Definitions and Terminology

Preparations

**Decoction:** A tea made from boiling plant material, usually the bark, rhizomes, roots or other woody parts, in water. May be used therapeutically. Natural dyes are often made this way.

**Water Infusion (Tea):** A tea made by pouring water over plant material then allowed to steep. The water is usually boiling, but cold infusions are also an option. May be used therapeutically, as hot tea is an excellent way to administer many herbs.

**Oil Infusion:** An extraction process in which the volatile oils of a plant are obtained by soaking the plant in a carrier oil for a period of time and then straining. The resulting oil is used therapeutically and may also contain the plant’s aromas.

**Tincture:** An extract of a plant made by soaking plant material in a dark place with a desired amount of either glycerin, alcohol, or vinegar for long period of time (generally two to six weeks). The liquid is strained from the plant material and then may be used therapeutically.

**Liniment:** Extract of a plant added to either alcohol or vinegar and applied topically to employ the therapeutic benefits.

**Poultice:** A therapeutic topical application of a soft moist mass of plant material (such as bruised fresh herbs), usually wrapped in a fine woven cloth.

**Percolation:** A process to extract the soluble constituents of a plant with the assistance of gravity. The material is moistened and evenly packed into a tall, slightly conical vessel; a liquid is then poured onto the material and allowed to steep for a prescribed length of time. A small opening is then made in the bottom, which allows the extract to slowly flow out of the vessel. The remaining plant material (the marc) may be discarded. Many tinctures and liquid extracts are prepared this way.

**Steam Distillation:** Steam distillation is a special type of distillation (a separation process) for temperature sensitive materials like herbs or flowers. Plant material tends to decompose at high sustained temperatures, so by using steam (as opposed to direct contact boiling water), the deterioration of plant material is reduced. The water vapor created carries small amounts of the compounds to a condensation flask, where the condensed liquid separates, allowing easy collection. If the substances to be distilled are very sensitive to heat, steam distillation may be applied under reduced pressure, thereby reducing the operating temperature further. The oil produced in steam distillation forms what is known as **essential oils**. The aqueous product of steam distillation are known as **hydrosols**.

Medical Terminology

**adjuvant** - aiding the action of a medicinal agent

**analeptic** - restorative or stimulating effect on central nervous system

**analgesic** - relieve pain
anesthetic - induces loss of sensation or consciousness due to the depression of nerve function
antianemic - preventing or curing anemia
antibacterial - destroying or stopping the growth of bacteria
anticatarrh - reduces inflamed mucous membranes of head and throat
antidepressant - therapy that acts to prevent, cure, or alleviate mental depression
antidiarrhetic - substances use to prevent or treat diarrhea
antiemetic - stopping vomiting
antifungal - destroying or inhibiting the growth of fungus
antihemorrhagic - controlling hemorrhaging or bleeding
anti-inflamatory - controlling inflammation, a reaction to injury or infection
antimalarial - preventing or relieving malaria
antimicrobial - destructive to microbes
antioxidant - prevents or inhibits oxidation
antipruritic - preventing or relieving itching
antipyretic - agent that reduces fever (febrifuge)
antirheumatic - easing pain of rheumatism, inflammation of joints and muscles
antiseptic - agent used to produce asepsis and to remove pus, blood, etc.
antispasmodic - calming nervous and muscular spasms or convulsions
antitussive - controlling or preventing cough
antiviral - opposing the action of a virus
aperient - a very mild laxative
aperitive - stimulating the appetite for food
asepsis - sterile, a condition free of germs, infection, and any form of life
astringent - agent that constricts and binds by coagulation of proteins a cell surface
bitter - stimulates appetite or digestive function
cardiotonic - increases strength and tone (normal tension or response to stimuli) of the heart
carminative - causing the release of stomach or intestinal gas
catarrhal - pertaining to the inflammation of mucous membranes of the head and throat
cathartic - an active purgative, producing bowel movements
cholagogue - an agent that increases flow of bile from gallbladder
cicatrizant - aiding formation of scar-tissue and healing wounds
counterirritant - agent producing an inflammatory response for affecting an adjacent area
demulcent - soothing action on inflammation, especially of mucous membranes
dermatitis - inflammation of the skin evidenced my itchiness, redness, and various lesions
diaphoretic - increases perspiration (syn: sudorific)
diuretic - increases urine flow
dysmenorrhea - painful menstruation
emetic - produces vomiting
emmenagogue - agent that regulates and induces normal menstruation
emollient - softens and soothes the skin
errhine - bringing on sneezing, increasing flow of mucus in nasal passages
euphoriant - produces a sense of bodily comfort; temporary effect and often addictive
expectorant - facilitates removal of secretions
febrifuge - an agent that reduces or relieves a fever
hemagogue - an agent that promotes the flow of blood
hemostatic - controls the flow or stops the flow of blood
hypertensive - raises blood pressure
hypoglycemant - agent that lowers blood sugar
hypotensive - lowers blood pressure
laxative - substance that acts to loosen the bowels contents
narcotic - induces drowsiness, sleep, or stupor and lessens pain

nervine - a nerve tonic

parturfaciant - induces contractions of labor at childbirth

purgative - laxative, causes the evacuation of intestinal contents

resorbent - aids reabsorption of blood from bruises

rheumatism - a general term for acute or chronic conditions characterized by inflammation of the muscles and joints (includes arthritis, gout, bursitis, myositis, and fibromyositis).

rubefacient - agent which reddens skin, dilates the vessels, and increases blood supply locally

sedative - exerts a soothing, tranquilizing effect on the body

soporific - inducing sleep

stimulant - temporarily increases body or organ function

stomachic - aids the stomach and digestion action

sudorific - acts to increase perspiration

tonic - a substance that increases strength and tone

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