

# Getting To The Root (And Leaves) Of What Ails You

May be as simple as harvesting the herbs in your garden.

By **LAURA M. SCHNEIDER**

*Scripps Howard Foundation Wire*



*Echinacea*

Whether you are plagued by restless sleep, an annoying paper cut or a migraine, herbs can offer an alternative to a trip to the doctor or drug store.

Naturopathic medicine, the use of western herbs for medical purposes, has been practiced and studied in Europe since the Middle Ages, according to Robin Depasquale, a professor of naturopathic medicine at Bastyr University and a naturopathic physician.

Depasquale said growing herbs gives people more options concerning their health.

“I think it gives them other options, economically and medically. Things in their backyard can help them,” she said.

The use of naturopathic medicine in the United States is growing rapidly, she said.

“It’s something people are really recognizing. No. 1, it seems to be very useful, it works ... No. 2, we call it the medicine of the people, people can grow these herbs in their garden. I can teach someone to grow a plant that can help them medically. People are so happy to feel more empowered.”

The following herbs can be purchased at local nurseries, either in plant or seed form. Once they are in your garden, herbs can be prepared several ways, but the easiest is to make a tea, said Depasquale. When making a tea from herbs, the upper part of the plant can be steeped or the root of the plant can be boiled.

Depasquale and Debra Ching Wu, certified in herbology and acupuncture for Chinese medicine, recommended a few herbs that can be grown in the United States and safely used to treat medical ailments.



*Chamomile*



*Calendula*



*Oregano*



*Lavender*



*Dandelion*



*Yarrow*

**Mint** is helpful to the gastrointestinal system and is good for anyone with digestive problems. Mint helps dispel gas and tastes good as well. Use the leaves of the mint plant to make a tea.

**Chamomile** is a gentle, soothing herb that calms both the stomach and the nerves. The daisy-like flowers are used to make a tea. Research shows chamomile is gentle enough even for pregnant mothers.

**Lavender** is a popular plant used for its pleasant scent as well as its medical aid. Lavender is mainly a relaxant. It can be used in potpourri or in a bath. The flowers are edible and can be used in baking or in a tea. You can make a small pillow from the flower petals to treat insomnia.

**Sage** is useful in cooking. Also, the leaves of the sage plant are effective in treating hot flashes when mixed into a tea with peppermint. A tea from sage leaves is beneficial to both the heart and liver and acts as an antioxidant.

**Garlic** is a natural anti-viral agent. Planting garlic around other plants can aid in avoiding pests. Garlic can be used in soups and other foods to stimulate the immune system. The bulb of the garlic plant is used. Garlic can be effective in fending off a cold.

**Echinacea** is a popular immune stimulant that can be used to fight off infections. The root of the plant can be used to make a tea, or the whole plant can be dried to make a powder. Echinacea is more effective in preventing illness than in treating it.

**Rosemary** is calming to the nervous system, dispels gas, and is helpful with memory. The stems and leaves of the plant are used in a tea.

**Oregano** is a culinary herb that is also very medicinally active. It is often used as a gargle for sore throats. The leaves can be used to treat fungal growths on the skin.

**Lemon balm** is easy to grow. Often called the “happy plant,” the leaves are used to lift the spirit.

**Calendula** is a healing plant used on cuts, scrapes, bruises, burns and rashes. Its flowers can be applied topically, made into a tea, or infused with oil to make a topical treatment.

**The dandelion plant's** leaves are used to stimulate the digestive system, as a diuretic. The entire plant is beneficial to the liver.

**Plantain**, known as “nature’s Band-Aid,” heals tissue. Chewing up plantain and placing it on a wound will aid in healing it. Placing a wad of it on the gum line will relieve a toothache.

**Feverfew**, in the daisy family, is for migraine headaches. The leaves can be chewed or prepared in a tea.

**The blueberry**, and often forgotten herb, strengthens capillary walls. It is effective in treating varicose veins, hemorrhoids and weakness in the cardiovascular system. Eating half a cup of blueberries per day is effective treatment for these ailments. The leaves of the plant are good for the urinary tract.

**Yarrow** is used to stop bleeding, using the leaves either topically or by making a tea. The whole plant is used in a tea to treat fevers by bringing on a sweat.