

How to make an Herbal Switchel



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When I think about the cold and flu season, the word fun doesn't readily come to mind. Why do so many of our herbal recipes for illness seem to taste bad? With that question in mind, I started to work on a recipe that would be fun and delicious for the winter months. That is when I thought up the idea of making an herbal switchel! The Winter Tonic Herbal Switchel is delicious and very versatile. I hope you enjoy it and that it might even become one of your family's go-to remedies for the fall and winter months. May you have a warm, cozy and healthy winter!

Elaine 

WINTER TONIC HERBAL SWITCHEL

Similar to a shrub or an oxymel, a switchel is a traditional herbal drink made with apple cider vinegar and some kind of sweetener, typically molasses, although you can also use honey, maple syrup or white or brown sugar. Switchels contain water and ginger as well.

I came up with a new twist on this old time recipe by adding herbs to make a Winter Tonic Herbal Switchel. Although it isn't traditional, it IS amazing, and tastes delicious!

The Winter Tonic Herbal Switchel can be used as a daily tonic during the fall and winter months to encourage health, vitality and proper immune response. It is useful for sore throat and croupy coughs, encouraging expectoration and reducing a fever. It can be used as a gargle to help sooth a sore throat. This blend encourages proper expectoration and respiratory health and can be used at the first sign of a cold or flu. It can be added as an ingredient to other herbal remedies such as cough syrups, cough drops, tinctures, herbal pills and teas.

THE INGREDIENTS

Honey: I think honey is made of magic: small insects all working together for a common cause, visiting thousands of flowers throughout the spring and summer to gather nectar. Their tiny wings beat, over and over, dehydrating nectar into honey. Honey is a gift from the flowers and the bees. I recommend raw honey as it contains more pollen, enzymes and other micronutrients. Honey is anti-bacterial, humectant and anti-inflammatory, making it soothing to sore throats and respiratory irritations. It is full of anti-oxidants, vitamins, and minerals. Due to risk of botulism, children under one year old should avoid honey.

Apple Cider Vinegar aids digestion, contains antioxidants, and may be helpful in supporting immune function. It has been studied for its anti-glycemic effect, making it useful for balancing blood sugar levels. It is antibiotic, antiseptic and soothing to a sore throat. I recommend raw apple cider vinegar, which is high in potassium, phosphorus, and some trace minerals.

Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*) is high in volatile oils, making it a helpful antimicrobial. It is an excellent expectorant for respiratory congestion and is useful for sinus and lung infections, colds and flu.

Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon spp.*) is antimicrobial, relaxing and anti-inflammatory. It is helpful for cough, congestion and symptoms of influenza such as fever, body aches and lethargy. As an antioxidant, it can help protect against cellular damage caused by free radicals.

Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*) is good for immune support and encouraging vital energy. Holy basil decreases stress hormone levels, corticosterone in particular. It is a powerful antioxidant and anti-inflammatory.

Elderberries (*Sambucus nigra*) are helpful for cold and flu, fever, body aches, lethargy, cough, sore throat, congestion, laryngitis, hay fever and sinusitis. Elderberries contain vitamin C, and bioflavonoids, including rutin and quercitrin. They also contain a high concentration of anthocyanins. Anthocyanins, derived from the purple pigments, have many medicinal properties. Ongoing research in Europe on the anthocyanins found in the elderberry has shown them to exhibit antioxidant activity, immunostimulant properties, anti-viral activity, cardiovascular protection, and even stress relief activity. Elderberries are also anti-inflammatory.

Hibiscus (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) is high in Vitamin C and bioflavonoids. It is useful for immune response and recovery from illness. Its astringent properties make it helpful for inflamed, stagnant tissues. It is an excellent remedy for the heart and cardiovascular system.

Sumac Berries (*Rhus spp.*) Fall is the time to harvest these sour tasting berries. An excellent source of vitamin C, they are astringent, cooling, and antioxidant. Sumac is helpful for respiratory ailments such as sore throat and cough. Be warned that there are also poisonous species of *Rhus*, such as poison ivy and poison sumac. Poison sumac has white berries and looks very different from the edible sumac, which has red berries (the picture at the bottom of this page is edible sumac).

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) is an excellent remedy for nausea and motion sickness. It is a superb anti-inflammatory and encourages circulation. As a diaphoretic, it will help reduce a fever. Ginger stimulates digestion and improve respiration.

THE RECIPE

By combining the above ingredients, you can create a delicious and healthful tonic for the fall and winter months.

Measure by weight:

- 1 ounce Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*)
- 1 ounce Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon spp.*)
- 1 ounce Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*)
- 1 ounce Elderberries (*Sambucus nigra*)
- 1 ounce Hibiscus (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*)
- 1 ounce Sumac Berries (*Rhus spp.*)
- ½ ounce Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), dried or fresh

Measure by volume:

- 3 cups raw unfiltered apple cider vinegar
- 3 cups raw honey, or to taste. Other sweeteners such as maple syrup, molasses and white or brown sugar can be substituted as desired.

YOU WILL NEED

- Quart canning jar
- Measuring cups
- Strainer
- Spoon
- Glass jars for storage (Don't use metal lids with vinegar as it will corrode.)

DIRECTIONS

1. Mix the herbs together in a quart canning jar and pour the apple cider vinegar over the top.
2. Infuse the herbs in the apple cider vinegar for 2 -4 weeks.
3. Strain through a strainer. I don't mind some sediment, but you can also strain it through an unbleached coffee filter or muslin cloth if you prefer.
4. Add the vinegar to the honey and mix well. If the honey is crystallized, you can gently heat the vinegar first for easier mixing.
5. Pour the switchel into glass jars and store in the refrigerator.
6. Shake before serving.
7. Want to get fancy? Garnish with berries, a candied ginger slice, peppermint or lemons.

HOW TO USE IT

Tonic Dosage: As a daily support, use 1 tablespoon for adults or 1 teaspoon for kids over 1 year old, 1-3 times a day.

Dosage for Cold and Flu: Take 1 tablespoon for adults or 1 teaspoon for kids over 1 year old, hourly.

There are so many ways to use the Winter Tonic Herbal Switchel. Here are just a few:

- Drink it hot or cold.
- Add it to your tea.
- Serve it over ice.
- Mix it with water, soda water, seltzer or mineral water.
- Add it to homemade lemonade.
- Add it to stock or soup.
- Use it as a salad dressing or marinade.
- Add it to juice or water and make popsicles.
- Add it to your favorite alcohol to make a seasonal cocktail.

RESOURCES

To find out more about medicinal plants and herbal recipes, check out Green Path Herb School!

Website: www.GreenPathHerbSchool.com

YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/user/greenpathherbschool>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Green.Path.Herb.School>

Pinterest: <http://pinterest.com/greenpathherb/boards/>



About Elaine:

The author of several books on herbal medicine and healing, clinical herbalist Elaine Sheff has been passionate about sharing herbal knowledge for over 25 years. Her latest book is *Naked: Botanical Recipes for Vibrant Skin and Healthy Hair*. Elaine is the Co-Director of Green Path Herb School, located in Missoula, MT, where she strives to inspire and empower students and clients to remember their connection to the earth, the plants and their own healing process. As a certified Instructor of the Natural Family Planning and Fertility Awareness Methods, Elaine has helped many couples to avoid or achieve pregnancy naturally. An artist and writer, Elaine has written numerous articles about her family's journey with epilepsy and a special needs child. You can often find her bent over an herb in her garden or marveling at small flowers in mountain meadows with her husband and sons. Find out more about Elaine and her life work at GreenPathHerbSchool.com.