

# Herbal Immune Support: Prevention and Care

## Yarrow, *Achillea millefolium*

**Habitat:** Highly tolerant and well adapted. Found in all 50 states. Ideal habitat is mildly disturbed, well drained soil in grasslands and open forests.

**Harvesting:** The flowering tops and leaves are best harvested early in bloom. Pungent/sour smell indicates potency. Medicinal strength can vary between stands.

**Actions:** hemostatic, styptic, anti-coagulant, astringent, antimicrobial, carminative, bitter tonic, cholagogue, stomachic, anti-inflammatory, antispasmodic, emmenagogue, diaphoretic (warm infusion), diuretic (cold infusion)

**Applications:** Yarrow is supportive to the body in initial stages of fever, often when chills are present. Drinking a warm yarrow tea (with the additions of any or all of the following: ginger, peppermint, elder flower or berry) ultimately increases core heat while bringing blood to the surface and cooling the body. This should be done in addition to drinking warm broths and water while avoiding meals of solid foods. The warm tea is also valuable in conditions of excess heat (high fever) that would be aided by bringing on a sweat. Yarrow lends a tonic and moving quality to the GI tract when taken internally that can aid in conditions of gas, bloating and upset stomach. Yarrow's most notable first aid application is its ability to quickly stop bleeding in cuts and abrasions. When applied to fresh wounds, preparations of yarrow also act to reduce inflammation and prevent microbial infection. It's a helpful remedy for UTI's, as well as microbial infections that produce diarrhea and intestinal irritation. As a uterine tonic, yarrow brings relief to a stagnant or clotty menses (when the application of heat feels appropriate) as well as slowing an abnormally heavy bleed. Internal use is not recommended in pregnancy. Energetically, yarrow is a strong protector of boundaries. It is very grounding and prevents us from taking on too much of the chaos and negativity of others. This quality, along with taking a few deep breaths is invaluable for both the person receiving and giving first-aid treatment.

**Dose:** Tincture: 1-4 drops directly on tongue for energetic qualities. 30—90 drops in warm water in early stages of the flu. Infusion: 2 tsp per cup of water, sipped as needed, up to 4 cups/day.



## Monarda, Bee balm, Wild bergamot, *Monarda fistulosa*

**Habitat:** Widely distributed around North America, it's most commonly found on the plains and lower altitudes east of the Rockies. Grows in dry open woods, fields, wet meadows and ditches. Prefers well drained, but moist acidic soil, sand, loam or clay.

**Harvesting:** Flowers, leaves and stems can all be used. Best harvested in early bloom. As a member of the mint family, trimming back the flowers encourages bushy growth and subsequent blooms.

**Actions:** local anesthetic, antiseptic, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, local analgesic, nervine, antispasmodic, diaphoretic, carminative, antispasmodic, diuretic, expectorant, emmenagogue, rubifacient, immunomodulator,

**Applications:** This prairie herb has a wide range of medicinal applications (and is a delicious culinary spice too). Monarda's pungent and spicy smell indicate strong volatile oils that make for an excellent antiseptic when applied to the skin or mucus membranes (via steam inhalation). The fresh leaf can be chewed and applied directly to minor cuts and burns or inflamed teeth and gums. First aid applications include: burn or wound dressing (as an infused honey paste, poultice, tincture or cooled tea), sunburn (use cooled tea or chew the flowering tops and apply directly to skin) and hemostat (spit poultice or

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powdered plant). A specific indication for Monarda is cool, clammy skin or when low grade fever is present (especially when related to septic or viral conditions). In situations of cold or flu, this herb is extremely effective at eliminating a sore throat (gargle) and preventing secondary infections (facial steam to access sinuses and

lungs). Use a strong tea to ease symptoms of upper respiratory tract irritation (bronchitis, laryngitis, minor cough with thickened mucus secretions). *Monarda* is also useful in cases of UTI, diarrhea or constipation with clammy skin and nervousness.

**Dose:** Tincture: 10-60 drops, 1-4 times/day. Infusion: 2 tsp dried herb per cup water. 1-4 cups/day.

## Reishi mushroom, Ling Zhi, *Ganoderma lucidum*

**Habitat:** The wild reishi is relatively rare, with almost all commercial products grown in sterilized environments. *Ganoderma* species can be found in China, Japan and the United States growing on elm, alder, oak and some strains are found on conifers.

