

# Zen Herbs: Herbs to Relax, Herbs for Energy

---



Wintergreen Botanicals, LLC  
Maria Noël Groves, Clinical Herbalist  
Allenstown, NH (Near Bear Brook State Park)  
603-340-5161, office@wintergreenbotanicals.com  
www.WintergreenBotanicals.com

---

**PLEASE READ:** *The information handout has not been approved by the FDA and does not in any way intend to diagnose or prescribe. Always consult with your health practitioner before taking any remedy.*

**Above this, I also recommend that you...**

1. *Research an herb in at least three good sources before ingesting it (see website for sources),*
  2. *Take proper steps to ensure that any wildcrafted or cultivated plant is what you think it is,*
  3. *Check with your pharmacist for herb-drug interactions if you take prescriptions, AND*
  4. *Listen to your body and/or intuition if an herb does not resonate with you or you experience side effects.*
- 

We live in a stressful world that can be hard to escape. Fortunately, certain herbs can tip the scales in our favor to help us move towards a more relaxed, balanced lifestyle. Keep in mind, though, that herbs are only ONE PART of the puzzle. If you're stressed because you work in a terrible job, relaxing and energy herbs may help alleviate some of the stress, but you may want to consider a job change. Stress can be caused and aggravated by many things. It's helpful to use herbs while also addressing the source of the stress. This will be most effective for creating long-term balance and mental wellbeing.

## RELAXATION, SLEEP & MOOD SUPPORT

### Why Do We Need to Relax?

---

**Parasympathetic Nervous System:** Sometimes linked to "The Relaxation Response." (Visit Herbert Benson's Mind Body Medical Institute [www.mbi.org](http://www.mbi.org) for more info.) Parasympathetic controls relaxed situations and normal functioning of organ systems.

- ➔ Increased digestion, easy defecation and urination.
- ➔ Healthy metabolism and blood sugar balance.
- ➔ Relaxed mental activity.
- ➔ Relaxed heart.
- ➔ Active, healthy immune system.
- ➔ Improved detoxification & wound healing.

#### Techniques for evoking the relaxation response:

Imagery	Repetitive physical exercises	Moderate exercise
Progressive muscle relaxation	Time in nature	Yoga
Repetitive prayer	Breath focus	Tai chi, Qi gong
Mindfulness meditation	Regular sleep	Pleasing aromas

#### Basic Mood Enhancers

- ➔ Exercise – One study found it as effective as Zoloft for depression, and less likely to have relapse.
- ➔ Sunlight
- ➔ Proper sleep
- ➔ Adequate nutrition
- ➔ Meditation
- ➔ B vitamin complex—Bs play a role in nervous system function and the ability of the body to make energy (ATP).
- ➔ Chocolate

## Sedative & Mood Herbs

---

### **Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) ~ Uplifting & Relaxing**

Lemon balm is a delightful, multipurpose herb. Used to relax the nervous system in anxiety, insomnia, agitation. Used in formulas for attention deficit in children and adults. Mild uplifter for depression and “funk”s. Antiviral and well-researched as a topical treatment for herpes (cold sores, genital herpes, shingles, chicken pox). (May be used internally for herpes as well.) Slightly bitter and used to improve digestion, especially where stress and indigestion are mixed. Used to lower thyroid. Lemony flavor borders between pleasant and Lemon Pledge-like, mixes well with mints and lemony herbs in tea. Use: Great as a tea herb or fresh tincture. The dried herb loses its potency quickly as the essential oils do not stick around long. Your dried herb should have a lemony flavor and scent. The tincture holds well and should have a lemon custard after taste. One of the few herbs I recommend as a fresh herb tea. Bring a pot of water to a light boil, remove from heat, toss in a handful of fresh lemon balm—mints, lemon verbena, lemon thyme, and tarragon also mix well in this fresh tea—cover, let sit 5-10 minutes, strain & drink. The essential oil is very expensive (close to \$100/ounce) and often adulterated; however, it is considered a potent mood lifter. For a cheaper thrill, keep the plant in your windowsill or garden and brush by it often. Cautions: Generally safe, but use caution in anyone with hypothyroid and during pregnancy.

