

Herbal Tea Blending Online Course Business Version

Module Two

Finding Balance

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Balance comes from paying attention to how you feel and learning to use herbs purposefully and responsibly. We have different moods and feelings everyday, if you are blending for yourself you can tap into your mood and simply ask "What do I need today"? The blend will usually just come to you.

When I started my tea business I had developed five loose leaf tea blends that pretty much summed up my past moods – my go to teas! So, for example – I get stressed quite a lot, the first tea I developed was my soothing blend which as it happens is my best seller!

You may wish to blend a tea for a friend or family member that suffers from low moods, or skin problems, you can tap in to that feeling or problem and find balancing botanicals perfect to help solve the problem.

You may just want to formulate a blend purely for pleasure as a flavourful celebration of the season or a moment in time.

Sometimes a blend only calls for two ingredients, sometimes you may have six or seven different botanicals, finding the balance a lot of time comes intuition and being thoughtful before you start.

Formulating Recipes

Tea formulation is where the artistry of herbalism merges with some of the more technical details about plant chemistries. If you take time to discover tea as a joyous expression of nature and learn a little about the chemistry that defines those flavours, the teas you make for yourself will be so much more meaningful.

Most people begin making teas with herbs that have touched them in some way. Garden roses and mints are inspiring herbs that many people feel a strong affinity toward. I have a deep love for lavender and sage from childhood memories in my grandma's garden, when I make tea with these herbs years of joyful memories wash over me. It is totally possible to fall in love with almost every new herb you discover. Herbalists are promiscuous when it comes to plants; it is my goal to always open my heart and mind when choosing which herbs to use.

Combining herbs can be unpredictable, but you get better the more you practice, you will often have to tinker with the blend quite a bit until you arrived at the right balance of medicine and flavor.

This section will introduce you to the importance of knowing the individual plants you use for medicine and flavor. Tasting each herb you use is incredibly important to the craft of herbal tea making, more so than with other forms of herbal medicine, because flavor is a big part of why people drink teas. Few people in the Western world will consistently drink a tea that does not taste good. Also, herbs can be categorized into specific tastes that are connected to specific plant physiologies and herbal actions. This simple yet remarkably reliable system has been used in natural medicine for thousands of years. The next section is dedicated to methods of formulating teas and little tricks I rely on to create teas that are both potent and delicious.

Learning from Nature

As an herbalist living a holistic lifestyle, one of my favourite ways to connect with nature and the healing powers she possesses is through herbal medicine — and my favourite type of herbal medicine will always be tea.

Tea has been used for medicine for centuries and is one of the oldest forms of herbalism that we have recorded and in my opinion is one of the most therapeutic ways that we can utilize healing herbs in our daily lives.

Then as adults, it is something that many of us will naturally reach for when we need a little “me time”. The art of boiling water, steeping tea, and then sitting down to enjoy a cozy cup is something that nourishes our soul and calms our stress hormones, even before the actual healing herbs ever begin to do their work.

For these reasons, I think it is important that more people learn how to use the native herbs and flowers that we have available to us to support our holistic well-being. Which is why learning how to create your own tea blends is such a wonderful place to begin, and can have an endless amount of possibilities for supporting your personal wellness and reconnecting you with nature and the natural medicines we once used to understand so well, and can again.

Some of my first teas were simple blends made from abundant flowers and plants I had in my own garden. In the spring I would combine fresh nettles, lavender flowers, and rose petals into a fun, light-hearted infusion. I make teas because I have a fondness for plants, and teas are a way to celebrate and appreciate the beauty and flavors of nature.

Training Your Taste Buds

Part of the reason we love tea so much is because we get to experience the taste and aroma of herbs — it feels less like medicine and more like a daily rejuvenating ritual. However, most of us were raised on a mild diet and without any understanding of how different taste sensations influence our bodies. Processed foods are rarely medicinal and lack strong, penetrating flavors derived from real herbs and spices. As a culture, we tend to prioritize sweet, salty, and artificially

flavored food because they are so familiar to us, and we remain relatively unfamiliar with most of the flavors of the natural world. So when it comes to becoming more attuned to the flavors and properties of herbs, it takes some practice and attention.

The first step to understanding taste and flavor is to simply pay close attention to the sensations you experience when tasting individual herbs. Take a piece of fresh or dried mint, for example, and focus your attention on the sensations in your mouth and nose:

- Does it taste sweet, salty, sour, bitter, or spicy? Most herbs have a spectrum of tastes, one being more dominant than the others.
- Is there a tactile nature to what you are tasting, such as texture, astringency (a dry feeling), or numbing?
- How does the herb make you feel? What does the taste remind you of?

