

Herbal Properties

7Song, Northeast School of Botanical Medicine

1. Adaptogen
 - Help the body adapt to stressful and challenging situations and are beneficial with recovery after illness or exhaustion. They help normalize bodily functions, the 'adapt' in adaptogen.
2. Adjunct
 - Help support a more primary treatment or therapy. For example, when treating an infection, an adjunct might be used to support sleep.
3. Adjuvant
 - Enhance the activity of an herb or formula, such as increasing its bioavailability.
4. Adsorbent
 - Substances that form tight molecular binds with noxious agents in the GI tract or on the skin. Activated charcoal is the most commonly used adsorbent.
5. Allergy aid
 - Plants that help with allergic symptoms such as stuffiness or breathing difficulties.
6. Alterative
 - A general well-being tonic. The word 'alterative' tends to be used similarly to 'blood purifier', indicating that the plant is helpful in a general rather than a specific way helping with overall body processes.
7. Amphoteric
 - These balance physiological (organ) systems. They may either increase or decrease activity depending on the context they are given. The dosage might alter how they function in the body. These are commonly used with hormonal or immunological swings in the body.
8. Analgesic/Pain
 - General category covering many types of pain, including internal and external pains such as headache, sprained ankle, arthritis, and back pain.
9. Anthelmintic
 - Help kill and/or expel various types of internal worms, such as pinworms.
10. Anti-galactagogue
 - Slows down or halts the production of breast milk.
11. Antiarthritic
 - Help with arthritic pain and damage. These are often antiinflammatories and connective tissue tonics.
12. Antibacterial
 - Kill or slow the growth of bacteria. These are used for internal and external bacterial infections such as staph or E. coli.
13. Anticholinergic

- Herbs that inhibit the action of the neurotransmitter acetylcholine. This affects a wide range of functions in the parasympathetic nervous system, such as slowing down digestion, causing dryness of the mouth and skin, and affecting cognitive function.
14. Antidepressant
 - Help ease the symptoms of depression and depressive states.
 15. Antiemetic
 - Reduce nausea and vomiting.
 16. Antifungal
 - Kill or inhibit fungi internally (i.e., yeast) and externally (i.e., tinea).
 17. Antihistamine
 - Reduce or block histamine or histamine receptors in the body. These are helpful for allergy symptoms and other conditions brought on by histamine release, such as hives.
 18. Antiinflammatory
 - Decrease inflammation and inflammatory processes internally (i.e., GI tract inflammation) and externally (i.e., swollen ankle). This action can help reduce pain.
 19. Antimicrobial
 - Plants that kill or inhibit a broad range of infectious agents, such as bacteria and viruses. Used both internally and externally.
 20. Antioxidant
 - Help stop cellular disruption and aid in the healing process by scavenging free radicals. Many flavonoids have this property.
 21. Antiprotozoal
 - Kill or inhibit protozoans such as Giardia and Entamoeba histolytica (the cause of amoebic dysentery).
 22. Antiseptic
 - Help kill external infectious agents, such as bacterial infections (i.e., staph).
 23. Antispasmodic
 - Help to reduce painful spasms, such as menstrual or GI cramps. They are usually more helpful for smooth (involuntary) muscle than skeletal (voluntary) muscle, though there is some crossover.
 24. Antitussive
 - Quell coughing through various actions such as reducing the cough reflex or soothing the respiratory tract.
 25. Antiviral
 - Inhibit or kill viruses either directly, by attacking the virus, or indirectly by stimulating the immune system.
 26. Anxiolytic
 - Help reduce anxiety. These may be relaxing, restorative, or sedative and help with feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or an overactive mind. They may also help with sleep.
 27. Aromatic

- Plants with a strong aroma and/or flavor. These may be used for their medicinal effects (such as relieving gas) or to make medicine easier to intake (i.e., the Mary Poppins effect).

28. Astringent

- Plants that contain tannins that help tighten and tone tissue. These are used externally for wounds and internally for disrupted tissues (such as gastrointestinal ulcers). Tannins also act as antioxidants.

