

MEDICINE OF WILD ROSE

No flower in history has been so intimately linked with human affairs as the rose; its story is the record of a flower that has left its influence on the lives, the customs, even the destinies of nations. In war and peace, in joy and sorrow, in kings' castles and cotters' homes, in religion and art and music, that influence appears in song and story, and though the nations that knew her have long passed away, the rose, which has seen a hundred generations come and go, remains unchanged in character though improved in form. When we learn something of this influence, we can understand why it is that for more than twenty-five-hundred years, the rose has ruled uninterruptedly as queen of flowers.



-from My Friend the Rose by Fancis E Lester, 1942

Rose has a mythic presence. She is associated with gods and saints – a symbol of beauty, love, protection and grace. Wherever she grows – from China, to the Middle East to Europe to the Americas – rose stories are intimately entwined in human history. She is an old soul after all – she has been here for 35-million years and has seen us through the rise and fall of many civilizations. Her influence has reigned in art, in poetry, in song, in religious ceremony since ancient times, and her powerful presence continues to reign today. In this season of blooming wild roses, I bask in their sweet scent and beauty. I gather the soft petals and fill my house with fragrance – restock my medicine chest with rose honey, teas, oils and elixirs. They ensure that in my darkest hours I will be able turn to rose to heal my body, open my heart and refresh my soul.

Identifying Wild Rose: All wild roses have beautiful pink flowers with 5 petals and many stamens. Baldhip or dwarf rose (*Rosa gymnocarpa*) has pale pink to pink flowers, alternate leaves with 5-9 toothed leaflets and orange to red pear shaped fruits without attached sepal lobes. The crown of sepals falls from the fruit (also called the hip) and leaves it “bald.” It has numerous small spines crowded along the stem and smaller flowers than other species. Nootka Rose (*Rosa nutkana*) is generally taller with a pair of large prickles at the base of each leaf. Leaves are alternate with 5-7 toothed leaflets with rounded tips. Flowers are deep pink and large. There is usually one per branch tip. Clustered Wild Rose or Swamp Rose, (*Rose pisocarpa*) is found in wet places and has clustered flowers with sharp-pointed leaflets.

There are many other varieties of rose that look similar to our wild rose. If they are fragrant they can be used for food and medicine. *Rosa rugosa* is commonly planted along roads by the Department of Transportation and in public spaces. Its deep pink flowers are very fragrant and are slightly larger than wild rose.



Where it grows: Wild rose grows in variety of habitats including wooded, open, dry and moist locations from low to middle elevations. Nootka Rose generally likes sunnier spots while dwarf Wild Rose is usually found in shaded areas. Many roses form dense thickets. Birds love to eat rose hips and help distribute the seeds.

When and how to Harvest: Wild rose flowers are prized for their beauty, their scent and their medicine. The best time to harvest is when they are most eye catching - in spring to early summer when they have just opened and are very fragrant. You will see bees and other winged creatures lapping up their nectar and pollen. Whole flowers can be pinched off but I harvest mostly the petals so that the inner part can turn into fruit, which is also called rose hips. Rose hips turn from green to orange or blood red depending on the species. Watch for a post on rose hips in the fall when they are ripe. Rose leaves and stems are also harvested for medicine and can be gathered in spring through early fall.

Rose Medicine: The smell of rose is heavenly and transports me to a refuge of grace and beauty. Many say it opens the heart and offers protection. Many Northwest Coastal Indian People use wild rose for spiritual cleansing and protection. The stem is traditionally placed over babies' cradleboards. Some stories talk about how rose thorns catch or remove unwanted energy from people. Rose is also used to bring grace and healing to those who have died or those who have been left by a loved one. This practice is echoed all over the world throughout history.