Asking — and answering — these questions helps you build a strong conscious memory of the herb. But it also helps you start to recognize taste patterns that reflect herbal actions.

Fresh herbs are going to taste different from their dried form. A fresh herb is typically between 75 and 90 percent water, so when you take a nibble from a properly dried herb, some aspects of the herb are going to taste more concentrated. When you taste a fresh herb, sugars, bitter compounds, and other elements, such as highly volatile essential oils, are going to be less intense. A dried herb will more fully express the dominant taste sensations that you will experience in your tea.

The Taste of Herbs

As you become better acquainted with individual fresh and dried herbs, start also giving greater attention to how they taste as tea. The whole tea rises to a different level when a tea maker achieves really good balance through herb choices. Each time you drink a tea, spend a few minutes focusing on the smell, taste, and “mouthfeel,” which together make up the flavor. Soon you will form a strong memory for that particular tea and start to recognize the different flavors that specific herbs impart into the tea blend.

The more herbal teas you try to recall, the more associative and connected your mind will become when you taste herbs. When I try a new tea, I let it wash over my palate without thinking, just appreciating its particular flavor for a moment or two. This is an exciting and curious moment. It feels a lot like my memories of being a child, wonder and surprise leading into a deep sense of joy. Once I have taken a couple sips, I start to associate the taste with particular herbs, memories, and changes in my body. I learn to appreciate the tea on many different levels when I mindfully enjoy my tea. Sometimes I get all giddy when I drink a tea that instantly makes me feel like I have connected or “arrived.” Some herbs are like old friends: you cannot help but stop what you are doing to converse with them. A really charming cup of tea can ground me perfectly in the moment.

The more familiar you are with the taste of an herb in all its forms, the more intuitive and practical you will become in regard to how you can and should use it. For example, dried rose petals look beautiful in a tea and provide other medicinal properties, most of the essential oils responsible for the aromatic scent tend to evaporate during the drying process. Because I am familiar with the fresh and dried form of rose petals, I know that I should only use it in my teas when it is fresh. So, instead of spending the time to harvest and dry the flowers for my dried teas, I add the fresh rose petals to whatever tea I might be drinking when the roses are in bloom. The more you work with the particular herbs that are locally abundant, the more you will learn to honor the plants in specific ways. In the case of roses, I can only share it with my immediate community as a fresh flower infusion.

You will also develop a really good sense about the quality of the herbs you use. I can instantly tell whether or not a batch of tulsi (holy basil) is high quality just by smelling and tasting it. And I have gone through many sources for lemongrass in the past five years due to extreme fluctuations in quality. Lower-quality herbs are immediately noticeable to your body once you build awareness about how an herb should taste.

As you dive into the wonderful world of herbal teas, I encourage you to try as many herbs as possible to get an idea of how each individual herb tastes and makes you feel. Pay attention to the subtleties you experience. Over time this awareness about how each herb tastes will not only enable you to make excellent teas for yourself, but it will also benefit your cooking and general food choices. As you become adept at recognizing and appreciating flavour, your world will be so full with possibilities that every meal will be a celebration of nature.

There are an endless variety of herbs, flowers, roots, barks, teas, and spices that you can utilize and incorporate in your homemade herbal tea blend formulations, but the following are a few of my favourites to help get you started.

Lavender:

If I had to pick only one herb to keep in my home herbal apothecary then lavender may very well be it. I love everything about lavender but it is a powerful adaptogenic herb that is incredible for mitigating stress in the body and also has the most delicious flavour and scent that immediately activates a sense of calm and balance.

Chamomile:

Chamomile is also excellent for supporting digestive health, promoting a good nights sleep, and reducing feelings of anxiety, which makes it a great herb to have on hand for many different herbal tea blends.

Lemon Grass:

Lemongrass is excellent for its calming scent and is often used in aromatherapy. It is also an excellent herb for supporting digestive health.

Hibiscus:

Just looking at hibiscus makes me happy and this is one of my favorite antioxidant rich herbs to include in many of my cold-tea infusions. I love adding just a little hibiscus to many of my herbal tea blends as a delicious and antioxidant rich accent.

Personally I find that it pairs especially well with holy basil, mint, and lemongrass.

