

Herbs: Why herbs?

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SGU Ranch has been researching and growing many different herbs and spices this Spring/Summer 2004. This article is the beginning of a weekly series, which will highlight a specific herb's uses, economic potential, and growth information. If you are interested in herb/spice production and research please call SGU Ranch @ 856-5236.

Medicinal plants and herbs contain substances known to modern and ancient civilizations for their healing properties. Until the development of Chemistry and, particularly, of the synthesis of organic compounds in the 19 Century, medicinal plants and herbs were the sole source of active principles capable of curing man's ailments. They continue to be important to people that do not have access to modern medicines and, moreover, modern pharmaceuticals rely heavily on the same active principles.

Herbs have played an important part in man's life for countless years -- in his politics, romance, love, religion, health, and superstition. Early settlers brought herbs to America for use as remedies for illnesses, flavoring, storing with linens, strewing on floors, or burning for their pleasant fragrances. Some herbs were used to improve the taste of meats in the days before preservation techniques were developed.

What Is Alternative Medicine?

Alternative medicine is any form of practice that is outside the realm of conventional modern medicine. It covers a broad range of healing philosophies, approaches, and therapies. Most of these treatments and health care practices are not taught widely in medical schools. Examples are naturopathy, chiropractic, ayurveda, homeopathy and acupuncture. If alternative medicine or therapy is used alone or instead of conventional medicine, it is called "alternative" medicine.

What is Holistic Medicine?

Many of the alternative practices pay attention to the mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of health, in addition to the physical body. Therapies like hypnosis and visualization claims to be able to change physical conditions through purely mental interventions. They believe that our bodies are remarkably resilient machines, capable, with some occasional prodding or intervention, of healing themselves. The name "holistic medicine" came from this unification of the mind and the body.

What is Natural Medicine?

Any therapy that relies on the body's own healing powers may be considered natural medicine. These include herbal remedies, diet and water therapies.

What is Herb?

From the botanical viewpoint, an herb is a seed plant that does not produce a woody stem like a tree. But an herb will live long enough to develop flowers and seeds.

Some herbs fit into one or more classifications according to use -- culinary, aromatic, ornamental, and medicinal.

Culinary Herbs

Culinary herbs are probably the most useful to herb gardeners, having a wide range of uses in cooking. These herbs, because of their strong flavors, are generally used in small quantities to add flavor. Parsley, produced in the largest amount, is used mostly as a garnish. Next in popularity is sage -- an important flavoring in pork sausage. Other popular culinary herbs include chives, thyme, savory, marjoram, mint, and basil.

Aromatic Herbs

Aromatic herbs have some novel uses and are not as popular to grow. Most have pleasant smelling flowers or foliage. Oils from aromatic herbs can be used to produce perfumes, toilet water, and various scents. For home use, the plant parts are used intact, often to scent linens or clothing. When dried, many aromatic herbs will retain their aroma for a considerable period. Some common aromatic herbs include mint, marjoram, lovage, rosemary, and basil.

Ornamental Herbs

Ornamental herbs have brightly colored flowers and foliage. Many have whitish or light-colored flowers. Valerian has crimson blossoms while borage and chicory are blue-flowered. Such herbs as variegated thyme, mint, lavender, and chives produce variegated foliage.

Medicinal Herbs

Medicinal herbs have long been thought to have curative powers. But while present medical knowledge recognizes some herbs as having healing properties, others are highly overrated. Medicinal herbs should be used carefully. Some herbs are harmless while others can be dangerous if consumed.

* Project NRE, SGU ranch, Author wish to publish a series of articles to promote awareness for herbs use in daily life – *The Lakota way of treatment*

