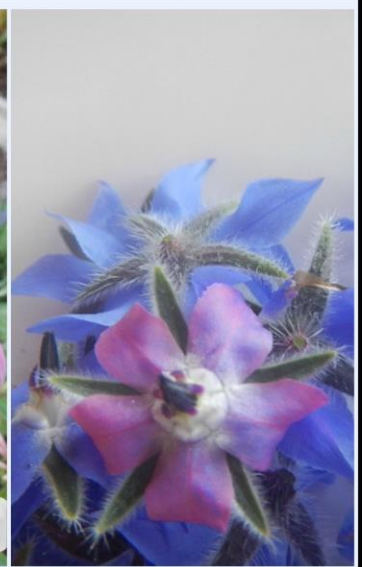




*Medicinal*  
**HERB GARDEN**



TESSA ZUNDEL

# Homestead Medicinal Herb Garden

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WHICH HERBS TO PLANT FOR THE  
HEALTH OF YOUR HOMESTEAD

Tessa Zundel

Puddleduck Press  
MOUNTAIN GROVE, MO

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Mountain Grove, MO 65711  
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*For my mom who let me grow all the weird stuff I ever wanted  
in the gardens of my youth.*

*If you look the right way, you can see the whole world is a garden.*

—Francis Hodgson Burnett

INTRODUCTION

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The following information is being provided for your use as a member of our newsletter family. We're so glad you've joined us!

These pages are an excerpt from:

- Our blog (<https://homesteadlady.com>) and our publication
- The Do It Yourself Homestead Journal which is meant to be used as a companion to our title
- *[The Do It Yourself Homestead](#)*, a 400 page go-to manual for homesteading.
- We hope this short e-book will be helpful to you as you plan your food preservation for the year.

Be sure to read to the end for a special offer for our newsletter family concerning *The Do It Yourself Homestead*.

Herbs are wonderful plants to grow in any garden because of their hearty growth habits and beautiful presentation. Medicinal herbs have the added benefit of being good for our health. The following is meant to help you brainstorm as you think of planting your own herb garden that includes medicinal herbs. For in-depth growing information, please refer to any and all of the other publications reference in this short E-Booklet.

## Must Have Medicinal Herbs

Here is a list of some of my favorite commonly grown medicinal herbs. That is, I consider them must have, must grow medicinal herbs. You will notice that quite a few make themselves useful in the kitchen, too. I concur with Hippocrates and feel that our food should be our medicine and our medicine should be our food.

Is this list comprehensive of medicinal herbs? No!!

For comprehensive, check out at least five ten books from the library. I originally started this list with the intent of giving you only five basic, grow-able herbs. As you will see, I can't count. Included here are the cultural requirements for each herb, and what it's typically used for.

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### Medicinal Herbal Terms

You'll need to know some basic herbal vocabulary as you learn more about medicinal herbs. Remember that all herbal actions/uses are only suggestions. Please see a qualified medical professional when necessary.

- Vulnerary – Externally helps the body to heal wounds
- Anti-microbial – helps immune system overcome pathogenic micro-organisms
- Demulcent – Mucilaginous herbs which relax, soothe and protect tissue
- Diaphoretic – Increases perspiration, dilates capillaries
- Carminative – sweet, spicy aroma, promotes expulsion of gas and soothes the stomach

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### Medicinal Herbs

Here are nine medicinal herbs for your consideration. Also listed here are other herbs worthy of note.

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#### #1 Calendula

- *Calendula officinalis* - Site – full sun to part shade - growing zone 3-10.
- Soil- tolerant of poor soils.
- Propagation – Direct sow in early spring through summer.



- Sometimes called “pot marigold” because it does well in pots.
- The seeds are large and easy to handle, so they’re great for kids.
- Even black thumbs can grow Calendula!

Externally - anti-inflammatory, vulnerary, lymphatic, anti-microbial. Taken internally, it is great for digestion, normalizing menstruation, and is anti-spasmodic.

Also used in salves for every topical problem imaginable like:

- Infections
- Cuts
- Scrapes
- burns
- chapping

## #2 Cayenne

- Capsicum Annuum - Site – Full Sun – zone 9 perennial grown as an annual in most areas
- Propagation - start indoors 6-8 weeks before last frost – protect from reappearing frost.
- Soil – same as for peppers, around 6.5 PH.
- One of herbal educator and practitioner, Dr. Christopher’s favorites!
- Externally it will warm hands and feet; may also use for rheumatic pains and lumbago, and for hoarseness as a gargle.
- Anti-microbial and, although stinging, a very effective styptic!
- Taken as a general tonic specifically for circulatory and digestive systems.
- Stimulant, good for the heart, arteries, blood flow, and nerves.

## #3 German Chamomile

- Matricaria Recutita - Site – Full sun to part shade, reseeding annual.
- Soil – Light and well drained but will tolerate poorer soils – surprisingly tough little buggers.
- Propagation – One of the few seeds that need light to germinate.
- Sprinkle on soil and LIGHTLY mix with dirt in the late spring.
- Roman Chamomile (*Chamaemelum nobile*) is a perennial, but typically the German is used medicinally.
- The flowers are used as a nervine tonic.
- Also, anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving, for a wide range of conditions along the digestive tract.

