

# herbnews

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*Mugwort*



# 2017/19 Herb Federation of New Zealand National Executive Committee

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**Cover image:** Mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), Billeder af nordens flora. v.1, 1917-1927

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# President's letter



Greetings!

Autumn is approaching; it is getting cooler in the mornings and evening. From the garden, I've been harvesting so many tomatoes, with many in the freezer already, awaiting addition to warming soups and casseroles in winter. I am not quite managing to beat the birds to the last of the blueberries and raspberries; delicious treats when I do get them. Luckily they leave the white, wild strawberries (*Fragaria vesca* var. *alba*), so sweet and lovely to eat.

With all these garden harvests, I am reminded of that famous poem, To Autumn, by John Keats (1795–1821), written on 19 September 1819 and published the following year:

“Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness  
Close bosom–friend of the maturing sun  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch–eves run;  
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage–trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
Until they think warm days will never cease...”

This also reminds us all that it is time to harvest seeds to save for next year – and to send to the Federation's Seed Bank.

March is our nationwide celebration of herbs – Herb Awareness Week – so, if you haven't already, find ways to publicise your local meetings or events – then send the editor reports for the next Herb News!

Warmest wishes

*Karina*

# NOTICEBOARD



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Don't forget:

## Deadline for the next issue:

20 May 2019

Do you have any **herb stories, news or recipes** you'd like to share? We welcome your submissions. Note: These must be original to avoid copyright issues. Any photos must be your own (or from someone who has given you permission to use them). Send your submissions to the editor: [jane@plainjanemedia.co.nz](mailto:jane@plainjanemedia.co.nz)

### Collecting Seeds For The HFNZ Seed Bank

Now's the time to collect herb seeds. Got any spare? Send them to our Seed Bank. Please label them with herb name, date collected and your contact details. Post to: Ella Flack, 2 Hill Road, Bay View, Napier, 4104. Ph 021 0294 2565.

### Alpine vs. Mock Strawberry – A Warning Tale

With alpine strawberry being one of the herbs chosen for HAW 2019, and an excellent ground cover plant, I wanted to get it established in my food forest. I was given a small plant which I decided to grow on in my berry house until it was big enough to compete in the food forest. The plant grew rapidly and looked great – until I tried the fruit. Arrgghh! It was tasteless. Even my duck wouldn't eat it (though the chooks did). I thought the berry looked slightly different, too. Further investigation showed there is a look-alike – the mock strawberry. It is actually a different species, *Duchesnea indica*, instead of *Fragaria virginiana*. The key difference is that the flower is yellow instead of white or pink as the true alpine strawberry has. Unfortunately for me, the mock strawberry is very prolific, having rapidly taken over a good-sized area of the floor in my berry house and is mixed up with the real plant. Now I have to dig the lot out, source the real plant, and start again somewhere else.

*Shonagh Hopkirk*

# *The Fine Art of Smudging*

*By Sam Stevens*

An Aboriginal Canadian friend of mine who teaches at the Whispering Lodge in Toronto was explaining to me how physical or emotional healing cannot take place until the person is cleansed of any of the following conditions:

- Emotional conditions such as resentment, bitterness, envy, jealousy and guilt
- Negative thoughts about others or one's past or future
- Negative emotions, such as grief, hatred, desire
- Bad or evil spirits
- Attachments or negative energy sent to us from other people

In most Aboriginal traditions, a sweat lodge, basically a tent or tepee or cave filled with smoke and heat, is used to remedy the sick person of these conditions. In ancient Rome, buildings called purgatoriums were used for the same purpose. These smoke and heat filled places were considered sacred spaces in which the spirits or God could lift negative entities and energies from an individual without interference with others. Many indigenous cultures throughout the world use burning herbs, plants and resins to accomplish the same purpose. In some cultures the smoke is taken into one's hands and rubbed over the body to blacken it. This is where the modern day practice got its nickname – smudging.

Below is a list of common herbs, plants, grasses and resins that are commonly used in smudging ceremonies. You can light these substances yourself and carry a bundle of the substance around your home in a counter-clockwise circle to cleanse your space. I highly recommend cleansing the body outside, however, as I have found that sage can burn very fast and create a lot of rapid whirling smoke that easily sets off the fire alarm.



*Sage*

**Sage sprigs** – The most common substance used for cleansing is sage. The word sage comes from the Latin word *salvia*, which means ‘to heal’. There are also plants known as sage brushes that are from the *Artemisia* family of plants. This includes mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*), also known as dream sage, which is used to stimulate dreaming, bring about prophecy and divinatory success. White sage (*Salvia apiana*) is used for cleansing and protection. Combining branches of pine and white sage together and burning them is used to attract prosperity.

**Cedar and juniper branches** – These evergreen boughs have historically been used to help cleanse, purify and protect ones belongings. Sometimes brooms are made from them to use the smoke ‘sweep’ to cleanse a home during a house blessing.



**Sweetgrass** – This musty smelling grass is used to drive out bad influences and draw good influences into the home. It is often used after a prayer or ritual to ‘hold the magic’ in its place. (Not grown in NZ.)

**Copal** – This aromatic plant resin is mainly used in South American rituals. The touch of the strongly scented smoke from burning copal is thought to cleanse and purify any object or person.

**Frankincense and myrrh** – These biblical resins are used in Africa, the Middle East and Europe for ceremonies and rituals. Burned together they are thought to balance yin and yang, or the masculine and feminine energies in a place or dwelling. Either is thought to draw blessings into a home.

**Tobacco** – Tobacco is burned to float prayers upwards to the Creator where they will be heard and answered. Burning a tobacco along with sage, cedar or sweetgrass is thought to enhance the magical intentions of the smudge.

