detoxify with herbs

Give your body a break with the help of time-tested herbal rejuvenators

**Grandma talked** about it. Infomercials trumpet it. We hear a lot about detoxification. Sure, we all want to get cleaned out, but just what is this detoxification?

Basically, health maintenance is relatively simple: give the body what it needs, avoid giving it what it doesn't need, and it will run itself. Failing that, imbalances occur, causing inefficient elimination of noxious substances. Cleaning out these "toxins" that build up in the body—safely, naturally, and effectively—can result in renewed strength and vitality.

To treat the accumulation of toxins, we can use a number of remedies that support the body in removing waste products via the kidneys, liver, or lungs. Many classic cleansing herbs, also known as "blood purifiers," are now being found to be potent antioxidants.

Here are three of the top detoxifying, antioxidant-rich herbs.

**1. Sarsaparilla Root: Detox Your Skin.** Sarsaparilla, the herb that gives root beer its characteristic flavor, has a long history of European use as a blood purifier. Several compounds in sarsaparilla (called saponins) have been researched and shown to be effective in treating psoriasis, a disease that many natural practitioners attribute to an overload of toxins. In a controlled study, sarsaponin (a type of saponin) greatly improved symptoms of psoriasis in 62 percent of subjects and completely cleared the disease in 18 percent. Another study found that sarsaparilla saponins showed anti-inflammatory effects by inhibiting COX-2 enzymes. Sarsaparilla helps bind endotoxins, bacteria by-products that are absorbed from your digestive tract. If these endotoxins circulate in the blood, they can contribute to gout, arthritis, psoriasis, and fever. Take 3 to 12 g of sarsaparilla root per day as a tea, or the equivalent in capsules or liquid extract.

**2. Burdock Root: Detox Your Liver.** Few herbs are more widely used than burdock root for detoxifying the liver. British herbalists use it specifically for eruptions of the head, face, and neck, and esteem the root for just about any liver toxicity condition, including eczema, psoriasis, and boils. A member of the daisy family, burdock is loaded with anti-inflammatory compounds, including flavonoids, lignins, and bitter glycosides. In a series of studies, scientists in Taiwan recently confirmed the powerful liver-protective effects of burdock. Also, a recent Dutch study found that burdock significantly inhibited skin allergy by reducing release of leukotrienes, which play a role in the inflammatory response. In Japan, you'll find it served as a food known as gobo. Bearing a resemblance to a long brown carrot, it can be prepared similarly, such as fresh juice or in a stir-fry. If you prefer, use burdock root in capsules or liquid extract.

**3. Globe Artichoke: Detox Your Blood.** Known mainly as a delicious vegetable, globe artichoke is a perennial thistle plant that is also an excellent detoxifier of the liver and gallbladder. Artichoke therapy is so important in Europe that an entire segment of phytomedicine is called cynotherapy (taken from the vegetable's Latin name *Cynara scolymus*). Artichoke contains a compound called cynaropicrin, which accounts for its characteristic bitter taste. Another substance in artichokes, cynarin, promotes bile flow and enhances liver function. The globe brings blood to the liver and supports regeneration. It also reduces blood fats, including cholesterol, and effectively treats gallstones—benefits that make it a valuable therapy for treating obesity.

One study showed significant reductions in total cholesterol (12.2 percent) and triglycerides (5.7 percent) with artichoke extract. Subjects in this study also lost weight. A newer study involving artichoke extract produced a significant reduction of cholesterol and an 11 percent improvement in general well-being in 12 weeks. Artichoke leaf would normally be consumed as a vegetable, but you can also juice the raw globe using an industrial-strength blender (such as a Vita-Mix). Globe artichoke extract, made from the whole plant, is available as a dietary supplement.