

## CERTIFIED ADVANCED HERBALISM COURSE - SESSION 13: The Action of Herbs

A great deal of pharmaceutical research has gone into analyzing the active ingredients of herbs to find out how and why they work. This effect is referred to as the herb's action. Herbal actions describe the ways in which the remedy affects human physiology. In some cases the action is due to a specific chemical present in the herb (as in the antiasthmatic effects of ma-huang) or it may be due to a complex synergistic interaction between various constituents of the plant (the sedative valerian is an example). A much older and far more relevant approach is to categorize herbs by looking at what kinds of problems can be treated with their help. Plants have a direct impact on physiological activity and by knowing what body process one wants to help or heal, the appropriate action can be selected. The qualities of herbs which make them beneficial in treating the human body, include:



### **Adaptogenic**

Adaptogenic herbs increase resistance and resilience to stress, enabling the body to adapt around the problem and avoid reaching collapse. Adaptogens work by supporting the adrenal glands.

### **Alternative**

Alternative herbs gradually restore proper functioning of the body, increasing health and vitality.

### **Anthelmintic**

Anthelmintic herbs destroy or expel intestinal worms.

### **Anti-inflammatory**

Anti-inflammatory herbs soothe inflammations or reduce the inflammatory response of the tissue directly. They work in a number of different ways, but rarely inhibit the natural inflammatory reaction as such.

### **Antimicrobial**

Antimicrobials help the body destroy or resist pathogenic (disease-causing) microorganisms. Herbs help the body strengthen its own resistance to infective organisms and throw off illness. While some contain chemicals that are antiseptic or poisonous to certain organisms, in general they aid the body's natural immunity.

### **Antispasmodic**

Antispasmodics ease cramps in smooth and skeletal muscles. They alleviate muscular tension and can ease psychological tension as well.

### **Astringent**

Astringents have a binding action on mucous membranes, skin, and other tissue. They have the effect of reducing irritation and inflammation, and creating a barrier against infection that is helpful to wounds and burns.

### **Bitter**

Bitter herbs with a bitter taste have a special role in preventative medicine. The taste triggers a sensory response in the central nervous system leading to a range of responses, including stimulating appetite and the flow of digestive juices; aiding the liver's detoxification work; increasing bile flow, and motivating gut self-repair mechanisms.

### **Carminative**

Carminative plants are those that are rich in aromatic volatile oils that stimulate the digestive system to work properly and with ease. They soothe the gut wall; reduce any inflammation that might be present; and ease griping pains and help with the removal of gas from the digestive tract.

### **Demulcent**

Demulcent herbs are rich in mucilage and soothe and protect irritated or inflamed tissue. They reduce irritation down the whole length of the bowel, reduce sensitivity to potentially corrosive gastric acids, help prevent diarrhea, and reduce the muscle spasms that cause colic.

## **Diuretic**

Diuretic herbs increase the production and elimination of urine. They help the body eliminate waste and support the whole process of inner cleansing.

## **Emmenagogue**

Emmenagogue herbs stimulate menstrual flow and activity. With most herbs, however, the term is used in the wider sense for a remedy that affects the female reproductive system.

## **Expectorant**

Expectorant herbs stimulate removal of mucous from the lungs. Stimulating expectorants "irritate" the bronchioles (a subdivision of the bronchial tubes) causing expulsion of material. Relaxing expectorants soothe bronchial spasm and loosen mucous secretions, helping in dry, irritating coughs.

## **Hepatic**

Hepatic herbs aid the liver. They tone and strengthen the liver and in some cases increase the flow of bile. In a broad holistic approach to health they are of great importance because of the fundamental role of the liver in maintaining health by not only facilitating digestion but by removing toxins from the body.

## **Hypotensive**

Hypotensive herbs are plant remedies that lower abnormally elevated blood pressure.

## **Laxative**

Laxative herbs are plants that promote bowel movements. They are divided into those that work by providing bulk, those that stimulate the production of bile in the liver and its release from the gallbladder, and those that directly trigger peristalsis (wavelike contractions of the smooth muscles of the digestive tract).

## **Nervine**

Nervine herbs help the nervous system and can be subdivided into three groups. Nervine tonics strengthen and restore the nervous system. Nervine relaxants ease anxiety and tension by soothing both body and mind. Nervine stimulants directly stimulate nerve activity.

## **Stimulating**

Stimulating herbs quicken and invigorate the physiological and metabolic activity of the body.

## **Tonic**

Tonic herbs nurture and enliven. They are used frequently in traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurvedic Medicine, often as a preventative measure. Tonic herbs like ginseng build vital energy, or qi.

## CERTIFIED ADVANCED HERBALISM COURSE - SESSION 13 – QUESTION & ANSWERS

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

FAX: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Please be sure to fill out the information above, complete the test and e-mail or fax it back to us at 425-955-4639 (US) or at +353 1 647 5705 (EU) or e-mail it to us at [joyful@best.com](mailto:joyful@best.com) (US) or at [answers@med-herbs.com](mailto:answers@med-herbs.com) (EU). We will grade your question & answer session and will let you know if we have any questions or concerns.

1. Go through your herbal medicine chest and list the products you currently use. Once you have listed them, determine what their action is and list that next to the product. If you are taking a product with multiple herbs, determine if the herbs all have the same action or if there are several actions taking place at the same time and list them next to the product.

	Product	Action
a.	_____	_____
b.	_____	_____
c.	_____	_____
d.	_____	_____
e.	_____	_____
f.	_____	_____
g.	_____	_____
h.	_____	_____
i.	_____	_____
j.	_____	_____
k.	_____	_____
l.	_____	_____
m.	_____	_____
n.	_____	_____