- It is also a blood thinner, so never use it during pregnancy or if you take similar medications.

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#### #4 Peppermint

- *Mentha Spicata* (Spearmint) & *Mentha Piperita* (peppermint) Site – Partial shade or sun – zones 5-11 but will survive lower.
- Soil – Moist, well drained, alkaline.
- Propagation – Take root or stem cuttings or divide it in spring and autumn.
- In summer, root stem cuttings in water.
- It is very invasive in the garden, so make sure you keep it contained or grow in pots.
- Carminative, anti-spasmodic, combats gas and aids digestion, nervine, anti-emetic (vomiting), anti-microbial.
- Spearmint is better for kids as it's milder.
- Peppermint is stronger and therefore better suited to adults.
- Mint is used in everything from toothpaste to candy – it's one of mankind's favorite flavors.
- Mint combined with Elder and Yarrow make a traditional treatment for cold/flu/fever.

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#### #5 Garlic

- *Allium Sativum* - Site – Sunny but tolerates partial shade.
- Will grow in most zones.
- Perennial grown as an annual.
- Soil – Rich, moist and well drained, tolerates poorer soil.
- Propagation – plant individual cloves.
- 1 ½ inches deep in the fall for larger bulbs.
- Spring planting will also produce bulbs.
- Dig garlic bulbs in late summer and handle gently to avoid bruising.
- Both soft-neck and hard-neck varieties will store in a cool, dry place – braid and hang.
- Use fresh, dried, roasted or infused in oil or vinegar.
- Anti-microbial, anti-fungal, anti-biotic, great for the heart and nervous system – traditionally used to kill everything from a sinus infection to ring worm!

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## #6 Echinacea

- Echinacea Angustifolia (one variety, but there are several) - Site – Full sun –any zone - wide range of soils and sites.
- Very drought tolerant – do not overwater.
- Propagation – seeds may require some chill – spotty germination.
- Won't usually flower until second year, but you harvest one to two-year-old roots for medicinal use.
- An at risk plant due to popularity so give it a go – plant some next spring!
- Angustifolia typically used, but Purpurea also can be used, as immune stimulant.
- Anti-microbial, anti-catarrhal (prevents inflammation of nose and throat).
- As with most dosages, plan for 10-14 days on, 7 days off – or as prescribed by your holistic practitioner.

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## #7 Yarrow

- Achillea Millefolium - Site – full sun – zones 3-10-ish - Soil – any but prefers well drained.
- Propagation – from seed or divide roots in spring; it can self-sow – be careful.
- One of the best diaphoretic herbs; also, vaso-dilator and has diuretic properties.
- Good for the tummy and is also astringent and anti-inflammatory.
- Externally used as a styptic and for its vulnerary properties.

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## #8 Dandelion

- Taraxacum officinale - Site and Soil – will grow pretty much anywhere.
- Propagation – Try and get it NOT to grow, I dare you.
- The root is a general tonic and very effective as a liver tonic, hepatic (cleanses the liver), increases bile flow, anti-rheumatic, helps dump metabolic waste.
- Root also helps relieve skin and degenerative joint disorders, lowers blood cholesterol and is a mild laxative.
- The leaf is a safe, highly effective diuretic, best natural source of potassium which avoids potassium depletion.
- Leaves are commonly used raw in salads but are a bitter herb.

## #9 Black Elder

- Sambucus Nigra (There are several varieties) – Site full sun to part shade - zones 4-9 – Soil with good organic content and drainage.
- They are prolific, heavy bearing, easy to grow sprawling bushes that can grow to 15' but can be pruned to 8'.
- Need a pollinator to set fruit, so plan to plant at least two.
- Berries are high vitamin C, good for jams, tea, natural dye.
- Whole plant a nearly complete pharmacy!
- Leaves used externally are vulnerary and emollient; internally, leaves are purgative, expectorant, diuretic, diaphoretic.
- Flowers prepared cold are diuretic and cooling; prepared warm diaphoretic and gently stimulating.
- Berries are diaphoretic, diuretic, aperient (mild laxative).
- Remedy for colds, flus, fever, bruises, wounds, sinusitis, hay fever, etc., etc.

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## Uses for Medicinal Herbs:

1. Calendula I use in almost every salve I make. It's great in lip balm, too. Fresh petals are beautiful in salads.
2. Cayenne is so easy to incorporate into Mexican dishes. I encapsulate it in my "multi-herbal-vitamin" and take a bit every day.
3. Chamomile I put in many of my infusions or teas – especially for my kids. It is also wonderful in potpourri and salad.
4. Peppermint is one I use in a lot of my kid's tinctures to improve flavor, and for tummy upset. I also throw it into green and fruit salads, into smoothies and ice cream. When an herb grows so abundantly, I feel like that's God's way of saying I should eat a lot of it!
5. Garlic is one I may even over use! Infused in olive oil, it's our ear infection remedy. Roasted and added to flatbread with fresh rosemary, it's a household favorite. In Russia, I used to eat it raw. Oi.
6. Echinacea is so great to grow, and a dehydrator makes drying the roots so much easier.
7. Yarrow is a wonderful bedding plant with its lovely flowers, and slightly apple-scented leaves. I grow it for both the humans and the livestock at my house.
8. Dandelion is great because it grows. The roots do best in a dehydrator, as well. Greens, though, should be eaten fresh and with a nice vinaigrette. Try Dandelion flower jello or cookie.