### **Scullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) ~ Nerve Sedative & Reduces Hypersensitivities**

Sometimes spelled “Skullcap.” Though little-researched, herbalists use this herb in many conditions where a nervous system relaxant is called for. Traditionally used to calm down an excessive nervous system response, whether in the form of anxiety, restlessness, oversensitivity to light/smells/etc. Traditionally used to control seizures. Used to help ease insomnia, nervous exhaustion/burn out, and for nervous system irritation of the cerebrospinal nervous system. Herbalists consider it to be a gentle yet effective over-all sedative and often use it for children and the elderly. Use: Tea or tincture. It is a bit bitter as a tea, but blends well with lemon balm and mints. It’s a common garden plant. Cautions: No known cautions. Commercial skullcap may be tainted with germander, a similar looking (and easier to pick) but liver-toxic plant. HERB CONTROVERSY: Due to past contamination of skullcap and a lack of research on it, some sources will warn against the herb, saying that it can cause liver damage and does not work.

### **Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*) ~ General, Gentle Relaxation & Mild Heart Relaxer**

This stunning flower (find a picture of it or a live plant in a nursery) was named Passionflower by missionaries who believed it to symbolize the Passion of Christ. The leaves, vine, and flowers can be used. It grows in Central America and the southern U.S., and is also called Maypop. It is considered to be cooling and sedating to the CNS. Often used where there is pain, anger, frustration, agitation, insomnia. Also believed to sedate the upper GI, cardio-pulmonary, and vascular systems. Unlike heavier sedatives like kava or valerian, it’s less likely to make you sloppy-feeling. Considered safe for children. Michael Moore recommended it for adults, teens, and children who get angry and don’t want to calm down. Generally “pissy” dispositions. (It’s one of the herbs he used himself.) He also recommended it for people who become agitated and stressed switching from blue collar, physical jobs to white collar desk jobs. It is helpful for essential hypertension because it seems to relax the diastolic of the major trunk arteries. Moore felt that it relaxes and increases the flexibility of arteries. It can be used for heart palpitations and sleep disturbances due to nervousness. Use: Tea or fresh tincture. The dried herb can lose its potency quickly. Blends well with scullcap, lemon balm, motherwort. Cautions: Not recommended during pregnancy or in conjunction with sedative drugs or alcohol.

### **Milky Oat Seed (*Avena sativa*) ~ Nerve Tonic & Addiction Support**

This gentle tonic is made from the same plant as oatmeal. When fresh, the milky oat seed contains small amounts of alkaloids that seem to have a relaxing, tonifying effect on the nervous system. The only way to utilize these constituents is to do a fresh extract (usually in alcohol, though some use glycerine). Water extracts (tea) are not useful. It is useful for the burnout caused by living on stress & adrenaline. As Michael Moore colorfully described, we use it for when “You drive from Bangor, Maine, to Phoenix, Arizona in a Geo with two kids and a parakeet in the back, stopping at every Denny’s along the way for coffee. By the time you get there, you can light lightbulbs with your finger tips.” Coffee-slugging cubicle workers may also find it useful. It combines well with skullcap. It has historically been used to help treat addictions, including morphine, tobacco,

and opium. Some studies support this use. The dried oat herb, while not a potent nervine, is high in minerals, particularly silica. It is often added to nutritive teas. Oatmeal is also nourishing, and lightly calming & energizing. It is considered safe for children. Use: General herb doses. Fresh herb tincture only. (Dry is much less effective.) Glycerine extractions ok. You can try a vinegar extract. Or try blending fresh oats with water or “milk” (cow or other) and then freezing it. Cautions: Generally safe, except possibly oat allergy.

### **Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) ~ Bitter Relaxer ~ Great for Digestion, Relaxation & Babies**

German chamomile flower tea is best known for its calming and digestive properties, making it doubly good for a nervous stomach. It is a key herb for children, assisting with colic, teething, irritability, and insomnia. It may even protect the stomach from ulcers. Fresh or freshly dried chamomile has a light pineapple-y scent and flavor with grassy undertones. (If your tea tastes like hay, your chamomile is old and useless.) The flowers of Roman chamomile and wild pineapple weed are used similarly. Cautions: Chamomile is usually well-tolerated; however, some people do experience hayfever-like symptoms from it. In rare cases it can cause contact dermatitis and anaphylaxis. If you react to ragweed and composite plants, while it is \*unlikely\* that you'll react poorly to chamomile, use caution at first.

### **Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*) ~ For Anxiety that Manifests in the Heart**

Rosemary Gladstar devotees coin this herb by saying it is for “mothers and people who need a little mothering.” Nervous system sedative and cardiogenic. It's especially helpful when the heart is affected by the nervous system—for example heart palpitations, hypertension, or tightness in chest due to anxiety or stress. Michael Moore recommended it for “Flakey and strong mood swings that start self-indulgently and then go out of hand. You know you're acting out, but can't prevent it.... Fierce passion, uncontrolled emotions, physical agitation, OCD-type tendencies.” Antispasmodic. Also used in hyperthyroid conditions. Can be used for premenstrual cramps and hot flashes, and to bring on delayed menses. May be useful for herpes/cold sore nerve pain. Use: Standard herb dose. It's very bitter and generally taken in tincture form. 2 squirts can bring down a low-grade anxiety attack in some people. Cautions: Contraindicated in pregnancy (emmenagogue/uterine stimulant), and in people with HYPOTHYROID disorders (often combined with bugleweed & lemon balm to help balance HYPERTHYROID).

