

# Herbal Energetics and Actions



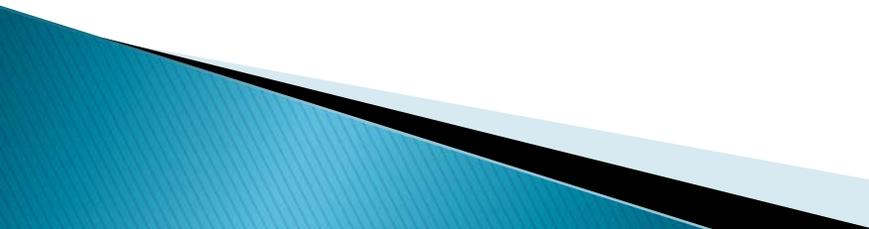
By Paul Bergner  
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# Paul Bergner

- ▶ Practicing natural healing and medical herbalism since 1973.
  - ▶ Publishing the *Medical Herbalism* journal since 1989.
  - ▶ Supervising faculty in teaching clinics in Colorado and/or Oregon 1996–present
  - ▶ Trained more than 350 students through 300+ hour residencies in teaching clinics. More than 500 entry level students by distance learning.
  - ▶ Director: North American Institute of Medical Herbalism.
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- ▶ The student or practitioner at every level must be engaged in ongoing and repeated tasting, testing, and sampling of their medicines.

# Maximize direct experience

- ▶ Sample herbs every day.
  - ▶ Continue to test for yourself what you learn in books.
  - ▶ Learn how to interview the person who says that an herb was helpful. “How so? What did you take? How long? What dose?” Etc.
  - ▶ Be part of a learning community, and maximize shared sampling, testing, and tasting in that community, and sharing of the results.
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# How to taste an herb

»» What questions will you ask?

# The stages of hands-on learning

- ▶ Sample the herb, and feel its initial sense impression in the mouth.
  - ▶ Then feel the immediate sense of the herbs effect throughout the system, feel changes in your pulse
  - ▶ Sense its effects on your mind.
  - ▶ Wait quietly, and at the 10–20 minute point, assess the total effect the sample had on you.
  - ▶ Take the herb in mild to moderate doses 2–4 times a day for at least 3 days. Notice the difference or exaggeration of effects by the end of day 3.
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# Questions to ask yourself

- ▶ Is this herb hot or cold? Does it warm me up or cool me off?
  - ▶ Is this herb moistening or drying? Does it allay my thirst or make me thirsty? Does it moisten or dry my mucous membranes?
  - ▶ What imaginal impressions does this herb evoke in my mind when I take it?
  - ▶ Does it make me feel more fortified and toned up, or more relaxed in systemic tension?
- 

- ▶ Does my energy move in a direction in my body? Rising up toward the head? Falling down toward my feet? Floating up toward my surface? Sinking in toward my core?
  - ▶ Does the herb seem to have any tissue or organ affinities?
  - ▶ Do I experience any medicinal effects or side effects?
- 

# Instructions for sampling

- ▶ Sample the herbs at a time when you are relaxed and aware. Feel your breath moving in and out, be aware of your pulse and your heartbeat, and pay attention to your mood and your general state of tension or relaxation. Be aware of and feel the life force within your body and your mind.
  - ▶ Start with a small dose of the tea or the tincture. Just sip the tea, or take 1–3 drops of the tincture. Put larger doses of tincture in a little water to avoid the harsh initial effects of the alcohol.
  - ▶ Close your eyes and pay close attention to the taste and any effects or reactions you experience.
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- ▶ After 10 minutes, take a little larger dose,  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  a cup of the tea, or 10–15 drops of the tincture.
- ▶ Again, pay attention to any effects you might feel.
- ▶ Answer as many questions as you can on the journaling form. If you didn't notice anything in one or more categories of observation, just say so.
- ▶ *If this is an herb you are studying in depth, repeat this process, with the above medicinal dose, 2–4 times a day for 3 days.*

# Why herbal energetics?

The detection of the warming, cooling, moistening, or drying effects of medicines is part of every traditional system of herbal medicine. It is essential

- To derive medicinal benefit when such properties are useful
  - To prevent adverse constitutional effects when those properties would cause discomfort or injury
  - To make energetically balanced pairs and formulas that may be taken in greater quantity or for a longer time.
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# What is hot?

