

The Vehicle Herbal First Aid Kit

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There are many types and sizes of first aid kits. The focus here is on a mid-sized herbal first aid kit to keep in your vehicle for short and longer excursions. This is a quick overview of some of the remedies to have on hand. There are many other herbal medicines that could be beneficial for the below situations or any other that might arise.

Many of these herbal medicines and products are easy to prepare or purchase.

Weather: A Major Consideration for Vehicular First Aid Kits

It is best not to leave herbal first aid kits in a vehicle for too long. Variations in temperature and humidity can damage some remedies as well as their containers. Heat is an especial problem, especially with salves, as they can melt and squish out of their tins, leaving quite a mess. Also, heat will cause infused oils to go rancid faster and degrade the rubber tops of tincture bottles.

To counter this, it is helpful to bring the first aid kit inside during very hot days and look through it periodically to make sure all the products and their containers are still in good condition.

Practical Considerations

1. Learn to recognize serious health concerns and know when to seek professional medical treatment.
2. Have a ready-to-go herbal kit, especially for long road trips. It can be difficult and expensive to find herbal remedies while traveling.
3. Keep wildcrafting tools in your vehicle, such as pruners and a hori, to be able to gather your own medicinal plants. You may also want to include a plant field guide.
4. Familiarize yourself with treating the most common first aid protocols, such as burns, cuts, and wounds
5. Each herb or formula should be checked every few months to ensure they are not empty or outdated.
6. When preparing your kit, consider the most common health conditions you and your traveling companions are likely to encounter.
7. Keep a checklist of what is in your kit to know what you have available and what may need to be replenished. Keep all items clearly labeled and dated.
8. Note that some plants cover a number of conditions, which can reduce the number of medicines in your kit.

Herbal Preparations

The below herbal preparations work well in vehicles due to their stability and usefulness.

Tinctures-are applicable for a wide variety of both external and internal conditions. They are one of the most stable herbal preparations.

Glycerites-these are also stable and are useful when avoiding the alcohol in tinctures.

Infused oil-for external applications, such as sprains and bruises. Oils can go rancid quickly when exposed to direct sunlight and heat.

Salve-for external uses such as sores, wounds, and bruises. They can melt and leak in a hot vehicle.

Liniment-for external applications such as bruises, sprains, and infections. These medicines are prepared in isopropyl alcohol and are very stable.

Planning your First Aid Kit

The first step in preparing a first aid kit for your vehicle is deciding the most common health issues you encounter. This includes anyone else riding with you. Here are a few common ailments that commonly occur in car rides.

1. Digestive upsets and nausea
2. Wounds and cuts
3. Headaches
4. Allergies and asthma
5. Pain
6. Sprains and strains
7. Sunburn
8. Stress and anxiety

Digestive Upsets and Nausea

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*)

Chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*)

Fennel seed (*Foeniculum vulgare*)

Ginger (*Zingiber officinalis*)

Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*)

Peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*)

Digestive upsets can arise from a variety of circumstances. Some people get nauseous from just being in a moving car, especially on curvy roads. Also, 'road food' may cause stomachaches. For these predicaments, it is helpful to have a prepared blend (see below). Peppermint spirits may also be beneficial for nausea. It is prepared from dilute peppermint essential oil in peppermint tea. It is given in small quantities due to its essential oil content.

Ginger tincture, as well as Ginger candies, are also helpful for nausea.

Road Trip Digestive Tincture

Equal parts

Catnip tincture

Fennel glycerite

Chamomile glycerite

Meadowsweet tincture

Dosage-½-1 dropperful as often as needed for digestive pain or nausea.