Smudging is not all hokey and voodoo. The practice is also thought to create negative ions in the air that remove static and create a positive atmosphere. Not only do people usually feel good afterwards, it also creates a space for the free flowing of positive energies and prayers.

## *The Still Room*

*By Jane Carden, Auckland Herb Society*

On engaging in a session with my group on how to make liqueurs, I realised that the making of the alcohol was also an important factor in the old days, as one had to first distil the alcohol before making the liqueur. You couldn't just go to the liquor store and buy the necessary ingredients. We then got talking about still rooms and I realised how little we really knew about that subject. So I started to do some research and this is what I found.



It was the duty of the lady of the manor to oversee the smooth functioning of her household. If she had a steward, much of the work could be delegated to him for supervision.

One very important responsibility that was not delegated was that of providing the healthcare for her family and its retainers. She did so through herbal medicines passed down from generation to generation. It was her task to concoct these remedies and also create and record new remedies and formulas.

To properly conduct this chore, it was necessary to learn how to grow, gather and harvest all manner of herbs. Then she needed to have the knowledge to discern which herbs should be used for what condition, the best preparation to use and, finally, how to administer them. This knowledge was passed on by word of mouth and usually by the still room book, wherein all of the remedies, formulas, types of herbs and their uses, sicknesses, and what was administered and to what effect, were recorded by the lady herself, or a scribe, for future use.

These books were highly treasured and passed from mother to daughter like a prized antique. They did not sit on a shelf and gather dust; they were continually being used and expanded. New methods and special shared recipes were carefully written.



Herb garden planning and planting was also included in the book. What dried herbs were on hand and the date each one was gathered, prepared and stored was recorded as well. The still room book was a complete guide to daily life. Not only a cookbook or just a herbal guide, but something of each and more, it contained drawings of herbs for identification, recipes and formulas for medicines, cosmetics, preserved foods, liqueurs, beers and ales, household products, along with advice on midwifery, animal husbandry and general care and cleaning methods for the household.

The still room was usually located near the herb garden, in a room set aside for that purpose, or even a small cottage, depending on the size of the estate or castle. Here would be the necessary equipment – the still for distilling sweet and soothing waters, baskets for gathering and harvesting, the mortar and pestle for grinding, wooden bowls and plates for sorting and mixing, hand crafted wooden casks for storing raw ingredients, the precious glass jars and bottles for storing the dried herbs, finished tinctures and oils. Spoons, sieves, scissors and knives would be essential here as in the kitchen. A large cask or cistern of fresh water was a necessity, as well as a source of heat. The room would likely be furnished with large tables for workspace, a bench or two, shelves and a drying rack (horizontal wooden slats or poles made into a frame to which one tied bundles of herbs to dry) was usually hung from the rafters and could be lowered and raised by ropes.

The still room frequently served as the infirmary for the household, therefore a few pallets or cots of some sort were a common addition. The still room was a dry and warm room, filled with the aroma of many drying herbs. Sunlight and excessive heat were detrimental to the herbs, therefore it was not bright with sunlight but rather dim and cosy.

A most pleasant place to work, methinks.

# *Treating Irritable Bowel Syndrome*

*By Richard Whelan, Medical Herbalist*

I must make it clear from the start that, in my experience and that of many others, the roots of true IBS are understood to be within a nervous system that has become too tense. It is no accident that IBS nearly always begins in the late teens or early twenties, because this is when a young adult must start confronting the world on their own terms, with all the considerable challenges that brings.

It is very normal for us to get too tense, but people process this differently. Some keep their tension in their heads and process it at a mental level. Some hold it in their neck and shoulders, or some other part of their body such as in their spine, their posture or their hands. Some people, especially those from the 'Bear' constitution, a subject introduced further at the end of this article, hold their tension in their digestive system, and especially in their bowel.

How a person might unravel a chronic knot of tension in their gut is discussed towards the end of this article, but, firstly, it equally needs to be made clear that many people who have been told they have IBS have been misdiagnosed. There are a number of common health problems that cause a collection of symptoms very similar to IBS. These problems, and how to treat them, are discussed first.

## **Food intolerance**

Many people have been misdiagnosed with IBS when, in fact, their problems are being caused by chronic food intolerances, which can cause all the same symptoms that IBS brings. In most such cases the problem started much earlier than the teens or early twenties and usually there are other signs of food intolerance in the health history, such as having had recurrent childhood infections in the ears, nose, throat or chest.

Another classic sign for food intolerance is any history of eczema or asthma, especially in early childhood.

## Worry About Food

Everyone with IBS symptoms worries about what they eat. In fact, anyone who gets an upset digestion for any reason automatically thinks about what they have been eating lately. This instinct to worry is hard-wired into our brains because it is an important survival mechanism. All animals have it; if we couldn't make the link between eating something injurious and then afterwards getting sick, we could never evolve in a world where some substances are beneficial to eat but many are not.

It doesn't matter how many times it happens, even if that same food was never a problem a thousand times before, when a person gets a bad patch of gut disturbance they will automatically think about, and suspect, what they've recently eaten. This point is so important to understand because anyone who has IBS symptoms must understand that they are going to be worried about what they eat.



If there really is a food intolerance, then that worry will eventually help to find and eliminate the culprit, but, if it is true IBS and the roots are much deeper into the nervous system, excess and unnecessary worrying about food will only end up making the person sicker.

I have met many people with IBS who have gone on incredibly restrictive diets but in the long run have only gotten into a worse level of health than where they were before they started. Partly, I think, this is because as the list of forbidden foods gets longer the chances of nutritional deficiencies gets higher, but largely it is because of the tension that gets created when you worry a lot about what you eat.

There are many extreme diet plans out there for IBS. Low fat, bland and monotonous diets were the thing for IBS when I came into practice in the late 1980s, but now, in recent years, it is diets that remove all starchy polysaccharides, i.e. carbohydrates with complex sugar particles that can become excessively fermented in the gut. If you have already looked into these diets you will know that they are very restrictive indeed.

