

Beginner Herbalist Study Plan: Month Two

Welcome back to my beginner herbalist study plan! This is month two, and contains subjects such as managing and documenting chronic conditions using herbs, identifying plants and mushrooms using the taxonomy system, and herbal dosage standards.

Quick note: For extra tips and resources regarding self-led study, visit this article, which is periodically updated. The books linked below are personal favourites of mine, and are amazon affiliate links. If you purchase them through the links provided, I may earn a small commission at no extra cost to you.

Body System of the Month: The Integumentary System

Skin is the largest organ of the body, and supporting it can be a complex process. For this system, I recommend focusing on how it heals, what happens as we age, and common concerns associated with it. If you plan on making salves, lotions, and balms, I would also recommend familiarizing yourself with the needs of skin on a daily basis, too. As someone with a huge love of skincare, I have spent several years learning about skin. I have found YouTube to be a good place to start when it comes to learning about ingredients, which are often derived from herbal sources. For example, salicylic acid, a great exfoliator for acne prone skin, can be found in a similar natural form (as salicin) in white willow bark.

I encourage you to continue learning about skin and how it functions after this month's study period ends!

Topics to Research

- What is skin? How is it structured, what are the different components and layers of skin?
- How does skin work to protect the body from illness? What happens when the barrier is broken?

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- Where are the layers of skin the thinnest? Where are they the thickest? What does this have to do with how the skin is treated?
- What are some common concerns for skin? How are they treated in allopathic medicine? How can herbalism be used to support it instead or alongside modern medicine?
- What is trans epidermal water loss? How can it be mitigated?
- What is the difference between hydration and moisture? What kind of products ensure that the skin receives both?
- What is exfoliation? What is the difference between physical and chemical exfoliation? What are some ways both physical and chemical exfoliation can be used with herbs?
- How does skin change as the body ages? What concerns develop? How can the skin support the skin when these changes happen?
- How can hormones influence acne and other skin concerns?
- What does sun exposure do to the skin? What can be used to mitigate the effects of sun exposure, both during and after?
- What role does sebum play in skin health?
- What is the comedogenic scale? What are the benefits of using scales like this to measure oils for formulation? What are some concerns brought forth about this scale?
- What is the ideal pH level of the skin of the face and other areas of the body? How can this pH be maintained?
- How do wounds heal? How can this process be aided by herbs?

Resources for Topics

- [“Anatomy, Skin \(Integument\), Epidermis”](#) by Hani Yousef, Mandy Alhajj, and Sandeep Sharma (article)
- [“Do you Really Need a Skicare Routine?”](#) by Northwestern Medicine
- [The Complete Human Body](#) by Dr. Alice Roberts; particularly starting on page 276, 422 (book)

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- “[Introduction to Skin Anatomy and Physiology](#)” by Armando Hasudungan (video)
- “[All About Exfoliation](#)” by lab Muffin Beauty Science (video)

Week One: Herbal dosages and lengths of use.

Journal Prompts

1. In what situations would you expect to have to continuously take an herb to support a body system?
2. In what situations would you expect to take an herbal preparation and experience the effects immediately?
3. Have you ever cooked with herbs for medicine? How might you incorporate medicine into your diet? What dosage do you think is recommended when cooking with herbs? Preparations? Heating limits?
4. In terms of dosage, how is herbal medicine different from allopathic medicine? Are there similarities?
5. While researching herbal dosages and the length of their use, what have you noticed is different from pharmaceuticals? Similar? The same?

Topics to Research

- Some herbs require consistent daily use over several weeks to derive the most benefits from; other herbs, including many nervines, for example, can act on the body immediately to provide relief from an acute imbalance. Using a book with herbal dosages and guidelines for use*, find two or three herbs with different dosage recommendations. Research why the dosage recommendation was set for each of your chosen herbs.

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- If you wanted to find a dosage recommendation for an herbal preparation, how could you do so? What factors might influence these guidelines?
- How can small doses of herbs be incorporated into someone's daily life? What would using herbs in this way provide them?
- Research a few ways people have made use of herbs to support their bodies. Some examples to look for include mental health, pain management, and reducing fatigue. How did these people use herbs? How frequently did they use them?
- When using a specific category of herbal energetics, you may find some dosages are higher in certain solvents. When might using a milder form of a medicine be useful? A more potent form?
- Dry herbal preparations are different from fresh ones. How might using fresh versus dried material affect the way a dosage is determined, or how a formulation performs?
- What are standardized formulations like? How are they different from making medicine at home, or when cooking?
- When can you expect to start seeing results when using herbs? How does the preparation, dosage, and herb used affect this time frame?

Resources for Topics

- [*The Modern Herbal Dispensatory*](#) by Thomas Easley and Steven Horne; particularly chapter thirteen: "Single Herbs" (book)
- [*Alchemy of Herbs: Transform Everyday Ingredients into Foods and Remedies That Heal*](#) by Rosalee De La Foret (book)
- ["How long does it take an herbal extract to work?"](#) By Herb-Pharm

Month Two Week Two: Chronic conditions and documenting progress.

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Journal Prompts for the Week

1. Chronic conditions can be debilitating without treatment. What are some ways a pharmaceutical may benefit a concern while causing another?
2. Have you or someone around you ever had to live with a chronic condition? What was your/their experience like? Do you think using herbs would have helped?
3. What are a few chronic conditions or imbalances you're familiar with? How might herbalism be helpful in supporting the body of someone with these ailments?
4. Herbalism is often considered more intimate and personal than allopathic medicine. How might this benefit someone struggling with a chronic condition?
5. Do you have a chronic imbalance you'd like to use herbs to amend? What would the ideal dosage be for your concern?

