



Herbal Tinctures

What is a Herbal Tincture?

A tincture is an extract of herbal constituents into alcohol. Tinctures are the most common kind of preparation used by medical herbalists in the UK today. Alcohol is an excellent solvent for extracting plant constituents, and a mixture of water and alcohol will dissolve nearly all the constituents in a plant making tinctures a strong and efficient herbal medicine. Tincturing is also a very simple preservation method, especially for fresh herbs to be used later out of season. To make sure that your tincture will keep, you need to use an alcohol with a strength of at least 25%. Most alcohol that is available to us to buy in the UK is a mixture of alcohol and water e.g. 40% strength vodka contains 40% alcohol and 60% water.

Herbal tinctures will keep for years if you store them in dark bottles away from the light, so they make effective medicines for a long time. A small dose of tincture is all that is needed for an effect to be felt from that herb. A standard dose is just 15-30 drops taken one to three times a day. The ease of taking herbal medicine in tincture form makes it very popular way of using herbs.

How to Make a Herbal Tincture:

The easiest method to use to make tinctures at home is called simple maceration, or the 'folk method'.

Tincturing By 'The Folk Method'

The 'folk method' is a very simple, DIY method which just involves mixing your chosen herb with alcohol and leaving it to macerate for a few weeks. Maceration is the floating time, when the alcohol and water gently draw out the essence of the plants into the solution. An important consideration with this or any other tincturing method is whether or not to use fresh or dried plant material.



Fresh vs Dried Herbal Tinctures

Until recently all commercial herbal tinctures were made using dried herbs. This is because the water content has been removed and many people believe this makes both a stronger tincture, and one where you can easily measure the 'tincture strength' - the ratio of herb to alcohol. However, traditional folk tinctures were made using fresh herbs and many herbalists favour these today for their delicate flavours. Fresh herbs contain roughly 85% water though, and so it is an idea to be careful that the final alcohol content in the tincture doesn't drop below the preservative level of 25%. A way to avoid this is to use a higher strength

alcohol e.g. 60% or above.