### **Kava (*Piper methysticum*) ~ Anxiety Herb & Pain/Muscle Support ~ The Friendly Herb**

This root is a well-known, fast-acting nervous system sedative used for anxiety, stress, insomnia, muscle tension, and asthma. Unlike many sedatives, kava does not seem to impair cognitive abilities, and it is traditionally used during meetings to foster friendliness. It appears to act through similar mechanisms as anti-anxiety drugs (binding to GABA receptor sites). It is numbing as well as muscle relaxing, and has been used for tension headache, urinary tract pain, muscle spasms. It is used in attention deficit formulas. It is one of the best herbs we have for panic attacks. Use: General herb doses. Ceremonially drunk in Polynesian cultures as beverage (though it does numb the tongue). While long-term use may be fine, I recommend using it as a short-term herb for symptomatic situations. HERB CONTROVERSY: Kava has recently met with controversy and is banned in several countries because of several cases of liver toxicity in Europe. Large doses of 9 grams or more per day can elevate liver enzymes (reversible when the herb is discontinued). Caution is advised in anyone with a liver condition, a family history of liver disease, or with anyone who uses other liver-toxic substances (alcohol, ibuprofen) regularly. Most of the cases of liver toxicity in Europe seemed to be complicated by 1. the person using other liver toxic substances at the same time, 2. extracts standardized to unnatural concentrations of kavalactones, and 3. companies using cheaper aerial parts of the plants to make standardized extracts instead of the roots; the aerial parts contain liver toxins that the root does not. Cautions: I recommend only using kava products made by herbalists and avoiding standardized capsules, and using it for more short-term conditions. Long term consumption in large doses can cause dry, pigmented, scaly skin on the palms of the hands, soles of the feet, forearms, back, and shins. This goes away when the herb is discontinued. Kava enhances the effects of alcohol and other sedatives. It is not recommended during pregnancy or nursing.

### **Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) ~ Sleep Herb & Muscle Relaxer**

This fragrant garden heliotrope has stinky, earthy, sweet-smelling roots that are harvested in the springtime. It is one of our more useful sedative herbs, best known for insomnia. The research is limited, and many of the studies

combine it with other herbs like hops and lemon balm. However, herbalists rely on it as a muscle relaxer and CNS depressant. It is used in restlessness, emotional stress, pain, insomnia, anxiety, nervous palpitations, nervous irritation, cardiovascular arrhythmias, high blood pressure, ADHD, menstrual cramps, sciatica, jerking, backache, and shingles. Its action seems to be partly due to volatile oils and alkaloids, as well as amino acids like arginine, GABA, glutamine, and tyrosine. Use: I find it most useful as a simple for insomnia. It appears to work better for people who are slight, nervous, and tend to be cold. General herb doses. Teaspoon to tablespoon doses for extreme pain. Cautions: Larger, hot people may find it agitating rather than relaxing. Not recommended to combine with sedative drugs, barbiturates, or alcohol. May aggravate depression.

### **Saint John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) ~ Depression & (Topically) Nerve Pain/Skin Issues**

St. John's wort is a SUN HERB. It blooms on the longest (sunniest) day of the year (near summer solstice and the feast of St. John). It has yellow flowers with red pigments in the buds. It brightens the mood and helps with burns and burning pain. Topical use can act as a mild sunscreen and help soothe sunburns. In rare cases, internal use can cause photosensitivity (sun rash). There is a lot of lore around this plant, for example, that it protects against witchcraft. Historically St. John's wort was used for nerve pain, neuralgia, injuries to the spinal cord, sciatica, shingles, facial neuralgia, etc. More recently, German researchers brought it to the forefront as a medication for mild to moderate depression. It appears to increase serotonin. The constituent hyperforin is a serotonin, dopamine, noradrenaline, GABA and glutamate reuptake inhibitor. The constituent hypericin appears to raise the concentration of melatonin. It generally takes 2-6 weeks to see improvements in depression, though some people notice improvements more quickly. It is also used in protocols for fear, insomnia, anorexia, anxiety, and poor self esteem. The bright red infused olive oil made from the fresh buds is used topically for nerve pain, burns, muscular pain, ear aches, and diaper rash. Use: General herb doses. The generally recommended dose for depression is 300 mg 3x/day of SJW standardized to hypericin. Cautions: Generally safe. In extremely rare cases, it may cause photosensitivity & rashes. (More likely to occur with fair complexions.) Do not use with pharmaceutical drugs. SJW affects the cytochrome P450 pathway, which metabolizes many drugs (cardiac, contraceptive, anti-rejection, etc.). Taking SJW with medication may make the medication less effective. It is also not recommended to combine it with SSRIs, MAO inhibitors, or other anti-depressive drugs. It is not recommended in pregnancy due to emmenagogue and abortifacient effects.

