

A Natural Farm & PermacultureFX Presents

Medicinal Herbs and How to Use Them

USDA Zone 9b

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Growing Tips

- Soil type: Most soil types will work, but it thrives in slightly moist areas.
- Sun exposure: Full sun (will tolerate some shade)
- USDA Growing Zone: 3-9
- Maintenance: Cut back multiple times per year
- Notes: My favorite variety of this plant is Bocking-14, because it will not spread much at all by seed or root. It will stay put and produce multiple harvests during the growing season. Other varieties can spread and get out of hand easily.

Traditional Uses & Applications

Healing: Topical poultices for injuries, sprains, muscle pain, arthritis, etc.

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Garden: Biomass accumulator, living mulch, mineral mining

Livestock: Minerals and nutrients for poultry, cattle, goats, etc.

Companion Plants

Growing comfrey at the base of the drop line between fruit trees and berry bushes create a nice, thick, living mulch. It makes it easy to cut them and throw them at the base of the tree. Because they grow so densely, I do not recommend putting them amongst other wildflowers, because they can choke them out. This makes it an excellent choice for mass planting areas in a food forest or any area where you are attempting to build soil and biomass.

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Growing Tips

- Soil type: Well drained, loamy soil.
- Sun exposure: Full sun (will tolerate some shade)
- USDA Growing Zone: 3-9
- Maintenance: Mulch or woodchip every other year.

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- Notes: Elderberry can be grown in most USDA zones and are extremely hardy. They will spread by runners, so is best used in a naturalized garden setting. Runners can be easily mowed over or cut off when they are younger and green. The tall bush can get to be 12' tall and nearly 8' wide, so make sure to give it plenty of room to spread out. It will reach nearly full height by year three and is very easy to propagate and transplant by root stock or cuttings.

Traditional Uses & Applications

Healing: Berries are used to make syrup, jams, preserves, pies, etc.

Garden: Pollinator, wild bird food source and nesting area.

Livestock: Forage (later season) for cattle, horses, goats, and poultry

Companion Plants

White pines will do really well as an overstory near the elderberries, and it's needles have similar vitamin and anti-inflammatory benefits. As an understory or nearby, currants and gooseberries will do excellent and benefit one another's sources of pollination. These berries will also appreciate the shade produced by elderberry.



Growing Tips

- Soil type: Appreciates bad soil, but will do well in loamy areas as well. Can tolerate some drought and neglect.
- Sun exposure: Full sun
- USDA Growing Zone: 7-10 as a perennial, but can be grown in other zones as a self-seeding annual
- Maintenance: Pinch off flowers for bushier shape and more branches.

Traditional Uses & Applications

Healing: Adaptogen, stress relief, heart health, calming. Mainly used as tea (fresh or dried) or used to make tinctures.

Garden: Heavy pollination source, attracts beneficial insects (including braconid wasps, which control aphids and tomato horned worms). This plant also helps repel mosquitos, so can be planted around sunny sitting areas.

Livestock: This herb can be used in poultry nesting boxes (fresh or dried) to help birds relax. Will also keep flies and mites away from nesting areas.

Companion Plants

Enhances fragrances of other herbs when planted nearby. Consider planting near oregano, dill, cilantro, thyme, or fennel.

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Growing Tips

- **Soil type:** Well drained, loamy soil. Will tolerate sand easily, but not white sand.
- **Sun exposure:** Full sun (will tolerate some shade)
- **USDA Growing Zone:** 9-10 as a tender perennial, but can be grown annually in other zones
- **Maintenance:** Mulch or woodchip every other year. Cut back before first frost. This plant thrives on the STUN method (severe, total, utter, neglect) of gardening.

Traditional Uses & Applications

Healing: This grass may help with digestion and stomach disorders, helps maintain healthy cholesterol levels, helps flush the liver, antiseptic and

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antibacterial properties. Generally taken as a tea (hot or cold) and you can use the grass fresh or dried.

Garden: Should be placed in the middle of the garden, because it can get 7-8' tall. Helps repel mosquitos, flies, and ticks. Plant along porches or decks as an ornamental grass to repel insects and rodents.

Livestock: This herb can be hung in the hen house to repel insects. Should not be fed to other livestock. A tea can be made and used in horse wash to help repel flies, but it should not be ingested by most livestock.