**“Heat” in the constitution may mean**

- Higher metabolism
- Increased circulation
- The heat of infection
- The heat of inflammation
- Heat in response to external stimulus cold water or wind, food, herb (quality or quantity), climate

**Note:** “Hot” herbs or foods do not all do the same thing, they may affect any of the above and are not necessarily interchangeable.

# What is cold?

**“Cold” in the constitution may mean**

- Slower metabolism
- Decreased circulation
- Decreased digestive capacity
- Cold “invasion” from the environment
- Response to other stimuli, including diet or herbal medicines

**Note:** All “cold” herbs do not do the same thing

# What is moist?

**“Moist” in the constitution may mean**

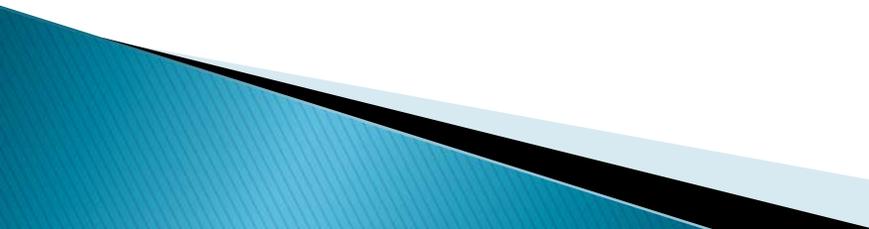
- Accumulation of dampness in the system
- Pathological edema
- Easy water retention
- Plentiful clear urine, not much thirst
- Loose, damp, or oily stool
- Moist or mucous membranes, easy expectoration, easy salivation
- Oily skin

# What is dry?

**“Dry” in the constitution may mean**

- Dry skin
- Dry mucous membranes with poor expectoration
- Dry mouth
- Scanty, concentrated dark yellow urine
- Inability to retain water and quench thirst.
- Tissues dry, with shrunken tissues.

# Some traditions with energetic concepts

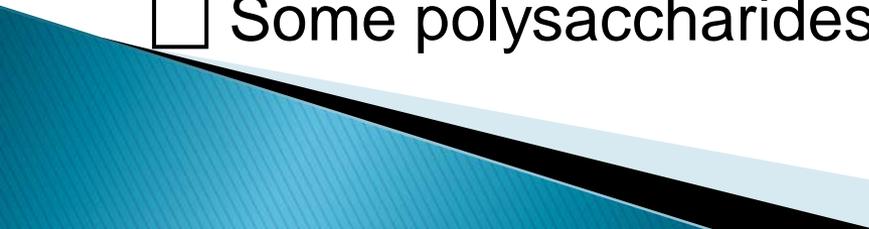
- Mesopotamian and Egyptian, the oldest known
  - Ayurveda from South Asia
  - Greek, Roman, and Arabic (four humors)
  - European folk medicine
  - British professional herbalism
  - Central and South American folk medicine
  - North American folk medicine
  - North American physician level herbalism
- 

# Properties and uses of demulcents

- Cooling, moistening, soothing, nourishing
- May enhance immune surveillance
- May be used topically for any dry inflammation (emollient)
- May be applied for inflammation of the orifices
- Internal use may cause reflex moistening in membranes
- Chronic internal use may increase capacity to retain water. ***Use to moisten a dry constitution***
- May be used in formulation to counter the drying or astringent effects of foods or herbs. (*Althaea* or small amount of licorice for teas; Licorice for tinctures.