Topics to Research

- Many people with chronic conditions take prescription medications, need to be prepared for surgery without much notice, or have symptoms that can be affected by herbal supplements. How can one avoid interactions? How can someone work with their doctor while using herbal supplements alongside allopathic medicine?
- When it comes to chronic conditions, how might one manage the same imbalance with different herbs, blends, or formulations? How can someone rotate or try new remedies without disrupting their progress?
- Documenting symptoms and progress can be tedious at times; what are a few ways you can document the progress, effects, and experiences you have with herbal medicine? How can you make this task less tedious?
- Some people experience reactions to herbs, just as they react to foods. What can be done to ensure you know the difference between an allergic response or sensitivity and a temporary change as your body rebalances?

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- Some herbs are part of food families known to cause irritation in some people. For example, if someone is sensitive to nightshades like potatoes and tomatoes, they may be sensitive to other nightshades such as ashwagandha. Where can you find this information, and how can you use it to find a fitting remedy for yourself or others?
- When introducing a new remedy, it can be useful to avoid other new treatments and remedies. What kinds of activities and changes might you avoid when trying something new?

Resources for Topics

- [“Herbs and the Chronic Pain Puzzle”](#) by The Herbal Academy (article)
- [“Herbal Medicine Symptom and Progress Tracker \(Journal\)”](#) by Me! (I made this for this week’s focus!) (downloadable/printable journal)
- [“Herbal Medicine”](#) by Johns Hopkins Medicine (good information on precautions) (article)
- [The Modern Herbal Dispensatory](#) by Thomas Easley and Steven Horne; particularly pages 12-15 (book)
- [The Herbal Apothecary by Dr. JJ Pursell](#), particularly the chapter "Herbal Treatment Plans" (book)
- [“Natural Products for the Prevention and Treatment of Chronic Inflammatory Diseases: Integrating Traditional Medicine into Modern Chronic Diseases Care”](#) by Ji Hye Kim, Gorkem Kismali, and Subash C. Gupta (article)
- [“Use Your Words Carefully: What Is a Chronic Disease?”](#) by Stephanie Bernell, and Steven W. Howard (article)
- [“From Seed to Safe Use: Defining the Modern Apothecary”](#) by The American Herbalists Guild (video)

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Weeks Three and Four

Journal Prompts for the Week

1. Have you ever used a field guide to identify a plant or mushroom? If so, what was your experience like? If not, how do you think a field guide works?
2. Have you ever used an app to identify a plant or mushroom? If so, did you find it was accurate? If not, download iNaturalist and attempt to identify a plant in your yard. How easy was this process?
3. What local plants do you recognize easily? What about them makes them recognizable?
4. What characteristics of plants do you find easy to notice? Which do you find more difficult?
5. What characteristics of mushrooms do you find easy to notice? Which do you find more difficult?
6. Attempt to identify a plant using a field guide or online identification guide. What do you find is most helpful in identifying plants?
7. Attempt to identify a mushroom using a field guide or online identification guide. What do you find is most helpful in identifying mushrooms? (if you don't have any nearby, google "mushroom" and find a photograph with the gills/etc showing to identify).
8. Find out what plants are currently growing in your area, and choose one. Draw it and label/note its identifying features.
9. Find out what mushrooms are currently growing in your area, and choose one. Draw it and label/note its identifying features.
10. Do you feel confident in identifying wild plants and fungi? Why or why not? What would you like to work on in the future?

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Topics to Research

- What is the taxonomy of plants? What is a family, species, genus, phylum, etc?
- Why do we use plant taxonomy to identify plants? Why do we use latin names to identify plants?
- What is plant anatomy? What are the different parts of a plant?
- What characteristics of a plant are used in identifying plants most often?
- How can you use a field guide to identify plants?
- How can you use an app to help identify plants?
- What plants grow in your area? Where do they tend to grow?
- What is the taxonomy of mushrooms like?
- What anatomy do mushrooms have? What are the different parts of a mushroom?
- What characteristics are most useful in identifying mushrooms?
- How can you use a field guide to identify mushrooms?
- How can you use an app to help identify mushrooms?
- What mushrooms grow in your area? What do they tend to grow on/with?

Resources for Topics

- [*Botany in a Day: The Patterns Method of Plant Identification*](#) by Thomas J. Elpel (if you live in North America) or another guide on botany fitting for your area
- [*“Botany in a Day Tutorial: The Patterns Method of Identifying Plants”*](#) by Thomas J. Elpel
- *Peterson’s Guide to Medicinal Plants and Herbs of Eastern and Central North America* by Steven Foster and James A. Duke (if applicable to your area, otherwise find a similar guide)
- [*“Plant Leaf Identification: How to Tell Plant Leaves Apart”*](#) by Gardening Know How (article)
- [*“How to Identify Wild Plants: A Guide to Botanical Plants”*](#) by Trillium Wild Edibles (video)

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- [“How to Get Started Foraging”](#) by Atomic Shrimp (video)
- [“New to Mushroom Hunting? Start Here!”](#) by Learn Your Land (video)
- [“Identifying Mushrooms”](#) by The Penn State Extension (article)
- [“Identifying Mushrooms: A Beginner’s Guide”](#) by Out Grow (article)
- [“Meet the Plants”](#) by American Herbalists Guild (video)