

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS
For Martial Arts

by
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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
ENERGIZERS. HERBS THAT INCREASE ENERGY AND ENDURANCE.	4
BRUISES	8
CUTS AND SCRAPES	10
SPRAINS, STRAINS AND FRACTURES	12
COOLING OFF	14
ACHES AND PAINS	15
COMFREY, IS IT SAFE?	17
MAKE YOUR OWN COMFREY SALVE	19
MAKING YOUR OWN HERBAL TINCTURES	21
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	21

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

Introduction

Safety first. Think of using herbs to bring you into better balance. If an herb takes you OUT of balance, (the herb makes you itch, a relaxing herb peps you up, etc.) don't use that herb. Educate yourself. If you wish to use an herb, obtain good information from a trusted source. There are many fine herb books available throughout the country, try browsing through the herb book section at your health food store. The national bookstore chains carry an increasing number of fine herb books. When selecting herb books, read about the author (usually on an inside cover); an experienced herbalist usually will provide better herbal information than a non-herbalist. Other impressive credentials, such as a Ph.D. or M.D., are NOT herbal degrees and do not imply herbal knowledge.

Herbs come in a variety of forms that include liniments, salves and oils to be rubbed into the skin, as well as pills, capsules, tinctures and teas that may be taken internally.

Liniments. These are herbal extracts in a base of water and alcohol. They are rubbed directly into the skin, are for external use only and may or may not include essential oils. Liniments traditionally have been used for pain, to speed recovery from bruises and generally to promote healing.

Salves or ointments. These are herbal extracts in an oil base with beeswax to solidify the salve. A salve is an herbal oil. They are rubbed directly into the skin, are for external use only and may or may not include essential oils. Traditional uses for salves include: to heal cuts and scrapes, to relieve itching, to guard against and reduce infection and to eliminate warts and fungus.

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

Herbal oils. These are herbal extracts in an oil base. The herbs are infused into the oil, in much the same way that you would make tea. Herbal oils are NOT the same as essential oils; essential oils are highly concentrated herbal extracts. Herbal oils are rubbed directly into the skin and some may be used as food, as in salad dressings. Most herbal oils are intended for external use only and may include essential oils. Traditionally therapeutic uses for herbal oils include: pain reduction and massage.

Essential oils. These are highly concentrated herbal extracts; ONE DROP of essential oil may have the same power as ONE OUNCE of raw herb. Essential oils are used therapeutically in aromatherapy for many health and emotional issues. Like anything with great power, they must be approached with respect. As a general rule, never take essential oils internally. (Some may be taken internally, highly diluted! Follow instructions precisely!) As a general rule, never place on the skin undiluted (except for Lavender e.o. and Tea Tree Oil); it is a waste of good essential oil and may irritate or burn the skin. Essential oils are often added to liniments, herbal oils and salves.

Pills. Ground herbs or powdered and dried herbal extracts, combined with fillers and pressed or molded. Not very common in the U.S.

Capsules. Ground dried herbs placed in capsules. Easy to transport. Inconvenient if combining with many other herbs.

Tinctures. These are herbs that are extracted in an alcohol and water solution. Tinctures retain their potency better than pills or capsules and are faster acting. Because they are fluid, tinctures may be combined easily as needed, for personalized formulas.

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

Energizers. Herbs that increase energy and endurance.

Remember Steven Segal in *Hard to Kill*? He had been in a coma for seven years. He awakened; having been in a coma for so long, his character was severely depleted of chi, or energy. He retreated to a peaceful environment and healed and strengthened himself using acupuncture, herbs and kata. What an inspiration!

Martial artists have used herbs and food to increase chi for thousands of years. The appropriate use of such herbs can increase endurance, aerobic capacity, and general vitality. These herbs were not used alone, they traditionally were combined with good nutrition and breathing exercises (Qi Gong or San Chin katas) and the stronger herbs were rarely used by the young.

