



# Winter Afield

## Living Afield

### Demulcents to combat winter dryness

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Those of us in northern climates know the troubles of wintertime dryness. The heating systems which allow us to make it through the frigid winters, can wreak havoc on the mucus membranes of our sinuses, throats, and lungs. I struggled each winter, with nosebleeds, and a constant dry cough. To soothe irritated sinuses, your body creates mucus. This mucus then drips down the back of your throat causing irritation, and a constant cough.

When I learned about demulcent herbs, it was amazing. I felt as though I had died and gone to heaven. Now when my sinuses are dry, I enjoy a delicious cup of demulcent tea, and the dryness goes away. An added benefit is that I seem to get far fewer wintertime colds.

Some common demulcent herbs are Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*), Common Mallow (*Malva neglecta*), Marshmallow (*Althea officinalis*), Slippery Elm (*Ulmus rubra*), and Plantain (*Plantago major*). Along with being demulcent, Plantain also contains Aucubin. Studies have shown that Aucubin stops virulent microbes from replicating, drastically shortening the duration of an

infection. This can be handy during cold and flu season.

These plants can be used alone, or in any combination that works for you. The ones I use most often are Mullein, Common mallow, and Plantain. I harvest my plants during the summer and dry them for use during the winter. When I need some relief, I simply brew a cup of tea, and before long my sinuses are soothed. To make my favorite tea, add 1 tsp each of dried mullein, dried mallow, and dried plantain to a mug, and then fill the mug with boiling water. Allow this to sit and steep for 10 minutes, and then strain and enjoy. I like to sweeten mine with a little local honey.

Try using a French Press to make your medicinal tea. It is much easier to strain the dregs of your demulcent herbs from your tea.

If you find you are making tea every day, you can speed the process by making and storing a decoction in your refrigerator.

I boil my decoctions for at least 20 minutes. My family loves this brew, so I make a gallon at a time. Start by placing a gallon of water into a large pot. Next, stir in 1/3 cup of each of your demulcent herbs. Bring the pot to a boil,

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reduce heat to medium, cover and boil for 20 minutes. Allow to sit for an additional 10 minutes, and then strain through cheese cloth. You can store this decoction in your refrigerator for up to a week. If you want to make a quart of decoction, you can follow the directions on the last page of this newsletter.



Marshmallow  
(*Althea officinalis*)

# A delicious syrup to fight off colds

There are many over the counter preparations that promise to reduce the length of cold or flu infections. I have a recipe that you can make yourself and it works exceedingly well. A while back, I took an herbal webinar and received a recipe for Elderberry Syrup. It was said that if you took this syrup as directed, at the first sign of illness, it would knock the infection out of you in a day. I was to put it mildly, skeptical. I made the syrup and kept it around for our next bout of illness. Not that I am a lousy parent or anything, but I hoped I could experiment on one of the kids. My throat started to feel scratchy, so I made a batch of this syrup, and followed the dosage instructions. When I awoke the next day, I was symptom free. My wife and kids have experienced the same results. I used it another time, and it did not knock the cold out right off, but it reduced the length and severity of the infection. I cannot say enough good things about Rosalee's recipe.

The following recipe was developed by **Rosalee De La Foret**.

## Ingredients:

- 1 c dried elderberries
- 2 c water
- 1 c tart cherry juice
- 20 g licorice root
- 1 tsp ground black pepper

Simmer 30 minutes, strain, and add honey/alcohol to preserve.

## Dosage Directions:

At the first sign of symptoms, take 1/2 tsp every 15 minutes for the first hour, and then every hour until symptoms subside.

## Finding the necessary plants to use

The plants discussed in the previous article can be purchased at health food stores. They are also available from various online sources. While most retailers are reputable, there are others who are only interested in making a quick buck. You may never be entirely certain that you are getting exactly what you are paying for. I have heard horror stories of people receiving something other than the plant they ordered. I

recommend doing some research prior to choosing an online resource. Talk to people you know who use herbal supplements. You might also want to join an online herbal forum. Other members of these forums are a great resource. Those of us who have

**"I have heard horror stories of people receiving something other than the plant they ordered."**

learned to grow these plants in our gardens, or to recognize them in the wild are always assured of getting high quality plant material to make medicine for our families. With a little practice you too can learn to identify these common plants near your own home.

In a very short time you can harvest enough of these plants to last your family a year or more.

# Harvesting plants locally

While you can certainly purchase fresh and or dried plants from local or online retailers, there is nothing like the feeling of harvesting the plants locally. When you harvest locally, you can take the time to pick only the freshest, most perfect plants. By taking this added care, you can ensure you are giving your family the best possible herbal supplements.

