

How to make an Herbal Tincture

Herbal tincture-making is a way of extracting and preserving the goodness of herbs so that you have them available to use all year round (because summer herbs do not grow in the winter!). Tinctures are usually made using alcohol. Alcohol is a very effective solvent and preservative so it is an excellent substance to use to make tinctures. Alcohol has a low boiling point so if you want to reduce the alcohol content of a tincture before giving it to someone then pour the dosage of tincture (e.g. 5 ml) into a dosage beaker or cup and add a splash of boiled water. Drink when cool. The heat of the boiled water will cause some of the alcohol to evaporate.

Tinctures are probably the most common herbal extract used by professional herbalists. They are also sold in health shops and chemists/pharmacies (e.g. Bioforce products). Tinctures are a convenient way of taking herbal medicine. Because tinctures are more concentrated than herbal teas or infusions the dosages are usually drops or teaspoons and this can really appeal to people who don't want to drink flasks-full of tea or who don't like the taste of herbs.

Because alcohol has a long shelf-life, herbal tinctures keep for many years. Try building up your collection gradually by making a few different tinctures ever year.

You can use fresh or dried herbs to make tinctures. I prefer fresh herbs for tincture-making but it is still a worthwhile process to make your own with dried herbs. Making your own herbal extracts can be so satisfying: like the difference between eating a nourishing, wholesome home-cooked meal and grabbing an unsatisfying sandwich when you're out.

Tinctures are more expensive to make than herbal infusions or teas because of the cost of the alcohol. However, good quality brandy or vodka is now available from cheaper supermarkets so that makes these products more affordable to make at home.

To make a tincture, take your herb, put it into a clean, dry jar and completely cover it with brandy or vodka. I give ratios and details on the next page but the amount of liquid that will cover an herb will vary depending on the size and absorbency of the herb. Make sure that it is completely covered with your alcohol. You may need to top it up a little over the first 2 days. If any of the herb is exposed to air then it will grow mould, make sure it is submerged in the alcohol.

Method

1. Finely chop **120g/4oz** dried herb or **240g/8oz** fresh herb and place in a glass jar.
2. Cover with $\frac{1}{2}$ **litre/ 1 pint** 30%/60 proof alcohol (eg. vodka or brandy) and tightly close lid (note: the alcohol should cover the herb. If the herb is very bulky then add more alcohol to ensure that the herb is covered).
3. Store the jar out of direct light e.g. in a cupboard.
4. Check the tincture for the first day or two to ensure that the herbs are fully covered in the alcohol. Top up the jar with alcohol if needed.
5. Leave for 2 weeks.
6. After 2 weeks, strain off the liquid through muslin, squeezing all the goodness out of the herb (the used herbs make excellent compost).
7. Pour the liquid into a glass bottle.
8. Label with the herb name and date made.
9. Store out of direct light and away from direct heat.
10. **Dosage:** This varies according to the herb that you have extracted as well as the age and health of the person to whom you want to administer the medicine. Please consult the appropriate lesson in this course, or seek the advise of a reliable, professional herbalist.