



**The
ONTARIO
HERBALISTS
ASSOCIATION**

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What is Herbal Medicine?

Herbal medicine is as old as mankind. From Neanderthal grave sites, to the Eber papyrus of the 16th century BC; from Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda, to the pioneers of North America; every culture of every era has, until recently, depended on plants for healing.

Plant medicines are still the primary healing modality for much of the world's population, and a large number of pharmaceutical drugs available in the western world, are extracts from plant material. While there are still relatively few clinical trials on herbal medicines, there are thousands of years of empirical testing that prove the efficacy and safety of these remedies.

Modern medicine relies on extracts and chemical preparations to force the human body to produce the required result. This may be appropriate for acute infections and emergency conditions, however herbalists believe that the application of herbal medicine is more appropriate, effective, and ultimately healthier for the body in almost any chronic disease state.

Our bodies have always co-existed with the plant kingdom. We have evolved to be able to extract and use the necessary chemicals from plants, and we have developed mechanisms for eliminating many potentially harmful substances. The safety of herbs is easily demonstrated by the wide availability of herbal products on the open market in recent years. Despite the fact that most people self-medicate, significant negative reactions remain rare with herbals.

The very safety of botanical medicines often misleads people into believing these remedies to be ineffective, and this has led to an increasing market for 'standardized extracts' and pharmaceutically enhanced products, with which there is little clinical experience. Herbalists use only whole raw materials and traditional extracts, believing that specific plants were chosen by our ancestors precisely because they contained the perfect balance of active constituents. Harvested, prepared and compounded in traditional ways, herbal medicine is a powerful healing agent, often achieving startlingly positive results in disease conditions where western medicine tends to have few choices.

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Why see a Herbalist?

Herbal medicine is both very easy and very complex. It is simple to make a soothing cup of Chamomile tea, or use a pre-made remedy off the shelf. It is much more complicated to treat effectively for a specific condition in a particular person. Popular herbal books offer standard recipes and suggestions, which while usually offering some relief, these are rarely the best possible choice for the individual concerned. Fortunately, the remedies are relatively inexpensive and have a high level of safety, so this approach is unlikely to be harmful.

Similar symptoms may have many different causes, and each person has a unique physiology, life history, and medication status. The professional herbalist is trained to assess all of these areas. Rather than treating symptoms, the underlying causes are sought, and custom botanical formulas are carefully crafted to meet the individual's need. The results are more effective, longer lasting, and take into account the multiple facets of the condition.

In addition to botanical remedies, herbalists also address the issues which led to the problem. Nutrition, exercise, lifestyle choices, and coping mechanisms are all part of chronic disease development. Often small life changes are all that is required to ensure permanent improvement, and herbalists include counselling around these issues as part of a consultation.

Registered Herbalists

The **Ontario Herbalists Association** is the only association providing self-regulated certification for herbalists in the province of Ontario. All professional members meet our minimum education requirements, and most have significantly higher levels of training.

Our practitioners are primarily trained in western herbal medicine, however we have an increasing number of professionally trained Ayurvedic doctors, and we accept competent members from any herbal tradition, including First Nations, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and others from around the world, representing the immense diversity of botanical medicine available in Ontario.

Our professional members adhere to strict codes of ethics and practice. The scope of practice for a registered herbalist (RH) is carefully crafted to include only plant medicines in whole forms and traditional extracts, ensuring the highest level of safety for the public.

If your herbalist is registered with the OHA, you can have confidence in the level of care you will receive. To find a Registered Herbalist in your area, or for other information about the OHA, please contact us.

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