

14 Herbs With Historical Medicinal Uses

PREFERRED GROWING CONDITIONS		
WATER	Full Sun	Part Sun
Moist	Elderberry	Marsh Mallow
	Garlic Turmeric Roseroot Candytuft Hollyhock Dandelion Pot Marigold	
Average water		Ginger
	Houseleek Thyme Sage Coneflower	
Dry		



1

Common Thyme

Thymus vulgaris

Basics

- Fragrant, pale lilac blooms
- 1' H x 1' W
- Perennial (Zones 5-9)
- Full sun, dry-medium well drained soil

Historical Use

- Used as a nervous curative, antiseptic, relief for gastric upset, bronchial and throat conditions

Parts Used

- Leaf and flowers

Tips for Harvesting

- Harvest leaves throughout the season
- Best time is in the morning, just before flowers open
- Dry quickly



Good to Know

- Tolerates rocky soil, and drought
- Cut back at least annually in Spring to avoid woody growth
- Grows quickly
- Attracts bees
- May start from seed (with some difficulty)

2

Sage

Salvia officinalis

Basics

- Evergreen with square stems, hairy grey-green and purple leaves
- 2.5' H x 2.5' W
- Perennial (Zones 5-8)
- Full sun, dry-medium well drained soil

Historical Use

- Used as an astringent and antiseptic, for ulcers and sores in mouth and throat, wounds, digestive aid and nerve tonic

Parts Used

- Leaf

Tips for Harvesting

- Harvest leaves throughout year, leaves most flavorful in summer just before bloom
- Dry quickly or leaves may be boiled/soaked



Good to Know

- Tolerates rocky soil, and drought
- Cut back at least annually in Spring to avoid woody growth
- Grows from seed
- Plants may need replacing after 4 years, because of woody growth

3

Elderberry

Sambucus canadensis

Basics

- Deciduous shrub, cream flowers, blue-black berries
- 5' to 12' H x 5' to 12' W
- Perennial (Zones 3-9)
- Full sun to part shade, moist soil, must drain well

Historical Use

- Used to relieve headaches, bruises, burns and boils; as a diuretic and for fevers, colds and flu

Parts Used

- Flowers and berries

Tips for Harvesting

- Collect flowers in bloom (June-August)
- Berries may be harvested beginning July through early fall
- Berries must be cooked (as well as bark, root leaves)



Good to Know

- Flowers and berries attract wildlife and pollinators; easy to grow once established
- Plant two different cultivars in well-drained soil within 60 feet to promote pollination and fruit
- Roots are shallow; self seeds as well as occasionally sends up lateral canes similar to raspberries; may propagate from wood cuttings
- Widely adaptable in US, promotes dense ground cover, may be used for erosion control on moist locations
- Thrives in woods, hedges and open areas

4

Coneflower

Echinacea purpurea

Basics

- Upright stems, and pink to purple daisy like flowers
- 3' H x 5' to 2' W
- Perennial (Zones 3-8)
- Full sun, rich sandy soil

Historical Use

- Used for external wounds, burns and bites, colds, coughs and allergies, stomach cramps

Parts Used

- Roots and flowers primarily, leaves

Tips for Harvesting

- Collect flowers and leaves while in bloom (June-August)
- Roots or rhizomes should be pulled in autumn 4 year old plants
- All are threatened in wild, so only commercially grown plants should be used



Good to Know

- Native to central US
- Grown from seed in spring and root division in winter

5

Dandelion

Taraxacum officinale

Basics

- Perennial that grows to 12", ragged basal leaves and yellow flowers
- Typically 2-8" H x up to 6" W
- Perennial (Zones 5-10)
- Full sun to part shade, average soil

Historical Use

- Leaves were used as diuretic and roots to support liver, gallbladder and kidney as a detoxifier

Parts Used

- Leaves and roots

Tips for Harvesting

- Leaves are collected in early spring for tonic and salads (less bitter)
- Roots are harvested in autumn from second year plants and dried
- Flowers may be used for wine



Good to Know

- Pollinators are strongly attracted to flowers
- Grows wildly in many parts of the US and world
- Adapts to soil and light conditions generally
- Seeds spread easily from spent flower

6

Marsh Mallow

Althaea officinalis

Basics

- Perennial that is tall and slender with heart shaped leaves and pink flowers
- 2-6' H x up to 6" W
- Perennial (Zones 3-9)
- Full sun to part shade, wet soil or marshland

Historical Use

- Soothes sore throat, expectorant and digestive aid

Parts Used

- Roots, leaves and flowers

Tips for Harvesting

- Aerial parts gathered in summer at beginning of flowering
- Roots are harvested in autumn



Good to Know

- Native in Europe and naturalized in US
- Grows best in marshy fields, loamy soil and wetland or tidal areas; not drought tolerant
- May be grown from seed if stratified
- Medicinal qualities of root come from its mucilage or sap
- Related to Hollyhock

7

Pot Marigold

Calendula officinalis

Basics

- Annual with bright orange and yellow daisy like flowers
- Up to 2' H up to 2' W
- Perennial (Zones 2-11)
- Full sun to part shade

Historical Use

- Used generally as an anti-inflammatory to soothe skin, wounds, acne, rashes, mouth sores; has antifungal properties

Parts Used

- Flowers

Tips for Harvesting

- Flowers harvested in early summer as they open
- Dried in shade



Good to Know

- Native to southern Europe, cultivated in temperate regions; distinct from marigold
- Tolerates frost so long blooming and will rebloom when cut
- Flowers may languish in heat of summer, plant grows weedy; cut back and/or reseed in late summer for fall blooms
- Grows readily from seed
- Wild species c. arvensis has similar medicinal qualities

8

Garlic

Allium sativum

Basics

- Showy, pinkish-white blooms on hardneck variety
- 1.5' H x 6" W
- Annual bulb (Zones 4-9)
- Full sun, organically rich medium water soil

Historical Use

- Used as an antiseptic and diuretic. Note that it is now advised not to use topically because of possible burning.