**There are MANY other Calming Herbs out there... California Poppy, Catnip, Hops, Blue Vervain... See the list at the end for several others.**

### **Aromatherapy...**

*Fragrances have a profound impact on our psyche. Pure essential oils are highly concentrated plant preparations that contain a plant's aromatic properties. EOs can be inhaled, diffused, added to the bath, etc. (It is always best to dilute essential oils before putting them in contact with your skin.) Or simply rub the real plants in your hands and then inhale. Mmmm...*

- **Lavender**: relaxing, calming, soothing, antimicrobial, wound/burn-healing
- **Citrus (Lemon, grapefruit, orange, tangerine...)**: uplifting, anti-depressive (Can cause phototoxic skin reaction if not well diluted)
- **Rosemary**: clear-thinking, memory, invigorating, antimicrobial
- **Peppermint**: energizing, uplifting, clear-thinking
- **Sandalwood**: grounding, relaxing (Old growth, often poached!)
- **Vanilla**: soothing, uplifting (EO is expensive, but you can use the kitchen extract, too)
- **Lemon balm**: uplifting, anti-depressive, anti-anxiety, calming (EXPENSIVE!)
- **Jasmine, Neroli &/or Rose**: soothing, relaxing, romantic (EXPENSIVE!)

### Easy Aromatherapy Mist

*Combine the following in a spray bottle & shake before using.*

50% distilled water

50% vodka

10-20 drops essential oil(s) per ounce of mist

1-5 drops flower essence(s) per bottle (optional)

## Flower Essences

*Flower essences are made from the vibration healing properties of plant flowers. Chemically, they are very dilute (like homeopathy) and do not have a fragrance. However, they can have profound and immediate actions on our mental, psychological, and emotional wellbeing. You can buy them or make them at home. Almost any flower can be made into a flower essence, but the most popular are the Bach Flower Remedies. They can be used safely by almost anyone: children, adults, pets. They can be ingested in drop doses, added to drinking water, dabbed on the skin, or added to an aromatherapy mist.*

*Descriptions from the Bach company website.*

- **Rescue Remedy:** A blend of five flower essences used for stress, trauma, and anxiety. Helps any stressful situation where you need to be able to collect yourself and be in charge of your emotions.
- **Aspen:** Helps you when you feel fearful without knowing why.
- **Cherry Plum:** When you feel like exploding and lose control of your emotions.
- **Red Chestnut:** Helps you when you find it difficult not to be anxious for other people, you are afraid that some unfortunate things may happen to your loved ones.
- **Sweet Chestnut:** Helps you when the anguish is too great and seem to be unbearable. Your mind or body feels as if it had bore to be the uttermost limit of its endurance. It feels as there is nothing, but destruction and annihilation left to face.
- **White Chestnut:** When your mind it too cluttered with thoughts and worries that you are unable to fall asleep.
- **Elm:** Helps you when your responsibilities overwhelm you. You feel depressed and exhausted and may lose self-esteem.
- **Gentian:** Frustration and despair due to set-backs.
- **Gorse:** Feeling hopeless and pessimistic
- **Impatiens:** You feel irritated, impatient and other people's lack of speed get on your nerves.
- **Rock Rose:** Helps you when you experience terror or fright and you feel frozen and unable to move or think clearly.
- **Mimulus:** Helps you when you feel fear, the type of fear that you can put a name on such as, fear of spiders, being alone, losing a job, not being able to do car payments, illness etc. Also fear of speaking freely of it to others and shyness.
- **Mustard:** Helps you when you feel suddenly depressed for no reason. It feels like a cold dark cloud have destroyed all happiness and cheerfulness.
- **Oak:** Helps you when your inner strength wanes. Usually because you are an over-achiever and will overwork and ignore your tiredness.
- **Willow:** Helps you when you have suffered adversity or misfortune and find it difficult to accept. You feel sorry for yourself and are grumble and sulky.

