

Herb Corner: Pathways Magazine Winter 08-09

## Herbs for Hard Times, Financial and Otherwise

By Tom Wolfe

*“Not a nation in this world, not an age throughout all time has been destitute of the discovery of Inner Light... Let us now see what love can do.”*

—William Penn (Quaker) “Innocency With Her Open Face”, 1669

*“Economic adjustment cannot be divorced from spiritual context...failing this fundamental requisite the attainment of the highest efficiency in production will only lead to a further sense of insufficiency and new conflict. A profound spirit of self-giving love must underlie all effort to solve and remove economic pressure and the causes of war.”*

—Meher Baba (Indian Spiritual Perfect Master) “The Origins and Effects of War”, 1957

*“Cultivators of the earth are the most valuable citizens. They are the most vigorous, the most independent, the most virtuous, and they are tied to their country and wedded to its liberty and interests by the most lasting bands.”*

—Thomas Jefferson to John Jay, 1785

One of the things that I most value about growing and using herbs is that herbs affect more than one aspect of one’s being at a time. Take Stinging Nettles (*Urtica dioica*), for instance. If one takes Nettles for spring allergies, for which they are very effective, one also receives the benefit of a gentle and pro-



Nettle Photo by Michael Bodmann

found liver and urinary tonic, and a mineral rich nourishment that encourages strong bones, teeth, nails, and hair. Herbs do far more than just treat an issue or symptom; they feed the body and soul.

In this *Pathways* article, I would like to share lessons learned from thirty-two years of herbalism. I will also show you how using and growing herbs offer us a doorway to the garden of physical healing, a bridge to understanding and attaining emotional balance, and a window to the energy (Prana) of the Infinite Intelligence of God. So join me, Friends, as we use herbs to guide us in walking through the doorway, across the bridge, and together peering through the window to find the physical strength, emotional balance, and mental understanding needed to prosper in the opportunity and challenge afforded by difficult times.

In the United States today we enjoy access to approximately 250 medicinal herbs that meet the standards of the American Herbal Products Association (AHPA.org). Obviously in this article we only have space for herbalism’s greatest hits, so I have chosen to feature five herbs that I know I will use in whatever challenges await us. These five herbs are Nettles (*Urtica dioica*), Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), Oregano (*Origanum vulgare*), Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), and Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinale*). These five plants are all super-easy to grow perennials, and all are grown in our gardens here in College Park at Smile Herb Shop. These herbs are also available in bulk dried form, in tincture, and all but Yarrow are available from New Chapter in Supercritical Extract, which in my experience as an herbalist is the closest extraction process to capturing the full spectrum of what God put into the plant. One of the ways to tell if an extract is true to the plant is to pop the capsule and taste the liquid within. If the extracts taste like the fresh plants (which the supercritical extracts very much do), then you can be reassured that the constituents and energies of the whole plant are present in the extracts. A little later in this article I will discuss in greater detail the importance of taste in herbalism. So without further ado, let’s look at our five herbs:

### **Nettles** (astringent taste)

As we said earlier, Nettles heal the physical body through mineral-rich nourishment, ton-

ing and strengthening the liver, that powerhouse of an organ, protecting the urinary system, and helping the respiratory system through the trials and tribulations of seasonal allergies. Anyone who has ever had Nettles in their yard or garden is fully aware of this plant's powers of determination to grow and spread. Once, twenty years ago or so, in my well-meaning but immature understanding of energetics, I decided that since Sister Nettles was so powerful I would plant her in all four corners of the garden in order to protect it. As Homer Simpson would say, "Doh!" To this very day, in the spring, all of the garden workers at Smile spend some time chasing Sister Nettles back to her designated place in the garden. This designated area is our "nettle corral," a system of five-foot high lattice fencing and 3 foot wide swathes of landscaping paper. Even these proactive efforts are not enough to convince her to be a well-behaved woman...and as we well know, "well behaved women rarely make history." So Sister Nettles is still making history at Smile.

Nettles astringent taste relates to the wood element that gives us the ability to shout, and fully express ourselves. Nettle has this ability in abundance and will joyfully share her strength with you. Nettle's healing emotion is Determination, and the energy of the Infinite Intelligence (Prana) is wood. Working next to her in the garden, braving her stings, and then enjoying her leaves and roots as tea or soup, will help the gardening herbalist to express the truth within in order to share it with others. Available as Gaia Herb's phyto-caps, bulk tea, and Herbalist

*and Alchemist tincture; and for the urinary system, New Chapter's Prostate 5LX supercritical blend.*

### **Ginger** (hot taste)

Ginger is the most treasured herb of one of my favorite herbalists, Paul Schulick. In fact his e-mail address is based on the Latin name for the genus of ginger (Zingiber). He loves the plant so much he wrote a book about it, titled, as you might guess, *The Ginger Book*. Paul is the owner of the New Chapter Herb Company, which to my mind is making the best herbal extracts in the world. Their supercritical extractions that are done in Germany capture the whole plant taste and molecular completeness, thereby coming as close as possible to preserving the energy (Prana) of the plant for our use as medicine. This is as close to what God intended as is humanly possible with the technology we have presently. Ginger's heat stimulates circulation, helping to warm cold hands and feet, increasing the flow of energy to the extremities. It is a beloved digestive tonic, easing nausea of all kinds and aiding the intestine in its essential work of absorbing nutrients. Due to its hot taste, ginger's healing emotion is Joy and Passion and the energy of Infinite Intelligence (Prana) found in ginger is fire. When digestive distress has taken the joy from your meals, or life, ginger can help. Available as *New Chapter Supercritical extract (GingerForce), whole plant constituent tincture and syrup (Daily Ginger and Ginger Wonder Syrup, respectively), and dried root for tea.*