Ginseng. Ginseng (*Panax Ginseng*) has been used for thousands of years as a general energy tonic. Although it is not usually recommended for long-term use by people under 40, this is an herb that increases energy while building long-term reserves. It is prized for its proven ability to increase strength, endurance, immunity and mental alertness. Studies show that it is an EXCELLENT energy tonic, with some reservations. Ginseng should NOT be used by people suffering from acute infectious diseases, including colds and flu. Chinese or Korean Ginseng should NOT be taken by people with high blood pressure, or who are always hot. Do not overuse, do not use when experiencing symptoms of excess (headache, hot feeling, high blood pressure, insomnia).

American Ginseng (*Panax Quinquefolium*) is closely related to *Panax Ginseng* and is more widely tolerated. It may be taken by heat sensitive people and is especially helpful to people with lung weaknesses. It helps to relieve fatigue and dehydration. Many

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

athletes who cannot tolerate Panax Ginseng, take American Ginseng. It is a VERY GOOD energy tonic.

Siberian Ginseng. Siberian Ginseng (*Eleutherio Senticosus*) may be taken to increase immunity, to increase aerobic capacity and endurance, to assist with jet lag or to assist with recovering from staying up too long. It is a great adrenal aid. Like Panax Ginseng, many people cannot tolerate it because it is so warming to the body. Discontinue use if you experience symptoms of excess (headache, hot feeling, high blood pressure, insomnia). Siberian Ginseng is particularly valuable for recovery from debilitating conditions characterized by cold.

Astragalus. This Chinese herb is primarily used as an immunity and spleen tonic, but it is a VERY GOOD energy tonic. It should not be taken by people who feel hot.

Nettles. This is the same as the "stinging nettles" that grows in some many regions of the U.S. This herb is highly nutritious and assists with adrenal support. It is especially well-suited for people suffering from stress and "burn-out." Used long term, it is a GOOD energy tonic. Recommended for all ages.

Burdock Root. This is known as Gobo root in many oriental stores and is cooked in many soups and stir-fries. It is found growing throughout the U.S. Although it does not provide immediate energy, it is especially useful for replenishing long-term energy supplies, for cooling the body and for "grounding" your energy. It is a VERY GOOD (long-term) energy tonic. Recommended for all ages.

Ma Huang (Ephedra). This is a POOR CHOICE for increasing energy. This is a very valuable herb, being used for an inappropriate purpose. (It does a great job of assisting someone

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

with asthma or congested bronchial tubes.) Its use does make you feel more energetic but it does so by cutting into deep energy reserves. You may not feel the loss today, but the loss is very real.

Wheatgrass. This is juice from the green leaf of the wheat plant. It is highly nutritious. Regular use (as low as 3-4 ounces per week) is very strengthening. Even a single, 1 ounce dose is energizing. This is a VERY GOOD energy tonic and may be considered a "superfood." It is building while it is detoxifying. Regular use can improve arthritis, rheumatism, and gout. Caution: large amounts can result in rapid detoxification, with diarrhea.

Spirulina, Blue Green Algae and other "green" foods. All of these work. They are all highly nutritious. Like wheatgrass, these are building while detoxifying. Regular use is energizing. These are VERY GOOD energy tonics. Recommended for all ages.

Coffee. Coffee does increase alertness and mental focus and it enhances performance. Many scientific, medical and sports research studies have shown a positive connection between drinking coffee and short-term increases in alertness, strength and endurance. The International Olympic Committee limits the use of coffee by athletes (to approximately 4 cups per day) because of the demonstrable performance enhancement.

Although coffee is fairly safe and fairly well tolerated, this is a POOR CHOICE for increasing energy because it depletes chi long-term. Coffee and other caffeine containing products, especially in moderate to large amounts, place great stress on the liver. It's regular use may exacerbate MANY hormonal problems, particularly in women. Its use is strongly discouraged in women with fibroids, fibrocystic tumors, endometriosis or cancer. Its regular use may exacerbate allergies. Finally, it is highly addictive.

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

Sugar. Sugar provides a fast energy boost that lasts for a very short time. This is a **POOR CHOICE** for increasing energy. The energy increase lasts for too short a time and may result in a subsequent drop in blood sugar that leaves you feeling more tired. It is **HIGHLY** addictive. Its use may deplete long-term energy reserves and may reduce immunity. Many holistic doctors link its use with many long-term ailments.

