

Making Chinese Herbal Formulas Into Alcohol-Extracted Tincture

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I have been making alcohol-extracted Chinese herbal formulas since 1988. I was introduced to the percolation method in New Mexico by Western herbalists Charlie Jordan and Mitch Coven. Later, Clarissa Smith of Portland, Ore. helped me fine-tune the process.

I have continued to use this method for the following reasons: first and foremost, patient compliance is very high compared with taking either traditional tang-decoction or Taiwan-type extracted granule powder. One takes small amounts (one teaspoon with some boiling water), and the taste and texture is much more palatable than extracted granule powder. Secondly, the cost is much less per day than raw herb decoction. Third, the efficacy has been demonstrated to me over the last 22 years on every type of condition, including, despite the alcohol, blood heat. For most conditions, I typically give one teaspoon splashed with a bit of boiling water, two times per day. Each dose (one teaspoon) delivers 3.5 grams of raw herb or 1.75 grams of extracted granule, but here the herbs have been extracted both in water and alcohol, making it much stronger than water alone.

One can make tinctures from raw herbs or from Taiwan-type extracted granules. In both cases, the overall cost is much cheaper than working with raw herb decoction, which requires at least 100 grams of herb per day. For tincture, we use 100 grams of raw herbs (about \$8) to make a 4-oz bottle of tincture, which will last two weeks. If using extracted granules, which are already concentrated, I recommend using 50 grams (\$4) per 4-oz bottle.

This cost does not include the grain alcohol, which costs about \$335 for five gallons, including shipping. One final 4-oz bottle will use up to \$7 of alcohol per final tincture made from whole dried herbs (14-oz of alcohol in a 50 percent solution at \$.50/oz), or \$6 for granule-extracted tincture. (The difference is due to the fact that raw herb contains more fiber, and absorbs more alcohol-water mixture.) So, if making tincture from raw herb, the cost of a 4-oz bottle will be \$15, and if made from granule it will be \$14. One usually doubles this for the final retail sale. This is more expensive than pills or tablets, but one has the advantage of custom prescribing.

Why I Went from Granule to Tincture

I started using extract granules for my customized formulas several years ago, as an alternative the traditional Chinese herbal tinctures I made from raw herbs. They were easy to store in limited space, and I could make a formula in 15 minutes instead of the 24-hours it takes for a tincture. They were also considerably cheaper to the patient than my tincture. Despite the ease and cost effectiveness, I found that many patients do not like taking the granules, either directly on the tongue, or mixed with water. So, I adapted my tincture method, usually done with raw herbs, to the extract granules, and found that patients much prefer the tincture. Patients told me that it was much more palatable. Also I

could make formulas of 50 grams instead of 100 grams. I now offer my formulas as granule, and I tell them that if they don't like it, we can make it as an alcohol-tincture. This gives the patient some choice.

Teaching the Patient

It is important to encourage the patient to use the small amount of boiling water to drive off the alcohol. This is essential in all heat conditions, and it also makes the formula more palatable. If the patient is unable to obtain boiling water, then have them add hot tap water. If this is unavailable, then add regular water. Take without food, except in cases where taking the herbs causes nausea.

My method is stronger than most store-bought alcohol tinctures. I use 100 grams of raw herbs, while they use 25 grams. I use 50 percent alcohol, while they use 22 percent. The difference, is they can slow cook for two weeks, maximizing the extraction, while I prepare mine as a 24-hour turn-around.

Although initially derided by traditional Chinese herbalists (basically too new, too different), I am now receiving many requests asking about this method, not only from American practitioners, but also from Chinese herbalists living in this country.

Their motivation is the same: how can one provide individualized Chinese herbal formulas that are inexpensive, that the patient will take over a long period of time, and that are as effective as water decoctions?

I believe this method is an excellent and economical approach for providing customized herbal formulas to your patients.

EQUIPMENT YOU WILL NEED:

1) Raw herbs or granules.

5 gal. Grain alcohol (95%). (\$335, includes shipping.) Pharmco-Aaper, (800) 446-2900.

Good quality water (filtered if possible).