*You can also use local herbs to make your own flower essences. See [www.lichenwoodherbals.com](http://www.lichenwoodherbals.com) for the uses of common local plants. Owner Christine Tolf sells her own blends and teaches classes on how to make flower essences.*

## ALSO INTRODUCING... ADAPTOGENS!

### What's the Big Deal About Stress?

---

**Sympathetic Nervous System:** Fight or flight system. Adrenaline is the prominent hormone/neurotransmitter. Cortisol kicks in with long-term stress. Most of us experience stress in this system.

#### What happens during sympathetic nervous system mode (STRESS)?

- Adrenaline may flood both nervous system and endocrine system pathways. Adrenaline is strong partly because it acts as both a neurotransmitter and as a hormone. There are many receptor sites throughout the nervous system that adrenaline can bind to.
  - ↳ Stress hits us quickly but can take a while to subside.
- Blood is shunted to the heart, brain, lungs, muscles.
  - ↳ We think and breathe better, muscles work better (at least initially).
- Heartbeat goes up, increased force of contraction. Blood pressure & viscosity increases.
  - ↳ Increased blood pressure, stress on the heart
- Lungs, bronchi dilate to bring more air and more O<sub>2</sub>
- GI peristalsis slows. Digestive sphincters contract to keep food in spot.
  - ↳ Poor digestion and constipation
- Liver glyconeogenesis (breaks down stored sugar) and glycogenesis (new sugar made from fatty acids, not glucose) for ATP (cellular energy) production.
  - ↳ Initially: increased energy levels, increased blood sugar
  - ↳ Long term: blood sugar issues, poor storage of nutrients, abdominal obesity, insulin sensitivity
- Mental activity increases.
- Immune system decreases.
- Libido decreases
- Wound healing (over time) goes down
- Detoxification slows
- Metabolism increases
  - ↳ Initially: weight loss
  - ↳ Long term: blood sugar issues can cause abdominal obesity

#### Some Stress Culprits:

Outlook on life	Inactivity, sedative lifestyle	“Wired” for anxiety, insomnia...
Stressful jobs	Too much structured time	Lack of social connections
Multitasking	Not enough time in nature	Lack of boundaries (saying no)
Poor nutrition (hi-carb, low nutrient...)	Negative past experiences	

### Stress-Busting Herbs: Adaptogens

---

Anti-stress herbs to the rescue! The term “adaptogen” was coined by a Soviet researcher studying substances that would increase productivity and performance of soldiers, athletes, and workers without the side effects of stimulants. Panax Ginseng and Eleuthero (formerly called Siberian Ginseng) are the two herbs best researched for this. (We'll focus more on the calming adaptogens for the purpose of this class.)

#### An adaptogen...

1. is relatively non-toxic.
2. has broad action on body systems and is non-specific. It provides resistance to a broad spectrum of biological, chemical, and physical factors. *For example, hawthorn is a great plant, but it's not an adaptogen because it targets the cardiovascular system. Ginseng is an adaptogen because it affects blood sugar, sex hormones, cardiovascular health, muscular health, etc. It also appears to protect the liver from poisons, the body from states of extreme cold or extreme heat, the mind from over stimulation, etc.*

3. can regulate or normalize body functions. Ginseng may increase or decrease blood pressure according to what the person needs.
4. is likely to work by regulating hormones, particularly stress hormones, via the hypothalamic/pituitary/adrenal (HPA) axis, and the sympatho-adrenal system (loosely, what we talked about in the first part of the lesson). Adaptogens seem to be able to raise or lower adrenaline, cortisol, and a variety of other hormones. They may also affect the nervous system directly.

Adaptogens, by their nature, are generally safe to take long-term. However, for optimal action, they are recommended to be taken in courses. 3 months on, 3 months off. Weekdays on, weekends off. 2 weeks on, 1 week off. Whatever makes sense in the situation.

## **Calming Adaptogens**

---

### **Gotu Kola (*Centella asiatica*) ~ Support for Nerves, Connective Tissue, Circulation & Brain**

Traditionally used as a brain and memory tonic (mental clarity). It is one of the herbs known as “Brahmi” in Ayurvedic medicine (the other is *Bacopa monnieri*). Studies show it increases circulation to brain, as well as in heart and leg veins (vascular insufficiency, used in varicose vein formulas). Useful for wound healing, appears to improve connective tissue/collagen repair. In Nepal, it is given to children on the first day of school. It is a gentle, but broad remedy. Studies have found it useful in decreasing anxiety. Used for children and adults with attention deficit disorder(s). Herbalists often use it in protocols for fatigue, fibromyalgia, and similar disorders via topical and internal applications. Ayurvedic practitioners use it to cleanse the system of toxins and inflammation. Use: Fresh or dry tincture from organic herb, capsules, standard doses. Topically as a liniment (combine with comfrey tincture for consistency), oil, or cream. Edible as a salad green & possible to keep as a house plant. It resembles Swedish ivy and requires lots of sun, nutrition, and water. Zach Woods Farm in VT is one source of organic gotu kola plants. Cautions: None known. However, it grows prolifically in questionable sludgy conditions in India (can have high amounts of *E.coli* and other bacteria). Gotu kola may impair fertility. Purchase only organic gotu kola to ensure good growing conditions.