9. Elder berries are divine as a cough syrup. Make a strong infusion and add some raw honey – your kids will be pretending they have a sore throat just to get some.

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### Other Medicinal Herbs to Consider:

If you ask five herbalists their opinion on the best herb, you'll get fifteen answers. So, the more research the merrier!

- Comfrey, also known as “Knitbone”
- Fennel
- Mullein
- Marshmallow
- Oregon Grape Root
- Sage

### Not Necessarily to Grow but to Have:

- Goldenseal
- Ginger (have to be grown indoors if you want to try it)
- Nettle (can grow it in most places, just have to learn to handle it)
- Reishi and/or Shitaake mushroom (can be grown indoors, but you must learn the process)
- Usnea lichen
- Kelp and/or Bladderwrack

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### Things to Do with These Plants

There are so many things you can do with these medicinal plants. Let me use just one herbal writer as an example. Devon Young writes at Nitty Gritty Mama and she is an excellent herbalist - I highly recommend her site. Just from her articles alone, here are three things to do with herbal plants:

- Make a foolproof, basic salve - easy peasy, anyone can do this with [these instructions](#).
- You can also make a [perfect infused oil every time](#) - Devon will show you how.
- And, just for fun, use [herbs in your homemade sodas](#) - no, I'm not kidding, just see here.

That's just the tip of the iceberg, so have fun figuring out what to do first!

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### Resources for more Information on Medicinal Herbs:

- *The ABC Herbal*, by Steven Horne - a short, sweet family herbal
- *Herbal Recipes for Vibrant Health*, by Rosemary Gladstar - this one lives in my kitchen
- *Medicinal Herbs: A Beginner's Guide*, by Rosemary Gladstar - a little simpler than the above and more growing info but I honestly recommend both.
- *The Herbal Medicine Makers Handbook*, by James Green - This is a great one in general, but it also has growth tables in the back for planning your own garden - read our review of that book by clicking [here](#).
- *Making Plant Medicine*, by Richo Cech - owner of Horizon Herbs - kind of a cosmic guy but very knowledgeable and down to earth.
- *The Complete Book of Herbs*, by Lesley Bremness - my first herb book and one of which I'm still very fond - Great recipes for food, crafts, lotions, oils, etc.
- *Growing and Using Herbs Successfully*, by Betty Jacobs
- *Herbal Antibiotics*, by Stephen Harrod Buhner - short and to the point
- *Smart Medicine for a Healthier Child*, by Janet Zand - Great family resource book that breaks down ailments, conventional treatments, dietary helps, nutritional supplements, herbal treatments, homeopathics, acupressure, general recommendations, prevention.

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## How to Plan and Plant a Medicinal Herb Garden

If you discover a proclivity for using medicinal herbs, the next logical step is to try growing some. Included in the previous information on those nine herbs are growing requirements for each. Let's talk a little more about what that means and why you might want to grow your own medicinal herbs.

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### Why Plan and Plant a Medicinal Herb Garden

Why would you want to know how to plan and plant a medicinal herb garden? With more and more of us opting out of the conventional this or that, there's been a rise in interest in gardening in general, and growing herbs specifically, over the last few years. Herbs are amazingly useful plants in the landscape, even if you're not ready to use them medicinally.

Most herbs are really not very difficult to grow, many have lovely flowers and/or interesting foliage and they can easily be integrated into your perennial beds or any traditionally landscaped area. A lot of herbs grow well in pots, either indoors or outdoors and many are very adaptable to climates and types of soil. Many, many herbs are basically pest resistant plants, ta-boot!

Should you need information on growing herbs specifically in pots, be sure to check out our e-book [Herbs in the Bathtub](#). Learn to grow your own potted herbs wherever you live, in whatever space you have.



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### Which Herbs to Begin With

Even people who aren't into herbs know the basics like basil, mint and garlic. Interestingly enough, all three of these are classified as culinary and medicinal herbs being both highly nutritive and flavorful as well as powerfully potent in treating various health

issues. My goal here is to cover a few basic principles on how to plan and plant a medicinal herb garden. A medicinal herb garden is defined as a garden planted with the goal of serving the needs of your general health maintenance, as well as acute issue that might arise.

There's no way I can cover everything on how to plan and especially how to plant your medicinal herb garden, but we'll cover some of the basics. If you have specific questions, feel free to ask and I'll do my best to answer them.

Here is a list of my Must Have, Must Grow Medicinal Herbs that are also very manageable for most gardeners.