Echinacea Root:

You most likely have heard of echinacea root before due to its popularity in supporting immune health, especially during cold and flu season. While there are many herbs that can help support immune health, echinacea is one that is great to begin with and well received by kids and adults alike.

Nettle Leaf:

If you struggle with seasonal allergies and other types of histamine sensitivity then Nettle Leaf is going to become your best herbal ally and a must for your home herbal apothecary.

Peppermint:

Peppermint is a classic herb and one that is excellent for supporting digestive health, and a great accent herb to add to many herbal tea blends for a little pop of flavour.

Formulating herbal blends is how amateur and professional herbalists fit the right remedy to a particular person or imbalance. Sometimes a single herb is all you need to get the result you are seeking. In my experience, however, an individual's complex, particular imbalances respond well to a blend of several different herbs. Plus, people really appreciate the balanced flavor that a blend can offer.

Few articles or discussions about formulation are available to budding herbal tea makers, and most herbal books provide only the formulas themselves. However, I think it is important for tea enthusiasts to also become skilled at the art of formulation so that you can make teas specific to your tastes and needs.

When you begin to step over the boundary between teas for flavor and medicinal teas, you may feel doubtful that you know enough about herbs. I still go through this regularly. But you will be motivated to learn what you need to learn as you explore the world of herbalism. And the more you learn about herbs through tea making, the more precise you will become when using them medicinally. Most of the herbs you will work with are safe. I pretty much use the same herbs for my medicinal teas as any other teas I make. The difference lies in the strength of the most active ingredients in the blend.

For a beginner, it is always a good idea to start with teas that are safe, gentle remedies. As your experience grows so does your ability to understand more complex physiological imbalances and the subtleties of the herbs we use to treat them. Being able to grow within your craft is one of the great joys of life.

The Formulation Triangle

Individual herbs typically have a dominant action or flavour and a whole host of subtleties, so whether you are trying to make a tea medicinal or not, having a reliable system for coming up with new blends is handy. Eventually, and with practice, formulation will become a creative and intuitive process, but in the beginning most people just do not know where to start. The herbal tea formulation triangle is a basic diagram that provides a structure that you can follow as strictly or loosely as you desire.

The idea behind the triangle is that it gets you thinking about the mechanisms of different herbs and gives you a simple method for figuring out proportions. It will also help you better understand the functions of the different herbs you see in other people's tea blends. You can approach this method for tea formulation two main ways: start with an herbal action in mind — for example, you might choose to make a digestive tea or a tea that helps soothe a sore throat — or start with an herb you really like (such as rose, ginger, or lemongrass) and build a blend around the flavor of that particular herb.

The triangle has three levels. The base is the "active" herb in the blend — the one with the most pronounced flavor and potency. For example, if you are making a tea to strengthen digestion, you will probably use a slightly bitter liver-supporting herb like dandelion root as your active constituent. The second tier of the pyramid consists of the "supporting" herbs, which give soothing support to the organ system affected. Supporting herbs for a digestive tea might be fennel, mint, or marshmallow root. The third tier "catalyst" herb is added as a flavor accent or to improve the function of the active herb. Ginger is a great example of a catalyst herb in a digestive tea. The heat in the ginger wakes up the digestive system, increasing your digestive fire.

You can think about the triangle method a little differently if you decide to make a tea around a specific herb you really like. I love tulsi, so let's use it as the main or active constituent. The first thing you want to do when working with tulsi is to taste

it. Steep tulsi in hot water and remind yourself of its complex flavor. Make a list of all the things that tulsi tastes like. Then you can start to imagine herbs that would accentuate specific aspects of tulsi. If I add mint, it will enhance its basil-like characteristics. If I add rose, it will draw out some sweet floral aspects of tulsi. Adding something bright and citrusy will bring out the bright top notes of the flavor. Also remember that when you accentuate one aspect of an herb, other aspects get muted. For example, if you add licorice or stevia to tulsi, its spicy peppery bite will be muted. If you add ginger, the subtle sweetness will fade. It takes practice to predict what will happen when you combine herbs. But you'll find it helpful to start by noticing the flavor spectrum in a specific herb, then deciding which medicinal and flavour aspects you want to enhance or mute. This is what will define your blend and make it completely unique.

The best part of formulating based on the triangle method is its simplicity. You are able to make really beautiful blends based around the medicine and flavor of a single highlighted herb. The supporting and catalyst herbs provide balance and direction to the main constituent.

