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A Bucket of Tea: Herbal Infusions for Horses

by Katharine Lark Chrisley, NHC, RMT

Majic in the winter enjoying a big bucket of herbal tea. Just as we enjoy a cup of warm herbal tea on a cold night or a glass of cool tea in the summer, our horses benefit from infusions of the plant properties into water.

Herbs for horses are found in nature throughout fields and forests. The horse in a feral state would seek out support and healing from the leaves, branches and roots that would be abundant in their moist, fresh condition.

When we add herbs to the equine diet, usually we are adding “cut and sifted” dry plants to be ingested like the dried grasses and legumes of the hays we feed. And just as we enjoy a cup of warm herbal tea on a cold night or a glass of cool tea in the summer, our horses benefit from infusions of the plant properties into water. Many herbs release their properties more fully when brewed (than just chewed) and many water soluble healing agents can be better utilized when released to the hot water. It is also true that some herbs, such as osha root, do not release to water and must be chewed (saliva) or made into a tincture with alcohol, but they are rare.

When I had my orphaned colt living just below my cottage on the side of a mountain, I prepared buckets of warm tea every evening during the winter to support his good health and prepare him for the cold night. You can make the teas, too, to support your horse physically and emotionally any time of the year. These infusions are made by brewing the cut and sifted herbs in water just off the boil. I use a large enameled cooking pot (contact with metal will change the volatile oils that contain the healing properties) into which I boil a gallon of pure water; turn off the burner; add one cup of the dry herb or herb mixture (for a 1,000 pound horse); cover and let steep for 15 minutes. Then I strain the herbs if I’m offering the tea as a drink (and add those herbs to a mash or the hay feed), or pour the entire contents over the food for that meal.

When offering the drink, be certain the temperature is not too hot and simply give it in a bucket. My orphaned colt drank his Foal-lac liquid from the bucket right from day one, so he was familiar with sustenance arriving in a pail!

Herbs to use

Herbs for detox and cleansing the body’s filtering systems (liver, kidneys, glands, skin) are dandelion leaf and root, burdock root, calendula blossom, milk thistle seed and nori sea vegetable. I have

had good results with these, used individually or in combinations. My horses have always liked the taste of these. It is most important to choose organic or chemical-free herbs to avoid contaminants such as chemical colorants, pesticides, and genetically modified organisms.

Other choices for tea, and their properties:

- Chamomile blossom – to relax the horse and as an aid for youngsters who are “cutting” teeth
- Echinacea leaf / root – to enhance the immune system and to prevent infections
- Yarrow – after giving birth (to reduce bleeding) and as a drink and body wash for colds/ flu and reducing fevers
- Sage – to heal sores in the mouth and as an aid to soothe coughs
- Peppermint (spearmint for foals or pregnant mares) – soothes the stomach
- Fennel seed – reduces gassiness in the digestive tract
- Chaste tree berry – helps with sexual aggressiveness and insulin imbalance
- Cleavers – is a premier anti-tumor herb
- Red clover – is another detoxing herb with anti-cancer properties
- Nettles – makes the most delicious tea (from dried herb – fresh is dangerous to the handler!) with skin healing and mineral rich properties
- Uva ursi – is the renal system (kidney, bladder) cleanser that can reduce edema as well

If you are using seeds, bark or roots, you can add them to the water as you start heating it to boiling. Harder plant parts need a bit of simmering to release their properties. Leaves, blossoms, fine stems and sea veggies require less heat and the “steeping” process (covered) to infuse the water.

Horses, being 10 times larger than humans, seem like they would need 10 times the “medicine”, but because of their sensitivity, the equine requires 4 times the dose of an herb that we would need. That’s a decent guideline to go by in most cases. And dried herbs and seaweeds are “concentrated” because the moisture has been removed to preserve them.

If you need to make large batches of “herbal tea”, you can refrigerate them for up to four days in most cases. But, from my experience, the horses prefer freshly brewed infusions that are not too cold or too hot. Aroma is a healing agent as well, and some wonderful herbs to add to your tea for aromatherapy properties in addition to systemic healing are:

Cinnamon bark – soothes indigestion and helps balance blood sugar

Pure rose petals and rosehips – add vitamin C and provide “cheer”; are uplifting

Lemon and orange peels – are also cheerful, help to clear mucus and are “antiseptic”

Coriander seeds – relieve gas and cleanse the digestive tract

Ginger – is useful for winter “anti-cold/ flu” tea – only use one tablespoon for a horse’s tea (added to other herbs) since it is very potent

Anise seed – digestive aid and lung support

Another way to provide healing support to the infirm equine with a brew is to make “hay tea” by steeping Timothy, oat hay, orchard grass or wheat grass and offering it in a bucket after straining. Alfalfa tea is a well known provider of minerals and protein and helps to remove toxins from the joints.