- Topical: Burns, sunburn, eczema, psoriasis, poison ivy, any hot condition with pain and/or itching.
- Respiratory: As solo treatment for dry cough, or component of treatment for unproductive cough. Not for moist cough with lots of mucous.
- Digestive: Pain and inflammation anywhere in the digestive tract. Not when bloating and/or nausea are predominant. Enema for colitis.
- Urinary: for infection or inflammation anywhere in the urinary tract. Combine with other appropriate herbs. In some cases and simple of althea will soothe bladder pain.
- Reproductive: as douche

# Mucilage -- more than just slime

- Plant mucilage is nearly identical in composition to human mucous.
  - Its topical slimy effect yields some of its soothing properties, as it coats inflamed tissues.
  - Plant mucilage contains a vast array of plant polysaccharides, and each of these may have a specific effect on cell physiology.
  - Some polysaccharides are detected by the immune system and perceived to be bacterial coats. This can improve local or systemic immunity.
  - Some polysaccharides are taken up into cells and alter their physiology.
  - Some polysaccharides trigger cells to repair tissues.
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# Properties and uses of astringents

- May be either cool or warm depending on the herb.
- Can restrain secretions, including saliva, mucous, or blood, either topically or internally.
- May be used topically on skin or orifices for any boggy and swollen condition.
- May treat digestive complaints with diarrhea, bloating, watery discharge, ulceration, bleeding, mucous.
- Internal use may cause reflex “dumping” or water from the intercellular spaces, may reduce swellings.
- Chronic internal use may dry or correct and constitution which is excessively damp due to internal or climatic influences.

- Restrain diarrhea
- Restrain bleeding from digestive tract (yarrow, shepherd's purse)
- May restrain excessive menses
- Apply to canker sores
- Apply to hemorrhoids
- Apply to varicose veins
- May be useful in chronic skin infections and ulcerations.

# A Cardinal Rule

*Do not suppress discharges that are a normal part of the healing process.*

# Mucilage and cold water

***Herban legend: that mucilaginous plants must be extracted in cold water.***

## ***Facts:***

Hot water extracts mucilage and starch

Cold water extract some but not all mucilage but no starch.

Cold water may also extract other plant constituents, but generally not starch.

# *Althaea* -- Marshmallow

Discussed in previous weeks

A polycryst, multi use herbs for many systems.

Cooling and mucilaginous, with mild bitter secondary taste.

Use root or leaf. Use root for immune modulating properties.

May be added as a component to most teas to counter drying effects.

Combines well with honey for a syrup

# *Ulmus* -- Elm

The famous herb of commerce, Slippery elm, *Ulmus fulva*, is endangered due to deforestation and commercial use. (never girdle the main trunk of a tree when taking bark)

Almost any elm can be used similarly to make an adequate medicine

Elm powder gruels with hot water, honey and cinnamon for the upper GI

# Yarrow -- *Achillea spp.*

A true polycrest herb with many uses and applications

Cooling and drying, especially when used as cold preparation. (hot teas are more warming and diaphoretic).

Useful topically or internally for any of the purposes of an astringent.

Is also a powerful topical disinfectant.

Has specific ability to astringe bleeding when taken internally, any bleeding.

# Agrimony - *Agrimonia* spp.

- A warming astringent excellent for any of the internal applications of astringents.
  - Very useful for diarrhea or “Leaky gut” syndrome.
  - Has medicinal effects also on the liver (mild stimulant)
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# Useful resources on herbal energetics

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- The Energetics of Western Herbs* by Peter Holmes
- The Yoga of Herbs* by David Frawley
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# Recognizing hot or cold people

- ▶ Layers of clothing
  - ▶ Open posture (heat) vs. curled (cold)
  - ▶ Habitual layers of bedding
  - ▶ Preferred temperature of drink or food
  - ▶ Redness (heat) or paleness (cold) of face or tongue.
  - ▶ Faster pulse (heat) or slower (cold)
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# Working with hot or cold people