If they simply didn't work it would not be a problem; people would hardly use and recommend them if they didn't help. The trouble is that they do work, at least temporarily, because if you remove all food substances that can be

fermented by bowel bacteria you will certainly get far less bloating as those foods move through your gut. If a person is sufficiently strict enough they effectively starve their gut microbiome – there is nothing there to ferment! Consequently, because they initially help, these types of diets have become increasingly popular, but at what cost?

The cost can be even higher levels of tension because, even when being completely strict on any kind of diet, people with true IBS eventually start to get bad patches again – but now that the whole focus of the treatment has been on removing foods, they assume the setback was the latest thing they had eaten and so tighten up their diet even further.

Some people end up eating a bare handful of foods and are harbouring suspicions on these as well. I've met many people in this situation who can be quite aware that they are worrying themselves sick but who just feel unable to break out of the self-reinforcing cycle of it all. You can end up very afraid of food with IBS.

If a person has true IBS, restricting difficult-to-digest foods will only ever be a partial solution. Becoming tenser about food when it is tension that is driving the problem in the first place is a certain recipe for trouble. You must address the cause, which means working on the nervous system as well as taking steps to improve the digestion. This is discussed in more depth further on.

## **Gut infection**

Some people who have all the symptoms of IBS can trace the origin of their troubles back to a gut infection that never properly went away. The name for a chronic infection of the gut is dysbiosis and, unlike the dramatic event of an acute gastroenteritis infection where everything gets purged, dysbiosis can come from many different kinds of parasites, fungi and bacteria that are able to take up residence in the digestive tract and then just not leave.

One of the most important questions you can ask a person with any kind of chronic illness is, "What happened or was happening in your life when you first got sick?" When dysbiosis is at the root of the 'IBS', there is often an answer to that question where the patient recalls getting a bad 'stomach bug' while they

were travelling somewhere or moving into a new environment. Such a person is usually a late arrival to their 'IBS' and had a perfectly normal gut in their early adult lives.

Unfortunately, it is not easy to test for dysbiosis. Everyone has enormous amounts of both good and bad bacteria growing in their guts, so taking stool samples for testing is rarely any practical help, unless you are simply ruling out parasites. Therefore, if the history fits, the best way to determine whether it is an issue may be by simply treating it and seeing what happens.

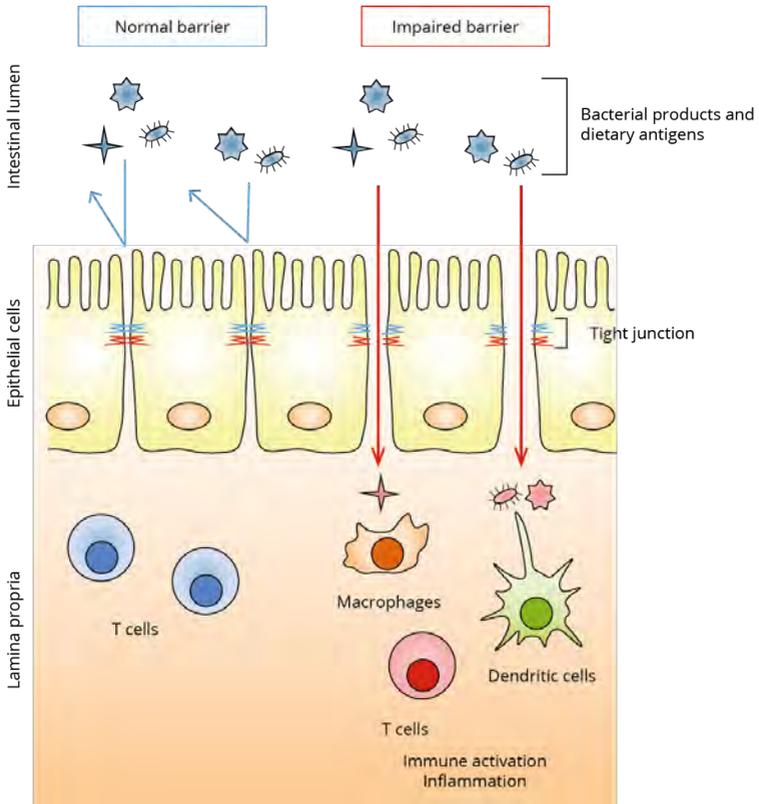
This process is called empirical medicine; it means that if you have a reasonable theory about what is causing a problem you then treat it accordingly, and if the patient gets better you were right, but if they don't you have to reconsider your hypotheses.

Fortunately, with herbal medicines we don't have to worry about doing any harm if the treatment isn't the right one. That said, don't use raw garlic, or use it sparingly, if you know your system can't handle it, but equally don't be shy of getting and using plenty of wormwood if this sounds like the path you need to try. [You can find more information about dysbiosis and treatments on Richard's website.]

## **Leaky gut**

Picture the lining of the digestive tract as being like a fine-meshed sieve that is able to absorb food but only when it has been reduced down to tiny particles within a thin liquid called chyme. A 'leaky gut' is the presence of tiny holes in that sieve, which allow particles of food that are larger than they should be to filter through into the blood. This in turn can cause an immune reaction, which can bring on the exact same symptoms of IBS, such as bloating, discomfort, altered bowel function, etc.

Imagine falling on concrete whilst running and grazing your skin, not to the point of serious blood loss (in the case of the bowel this would be the example of an actual ulcer, as discussed below) but just in the form of a significantly damaged surface layer. Now imagine that every day, and several times a day, you were to rub a lot of juicy, caustic substances over that graze. You can see how it just wouldn't get a chance to heal, and this is exactly what can happen with a 'leaky gut'.



