**Making an Herbal Infusion**

Nutritive herbs are most easily taken as an infusion.  An infusion is not “tea”.  The main reason for making an infusion is to get all the nutrients (not medicinal properties, although they come out, too) out of the plant matter. An infusion is much stronger in flavor than a tea as it uses much more herb and has a much longer steeping time.  This enables all the nutrients to come into solution therefore making them easily assimilated by the body.  That said, making an herbal infusion is easy!  You only need a few simple tools and ingredients.

First, though, we’ll go over what herbs make excellent herbal infusions.  Nutritive herbs are those plants which you could eat as food and in as much quantity as you’d like.  These are the herbs you can eat (or drink the infusion of) every day, all year long.  They’re high in nutritional value, and have medicinal qualities that are best utilized over the long term.  Nutritive herbs include (but not limited to):  red clover, oatstraw, nettles.

I’ll briefly go over oatstraw and nettle, both are nutritional powerhouses.  Oatstraw is extremely high in magnesium, chromium and protein; high in calcium, niacin, Vitamin A; and has good quantities of riboflavin, thiamine, B6 and choline.  Niacin, riboflavin, thiamine, B-6 and choline are all vitamins found in the B-complex which are extremely important for brain function, including mood regulation.  Traditional uses of oatstraw include relief of “hysteria” (i.e. woman having nervous tension/depression), balancing the menstrual cycle (old physician speak for PMS and/or menstrual irregularities).  Modern uses also include prevention of osteoporosis (the balance of calcium and magnesium in oatstraw enables the body to utilize the calcium.  Without enough magnesium, the body can’t use calcium).  Oatstraw can be made into an infusion with part lemon balm (up to 1/2 oz of lemon balm to 1/2 oz of oatstraw).  Lemon balm made into an infusion is very strongly flavored.  You can also use the oatstraw infusion as a base to make lemon balm tea (tea = 1 tsp herb steeped in 1 cup of water for 10 - 15 minutes).   Lemon balm is a tranquilizer and anti-depressant herb that also hase anti-viral and antibacterial actions.   I find oatstraw good hot with honey or cold.  It also works great as the liquid part of a smoothie.  It’s especially tasty with peaches.

Nettle is also full of nutrients.  It is very high in calcium, magnesium, chromium and zinc; high in potassium, protein, riboflavin, selenium, thiamine, Vitamin A, Vitamin K and Vitamin C.  Nettle also has good amounts of niacin and iron.  As you can see, nettle is full of  B-vitamins as well.  Nettle, too, has an excellent amount of both calcium and magnesium giving the body what it need to be able to absorb and utilize calcium.  Nettle’s traditional use has been as a ”blood purifier” meaning that it increases the efficiency of both kidneys and liver function.   Nettle is also a great help to women who experience menstrual cramps.  Nettle has a very strong flavor.  I generally chug nettle infusion really cold although it’s good added to soup broth or heated up with miso for a quick miso soup.

**Here’s how to make the infusions**

**What you need:**

* 1 ounce of herb
* 1-quart Mason jar (or any heat proof container that will hold 1 quart and has a tight-fitting lid)
* metal lid for Mason jar (plastic lids made for Mason jars don’t work well in this application)
* something to boil 1 quart of water in
* 1 quart of water
* chopstick or knife
* scale to weigh herb
* large-mouth funnel (optional, but keeps the mess down)

**How to Proceed:**

1. Bring your water to a boil.
2. While the water is coming to a boil, weigh out 1 ounce of herb into the Mason jar.  You may need to use the funnel here.
3. Pour boiling water over the herb until the water reaches about 1 inch from the top of the jar.
4. Stir with chopstick to release any trapped air.
5. Fill Mason jar the rest of the way.
6. Cap tightly with lid.
7. Let steep for at least 4 hours or overnight.

**Straining the Infusion**

**What you’ll need:**

* Jar of infusion
* Large-mouth funnel
* Strainer or potato ricer
* Tea towel, muslin, cheesecloth, etc.
* Another container

**How to Proceed:**

1. Take lid of your finished infusion (you may need a bottle opener, since the lid will vacuum down).
2. Line your strainer or potato ricer.
3. Put wide-mouth funnel into empty jar and put strainer on top of funnel.
4. Pour liquid into strainer to catch the herby bits.  You may need a spoon to get the herb out.
5. Press the remaining liquid out of the herb.  If you’re using a regular strainer you can gather up the corners of the cloth and squeeze out the liquid or press with the back of a spoon.
6. Once you’ve all the liquid into the new jar, cap it & store it in the fridge.  It’ll keep for about 36 - 48 hours.  If it smells “sour”, it’s done.  Don’t drink it, use it to water your plants or put it in the compost or dump it in the yard.
7. Compost the herb.