The list includes some cultural requirements for each plant and a few of their uses but most herbs are multi-taskers. Always double check everything you read about herbs so that you can be sure of your information; don't take my word for anything, do your own homework. See our full disclaimer at the bottom of this post.

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## How Do I Plan Which Medicinal Herb to grow?

Most herbs are not terribly tricky to grow, but they are plants and will require you to have a certain amount of gardening knowledge. Fortunately for all of us gardeners, nature is adaptable and resilient, and whenever I have a garden failure I just say right out loud, "Well, that's why God invented next year"! My first piece of advice for effectively planning your medicinal herb garden is to evaluate how much gardening experience and knowledge you realistically have. The best rule to follow for new gardeners is:

Aim Small, Miss Small

If you've never really grown much, try basil or calendula this year as both are easy to grow (easy to grow from seed even, if you're feeling ambitious). They're very pleasing plants when they leaf and bloom - not to mention what great medicinal herbs they are!

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## Herb Challenge

Here's a little herbal homework:

- Most quality, local nurseries will carry a selection of herbs. Walk through one and see which plant speaks to you.
- If you're new to growing plants, I'm limiting you to two purchases this year.



- If you've grown a garden before, I challenge you to pick up an herb you've never heard of or, at least, one you've never tried growing.
- Before you take home your herb, check out the label and make sure it's one that will survive the conditions of your climate and yard. If you have questions, ask your nurseryman or continue reading.

Remember to only take on two new-to-you plants this year. I don't want you to get overwhelmed and frustrated, suffer a loss, and then figure you have a black thumb. You're going to be busy living your life, AND tending your few new plants, AND reading herb/plant books from the library, AND looking for community gardening classes to join so that you can improve your garden Ninja skills.

Two plants will be all you can handle.

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## Questions About Planting Medicinal Herbs

### What Medicinal Herbs Do I Use?

There are literally thousands of wildly useful herbs you COULD grow. But your climate, soil and other growing conditions will only successfully support so many of those varieties. Sit down and go through your herb closet or shelf to see which herbs you use all the time.

- Is it Echinacea?
- Ginger?
- Garlic?
- What about Fennel?
- Mint?
- Licorice Root?
- More exotic?
- Are you always out of Ginseng?
- Myrrh?
- Black Walnut Hull?

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### What are the Herbs' Cultural Requirements?

Now, grab one of those herb books you've checked out from the library, and start looking for information on each of your herbs' "Cultural Requirements." These are the conditions that each herb will need in order to grow and thrive.

You'll be lucky, too, is the plant will propagate itself in some way. Propagate is when a plant reproduces itself which it can do by:

- reseeding
- producing seed for you to harvest
- layering
- cutting
- and more!

Pay special attention to how many hours of sun your medicinal herb needs a day, because if your book says the herb needs 6-8 hours of sunlight is required, it probably means it. Here are some medicinal plants for the shade, in case you need them.

Also pay attention to what water requirements the plant has, what kind of soil it needs and, VERY important, what kind of winter and summer temperatures it can take.

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### **Which Medicinal Herb Should I Plant in My Climate?**

Sometimes you can fudge a little with each individual plant requirement. For example, a little less water, only 5 1/2 hours of sun, a soil that is only borderline quality. However, winter temps, especially, are not forgiving. Make sure you are zoned for the plant you want to grow. If you're not sure, go to this site and type in your city. (Be sure to ask your nurseryman what the temperature range is for the plant you're interested in, if the tag or the website doesn't specify.)

Realistically determining what herbs, you can actually grow will knock out a big chunk of your wish-list. Some of the common medicinal herbs we've become accustomed to ordering from our favorite herb suppliers are among those that will only grow in specific, delicate conditions.

For instance, in my climate without a greenhouse, using the examples above I can only grow:

- Echinacea
- Garlic
- Fennel
- Mint
- Licorice
- Walnut

Did I say only?!? That's a pretty good list, all things considered.

As I tend my medicinal herb garden, I'll find herbs that can serve as substitutes for those ones I can't grow in my zone. God wants us to be healthy and has provided all we need to be so no matter where we live. I truly believe that, and I've bet my life on it, literally.

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## Should I grow medicinal herbs from seed?

Once you have a working list of medicinal herb plants you know you'll use AND be able to plant, order an herb catalog from a quality seed house. In fact, order from two or three. Read the descriptions of the plants and see how much you've learned. Keep your herb book close by as a reference, and to answer any questions you have about the plants that the catalog isn't answering.

What you're doing here is finding an herbal seed vendor with whom you want to work.

- Which companies has the criteria you're seeking?
- Will they be a good educational resource for you?
- Is their website helpful?
- Is their ordering process easy, and what does their customer service look like?
- What about ethics - are you trying to stay away from Seminis, GMO or even hybrid seed?

The fact is, you may not be ready to start growing your herbs from seed this year (this is a step above keeping a plant alive in a pot on your deck), but you will eventually get there. And it's good to begin with the end in mind.

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## Where Do I Find Medicinal Herb Plants?

