Book Review

Herbal Vade Mecum
800 Herbs, Spices, Essential Oils, Lipids, Etc.
Constituents, Properties, Uses, and Caution
by Gazmend Gazmend Skenderi, 2003

The Latin in the title of this book says to "take me with you," and the book is in fact a very useful quick reference for the professional or advanced student of herbalism. It is in the same niche as other quick reference books such as Potter's Encyclopedia, but so superior as to be in a class of its own for the following reasons:

1) It covers 800 herbs and related substances, including common herbs of commerce as well as the major herbs from British and German phytotherapy.

2) It has up-to-date and accurate details on plant chemistry, something missing in most general reference herbals, which, when they include plant constituents, usually just transcribe lists from other older books. Skenderi is himself a plant chemist, with access to the most recent research and reference works in natural product chemistry. I suspect this book will become a new affordable source book for others not able to do their own authoritative constituent homework.

3) Skenderi, being multilingual, has mined the wealth of herbal literature in German, Italian, and French as well as English.

4) The book contains reasoned judgements on safety considerations lacking in the other books in its class and contains better and more balanced information in this area than most other books devoted entirely to the subject. He frequently issues a caution for the general public but says the herb "may be used safely when directed by a trained professional," a welcome distinction in this kind of literature.

5) It accurately describes the most important actions and most important uses for the herbs, in a well thought-out section, instead of giving long lists of theoretical or minor actions copied uncritically from the usual laundry list of historical books.

I'll be using this as a textbook for my intermediate-level students at the North American Institute of Medical Herbalism. — Paul Bergner

Orders: $24.95 + $2.95 (S&H, delivery: 3-8 business days) $24.95 + $4.95 (S&H, delivery: 2-3 business days) New Jersey residents have to add 6% to the book price. International Orders: $24.95 + $14.95 (S&H, delivery 7-10 business days).

Traditional Medicine

Boneset and Influenza

Historical notes and commentary
by Paul Bergner

Abstract. The herb Eupatorium perfoliatum, boneset, has been used to treat influenza and other viral respiratory infections continuously in the U.S. since before first contact with the Europeans. A review of this use by physicians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is reviewed, with commentary, along with their general recommendations for prevention and care of influenza.

With a severe influenza epidemic sweeping the country, it seems appropriate to review the clinical uses of Eupatorium perfoliatum for influenza on North American medical history.

Excerpts from "A Treatise on Eupatorium perfoliatum — Drug Treatise Number XXXI." Lloyd Brothers Pharmaceutical Company.

Since the early settlement of America, Eupatorium has been employed in medicine, having been introduced by the Indians, who used it in fevers and colds. Over one hundred years ago, before there was in print an American materia medica, Eupatorium was through this introduction, a favorite of observing American physicians. Its usual preparations at that early date were, naturally, decoctions and infusions, both of which, from their very nature and crudity, were severe in action as well as disagreeable in taste. The word "nasty" applies to them without reserve, and yet their popularity in colds and influenza remained undisturbed.

The first work in covers touching American medicinal plants, Schöpf, 1785, gave a setting to eupatorium. This was followed, in 1798, by the Collections of the celebrated Prof. B.F. Barton, of the University of Pennsylvania, then an authority second to none on American medicines. The drug was recognized by such authors as Thacher, 1810, Bigelow, 1817, W.P.C. Barton, 1818, and Chapman, 1819, and under their commendations it passed naturally into the first Ameri-
can Pharmacopoeia, 1820, as well as the first edition of the United States Dispensatory, (first edition) 1830, the American Dispensatory (first edition) 1852, and the National Dispensatory (first edition) 1879. Probably every work that gave thoughtful attention either to American medicine or its materia medica, including all publications devoted to domestic or home treatment, for over one hundred years, described Eupatorium as a remedy serviceable in influenza.

Schöpf, 1877, author of the first botanical treatise on America’s medicinal plants, early explorer of America, states that Eupatorium was employed by Indians as a remedy in fever and cough. Schöpf’s Materia Medica Americana Potissimum Regni Vegetabalis, 1787

“To catarrhal affections, in the early stage, our medicine is said to be well adapted. The people of the country prescribe it freely in such complaints, and repose no slender confidence in its powers. Not the least memorable application of the article was of this nature. Thirty years ago we had throughout the United States, a singular catarrh, or species of influenza, which, in consequence of the sort of pain attending it, came to be denominated the break bone fever. The eúpatorium, acting as a diaphoretic, so promptly relieved this peculiar symptom, that it acquired the popular title of bone-set, which it retains to the present moment.” Chapman’s Discourses on the Elements of Therapeutics and Materia Medica, Volume II, 1819.