29. Bioavailability

- Assist in increasing the availability and distribution of herbal medicines in the body. This is achieved through various mechanisms, such as helping a plant's absorption through the skin into deeper tissue or from the digestive tract into the bloodstream.

30. Birth/Labor aid

- Herbs that aid with the birthing process.

31. Bitter

- Plants with a bitter flavor, which may increase or decrease various physiological functions. They are often used to help with reduced secretions and for sluggish digestive function.

32. Blood sugar aid

- Help move sugar from the bloodstream into tissues (and cells). They may assist with metabolic syndrome, Type 2 diabetes, and other blood sugar disorders.

33. Bronchodilator

- Open up (dilate) the bronchi (airways), especially during an asthma attack. They do not have an antiinflammatory effect. These may be used in conjunction with conventional medicines.

34. Burn remedy

- These may limit damage, prevent or fight infection, and assist in burn recovery in 1st and 2nd degree burns.

35. Cardiovascular tonic

- Beneficial for heart and vascular health. These are tonics that are used over time to improve the form (structure) and function (physiology) of the heart and blood vessels.

36. Carminative

- Help move and expel gas from the digestive tract. Useful for bloating and abdominal distension caused by gas build-up in the stomach, small or large intestine.

37. Cholagogue

- These affect liver and gallbladder bile by increasing bile production or bile release. This affects the breakdown of fats in the intestines.

38. Cholesterol aid

- Have a positive effect on blood cholesterol. They may affect LDL, HDL, or other lipid values.

39. Cognitive support

- Helps with focus, concentration, and memory through various mechanisms, such as increasing vascular tone to the brain after injury or disease. They may alter central nervous system neurotransmitters, though most of their mechanisms of action are unknown.
40. Connective tissue tonic
- Beneficial in repairing supportive connective tissue such as cartilage, ligaments, and tendons.
41. Corrigent/Flavoring agent
- Help make herbal medicines more palatable. They can mask or alter the flavor of plant medicines. (But don't ask too much of them for very bitter or yucky plants like Chaparral.)
42. Culinary
- Any plant that is employed in cooking as well as medicine. These may be spices, flavorful, or nutritious.
43. Decongestant
- Help remove excess mucous from the sinuses and nasal passages by either drying or expelling the mucous from the nasal cavity.
44. Demulcent
- This property is derived from the mucilaginous component of some plants. The mucilage is made up of plant starches (polysaccharides), which have a thick, moist, slimy quality. These either directly or indirectly soothe mucous membranes.
45. Dermatological (skin) aid
- To help with various skin issues such as rashes, acne, psoriasis, and eczema. These are often applied externally, but some are taken internally.
46. Diaphoretic
- These increase the ability to sweat and are usually used during a febrile illness to bring on sweating and bring down fever.
47. Digestive aid
- Plants that help with restoring gastrointestinal health. These may be bitter, aromatic, antiinflammatory, antispasmodic, or carminative. They are used to normalize the actions of the digestive tract. They are used for pain, diarrhea, bloating, and other digestive irregularities.
48. Diuretic
- Increases urinary output (makes you pee). This is done through different mechanisms and can be helpful for edema, urinary tract infections, and other conditions where it is beneficial to remove excess fluid from the body.
49. Drawing agent
- Help pull out buried foreign materials from the skin, such as splinters.
50. Emetic
- These induce vomiting and are used to rid the stomach of recently ingested contents.
51. Emmenagogue