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

Bruises.

The Asian martial arts tradition includes many herbs and formulas to assist healing from trauma. Historically, many have used "Dit Dat Jao," to heal bruises more rapidly. Usually, these are liniments made by soaking a combination of herbs in Sake (rice wine) for weeks to months, straining off the herbs. Different masters would have their own secret ("the best!") and highly prized formulas. The fact is, many of these formulas work extremely well. Use of these formulas enabled practitioners to train with much less fear of injury, after all, the master would heal them!

The anti-bruising formulas typically contain herbs that disperse stagnation and stop bleeding. Bruises that might take 4-6 weeks to heal may heal in as few as 2 to 4 days (or may not show up at all). If the skin is broken, heal the skin first, before applying Dit Dat Jao. (See section on Cuts, Scrapes and Abrasions.)

You use Dit Dat Jao by applying repeatedly to the skin, as soon after the trauma as possible. Dit Dat Jao is NOT to be taken internally; many formulas include herbs that could be toxic if taken internally. Use CAUTION before using when pregnant, because so of the herbs may be so stimulating. Always wash your hands thoroughly after application.

BruiseAway™ by EarthWays Herbal Products is a Dit Dat Jao made from a combination of western and Chinese herbs, extracted in U.S.P. grade alcohol. It was specifically formulated by a martial artist / herbalist to assist western martial artists and athletes who do not have access to Dit Dat Jao from their instructors. Avoid using BruiseAway on broken skin.

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

Some people have had success using Arnica gel to heal bruises. This is a homeopathic product, that may be obtained at health food stores and possibly from your martial arts supplier.

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

Cuts and Scrapes.

Remember the tree kicking scene in Kickboxer? The master instructs Jean Claude to kick the tree. Our hero kicks the tree with his shin until it falls and then he falls to the ground in agony, his shin a bloody mess. With a nod from the Master, the beautiful niece rushes to his side to begin treating his wound. We can guess that the skin is shredded and that damage goes right down to the bone. OK, so most of our schools don't train quite this way. Still, the guidelines for treatment will be the same. If the skin has been broken:

- Clean out debris
- Disinfect
- Heal the skin
- Heal the underlying tissue

Immediately, remove all debris from the wound and clean it thoroughly with soap and water. Use of an antiseptic or antibiotic will reduce the chance of infection. Heal the skin by using an herbal salve containing comfrey root. The comfrey will greatly accelerate the healing of the skin and additionally will promote healing of the tissue below. (Comfrey is preferred to Calendula or Aloe, which also help to heal the skin but work much more slowly.)

Apply the salve directly to the cleaned wound and reapply as needed. DO NOT apply a comfrey salve to a deep puncture wound; comfrey promotes such rapid healing, that an insufficiently cleaned wound could fester. (Use calendula instead). A comfrey salve containing antibiotic essential oils, such as tea tree oil or rosemary essential oil may be especially helpful both for its antibiotic effect and for the more rapid healing.

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

Jean Claude's character could fully heal using the steps taken above, but would heal more rapidly if he also took herbs internally. Comfrey or Tienchi ginseng, taken internally, will substantially speed the healing process. The comfrey in particular will assist in healing any damage to the bone

An herbal salve containing essential oils is easy and fun to make. Alternatively, such salves are available at health food stores. EarthWays Herbal Products makes an excellent healing salve, called HealAll™.

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

Stopping Bleeding.

To be sure, Quai Chang Caine (Kung Fu) always would have carried some powder with him that would stop external bleeding. He likely would have carried powdered Tienchi Ginseng (San Ji Ginseng). Poured directly on the wound, bleeding will soon cease. It can be taken internally for the same purpose. You can carry Tienchi in a small plastic bag for a travel kit or dojo first aid kit. It is available from Chinese herb shops.

On the other hand, Caine could have run out of his Tienchi, and might have relied upon herbs native to North America. He could have used Cattail pollen (the brown part of the cattail), which also is very effective at stopping external bleeding.