### **Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*) ~ Zen Herb for Mind/Spirit, Blood Sugar Balancer**

A versatile herb. It is also called Tulsi, or holy herb (after the god), and is considered sacred in Ayurveda. Frequently planted in temples in India. It is a pretty purple, slender basil with a somewhat similar fragrance to basil. Easy to cultivate. Used for a broad range of conditions in India, including memory, colds, indigestion, asthma, and fatigue. It is best known in the U.S. for reducing stress and cortisol levels. This is due to both the research and the marketing hype produced by New Chapter and Paul Schulick. It is believed to enhance parasympathetic/relaxation response. I have heard of it being drunk as a tea before yoga or meditation. It also appears to have anti-inflammatory properties, perhaps via COX-2 inhibition. Lab studies suggest that it has antioxidant properties. In animal studies, it increased endurance, inhibited ulcers, and protected against radiation. Human studies suggest that it can help modulate blood sugar in non-insulin dependent diabetes. It is possible, but not proven, that our culinary basil has similar properties. I find it incredibly useful for calm energy and reduced sugar cravings. It's nice a nice adjunct (to diet and exercise) for weight loss. Use: General herb doses. Also available as a carbon dioxide extraction (stronger) from Gaia, New Chapter, and other herb companies. Makes a pleasant aromatic tea. The Tulsi brand offers it in teabag form solo and in blends. Holy basil is easy to grow (though hard to germinate) as an annual; all three varieties can be used similarly. Cautions: None known.

### **Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) ~ Nerve Tonic, Pain/Inflammation Support**

Popular in Ayurvedic (Indian) medicine for a variety of conditions. Considered a “relaxing adaptogen” meaning that it appears to both relax and improve energy, but not stimulate (as ginseng might). Useful for anxiety and nervousness. Strengthens immunity and vital force. It may increase thyroid production and help balance hypothyroid conditions. have found it reduces the immuno-suppressive action of some drugs and restores immune health more quickly. Often used in formulas for people with chronic pain, perhaps due to anti-inflammatory action. May be helpful in fatigue-related disorders as well as nervous system-based diseases like multiple sclerosis, chronic fatigue, Lyme, and fibromyalgia. Appears to improve the action of reproductive, nervous, respiratory, and digestive systems. Appears to be helpful for bacterial or fungal infections, as well as

inflammation. It is often called “the Ginseng of India” though it is not considered as stimulating as ginseng. (It is also in the nightshade family, not the aralia/ginseng family.) Use: It is traditionally prepared in ghee (clarified butter) or decocted in milk, which suggests that the constituents are more fat-soluble; however, western herbalists tend to use it as tea, tincture, capsules. General herb doses. Cautions: Generally considered to be safe; however it is not recommended during pregnancy. Nepalese traditional medicine calls Ashwagandha herbs in the *Convolvulus* species, which have similar actions as *Withania*. However, the *Convolvulus* species that grow locally (bindweeds that look like morning glory) are associated with toxicity.

### **Codonopsis (*Codonopsis spp*) ~ Poor Man’s Ginseng**

Also called Dang Shen and often referred to as “poor man’s ginseng.” Used similar to ginseng, but it is much less expensive and easier to grow. It’s a lovely garden plant. Similar uses as Eleuthero, but less research to support it. Useful for energy, longevity, and immune support. Also used for poor appetite, gastric irritation, ulcers, fatigue, Commonly used in protocols to strengthen an extremely compromised immune system: AIDS, cancer, mono. One of the “Fu Zheng” therapies used to prevent side effects from chemotherapy or radiation. Increases hemoglobin and red blood cells. Use: General herb recommendations. I tend to decoct it as a tea with fresh ginger root slices, sometimes adding astragalus, cinnamon, cloves, etc. It would make a nice honey extract. Cautions: None known.