If you're wanting to create a MEDICINAL herb garden, then the chances are you'll exhaust the resources of your local nursery within a few years. You'll just be so herb savvy! You'll discover you've moved beyond the simple basil and sage options at the nursery and are looking for a wider variety from which to choose. I have several favorite, high-quality seed houses that I do business with.

However, if I'm looking specifically for medicinal or culinary herbs seeds, there's only one choice for me and that's Horizon Herbs. They answer all my important seed house questions:

- the seeds are always viable
- the packets have great information
- the catalog is a wealth of knowledge
- the people behind the seeds are some of the nicest you'll ever do business with
- they also sell some potted plants and root cuttings, which is helpful for those times I just really don't want to take the time to grow some of the harder plants from seed

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## Easiest to Grow Your Own

There are some online vendors who sell medicinal herb plants but unless you have a very small yard and a very big budget, stocking an entire herb garden with mature plants will be cost prohibitive.

So:

- Go back to the library and get a book on seed starting.
- Take a local seed-starting class (try your university extension and/or your local seed exchange group).
- Ask your gardening nerd friend if you can come see their set up and pick their brains about what they do.

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## Can I Only Grow Medicinal Herbs from Seed?

I will say that some herbs can be buggers to grow from seed, but all is not lost! If you are lucky enough to have a neighbor or friend who is growing an herb you need, research the best method of cutting or rooting for that plant and see if you can do that. For example, thyme can easily be propagated by a method called layering.

Here's how to layer with thyme:

Take a supple but mature stem of thyme, laying it in the dirt and covering up a section with more dirt.

Weighting that down with a rock or garden pin, you keep it watered and wait for the point of contact with the soil to sprout roots.

Voila! Cut it off, and you have a new plant - no seed needed.

Again, have a good book on hand. Also, where it's legal and the plants are available, consider learning how to wildcraft (harvest from native plants) the herbs that you need from your local environment. Please be sure to do this responsibly.

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## How Much Space Do I Need?

Be realistic about the space available to you when planning and planting your medicinal herb garden.

Are you in an apartment? Well, then look at what you can grow in a sunny window or a southern facing deck. What about a community or farm garden plot, or a friend who has extra space in their yard? You're into medicinal herbs, right? So, you're used to thinking outside the box - bottom line, find a decent amount of space to grow some herbs.

What's a good size? Ahhhh...ummmm...that depends. Argh - it's impossible to get a straight answer from a gardener! Sorry, but it really does depend on certain factors.

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## Things to Consider About How Many Medicinal Herbs to Grow:

- How many people are you growing medicine for this year?
- How many different plants will be taking up space? (For example, fennel takes up a lot more space than thyme, both vertically and horizontally.)
- How much of the area in your yard or plot is a good match for the plants you want to grow? (Are you able to use your entire growing space, or is there a lot of shade or unusable ground?)

Let me give you an example: I grow medicine for seven people. I have a spearmint patch that I inherited it with the house that is about two feet wide and eight feet long. I harvest at least twice, sometimes three times a year, by shearing the plant about six inches from the ground, and then letting it regrow. We hang-dry all of that, and then we use it fresh from the plant throughout the growing season, both in the house and in the barnyard.

With those two or three harvests (which equals several, large fresh bundles), I have enough to last all winter for both the humans and the animals. I even have some left over most of the time.

Here's another example using seed fennel. I put fennel seed directly into the ground and grew up three patches of sweet fennel (not to be confused with bulb or Florence fennel). Those three patches left me with a #10 can size harvest of fennel seed - plenty for this year and then some! Remember, some herbs are culinary, too, and you'll need to plan amounts to use in the kitchen. From each herb, harvest during the growing season to use fresh, and then harvest some for storage through the winter. I have no sense of proportion, and plant way more basil every year than I technically need but is that really a bad thing?!

The key is to practice with these plants so that you get familiar with how they perform, and how much you typically need each year.

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## Planning the Medicinal Herb Garden on Paper

Are you still with me?

Ok, so you've done a good deal of thinking and studying, now:

- get a nice sized piece of paper and a pencil with a good eraser
- draw a sketch of your growing space
- start plugging plant ideas into your sketch - this will serve as a rough design for your new herb garden.

Your design can be something as simple as a Square Foot Garden bed devoted to herbs, or as complicated as an entire yard full of these great plants. Remember to utilize our book *Herbs in the Bathtub*, if you need a little help.

### **Need A Little More Help with Planning Your Medicinal Herb Garden?**

There's no shame in hiring a designer if this isn't your thing.

I ended up consulting with a designer for our medicinal herb garden because it was in the front yard in a neighborhood with manicured growing spaces. I took her great plans and tweaked them the way I wanted. We also included a lot of edible plantings, and even some ornamentals since the space was large. I wanted the garden to be full and rich all year round, especially for my bees. It will take me years to get all the herbs I want in, and to grow up the edibles and ornamentals to a mature size. Tasha Tudor says it takes over a decade for a garden to look like it's been there a lifetime. Sounds about right to me and I'm on track.