- These stimulate and promote menstrual flow and are sometimes used as abortifacients.
52. Emollient
- Applied topically to soften or soothe the skin. Lotions, ointments, and salves are common emollient preparations. Raw plant matter may also be softened and applied topically for this effect.
53. Errhine
- A plant that is snuffed through the nose to cause sneezing and clear the nose and sinuses. They are also called sneezing powders.
54. Expectorant
- Help expel mucous from the respiratory tract. This can reduce coughing, resolve chest tightness, and ease breathing.
55. Galactagogue
- Herbs that stimulate and increase breast milk production.
56. Headache aid
- Help with different types of headache pain. They have varying actions, including antiinflammatory, sedative, muscle-relaxing, and analgesic properties.
57. Hemostatic agents
- Stop or control internal and external bleeding.
58. Hormonal modulator
- Herbs that regulate hormones. These may increase, decrease, or normalize hormonal activity and act on reproductive and other endocrine hormones.
59. Immune modulators
- Regulate immune function and may increase, decrease, or normalize the action of immune cells. They are used for weakened immunity and auto-immune disorders.
60. Incense
- Plants that are lit up for their aroma. These are used for cleansing, ceremonial, healing, spiritual, and medicinal purposes.
61. Integumentary aid
- Help protect, restore, nourish, and heal the integumentary system. This is made up of the outermost layer of the body, the skin, hair, and nails.
62. Kidney/Urinary tract aid
- Herbs that assist in the structure and function of the kidneys, bladder, and other parts of the urinary tract.
63. Laxative
- Help relieve constipation. These may be stool softeners, bowel stimulants, or bulk-forming agents. They may also help normalize peristaltic tone.
64. Lithotriptic
- Break up and help with the discharge of kidney stones. They are usually accompanied by diuretics, antispasmodic, and other pain remedies.
65. Liver/Gall bladder aid
- Help regulate liver and gall bladder structure and function.

66. Lymphatic
- Help normalize and restore lymphatic system function. These may aid with lymphatic fluid movement or affect the lymph nodes and lymph vessels.
67. Menstrual aid
- Aid the menstrual cycle. They may help normalize menses, reduce symptoms, or assist in menstrual dysregulation.
68. Nerve repair
- Assist in repairing damaged nerves (neuropathies) due to physical accidents or internal dysregulation (i.e., diabetic neuropathy).
69. Nervine
- Herbs that nourish and tonify the nervous system, helping to restore function. These are beneficial after stressful events, for long-term anxiety and depression, or after an illness that affects cognitive function. They are generally not sedative in action.
70. Nutritive
- A medicinal plant that is also nutritious and is eaten as a food. Its therapeutic value is partially due to its nutritional value.
71. Ophthalmic aid
- Help with eye health and vision. These are used for both acute and chronic eye conditions.
72. Oral health aid
- Help with teeth and gum disorders such as dental pain and gingivitis (swollen gums).
73. Parturient aid
- Assist in the birthing process.
74. Purgative
- Strong ('purging') laxatives and should be used with caution.
75. Rubefacient/Counterirritant
- Topical agents that relax blood vessels and bring blood to the surface, creating warmth and redness where applied. They are generally used to reduce joint, muscle, and other localized pains.
76. Sedative
- Plants with a tranquilizing, relaxing effect. These are often used for sleep, to reduce anxiety, and for pain. They may impair cognitive function and cause sleepiness, which should be considered when taking them.
77. Sexual health aid
- Herbs that may improve sexual activity and libido.
78. Sialagogue
- Plants that increase the production and secretion of saliva. These can help moisten a chronically dry mouth.
79. Skeletal muscle relaxant
- Help relax skeletal muscles. These reduce tightness and relieve pain, particularly in the neck, shoulders, and back. They are also used to lessen some types of headaches and arthritic pain.

80. Sleep aid

- Help to fall and/or stay asleep. Many of these are sedatives, but they may also reduce pain, act as muscle relaxants, or be taken regularly as nervines.

81. Spice

- Any medicinal plant that is also used as a cooking spice.

82. Stimulant

- Excite the nervous system and can be used to increase energy levels and reduce fatigue. But they can cause anxiety, agitation, and sleeplessness.

83. Sympathomimetic

- Innervate or imitate the sympathetic ('fight or flight') nervous system. These are stimulants and are used to resolve conditions such as asthma, nasal congestion, and anaphylactic shock. They can raise heart rate and blood pressure significantly.

84. Thyroid aid

- Plants that normalize thyroid function for both hyperthyroid and hypothyroid conditions.

85. Toxic

- Plants that may be dangerous to ingest or apply topically, even in small doses. They are also classified as low-dose botanicals as their medicinal actions are apparent in small amounts. These should only be used by experienced practitioners.

86. Trauma aid

- Help with long-term and acute trauma symptoms. These can also be used for PTSD and other trauma-induced conditions.

87. Vulnerary

- Assist in wound healing and are mainly used externally.