### **Schisandra (*Schisandra chinensis*) ~ Balancing Stress Support, Liver & Respiratory Tonic**

Also called “schizandra” and “wu wei zi” or “five-flavored fruit.” In Traditional Chinese Medicine, it is believed to have all five flavors (pungent, sour, bitter, salty, sweet), making it a broad remedy for a variety of constitutions and conditions. It has an affinity for the lungs, digestive system, liver, and immune system. Most research on the herb has focused on its liver benefits: it has been shown to protect the liver from poisons and assist in liver regeneration, it increased the cytochrome P-450 antioxidant system and improved the health of liver mitochondria (energy-producing parts of cells) in rats, it lowered elevated liver enzyme levels in patients with chronic viral hepatitis, and so on. Studies in Russia indicate that it is an adaptogen—an herb that reduces the body’s reaction to stress, improves overall health, and has few/no side effects. Studies on people and animals found that it improved work and athletic performance. The herb also acts as a tonic to the immune system, reduces inflammation, and normalizes the nervous system. It is used to both energize, relax, and improve memory, and so it will be found in both sleep and energy formulas. Practitioners use it to work with irritability, palpitations, night sweats, disturbed dreams, and insomnia. TCM practitioners use it for weak lung conditions, like wheezing, chronic cough. It can be used as a digestive bitter to stimulate the digestive system. Historically, Chinese practitioners believed this herb (among others like ginseng) prolonged life. Use: General dose recommendations. Tangey berries can be chewed on. Possible to grow as a garden plant in our climate. Cautions: No known toxicity. However, as with any liver herb, it may slow or speed metabolism of pharmaceutical drugs.

### **Maca (*Lepidium meyenii*) ~ Nutrition, Hormone & Stress Support**

Recently “discovered” turnip-like root grown as a food crop in the Andes Mountains. Extremely nutritious (high in minerals, protein), and tasty, it is used in a variety of dishes. Traditionally used to raise libido and increase fertility. Small studies show it does improve libido but does not appear to affect sex hormones directly. Used as a nourishing energizer and stress reducer. Use: Tasty and eaten in many forms in the Andes. General herb doses. Powder mixes well in smoothies, home-made energy nut butter balls, etc. Cautions: No known toxicity; used as a food in some cultures.

## **Stimulating Adaptogens**

---

### **Eleuthero, Formerly Siberian Ginseng (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*) ~ Energy/Body Tonic**

Formerly called Siberian Ginseng (it is in the same family, but not the same genus, as ginseng) eleuthero increases resistance to environmental stress. It is used to enhance physical and mental performance. Studies suggest it supports adrenal stress hormone function, stimulates immune response (immune modulating), and protects the liver against toxins. Eleuthero was studied on nearly 5000 people in Russia, starting in 1962. The studies found it increased people’s ability to withstand adverse conditions (heat, noise, motion, work load increase, exercise, decompression); to improve auditory disturbances; to increase mental alertness and work output; and to improve the quality of work under stress conditions and athletic performance. It was generally

helpful and well tolerated by people with neurosis, arthrosclerosis, acute disease, diabetes, pyelonephritis, hypertension, hypotension, rheumatic heart disease, chronic bronchitis, cancer, etc. Use: General herb doses. Tincture, pill, decocted tea. Cautions: Virtually no acute toxicity (studied on thousands of people in Russia). Uncommon side effects include insomnia, headaches, and elevated blood pressure. (Elevated blood pressure only occurred in people who were taking very high doses: 4.5-6ml/1-2x/day. In lower doses, it tended to reduce blood pressure in people with hypertension, raise blood pressure in people with hypotension.)

### ***Rhodiola (Rhodiola rosea) ~ Mental & Physical Energy, Stimulating***

Also called arctic root or golden root. Traditionally used in Siberia for more than 100 years for energy and longevity. Becoming popular in the US for mental and physical energy. In studies, it improved performance and reduced fatigue in night shift workers, and improved test-taking ability of students during exams. May be helpful for chronic fatigue syndrome, in part due to improved synthesis of ATP (energy for cell function). Appears to work by modulating stress hormone production, reducing the effects of stress on the body and mind. May improve weight loss in conjunction with an exercise routine. Use: Tincture or other alcohol extract (infused brandy, vodka, wine). Astringent and very aromatic; not a good tasting tea. Popular in capsule form from 100 to 500 mg dose. 200-300 mg 2x/day is probably adequate for most. Tincture, standard dose. High doses are used for short term energy. General herb doses. Cautions: None known. The herb is still new to western herbalism. May cause irritability and insomnia in high doses (1-2 g/day), and may induce manic stage in bipolar disorder. It's astringent and aromatic, which can stimulate digestion and upset the stomach if taken w/o food.