Unlike food intolerance and gut infection, there may not be any obvious clues in the history to point towards a leaky gut, so in this case we again may need to practise empirical medicine to rule it out as a potential cause. Fortunately, we have in nature one substance that will virtually always help it to heal:

### Slippery elm powder

Slippery elm powder can form a literal bandage over a 'graze' in the gut. If you will try it for yourself then I suggest you mix a little into water and then put it on to the skin of your hand. You will soon feel how it makes a sticky but incredibly soft and soothing kind of 'gel'. Doing this experiment helps to better understand how it can heal your gut lining when needed.

Exactly as you would stop rubbing things against a wound for it to heal, so you must 'apply' the slippery elm in frequent and robust quantities to really assess how much it may help. Only a few days will be required to know if it is the right action because the relief from finally getting a bandage onto a leaky gut should be highly noticeable!

## Constipation

If someone swings from diarrhoea to constipation and then back again, that certainly may be true IBS, if not one of the other common health problems just mentioned. However, if they really only get constipation, bloating, etc, but no real looseness or urgency, unless they take some kind of laxative then, well, it may just be constipation.



Something happened in the last few decades whereby people who would have previously understood their problems being due to constipation have been given the IBS-C label. To be honest, I've never really understood this. The patients who present with constipation have such clearly different histories and symptoms to those who get the classic frequency and urgency of true IBS that it baffles me as to why it should have been put under the same umbrella. Is it because by the time you have seen your doctor and a specialist and paid many hundreds of dollars to rule out anything nastier it sounds better to give you a 'syndrome' than something a bit more ordinary?

Constipation is a problem that has always affected people and it can cause a great deal of unnecessary misery. Older people especially can get somewhat obsessed about being sure to get their bowels cleared because they have lived long enough and have enough war wounds from life to know that if their bowel isn't properly emptied every day then everything else feels so much worse. Sometimes constipation happens because the muscles in the bowel just don't move that well and sometimes it is from the muscles in the bowel being too tight to move freely. Sometimes constipation comes from being born with a longer section of the bowel or a twist or turn somewhere it shouldn't be (which is more common than people realise) and sometimes constipation comes from benign polyps in the bowel that block the transit of wastes.

Whatever the cause of constipation, a person who has it will eventually get bloated, tired, irritable and out of sorts, and it is these whole-body effects that seem to get it confused with IBS. If the 'IBS' is actually constipation then most

certainly use herbs to help, starting with plantago (psyllium) husks. If the plantago is not enough by itself to sort things out then consider using herbal laxatives as well. Of course, it is never ideal to be dependent on anything, but it is far better to have to take a small dose of herbal laxatives whenever you need than to suffer the miseries of constipation.

Yellow dock is the gentlest of the bowel cleansing herbs. Again, if it is not sufficient by itself, and the only way to know is to try and see, then go to the next step, which is the potent *Cascara sagrada*. So long as the cascara is fresh and well prepared from properly aged herb, it should clean out the most stuck and stubborn bowel.

## **Endometriosis**

Endometriosis is a difficult and increasingly common problem for many women. They can experience endometriosis in a number of ways, including symptoms of bloating, bowel disturbance, etc, when endometrial tissue has grown outside of the uterus and caused adhesions to form into the bowel. Symptoms can occur throughout the month when adhesions are involved, but when endometriosis is a primary cause significant worsening of symptoms immediately prior to, and/or during the period, can be expected. However, it should also be noted that true IBS can make the symptoms of endometriosis much worse, so it goes both ways.

## **Physical bowel disease**

Physical bowel disease brings up the most unpleasant possibilities and it may have to be considered, but, before going on, you should know that if you have already had your symptoms for years without them getting consistently worse, then you can probably already exclude physical bowel disease based on the fact that such conditions almost never lurk around without getting worse, especially for the direst possibility of them all, i.e. bowel cancer.

Likewise, people with diverticulitis, ballooning 'pockets' from the bowel wall, always end up getting acutely unwell at some point and so get their condition diagnosed from an emergency hospital visit when the necessary tests are performed. Likewise, both Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis present with

such extreme inflammation when they are in their relapsing stages that most people with these diseases end up getting a definitive diagnosis by virtue of needing specialised care.

If you have been to a gastroenterologist you may have already had a colonoscopy, in which case you can be sure that all the dangerous stuff has been ruled out. However, you should know that a colonoscopy is not sensitive enough to detect the tiny tears of a leaky gut and nor will it be able to exclude dysbiosis or food reactions as a driver for the condition. All it may be able to say is that you have low-grade inflammation, which can be caused by any of the conditions described above.

## **Treating True IBS**

If you are sure that the problem is true IBS, then there are several stages of treatment that are recommended to try. None of what follows will cure things overnight, but many people find these things help a great deal, and the way you make the biggest and most lasting turnarounds with true IBS is to find those things that clearly can make a positive difference and then to keep patiently using them.

### **Stage 1: Improve Digestion**

For many people with IBS, one of the best ways to help the health of the bowel is to improve the health of the upper digestive system. The following steps are easy to do and will quickly make a positive difference if this is an area that really does need some help.

#### **1) Before eating, take some bitters**

The use of 'bitters' a few minutes before food is a powerful and proven way to improve the function of the whole digestive system. Taking a dose of bitters causes an immediate increase in the production of digestive juices and increasing the flow of digestive fluids effectively primes the 'fire' of digestion so the body is able to better break down and absorb the goodness from its food.

Bitters obviously taste bitter, and this is initially a shock to a system that is not used to it, but people quickly adapt and many even grow to enjoy the experience. Initially, it is felt most palpably in the mouth, but the effect of the

bitters goes right down into the organs of digestion; the stomach, liver and pancreas.