Headaches

Blue vervain (*Verbena hastata*)

Chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*)

Feverfew (*Tanacetum parthenium*)

*Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza uralensis* or *G. glabra*)

Peppermint roll-on

Skullcap (*Scutellaria* species)

Willow (*Salix* species)

*Caution-Licorice may potentially raise blood pressure

Headaches are common in car rides, especially during long drives. They can be caused by eye strain, being confined, sun exposure, and the stress of traveling. Licorice and Willow may help with inflammation and have similar properties to aspirin. Skullcap is helpful for headaches due to muscle tension. Feverfew can sometimes ease migraine-type headaches when taken at the first sign of an oncoming headache. Peppermint oil roll-ons are rubbed onto the temples and are beneficial for tension-type headaches. Chamomile and Blue vervain are a good consideration for stress-induced headaches.

Headache Tincture

Feverfew 3 parts

Willow 2 parts

Chamomile 2 parts

Blue vervain 2 parts

Skullcap 1 part

Dosage-½ dropperful at the first sign of a headache. More can be taken as needed. Start with a small amount as unknown flavors and smells can worsen an individual's headache.

Allergies and Asthma

Eyebright (*Euphrasia* species)

Ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*)

Lobelia (*Lobelia inflata*)

Asthma and allergies can be brought on by plant pollens or a variety of chemicals while traveling. If you take conventional medicines for asthma, make sure to have them with you.

Eyebright and Ragweed are taken for allergy symptoms such as a running nose, itchy watery eyes, sneezing, coughing, and hives.

Ragweed may seem strange here, as its pollen is a significant cause of allergies, but the leaf of the plant can help relieve these symptoms. When gathering this plant, collect it before the plant starts to flower, which usually begins in mid-summer. Lobelia can be helpful for breathing difficulty by opening the breathing passages in the lungs. It can be taken as along with emergency inhalers such as Albuterol.

Lobelia Tincture

Dosage-5 drops as often as needed to ease breathing difficulties.

Allergy Tincture

Equal parts

Ragweed

Eyebright

Dosage- ½ dropperful as often as needed for allergy symptoms.

Wounds and Cuts

Propolis

Barberry or Oregon graperoot (*Berberis* species)

Chaparral (*Larrea tridentata*)

Echinacea (*Echinacea* species)

St. Johnswort (*Hypericum perforatum*)

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*)

Comfrey (*Symphytum* species)

Open wounds and cuts can happen at any time. The main goals are to prevent infection and help with the wound healing process.

Propolis tincture is a practical first-aid remedy as it helps reduce possible infections. It has a sticky consistency, so it stays in place when applied locally. Its tackiness may also help hold Band-aids in place. Oregon graperoot, Barberry, and Chaparral are useful for open cuts and wounds to help prevent infections. They can be applied in tincture, liniment, and salve form.

Echinacea can help stimulate the immune system and increase local tissue recovery.

If the infection appears to be spreading, or if it continues to worsen, seek medical assistance.

After the possibility of infection has passed, a salve of St. Johnswort, Calendula, and Comfrey can be applied to help the skin mending process.

Infection Tincture

Barberry (or Oregon graperoot) 3 part

Echinacea 3 part

Chaparral 2 part

Propolis 1 part

Dosage-apply this tincture directly over the wound or cut throughout the day. You can also moisten a dressing with the formula and tape it in place. Make sure the bandage is not too saturated, as that can impede wound recovery.

Sunburn

Aloe (Aloe species)

Prickly pear cactus (Opuntia species)

Lavender essential oil (Lavandula species)

Honey

Sunburns are a common health issue when traveling, and they can lead to further skin problems if they happen frequently. Protection such as clothing, shade, and sunblock are the most important measures to prevent sunburn, but there are some helpful herbs if you do get sunburned.

A less commonly known sunburn remedy is the inside of Prickly pear cactus. It is used similar to Aloe leaves. A cactus pad is clipped off a plant, and the spines and glochids (hairs) are scraped off. The pads are then cut to expose the moist inner surface. This pulp can be removed and applied directly to the burn, or the cacti can be placed pulp side down and held in place with a self-adhering bandage. This plant may be impractical for many people, but Prickly pear can be found growing in a variety of environments. I have seen it growing wild in West Virginia, Montana, and Michigan, though they are not as common there as they are in the southwest US. The pads can be cut and kept in the fridge and put into a first aid kit when needed. The cacti pads will also stay fresh for many days in a car.