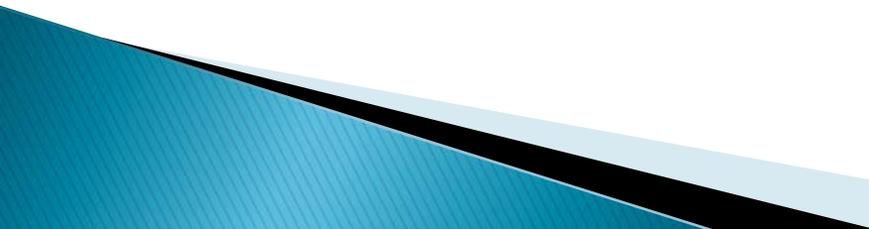
- ▶ If it is not environmental, constitutional heat or cold starts in the digestive tract.
- ▶ Digestive inflammation will create systemic inflammation and heat
- ▶ Cold, deficient digestion will cause constitutional cold through malabsorption.
- ▶ Begin first with the digestive tract
  - Food intolerance may cause heat in hot patient
  - Food intolerance may cause malabsorption, coldness and dryness in the cold patient.

- ▶ Warm the stomach to warm the system.
- ▶ The stomach is like a crock-pot, it should be warm and moist
- ▶ “Eating cooked foods is a species-specific to Homo sapiens as eating grass is to a cow.”

*Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human* Wrangham

- ▶ Cold water, ice water, or raw food at the start of a meal suppress digestive fire. Start the meal with a warm soup.
- ▶ Medicate soups and stews with warming herbs

# Foods

- ▶ Meats are important tonic foods for the cold person.
  - ▶ Most meats are warming in the upper part of the 1<sup>st</sup> degree
  - ▶ Lamb is warming in the lower part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> degree.
  - ▶ Pork is neutral in temperature, but is moistening. It is specific for the hot/dry person.
- 

# Foods

- ▶ Cooked bitter green vegetables are among the best foods to reduce heat in the digestive tract and the body.
  - ▶ Raw foods are cold, but hard to digest, and can cause cold injury to the digestion
  - ▶ Fruits are cool to cold, and retain these properties even if cooked or stewed. The cooked or stewed fruits are easy to digest.
- 

# Hot and cold herbs



# Degrees of hot/cold foods/plants

Degrees of hot and cold introduced in the West by the Roman Galen. Same kind of rankings in TCM.

## ▶ Herbs more like food

- First degree are mild and will not overheat or overcool. “somewhat warm/cool”
- Second degree are still food-like but stronger. “warm/cool”

## ▶ Herbs more like drugs

- Third degree are strong in humoral effect and will cause discomfort or imbalance with higher dose or prolonged use. “hot/cold or “very hot/very cold”
- Fourth degree are toxic, can injure tissue or life. “toxic”

# Minimizing side effects

- ▶ Avoid constitutional side effects by preferring foods and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> degree herbs.
  - ▶ Moderate the stronger effects of 3<sup>rd</sup> degree herbs by pairing with media or companion herbs that reduce the strong effect.
  - ▶ Moderate the 3<sup>rd</sup> degree herbs by using them in lower doses
  - ▶ Moderate 3<sup>rd</sup> degree herbs by using them for short periods of time.
- 

# Some popular cold herbs

- ▶ Bitters for digestion
  - ▶ Antifungal herbs for Candida. Pao D'arco
  - ▶ Antiparasitic herbs for parasites. Wormwood and black walnut
  - ▶ Detox herbs. The “blood-purifiers” are traditionally strong cold bitter herbs suited to warm and moist conditions, but contraindicated in cold, dry ones.
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# The injury of cold herbs

- ▶ *Life is warmth and cold is death and that is why the Creator has spread so many warming herbs across the earth. That is also why cold herbs should never be persisted in.”*

*Nicholas Culpepper*

- ▶ The primary injury of cold herbs is to the digestive fire, which then results in the entire system becoming cold through indigestion and malabsorption

# Some popular hot herbs

- ▶ **Allium** for CVD and Hypertension
- ▶ Cinnamon for diabetes
- ▶ **Curcuma** for pain
- ▶ **Zingiber** for pain
- ▶ Clove for parasites

These herbs are promoted for allopathic diagnoses with disregard for their 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> degree hot properties. They may cause discomfort through heat signs.