1.5 or 1 gallon glass bottle and cap (for alcohol-water stock solution)

4-8 Industrial Nalgene 1/2 gallon bottles with screw-on caps; or industrial glass 1/2 gallon bottles with screw-on caps; or, plastic soda bottles, 2 liters, or 2 quarts, with screw-on caps.

You must cut the bottoms off of the bottles, leaving the neck with screw on caps.

4-8 Hard plastic bowls (Rubbermaid) that fit into bottle bottoms

4-8 Small drain filters that place inside bottles

1-2 Unbleached-brown coffee filters, number #4 and #6

4-8 Stainless steel bowls

4-8 Ball wide mouth glass jar, 1-quart

1 Glass measuring cup, 8 oz. or 16 oz.

4-8 Plastic dinner plates (to cover steel bowls)

1 Flat wooden rice spatula

1 Small plastic funnel (for the 4 oz. bottles)

1 Large plastic funnel (to make stock solution)

1 case 4 oz. brown bottles with droppers; (Industrial Container and Supply, (800) 748-4250

1 pad of Post-Its

Individual labels (customized at a printer)

2) Raw herbs only.

1 Commercial herb grinder (\$450-\$650).

1 Soft-bristle paint brush (to clean or empty grinder)

1 High-quality garden shears

1 Brass mortar and pestle

Preparing Raw Herbs Into Powder

1. Prior to grinding, certain herbs need to be cut into smaller pieces with the garden shears, e.g.: Astragalus Huang Qi.

Other herbs may need to be crushed, such as shells, with a brass mortar and pestle. If possible, certain herbs can be bought in a powder state: e.g. Ginseng Ren Shen, Codonopsis Dang Shen, Ostrea Mu Li.

2. Using a commercial herb grinder, grind 100 grams of herbs into a fine powder.

Use a soft-bristle brush to empty contents into steel bowl. Blades need to be replaced when dull. Good grinders and replacement blades can be obtained from Mayway (Oakland, CA) or Spring Wind (Berkeley, CA).

Preparing Herbal Powder Into Tincture

Use 100 grams of raw herb, or 50 grams of concentrated granule.

1. Prepare a stock bottle (1 or ½ gallon glass bottle) made of 50 percent water, and 50 percent alcohol. The alcohol needs to be 95 percent corn grain alcohol.
2. Pour the herbal powder into a stainless steel bowl.

Carefully pour the water-alcohol mix from the stock bottle onto the powder. Make the powder

the consistency of a wet sawdust - not too wet, not too dry. Cover with a plate and let sit for 18 hours.

Mark a Post-It® with name, condition, date and time, and put on the plate.

3. Prepare the Ball wide-mouth glass jar, 1-quart.

Place an inverted plastic bottle with its bottom cut off (industrial Nalgene, glass or plastic soda bottle), and with its cap screwed tight, into the Ball jar.

Place the drain filter inside the bottle. (This is to catch raw herb if it spills out of filters. It's not necessary if you are careful.)

4. Take two unbleached coffee filters (a #4 and #6). Insert the #6 into a #4, and place both filters into the bottle. Use your fingers to widen and center the filters so they can receive the herbs.
5. Using a flat wooden rice spatula, scoop up the wet herb and pack it into the filter. Make sure to keep the filters centered.
6. Measure 4 oz. or 170 ml. of the alcohol-water mix into the glass measuring cup.

Pour onto the herbs in the filter. Cover the open end of the bottle with the shallow plastic insert (the Rubbermaid plastic bowl). Place the Post-It® label with name, time and date, on top of the plastic insert.

7. Allow the solution to soak for 1 hour. Then unloosen the screw-cap so that liquid can pour through.

This will take about 15 minutes. When completely dripped, repeat by pouring the now dark solution from the Ball jar back onto the herbs and filter a second time. Allow to completely pour through into the Ball jar.

8. Use the small funnel to pour the liquid into a 4 oz. glass bottle.

Label with name of patient, condition or name of formula, date, and instructions which say: Takes one teaspoon (6 squirts), x times per day. Children take 2-5 squirts, two times a day. Cover with one-inch of boiling water to drive off the alcohol, wait 10 minutes, then drink alone or with some added water. Do not take directly into the mouth. Best away from meals by 15 minutes or more.

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