

MAKING AN ALCOHOL TINCTURE

A tincture is made by immersing a fresh or dried plant in full-strength alcohol or an alcohol and water mixture. Alcohol is extractive: it pulls all the water out of plants into itself. The resulting tincture is a mix of both water and alcohol. With fresh plants, the liquid tincture is generally equal to the amount of liquid added at the beginning. With dried plant material, especially roots, the final volume is often much less than what you started with.

Store tinctures in amber jars out of the sun. Alcohol-based tinctures will generally last for many years. Because of the shelf life and ease of dispensing, many herbalists prefer tinctures over capsules and infusions. Tinctures from various herbs can be combined for dispensing as a blend (although a certain few such as myrrh and propolis do not combine well).

Using Fresh Herbs

Fresh leafy plants may be chopped or left whole before placing them into the alcohol or pureed with the alcohol in a blender. Fresh roots should be ground with the alcohol in a blender into a pulpy mush. Fresh plants naturally contain a certain percentage of water. When a tincture is made from fresh plants the plant is placed in 190 proof alcohol (95 percent alcohol): one part plant to two parts alcohol. For example, if you have 3 ounces (85 g) (dry measure) of fresh echinacea flower heads, they would be placed in a jar with 6 ounces (177 ml) (liquid measure) of 190 proof alcohol.

I generally use well-sealed Mason jars, store out of the sun, and shake daily. At the end of 2 weeks, decant the herb and squeeze in a cloth until as dry as possible (an herb or wine press is good for this), and store the resulting liquid in labeled amber bottles.

Using Dried Herbs

Plants as they dry lose their natural moisture content. Some plants, like myrrh gum, contain virtually none; others, like mint, contain a great deal. When making a tincture of a dried plant you add back the amount of water that was present in the plant when it was fresh. Many books list the amount of water that should be added back. One good one, and the