# Properties of some herbs we have studied

- ▶ Clove *hot*
- ▶ Allium *hot*
- ▶ Zingiber *hot*
- ▶ Commiphora warm
- ▶ Juniper warm
- ▶ Foeniculum warm
- ▶ Citrus warm
- ▶ Plantago cool
- ▶ Calendula cool
- ▶ Hypericum cool
- ▶ Althaea cool
- ▶ Achillea cool
- ▶ Taraxacum *cold*
- ▶ Hydrastis *cold*
- ▶ Artemisia *cold*
- ▶ Urtica neutral
- ▶ Avena neutral
- ▶ Matricaria neutral
- ▶ Equisetum neutral

# Warming the upper digestion

- ▶ **Allium**

May use in dietary amounts of ½ to 1 clove per meal, as powder, or cooked into food.

- ▶ **Foeniculum**

May chew on seeds, or sips the tea.

- ▶ **Zingiber**

Sips of ginger tea

- ▶ **Citrus.**

- ▶ **Clove.** See recipe above. Or ½ tsp of clove powder stirred into a little water for cold digestion with nausea

# Curry for “agni”

- ▶ 5 Tbls ground coriander seeds cool
- ▶ 2 Tbls ground cumin seeds warm
- ▶ 1 Tbls ground **Curcuma** hot
- ▶ 2 tsp ground **Zingiber** hot
- ▶ 2 tsp dry mustard hot
- ▶ 2 tsp ground fenugreek seeds warm
- ▶ 1 1/2 tsp ground black pepper hot
- ▶ 1 tsp ground cinnamon hot
- ▶ 1/2 tsp ground cloves warm
- ▶ 1/2 tsp ground cardamom hot
- ▶ 1/2 tsp ground chili peppers

# The energetic logic of curry

- ▶ Cool (coriander) 15 parts
- ▶ Warm (cumin, fenugreek, cardamom) 8 1/2 parts
- ▶ Hot (turmeric, ginger, mustard black pepper, cinnamon, cloves, chili) 8 1/2 parts

The hot stimulating spices are more than balanced by the cooling coriander. The net effect is stimulating and warm but not overheating.

# Warming the constitution with herbs

- ▶ For deep coldness in the system, always correct the digestion and diet.
- ▶ The following classic combination from Chinese medicine will warm the system
  - Cinnamon, **Zingiber, Foeniculum**
  - May take as tincture, powder, or tea.
- ▶ The following pair will powerfully warm the core and stimulate the repro system
  - Cinnamon 1 tsp, ginger, 1 tsp, clove ½ tsp
  - See dose chart on following slide

<b>Table One</b>		<b>Dose powder</b>	<b>Dose decoction</b>	<b>Modify heat</b>
<i>Allium sativum</i>	hot 3 dry 3	3-10 g		coriander, age, fry
<i>Capsicum</i>	hot 3 dry 2	50 mg to 1 g		milk/ghee
<i>Cinnamomum cassia</i>	hot 3 dry 2	1-3 g	2-5 g	fruit
<i>Curcuma longa rhizome</i>	hot 3 dry 3	1-3 g	3-10 g	licorice, citrus
<i>Eugenia</i>	hot 3 dry 3	.5 to 1 g	2-5 g	cold, moist
<i>Zingiber</i>	hot 3 dry 1	1-3 g	3-10 g	honey, olive oil

1 tsp = 2-3 grams

# Cooling with bitter herbs

- ▶ Cool the digestive tract with mild bitters such as **Calendula** and **Plantago**
- ▶ Cool digestive conditions with more pronounced heat with
  - **Taraxacum** root
    - May be taken as tea, tincture, and combined with other herbs
  - Oregon grape
    - Same as above
- ▶ Both these herbs are cold and may impair the digestion through bitter injury if taken in large doses or for long periods.