I love how the spiritual uses of rose mirror the physical uses. Where rose removes unwanted energy and helps to bring strength and protection to the spiritual body, it also does this physically. Rose is an excellent simple astringent along with most members of the rose family. What this means is that it tightens and tonifies inflamed tissue, both topically and internally where the medicine makes contact. While this sounds simple – it is really quite profound. Say you get burned. Your skin becomes red and inflamed. Even if you cool the burn off, the puffiness persists and can become painful. Nutrients have a tough time getting into the area and waste products are not carried away easily because there is so much fluid. An astringent will tighten the puffiness and help remove excess fluid – allowing for better nutrient and waste transport. Everything works better and heals more quickly. Much of disease is caused by inflammation and lack of resistance to disease because of poor tissue tone. Rose is especially indicated for diarrhea, mouth sores and sore throats, sore eyes, irritated skin, burns, bleeding and other conditions where the tissue is boggy, disorganized and puffy.

Rose buds and blossoms are one of the most revered cosmetic ingredients. They are balancing and moisturizing, specific for irritated and delicate skin. I have seen rose oil and rose toner ease acne rosacea – maybe because they help to tighten those tiny inflamed blood vessels. Rose is also a mild diuretic and the tea is drunk in large amounts to flush the urinary tract. The flowers are considered an aphrodisiac that wakens feelings of warmth and love. Definitely worth a try...

You make many forms of rose medicine – tea, infused petals in honey, brandy, infused oil, etc. Herbalist Janice Schofield makes rose petal vinegar that she uses for sore throats, as a douche, an after-bath splash, a facial rinse and for salad dressing.

Rose Recipes

Rose Infused Honey

1. Gather aromatic petals and let wilt until they are half dry – usually about a day
2. Place petals in a glass jar with a tight fitting lid
3. Warm honey gently on the stove top so that it is very fluid but well below boiling
4. Pour enough honey into the jar so that it completely covers the flowers. Cap tightly and place in a warm spot in the garden or on a vent.
5. Stir and wipe moisture off the underside of the lid every few days. This will help remove excess water from your honey.
6. Strain with muslin cloth after 2-3 weeks. The pressed petals can be made into tea and drank or place in a bath for a luxurious “rose honey bath”. Store honey in a glass jar in a cool dark place. Some people like to keep it in the refrigerator but this is not necessary as long as your honey does not have too much water in it.

Add to tea, cooking recipes, cough syrup and other creations. Rose honey makes a great balancing face wash. To use it, wet your face with warm water. Place about a quarter’s worth of honey in your palm. Massage into your face until it begins to get tacky. Rinse with warm water. Don’t forget to lick your lips first.

Persian Rose Tea

- 1 cup good quality loose leaf black tea like Darjeeling, Ceylon or Assam
- ¼ cup wild rose petals or other fragrant small petaled rose
- 2 teaspoons green cardamom seeds, chopped fine or powdered

Cut rose petals into small pieces with scissors. If you can get whole green cardamom pods for this recipe it is worth it. They are much more fragrant and flavorful than powdered cardamom. Open the green pods up with your fingernail and remove the dark seeds. They do not look like much beside mouse droppings but if you taste one you will see why they have inspired cooks for thousands of years. Finely chop the seeds. Mix all ingredients together and store. Brew 1 teaspoon tea per cup of boiled water. Steep about 5 minutes and serve with milk and honey.

Wild Rose Toner

Rose is considered the most balancing of all plants for the skin. This old fashioned recipe stands up to modern expensive facial care products. Witch hazel is a tree with bark that is very astringent and healing. It is extracted in water, usually with about 15% alcohol as a preservative. You can find it at many natural food stores, herb shops and pharmacies.

1. Fill a glass jar with wilted or dried wild rose petals.
2. Cover completely with witch hazel extract.
3. Cap the rose and witch hazel jar with a lid and let sit for at least 2 weeks. Shake every couple days to distribute medicine throughout the fluid.
4. Strain with muslin cloth then store in a glass jar or spray bottle. Label.

Spray or pat this liquid on your face as a refreshing astringent to tighten pores and balance skin. You can add 25% rose water to this extract for additional rose fragrance and medicine.

