

Despite these drawbacks, if you want to make a glycerin extract, here are two easy methods:

Method One: Mix glycerin with warm water. Different ratios are used, from 1:1 (1 part glycerin to 1 part water) to 1:4 (1 part glycerin to 4 parts water). Experiment to decide which ratio you prefer. Put the powdered or chopped herb into a glass jar and cover it with the glycerin menstruum. Screw the lid on tightly and label the jar with the name of the herb, the ratio of water and glycerin used in the menstruum, and the date. Let it sit and percolate for 4 weeks, shaking it every day. Then strain and separate the herb from the glycerin. Store the glycerin preparation in sterile glass containers that are labeled and dated.

Method Two: Make a strong herbal tincture using grain alcohol and water for the menstruum. Pour the finished tincture into a cooking pan and heat it below the boiling point until most of the liquid has evaporated and the remaining product is a wet mass. Add glycerin to this, mix well, and bottle in sterile containers.

Creating Alcohol Tinctures

Making alcohol tinctures is easy, fun, and extremely rewarding. It does not require fancy equipment, especially for small batches, and can be accomplished in your own kitchen. There are many ways to make tinctures, and the more herb books you read, the more you will discover variations among herbalists. One method that may appeal to scientifically oriented people requires making mathematical calculations and measurements, weighing with scales, determining variables between tincturing dry and fresh herbs, and figuring out desired ratios of herbs and liquid solvents. The older and more traditional **simpler's method** is much less complicated and exacting, with the end product being nearly identical to the more complex version. Several years ago when I was teaching an herb class about these two methods of tincturing, one of my apprentices came up with the term "**complexer's method**" to describe the more complex process involving mathematical calculations and measurements. This is a perfect description that I have adopted into my herbal vocabulary. Try both methods of making tinctures and decide which works best for you. You may want to begin with the less demanding simpler's method.

Making Tinctures by the Simpler's Method



1) Freshly harvested Echinacea

- ❖ Gather the herbs you want to tincture from your gardens, by wildcrafting, or by purchasing dried herbs from health food stores. Most tinctures on the market are made with herbs that have been pre-dried and stored for questionable periods of time. If you have the opportunity to use freshly harvested herbs, take advantage of it because they always produce more potent tinctures than dried, aged plants.

- ❖ If herbs have been freshly harvested, they can be dried for several hours to remove at least some of their water content. Roots that have been washed should be allowed to dry for a few hours.

- ❖ Chop fresh flowers, leaves, or roots into small pieces, or crumble dried herbs into tiny particles. This increases their surface area, allowing for better extraction. Remember that breaking up the fibrous cells of plants allows their chemical constituents to be released into liquid solvents more efficiently than if they are left whole.



2) Chopped herbs

- ❖ Put the plant material into a clean glass jar and pack it tightly so the jar is completely full. The size of the jar is determined by the amount of herb material you have. Quart and half-gallon canning jars work well. Glass gallon jars are great for larger amounts of plant material.



3) Pack herbs in glass jar

- ❖ Prepare the liquid menstruum by combining the desired ratio of 190-proof grain alcohol with distilled water in a measuring cup. A **standard menstruum ratio for moist, freshly harvested plants that hold a lot of water is typically 75% grain alcohol mixed with 25% distilled water, which is abbreviated as (75A:25W).** Fresh plant material that has been **partially pre-**

dried for a short time can be prepared with 65% grain alcohol and 35% distilled water (65A:35W). The menstruum ratio for dry herbs is usually 50% grain alcohol to 50% distilled water (50A:50W). If the menstruum is 90- to 95-proof liquor like brandy, vodka or gin, no water is added.

- ❖ When the menstruum is prepared, pour it into the glass jar and completely cover the plant material.

- ❖ Eliminate air in the jar by using an implement, like a long knife or poker, to stir the marc and menstruum so air bubbles rise to the surface. This usually creates extra space at the top of the jar, so add more liquid menstruum to completely cover the



4) Cover herbs with alcohol and water menstruum



5) Remove air bubbles



7) Label and date the jar

herbs. If air space remains, exposed plant material typically oxidizes and turns black.

❖ Screw the lid tightly onto the jar. Be sure that no liquid dribbles out when the jar is vigorously shaken and turned upside down. If there is leakage, fold a piece of plastic wrap 3-4 times and place it between the lip of the jar and the lid to create a tight seal.

❖ Label the jar with the name of the herb, ratio of alcohol to water used in the mix, and the date.

❖ Place the jar out of direct sunlight and shake it on a daily basis to encourage the osmosis process. Keep your tincturing jars in plain view as a reminder to tend them daily. As more constituents are drawn out of the herb, the color of the menstruum usually darkens.

❖ Allow the tincture to sit for 4-6 weeks for maximum extraction.

❖ After 4-6 weeks the tincture is ready to **decant**, which is the separation of the liquid menstruum from the herbal marc. It is fine if it takes you longer than 4-6 weeks to get to this decanting process, because the tincture will not deteriorate over time.

❖ To decant, line the inside of a strainer or colander with several layers of cheesecloth. Place the strainer over a large bowl, then dump the contents of the jar into the strainer. The liquid will empty into the bowl while the cheesecloth captures the plant material.

❖ Next, squeeze as much of the menstruum as possible out of the remaining marc. This is important because the marc still contains substantial amounts of chemical constituents that

should not be wasted. Plant material remaining in the cheesecloth can be squeezed by hand. If you are tincturing large amounts of herbs, you may want to use a juicing machine or press. Juicing machines that operate by centrifugal force are excellent for

small amounts. Put the remaining marc into the juicer (without the slicing bade), turn it on, and let it spin around. More liquid will be spun out, leaving the marc almost dry. Investing in a juicer is also a great opportunity to make delicious fruit and vegetable juices at home. Juicing machines are available at department stores and in some health food and kitchen specialty stores. Presses made specifically for processing herbs can be purchased from herbal equipment suppliers. With a few modifications, apple cider presses can be converted into tincture presses. They work well and save a lot of time, especially when processing large amounts of herbs.

❖ Put the discarded herbs in a compost bin or back on the earth as compost.

❖ Next, filter the menstruum to remove all sediment. Knee-high nylon stockings are the fastest filters I've found, while coffee filter paper is a slower but more complete filtration. Put the foot section of a clean stocking in a

glass jar and pour the liquid into it. Or coffee filter paper can be placed in a large funnel or colander, and the menstruum is poured through this. As it passes through these filters, extraneous plant material and sediment are captured. The filtered liquid is the finished tincture.

❖ The last step is to pour the finished product into glass jars. Tinctures can be stored in empty alcohol bottles, glass gallon or quart jars, or smaller glass bottles. One- and two-ounce dark glass bottles with droppers, called Boston amber round bottles, are perfect for administering doses of tinctures and can be purchased from many pharmacies or in bulk from glass manufacturers. Never store herbs in plastic containers due to questionable chemicals in plastics.

❖ Label your jars and bottles with the name of the herb, the alcohol-to-water ratio, and the date.

❖ Store the finished tincture in a cool, dark location.



6) Cover jar with plastic wrap



8) Decanting



9) Apple cider press for decanting



10) Final cleaning with filter paper

A Few More Tincturing Tips

Fresh plant tinctures: For exceptionally potent tinctures, gather your own fresh plant material. Prepare herbs for tincturing immediately after harvesting to maintain their freshness and maximum quality.