

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

Old ways die hard-especially when we have been raised with them. In our society, mainstream approaches to health maintenance focus on symptomatic intervention. Typically, when a person or animal gets sick, the conventional practitioner works to identify and suppress uncomfortable or unsightly symptoms in order to achieve immediate relief. As children, most of us are taught time and again to confront fever with pain relievers such as aspirin, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen; dandruff with shampoos; and constipation with laxatives. But what about the causes of these discomforts? Are we really taking a curative approach toward a fever if we don't recognize its origin and its purpose? Why do we have dandruff anyway? Why are our animals suffering with chronic constipation? These are questions that are addressed by the holistic herbalist-one who looks at the body as an entire, intricately balanced biocommunity of countless organs, chemicals, microorganisms, and life energies. From a holistic perspective, the herbalist realizes that all body functions are interdependent and that physical or emotional discomforts do not represent the totality of a health crisis but only the body's conveyance of an underlying imbalance or crisis-a state of "disease." Unlike conventional Western medicine, the focus of holistic healing is not to kill or cut out disease as it occurs, but to reestablish and maintain holistic homeostasis, the state of harmonious balance and rhythm among mind, body, spirit, and environment. For most of us, this involves putting some old predispositions aside, revving up the imagination, and engaging in some open-minded observation. We don't need bioscience degrees to embrace the principles of effective herbalism, but we are required to view health and healing from a much deeper perspective-one that takes into account not only the discomforts of disease but also the totality of wellness. Western society is spoiled by the concept of making problems go away quickly so we can get on with life. Rather than taking the longer route toward finding a true cure, the conventional goal is to find a quick-fix solution to the inconveniences of a crisis. Herbs are often employed in much the same capacity. The greatest healing potential of herbs, however, does not emanate from their uses as natural drug alternatives but from the holistic principles and philosophies that enable us to use them in support of a body's natural healing mechanisms. The holistic herbalist looks beyond the symptoms of disease to identify and correct their underlying causes. An herbalist strives to understand the harmonious checks and balances that are required among all physical and nonphysical aspects of mind, body, spirit, and environment. In addition to complete nutrition, a body sometimes requires a specialized source of stimulation or systemic support in order to maintain a state of health and well-being. This is where herbs come in.