating a more generalized action
- Have a more generalized action that affects the body in a more diverse way (like a shotgun)
- Require less knowledge and skill to use effectively

Herbal Recipes

- Like creating a single dish from a recipe of ingredients, an herbal formula is more than the sum of the single actions of its ingredients
- Herbs can both enhance and neutralize the effects of other herbs, so the blend is different than the sum of its parts
- People unskilled in herbalism often create "kitchen sink" formulas where they simply blend together everything that has been historically used for a problem thinking that will fix everything

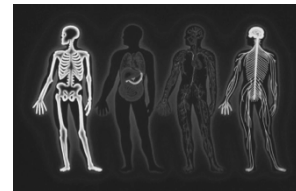


Herbal Energetics

- Herbs have "energetic" properties that move the body's energies in certain directions, as follows:
 - Energy Production: Herbs can *warm* (speed up metabolism) or *cool* (slow down metabolism)
 - Minerals and Fluids: Herbs can *moisten* tissues or *dry* tissues
 - Tissue Tone: Herbs can *relax* tissues or *constrict* (tone) tissues

Herbs and Body Systems

- Herbs have affinity for various body systems and functions
- Formulas can be blended to support specific body systems in both structure and function, such as:
 - Digestive formulas
 - Respiratory formulas
 - Urinary formulas
 - Nervous system formulas
 - Cardiovascular formulas



Herbal Properties

- Herbs have certain properties, which are used to describe ways they affect structure and function
- Herbs can be blended by combining remedies with similar properties, such as:
 - Nervines
 - Blood purifiers



Formulation Principles

- Herbal formulas will be more therapeutic in their effects when herbs are combined according to common energetics or properties, so that they move the body's energies in a unified direction
- Herbal formulas will be more nourishing in their effects when herbs are combined in ways that cancel out their energetic effects, so they don't move the body's energies strongly in any direction

A Plan for Designing Formulas

Components

- 1-2 Key Herbs (8-16 parts per herb)
- 2-4 Supporting Herbs (4-8 parts per herb)
- 0-3 Balancing Herbs (2-4 parts per herb)
- 0-2 Catalysts (1-2 parts per herb)

Example

- 8 oz. Key Herb
- 4 oz. Supporting Herb 1
- 4 oz. Supporting Herb 2
- 2 oz. Supporting Herb 3
- 2 oz. Balancing Herb 1
- 1 oz. Balancing Herb 2
- 1 oz. Catalyst

Key Herb(s)

- The key herb(s) has the primary action you want in the formula, which can be:
 - Energetic
 - Body System Affinity
 - Property
 - A Combination of the Above
- The key herb is like the king or emperor of the formula; it directs the action of the other ingredients



Supporting Herb(s)

- Supporting herbs are like the king's advisors
- They may have a similar action to the key herb(s) or may somehow enhance that action
- They may also "fill in" effects wanted in the formula that are not supplied by the key herb(s)



Balancing Herbs

- Balancing herbs are added to a formula to restrain undesirable properties of the key herb, such as:
 - Toning down harsh or unwanted actions
 - Masking unpleasant flavors
- TCM formulas usually contain small quantities of herbs with opposite effects of the main herbs to ensure the effect of the formula isn't too harsh



Catalysts

- Catalysts are herbs that are added in very small amounts to enhance the overall effect of the formula
- Common catalysts include:
 - Licorice root
 - Lobelia
 - Cayenne
 - Ginger



Example 1: Laxative Formula

- **Key Herbs:** Senna, Cascara Sagrada, Butternut Bark, Cape Aloe
- **Supporting Herbs:**
 - Milder laxatives: Turkey Rhubarb, Buckthorn, Butternut
 - Bitters: Burdock, Barberry, Dandelion
- **Balancing Herbs:**
 - Soothing: Slippery Elm, Licorice
 - Antispasmodic: Wild Yam, Lobelia
- **Catalysts:** Capsicum, Fennel, Ginger

Example 2: Sleep Formula

- **Key Herbs:** Hops, Valerian, Skullcap, Passionflower
- **Supporting Herbs:**
 - Nervines: California Poppy, Corydalis, Kava Kava, Chamomile
 - Nerve Tonics: Milky Oat Seed, Ashwaganda, Jujube Dates, Hawthorn
- **Catalysts:** Licorice Root, Anise, Lobelia, Spearmint

Example 3: Digestive Bitter Tonic

- **Key Herbs:** Gentian, Dandelion, Goldenseal
- **Supporting Herbs:**
 - Aromatics: Cardamon, Chamomile, Angelica, Ginger, Orange Peel, Peppermint
 - Bitters: Artichoke, Myrrh Gum, Turkey Rhubarb, Burdock, Turmeric
- **Balancing Herbs:** Kelp, Irish Moss, Licorice, Anise
- **Catalysts:** Essential oils