Incorporating all those other plantings also opened my eyes to the truth that so many plants I'd never thought of before have *herbal* actions. For example, we're growing rugosa roses to form a living fence at the front of the garden, and because they're lovely and will survive our winters. It turns out that their hips are so incredibly nutritious and powerfully healing that they are a medicinal plant. We took our first harvest of those hips this season and, wow, did everyone from the children to the goats appreciate those plants!

## Final Thoughts

If you'd like just a few great herbal posts to read, how about these?

- Here are [10 Ways to Use Oregano](#) by Homespun Seasonal Living.
- How to [Harvest Herbs](#).
- Harvesting and Using Dandelion Roots from [Common Sense Home](#).
- Why Medicinal Herbs Don't Always Work.
- From [Grow, Forage, Cook, Ferment](#) here are 10 Reasons to Grow Lavender.
- And from Joybille Farm here [are 10 Herbal Remedies that are also Culinary Herbs](#).

There are countless more around the Web!

I don't mind the time it will take to mature my medicinal herb garden as I continue to plant it. I'm using the time to learn more and more about herbal preparations, properties and uses. I'm also getting to know the plants themselves, as they grow and occasionally fail. (We had a horribly hot summer and a terribly cold winter - I shudder to think what I'll find this spring...)

So, I guess my last piece of advice is, take your time and pace yourself BUT start this year and do something to plan and plant your medicinal herb garden. No matter how small the effort may seem. Just like growing a vegetable garden, the key is to:

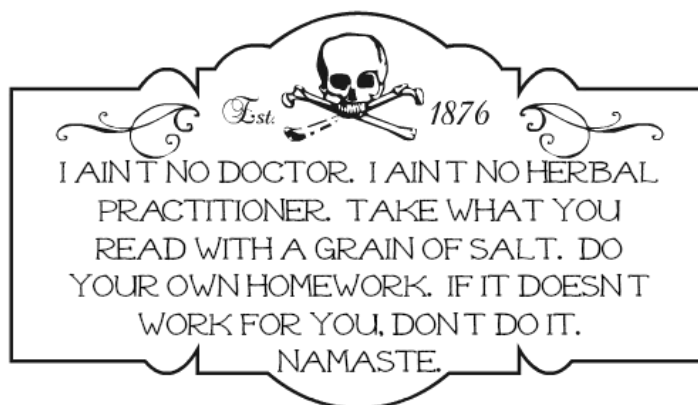
Grow what you'll use and grow what will grow!

The unspoken truth of successful gardening.

## Why Medicinal Herbs Don't Always Work

Why don't herbs always work to heal? What am I doing wrong? Are doctors bad? Here's a little discussion on why medicinal herbs don't always work. The following will most likely be of most use to women who have or are birthing, although all of us can benefit from the reminders herein. Especially those of us who use herbs in our health regimens and as a first line of defense against illness.

All the information shared here is personal experience and is not meant to diagnose or replace any information from your chosen medical professional. Do your own research. Here's my official disclaimer so we can be square:



Herbs, in fact, don't always work and there a myriad of reasons why. Conversely, there are a lot of times herbs do exactly what I expect them to. There are a lot of times I've had conventional medicines fail and function for me and my immediate problem. The following is a cautionary tale meant to help inspire you to take better care of yourself. The personal experiences related her are just that, personal to me. Your experiences will be different.

The basic moral of the following tale is always, always take good care of yourself.

### THIS GRATEFUL MAMMA

I've had an overwhelming feeling of gratitude for the times in which I live. What a blessing to have so many options and so much information to study. I'm also grateful for mentors like my herb lady friend, [Amy](#), as well as the multitude of herbalists who've inspired and instructed me like those at Herbal Academy. (To learn more about The Herbal Academy's online courses, [Preview Lesson from the Introductory Herbal Course](#).)



I'm also thankful for the good [allopathic](#), or conventional western, doctors I've encountered over the years. You can read some positive experiences I've had with western medicine in my article: [Broken Body Homesteading - Advice for Keepin' On](#).

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## Pain Stinks

Even with all that gratitude, I'm still no fan of pain, despite the great teacher that it can be. Several years ago, I was having a rough time after the birth of my fifth baby, I don't mind confessing.

First, it must be pointed out that, I have a wonderful life full of people who love me. I have good work in which to engage and a peaceful knowledge of who I am and who God is.

However, aforementioned God felt that it was time I had a learning experience and, pain being that great teacher, He chose the physical ailment route. I've decided to take the experience as a compliment. Praise Him, my trial did not involve a life threatening, wasting disease. The one thing that can be said about physical pain is that it teaches *quickly*.

I learned a lot about why I need to think about my whole person when I'm trying to heal. I can't use natural medicines and not practice natural healing which involves things like:

- whole foods eating
- adequate rest
- consistent herbal regimens for maintenance and treatment
- adequate water consumption
- and so much more!

IF I want to be all herb-y, natural and holistic in my health regimens then I need to follow all those criteria. Not just the ones I feel I have time for. Here are some example of what I've found to be important, how I've failed to respect that importance and my most recent learning experience.