# Cooling with hot spices

- ▶ Throughout the tropics, hot spices are popular.
- ▶ They stimulate a cooling response in the body. The surface opens up to ventilate more heat.
- ▶ Capsicum, Zingiber

# Cooling with mild diffusives

- ▶ Diffusive means gently opens up the surface capillaries in a gentle and non-heating way
  - Lemongrass
  - Hibiscus
  - **Mentha** species.
    - Peppermint is warmer than spearmint
- ▶ Taken cold, they assist with environmental heat

# Cooling with “relaxants”

- ▶ These herbs relax the surface tension in the body, and open up the surface so the body can radiate out heat. With these herbs you get to “sweat for free.” These are often used for fever.
- ▶ Boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*)
- ▶ Elder (*Sambucus species*)

# Cayenne – *Capsicum* species

- ▶ The classic warming herb in U.S. history for the last 200 years.
- ▶ Added to formulas in 1 / 10 part to warm an otherwise cold combination of herbs and to stimulate digestion and circulation.
- ▶ The most famous warming formula in U.S. herbal history is from Samuel Thomson, the proportions were 1 pint of **Commiphora** tincture, with 1 ounce of **Capsicum** tincture poured into it. This would be 1 tsp of **Capsicum** added to 2 ounces of **Commiphora**

For most of the purposes cayenne was used for historically, ginger is a more acceptable substitute for the patients, conditions, and climate we experience today in north America. Most Americans today do not tolerate it well as a medicine.

# Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*)

- ▶ **Curcuma** possess powerful anti-inflammatory properties
- ▶ It can be used to replace anti-inflammatory medications, without the risk that they present when used chronically.
- ▶ Most patients will not take the powder due to its unpleasant taste, and to the heating effects
- ▶ Turmeric may be paired with ½ part licorice which helps reduce the bad taste and the dryness.
- ▶ It can be delivered in a medium of honey and citrus.

# The properties of some media

- Alcohol is **hot** and dry -- *tinctures*
  - Wine is **warm** and dry
  - Honey is **warm** and moist
  - Citrus juice is **warm** and moist
  - Ghee is **warm** and moist
  
  - Water (warm or cold) is **cold** and moist
  - Yoghurt is **cold** and moist
  - Vinegar is **cold** and dry
- 

# Oxymel

The traditional oxymel is made from honey and vinegar. Lemon can be used instead of vinegar.

- It is balanced warm cool moist and dry.
- It is often used for cough herbs.
- It can be made more moist by using lemon juice instead of vinegar

# Oxymel recipes

## #1 Tea

1 ounce of herb or herbal mixture

32 ounces of water. Simmer till 24 ounces of water remain. Strain. Add 4 ounces of vinegar (or lemon) add 4 ounces of honey. Simmer to mix everything

## #2 Tincture

1 pint apple cider vinegar or lemon

2 ¼ lbs honey

Simmer to consistency of syrup

Deliver tinctures at ratio of 1:3 tincture:oxymel

# The “corrigents” of Unani

▶ Artemisia	Anise
▶ Allium	cooked with coriander
▶ Althaea	honey and fennel
▶ Mahonia	grape sugar and cloves
▶ Capsicum	milk, ghee
▶ Citrus spp.	sugar and honey
▶ Commiphora	honey and cold items
▶ Curcuma	citrus juice
▶ Juniperus	honey and butter
▶ Matricaria	honey
▶ Mentha pip	honey, rose, violet
▶ Plantago	honey and lemon
▶ Zingiber	almond oil, honey

One or more corrigents is listed for each entry in a Unani materia medica. “correcting” humoral effects with other foods or herbs is a way of thinking in all traditional systems.

# Useful resources on herbal energetics

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- The Energetics of Western Herbs* by Peter Holmes
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# Actions and energetics

Since the passing of the Four Humors system, our concepts of energetics are contained in the categories of herbal actions.

- A review of a database of 240 Western herbs, correlating the Western actions with the herbs energetics, find much consistency.
- The following applies to herbs with simple actions, but some herbs may have mixed actions, such as yarrow, which has cooling bitters but also warming aromatic constituents.