When you provide buckets of teas for your horses, do not remove their normal, plain water supply. The water is necessary, free choice at all times – the teas are additional sources of nutrients, not replacements.

And, while we might enjoy a spoon or two of sugar in our cup of tea, resist any notion that sweeteners would enhance the experience for your horse! Sugars are not beneficial additions to the equine diet and (much worse!) artificial, chemical sweeteners can be actual poisons.

Equipment needed for preparing tea for horses:

One large non-metal pot with well fitting lid

One large strainer (it can be metal since the tea pours through it so quickly)

A wooden spoon for stirring

Assortment of dry, cut & sifted herbs kept in airtight containers

A rubber or plastic bucket

On that mountain, I was fortunate to have a separate building for my herbal and healing business with its own ovens, etc. I now prepare the tea on my stove in the kitchen. No matter where we cook, adding our horses’ dietary needs to the menu will make them happier and healthier. ♡

About the author:

Katharine Lark Chrisley is back on her mountain in New Mexico with a new facility and new horses (all rescued by or gifted to her) where she and Jerry Crenshaw do herbal and water therapies for animals in need. With degrees in Natural Health Counseling, Veterinary Assistance and Reiki Mastership, Katharine is available for speaking engagements, healing workshops and clinics to build confidence and communication. The Dharmahorse Company (www.dharmahorse.com) offers products and publications along these nature based lines. Contact: katharinechrisley@yahoo.com
575-541-0137

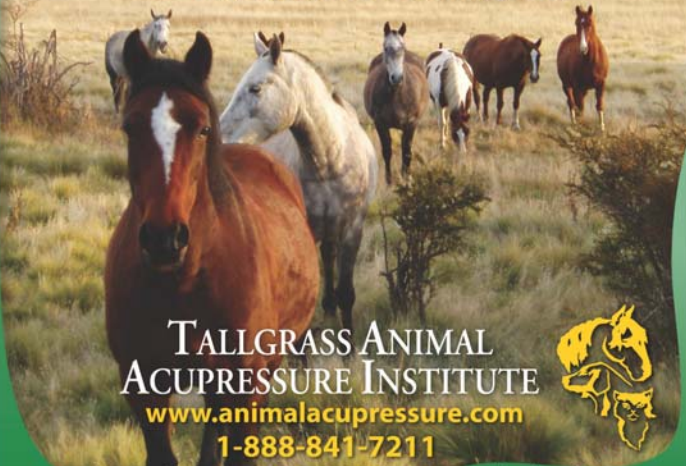


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Profiles in Plants

by Katharine Lark Chrisley

Thyme:

Thymus vulgaris and *Thymus serpyllum*
(Labiatae)

An ancient healing and culinary herb, thyme has multiple uses for maintaining and restoring equine health. Because of its expectorant properties, it is a particularly useful winter and spring addition to the diet of many species. The feeding of cut and sifted leaf, powdered dry leaf, or fresh stem and leaf will help relieve congestions and coughs. For horses, I feed one tablespoon dry herb mixed into a wet bran or soaked pellet mash daily for therapeutic purposes.

Thyme also is a vermifuge herb, expelling worms from the digestive tract. It contains the volatile oil "thymol" that has been effective in heartworm and hookworm prevention as well as treatments.

Other components of the herb are: borneol, carvacrol, cineole, linalool and pinene volatile oils; the flavonoids apigenin and luteolin; and tannins.

The specific name *serpyllum* refers to the creeping, rooting stems of one variety of thyme commonly called Wild Thyme or Creeping Thyme. The specific name *vulgaris* refers to the common garden and culinary thyme.

Infusions of thyme leaf can be made by steeping the dry or fresh herb in pure water just off the boil. This "tea" can be dosed by mouth to horses with gum infections, flatulent colic symptoms, or internal parasites. The same infusion makes a fine, antiseptic skin or wound wash externally. I use the powdered or ground dry thyme leaf as an external parasite repellent "dust" for horses or dogs (not for use on cats because of the strong volatile oils).

Thyme leaf is a wonderful winter and spring herb for health support and healing.

These statements have not been approved by the FDA or USDA. Remember to always use the herbalist's safety ways: use a small amount of an herb at first, watching for any adverse reactions. All beings are individuals with possible sensitivities. ☺

About the author:

Katharine Lark Chrisley, NHC, RMT, has studied and practiced the use of Phytotherapy (healing with plants) for horses since 1973. Her book, *The Well-Being of Pets and Companions*, www.rosedogbookstore.com/welofpetandc.html, covers the use of herbs, flower essences, oils, homeopathy and energy work for horses with many charts and recipes.