Bitters are a safe, potent and inexpensive treatment to try (only tiny amounts are required, so there is no great material cost for the medicine). There are many good options, but one of the best of all bitter digestive tonics is from the root of the gentian plant. [How to use gentian is described on Richard's website in more detail: <https://www.rjwhelan.co.nz/herbs%20A-Z/gentian.html>.]

## **2) Slow down**

People with true IBS always have too much tension in their digestive systems and one of the most important ways to address this is to practise relaxing, and not rushing, during meals. Another result of eating your food more slowly is that your food will be in more contact with the enzyme amylase, something that we make in large amounts in saliva and in the pancreas. Amylase breaks down the starch in food, and it is starches that can especially cause problems with fermentation and bloating in the digestive tract when they have not been digested well.

Another byproduct of slowing down when eating is that we will generally eat less, and for many people, overeating is one of the sure things that will worsen their IBS. When we eat quickly, we don't realise that we have had enough to feel full because it takes a while for signals from stretched nerve fibres in the stomach to signal satiety to the brain. To help slow down, it can help to have a good chat or read a book while you eat.

## **3) After eating, drink GI tea**

One of the best medicines that has been seen to help people with IBS is from a European formula that has been used since antiquity to improve digestion and relieve symptoms of bloating and discomfort. We call it GI tea and it is simply a combination of equal parts, or weights, of chamomile flowers, fennel seeds and caraway seeds.



The method to make the tea is very simple and just once or twice a day is often enough to make a positive difference. Take 2–3 heaped teaspoons of the combined herbs and place them in a teapot, or a saucepan, anything that you can cover, and then leave for a good 10 minutes. Adding a teaspoon of honey is perfectly OK. You strain the tea through a tea strainer or some fine cloth like muslin and, importantly, sip it whilst it is nice and fresh so you absorb plenty of the volatile oils that relax and heal the gut.

## **Assessment of Stage 1**

You should be able to honestly assess if these steps are making a positive difference in as little as a few days to a week or so, but be careful to assess their benefit over the whole timeframe, not just when you are having a bad patch.

If you think it made no real difference then don't despair – nothing works for everyone – but you should put these treatments aside and go on to try stage 2.

However, if you believe that they made a clear and positive difference overall, then you should know that the longer you take these steps the more they will be likely to help, so just keep going and, when you are ready, slowly start to reintroduce foods that you have been avoiding, as being able to digest them better is likely to mean that you will be far less reactive to them and it will help to reinforce to you that you are on the right track.

If you have received some benefits but they are only moderate, then take this as a positive sign that you are on the right track and keep the treatment going, but now also include stage 2 at the same time.

## **Stage 2: Improve Bowel Health**

### **Probiotics**

Probiotics can certainly help true IBS and should be tried with an open mind, especially if you can obtain one or more of the strains that have been specifically tested and shown to be beneficial for IBS.

If you have already tried increasing fermented foods or have taken a probiotic and felt it may have made your symptoms worse, then you should probably take an empirical 'try and see' course of the herb wormwood, as you may have an overgrowth of bad bugs in your system that are reacting with displeasure to

you trying to introduce some more friendly residents. This subject was touched on above as a potential root cause of IBS-type symptoms.

## **Plantago husks**

Plantago (*Plantago psyllium*) is one of the only substances in nature that you can give to one person with diarrhoea and another with constipation and expect there to be a good chance for it to benefit both.

Plantago is not absorbed into your body whatsoever, so every time you take it you will eliminate it in its entirety, but along the way it forms a soft, water-retentive, spongy mass that effectively massages itself throughout the entire bowel. In the case of overly loose stools, this action can eventually bring about some stability to the rapid transit that happens with diarrhoea, and, in the case of a blocked or lazy bowel, it will usually assist in a natural bowel elimination without needing any harsh laxatives.

You must be prepared to experiment with the dose to feel how your bowel responds. Take from as little as two heaped teaspoons once a day up to 4 heaped teaspoons twice a day and, ideally, get the 'husks' rather than the ground herb.

The challenge with plantago is that you must try it to see how it helps and this can be a daunting prospect for some people with IBS because they have grown to fear fibre from negative experiences where they have previously taken a fibre supplement, or simply eaten more fruit or vegetables than usual, and then had a marked increase in bowel motions with the associated urgency and discomfort that this can bring.

Plantago most certainly is a fibre and there is a very good chance that it will initially cause an increase in bowel activity, but I encourage anyone with IBS to persist with it for at least one week to find out for themselves if that initial over-activity does not quickly improve and for there then to be a decrease in their IBS symptoms. Moving wastes through the bowel in a timely manner can be of great help to improving bowel health and this is something that plantago excels at.

## **Assessment of Stage 2**

If you do not feel any benefit from taking the probiotics, then you should at least finish what you started, but don't keep buying them on faith. Likewise, if you feel you have given plantago husks a fair trial but they haven't helped, or they make things worse even after you have had a chance to adapt to them, do not continue on. Don't give up on yourself if this is what has happened. Some people with real IBS need to significantly unwind their nervous tension before they can make any real headway. This is not easy, either, but it's not impossible and this subject is introduced next in stage 3.

If, on the other hand, you believe that the steps of stage 2, either the probiotics or the plantago, or both, have much improved things, then again be aware that the longer you use them the more they will help, and continue on.

If you feel you are getting some benefit from stage 2 and/or stage 1, but it is only moderate, then by all means carry on with the treatments, but now add some further strategies as discussed next.

## **Stage 3: Work With The Nervous System**

When it comes to true IBS, what is potentially the most important subject, working with the nervous system, has been left till last because it's difficult, because there are no quick fixes, and because all the simpler physical conditions and potential physical treatments should be ruled out or tested out first. Remember, if you have received some benefits from improving your digestion and bowel health with any of the steps described above then don't stop now. Never leave out the 'body' part of treating mind-body conditions.