Oregano (hot taste, like garlic, sweet taste when cooked)

In terms of hard times, where insurance and health care may not be available for all, Oregano is absolutely fantastic for treating infections, particularly those of the sinuses and respiratory system. Whether eaten raw, brewed as a tea and drunk or gargled, taken in tincture, or used in the super-concentrated oil form, Oregano is an extraordinary ally in the fight against infected mucus. New Chapter makes a supercritical extract of this powerful plant available in capsule form and I have seen it beat back stubborn infections on many occasions. Heating and clarifying in its fresh, raw form, sweet and warming in its cooked form, Oregano can also aid in the digestion of heavy foods (perhaps the reason it is so often used in pasta sauces?) and refresh mucus membranes that have been wearied by a head cold. The healing emotion associated with the sweet taste is Love, and the energy of Infinite Intelligence (Prana) served by this aspect is earth. When a stubborn infection has worn you down, oregano can refresh and support you in the healing process. Available as *New Chapter supercritical extract (Oregano-Force), HerbPharm Oregano Spirits, and of course the bulk leaves for tea and cooking.*

### **Yarrow** (bitter taste)

Yarrow is my favorite green angel of all with a bitter taste since it is the herb that made me decide in 1975 to become an herbalist. Yarrow stops bleeding much like the sometimes bitter nature of truth stops the bleeding in our hearts. Two stories about the ways in which Yarrow

helps in hard times are appropriate here.

First, when I was a student at the University of Pennsylvania we had free health care. For three years I had a chronic cough that the University hospital system couldn't cure with antibiotics. This cough was not life-threatening but seriously annoying. When I first met Cecilia, the woman who gave birth to Smile Herb Shop, she said to me, "You do all that yoga breathing...drink a half gallon of strong yarrow tea, do your yoga breathing, and I bet that will help." I did as she suggested, and then coughed up a mess of bloody mucus and the cough was gone! It never came back. I said to myself, "Tom, how come nobody knows that fifty cents worth of Yarrow could cure this cough?" Right then and there I decided to learn what Sweet Cecilia knew about healing with plants. Three months later (May 1975) Cecilia decided she would rather live in the woods for awhile and not be a shop keeper, so she sold Smile to me for \$200.00.

The second Yarrow story is about the time a group of Amish farmers came down to build our barn at Smile. A young man was hammering one-handed on the roof with a bloody handkerchief stopping up his nose. So I asked him if he would be willing to try Yarrow tea to stop the bleeding. He agreed, and pulled two nosefuls of strong Yarrow tea into his nose. The bleeding stopped immediately. He was so excited to stop this bleeding that had plagued him for years that he took three yarrow plants back home with him to the simple living of Amish farms.

The healing emotion associated with Yarrow is enthusiasm,

and the energy of Infinite Intelligence (Prana) served by this plant is Truth. When you need help removing obstacles from your true vision or voice, Yarrow will be there for you. *Available as tea of the leaves and flowers, and tincture.*

### **Lemon Balm** (salty taste, bland)

This is the first plant I give to people in the herbal clinic because it is delightful for everybody and smells so good. Lemon Balm is specific to the herpes virus and is used extensively in Europe for that purpose. It is also arguably the best herb for the nerve endings that are found in the stomach. As a digestive tonic, this friendly plant soothes, relieves gas, and comforts any type of "nervous stomach." Lemon Balm combined with Lavender and Chamomile is one of the best-tasting medicines in the world. In the contest for easiest plant to grow in the DC area, Lemon Balm and Stinging Nettle are currently neck and neck (or stem and stem, as the case may be). The healing emotion promoted by the bland or slightly salty taste is Peace, and the energy of Infinite Intelligence (Prana) served by this plant is water. Whenever you need more flow and flexibility in your life, turn to Lemon Balm. *Available as tea, tincture, capsule; and for cold sores is available as an easy-to-use cream called Herpilyn.*

As we have seen, the really cool importance of taste is that taste links to the five healthy emotions in Ayurveda. These five healing emotions are: Determination, linked to the as-

tringent/sour taste; Joy/Passion is hot; sweet is linked to Love, sweet Love; Truth can be bitter; and the ocean of Peace is salty. These tastes are the tastes of the five elements that give us the gift of five healing emotions. If you could have enthusiasm about your vision for your life, be at peace that you have sufficient resources to manifest that vision; have determination and the freedom to express yourself fully; have joy in seeing your vision manifest; and deeply love the people around you while you are healing and helping others to heal, then you would be in balance with the five elements. Doesn't that sound like a great way to live this life at its best? Greater access to these five healing emotions is available from knowing which plants promote which emotion. If times get hard (or should I say when?), those of us who can stay centered in these five emotions will be blessed indeed.

Don't Worry, Be Happy, Herbs Can Help! I am honored to be your Friendly neighborhood herbalist, and wish you God Speed on your herbal journey back to the Eden of balanced energy.

*Tom Wolfe, AHG, is a Professional Member of the American Herbalists Guild. He has co-owned Smile Herb Shop since 1975. [www.SmileHerb.com](http://www.SmileHerb.com)*

© 2008, Pathways Magazine  
[www.PathwaysMagazine.com](http://www.PathwaysMagazine.com)