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## Battling the Yeastie Beasties

I have always had a hard time breast feeding, even with this current baby. In fact, all but one of my four earliest children went on formula after only a few months of being at the breast. You really don't know much of anything useful when you're young and I had never bothered to read anything about how formula is made or what goes into it.

Neither did I know anything about [yeast overgrowth](#) or acid diets or soaking grains or any of the banquet of things I know now. I just knew that breast feeding equaled constant breast infections complete with horrific pain, burning fevers and unhappy babies.

To learn more about yeast overgrowth, please visit [this link](#), then [this one](#), then [this one](#).

## TRICKY MILK SUPPLY

I also knew that, even when I wasn't battling infection, my milk supply was insufficient to keep baby happy and well fed. My child, one I breast feed for eleven months through sheer will power, was colicky and unhappy all of the time. I mean, all of the time. And I hated being a mom.

With the others, the formula magically seemed to fix that. Never mind what the tradeoff was because I didn't realize [anything negative was happening](#) as a result of using it. I digress. With this last baby, I'm much better informed all around and I have enjoyed breast feeding for many months now.

I had started to heal my gut before I got pregnant but never quite finished. (I need to do a few deep cleanses, some more rebuilding and make a few more dietary changes. Besides, when you're breast feeding, it's not really a good time to fiddle with your system.) Not being quite "there" yet, I experienced my first breast infection with this baby. Wowzers had I forgotten how incredibly much that hurts.

I immediately went for my [herbal antibiotics](#), my [probiotic kefir](#) and started using warm packs with essential oils, cabbage leaves and mullein fomentations.

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## What I Didn't Do

What **didn't** I do while suffering from this breast infection?

1. Slow down and rest.
2. Eat more deliberately, or at all.
3. Drink enough water.

One of the biggest things your body is telling you when you get a breast infection is to rest and replenish. I didn't do it.

I was finishing up our rather pathetic garden harvest, trying to get home school started and dealing with various other responsibilities. The world would have stopped turning if I slowed down, right?

Despite the lack of respect I showed my system, the breast infection mostly (only mostly) abated. But the infection moved into my outer ear.

Ever had an outer ear infection?

Y'all, I've had staph present on my eyelid, a cavity in Russia and birthed a 12 lb 6 oz baby in my dining room. I am no stranger to stuff that hurts. BUT, that thing left me curled up in the fetal position, moaning incoherently and sobbing in pain.

## **I'D GONE BEYOND HOME REMEDIES AND HERBS ALONE**

Realizing that I'd gone beyond what my home remedies and herbs were able to do for me (especially since I wasn't willing to do what I was supposed to), I went to an urgent care clinic.

You know, if you've got to go the conventional medical route, I love those places. They're no nonsense, staffed by typically cool PAs and have a simple format without all that doctor mumbo jumbo about tests and specialists. In this case, I was prescribed a powerhouse commercial antibiotic and some drops for the pain in my ear. (To learn how to keep your probiotic levels up in your gut while you're on commercial antibiotics, [read our post here.](#))

The ear drops ended up not being able to control the acute pain in my ear. I was actually getting a little delirious with the pain. So, I went to my family doctor (whom I hadn't seen in years) and was prescribed a powerhouse pain pill to go with my antibiotic. I like this doctor because he doesn't just hand out pills because you have an owie. I told him I didn't need it not to hurt, I just needed to be able to stay conscious. Har dee har.

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## **The Herbal with the Conventional**

I continued to take my herbal antibiotics to make it all go faster and upped my probiotics to avoid a yeast infection from the conventional antibiotics. (Historically, I can't even look at those things without getting a yeast infection). I continued with my oils and hot packs for my ear and continued to pray.

Let me just mention: lavender and melaluca oil on a cotton ball (not your ear, put the oil on the cotton), placed just inside an infected ear, can really help with pain management. However, as the ear infection subsided, another breast infection began, as well as migraines.

## **WAS I RESTING ENOUGH YET, YOU ASK?**

Apparently not. I FINALLY took to my bed to rest. I also became really adept at making fomentations for my breast using breast pads and saran wrap. I felt gift wrapped. And silly. But, those fomentations help; especially when you put a heating pad over them. I digress again.

- [Here's how to make a fomentation](#) - though I pray you never have need of it!

## What I Learned

Here are a few basic lessons I learned from this experience. Do any of them resonate with you?

### **WESTERN MEDICINE IN ITS PROPER PLACE**

As much as I disagree with the paradigm of modern "healing", western medicine can be a boon, especially at managing acute conditions. Painful, immediately presenting issues are where modern medicine *can* excel.

True healing will, in my opinion, always allude a physician trained to only treat a few symptoms without addressing the vital systems of the body as a whole. But, emergent problems can be helped with some western intervention, properly prescribed. Let me tell you, once the pain starts, the first thing you think of is how to make it stop. Human condition.

We don't need to run to the doctor for every, little thing but we can use their expertise when it's needed.