This article began with the statement that in my experience and that of many others the roots of true IBS are understood to be within a nervous system that has become too tense, and that it is no accident that IBS nearly always begins in the late teens or early twenties, because this is when a young adult must start confronting the world on their own terms, with all the considerable challenges that brings.

If this truly is the case, then how do we go about making a lasting shift in a too-tense nervous system? The answer is not simple, and it will take time and patience, but a person can greatly improve the health of their nervous systems if they set their minds to it and do the 'work'.

I am very aware, as I write this, that my entire patient population of people with IBS has been from the 'Bear' constitution. Bears are usually very strong characters in terms of their mental health. They may have never even thought of themselves as being particularly anxious because they can work out their problems internally and are less likely than others to spill over when they are in stress. Consequently, it may be a little difficult to now shift the attention, as I am about to do, towards an article that is clearly written for people suffering anxiety...

If you have true IBS and you are a Bear to boot, then please just take it from me that I make zero assumptions about the robustness of your mental health, and if I did it would only be to assume that it's strong! But if you are a Bear and you have IBS then you have too much tension in your gut.

If you need to work on your nerves to get well, or at least get better, then the best, most effective, most practical advice I can offer is in an article on anxiety and tension that has been written with care to be as accessible and doable as possible. Read more here:

[https://www.rjwhelan.co.nz/conditions/anxiety\\_tension.html](https://www.rjwhelan.co.nz/conditions/anxiety_tension.html)

*\* Please understand that I cannot personally advise you without seeing you in my clinic.*

**Visit Richard Whelan's website : [www.rjwhelan.co.nz](http://www.rjwhelan.co.nz)**

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## *Herbal Kitchen Vinegars*

***By Mary Allan, Medical Herbalist***

It is quite commonplace nowadays for people to put 1–2 tablespoons of neat apple cider vinegar (ACV) in a glass of water and drink it every morning. If this practice is way too much for you to even contemplate (you wouldn't be alone) or if you've tried it already and it's too strong on the palate, you can instead incorporate it into the diet, which I think is much more sensible. The following article explores different ways we can do that.

## **Herbal Medicine Making Basics**

Human beings have come up with many ingenious ways to effectively extract the medicinal attributes of plants into a form that we can incorporate easily into our daily lives. Hence, nowadays we can choose fresh herbs as well as teas, tinctures, powders, capsules and even wine and beer – and, of course, herbal vinegars.

The maceration or steeping method is often used, which involves placing the herb (later to become the ‘marc’) into a liquid known as the ‘menstruum’ to release its properties. Commonly used menstrooms are water, alcohol, and fixed oils such as olive oil or vinegar. The menstruum acts as a ‘solvent’ which draws out the natural chemicals into the liquid. Each menstruum has its own particular virtues, and the type of menstruum selected depends largely on what you are wanting to use the end product for.

Vinegar is a useful solvent which tends to be good at extracting minerals from the herbs. On top of this, as a digestive aid it promotes the absorption of important nutrients when taken with food. Vinegar is also a preservative so it keeps well (unlike a tea or water based extraction). A vinegar that is stored well can easily keep for a couple of years. Vinegar is good for those who want something that keeps well, but for whatever reason cannot take alcohol.

### **Buying Vinegar**

When shopping for apple cider vinegar, choose an organic one if possible because commercial apple orchards use a lot of questionable chemical sprays. I prefer to buy New Zealand made to support local growers and manufacturers. For health benefits it is very important to select an unrefined, naturally fermented apple cider vinegar that has been made with the ‘mother’ – a colony of beneficial bacteria similar to a ‘scooby’. I remember many years ago when I lived on a winery, the ‘mother’ in the winemaker’s vat was so impressive I wish I had filmed it. It must have been about 4 metres in diameter as it floated in the vat, making the most delicious vinegar I have ever tasted!

### **Notes on making vinegars:**

- The tougher leaves of herbs work well for this, e.g. thyme, rosemary, sage, etc. Delicate flowers such as nasturtium flowers tend to just collapse into the vinegar. You can use them if you really want to – just put them in the top of your herb mix, and fish them out after a couple of days.

- Using a plastic lid stops the vinegar from corroding a metal lid – which then gets stuck and you'll never get the lid off. If you don't have a plastic lid, you can just stick a bit of old bread bag or some greaseproof paper between the lid and jar to stop the vinegar eating away the metal and causing issues.
- If you drink ACV regularly with water, use a straw to protect your teeth! You can buy stainless steel ones now so you don't have to use plastic-polluting throwaway ones.

## **SALAD VINEGAR**

- Jam-size jar with a plastic lid
- Real apple cider vinegar
- Fresh garlic
- Fresh thyme
- Fresh rosemary (optional)

### **Method**

1. Peel 3–5 cloves of garlic and place in the bottom of a jar. Pick a generous sized fresh sprig of thyme, rub briskly between the hands and place in jar. Add some rosemary as well. Also black pepper if you wish. The jar should be loosely packed about one-third full of herbs.
2. Now fill the jar with your vinegar and allow it to macerate for up to 4 weeks. Giving it a shake every day or two will help it to release its goodies into the vinegar. You can start using it before the month is up if you can't wait.
3. Once you've completed the maceration process, strain and store in a glass bottle with a label that includes date and ingredients.

To use, mix with a healthy oil of your choice; olive oil tastes particularly good with this blend of herbs. Pour liberally on salads, brassicas (which contain lots of calcium) and cooked vegetables.

**Benefits:** Improves digestion and absorption of nutrients, including calcium. The herbs garlic and thyme contain antimicrobial actions and thus supports a healthy immune system. If you're feeling a bit under the weather, try a tablespoon in a tall glass of hot water, with honey and some fresh chilli. Thyme and garlic also have an affinity with the lungs; this is useful if you catch a cold or are suffering from respiratory congestion.

