

HERBAL SYRUPS

What are syrups?

A syrup is very simply a sugary mixture, and if you add herbs to it, it is a herbal syrup! Sugar is a preservative ingredient so syrups can be a good way of preserving fresh herbs to take later on when they are no longer in season.

When should you take them?

In herbal medicine syrups are commonly used to make improve the taste of medicine, to make herbal medicine appeal to children, or as excellent cough medicines in their own right. They can be a great way of encouraging somebody to use herbs as medicines by giving them something delicious but also beneficial to take. The bonus of making syrups is that you can also use them as an ingredient in your cooking, just for their flavour - try putting them on pancakes, ice cream, in refreshing summery drinks, or in a warm winter tea.

So, how to make one?

Syrups are really simple, and there are endless variations you can make once you are comfortable with how it is done. The essence of it is making a herbal sugary solution, which you can do with water and either sugar, honey or other syrups like date syrup, maple syrup or birch syrup. Then you add herbs to the mix at different stages depending on how delicate your chosen herbs are.

Recipe for a warming winter syrup (makes 500ml)

- 50g dried Marshmallow Root (*Althaea officinalis*)
- Handful of sliced Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)
- 50g dried Elderberries (*Sambucus nigra*)
- 700g refined, white sugar
- 1 litre of water

Why these herbs?



Elderberries are rich in vitamins and biochemicals that strengthen the immune system. They are also anti-inflammatory so can ease aches, pain and fever. They are often given to lessen the symptoms of colds, flus and coughs. Combined with ginger they can treat nausea like morning sickness.



Marshmallow root is a very old remedy for soothing throats and the digestion. It is a very demulcent herb, which means it is excellent at treating inflammations or irritations of our soft internal tissues - like the throat and stomach. It is also delicious, and where the sweet 'Marshmallow' originally came from.



Ginger root is an excellent and tasty warming herb, which has the added benefits of relieving pain and nausea.

Making Herbal Syrups

You have got all those ingredients. What should you do now?

When you are using ingredients that are hard, or woody such as the roots of a plant, or the dried berries, you need to 'decoct' them to get the goodness out. This is really just a fancy word for heating them in some water or another liquid.

So, to start off this syrup:

1. Measure out 1litre of water
2. Add your chopped ginger root, chopped marshmallow root, and crushed elderberries.
3. Bring the water and dried herbs to the boil and then simmer it for a further 20-30 minutes, until the decoction has reduced to approximately 700ml
4. Strain out the herbs
5. Add 700 grams of sugar to your mixture
6. Bring it to the boil again and allow to simmer for a further 10 minutes or until it reaches your required flavour/consistency
7. Allow it to cool and bottle it
8. Store it in the fridge and consume within a few weeks

Some more syrupy suggestions

- Thyme and liquorice syrup - for coughs and sore throats
- Rosehip syrup - for colds and boosting the immune system
- Marshmallow syrup - for sore throats and general deliciousness
- Peppermint syrup - for digestion, and cocktails
- Elderflower syrup - for colds, flu and fevers, and refreshing cordial
- Chamomile syrup - for digestion, and relaxation
- Oat syrup - for calming the nerves
- You can try making your own herbal honeys too - just add powdered herbs to honey

A note on preservation

As mentioned earlier, sugar is a preservative, but you only make a truly preservative syrup if you use the right concentrations of sugar. This is because sugar is a carbohydrate, so when mixed with water, it provides food for tiny micro-organisms to feed on and grow. This can lead to the growth of moulds and yeasts. However, as the concentration of sugar increases, there is less 'available' water for these organisms to grow in. A sugar syrup needs to reach saturation to be a totally effective preservative that you don't need to store in a fridge, and which may keep 'indefinitely' on your shelves.

Pharmacists have discovered the perfect sugar to water ratio for this –

85gm of white, refined sugar to 47ml of pure water.