Cayenne pepper poured directly on a wound will quickly stop bleeding. In a travel kit, you could carry a small plastic bag or capsules of cayenne pepper. (Some people will experience some burning sensation from this.) You can buy this in any grocery, natural products store, or herb shop.

Comfrey, that large leafed plant that grows prolifically throughout much of the U.S., is the best herb that we know of for stopping internal bleeding. It is best taken in tea or tincture form, one dropperful of tincture or cup of tea. Grow your own and save money. See the separate section on Comfrey.

Sprains, strains and fractures.

Remember Bruce Lee in Dragon? In a challenge match his opponent rushed him and viciously attacked him from behind. Soon

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

afterward, we see Bruce in traction with a broken back. He is paralyzed and has no feeling beneath the point of injury.

Herbs taken internally would greatly enhance the prospects for healing from such an injury and would substantially accelerate the healing process. A combination of comfrey root and Tienchi would stop internal bleeding and would accelerate healing. Comfrey specifically will accelerate healing of bone tissue. St. John's Wort will aid in the regeneration and healing of nerve tissue.

A combination of comfrey and Tienchi ginseng, or comfrey alone, taken internally, will greatly accelerate healing from internal sprains, strains and fractures. Cracked ribs may heal in 4-6 weeks without herbal assistance, and in 3-4 days with herbs. A sprained ankle that ordinarily would require 4-6 weeks to heal, may heal in only 3-4 days.

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

Cooling Off.

Let's return to Kickboxer. The training is intense and it is HOT in the middle of the jungle. Our hero could become dangerously overheated from time to time. Chrysanthemum Flower tea, drunk hot or cold, would have cooled him. (Chinese medicine classifies it as an herbal refrigerant). Because it is so cooling, most people reserve it for the hottest times of the year. Just don't drink it if you are cold! A small handful of the flowers makes 1 quart of tea. Also, many restaurants serve Chrysanthemum Flower tea at dim sum - you will need to ask for it.

Eating watermelon or drinking watermelon juice also will cool you. To be effective, you would need to eat or drink several cups of watermelon at one sitting. Most salads, eaten without oil, are mildly cooling.

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

Aches and Pains.

We don't need to talk about action heroes to understand overuse, soreness and general aches and pains. As martial artists, we've all experienced them!

Let's say you've pushed yourself past your (perceived) limits and although you still are walking today, you believe you will stiffen considerably. What can you do?

Take a long contrast shower. Stand in a COLD shower as long as you can stand it. Then stand in a very warm (don't burn yourself!) shower until you have relaxed. Repeat this cycle at least 2 more times.

Soak in a very warm bath with a 1-2 pounds of Epson salts. (You may need to stir with your hand or a brush to dissolve them). The addition of 10 drops (total) of essential oils such as Eucalyptus, Rosemary, Camphor or Peppermint mixed into a capful of shampoo or liquid soap (this disperses the oils in the water) will be very pleasant and will aid in dispersing toxins that contribute to soreness.

Drink A LOT of water. Drink as much as you can, and then drink at least 8-12 glasses per hour. Beer is NOT a substitute for water!

Comfrey and Tienchi Ginseng will greatly diminish stiffness and soreness. Take 1 dropper of the combined tinctures, 3x per day following extreme exertion and while symptoms persist.

Liniments and salves, applied directly to the skin, assist in relieving soreness. Tiger balm works for highly localized soreness. Many liniments containing Eucalyptus, Rosemary, Camphor or

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS
For Martial Arts

Peppermint will help. St. John's Wort, applied externally, relieves spasms.

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

Comfrey: Is It Safe?

The use of Comfrey has been criticized by the FDA and by several authors. No herbalist of whom I am aware has ever cautioned against the use of comfrey for the purposes listed above. Indeed, the vast majority of herbal texts (written by herbalists and not by journalists or others) extoll the many virtues of comfrey! Most herbalists will go on record (and do!) saying that comfrey is a very safe herb. In my practice, I have found remarkable results in very short periods of time and I have never seen any side effects.