Rose Oil – Solar Infusion

Wild rose infused oil has a sweet delicate scent and is great for skin care products. Jojoba oil is definitely my first choice as a base for making this but it has become prohibitively expensive in the last year. Olive oil works. It is inexpensive, accessible and has a long shelf life but it does have its own fragrance. Grapeseed, almond or sunflower oils are also good choices for making rose oil but be extra careful to remove moisture so that they do not go rancid or form a gel at the bottom of the bottle. You may want to add a preservative like Vitamin E (1 teaspoon per cup of rose oil) to help prevent this.

1. Gather rose petals on a dry day and set them in a basket. Let them wilt for about 1 day until they are half to three-quarters dry.
2. Place the petals in a wide mouth jar and completely cover with oil. Make sure no petals are above the oil – this increases the likelihood of mold forming. Cover with a lid and place in a sunny spot or a warm place in your house.
3. Stir the oil every few days. Make sure to wipe condensation away from the underside of the lid.
4. After at least 2 weeks strain out petals with muslin cloth. Let the oil sit for several hours so that any water falls to the bottom.
5. Pour the oil into a glass jar – leaving any water behind. Label and store in a cool dark place. Rose oil should last about a year.

Rose oil is a favorite base ingredient in making lotion, lip balm and salve. It is also nice as a body oil or massage oil.

Rose Cream

There are many recipes for lotions and creams, but I have found that this is the easiest to make. It's modified from *The Family Herbal* by Rosemary Gladstar. The ingredients are pure, easy to obtain, inexpensive and much better for your skin than most commercial lotions.

You will need: Lotion ingredients including oil, beeswax, distilled water, aloe vera gel and essential oil. You will need measuring cups, a pan to melt oil ingredients, a blender and a spatula.



Group I Oil Ingredients

- 1 cup grape seed oil (other natural oils such as apricot oil, jojoba oil, olive oil and almond oil can be used, but grape seed oil is the lightest and least oily)
- 1/3 cup coconut oil, cocoa butter or shea butter (or a combination of these)
- 3/4-1 ounce grated beeswax

Group II Water Ingredients

- 2/3 cup distilled rose water, lavender water or plain distilled water
- 1/3 cup aloe vera gel
- 4-8 drops of essential oil for scent

Please note before blending Group I and Group II:

Be sure to use distilled water or distilled floral waters so that bacteria will not be introduced and cause molding. Do not use fresh aloe vera gel from your houseplants because this may introduce bacteria into the cream.

If you want a thicker cream, add less of the Group II waters. If you want a pourable lotion, add more waters. The cream will be a little thinner when you first make it, so expect that it will thicken as it settles.

To Make Lotion

Step 1 – Blend Group II ingredients and set aside.

Step 2 - Combine, then melt Group I ingredients over low heat in a double boiler. Do not overheat!

Step 3 – Pour melted mixture into a glass measuring cup and let it cool to room temperature. This usually takes several hours. Oils should become thick, semisolid, and cream-colored. This cooling process can be hastened in the refrigerator but keep an eye on it so it doesn't get too hard. When it is room temperature, you are ready for step 4.

Step 4 – Place Group I oil ingredients in the blender. Turn the blender on to the highest speed. In a *slow, thin* drizzle (just as making mayonnaise) pour the Group II water mixture into the center vortex of the blender.

Step 5 – When most of the water mixture has been added to the oil mixture, *listen* to the blender and *watch* the cream. When the blender “coughs and chokes” and the cream looks as thick and white as butter cream frosting, turn the blender off. If there is still liquid not mixed in, hand beat for a minute then blend again until it is completely mixed. You should have a beautiful, rich, thick cream.

Step 6 – Pour the cream into jars and store in a cool place. This cream will not go bad when stored at room temperature. However, if you make more than you can use in six months, it will keep longer if the excess is stored in the refrigerator.

Followed as above, the cream recipe should work for you. If it doesn't, and the water mixture and oils separate, it is most likely because of improper temperatures. All ingredients should be room temperature before blending them. Another possible explanation is that the blender speed may have been set too low. It must be set at the proper speed for the cream to emulsify.

