

SUMMER IN A JAR

By Kathy Fitzpatrick

As a child i marveled as my mother captured summer in a vast array of glass jars. She filled them with tomatoes, pickles, jams, jellies, peaches, pears, apple butter and many other taste tempting delights. Because of this early initiation into the rite of preservation, it's become an obsession for me, an almost primal urge, to capture, in jars, as much of each season as i can. Here a few simple ways to help you capture summer in a jar.....

For collecting herbs to use in the following ways please collect them after the dew has dried. Be sure you know not only what you're harvesting but that it hasn't been sprayed with pesticides. As you're gathering be sure to have your highest healing intention in mind and of course be sure to thank the plants and the earth for their wonderful gifts to us. Shake them off or run under water to clean, being sure they are dry [but not dried] before using them in any of the following ways.

Drying

Drying is a simple, low tech, low cost way to preserve the summer's bounty. Herbs can be dried hung in bunches, placed in brown paper bags, a microwave, oven or dehydrator. After drying they can be stored in glass containers for a year when it's best to replace them. I no longer hang them in bunches because they end up with webs and dust and crinkle all over the floor. My preference is to dry them in brown paper grocery bags, waiting to crush them until it's time to use them. In this way they impart a much stronger flavor than if they'd been cut up and crushed before hand. For this method all you do is collect the herbs, making sure they're dry, place them in the paper bag, scrunch it down, label and store in a cool dry place until they're dry and you're ready to use them.

Dried herbs can be sprinkled as desired on salads or in cooked foods, or can be crushed and placed in a tea ball and steeped for a delightful herbal tea.

Apple Cider Vinegar Infusions

Collect the herb of your choice and place in clean jars, then cover with apple cider vinegar. Put the lid on [if using a metal lid you'll need a piece of wax paper between the lid and the jar to prevent rust], label and let steep for 6-8 weeks.

We all have hometown appetites. Every other person is a bundle of longing for the simplicities of good taste once enjoyed on the farm or in the hometown left behind.

Clementine Paddleford

You may decant into another jar by straining out the plant matter or leave and use as is.

In fused vinegars are rich with minerals. Use as desired in cooked foods and to dress salads.

Infused Oils

Place plant matter in a clean jar and cover with oil. Make sure the plants are DRY. Cover and steep for 6-8 weeks. Strain and use as needed for medicinal purposes or for pleasure.

Simples

A simple is a tincture made with one herb. Simples take the confusion out of making tinctures. By working with one single herb at a time you become intimate with it, aware of its subtleties and nuances. Recording and harvesting at various times throughout the season allows you to see not only visual changes in the herb but in the tinctures as well. Using simples is a way to avoid interactions with other herbs. Through the years I've used tinctures that contained combinations. When I reacted to them I had no idea what I was reacting to! With simples it's simple, because it's just one herb used over time. It's best to use a simple for a period of three to six months before adding another to your healing venue.

To make a simple, select and collect your plant material. Try not to go overboard, tinctures are highly concentrated and a little goes a long, long way! One quart jar will yield a pint of tincture. Fill the quart to the halfway mark with cleaned fresh herb. Cover with 100 proof vodka or brandy or you may substitute apple cider vinegar. For a strong effective tincture make sure the jar is densely filled. Add vodka pouring over so all the plant material is covered and submerged. The plant needs to be completely covered so that no bacteria will grow. After covering wait a bit and add a bit more vodka. Cover the jar tightly and let steep for 6-8 weeks. [if using a metal lid you'll need a piece of wax paper between the lid and the jar to prevent rust] Personally I never strain my simples because the longer they sit the stronger and more effective they become. Shake daily for the first few weeks to keep the herbs from settling to the bottom of the jar. Be sure to shake with intention for your highest healing good. When ready to use, you may do one of two things,

**The only reason for being
a bee that I know of is
making honey....and the
only reason for making
honey is so I can eat it.**

Winnie the Pooh

1. Same as above only instead of straining all the plant matter out you only pour out enough liquid to fill a small 1 or 2 ounce amber bottle with a dropper. Label and date.

2. Line a stainless steel strainer with cheesecloth and place over a large wide

mouth jar or glass bowl. Pour the liquid out slowly, when finished squeeze to get out every single drop. This is your medicine. Put the finished tincture in a clean, dry glass bottle or jar with a tightly fitting lid. You can use a mason jar or amber colored tincture bottles from a health food store. Be sure to label and include the date. When properly stored tinctures will last for years. Please note, vinegar tinctures don't last as long as those steeped with alcohol. Be sure to keep them in a cool, dark place.

How to use

Dosage depends on the herb being used as well as the individual. It's best to start out with a small amount in water and build up over time. Be sure to stop using any tinctures that cause blurry vision, headache, diarrhea, stomach pains, or dizziness. If a tincture disturbs your digestion it could be your body is simply learning to process it. Be sure to give it a few more tries before giving up.