

First Five: Everyday Herbal Remedies to Keep on Hand



by Emily Mathis

welcome to city garden goods!

First Five: A Beginner's Guide to Herbal Remedies That Work

A starter kit for building your own herbal medicine cabinet.

If you're looking for a way to care for everyday health needs without relying on store-bought meds, start here. These five herbal remedies are safe, simple, and useful for all ages – and are among the most frequently-used with my own family.

Elderberry Syrup for Colds & Viruses

Replaces: Children's Tylenol Cold, Robitussin, Zarbee's

Why it works: Elderberries support immune response and may reduce cold/flu severity.

1 c dried elderberries
optional cinnamon & ginger
3 c water
3/4 c raw honey.

Simmer elderberries, cinnamon, and ginger for 45 min, adding honey **after** straining and letting the temperature come down to warm rather than hot – in order to preserve the health benefits of the honey.

Use: 1 tsp daily for kids, 1 tbsp for adults; 2–3x/day during illness.

Mullein & Marshmallow Tea for Coughs

Replaces: Delsym, Robitussin, Mucinex

Why it works: Mullein soothes lungs and clears mucus; marshmallow coats and calms tissues.

1 T mullein leaf
1 T marshmallow root

Steep herbs in 2 c hot water for 20–30 minutes. Strain.

Use: Sip throughout the day. Sweeten with honey if desired.

Ginger for Tummy Troubles

Replaces: Pepto-Bismol, Tums, Gas-X

Why it works: Ginger eases nausea, stimulates digestion, and boosts circulation with gentle warming and anti-inflammatory effects.

Ginger Tincture

fresh ginger root (washed and chopped or grated)

80–100 proof vodka (or brandy)

glass jar with tight-fitting lid

cheesecloth or fine strainer

dropper bottle for storage (optional)

1. Fill a clean glass jar halfway with chopped or grated fresh ginger. (No need to peel!)
2. Pour vodka over the ginger until the jar is full, covering the ginger completely.
3. Label your jar with the date and contents.
4. Store in a cool, dark place and shake gently every day or so.
5. After 4–6 weeks, strain out the ginger through cheesecloth or a fine mesh strainer.
6. Pour the finished tincture into a clean glass bottle (dropper bottles are handy for use).

Adults: ½ to 1 dropperful (15–30 drops) as needed, or at the first sign of nausea.

Children: Use a **glycerite** instead, or dilute with water and give only a few drops.

Ginger Glycerite (Alcohol-Free Tincture)

Same ingredients – other than swapping out the vodka for vegetable glycerin (food-grade, preferably organic) and distilled water.

Fill a clean glass jar about halfway with chopped or grated fresh ginger.

1. **Mix your liquid base:** combine 3 parts glycerin to 1 part distilled water.
(for example: ¾ c glycerin + ¼ c water = 1 c total liquid.)
2. **Pour the glycerin-water mixture over the ginger** until completely covered.
3. **Label the jar** with the date and contents.
4. **Store in a cool, dark place**, and shake gently every day or so.
5. **After 4–6 weeks**, strain out the ginger through cheesecloth or a fine mesh strainer.
6. **Bottle and store** in a dark glass dropper bottle or jar. Shelf stable for up to 1 year.

Kids age 2–6: 5–10 drops as needed

Kids age 6–12: 10–20 drops

Teens and adults: 30–60 drops (about 1 dropperful)

Calming Tea for Sleep & Wind-Down

Replaces: Melatonin, Benadryl for sleep, Tylenol PM

Why it works: Chamomile, lemon balm, and lavender soothe the nervous system.

1 tsp chamomile
1 tsp lemon balm
½ tsp lavender

Steep using a tea ball or tea infuser in hot water for 10–15 minutes.

Use: Serve warm at bedtime. Great as tea, glycerite, or calming bath.

Calendula Salve for Cuts & Scrapes

Replaces: Neosporin, triple antibiotic ointments

Why it works: Calendula is antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory, promoting quick healing.

1/2 c dried calendula flowers
1 c olive oil
2 oz beeswax pastilles

Infuse the calendula in the oil in one of two ways:

1. In a covered jar on the counter or in a cabinet, for 4-6 weeks.
2. Place the jar of calendula and oil in a crockpot on lowest heat, with a potholder or small cloth on the bottom beneath the jar. With the slow-cooker set on WARM, leave the mixture to infuse for 4 hours.

Strain the herbs from the oil.

Melt 2 oz beeswax in a jar and add the infused oil.

Pour into tins.

Use: Apply to clean skin for cuts, bites, rashes. Keeps 6–12 months.

Tools You'll Want: Mason jars, cheesecloth or nut milk bag, small tins or jars, labels and marker (or just a Sharpie – the ink scrubs right off when you're done!), small spray bottle

Reliable Sources for Herbs: [Mountain Rose Herbs](#) and [Starwest Botanicals](#)

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