**Actions:** Anti-oxidant, anti-viral, anti-bacterial, anti-microbial, hepatoprotective, immune-modulant (ok for autoimmune conditions as well), lowers blood sugars and cholesterol

**Applications:** Reishi, meaning “divine or spiritual mushroom”, is known as “the mushroom of spiritual potency” by Taoist monks. It has a long history of use in eastern Asia where its relative rarity led to its use by those of privilege. A water extract of reishi produces the best medicine, with much of the immune-modulating activity coming largely from water soluble polysaccharides. A large number of clinical trials have been conducted on the fruiting body and mycelium of reishi and shown increased immune system activation, which has led to reports on anti-viral, anti-tumor, anti-HIV and anti-bacterial activity. The anti-viral components of reishi are active against influenza and herpes viruses. However, reishi is best used as a tonic with long term, daily use improving immunity against potential infection and chronic illness. That said, chronic urinary tract infections have been shown to improve greatly with consumption of reishi. The most widely observed physiological effect of reishi mushroom is improved oxygenation of the blood which has shown improvement in liver function and hepatitis as well as altitude sickness. The long held reputation of reishi as a wisdom remedy is due, in large part, to the increase in circulation of oxygen rich blood, particularly to the brain. Emotional wounds are often trapped and remembered in the circulatory system. Herbs that promote blood flow can be helpful for clearing old physic pain. Reishi does this very nicely.

**Dose:** Long decoction of Reishi (2 plus hours, slow cookers are great for this). Approx. ¼ cup reishi per 32oz water (make a large batch and reheat as needed). Drink 16oz daily. Or look to purchase a quality reishi extract (Nebraska Mushroom Co, Arise Botanicals apothecary, MushroomScience.com capsules)



## Echinacea, Purple Coneflower, Snakeroot, *Echinacea pallida*, *E. angustifolia*, *E. purpurea*



**Habitat:** *E. angustifolia* and *E. pallida* are both native to Nebraska and the great plains region. *E. purpurea*'s native habitat is east of the Missouri river. The plains species of echinacea prefer loose, well drained, sandy soil. They both require stratification before planting. *E. purpurea* is the easiest to cultivate and tolerates more dense soil and wet roots, although it does not want to continually stand in water. *E. purpurea* does not require stratification.

**Harvesting:** Wild populations of echinacea were decimated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to over-harvesting. Today it is best to use only cultivated echinacea, grown on your own or purchase from a reputable source. The roots are the easiest to use and have the highest clinical efficacy, but the flower and seeds are also useful. Leave can be used *externally* as an anti-inflammatory poultice.

**Actions:** Immune enhancing, anti-inflammatory, antiviral, antibacterial, antifungal, inhibits hyaluronidase (found in the venom of some snakes, spiders and bacterias).

**Applications:** This herbs is a well known immune stimulant that increases overall resistance to disease. Useful in treating the early phases of bacterial or viral infection, echinacea speeds resolution of colds and urinary tract infections in particular. Recent studies have not found it to

be as effective in treatment and prevention of the flu. The herbs makes an anti-inflammatory remedy for infected wounds and the bites of reptiles and insects. Echinacea is also a potent sialagogue (promotes salivation). One good test for the quality of herb or extract is how much it stimulates your spit. Look to echinacea at the very first signs of cold or upper respiratory tract infection. It has also been considered a “blood purifier” which is better described as a substance that increases the body's powers of elimination and stimulates immune functions such as phagocytosis. However, continuous use to avoid viral infections is not recommended. Rather, echinacea is most effective when combined with rest, a high-quality diet and other healthy habits. Note that the use of echinacea by those with autoimmune conditions is not recommended as it may promote a flare up.

**Dose:** Infusion, use 1/2-1 tsp dried root per cup of water and drink 1-4 cups/day or tincture 10-30 drops 1-4x/day as a preventative and 30-90 drops 2-4 times/day for acute illness.

## Elder, *Sambucus canadensis*

**Habitat:** This species of Elder bush covers a large area of North America east of the Rocky Mountains and south through eastern Mexico and Central America. It grows in average, medium to wet, well-drained soil in full sun to part shade. Prefers moist, humus rich soils. Spreads by root suckers to form colonies.

**Harvesting:** Elder is an abundant herbal remedy from which the leaves, flowers and berries all provide healing support. The leaf can be harvested at anytime during the growth cycle and used fresh (*external use only* as a poultice). The flowers are best harvested in the early flowering stage and used fresh or dried. And the berries are harvested at peak ripeness (when they're deep purple/black) and dried or extracted fresh into water or honey.

