

# KIDS AND SUMMER FUN GO TOGETHER NATURALLY

Tree O'Toole-Williams



When I was a kid, my folks would pack me up and send me off to spend summers with my grandparents out in the country. Life out there was sure different than at home – there was a washing machine, but to dry your clothes you had to hang them out on a line between two giant fir trees that always smelled like Christmas; there were no sugary cereals, but there was fresh cow's milk over berries you had picked down the dirt lane just that morning; and if you got sick or hurt yourself while playing, there was always a remedy growing in Nana's garden.

You see, my Nana was “from the Old Country”, and I realized early on that folks from that mysterious faraway place weren't too keen on visits to the doctor. Nana would always say, “Why pack up and head into town to see the doctor when everything I need is right here in my garden? Remember this – if you love and care for the herbs, the herbs will always love and care for you!”

It always seemed so strange to me that some of the plants she liked to treat me with were the very same weeds I'd just helped my Dad remove from his well-maintained lawn back home, and I'd swear that some of them looked exactly like the wild brush I'd seen growing along the interstate on our journey to her house. One afternoon I recall asking her to confirm or deny these childhood observations. She not only confirmed them, but provided me with the very basis of my herbal beliefs that I carry with me today – if you believe there is a Loving Creator responsible for all the perfection that surrounds you, why couldn't you expect there to be a perfect plant for every illness known to Every Man?

I was lucky to learn the healing powers of herbs at a young age, and I strongly encourage parents today to plant healing gardens with their children. Kids love to explore the textures, the smells, and the tastes of herbs in a garden, and it gives them the opportunity to share in their own healthy wellness by involving themselves with the very plants that will heal them. We all know how kids hate to be sick, and that they hate taking their medicine even more. It tastes “icky”, and sometimes it can even make them feel worse! But get a child to plant a seed, tend a plant and watch it grow, then observe how they innately “know” the wellness connection and how they'll be much more receptive to accepting their cure.

Now don't fret if you don't have yard space for a garden to grow your herbs – potted herbs are just as fun (and can even be easier to grow), and all you need is a sunny windowsill! But if you're a busy parent with not a lot of time to wait for your herbs to grow, you can get your herbs like a lot of folks by visiting a local health food store. (Of course, I personally believe that the best way to learn about herbs is by associating yourself with a local herbal guide or herbalist.)

Now that you've decided to try the “natural way”, don't let yourself get overwhelmed with trying to remember which herb you heard about, what it did, and, “Oh m'God, what if I give them the wrong thing?!” Remember, herbs are phytonutrients – PLANT FOODS! – and all of the herbs we're reviewing here are “kid friendly”.

## HERB ENERGY

Here's an easy way to think about the way herbs work – herbs will affect the *function* of the body in two directions – HEAT AND COOL. They'll either **INCREASE** the activities of the body by stimulating or speeding up the metabolic processes in a tissue (**HEATING**), or they **DECREASE** activity by soothing or slowing down excessive function (**COOLING**).

-AROMATIC herbs are often spicy and pungent, and will increase activity of tissues they come in contact with (ie: – what happens when you eat a red hot pepper or horseradish – **HEAT!**)

-MUCILANT (MEW-sill-ent) herbs cool and soothe tissues they come in contact with, and will reduce irritation of the tissues (ie: – think of cool cucumber slices on your eyelids when your eyes are sore – ahh, **COOL!**)

Herbs will also affect the *structure* of the body by either making it softer, more pliable, more relaxed, loose and open (**MOISTENING**); or they may tighten it making it harder, more rigid, tenser, firmer and more closed (**DRYING**).

-BITTER herbs will relax and loosen tissue and promote discharge (ie: – remember the last time you bit into something bitter, like a lemon, and your mouth filled up with saliva? – **MOISTENING!**)

-ASTRINGENT herbs will tighten and tone tissue. They'll stop bleeding, discharge and swelling (ie: – have you ever eaten a not-quite-ripe persimmon?? – **DRYING!**)

To remember the herbal actions (aromatic/hot, mucilant/cool, astringent/dry, and bitter/moist), I take the first letter(s) of each action and use the phrase – **Aren't Herbs My Choice AS Disease Befalls Me?**



## SUMMER FUN HERBS

Bearing these actions in mind, let's review a list of the herbs and their uses that would most likely appear in a Kids' Herbal Summer First Aid Kit. You'll notice that a number of these herbs can be used for a lot of different situations –

**HERBS FOR THE SKIN**—Firstly, a child's skin can really take a beating during the summer. Sometimes summer fun can lapse into “excess”, and kids will be affected by too much sun, too much heat, and maybe even too much horseplay. Let's start by taking a look at a few skin conditions and the herbs to have on hand:

For sunburn, prickly heat/rashes, poison oak or ivy, minor cuts and scrapes you would want to use a mucilant herb like **ALOE VERA** to cool and soothe. If you grow this plant, you can simply break off a leaf and apply the gel-like substance directly to the skin. Otherwise, aloe vera gel can be purchased at most drug and health food stores. **COMFREY** is another mucilant herb that can be applied to the skin in a lotion or crème to speed wound healing, and will guard against scar tissue developing incorrectly. At the same time that you're cooling and soothing, you also want to be using astringent herbs as anti-inflammatories - **ST. JOHN'S WORT** applied to the skin in a lotion or crème will speed the healing of wounds, bruises, and mild burns (it is especially useful in a lotion for healing sunburn). **CALENDULA** as a lotion can be used for any inflammation of the skin whether due to infection or physical damage, and used for any external bleeding, bruising or strain, minor burns and scalds.



