



Ch. 12: Herbs for Menstrual Cramp Relief

You'll learn how to make your own menstrual pain relief tincture with herbs that have been scientifically-proven to help ease period pain.

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Herbal Medicine for Menstrual Cramp Relief

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Prior to modern medicine, humans used plants widely to treat many types of ailments like menstrual cramps. In this section, we will be working with medicinal herbs that were purchased dried and that can be found without too much trouble in the United States and Europe.



WARNING



Before we dive in, it's important for you to recognize that this section of the class is intended for educational purposes only. I am not rendering medical advice of any kind and this class isn't a replacement for medical advice or to diagnose or treat any condition, injury, disease or illness you might have. I am not a licensed or registered healthcare practitioner.

What I am is an environmental educator who has studied both botany and herbalism in school, in the field and online. You are responsible for consulting your medical care provider before using any herbs or remedies mentioned in this class. Some of these herbs we will be using are contraindicated with pharmaceutical drugs, some aren't safe to use when pregnant, or if you have thyroid issues, a heart condition, and so on. Just because it's natural doesn't mean that it's right for you. You're responsible to research and verify information before relying on it. In addition to this, our tincture calls for alcohol, so if you aren't of legal age to consume, we recommend you don't consume alcohol. I will also note that none of these recipes are intended for children. For more information, you can check out our Health Disclaimer. It's important to me - and hopefully to you too - that you are safe.



There are many ways to prepare your home medicine, and my favorite way to make herbal medicine is by formulating tinctures.

A tincture is a solution of a medicinal substance in a solvent that is typically alcoholic. It's a medicine made by dissolving the medicinal properties of plants in alcohol, or sometimes in vinegar or glycerin. The resulting liquid is very potent, which is why several drops are sufficient to address an ailment like menstrual cramps.

The tinctures we will be making today will be alcohol-based, because these are the most shelf-stable. If you prefer not to have alcohol, you could make a vinegar tincture instead, but vinegar isn't as strong a solvent and the tincture will only keep for 1-2 years.

The reason I love alcohol tinctures is because they last forever, are easy to travel with, and especially because they are so simple to make and take.

There's no need to make a fresh batch of medicinal syrup, or warm up a pot of tea, or chop up herbal ingredients when you're feeling crampy. All you need to do is place a dropperfull of tincture on your tongue or mix a dropperfull in a glass of water if the taste is too strong for you. It's convenient and quick.



Herbs in the Pain Relief Moon Tincture

We will be making a pain relief moon tincture. Herbs include Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*), Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiac*), and rose flowers (*Rosa spp.*). This tincture won't be adapted to women with heavy menstrual flows, but there are many other herbs that you can choose from too.



Valerian

Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) acts as a muscle relaxant – it can relax the uterine muscle during cramping, which can help with muscle pain[35]. In two separate studies, it was found to both reduce the severity of PMS[36], and to be an effective treatment for menstrual pain, likely due to its antispasmodic effects[37]. This is a great herb to have on hand for effective muscle pain relief and as a sleep aid.

Valerian is generally recognized as safe, but you must be careful not to use potentially toxic Valerian preparations from Mexico and India. There may also be side effects, like headaches, dizziness, stomach problems and sleeplessness. It's best to not use it when pregnant, breastfeeding, or if you have liver problems. Always check with your doctor before using this herb.



Motherwort

Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiac*) is traditionally used for painful menstruation because it's a uterine antispasmodic. It can actually also be used to bring on menstruation after emotional stress may have put our menstruation on hold. Motherwort is an emmenagogue, which means that it can increase menstrual flow. For this reason, you shouldn't use it if you already bleed heavily when on your period, or if you have endometriosis or fibroids. It is an herb that should most definitely be avoided in pregnancy too. Remember to always ask your doctor prior to using any herbs we are talking about in this course.



Rose

Rose flowers or Rosaceae flowers are the third herb in our tincture.

They have been traditionally used to help ease menstrual cramps and heavy bleeding. While there aren't many studies on the efficacy of rose flower tincture on menstrual pain, rose tea has been proven to relieve menstrual pain in teenage women[38]. Like any other herb, run rose flowers by your doctor first.

There are many other herbs that you can use to support yourself during your period. I simply used those that work for me and that I can easily get a hold of here.

You may want to change your moon tincture based on what your symptoms are.



Other Herbs for Menstrual Care

Menstrual Cramp Relief

For menstrual cramp relief, herbs like Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*), Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiac*), Rose (*Rose spp.*), Ceylon Cinnamon (*Cinnamomi Ceylon*), lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus* and *flexuosus*), cramp bark (*Viburnum opulus*), common lady's mantle (*Alchemilla vulgaris*), mugwort (a uterine stimulant) (*Artemisia vulgaris*), yarrow (a uterine stimulant) (*Achillea millefolium*) or even Angelica (*Angelica archangelica*) for sluggish cramping have traditionally been used. Other herbs for gentler pain relief include lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) and catnip (*Nepeta cataria*).

