

Herbal Medicine For Your Dog

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Herbal, or botanical, medicine is the use of plants and plant products as therapeutic agents. The leaves, roots, and flowers of herbs and other plants have been used in healing for thousands of years. A number of modern medications are compounded from herbs, but herbalists believe that the plant in its pure state has stronger and more effective properties. Herbs in their natural state contain a number of chemicals that work together. While an herb might contain one main chemical that gives a certain effect, tiny amounts of other chemicals may play a role in reducing side effects or otherwise assisting the action of the primary chemical.

Herbs work by detoxifying the body, eliminating troublesome substances from it, or by acting as a tonic to invigorate or build up the system. They also contain efficacious blends of vitamins and minerals. Some herbs have antimicrobial properties, while others are believed to boost the immune system. While herbs cannot be used to act directly on individual cells—for instance, an herb can't make T cells increase—they have been shown to speed healing. Other immune system-enhancing effects of herbs include stimulating natural killer cells, which detect and eliminate infected cells, and inhibiting tumor growth. Sometimes herbs fill in where there is no pharmaceutical drug available. One of the best examples of this is milk thistle, which is used in the treatment of liver disease.

Herbs can be divided into two types: Chinese and Western. Chinese herbal remedies combine 15 to 20 different herbs. In essence, they're recipes that have been passed down for hundreds or even thousands of years. Western herbal medicine tends to make use of a single herb at a time. Is one better than the other? Not necessarily. They're just different.

While herbs have many health benefits, they are powerful medicines and should not be given casually. Just because herbs are natural doesn't mean they're nontoxic. Herbal medicines should be prescribed or approved by a veterinarian. That's because a veterinarian can both diagnose a problem and has enough medical information to be aware of other conditions that might have similar symptoms. The veterinarian also knows how an herbal medication reacts with other medications.

Herbs can be used in conjunction with traditional medications, but it's important to know the effects of each and whether they are compatible. An example of a medication that doesn't work well with herbs is cortisone, a hormonal drug that is used to decrease inflammation. As a rule, cortisone and herbal medicines fight against each other, the result being that neither does much good.