### **Ginseng: Chinese Ginseng (*Panax ginseng*) and American Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolium*) ~ The Classic (but Overused) Adaptogen**

I rarely use the ginsengs because they are rare, over-harvested, poorly cultivated, and expensive. However, they are the classic adaptogens by which all others are measured. They are among the most popular medicinal herbs in the world for good reason. After the Chinese all but depleted their wild ginseng, they sent word to North American missionaries to look for similar plants. In 1718, a Jesuit priest "discovered" American ginseng. Long before Americans caught on to this whole herbalism thing, up to 55 TONS of this slow growing root was shipped from Boston Harbor to China in just one year. Most of the ginseng on the market now is cultivated, but it is hard to grow, and is often sold too young. Wild roots are much stronger, but no longer ethical to purchase. If you use ginseng, try to find woods-grown cultivated roots and buy the whole root so that you can count the leaf scars (each indicating a year of growth). Good roots should be at least seven years old. All that said, here is why the ginsengs are so amazing: Panax ginseng has been shown to protect against high cholesterol, radiation, tumors, viruses, chloroform, amphetamines, and other toxins. (Kids, don't try this at home.) Both ginsengs are used to fight fatigue. They appear to reduce blood sugar in diabetics (controversial), increase hematocrit in post-op patients, increase nerve growth in animals. Panax has the reputation as a libido herb, may increase the weight of prostate glands, seminal vesicles, increase sperm count and pregnancies. One study on red (steamed) Panax ginseng found it effective for erectile disorder. In our culture, most people use ginseng to get through a stressful day with more energy. Ted Kaptchuk, author of the Chinese medicine book *The Web That Has No Weaver* said once "Ginseng is for those who are old or for those who are young but feel old." In the continuum of adaptogens, ginsengs are mildly to moderately stimulating, and somewhat warming. Cured "red" Asian ginseng, Uncured "white" Asian ginseng, and American ginseng are, in that order, most warming and stimulating to least. Use: Some people simply chew on a dried root. Though not necessary, frying your ginseng a little before making a tea or tincture can increase its strength. You can follow general dosage information. For a tasty snack, you can sauté root slices or mini rootlets and then cover them in honey to preserve them as an energizing snack. Cautions: Overuse can cause over stimulation in some people. May aggravate mania, especially when combined with the drug phenelzine. Not recommended for people with anxiety disorders. Use caution in hypertension; some studies have shown benefit, while others found it aggravated high blood pressure.

---

## Two of My Favorite Teas

### Good Morning Tea

*This tea is for calm energy, with only a small amount of caffeine coming from the green tea. Infuse for at least 15 minutes before drinking. If desired, sweeten with honey.*

- Holy Basil                    25% or 1 part
- Gotu Kola                    25% or 1 part
- Jasmine Green Tea    50% or 2 parts

### Sleep Tea

*This is my favorite relaxing tea for bedtime. Except for the spearmint—which is there for flavor—all the herbs have anti-anxiety properties. For daily anxiety, use slightly less passionflower and skullcap (which are more sedating), and more lemon balm. Infuse at least 15 minutes before drinking. Honey is a nice sweetener for the tea.*

- Lemon Balm                25% or 1 part
- Scullcap                    25% or 1 part
- Passionflower            25% or 1 part
- Spearmint                   25% or 1 part

## Nervous System Herb Continuum

Most Stimulating		←Adaptogens→		Less Stimulating
High Caffeine	Low Caffeine	Stimulating Adptogen	Semi-Stim. Adaptogen	Balancing Adaptogen
Guarana*	Mate*	Red Ginseng*	Codonopsis	Maca
Kola Nut*	Black Tea*	White Ginseng*	Eleuthero	Schizandra*
Coffee*	Chocolate*	American Ginseng*	Cordyceps	Licorice
	Green Tea*	Rhodiola*	Aralia spp	
	White Tea*			

Balancing/Neutral		Calming		Most Sedating
Calm Adapt/Brain	Mild/Mood	Relaxing	CNS Relaxers	CNS/Musc. Relax
Ashwagandha	Fresh Milky Oat	Chamomile	Passionflower	CA Poppy
Holy Basil*	St. John's Wort	Lavender	Skullcap	Valerian
Gotu Kola*	Damiana	Lemon Balm*	Blue Vervain	Pedicularis
Bacopa*	Bay leaf?	Catnip	Motherwort	Kava

(Not all herbs listed are discussed in this series.)

\* Memory/Brain Boosting/Attention Properties

---

Visit the Links page of [www.WintergreenBotanicals.com](http://www.WintergreenBotanicals.com) for Local & Online sources for seedlings, seeds, *herb supplies, herbs...* as well as links to *informative herbal websites*.

---