“The article is very nauseatingly bitter to the taste. By different methods of preparation and management, it may be made to produce a variety of effects. A strong tea prepared by long steeping, or by boiling, and taken freely while warm, may, according to the quantity, be made either to produce perspiration and assist in raising phlegm from the lungs, or to purge, or to vomit. Taken cold, and in more moderate quantity, it gives strength. In one or other of these methods, it may be useful in common cold, influenza, malignant pleurisy, low fevers, agues, indigestion, and weakness in general, being managed as above directed, according to the effect desired.” Hand’s House Surgeon and Physician, 1820

“This plant may be so managed as to act as a tonic, a sudorific, a laxative or an emetic, as required. No other tonic of equal activity can be exhibited in fevers, with less danger of increasing excitement or producing congestion; the only objection to its general use is its nauseous and disagreeable taste.” Rafinesque’s Manual of the Medical Botany of the United States, 1828

“...It is of a sweating nature, and may be made into a strong tea, of which you may drink freely on going to bed. If you have a slight cold, you may generally get rid of it in this way, by being a little careful the following day. The blows of this herb, if taken freely, will operate as an emetic....” Bowker’s Family Instructor, 1836

“Good in coughs and colds and if given freely in the early stages of fever... it rarely fails of removing the disease. It is an excellent diaphoretic.” Sperry’s Family Medical Adviser, 1847

“Prof. Lee says: ‘With regard to the use of this plant in influenza, whether sporadic or epidemic, we have proved it possessing great efficacy - relieving the pain in the back and limbs, as well as the general lassitude, with great promptness; for although in this disease the skin is often bathed in perspiration, yet it is of a morbid character – the surface being pale, and morbidly sensitive, and the excretion of a passive kind. When the secretions are of this morbid nature, and the pulmonary system is involved, the Boneset has proved in our hands a most valuable remedy, inducing a health and free perspiratory discharge, and replacing the chilly or febrile sensations with a uniform or health glow.’ Hale’s New Remedies, 1867

“Eupatorium was a favorite medicine of the Indians of North America; it has always been a popular remedy in the United States. When used in the treatment of influenza it should also be administered in the form of an infusion made in the proportion of an ounce [of herb] to sixteen ounces of boiling water; and in doses of a wineglassful, to be drunk warm every half hour, the patient remaining in bed the whole time. After four or five doses profuse perspiration, and sometimes, vomiting, is produced, when relief is at once obtained; after which the medicine should be given in small and repeated doses. Bentley and Trimen's Medicinal Plants Volume III, 1880.

“Dose: - If to produce emesis, one teacupful should be taken every fifteen minutes. One half teacupful every half hour produces perspiration. One teacupful, cold, every hour, acts as a laxative, and a half a teacupful, every two hours, is a tonic.” Hale’s New Remedies, 1867

As a suggested prophylactic in influenza—‘An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” During

Continued on back page
the present (1918) epidemic of what is known as "Spanish Influenza," Eupatorium was employed both in the course of treatment of the disease, and as a preventive. Five employees in one manufacturing establishment were afflicted in one day. At once, a prescription was filled and given each of the large force remaining, with the direction to begin taking it immediately. None were thereafter afflicted.

**Some Influenza Suggestions**

- Put your patient to bed and keep him there even beyond the period when safety seems assured.
- Don’t ply him with whiskey, quinine, aspirin, and cola-tar depressants in repeated and full doses.
- Don’t over-medicate him with any kind of medication.
- Beware of the reckless use of unproven serums and vaccines.

**Reference**


**Commentary**

The general influenza recommendations at the end of the above article may even more useful than the plant itself. Poorly managed influenza, when the patient gets up and back to work too soon, can readily result in a relapse and viral pneumonia. It may also lead to chronic post viral infection syndrome, with lingering debility for weeks, months, or even years.

Failure to fast during the febrile stage of the illness results in a longer duration of symptoms and in some cases will result in deterioration of the patient to a critical state, or to chronic viral syndrome afterwards.

Avoidance of immuno-suppressive agents during flu season may help with prevention or moderate the severity of the disease. Sugar and its analogues, food allergens, sleep deficit, and over-exercise are common causes of immune suppression. Most over-the-counter drugs used for influenza are also immuno-suppressive, including aspirin and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs.

The influenza vaccine is controversial, in that it may in some cases confer immunity, in other be of no use, but in general depresses and disrupts the immune system. Those who have had the vaccine but get the flu anyway may have more severe problems.

--- Paul Bergner

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