**Actions:** Flowers: expectorant, relaxing diaphoretic (promotes a healthy sweat), diuretic, alterative (supports the body's waste removal/detox process), soothing nervine (calming), mild laxative, anti-viral, immune-stimulating Berries: nutritive (high in flavonoids, a type of antioxidant and vitamin C), mild laxative, anti-inflammatory, immunosupportive, anti-viral.

**Applications:** Elder was traditionally known as “Nature's medicine chest.” Modern research has also confirmed the usefulness of elderberries, in particular, for shortening the duration of the flu. The ripe, well-processed berries can be extracted into water or honey and taken as a preventative to viral infections as well. Consumptions of the unripe berries and seeds can produce gastro-intestinal upset (nausea, vomiting.) Care should be taken to remove the stems as well. Flowering tops are ideal for coughs, colds, and flu as it soothes and supports the removal of cellular waste from the immune battle that is raging. In states of high fever, the infusion can be used to bring on a mild perspiration. The flowering tops also tone the mucous linings of the nose and throat, increasing their resistance to infection. They are useful for chronic congestion, allergies and ear infections. The alterative action of elder flowers can also aid in the severity of some arthritic conditions. Elderberries are also used in the food industry as a flavoring and coloring agent.

**Dose:** Infusion, 1 Tbsp. dried flowers or fresh/dried berries per cup of water. Tincture of flower, take 10-60 drops, 1-4 times/day. Elderberry syrup, take 1 Tbsp 1-3 times/day to prevent virus or 3-5 times/day at onset of cold/flu.



### References:

- [Herbal Medicine From the Heart of the Earth](#), Dr. Sharol Marie Tilgner
- [Herbal Vade Mecum](#), Gazmend Skenderi
- [Making Herbal Medicine](#), Richo Cech
- [Echinacea, The Immune Herb](#), Christopher Hobb
- [Encyclopedia of Herbal Medicine](#), Andrew Chevallier
- [The Fungal Pharmacy](#), Robert Rogers

# Rosemary's Original Fire Cider Recipe

Fire Cider is a delicious, spicy and sweet vinegar tonic first developed in the 1980s by herbalist Rosemary Gladstar who wanted to teach her students, “how to make herbal preparations that were as much food as they were medicines.” (Source: [freefirecider.com/rosemarys-story](http://freefirecider.com/rosemarys-story))

This is a great remedy to have on hand during the colder months to improve circulation and support immune, respiratory and digestive function. Try it by the spoonful, dilute in warm water or enjoy it as a culinary ingredient. Try mixing Fire Cider with olive oil as a salad dressing or adding it to cooked meats and veggies.

## Ingredients

1/2 cup fresh ginger (grated)

1/2 cup fresh horseradish (grated)

10 cloves garlic (crushed or chopped)

1 small onion (chopped)

2 peppers, jalapeño or cayenne (chopped)

2 tablespoons rosemary, dried (or several sprigs of fresh rosemary)

apple cider vinegar (by volume, see below)

1/4 cup honey (plus more to taste)



*Optional ingredients:* lemon and/or orange peel, turmeric (fresh or ground), oregano, cinnamon, echinacea

## Instructions

Combine ginger, horseradish, onion, garlic, peppers, and rosemary in a quart sized canning jar. Cover with apple cider vinegar by about two inches (your ingredients will initially float to the surface, this is ok.) Use a piece of natural parchment paper or wax paper under the lid to keep the vinegar from touching the metal (or use a plastic lid.) Shake well. Store in a dark, cool place for one month and shake daily (this improved extraction and prevents spoilage.)

After 4 weeks, use cheesecloth to strain out the pulp, pouring the vinegar into a clean jar. Be sure to squeeze as much of the liquid goodness as you can from the pulp while straining. Add 1/4 cup of honey and stir until incorporated. Taste your cider and add honey by the tablespoon until you reach desired sweetness. Fire cider should taste acidic, spicy and sweet.

Label and store in a cool place away from direct sunlight (option to store in the fridge as well.) Fire Cider will keep for several months (or longer if refrigerated.) As this is a food-based folk preparation, feel free to experiment and change ingredients year to year depending on what you have available. Another option is to save the strained pulp and add it to stir fry, soups and other foods for warmth and flavor.

*Cheers to your health!*