The criticism, is that some comfrey root may contain a particular chemical compound (pyrilizidine alkaloids, or PAs) which has been associated with liver disease. Literally millions of people worldwide have widely used comfrey for a variety of common ailments, with no ill effects. A possible explanation is that plants contain a complex biochemistry which allow for small amounts of substances which otherwise would be toxic, and that other substances in the plant effectively neutralize such potential toxins. Examples would be Basil, Black Pepper and Nutmeg, all of which contain the chemical safrole. Safrole will induce cancer in both lab animals and humans. Basil, black pepper and nutmeg do not.

Contrast the possible (an unlikely!) ill effects of comfrey with its demonstrable benefits. Contrast the possible ill effects of comfrey with the KNOWN and major side effects of tobacco! Compare it with the known and major side effects of MANY chemical pharmaceuticals.

So, do you want to take comfrey to aid healing? I recommend that you decide for yourself. Personally, I don't use it as a beverage, but I certainly will take it to accelerate healing. An herb that stops hemorrhaging? An herb that heals bone tissue? Absolutely! An

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS
For Martial Arts

herb that can eliminate soreness? (But, being cautious, I would avoid its internal use by pregnant or nursing mothers and by infants.)

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS
For Martial Arts

Make Your Own Comfrey Salve.

8 ounces of vegetable oil (I prefer grapeseed oil or olive oil)
2 ounces of dried cut up comfrey root or 4 ounces fresh cut up root
- 1 ounce of beeswax, grated or minced
(Optional: 15-20 drops (total) of essential oils: tea tree, rosemary,
lavender and lemon)
to 2 ounce jars with tops.

Preheat oven to 200 degrees. Combine oil and comfrey and heat for 2-4 hours. Strain out the herb and reserve the oil. Dissolve the beeswax in the oil. As the oil cools, it will harden. Stir in the essential oils before the salve hardens. Pour into jars. Allow to sit for at least 30 minutes, until hard. Label the jars.

(Store in a cool place, as this salve has no preservatives.)

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS
For Martial Arts

Make Your Own Tinctures.

5 ounces of 100 proof vodka
1 ounce of cut up or ground dried herb or 2-1/2 ounces of cut up
fresh herb

Combine the vodka and herb in a wide mouth jar, cover, and shake well. (If the vodka does not cover the herb with at least a 1/4 inch to spare, then add more vodka). Label the jar! Let sit for at least 2 to 6 weeks, shaking daily. Strain off the herb and reserve the liquid. You now have made a tincture! Label and use as directed!

For most herbs, and specifically for comfrey, Tienchi ginseng, or St. John's Wort, a standard dose (taken 3x daily) is one dropperful = 20 drops = 1/4 teaspoon. If you were taking a combination of comfrey, Tienchi ginseng, St. John's Wort and burdock root tinctures, you would take 1 teaspoon of the combined tinctures. If you were taking 8 different herbs, you typically would take 1 teaspoon of the combined herbs.

HERBAL TRAINING AIDS For Martial Arts

Where Do I Find What I Need?

Herbs: Grow your own! Herb stores. (Chinese herbs might only be available in Chinese herb shops) From the author.

Oil: Supermarket. Natural Food Stores. From the author.

Vodka: Liquor Store or food store (some states).

Essential Oils: Natural Food Stores. Aromatherapy shops. From the author.

Dit Dat Jao: Your instructor. Herbalists. The Products Page!

Pain Liniments: Your instructor. Herbalists. The Products Page

Jars: Supermarkets. Container stores. Yard Sales. Hardware Stores.

Herb Books: Natural Food Stores. Large book stores. Some libraries. Herb shops. [www. amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). From the author.

About the Author.

Susan W. Kramer, Ph.D., Esq., Herbalist, began working with therapeutic herbs when she was seven years old and now works full-time in Atlanta as an herbalist and herbal educator. An active martial artist, she is the founder and President of EarthWays Herbal Products™, a company which manufactures a premium line of all-natural topical blends, including AcheAway™, BruiseAway™ and HealAll. She sees clients in her herbal practice and is an herbal educator.

By Susan Kramer

Page 21