

Principles and Practices of Herbalism

Herbs can help promote a harmonious rhythm and balance in your pet's mind, body, spirit, and environment.

Mary L. Wulff-Tilford & Gregory L. Tilford

The holistic herbalist employs the chemical and energetic properties of plants to help bridge the gaps between what a body receives from complete nutrition and what it requires from time to time in terms of supplemental support. In this holistic context, herbs are used to stimulate, regulate, or adjust natural body functions back into healthy harmony with the rest of the body. The therapeutic effort is not directed at treating disease but at supporting the body in its efforts to correct the problem itself. In other words, herbs are used to naturally assist the body at what it is naturally designed to do: stay healthy.

Like humans, animals sometimes require supplemental support to boost their body's natural healing powers. Such is the case with ear problems, which most commonly come in the form of bacterial or fungal infections, mites, fleas, or foreign objects (foxtails, dirt, etc.) lodged in the ear canal. Some other common problems include hematoma of the earflap and tumors of the inner ear.

Mullein flower, Oregon grape, garlic, marshmallow, ginkgo, and yarrow are especially well suited for treating infections and parasite infestations of the ear. Mullein flower, garlic, and Oregon grape are all strong antimicrobials with strong affinities toward inhibition of mites and various pathogens that may cause ear problems. The slippery oily mucilage of marshmallow root provides soothing relief and a protective, antimicrobial barrier on inflamed tissues of the outer ear.

Yarrow is especially useful for treating small hematomas of the earflap. Used externally, the oil helps strengthen exterior capillary walls, while internal doses of yarrow and ginkgo tea or tincture improve capillary circulation and internal tonicity. Witch hazel may also be effective for external treatment of earflap hematomas, as its strong astringency quickly constricts weak or inflamed blood vessels.

To prepare an antimicrobial and antiparasitic ear oil combine equal amounts of the following oil infusions: mullein flower, Oregon grape, garlic and marshmallow. You can add 10-20 drops of vitamin E oil to this mixture to act as a preservative and aid in skin healing. For ear mites or infections of fungal or bacterial origin, 6-12 drops of the oil can be applied to affected areas of the earflap or ear canal. A soft plastic dropper is best for application into the ear canal, while a piece of soft cotton, gauze, or even clean fingertips will suffice as an external applicator.

To allow the body to correct itself with support of herbs may not be easy because this requires trust in something that baffles many people. With any treatment or maintenance program you choose to use with your pet, always consult your veterinarian or locate a veterinarian who specializes in herbalism.

Adapted with permission of BowTie Press, from "All You Ever Wanted to Know About Herbs for Pets" by Mary L. Wulff-Tilford & Gregory L. Tilford (BowTie Press, 1999).