# Bitter herbs are cool and dry

Taraxacum

Hops

Gentian

Oregon grape

and 18 other bitter herbs in the database

# Carminative herbs are warm and dry

Zingiber

Cayenne

Foeniculum

Mentha pip

and 7 other carminative herbs in the database

# Demulcent herbs are cool and moist

Althaea

Ulmus

Symphytum

Glycyrrhiza

and 5 other demulcent herbs in the database

# Astringent herbs are dry

But may be warm or cold

**Achillea** - cool

Geranium - cool

Quercus bark or leaves -- cool

Agrimonia -- warm

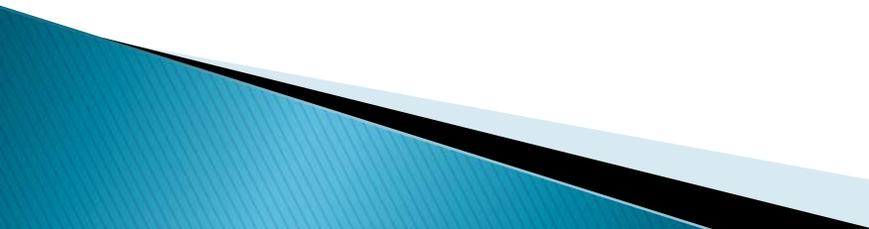
Myrica spp -- warm

Anemopsis -- warm

and 9 other astringent herbs in the database



# Other actions which are invariably dry

- Antiseptic: 13 herbs all dry
  - Antifungal: 7 herbs all dry
  - Antiparasitic: 4 herbs all dry
  - Nervine: 9 herbs all dry
  - Diaphoretics: 12 herbs all dry
  - Expectorants: 9 herbs all dry, except where complex actions were present.
  - Diuretics: 6 herbs all dry
  - Lymphatic: 10 herbs all dry and cold
- 

# Other herbs and actions

Anti-inflammatory herbs may be hot cold, moist, or dry.

Zingiber is hot and dry

Althaea is cool and moist

Plantago is cool

Glycyrrhiza is moist

Achillea is cold and dry.

and 9 other astringent herbs in the database

***Of the herbs in the database,  
only those classified as  
demulcents are moistening***



Practical Herbal Medicine for Daily Life  
By Paul Bergner  
North American Institute of Medical Herbalism



# Disk Eight

Digestive Herbs

# Bitters

- ▶ Bitter flavored herbs are “cooling, drying, and draining.”
  - ▶ Part of the draining effect is to promote the secretion of digestive substances.
  - ▶ A quick trick for indigestion is to take bitters, even in a small amount, 10 minutes before meals.
  - ▶ Persistent or habitual use leads to the drying and cooling of the tissues, and digestive injury.
  - ▶ Combine with warming carminatives, and/or demulcent herbs.
- 

# Some bitter herbs

- ▶ *Matricaria recutita*, *Anthemis nobilis* German chamomile/ roman chamomile
- ▶ *Taraxacum officinalis* dandelion root
- ▶ *Mahonia spp.* Oregon grape root
- ▶ *Achillea millefolium* yarrow

# Carminative herbs

- ▶ Warming and drying circulatory stimulants to digestive tract
- ▶ Promote peristalsis and expulsion of gas
- ▶ *Mentha spp.* mints
- ▶ *Zingiber officinalis* ginger
- ▶ *Foeniculum vulgare* fennel
- ▶ *Citrus spp.* (see recipe in week 1)

# Digestive anti-inflammatory

- ▶ *Matricaria* (chamomile)
  - ▶ *Mentha* (peppermint)
  - ▶ *Althea* (marshmallow)
  - ▶ *Calendula* (marigold)
  - ▶ *Plantago* (plantain)
  - ▶ *Achillea* (yarrow)
- 

# Fundamental herbal pair

- ▶ *Mentha* and *Matricaria*
- ▶ Combines bitter, carminative, antispasmodic, and anti-inflammatory effects in a simple pair.
- ▶ Make a triplet by adding: *Glycyrrhiza*, *Foeniculum*, *Althaea*, *Arctium*, or *Taraxacum*.

# Classic formula

- ▶ *Mentha*
  - ▶ *Matricaria*  
*Foeniculum*
  - ▶ *Glycyrrhiza*
  - ▶ Modify to patients or conditions by adding calendula, plantain, marshmallow, dandelion root, Oregon grape, or others.
- 

# Best form for digestive herbs

- ▶ Teas (decoctions)
- ▶ Powders
- ▶ Powders delivered in media such as applesauce, nut butters, etc.