Heavy Bleeding

To help with heavy bleeding, you may want to explore herbs like rose (*Rosa* spp.), common lady's mantle (*Alchemilla vulgaris*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), and mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), or Sheperd's purse (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*), which was actually shown in a randomized clinical trial to reduce heavy menstrual bleeding[39]. Make sure, again to avoid motherwort (*Leonurus cardiac*) if you tend to bleed heavily.

Late Period

If your period is late and you're looking to jumpstart it, you might want to look into herbs like cinnamon (*Cinnamomum verum*), motherwort (*Leonurus cardiac*), mugwort and angelica (*Angelica archangelica*). Angelica is particularly strong and has traditionally been used to bring on abortions, so always make sure to check with your doctor first to see if any of these herbs I listed are safe for you.

PMS

Finally, if it's mostly the symptoms of PMS that you're looking to appease, an herb traditionally used for this like vitex (*vitex agnus castus*) might be most adapted to your needs, although current research on vitex is non-conclusive. You might want to use Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*), which has been scientifically proven to help with PMS symptoms.

There are more still that I haven't mentioned here, and I encourage you to explore what is available to you locally.



How to Make the Pain-Relief Moon Tincture

For this tincture, I'll be using alcohol as my solvent. Alcohol, in particular, is an effective solvent for resins, balsams, camphors, alkaloids, essential oils, glycosides, and bitter constituents. When I refer to alcohol, I'm talking about ethanol from grain, cane or corn alcohol, ideally organic or 100-proof vodka. When I make this preparation, I personally use 100-proof vodka, which is 50% alcohol, 50% water. That's what I have been using because it's what I can find easily near me. It might be difficult for you to find 100-proof vodka, you might only find vodka that's 35% alcohol, or gin or whiskey that are 40% alcohol or brandy that's 30% alcohol. If you opt for one of these solvents that are less than 50% alcohol, you'll need to realize 2 things. First, it won't be quite as effective a solvent, and second, make sure to work with dried herbs like I am today to make sure the tincture has a long shelf life. A final note about choosing your alcohol is that if you have a gluten intolerance, you might want to opt for gluten-free alcohols like corn, cane or grape alcohols.

Personally, since I make this medication for myself and I'm not trying to sell a product on the market, I am not so caught up in exact proportions. I do weigh out my herbs, which isn't necessary, but I like to keep these proportions for myself and for you to recreate. Find the measurements below. Had cramp bark been available here locally, I would have added some of that herb as well. Since I make this tincture for home medicine purposes, I prepare it the folkloric way.

Ingredients:

0.75oz Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*)(by weight)

0.75oz Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiac*)(by weight)

0.5oz rose petals (*Rosa spp.*)(by weight)

100 proof vodka (50% alcohol)



Materials:

- Blender
- 1 quart-size jar
- Stainless Steel Wide-Mouth Funnel (fits quart-size jar)
- Nut milk bag
- Potato ricer
- Amber tincture bottle
- Mini metallic funnel (fits your tincture bottle)
- 1 amber glass bottle

Step-by-step Instructions

- Check with your doctor to determine whether these herbs + alcohol are safe for you.
- Blend the herbs (since rose is voluminous) and transfer them to a large glass sealable jar
- Cover the herbs with 100-proof vodka
- Let sit for 6 weeks in a dark spot and shake daily (or when you remember!)
- Strain: Place the nut bag into the glass jar, the wide-mouth funnel over the bag, and the potato ricer on top. Transfer the liquid and herbs into the potato ricer so that it dribbles down into the nut bag and into the amber jar. Squeeze the potato ricer to extract the tincture from the herbs.
- Compost the leftover herbs.
- Transfer some of your tincture from your glass jar to a tincture bottle using the mini metallic funnel.
- Label your bottle.

You'll want to label your jars so that you know exactly what's in them. I like to write what I made them for (menstrual cramp relief). Then I'll add the common name of the plants used, their scientific names, the parts of the plants that were used, the date I made the tincture, then either the lot number if I purchased the herbs or where I harvested the herbs if they were foraged, the type of alcohol that was used, and then finally whether it was a folkloric preparation or a weight-to-volume preparation. (In this course, we only explore the folk method.) Since it's possible for the labels to get wet, it can be good practice to add some scotch tape over the labels, even if that's not a zero waste practice. I alternate between this and old cardboard with string.



To take: Determine dosage with your doctor. I personally take up to 2 droppers' full when I sense cramping coming on. You can take some on your tongue or mix some in some water, tea or juice.

Prefer to purchase a moon tincture? Keep an eye out for the herbs you're looking for and whether your local apothecary has a tincture with these herbs.

HOMEPLAY

Determine whether this pain-relief moon tincture is safe for you. If you wish to test it out, here's the time to purchase the herbs, alcohol, and tools to make your tincture!



Next time you have period cramps, write down how the pain-relief tincture worked for you.