Companion Plants

Any herbs that like full sun and well-drained soil. Not advised in the vegetable garden, because its roots can spread out a few feet around the plant and compete with the water intake of veggies.

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Growing Tips

- **Soil type:** Any well drained soils. Prefers dry soil.
- **Sun exposure:** Full sun (will tolerate some light shade)
- **USDA Growing Zone:** 3-10 as a perennial

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- **Maintenance:** Grass clippings as mulch will allow it to spread and be harvested easier.
- **Notes:** Identify most types of mint by the four-sided, square stems. Some wild mints (like Florida's Spotted Wild Bee Balm) can also be used for teas or insect repellants, but may not have as pleasant of flavor on their own, so other herbs can be added for flavor.

Traditional Uses & Applications

Healing: This herb is most often used with stomach issues and to help promote relaxation.

Garden: Help pollinate the garden, pest and rodent repellent, specifically helps keep out mice and rats. Often planted in areas where it can spread freely. Should not be planted in a vegetable garden.

Livestock: Can be added fresh or dried to the nesting boxes in the summer to help repel flies.

Companion Plants

Mexican oregano, marigolds, etc. However, even planting it in it's own pot will help repel pests and it can be then more easily moved around the garden to help where needed.



Growing Tips

- **Soil type:** Prefers poor soils with little care or water after germination.
- **Sun exposure:** Full sun
- **USDA Growing Zone:** 3-9 (annual, but might self seed)
- **Maintenance:** None
- **Notes:** Should be started from seed in trays and then planted for best results. Before planting, soak seeds for 12 hours to ensure higher germination rates.

Traditional Uses & Applications

Healing: Antiviral, antifungal, antibacterial. High levels of vitamin C. Leaves and flowers can be eaten raw in salads, and have a warm radish-like flavor. You can also soak flowers for a few weeks in apple cider vinegar and make a healing salad dressing.

Garden: This is an insectory plant, that will “trap” the bad bugs before they get to your prized plants. It’s GOOD if it attracts the bad bugs – it’s an “insect trap” and doing it’s job.

Livestock: Chickens and cattle really enjoy their flavor and can eat the entire plant. The healing benefits listed above are similar for your chooks and cows. Goats can eat them as well, but in small quantities, because over indulging can add too much water to their rumen.

Companion Plants

Broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, squash, tomato, pumpkins, etc. It will attract hoverflies, which will feed on aphids, so are also beneficial to plant near roses.

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Growing Tips

- Soil type: Well drained, loamy soil, will also grow in sandier areas. Does not like wet feet.
- Sun exposure: Full sun
- USDA Growing Zone: 9-12 (tender in zone nine, and should be mulched in winter)
- Maintenance: Mulch or woodchip in late fall. Likes an organic fertilizer feeding 2-3x a year

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- **Notes:** Elderberry can be grown in most USDA zones and are extremely hardy. They will spread by runners, so is best used in a naturalized garden setting. Runners can be easily mowed over or cut off when they are younger and green. The tall bush can get to be 12' tall and nearly 8' wide, so make sure to give it plenty of room to spread out. It will reach nearly full height by year three and is very easy to propagate and transplant by root stock or cuttings.

Traditional Uses & Applications

Healing: Antibacterial, antifungal. Good for skin, hair, and teeth. Can be preserved in oil, made into a tea, or taken as a tincture.

Garden: Best anti-fungal spray! Make an olive oil cold-infusion, add organic dish soap or cleaner, like Shaklee Basic H2, and water. Fights mold, mildew, wilt, etc. It's also an excellent insecticide to fight aphids, inch-worms, scaly mite, etc. Will NOT kill honey bees coming back to the plant.

Livestock: Can be fed to sheep, goats, and cattle to improve overall performance and help boost their immune systems. Helps with livestock who have digestive problems or bloat. Strong antiseptic properties, so a spray can be made to help repel flies and treat small cuts, scrapes, bruises, or warts. Drops of the oil can also be added to sweet feed.

Companion Plants

Beans do well growing at the base, and climbing beans can be grown up the branches. The neem tree will enjoy the nitrogen fixing properties of any legume.



Growing Tips

- Soil type: Well drained soil. Does not like wet feet
- Sun exposure: Full sun (will tolerate some light shade, but will not flower as much)
- USDA Growing Zone: 3-9
- Maintenance: Apply compost around the base every spring and midsummer to encourage more flowering.
- Notes: Cut flowers when they are in full bloom for the best phytonutrients.