If the water and oil separate, let them separate entirely and begin the process over again. Or put a little note on your package that says “Shake before using.” I've actually re-emulsified creams that have separated by hand-shaking them or beating them for a few minutes with an electric beater.

Rose hips

Rose hips glow like rubies in the fading colors of autumn. They are red to orange colored, round and fleshy – pregnant with a belly of seeds. These tiny jewels bestow a wealth of nutrients and medicinal properties to those who take time to harvest them.



Rose Plants with Good Hips

Most rose plants have hips that are useable including all of our northwest native roses, rugosa rose, cabbage roses and heirloom varieties. Avoid gathering rosehips from plants that have been treated with herbicides, pesticides or fertilizers unless they are organic. Domesticated roses have much larger hips but they are usually not as flavorful or medicinal as wild varieties.

The Creation Story of a Rosehip

In spring rose plants form tightly fistful buds that are protected by green leaf-like sepals. These unfurl to reveal soft petals that bloom into fully developed flowers. Roses attract insects and other pollinators with their bright colored petals, fragrance and sweet nectar. And why do they do this? One reason is that they need pollinators to reproduce – a common urge across species.

Wild roses have five petals, while garden varieties can have numerous rows of petals. All rose flowers share similar characteristics in the center of the petals. They have a single thick pistil right in the middle (female part), surrounded by many thin stamens (male part). Each stamen has a little sack of pollen at the tip. The top of the pistil has a sticky bulb that can catch pollen. This narrows into a tube that leads down into an ovary. The ovary has several compartments that are filled with ovules.

Let's get some action. A bee flies into the center of a rose to drink nectar. While taking in the sweetness, its fur rubs against the pollen-filled sacks on the stamens and then brushes pollen on the tip of the pistil. Microscopic pollen grains travel down the tube and into the ovaries where they fertilize the ovules. These swell into seeds.

Once the flower is fertilized, the petals begin to wither and fall off. The base of the flower develops to protect the growing seeds. The outer flesh becomes orange to red and sweet. This attracts birds and other animals that eat the ripe fruit and deposit seeds near and far. Thus, a new rose plant is born.

Eating Rosehips

Rosehips are sought after by birds, squirrels, rabbits, wild game, bears and humans alike. Their outer flesh tastes like a cross between tart apple, plum and rose petal. They are delicious. But here is the catch – people cannot eat the hairy inner seeds of rosehips because they irritate our intestines. Other animals and birds can eat them with no ill effect and benefit from the many nutrients including essential fatty acids. We humans have three options:

1. Pretend you are a squirrel and gingerly eat the red fleshy part from the outside while avoiding the seeds. My 3-year old daughter has become an expert at eating rugosa rose hips. She cannot get enough of the sweet and tart fruit that is almost jam-like. This is much easier to accomplish on larger varieties of rosehips.
2. Deseed rosehips by cutting them in half and scooping out the seeds with a tiny spoon or round-tipped knife. This is a labor of love that I have not had time for in years. Friends swear that once you get in a rhythm it is easy to do and well worth it.
3. Make rosehip jelly or syrup and strain out the seeds. You can find some great recipes online or in herbal books.

4. Buy dried deseeded rosehips. They can be made into a delicious jam or can be added to a variety of dishes including soups, sauces and desserts. Add to wet ingredients or rehydrate by letting them sit with a little water so they are not hard in baked goods. You may be surprised to find that a little powdered rosehip add depth and tartness to chili or black bean soup.