## **MINERAL-RICH VINEGAR**

You can make a mineral rich vinegar by incorporating nutrient-dense (fresh or dried) herbs into the vinegar. Nettle leaf is particularly rich in minerals, but also explore garden runaways and wild greens such as parsley, nasturtium leaves, dandelion leaves, chickweed (make sure you identify this correctly; there are some look-a-likes that will make you sick!), puha, fat hen. There are many more I'm sure you can come up with.

### **Method**

1. Three-quarter fill a jar with a blend of nutrient-dense herbs, as well as some tasty ones.
2. If you eat organic eggs, keep the eggshells aside, then bake off a few in the oven to dry them. Crush them into the top of the jar, and the vinegar will dissolve them in a couple of weeks. They don't taste of anything, but it's a great way to get absorbable calcium, and just seems more wholesome than the ground-up cows bones that many supplements are made from.
3. Fill the jar with vinegar and seal.
4. Give a shake every day or two, macerating for a month or more.
5. Strain, label and bottle.

Take a tablespoon a day for a mineral-rich tonic. You can also use this in your diet by mixing into salad dressings.

## **FIRE CIDER**

Fire cider is a traditional folk remedy from the US with the name coined by herbalist Rosemary Gladstar in the late 1970s. Rosemary taught hundreds of students how to make it from 1978-1987 and it was also published in a couple of her books. There are now untold varieties of fire cider. It is a flexible recipe designed to be adapted to taste and season, using what you have on hand. Below is the original recipe from an article from Rosemary Gladstar which is available freely on the internet.

### **Medicinal Benefits**

Fire cider is an 'oxymel' – that is, a blend of vinegar and honey (yum). The addition of honey adds further medicinal benefits to the vinegar and herbs. In New Zealand we are spoilt for choice, with a wide range of lovely, raw, medicinally active honeys available, manuka being the most well known. When we mix honey with hot spices and vinegar, the result is an incredibly delicious, sweet, spicy, hot concoction that can be taken at the very first sign of a cold, many times stopping it in its tracks. This oxymel remedy is very popular.

## In Support of Herbal Lore

In the more recent past this powerful kitchen remedy has been (and continues to be) the subject of fiery lawsuits and corporate greed as the US herb company Shire City Herbals claimed and trademarked the name fire cider a few years ago. This is despite the fact that fire cider has been an integral part of herbal lore (not law!) in the US herbal folk tradition for decades, as herbalists and small herbal businesses have been using the name freely since the 1970s. An anti-trademark movement was formed a couple of years ago as the battle continues, with thousands of grass roots herbalists and people in support. A court date has been set for March 25, 2019 with the intent to free fire cider from trademark restriction. I'll drink to that! Visit [www.freefirecider.com](http://www.freefirecider.com) for updates.

## ORIGINAL FIRE CIDER RECIPE

- ½ cup grated fresh horseradish root
- ½ cup or more fresh chopped onions
- ¼ cup or more chopped garlic
- ¼ cup or more grated ginger
- Chopped fresh or dried cayenne pepper (whole or powdered) 'to taste'. 'To taste' means it should be hot, but not so hot you can't tolerate it. Better to make it a little milder; you can always add more pepper later if necessary.
- Optional ingredients: turmeric, Echinacea, cinnamon, etc.

## Method

1. Place herbs in a preserving jar and cover with enough raw, unpasteurised apple cider vinegar to cover the herbs by at least 3–4 inches (7.5–10cm). Cover with a tight-fitting lid. Place jar in a warm spot and leave for three to four weeks. Best to shake every day to help in the maceration process.
2. After three to four weeks, strain out the herbs and reserve the liquid. Add honey 'to taste'. Warm the honey first so it mixes in well. "To taste" means your fire cider should taste hot, spicy and sweet.
3. Rebottle and enjoy! Fire cider will keep for several months unrefrigerated if stored in a cool pantry, but it's better to store in the refrigerator if you have room. (Ref: <http://freefirecider.com/rosemarys-story/>)

*Mary is a medical herbalist and yoga therapist based in Auckland. She also runs Thyme Heal, a small herbal products business that makes potent healing remedies. Mary also works for the Southern Institute of Medical Herbalism (SIMH). Contact Mary at: [clinic@solsticeherbs.co.nz](mailto:clinic@solsticeherbs.co.nz) or [mary@thymeheal.co.nz](mailto:mary@thymeheal.co.nz)*



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## *Rare Tropical Fruit*

*By Marilyn Wightman*

Here, in New Zealand, folk will be into processing the last of the summer harvest, be it lifting garlic and potatoes, drying lemon verbena and bay leaves, infusing needed herbs for tinctures and oils or bottling and freezing the harvest from the vegetable and fruit gardens. Which brings to mind the inspiring stop-off last year when on the Australian Herb Conference tour with Alison and Peter Salleras at First Forest Farm. They've been there since 1983 on their 220 hectare hilly property at Tully.

Having left the 'dry tropics' of the Townsville to Brisbane area, we were nearing Cairns, so in a climate that is designated 'wet tropics'. Translate that into a very wet monsoon/summer season with four metres of rain expected to fall. The occasional cyclone comes inland, too, which can damage growing plants and livelihood. The Salleras learnt after the first devastation of the 1986 cyclone to create a special V-shaped pole system to grow and train fruiting vines along. These can then be untensioned and laid flat in the event of a threatening cyclone. The whole farm uses solar power, and springs further up the hilly slopes provide gravity-fed water supply and power farm sheds.

A handy, passenger-carrying trailer fitted out with seats was hitched onto the tractor and we were taken on a tour round the farm. Some fruit trees, heavily laden with ripening crops, were covered to protect them from the eight varieties of bats that live in this area (all that yummy fruit must be a headache to protect, just like we have to guard against possums in New Zealand). Another natural hazard is the cassowary. This large bird, because of its sheer size and strong, three-toed clawed feet, can be lethal. We were told the story of a pet dog being stabbed in the throat and killed with that large claw.

