

How to make a tincture?

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Tinctures are concentrated liquid extracts of medicinal herbs. The most common liquid (or menstrum) used to extract the medicinal properties of herbs is alcohol, but you can also use vinegar and glycerine, in combination or on their own. You can tincture plants when they are in full bloom or when the roots are ready, capturing their medicine when they are fresh and most vital, to use throughout the rest of the year. Tinctures are easy to use, especially if you're traveling, working, or sick in bed and can't make your own teas. Once in tinctured form, they are all prepared and ready to use. You don't need to heat water or carry around any fresh or dried herbs. The menstrum (alcohol, vinegar, or glycerine) not only draws out the medicinal properties, it also preserves them.

You can place tinctures directly in your mouth, or dilute them in water, tea, or juice. Some people like to add their alcohol-based tinctures to a cup of very hot water, so that some of the alcohol evaporates.

There are many methods for making tinctures. You can do it by ratios and percents, using scales, measuring cups, and blenders. While it's fun to experiment with different methods, my favorite way is to harvest the herbs I've grown in my garden or found in fields and forests and tincture them fresh, letting them macerate (soak) for at least one moon cycle of 28 days.

Tincturing Fresh Herbs

- Find the herb in a place that feels good, away from busy roads and pesticide-sprayed lawns. Harvest only what you need and give thanks to the plants, however you wish.
- Chop/tear the herbs finely and fill a clean jar, leaving a couple inches from the top. Don't pack the herbs down - you want to leave space for the herb and menstrum to move around. You can also leave some of the leaves, flowers, or roots whole if you like.
- If you are using grain alcohol and/or glycerine and you'd like to add a percentage of water, combine your fluids in a jar, bowl, or measuring cup, and shake or stir to blend them together.
- Pour your menstrum over the herbs, until there is at least 1" of liquid over your herbs. Seal with a tight fitting lid.

- Let your tincture sit. Some say you only need 10 days-2 weeks to fully draw the medicine into the menstrum, while others leave it for one month, or until they need it, as long as a few years (for alcohol-based ones). I like to give it time, at least one full month. During this time you can shake it daily. The more connected you feel throughout the process (growing, harvesting, making medicine, taking the medicine), the more powerful the medicine will be.
- When you're ready, strain the herbs, squeezing to get out as much medicine as you can. You can strain your herb using fine-mesh metal strainer or a funnel lined with a piece of cheesecloth or muslin. Compost the herb and pour your tincture into bottles. Amber colored glass will protect your tincture from sunlight, which may cause it to lose its potency, and dropper-tops make it easy to get the right dosage. You can reuse amber glass vitamin bottles or tincture bottles. Store your tincture in a cool, dark place like a cabinet, and be sure to label it well, with the name of the herb, date, and any other info you'd like to include ~ phase of the moon, where you harvested it from, what you saw that day.

Tincturing Dry Herbs

- Check the color, scent, & taste of your herb to be sure that it has maintained its vital energy.
- Fill your jar one-third to one-half of the way with dry herb. Since dried herbs have had their moisture removed, the medicine is less dilute and more potent.
- Add enough menstrum so that there is 2-3" of space to the top of the jar. This allows the herb room to expand as it rehydrates, and space if you need to add more menstrum to keep the herb covered.
- Follow #4 and 5 from above.
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Some folks choose to make tinctures individually, and then create formulas as needed. Others make blends that are tinctured together from the beginning. There's definitely some magic/synergy that happens when herbs join and blend together. However, tincturing herbs separately is a good way to start, to get to know the herbs on their own.

Michael Moore, may he Rest in Peace, was all about medicine for the people. You can download his material medica for free off his website at www.svsbm.com. Here you'll find out which herbs to tincture fresh or dried and what percent alcohol to use. If there's an herb that's new to you, that you'd like to make medicine from, it's a good practice to research it in at least 3 herb books written by trusted herbalists (see booklist at end).

Tincture dosage depends on the herb, person, and situation. In general, 1/4-1/2 teaspoon (15-30 drops, 1/2-1 dropperfull) of tincture is used 3 times daily for chronic situations. For acute ones, you want to take smaller and/or more frequent doses, such as 1/4 tsp every hour. For children, when an adult would use 1 teaspoon:

6-12 months	4 drops
12-24 months	7 drops
2-3 years	10 drops
3-4 years	12 drops
4-6 years	15 drops
6-9 years	24 drops
9-12 years	30 drops

Menstrums

Alcohol extracts many of the plant's constituents and is rapidly absorbed into the bloodstream. Many people use vodka, brandy, or gin. Divide the proof # in half to determine the alcohol content; 100 proof alcohol is 50% alcohol (and 50% water), 80 proof is 40% alcohol (and 60% water). The alcohol extracts certain components, the water others. To preserve your tincture you need at least 25% alcohol by volume, and it will last for years. Some folks



prefer using Everclear or organic grain alcohol, which are both 190 proof (95% alcohol, 5% water) then adding distilled water or fresh well water to get the desired ratio. Feel free to keep it simple by using what you can get at the liquor store. I began by using 100 proof vodka with fresh plants. Then you can experiment from there. Just remember that you need at least 25% alcohol to preserve a tincture. If you're tincturing an herb that's resinous (i.e. myrrh) or more water-soluble (i.e. marshmallow root), check a solvent chart to find the optimum alcohol to water ratio.

Glycerine is sweet and soothing to our mucous membranes (such as the throat and gut). Like alcohol, it is a natural preservative, but it does not extract as many of the herb's components. However, if you want a sweet tasting remedy, especially for little ones, or a tincture for folks who don't want any alcohol, you can explore glycerine as a menstrum. Glycerites (glycerine-based tinctures) don't last as long as alcohol-based ones, so keep an eye on them. You can refrigerate them if you wish, to extend their shelf life. Be sure to use 100% pure vegetable glycerine, available at herb shops, coops, natural food stores, and through mail-order companies such as Mountain Rose. If you choose to combine your glycerine with water, just be sure that the majority of your blend is glycerine in order for it to keep. Most people keep their glycerine ratio around 80% (adding 20% water), or even 100% for particularly juicy fresh plants.



Vinegar, like alcohol and glycerine, is a natural preservative and extracts certain properties. While it doesn't draw out medicine from plants as well as alcohol, it is very good for digestion and it can be easily incorporated into your daily routine as a food – in soups, salads, stirfries, on greens, or just on its own. I like to make vinegars infused with *tonic* herbs - herbs that are nourishing and safe to take every day. If possible, try to use organic/locally grown apple cider vinegar. The distilled white vinegar is best reserved for cleaning.