Aloe leaves are used very similarly to cacti. The leaves are cut to expose the moist interior and applied directly to the sunburn. You can also carry aloe gel, which while more convenient seems less effective than the whole leaf.

Honey can assuage sunburn pain and help with skin recovery. Any raw honey will do. It is simply spread onto the sunburned skin. It does have drawbacks. It is messy, and doubly so if you are in a vehicle traveling. Also, it will trap any dust or dirt that it comes into contact with. When using honey, cover it with some light cloth or dressing.

One other sunburn remedy is dilute Lavender essential oil, which also helps with the pain and inflammation as well as helping with tissue repair.

For the discomfort of sunburn, consider some of the pain herbs listed below. These would be taken internally.

Lavender Spray

Spray bottle

Lavender essential oil

Water

Preparation-add 5 drops of Lavender essential oil to each ounce of water. This can be applied as often as desired. Aloe vera gel can also be added to this solution.

Anxiety and Stress

Blue vervain (*Verbena hastata*)
Chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*)
Damiana (*Turnera diffusa*)
Kava (*Piper methysticum*)
Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*)
Rose (*Rosa species*)
Tulsi (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*)

Travel can be a cause of anxiety and stress. All the planning, packing, trip details, and the traveling itself can bring on a sense of uneasiness. There are quite a few valuable plants to help relax and nourish the nervous system. Passionflower and Blue vervain can be used when the mind is wound-up too tightly. Damiana and Kava can have an overall relaxing effect on the body and the mind. If you are the driver, be cautious when using these two as they can cause drowsiness. Chamomile, Tulsi, and Rose have milder but are good over all nervous system tonics. They can be taken regularly to help relax and ease an anxious mind.

Stress Reducing Tincture

Tulsi 3 part
Rose glycerite 2 part
Passionflower 2 part
Damiana 1 part
Dosage- ½ -1 dropperful as needed for relaxing

Pain

Hops (*Humulus lupulus*)
Jamaican dogwood (*Piscidia piscupula*)
Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*)
Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*)

Pain can come from many different sources, and it is helpful to figure out the origin of the pain to help prevent future episodes. These four plants are general pain remedies and are beneficial for a range of discomfort and pain. However, these herbs may also cause drowsiness, so please be cautious if using them while driving. They can also all be used to help with sleep due to their sedative effects.

General Pain Tincture

Equal parts
Valerian
Skullcap
Hops glycerite
Jamaican dogwood
Dosage ½-1 dropperful as often as needed to reduce pain.

Sprains and Strains

Arnica (Arnica species)

Black birch (Betula lenta)

Licorice (Glycyrrhiza glabra, G. uralensis)

St. Johnswort (Hypericum perforatum)

Willow (Salix species)

Sprains and strains are common occurrences. They can happen when stepping into a hole, falling on one's wrist, or other awkward body moments.

The main goal for these situations is to eventually reduce the inflammation so the body can heal the damaged tissue.

Initially, it is important to avoid putting pressure on the afflicted body part. This will help it recover more quickly. Cold packs are beneficial to help reduce inflammation, especially during the first few days.

For these types of injuries, both internal and external preparations can be used.

Sprain Tincture

Equal parts

Black birch

Willow

Licorice

Dosage-1 dropperful every 4 hours for the first two days. Then ½ dropperful every 4-6 hours for 2 days afterward. This can be continued for up to a week.

External Sprain Formula

This medicine can be used as either an infused oil, liniment, or tincture.

Arnica 2 part

St. Johnswort 1 part

Dosage-apply this around the sprained or strained area a few times a day.

Non-Herbal Supplies

Some valuable non-herbal first aid items.

1. Activated charcoal
2. Band-aids and other wound dressings
3. Cold pack
4. Disposable gloves
5. Elastic bandage (i.e., ACE)
6. Headlamp
7. Self-adhering bandage (ex. Coban, Vetrap)
8. Tape
9. Tweezers