Example 4: Cardiac Tonic

- **Key Herbs:** Hawthorn, Lily of the Valley, Arjuna
- **Supporting Herbs:**
 - Cardiovascular: Night Blooming Cereus, Ginkgo, Prickly Ash, Guggul
 - Nervine: Passionflower, Motherwort, Linden
 - Diuretic: Nettle Leaf, Goldenrod
- **Catalysts:** Capsicum, Ginger

Example 5: Anti-Inflammatory

- **Key Herbs:** Boswellia, Devil's Claw, Turmeric, Willow Bark, Yucca
- **Supporting Herbs:** Ginger, Hops, Valerian, Holy Basil, Feverfew, Skullcap, St. John's wort, Chamomile, Licorice
- **Catalysts:** Black Pepper, Ginger

Example 6: Fiber Blend


- **Key Herbs:** Psyllium Hulls, Guar Gum, Oatbran, Apple Pectin, Flaxseed, Slippery Elm
- **Supporting Herbs:** Dandelion, Red Clover, Plantain, Walk Yam
- **Balancing Herbs:** Ginger, Black Pepper, Cinnamon

Example 7: Allergy-Reducing

- **Key Herbs:** Burdock, Eyebright, Nettle Leaf, Goldenrod
- **Supporting Herbs:** Bayberry, Brigham Tea, Blessed Thistle, Osha, Goldenseal, Horehound
- **Balancing Herbs:** Elderberry, Licorice, Mullein
- **Catalysts:** Lobelia


A Dash of Experience

- Learning to blend herbs is a lot like learning to be a great cook
- It's not about strictly following a recipe
- It's more about knowing your ingredients well and being able to adjust them to get the effect you want




A Dose of Common Sense

- Just as you can adjust a recipe with different ingredients, the specific ingredients in a blend are less important than the overall result
- You don't have to be precise with herbal remedies except when dealing with toxic botanicals
- There's a wide margin of safety in both preparation and dosage



Evaluating Herbal Formulas

- When evaluating a commercial herbal formula, don't just look at the name, look at the key herbs it contains
- Often a formula will do much more than it's name implies
- Look at what body system(s) it acts on and what it's primary energetic direction of action will be



Don't Think Remedy, Think Strategy

- Beginning herbalists focus on remedies
- Well-trained herbalists think in terms of strategies
- Strategies give you flexibility when selecting remedies
- When selecting (or blending) herbs get your strategy clear



Circulatory Formula Key Herbs

- Cardiovascular Stimulant Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Garlic, Capsicum, Ginger, Prickly Ash
 - **Supporting Herbs:** Hawthorn, Ginkgo
- Cholesterol Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Artichoke, Guggul, Garlic, Coleus
 - **Supporting Herbs:** Fibers (Apple Pectin, Guar Gum, etc.)
- Hypotensive Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** European Mistletoe, Garlic, Linden, Olive Leaf
 - **Supporting Herbs:** Hawthorn, Garlic, Motherwort, Ginkgo, Black Cohosh, Capsicum, Passionflower
- Vascular Tonic Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Butcher's Broom, Horsechestnut, Collinsonia
 - **Supporting Herbs:** Witch Hazel, Ginkgo, Hawthorn, Ginger, Lycium, Prickly Ash, Grape Seed

Digestive Formula Key Herbs

- Antacid Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Catnip, Fennel, Meadowsweet
 - **Supporting Herbs:** Turkey Rhubarb, Goldenseal, Chamomile, Gentian, Anise, Cinnamon, Peppermint
- Carminative Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Fennel, Ginger, Cardamom, Black Pepper, Chamomile, Peppermint, Cinnamon
 - **Supporting Herbs:** Lemon Balm, Gentian, Wild Yam, Licorice, Chicory
- Digestive Tonic Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Astragalus, Atractylodes, American Ginseng, Licorice, Ginger
 - **Supporting Herbs:** Key Herbs in Carminative Formulas

Glandular Formula Key Herbs

- Adaptogen and Adrenal Tonic Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Ginseng (American and Korean), Eleuthero, Schizandra, Holy Basil, Ashwaganda, Rhodiola, Astragalus, Licorice
- Blood Sugar Reducing Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Bitter Melon, Cinnamon, Devil's Club, Gymnema, Jambul, Nopal, Goldenseal, Fenugreek
- Hyperthyroid
 - **Key Herbs:** Bugleweed, Lemon Balm
 - **Supporting Herbs:** Motherwort
- Hypothyroid
 - **Key Herbs:** Ashwaganda, He Shou Wu, Bladderwrack, Kelp, Irish Moss