While you certainly can venture into the forest to harvest your plants, and I highly recommend this activity. It is not necessary. You can find these plants growing in places you might not expect. Any un-treated field will probably yield a treasure trove of plantain, mullein, and common mallow. While walking along a local river or pond, you will more than likely end up running into marshmallow. I can harvest all 4

within a mile of my house. Once you are familiar with the characteristics of these plants, you will start noticing them everywhere. If you practice ethical harvesting, meaning not taking more than 25% of the plants you find in an area, you can ensure they will always be easy to find.

You can learn about these plants and many more by attending LivingAfield plant walks

# Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*)

Other Names:

Old Man's Flannel

Range:



Family:

Scrophulariaceae – Figwort or Snapdragon family

Identifying characteristics:

Growth Type:

A biennial plant

Height:

First year plants form a reclining basal rosette. Second year plant can grow up to 8 ft tall or higher under optimal conditions; although 3-5 ft tall is typical.

Leaves:

The plant produces a large rosette of fuzzy, gray-green leaves the first year, and an attractive spike of light yellow flowers the second year. The leaves are large, oval shaped, and extremely hairy, even flannel like.

Stem/Trunk:

The second-year flower stalk is erect, and quite large, growing up to 8ft in height. The end of the stalk has a spike fully of tiny yellow flowers.

Root:

Taproot and hairy root mass

Flower:

Season:

Summer persisting into Autumn

Appearance:

The second-year flower stalk is erect, and quite large, growing up to 8ft in height. The end of the stalk has a spike fully of tiny yellow flowers. The dried flower stalk can persist throughout the winter and can be used as a drill for fire making, or as a survival arrow shaft.

Seed / Fruit:

Seeds from the second-year plant are small and quite numerous.

Miscellaneous Characteristics:

This common plant is often missed, but I have no idea how, as it is so large, it grows practically everywhere, and is quite beautiful. The blossoms and seeds contain a small amount of saponin. This is useful in a survival situation because it works to temporarily paralyze fish.

Habitat:

Abandoned homesteads, disturbed soils, fields, waste areas, and forest margins.

Parts Used:

Flowers, Leaves, Roots

Uses:

Wild Food Uses:

None Known

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Medicinal Uses:

A tea, decoction, or tincture made from mullein leaves is used to treat a host of lung ailments including asthma. Native Americans smoked the leaves to alleviate coughing, bronchitis, and asthma. I have personally used mullein tincture to treat colds, and asthma. I use mullein in a tonic to treat colds. Mullein flowers infused in Olive Oil is an excellent remedy for ear infections. It is highly effective for both humans and pets. It is also an excellent treatment for ear mites in dogs and cats. This is one of my favorite medicinal plants.

Medicinal Actions:

Antiasthmatic, Antibacterial, Anticatarrhal, Anti-Infective, Anti-Inflammatory, Antimicrobial, Antispasmodic, Antitussive, Demulcent, Expectorant, Lymphatic, Pectoral

To learn more about this plant

Visit our website

[http://livingafield.com/plants\\_mullein.html](http://livingafield.com/plants_mullein.html)

# Common Mallow (*Malva neglecta*)

## Other Names:

Buttonweed, Cheeseplant, Cheeseweed, Dwarf Mallow and Roundleaf Mallow

## Range:



## Family:

Malvaceae – Mallow family

## Identifying characteristics:

### Growth Type:

A deep rooted herbaceous perennial which can grow to a height of 1 foot. The stems are trailing.

### Height:

Can grow 8 - 24 inches tall, but generally a spreading plant.

### Leaves:

The leaves are rounded, toothed, wavy, and slightly lobed. There are typically 5 - 7 lobes on each leaf, making them resemble small green coffee filters, or upside-down umbrellas. The leaves grow alternate and are mucilaginous (slimy) when crushed.

### Stem/Trunk:

On older plants, the trailing stems can become quite thick, and long.

### Root:

Deep often forked taproot

### Flower:

#### Season:

Summer through Autumn

#### Appearance:

Flowers are distinct, regular, funnel shaped, with 5 distinct petals, and 3 - 5 partially united sepals. Often surrounded by several bracts. Flowers can be white to pink or lavender tinged. There are numerous stamens united to form a distinctive column around the pistil.

### Seed / Fruit:

The ovary is positioned superior, and is chambered, and is the reason for the common name cheeses, as it resembles a wheel of cheese.

### Miscellaneous Characteristics:

This unassuming little plant is a powerhouse when it comes to edible and medicinal value. There are over 85 genera in the Malvaceae family, with over 1500 species. Most have the same medicinal and edible properties. Although often considered a weed, this plant is reportedly consumed as a food. This is especially true of the seeds, which contain 21% protein and 15.2% fat.

## Habitat:

Yards, fields, and waste areas, dry areas

## Parts Used:

Entire plant including seeds (cheeses)

## Uses:

### Wild Food Uses:

The highly nutritious leaves and flowers can be eaten raw, or used as a cooked vegetable, or in soups. They are also dried and added to smoothies and other drinks. As with Okra, Mallow is a mucilaginous plant which can be used to thicken soups and sauces. The cheeses are a wonderful snack that can be eaten raw right from the yard.