Parts Used

- Bulb and leaves

Tips for Harvesting

- Remove floral stems as they appear (in May) to increase bulb size
- Start checking for mature cloves (sections) in late June or wait for leaves to turn yellow-brown
- Dig and then dry in a shady, warm, dry area



Good to Know

- Resistant to deer and black walnut
- Bulbs may not survive very cold winters and may rot in wet soil
- Softneck variety produces more, smaller cloves (sections)
- Attracts butterflies
- Plant cloves in fall after first killing frost

9

Turmeric

Curcuma longa

Basics

- Showy, pale yellow blooms
- 4' H x 4' W
- Tender perennial (Zones 8-11) or indoors
- Morning sun, consistently moist soil

Historical Use

- Used for digestive issues and breathing problems.

Parts Used

- Rhizomes (underground stems)

Tips for Harvesting

- Harvest in the fall when foliage begins to dry
- Dig up the entire plant and brush soil away from rhizomes
- Wash, peel, and freeze rhizomes



Good to Know

- Tolerates wet soil
- Plants grown in large containers may require frequent repotting
- Potted specimens require lots of water
- Spider mites may appear if soil is dry
- Grows from firm, 2-inch piece of rhizome

10

Ginger

Zingiber officinale

Basics

- Cone flowers
- 4' H x 4' W
- Tender Perennial (Zones 9-12) (Pot more practical)
- Part shade, medium wet soil

Historical Use

- Uses were primarily digestive but also for coughing/colds

Parts Used

- Rhizomes (underground stems)

Tips for Harvesting

- Harvest in the fall when foliage begins to dry
- Dig up the entire plant and brush soil away from rhizomes
- Wash, peel, and freeze rhizomes



Good to Know

- Bring pots in before temp drops to 50F
- Rhizomes subject to rot in wet and cold conditions
- Allow months of growth for large rhizomes
- Young shoots are edible
- Grows from slightly dried piece of rhizome

11

Roseroot

Rhodiola rosea

Basics

- In flower from May to August
- 1' H x 1' W
- Perennial (Zones 2 to 9)
- Full sun, moist soil

Historical Use

- Used largely for respiratory issues

Parts Used

- Root

Tips for Harvesting

- Takes 4-5 years to produce sizable roots
- Best harvested in the fall or in the spring before the snow melts
- Slice and dry



Good to Know

- Requires cold treatment to germinate
- Hardy but needs full sun
- Native to crevices of mountain rocks
- Plants are gendored and require bees or flies for pollination
- May start from seed (with some difficulty)

12

Candytuft *Iberis sempervirens*

Basics

- Showy white blooms
- 1' H x 1.5' W
- Perennial (Zones 3-8)
- Full sun, medium moisture, well drained soil

Historical Use

- Use was primarily for digestive issues

Parts Used

- Seeds, roots, stems, leaves

Tips for Harvesting

- Allow seed pods to dry on plants
- Handle gently, dry further, break open to collect seeds
- Harvest flowers when ¼ of florets are open



Good to Know

- Tolerates rabbits, deer, and drought
- Cut back by 1/3 after flowering to encourage new growth
- Typically forms a foliage mound
- Attracts butterflies
- May start from seed (with some difficulty)

13

Hollyhock *Alcea rosea*

Basics

- Attractive, varied color blooms on stalks
- 8' H x 3' W
- Biennial (Zones 5-9)
- Full sun, medium wet soil

Historical Use

- Used largely for ear/nose/throat issues

Parts Used

- Flowers

Tips for Harvesting

- Gather flowers in full bloom and dry in a thin layer in warm air
- Flowers tend to bloom in July and early August
- Will be deep, purplish-black when dried



Good to Know

- Tolerates frost and moderate amount of heat
- Cannot grow in the shade and prefers rich dry soils
- Grows in clumps with moderate spread
- Attracts birds and butterflies
- May start from seed (with some difficulty)

14

Houseleek *Sempervivum tectorum*

Basics

- Showy reddish-purple blooms
- 1' H x 1.5' W
- Perennial (Zones 3-8)
- Full sun, dry, well drained soil

Historical Use

- Leaves were used like aloe vera for skin treatments

Parts Used

- Juice in leaves

Tips for Harvesting

- Break off leaves and squeeze as needed
- Leaves are evergreen
- Rosettes dry after bloom and should be removed



Good to Know

- Tolerates deer, drought, dry soil, shallow soil
- Best planted in groups or massed as ground cover; chicks fill space after hens flower
- Grows in rocky soil and rock gardens
- Hardy.
- May start from seeds, seedlings, or dividing

15

Summaries at a Glance

MOST COMMON MEDICINAL PARTS					
Bulb	Root	Rhizome	Leaf	Flower	Seed or Berry
	Roseroot Dandelion Coneflower	Turmeric Ginger	Houseleek Dandelion Thyme Sage	Hollyhock Elderberry Coneflower Pot Marigold	Elderberry Candytuft
Garlic	Marsh Mallow				
BLOOM TIME BEGINS					
Apr	May	Jun	Jul		
	Roseroot Thyme Sage Coneflower		Hollyhock Houseleek Elderberry		Turmeric Marsh Mallow
Garlic Candytuft	Pot Marigold				
Note: Ginger and dandelion are repeat seasonal bloomers					