Another group of skin problems can be bruises and black eyes when the horseplay turns to rough-house.

Now this is **IMPORTANT!**\*\*\*\* - if the skin IS BROKEN, apply **CALENDULA** oil or gel or crème to the area. If the skin IS NOT BROKEN, apply **ARNICA** oil or gel or crème directly to the bruise to ease the pain. This wondrous herb, arnica, will actually prevent the bruise from getting any larger than when it is applied. It is also very important to bump up your child's intake of Vitamin C to promote healing by building up the blood vessel walls and thereby minimizing future bruising.



Insect bites and stings can be a “real pain” at a summer barbeque. Be sure when removing the stinger that you first scrape it out in a sideways motion with your fingernail versus pulling, which can squeeze more venom into the wound, Wash the area thoroughly. Again, **ALOE VERA** gel will not only cool, but will actually reduce the spread of histamines; and **CALENDULA** lotion or crème will soothe and calm the irritation. Another non-herbal, but natural, remedy to keep in your kit is activated charcoal capsules. Open a cap, moisten the charcoal with a small amount of water or saliva and apply the paste to the bite or sting to adsorb poisons.\

**HERBS FOR TRAVEL AND MOTION PROBLEMS** –Moving away from skin problems, travel is usually a big part of a family's summer fun, and sometimes mixed messages can come from the inner ear to the brain causing motion/travel sickness.

Acting with aromatic herb energy, **GINGER** and **CHAMOMILE** stimulate the stomach to produce gastric secretions which will help control the nausea. **GINGER** can be taken internally by chewing the crystallized form found in the fruit or baking sections of most supermarkets, or chewing on a raw piece of ginger root found in the produce section. It also comes in capsules, or can be made into a delicious tea. If your child is a bit of a nervous traveler, **CHAMOMILE** can be taken either in capsule or tea form to calm and soothe their stomach. (Remember how Peter Rabbit's mom gave him chamomile tea after he'd eaten Farmer McGregor's garden? Well, it works on human children, too!)



Another handy trick I like to use is to put a few drops of peppermint oil, ginger oil, or cinnamon oil onto a handkerchief and hold it up to the child's nose (but not touching the nose) and have them breathe in the vapors of these calming herbs. Herbal inhalation is a passive technique that doesn't require much from the child when they're experiencing an unsettling state of nausea. Finally, these two herbs also work great for headache relief, particularly if they are taken as a warm tea.



**HERBS FOR EARS AND NOSES** -Swimming pools are a big part of most kid's summer, but if the chlorine is not dried out of their ears properly, they can develop an inflammation of the outer ear called Otitis Externa, better known as Swimmer's Ear. By fixing up 1 teaspoon of olive oil and 2 drops of either **CHAMOMILE** or **LAVENDER** herbal essential oil, you can drop 2 drops of the mixture into the infected ear at night and plug the ear GENTLY with a cottonball. You can continue this application with two drops per night until the whole mixture has been used. If you don't want to involve yourself with the "concocting", you could simply take a **GARLIC** oil perle (a gel-like capsule), puncture it with a pin, and place two drops directly into the infected ear. Garlic is one of Nature's most effective anti-microbial plants, meaning that it acts on bacteria and viruses, and so I use it frequently for many ear/nose/throat infections.



It wouldn't be right for me to close without addressing another major concern for a lot of children, that being problems with pollens and hayfever. Allergies are over-sensitivities of mucous membranes in the respiratory tract, and actually relate to over-susceptible immune and respiratory systems. One of the first things to do is remove wheat from your child's diet because it is a member of the grass family, and grasses contribute largely to respiratory allergies. If you REALLY want to see dramatic results, also remove dairy from their diet (remember that the cows eat grass!) – you will see startling results after only one week without wheat and dairy !



It's always a good idea to build up a child's immune system before pollen season arrives, and so I like to use a tea mixture of **CHAMOMILE**, **ECHINACEA**, and **ELDER FLOWERS** served three to six times a day (depending on the severity of the allergies). The combination of these herbs will break up particularly persistent mucous, at the same time tone the mucous membranes. I also like to have a child inhale the vapors of the tea just before drinking it as an added treatment for the mucous membranes in their nose.

So now you're ready to face Summer in all her glory and you're prepared for all her little surprises. Enjoy your summer and your kids with herbs, and don't forget the words of a wise old woman – "If you love and care for the herbs, the herbs will ALWAYS love and care for you!" ENJOY AND BE WELL...

