

Infusion: Dried Comfrey Leaf



Comfrey abounds with health benefits. Infusions derived from the leaves assist the body to strengthen its bones, protect from cancer, soothe painful joints, improve mental functioning, and maintain good vaginal lubrication. With this in mind, I begin my journey.

It is a chilly fall day as I walk toward my comfrey patch with two five-gallon buckets and a pruning saw. I have already harvested the largest dying leaves and tipped-over flowering stalks of my comfrey plants. They will soon become fertilizer in the garden along with three feet of oak and maple leaves that will decompose over the winter. Now as I intend to make a herbal infusion, I am being selective with the leaves. Only the most vibrant, green, healthy-looking leaves with no signs of browning will be acceptable. After about an hour of selecting leaves and filling buckets, I headed back indoors with my harvest.

Once inside, I began sorting through the leaves a second time, folding them in half lengthwise and discarding any that still had too much brown, were beginning to yellow, or had dried grass that I could not easily remove from the fuzzy little hairs. Using my cutting board and a

freshly-sharpened knife I folded the leaves in half one at a time and quickly cut out the stems that divide the leaves down the center and discarded them for composting later. Removing the mucilaginous stalks helps the leaves to dry more quickly and evenly although most commercial available comfrey leaf mixtures include them.

The next step was to cut the leaves (stems removed) into about half to one inch bits and place them in the dehydrator at 95 degrees Farenheight. Within about eight hours they were a beautiful dark green and "crunchy", not brittle. Ready to be powdered.



Dried Comfrey Leaf & Raw Apple Cider Vinegar Infusion Preparation

The comfrey "powdered up" very nicely in the blender. From there, the powder was collected in a quart mason jar and raw apple cider vinegar was added. I waited for it to settle into the powdered comfrey and then added more to cover the mixture by about an inch. The opening of the jar was covered with a waxed paper square, then secured with a

lid and screw band. The mixture was then shaken well to completely saturate the herb. Just before the jar was placed into the dark cupboard to begin macerating, a label was affixed which read:

Name: Fresh Comfrey Leaf/Symphytum officinale
Menstruum: Raw Apple Cider Vinegar
End: 11/16/14

The next morning when I removed the jar to shake it again and it had expanded enough that it required a bit more vinegar for the particles to agitate properly. Another ounce or so was added. The macerating herb was agitated daily for 14 days total, then allowed to rest one extra day as detailed in "The Herbal Medicine Maker's Handbook" by James Green.

It was time to drain the liquid off of the herb. I poured half of the mixture into the cloth-lined stainless steel strainer and then gasped as I thought "Oh no! What did I just do?" I was planning to take a photo of this step so I used a brand new white linen towel instead of one of my not-so-pretty stained ones. I could not remember for certain if I had ever washed this towel. I thought I must have, but that would have been at least two moves ago, maybe more. My heart sunk and I decided to throw out the infusion that had passed through the towel because my intent was to use this as a medicinal. I simply could not risk the possibility of Formaldehyde being in the unwashed linen and tainting the infusion.

So a few minutes later, with a clean bowl and strainer and a clean-but-stained cloth, I started over and strained the remaining half of the infusion. I felt very grateful that there was enough infusion left to finish my project.

Once the infusion was poured through the cloth on my second attempt, I gathered up the corners of the cloth and twisted the mark tightly

into a ball to get most of the "comfrey vinegar" out. Then I flattened out the mark and folded the cloth over it to make a "burrito" and placed it in the tincture press. Once the marc was pressed and dry, I added the residual liquid to the bowl. The first straining was complete.



From there, the comfrey leaf infusion was strained two more times through paper filters set in a strainer over a bowl as depicted above.

The final liquid was a light brown color and looked just like the original apple cider vinegar. It still had its apple cider vinegar smell only with an additional fresh green scent, like the smell of alfalfa hay. The comfrey leaf infusion had a pleasant, specific taste that reminded me of when I was a little girl eating dinner with my mother. I distinctly remember her showing me how to put vinegar on my boiled spinach. That is what the comfrey leaf infusion tasted like to me. Boiled

spinach with vinegar (which is actually a food I enjoy!) Perhaps I will try adding some of this vinegar to a dinner salad soon. What a wonderful way to take my medicine!

The filtered infusion was then poured through a stainless steel funnel into a sterile dark green glass jar. The final label (see image below) was filled out and affixed to the jar just before it was put in the closet for storage.

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The dosage for this preparation would be approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ -2 teaspoonsful per day for no more than two weeks. It should not be consumed if one is pregnant, lactating, or has liver disease. Internal use has become controversial due to the high content of isolated Pyrrolizidine Alkaloids, especially in the root. Leaves harvested in the fall have a very small amount of this alkaloid. Historically, comfrey has been safely used by both humans and animals for centuries.

Taking a moment to reflect on this project, I am sure that something I would do differently in the future would be to make sure that all of my equipment was "safe" and clean (no formaldehyde) before proceeding to process the infusion. I have since washed that offending towel (there are no other brand-new, unwashed towels around) and also have purchased some muslin bags to use for future straining and pressing.