### **WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR OWN HEALTH**

No one else, especially our physician, is responsible for our health and well-being. *We are*. It's our responsibility to eat well, exercise and see to our basic needs through educating ourselves on simple home remedies and herbs. We're also responsible for taking care of ourselves.

This is an area where moms, especially, fail in epic ways.

In this instance, modern medicines were a safety net that had to catch me because I refused to do what my body was asking me to do. A mom's work is never done, true, but even mom has to recover when she's ill. I shouldn't be too proud to do what I'm supposed to do to heal.

If I had obeyed, in this instance, I feel I would have been healed with my herbs, oils and prayers.

### **OUR ENERGY/SPIRIT MAKE A DIFFERENCE**

Not to go all new-age, spiritual, Christian on you but I believe that energy plays a vital part in our health and wellbeing.

Interestingly, there was a topic close to my heart on which I was unwilling to hear the Word of the Lord. He was telling me what to do and I didn't like the answer. So, I was refusing to truly *hear* Him. I had worked myself up so much that I simply didn't have ears to hear – literally with that outer ear infection!

Needless to say, after this experience, I am much more willing to listen. If you ask the advice of an omniscient being, it's a good idea to *listen* to His advice. Just sayin'!

## THERE'S NO SUBSTITUTE FOR REST

I need to rest. Period. I am one person. The older I get, it seems to me, my biggest flaw is that there IS only one of me. But you know what? I am not indispensable. The world will go on turning if I say no or nap or stay home. I do no one any good sick and useless for three months.

## OTHERS CAN PICK UP MY SLACK

The family farm down the road grows amazing produce. Consequently, I didn't have to freak out about not having the garden up and running at a 100% this year. Once I got to feeling better, [we actually made pickles](#). They weren't made from *our* cukes, grown in *our* garden, but they were fabulous. I supported local agriculture and there was no shame in not being able to deal with my garden. Indeed, it was fantastic!

It's OK, I reminded myself, to rely on other people sometimes. We can benefit from their talents. That's what community is for. On that note, letting a friend from church do my laundry, wash my dishes and bring me dinner was also a great idea.

## HEALING IS HEALING, NO MATTER WHERE IT COMES FROM

There's a place for most healing modalities in my world.

Yes, some I use more often because I have more faith in them. However, whether it's western medicine or faith or herbs and oils, I'm grateful for all the tools the great Healer has given us in our times. I'm also grateful for knowledgeable and qualified healers who are there to assist us. Always consult a physician or herbalist you trust – never stop asking for help when you need it!

I'm convinced that God wants us to be healthy. He's has given us so much of what we need to find healing when things go awry. We tend to feel like we'll always be stuck with the pain and for some, like [Paul with his thorn in the side](#).

That might be true for some, but far too many of us live beneath our privileges in this matter by not taking care of ourselves first. Quite often we won't need anyone's intervention, western or holistic. We can learn to listen to our bodies and do what it takes to find [health in the navel](#) (heal our guts) and marrow in the bones (nourish our systems).

Bottom line, if you're ill, be wiser than I have been these past few months.

- Deep breaths every day.
- Say no to everyone but your spouse and children (or those people to whom you are deeply connected).
- Fill your body with light in the form of whole food, whole communication with your God and a whole lot of sleep.

Namaste.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tessa Zundel is the homemaking, homeschooling, homesteading mother of five children and wife to one long-suffering man. Although she has called several states and properties home over the years, she now resides in the great state of Missouri in the middle of acres of fairy forests and hidden ponds. She is the author of several books including *The Do It Yourself Homestead* and is the voice behind the blog Homestead Lady. She has also contributed to online and print magazines like Hobby Farms. She is an advanced master gardener and has worked with several community groups in areas of home education, gardening and seed saving.

Most days you'll find her hauling her good natured, adventuresome children around to learn about herbs, small farm livestock, fiber and other lost arts, whole foods and home education. There's always something being tinctured, fermented, built or milked around here - just ask the long-suffering man!

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## Connect With Me

Feel free to connect with me online—I'd love to hear how your homestead efforts are progressing!

Homestead Lady Blog: [www.homesteadlady.com](http://www.homesteadlady.com)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/homesteadlady](http://www.facebook.com/homesteadlady)

Twitter: [www.twitter.com/homesteadlady](http://www.twitter.com/homesteadlady)

Pinterest: [www.pinterest.com/homesteadlady](http://www.pinterest.com/homesteadlady)

*The Do It Yourself Homestead* has its own Facebook Community to provide an immediate network for you as you pursue your homestead education. Join us here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/TDIYH/>

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The book details many topics that are close to a homesteader's heart:

- The Homestead Kitchen
- The Homestead Garden
- Going "Green" on the Homestead
- Livestock for the Homestead
- Homestead Finances
- Homestead Families
- The Homestead Community
- Becoming a Prepared Homestead

The best part about this book in our humble opinion is that it's written on four different levels of homesteady-ness. Simply choose the beginner level, if that's where you feel comfortable. Or, start with the more advanced information and challenges, if that's what you're ready for.

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