You can purchase dried rosehips in herb stores, food coops and online from herb distributors like Mountain Rose Herbs. Sort through them on a plate to make sure seeds and stems are removed, then grind them up into a powder in a coffee grinder. Here are two of my favorite rosehip recipes:



Cranberry Rosehip Relish

1 12oz. bag of cranberries

1 cup fresh rosehips or 1/2 cup of dried rosehips (cleaned, seeds removed)

The juice of 1 orange

Honey, agave nectar or sugar added to desired sweetness

2 tablespoons lemon juice

In a medium-sized pan gently heat cranberries, rosehips, orange juice and lemon juice until the cranberries and rosehips are soft and cooked. Add honey or other sweetener to taste. You will be surprised at how much you need to add to counteract the bitterness and tartness of the cranberry. Let the relish cool before serving it and keep refrigerated for up to several weeks.

Easy Rosehip Jam

I originally learned this recipe from Tracy Bosnian and Cascade Anderson Geller about 15 years ago, and it has become part of my regular cuisine. It is one of the easiest and most nutritious recipes I know!

1. Spread rosehips out onto a plate and remove any remaining seeds or stems.
2. Grind rosehips into a fine powder in a coffee grinder.
3. Add apple cider or apple juice to the powder until it forms a jam consistency. Let sit 5 minutes and add more fluid as needed.
4. *Optional* - Add honey or other sweetener to taste.
5. Place in a jar and serve immediately or refrigerate.

Use as a spread on fruit, bread, cakes or cookies. This will last two weeks when refrigerated, and you can also freeze it. Rosehip jam is a tasty way to deliver Vitamin C to your family during the cold season. You can modify the recipe by adding cinnamon powder, vanilla, orange peel and other spices.

Rosehip Seed Oil

A few years ago I discovered rosehip seed oil as an ingredient for making lotion, salve and skin oil. While this is not something we can make at home, I have totally fallen in love with it and incorporate it into my cosmetics. I have purchased it from Aubrey Organics, Mountain Rose Herbs and Majestic Mountain Sage. Much of what is on the

market comes from Chile, where rose has been a beloved medicine since time immemorial. Chileans have pressed wild rose seeds to extract the oil for many generations. It has historically been used for healing skin problems, reducing aging spots and wrinkles, and hydrating dry skin. Science has confirmed this traditional knowledge. Rosehip seed oil is high in Vitamins A and E along with essential fatty acids. It can be used directly on the skin or it can be added to other cosmetics.

Rosehip Medicine

Rosehips are so loaded with nutrients that they can be considered a super food. They contain the Vitamins A, B complex, C, E, K and minerals including calcium, silica, iron and phosphorous. Rosehips are particularly high in bioflavonoid rich antioxidants including rutin that help strengthen our heart and blood vessels, and prevent degeneration of tissue. They contain carotenes including lycopene that have been linked with cancer prevention. Natural pectin found in rosehips is beneficial for gut health.

Perhaps the most common use of rosehips throughout history has been for prevention and treatment of colds and flu. Wild varieties have the highest concentration of Vitamin C, with some estimates reporting 30-50 times the Vitamin C of oranges. Natural health stores carry many types of rosehip remedies including teas, syrups and capsules. Most grocery stores now carry rosehip tea.

Drying Rosehips

Harvest rosehips in autumn when they are bright red or orange. They get sweeter after the first frost but you run the risk of them getting brown spots soon after. Pick hips on a dry day to prevent molding. They are easy to remove from the plant with a little twist. I place them in a flat basket and process them by pinching off the brown sepals. This leaves a little hole in the hip that serves as ventilation for the drying process. Leave them single layered in a basket or paper bag in a dry room with good airflow. Keep them out of direct sunlight. Move them around every day and wait until they are completely dry before placing them in a storage container like a glass jar. This can take up to 10 days. You can also deseed rosehips to dry them if you have the time.

Making Rosehip Tea

Use 1 heaping teaspoon of rosehips per cup of boiled water and steep 15 minutes. Some people prefer to boil rosehips, which makes a stronger, darker brew. While you will lose Vitamin C content with boiling, it may increase extraction of minerals and pectin.



One of my favorite winter teas is “Rose Mint” – a combination of rose petals, rosehips, peppermint and spearmint. It has a sweet and lively flavor that even dubious herbal tea drinkers enjoy. Cheers!