Hepatic Formula Key Herbs

- Blood Purifier Formulas (Alteratives)
 - **Key Herbs:** Burdock, Dandelion, Pau D'arco, Red Clover, Sarsaparilla, Yellow Dock
- Cholagogue Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Artichoke, Barberry, Celandine, Culver's Root, Fringetree, Toadflax
- Hepatoprotective Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Milk Thistle, Schizandra, Lycium
- Liver Tonic Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Blessed Thistle, Bupleurum, Beet Root, Dandelion
- In each of the above, herbs from all the other categories will often be used as supporting herbs in the formula

Infection Fighting Key Herbs

- Antibacterial Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Baptista, Echinacea, Garlic, Goldenseal, Myrrh, Oregon Grape
- Antifungal Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Garlic, Oregano, Pau d'Arco, Spilanthes, Tea Tree, Usnea
- Antiviral Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Astragalus, Echinacea, Elder, Isatis, Lemon Balm, Lomatium, Olive Leaf, St. John's wort
- Cold and Flu Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Astragalus, Boneset, Capsicum, Elder, Garlic, Ginger, Lemon Balm, Yarrow

Immune Formula Key Herbs

- Immune Stimulating
 - **Key Herbs:** Astragalus, Echinacea, Goldenseal, Larch, Reishi, Ganoderma
- Immune Balancing
 - **Key Herbs:** Astragalus, Cordyceps, Eleuthero, Maitake, Reishi, Schizandra
- Anticancer Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Burdock, Chaparral, Poke Root, Red Clover, Sheep Sorrel
- Variations of Goldenseal and Echinacea is one of the most popular immune formulas

Intestinal System Key Herbs

- Antiparasitic Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Black walnut, Clove, Garlic, Male Fern, Quassia, Sweet Annie, Tansy, Wormwood
- Stimulant Laxative Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Cape Aloe, Buckthorn, Cascara Sagrada, Senna, Turkey Rhubarb
- Gentle Laxative Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Triphala (Haritaki, Bibhitaki, Amalaki), Prune, Yellow Dock, Licorice
- Intestinal Toning Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Chamomile, Marshmallow, Slippery Elm, Licorice
 - **Supporting Herbs:** Wild Yam, Turmeric, Kudzu, Ginger, Plantain

Nervous System Key Herbs

- Analgesic Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Willow, Turmeric, Indian Pipe, Jamaican Dogwood, Corydalis
 - Supporting Herbs: Valerian, California Poppy, Black Cohosh, Licorice Root, Lobelia, Kava Kava, Feverfew
- Antispasmodic Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Lobelia, Black Cohosh, Blue Cohosh, Cramp Bark, Khella, Skunk Cabbage
- Migraine/Headache Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Feverfew, Butterbur, Periwinkle, Jamaican Dogwood, Scullcap
- Relaxing Nervine Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Blue Vervain, California Poppy, Chamomile, Hops, Kava Kava, Lavender, Lobelia, Passionflower, Scullcap, Valerian

Brain and Mood Key Herbs

- Antidepressant Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** St. John's wort, Mimosa, Lemon Balm, Black Cohosh, Damiana, Bupleurum, Ginkgo, Kava Kava
- Brain and Memory Tonic Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Bacopa, Ginkgo, Gotu Kola, Periwinkle, Rosemary, Sage
- Brain Calming Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Chamomile, Ginkgo, Hawthorn, Jujube, Lemon Balm, Milk Oat Seed

Respiratory Energetics

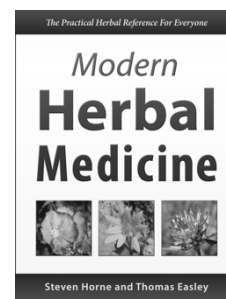
- **Key Drying:** Wild Cherry, Osha, White Pine, Thyme, Yerba Santa
- **Key Moistening:** Astragalus, Elecampane, Fritillary, Licorice, Marshmallow, Mullein, Slippery Elm
- **Key Soothing:** Licorice, Slippery Elm
- **Key Stimulating:** Garlic, White Pine, Thyme, Rosemary
- **Key Relaxing:** Lobelia, Black Cohosh, Khella

Urinary Formula Key Herbs

- Diuretic Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Buchu, Dandelion leaf, Juniper, Pipsissewa, Uva Ursi
- Kidney Tonic Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Eucommia, Horsetail, Nettle, Goldenrod, Cornsilk, Cleavers
- Lithotriptic Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Gravel Root, Hydrangea, Stone Breaker, Lemon
- Urinary Infection Fighting Formulas
 - **Key Herbs:** Cranberry, Echinacea, Goldenseal, Pipsissewa, Uva-Ursi

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