Belonging to the Rare Tropical Fruit Grower Association, the Salleras are as passionate about their plants as we herbies can be about our speciality. They are well known and respected for their knowledge. It is great to have the privilege of visiting such people who willingly share their bounty with whole-hearted enthusiasm. On their farm there are areas of well-established crops that provide plentiful income-supplying fruit. Having been in the horticultural

industry for 35 years, they have set crops for their living but also have several 'fruit salad' rows where new varieties are being trialled to ascertain whether they can provide a new income source.

Proven crops include black sapote. This South American shrub has apricot-sized fruit which softens when ripe. Peter described it looking like axle grease. Could it be said, more sympathetically, a custard-like texture when added to whipped cream that makes a delicious mousse dessert? It grows well from Brisbane north and the wholesale price can be \$9 a kilo.

Breadfruit has a leaf that is commonly replicated on tropic-looking fabric and art. When the fruit is green and hard it is eaten as a vegetable, much like potato. As it has no seeds, it can only be propagated by suckers.

Back at the nursery packing shed, Alison cut into a large jackfruit. This has been bred from the breadnut tree on the Fly River in Papua New Guinea. One fruit can get to a weight of 30 kilos. While there are lots of different varieties, Alison and Peter grow their preferred 'crunchy' types. Opening up the fruit, about the size of a very large watermelon, she had to separate out the glutinous, sticky sap to get to the yellow flesh – the crunchy bit. It was delicious, the texture akin to a pineapple but smoother. To give an idea of the flavour, Wrigley's Juicy Fruit originally used jackfruit for flavour.

We were shown pea aubergine, vanilla, sweet leaf bush, humming bird tree, gotu kola, pepper, red cherry guava, sour apple, lychee, African raspberry and many more.

What they grow is destined for a niche market. It is transported to Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne. Commercially, they supply abiu, banana bell, breadfruit, chempedak, dragon fruit, durian, jackfruit, kekedang, mangosteen, plantain, pommel, rambutan, soursop, star apple, wax jambu and white guava.

### **FROSTY MANGO**

When next travelling between Townsville and Ingham in Queensland you must stop off and have a tropical fruit ice cream. This well known shop, Frosty Mango, is very popular. The flavour selection is pretty large – black sapote, pineapple, star fruit, mango, carambola, Brazil cherry, abiu, jacoticaba, pawpaw, coconut, rambutan, custard apple, jackfruit, soursop, passionfruit, lychee, logan, banana, star apple and rollinia. Selecting a flavour to try, the busload of herbies on the Australian Conference 2018 tour appreciated standing and licking a cone while reading the large wall display describing all these tropical fruits. Ice cream heaven.

# HFNZ & Society News

## *Recipes from...* The NZ Native Herb Workshop

presented by Jan Smith, and held at the HFNZ AGM, Nov 2018, in Stratford

### Horopito Hummus

1 can chickpeas	1 clove garlic
¼ cup infused horopito oil	2 tablespoons lemon juice
½ teaspoon ground cumin	¼ teaspoon smoked paprika
Salt to taste	

In a food processor, purée the chickpeas and garlic with the oil, lemon juice, cumin, paprika and  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt until smooth and creamy. Add 1–2 tablespoons water as necessary to achieve the desired consistency.

### Horopito Oil

Chop up several bunches of horopito (*Pseudowintera colorata*) leaves and add to ½ cup light oil, such as sunflower. Heat the oil gently for about 5 minutes. This releases the citric flavours and aromatic oils from the horopito. Remove from heat, cover, and let infuse for several hours. Strain and use.

### Kawakawa Digestive Smoothie

4 large kawakawa leaves	½ green kiwifruit
½ banana	2 teaspoons cocoa powder
1 tablespoon chia seeds	1 teaspoon ground ginger
1 teaspoon cinnamon	plain yoghurt

Blitz until smooth.

### Herbal Pesto

2 cups green herbs	1/3 cup sunflower seeds
1/3 cup pumpkin seeds	1/3 cup nuts
4 tablespoons lemon juice	2/3 cup oil
½ teaspoon salt	2 teaspoons kelp

Toast the nuts and seeds. Blitz all together.

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# MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

I/We wish to apply for membership to the **Herb Federation of New Zealand Inc**  
(PLEASE PRINT)

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss \_\_\_\_\_

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INDIVIDUAL	\$35.00
FAMILY (For two members) Add \$5.00 for each additional member.	\$40.00
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Payment by direct credit is available. Our bank is Westpac, Account No. 03-1549-0030463-00. Please make sure you name is identified with the payment.

- Please tick if you require a receipt.
- Please tick if you want your details kept confidential. (Your name will only appear on any membership list required for official **HFNZ** business.)

**Please send your application to:** The Treasurer,  
Herb Federation of New Zealand, PO Box 128077, Remuera, Auckland 1050

For office use

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# The Aims and Objectives of the Federation

- To promote greater interest in herbs and an appreciation of the value of herbs and their safe use.
- To increase knowledge through education.
- To assist in maintaining the diversity of herb collections.
- To protect and promote the use of herbs, now and for future generations.
- To encourage accurate identification of plants and the use of botanical names.

Activities we promote include Herb Awareness Week events, establishment and maintenance of herb gardens and plant collections, seed and plant exchange, workshops and booklets on specific topics, visits to interesting gardens, nurseries and garden centres, exchange of newsletters.

Long term aims include the possibilities of a national garden and support for recognized herbal qualifications.

## CONTRIBUTIONS FOR WINTER 2019

**Herb Society members are invited to submit  
contributions for the next edition of Herbnews**

Deadline for next edition: MAY 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019

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