

Reading the Leaves

Wellness teas offer seasonal relief

One day this past summer, I ducked off the bright, crowded thoroughfare of Burlington, Vermont's Church Street and into a dim, serene little teashop. It reminded me of the mysterious calm associated with this beverage, an unlikely staple of empires (British) and revolutions (American). It also triggered my awe at the dizzying variety of tastes—not to mention the wide range of healing properties that extend far beyond the relaxation that descends when your fingers wrap around a mug.

The change of seasons is an excellent time to consider the simple, time-tested relief that comes in a teabag. Or to check out the new wellness tea combinations being launched regularly—worth investigating if you suffer from a specific ailment.

Herbalist Rosemary Gladstar makes a keen distinction between beverage teas and those blended for health purposes: "It's a tea blend with a mission." With that in mind, here's a sampler of teas whose mission, separately or combined, is to take you through fall and winter in good health.

STUFFY NOSE, COLD/FLU: Many Western herbalists consider echinacea to be the number-one immune enhancer, and it's certainly among the most popular. Echinacea helps protect against viruses and bacteria. Taken at the first sign of a cold or flu, it fights sore throats and respiratory/bronchial infections and helps boost the immune system back to health. It's frequently combined with elderflower, another powerful immune enhancer that relieves upper respiratory infections, colds, and flu.

SORE THROAT/COUGH: The next time you're making s'mores, remind yourself that marshmallow root was where this sticky candy began—cooked up with honey and served to pioneer children to ease sore throats. The herb is still working its mucilaginous magic, coating throats and soothing bronchial inflammation. Licorice root calms inflamed tissues too. Gladstar calls it the "herb of choice" for a sore throat. Gargling with eucalyptus tea also helps relieve soreness.

INSOMNIA: Too tired to sleep? Ironically, just when we need it most, rest often flies out the window. That's when the simple act of brewing tea comes into its own. Look for combinations that include valerian root, which relieves anxiety, stress, tension, and insomnia. (It actually decreases activity in the central nervous system.) A muscle relaxant, it also relieves headaches and backaches. Valerian is often paired with passionflower, which despite its name is a well-known sleep aid and combats anxiety, stress, and depression.

DIGESTION: Overindulgence is a time-honored tradition, hence the need for ginger. A master at relieving nausea, stomach upset, and gastrointestinal infections, it's even good for cramps, motion sickness, and morning sickness. Though lesser known, its cousin, turmeric, has many of the same properties but is also one of the best anti-inflammatory herbs, rich in antioxidants and powerfully immune enhancing.

DETOX: Dandelion root, the detox gold standard, helps stimulate, purify, and decongest the liver. Dandelion kicks up bile production too, which helps the body break down fat and cholesterol, and it's a great digestive aid, stimulating the digestive tract to do its work. And it's always good to have backup (or be proactive): Herbalist James A. Duke, PhD, suggests a liver-protective tea that combines dandelion with licorice, chicory, turmeric, and ginger. It's called sipping your way to wellness.

SELECTED SOURCES Herbal Recipes for Vibrant Health by Rosemary Gladstar (\$16.95, Storey Publishing, 2008)

"Immune-Modifying and Antimicrobial Effects of Eucalyptus Oil and Simple Inhalation Devices" by A.E. Sadlon and D.W. Lamson, *Altern Med Rev*, 4/10

"Inhibition of Proinflammatory Activities of Major Periodontal Pathogens by Aqueous Extracts from Elder Flower (*Sambucus nigra*)" by E. Harokopakis et al., *J Periodontol*, 2/06

Medicinal Herbs by Rosemary Gladstar (\$14.95, Storey Publishing, 2012) n

"Plant-Derived Health: The Effects of Turmeric and

Curcuminoids" by S. Bengmark et al., *Nutr Hosp*, 5-6/09