Traditional Uses & Applications

Healing: This herb is excellent as a tea and tincture. A tea can be made to apply topically to help stop bleeding or to treat sunburn. It helps soothe gastrointestinal disorders, helps remove mucus and phlegm from the body, soothes the respiratory system, and may help in lowering a fever. The tea can also be used to help with women's menstrual issues. The young leaves can

be used raw in a salad, but all arial parts of the plant can be used in tea or tincture.

Garden: Great pollinator for native bees and butterflies. Attracts beneficial wasps which will help control the “bad” insects. Will also help attract the fig wasps, which help pollinate for more fruiting.

Livestock: This herb, when mixed into their feed (fresh or dried) can help with wound healing and respiratory health. Especially beneficial for upper respiratory conditions. Cattle and horses will eat the flower head when it’s available at pasture, but will generally “self medicate” as needed. Sheep and goats will do the same, but prefer the green material. Because the plant has such powerful volatile oils, animals will generally leave it alone until their body needs it.

Companion Plants

Does well with other native prairie plants like purple coneflower, lobelia, blazing star, laitris, etc. It is excellent in the orchard or food forest as an understory, because it can spread in a thick, pollinating mat like a groundcover between trees or bushes (as long as it gets enough sun). It’s an extremely hardy plant that can very easily be transplanted and divided for multiplying around the yard.



Growing Tips

- Soil type: Sandy, well drained
- Sun exposure: Full sun (will tolerate some shade)
- USDA Growing Zone: 7-12
- Maintenance: None. Best found in the wild. Do not plant in the garden, as it will spread by seed.
- Notes: Most southern gardeners hate Spanish needle (*bidens alba* and *bidens pilosa*) because it's continually found hitch-hiking clothing. However, it's one of the wild edible / medicinal unsung heroes of the south.

Traditional Uses & Applications

Healing: Before and during the Civil War, this wild flower was used similarly to penicillin. A tea or tincture made from the plant is a powerful astringent, is anti-inflammatory, anti-infective, and anti-bacterial. It can be used internally or externally and is extremely effective for clearing the lungs, sinuses, digestive system, and urinary tract. The part most used are the younger leaves, which

can be added to soups, salads, or juices. In addition, leaves of any age can be used for making teas or tinctures.

Garden: This wildflower is one of the best native pollinators of the south. Birds, bees, moths, and butterflies of all kinds enjoy this species. So, although it may not have a place in the cottage flower garden, a weed is still valuable when it's found and used in the right place.

Livestock: This plant is foraged as excellent animal fodder for all livestock. Chickens will devour the leaves and eat the insects in the roots up plants you have pulled up. Goats, sheep, cattle, and horses will eat it while out on pasture. The medicinal qualities are as applicable to livestock as they are to humans. This is an excellent plant to feed your animals before heading into winter.

Companion Plants

Will grow almost anywhere in the wild. Very beneficial in a naturalized setting or orchard edges, because of the pollinators that it continually attracts.

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Growing Tips

- Soil type: Moist, fertile soil (needs a lot of nitrogen)
- Sun exposure: Part sun / part shade (best in an understory scenario)
- USDA Growing Zone: 3-10
- Maintenance: Cut back / harvest before flowering
- Notes: Always wear gloves when harvesting and processing. Once the leaves have been cooked or steeped, they are no longer able to “sting”. They can be cooked (used in teas, soups, or pot dishes), used to make tinctures, or dried to be processed later. The fibers of the stems have been used by First Nations tribes to make rope and weaving material.

Traditional Uses & Applications

Healing: High in calcium, magnesium, potassium, and chlorophyll.

Traditional herbalists use this to fight inflammation, manage joint pain and arthritis, improve circulation, and to help ease allergies.

Garden: Because of the “sting”, it’s not recommended to have this wild plant in the main crop gardens. However, located on the edges, it’s a great pollinator

Livestock: Cows, goats, and horses will consume nettle once it has died and is dried. The nutrient value of the plant rivals clover and alfalfa.

Companion Plants

Carrot farmers will plant nettle on the edge of their crop, because carrot fly, aphids, and blackflies will be more attracted to the nettle than to the carrot crop.