

Garden Medicines for Common Digestive Complaints

Work with digestive issues in fun and simple ways using herbs your patients can grow in their gardens. We will taste teas, tinctures and the living plants themselves. From acid reflux to leaky gut, from GI bleeds to diarrhea, the cure could be growing in your backyard! We will explore links between the GI and mental health and briefly review common pharmaceuticals seen in practice for gastrointestinal concerns.

Min Zidell Healing Garden – GI Materia Medica

Achillea millefolium, Yarrow. Sunflower family.

Actions:

- bitter (promotes digestive juices, stomach acid, mucus production). Watch for worsening heartburn with bitters, although they may just as well improve it. Appetite stimulant.
- hemostatic: bleeding stomach ulcers. Colitis (in enema).
- astringent: diarrhea and dysentery (with slippery elm)
- diaphoretic if drunk hot. Diuretic when drunk cold.
- chew the root for toothache or gum problems.

Preparations: tea is very bitter. Tincture less so.

Energetics: contains cooling bitters and warming aromatics.

Agrimonia, Agrimony. Rose family.

Actions: astringent and anti-inflammatory.

- YARFA - “yet another rose family astringent” (Michael Moore)
- Diarrhea
- Protects the liver from damage. Hepatitis/cirrhosis.

Alchemilla, Ladies' mantle. Rose family.

Actions: YARFA,

- Mild antispasmodic.
- Hemostatic.

Uses: Smooth muscle cramping, GI bleeding and inflammation.

Angelica, Angelica. Umbel or carrot family.

Actions: antispasmodic

- also emmenagogue and expectorant

Uses: intestinal cramping. Uterine cramps that “spill over” into diarrhea. Gastroenteritis and stomach flu. Similar to peppermint oil. GI pain (will not cover up an emergency, safe to try as first aid). Kids' colic with catnip, lavender, star anise. Nausea and vomiting, dry heaves, borborygmus, acid indigestion.

Parts used: root and seed

Calendula, calendula or pot marigold. Sunflower family.

Actions: -vulnerary

- mild hepatic

Uses: stomach ulcers, with licorice and comfrey. GI inflammation. Leaky gut syndrome.

Energetics: warm and dry

Cynara scolimus, Artichoke. Sunflower family.

Actions: Cholagogue/choleretic.

-bitter

Uses: Dry stools, constipation, gallbladder “sludge”, poor digestion of fatty foods. IBS with predominant constipation. Leaky gut with lower GI deficiencies. Jaundice.

Echinacea. Sunflower family.

Actions: antimicrobial,

-wound-healing

-immune stimulant

Uses: for diarrhea and dysentery.

Equisetum, Horsetail. Horsetail family.

Nutritive, high mineral content, and may be helpful for intestinal bleeding.

Pick in a clean place. May accumulate environmental toxins.

Foeniculum vulgare, Fennel. Umbel or Carrot family.

Actions: -carminative

-antispasmodic

Use with *Nepeta* as an antacid/stomach upset remedy. Sedative to sensory nerves in the stomach, slows peristalsis. People who eat to calm down – quiets them so they don't have to eat. Tonic for emotional eaters. Also can induce appetite when low. Combine with carminatives. Antispasmodic to stomach. “Butterflies in the stomach.”

Abdominal cramping with bloody diarrhea – give with cinnamon bark (spice rack first aid).

IBS and colitis.

For morning sickness, take on waking.

Fennel water – delicious! Helps motivate to drink more water.

Spiritual use: Grounding – courage to face danger and adversity. Protection.

Energetics: warm and dry.

Hypericum, St. John's Wort. St. John's Wort family.

Actions: alterative

-mild liver stimulant,

-nervine,

-antidepressant

-wound healing

Uses: Chronic gastritis or stomach ulcers. 1 tsp oil BID on an empty stomach.

To shift into parasympathetic/healing mode from a stress state.

Hyssopus, Hyssop. Mint family.

Actions: Mild sedative

-anti-inflammatory.

Uses: Tissue irritation, food allergies, pet allergies. Mild action, use in combo.

Lavandula officinalis, Lavender. Mint family.

Actions: -antispasmodic
-carminative.

Uses: From babies with colic to hungover old men. Put on nipple or finger for babies. IBS with gas. A safe and abundant medicine.

Spiritual use: Grief – brings solace.

Energetics: warm and dry

Leonorus cardiaca, Motherwort. Mint family.

Actions: Antispasmodic
-nervine tonic.

Uses: Emotional agitation resulting in physical reactivity. Stomach problems with fear, anger and stress. Stomach overreactions by body to mental/emotional issues.

Spirit: strength and sense of purpose. Inner trust that all will be well and all is ok with the universe.

Melissa officinalis, Lemon Balm. Mint family.

Actions: -Carminative
-antispasmodic
-antidepressive
-sedative (tea)
-anti-anxiety
-diaphoretic

For people who can't eat when they are upset and grieving. Colic, gas, gastroenteritis, diarrhea.

Energetics: warm and dry

Nepeta cataria, Catnip. Mint family.

Actions:

- Carminative – increases digestive juices, improves digestive tone and helps dispel gas.
- Anti-inflammatory (all mints).
- Antispasmodic.
- Nervous system relaxant, sedative/hypnotic.

Excellent for colicky babies, abdominal distress (uterine vs GI). Cramps, spasms, and the emotional distress caused by them.

Combine with hops or peppermint, with silk tassel and fennel for severe GI cramps.

Catnip and fennel – classic kids' formula “good for what ails them.”

Passiflora, Passionflower. Passionflower family.

Action: Nervine relaxant.
-antispasmodic

Uses: To switch into parasympathetic mode – the “rest and digest” instead of “fight or flight.”

Plantago, Plantain.

Actions: Vulnerary
-antimicrobial.

Uses: Esophageal issues due to acid reflux. Give with chickweed juice. Topical anti-inflammatory as it bathes the stomach.

Preparations: Fresh juice (freeze it as ice cubes!) for ulcers dose ½-1 oz. Tea.

Energetics: cooling and moistening.

Rosa, Rose. Rose family.

Actions: Astringent (YARFA).

-Nervine tonic

Rosmarinus officinalis, Rosemary. Mint family.

Actions: Sedative

-carminative

-antimicrobial.

Uses: Gas and anxiety in the stomach. Depression reflected in the stomach. Nervous tension with headache and depression.

Energetics: hot and dry

Rubus spp., blackberry or raspberry (or salmonberry!) leaf. Rose family.

Actions: astringent (YARFA)

-nutritive

Uses: Diarrhea.

Thymus vulgaris, Thyme. Mint family.

Almost all common kitchen mint family spices are carminative and anti-inflammatory. In a pinch, you can use any of them for GI first aid.

Valeriana, Valerian. Caprifoliaceae (honeysuckle family).

Actions: Carminative

-sedative

-cerebral stimulant.

Uses: Helpful for upper GI deficiencies. Also helpful for pain. Nervous indigestion, cramping.

Not recommended for long term use. Also about 20% of people will be over-stimulated by it.

Withania somnifera, Ashwagandha. Nightshade family.

Actions: mild sedative.

Uses: to reduce stress and therefore enhance digestion.