

Herbal Bitters

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Why Herbal Bitters?

- ~Stimulate the digestive system to promote better digestion of food and help the body to absorb nutrients better
- ~Stimulate the metabolism
- ~Stimulate the immune system
- ~Stimulate the liver and prepare the gall bladder for the release of bile
- ~Help support the liver's natural detoxification process, keeping your body toxin free
- ~Increase the tone of the autonomic nervous system that energizes the digestive organs which helps reduce anxiety and overall stress
- ~Have a reflex action on our stomach and pancreas, stimulating the production of digestive juices
- ~The more bitters you eat, the more you will want, replacing the craving for sweets

Herbs for Using as Bitters:

The following list is NOT complete! Herbal Bitters are varied and can be combined for different aspects. Many common bitters are as follows:

Angelica (*Angelica archangelica*)
 Boneset (*Eupatorium*)
 Burdock (*Arctium lappa*)
 Calamus (*Acorus calamus*)
 Chicory (*Cichorium intybus*)
 Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinalis*)
 Gentian root (*Gentiana lutea*)
 Goldenrod (*Solidago spp.*)
 Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*)
 Horehound (*Marrubium vulgare*)
 Milk Thistle (*Silybum marianum*)
 Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*)
 Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*)
 Orange Peel (*Citrus aurantium*)
 Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*)
 Yellow Dock (*Rumex crispus*)

How to Incorporate Bitters into Your Day

Bitters can be taken in a couple of forms. The most important thing to know is that *you must taste the bitter action for it to be effective*. And while bitter is not a flavor we typically enjoy, you will find that the more you take it, the more you enjoy it and begin to crave it.

The easiest way to incorporate bitters into your diet is to simply eat them. In the spring, the first plants to pop up are often the bitter greens such as Dandelion and Chicory. Try eating a leaf 15 - 20 minutes before your meal to stimulate digestion.

Leaves can also be added to salads or sautéed as you would mustard greens (which are also considered bitters). You can add them to your usual bitters (greens, kale, spinach, etc) or eat them alone. Experiment with them. As long as you can taste the bitterness, you are getting the benefits.

Another way to add bitters to your daily routine is through the use of herbal bitters extracts. These extracts are often a combination of aromatic bitters, bittersweet bitters, regular bitters and other digestive herbs. There are many variations on recipes, which can be simple or complex, depending on the blender's preferences.

Bitters are a true tonic that should be taken regularly over time in the same way that bitter foods would be consumed. Bitters should be taken ten to fifteen minutes before meals to help activate the digestive process. Use twenty to forty drops in a small amount of water, which should be sipped slowly so that you can taste the bitterness, which is important to stimulate the bitter action on our digestive system.

Recommended Herbal Books (*indicates available through library loan system):

~Making Plant Medicine by Richo Cech

~The Male Herbal by James Green*

~Healthy Digestion: A Natural Approach to Relieving Indigestion, Gas, Heartburn, Constipation, Colitis & More by David Hoffmann*

~The Wild Medicine Solution: Healing with Aromatic, Bitter and Tonic Plants by Guido Masé*

Online Resources

Jim McDonald article, Blessed Bitters:

<http://www.herbcraft.org/bitters.pdf>

Elizabeth Walling:

<http://www.livingthenourishedlife.com/2010/05/bitter-taste-sweet-rewards-improve>

Weston A Price Foundation:

<http://www.westonaprice.org/basics/bitters-the-revival-of-a-forgotten-flavor>

Sarah Head:

<http://kitchenherbwife.blogspot.com/2008/07/bitters-herbs-which-promote-release.html>

<http://kitchenherbwife.blogspot.com/2010/01/bitters-and-white-hoarhound.html>

<http://kitchenherbwife.blogspot.com/2010/01/citric-bitters.html> - has several recipes