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### Medicinal Uses:

A wash can be made from the leaves and root of this plant, which is an excellent treatment for sunburn, as well as other minor burns or skin irritations. Leaf, flower, and or root tea is very soothing to the throat and lungs, as well as the digestive tract. It is has been used to soothe irritated mucus membranes. The tea is also used to treat angina, coughs, bronchitis, and stomachaches. Root extracts have been shown to be an effective treatment for tuberculosis.

### Medicinal Actions:

Anti-inflammatory, Astringent, Demulcent, Emollient, Expectorant, Pectoral, Stomachic

To learn more about this plant

Visit our website

[http://livingafield.com/plants\\_mallow.html](http://livingafield.com/plants_mallow.html)

# Marshmallow (*Althea officinalis*)

Other Names:

Marshmallow

Range:



Family:

Malvaceae – Mallow family

Identifying characteristics:

Growth Type:

Perennial herbaceous plant

Height:

3 to 4ft tall

Leaves:

Leaves are shortly petioled, roundish, ovate-cordate, 2 to 3 in long, and about 1- 1/4 inch-wide, entire or three to five lobed, irregularly toothed at the margin, and thick. They are soft and velvety on both sides, due to a dense covering of stellate hairs.

Stem/Trunk:

Erect, sometimes sparsely branched

Root:

The roots are perennial, thick, long and tapering, very tough and pliant, whitish yellow outside, white and fibrous within.

Flower:

Season:

Summer through Autumn

Appearance:

Flowers are distinct, regular, funnel shaped, with 5 distinct petals, and 3 - 5 partially united sepals. Often surrounded by several bracts. Flowers can be white to pink or lavender tinged. There are numerous stamens united to form a distinctive column around the pistil.

Seed / Fruit:

The ovary is positioned superior, and is chambered, and is the reason for the common name cheeses, as it resembles a wheel of cheese.

Miscellaneous Characteristics:

This plant is very similar to common mallow, only larger.

Habitat:

Growing in moist areas

Parts Used:

Entire plant

Uses:

Wild Food Uses:

The flowers and young leaves can be eaten raw or cooked. The root of this plant was originally used to make marshmallows. In the middle east it is still used as flavoring for a confection.

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Medicinal Uses:

Marshmallow is higher in mucilage than common mallow. It is traditionally used for irritation of mucous membranes, including use as a gargle for mouth and throat ulcers and gastric ulcers. The root can be made into a tea or chewed to ease sore throats.

Medicinal Actions:

Anti-inflammatory, Astringent, Demulcent, Emollient, Expectorant, Pectoral, Stomachic

To learn more about this plant

Visit our website

[http://livingafield.com/plants\\_marshmallow.html](http://livingafield.com/plants_marshmallow.html)

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Living Afield has been helping people find and build harmony between the natural and modern worlds since 2007. It is our mission to ensure the time-honored knowledge of our forefathers is not lost to future generations.

We offer edible and medicinal plant walks, as well as weekend wilderness skills classes. You can join one of our scheduled classes, or we can schedule a walk or class for your group.

Contact Kirk Wahl via email at [kirk@livingafield.com](mailto:kirk@livingafield.com).

*Adventure lies just beyond  
the beaten path*

We're on the Web!  
<http://livingafield.com>

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## Herbal Preparations

### Decoctions:

Think of a decoction as a very strong tea. A medicinal herb is boiled in a quart of water.

One would make a decoction from fresh or dried roots, barks, berries, or seeds. This method is not used for aromatic herbs, as the essential oils will be lost when the water is brought to a boil. Place 2 ounces of fresh, or 1 ounce of dried herb into a pan. Add 1 quart of water and bring to a boil. Continue to boil over medium heat, stirring periodically, until reduced by half. Cool the mixture, and strain and drink.

### Teas:

Teas are by far the easiest way to make use of the health benefits of a plant. They are also one of the best ways to harness and benefit from aromatic herbs. The fact that the herb is not boiled means that any water soluble volatile organic compound, VOC, is captured and used. To make a tea, simply measure 1 teaspoon of dried herb, or 1 tablespoon of fresh herb into a cup of near boiling water. Allow this to steep for 10 or 20 minutes, strain and enjoy your healthful tea. Adding 1 tsp of raw honey will satisfy a sweet tooth.

### Tinctures:

A tincture is an alcohol-based extraction. I find tinctures to be the most effective way to harness all of the medicinal benefits a plant has to offer. Another benefit of making and using tinctures is that it allows us to harness the medicinal value of a plant while it is at peak strength and use it for up to 2-3 years.



To learn more about herbal preparations visit our website  
[http://livingafield.com/Herbal\\_Preparation.htm](http://livingafield.com/Herbal_Preparation.htm)

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