

Breathe Easy

Kelly Bowers offers a breath of fresh air



Mullein

Ma Huang, commonly known as Ephedra (*Ephedra sinica*), contains the alkaloid *ephedrine*, which is an adrenalin-like stimulant that provides quick relief for allergies, asthma and other respiratory problems. It dilates the bronchial tubes, resulting in deeper breathing and increased oxygen intake, and has antihistamine. Dosage is 2-6 grams in a decoction.**

Introduced to North America by European settlers, **Mullein** (*Verbascum thapsus*) was quickly adopted by Native Americans and is commonly used to support the respiratory system. The Menominees smoked the dried, powdered root and the

Mohegans and Penobscots smoked

the dried leaves for respiratory issues. The Catawba Indians also made syrup from boiled mullein root to help soothe coughs. It is specifically used for asthma, coughs, bronchitis, chest colds, hay fever, sinusitis, phlegm and whooping cough. Drinking mullein tea daily or burning the dried leaves and inhaling the smoke can assist with asthma attacks. Dosage is a standard infusion, 3-9 grams or 10-30 drops of tinctured leaves and flowers.

Wild Cherry Bark (*Prunus serotina*) is commonly used in cough drops and is anti-tussive, expectorant, antispasmodic, antiseptic and a relaxing nerve. It helps soothe respiratory nerves to alleviate coughs and asthma. It is also used to assist with bronchitis, smoker's cough, whooping cough, colds and pneumonia. The inner bark is collected in the fall and can be used in infusions, decoctions, cough syrup and tinctures. Dosage is a standard infusion, 3-9 grams or 10-15 drops of tincture. Wild Cherry fruit is also considered a poor man's substitute for cherries.**

** Herbs are either contraindicated for certain health conditions, have limits on safe length of use, contain specific parts of the plant that are poisonous or can cause possible side

effects. Herbs and book sources are listed in a longer version of this article on newlifejournal.com

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Each day, we inhale 25,000 times, receiving and sharing that air with all life on our planet. Fortunately, the very plants that provide us with oxygen can also provide us with much-needed relief when our breathing is stressed by illness and pollution. Here are a few of our local plant friends who can help us to breathe easy.

A popular European cough remedy, **Coltsfoot's** (*Tussilago farfara*) yellow flowers are the first blossoms to appear in the Northeast in spring. Coltsfoot is superb at resolving asthmatic wheezing and shortness of breath, and has been smoked since ancient times to sedate coughs. A cup of coltsfoot tea before rising helps with emphysema and morning cough, while inhaling the steam from the leaves and flowers can soothe bronchitis and shortness of breath. Dosage is 10-20 drops of tincture, 3-9 grams or a standard infusion of dried flowers and leaves.**

The rhizome and root of sunny **Elecampane** (*Inula belenium*) stimulates a productive cough and soothes the respiratory system with its relaxing mucilage. A superb lung tonic, it strengthens lung muscles and promotes lung tissue longevity. It is useful for chronic cold lung conditions with clear expectoration, pneumonia, coughs, whooping cough and bronchitis. The flowers lower chi in order to stop coughs, bring up and dissolve phlegm and relieve wheezing. Dosage is a standard infusion, 3-9 grams or 10-30 drops of tincture.**

Lobelia (*Lobelia inflata*) causes immediate relaxation and expansion of the bronchial tubes. In large doses, it can cause vomiting, leading to its common name, pukeweed. Although emetic (vomiting) therapy can be employed to treat asthma, smaller doses of Lobelia can resolve an acute attack without leading to nausea. Lobelia contains *lobeline*, a chemical cousin of nicotine, which helps reduce nicotine cravings. A blend of lobelia, coltsfoot and mullein can be smoked as a soothing alternative to tobacco. Dosage is 5-15 drops of tincture or 6-15 grams of the seeds, leaves and/or flowers in an infusion.

Garlic Syrup

This expectorant syrup from James Green's *The Herbal Medicine Maker's Handbook* relieves spasmodic coughs and lung congestion:

- Slice and bruise 3 oz. of fresh Garlic
- Measure 1/2 pint of vinegar
- Measure 1 lb of white sugar
- Macerate the Garlic in vinegar for four days
- train and press
- Add sugar
- Agitate vigorously or warm the liquid until sugar dissolves fully
- Bottle in small clean bottles

Standard Infusion

Use 1 teaspoon of herb per cup of hot water, cover and let steep for 10-15 minutes before straining.

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