

# Cooking your Raw Herbs

## General Instructions

Always start with a general inspection of your herbal formula. Notice any separately bagged herbs and the instructions indicated on how to add them to the overall formula. Some may need to be cooked separately, some may need to be added towards the end of the cooking process. Herbs that require pre-cooking can be covered with water, brought to a boil, and simmered – covered - for the specified amount of time (usually 1 hour). Then add these cooked herbs and their cooking water to the remaining herbs and their soaking water. Follow one of the cook methods below as indicated on your herbal formula invoice.

## Tonification Method

This method involves a “double cook” of the herbs. Start by pouring the herbs into a suitable cooking vessel(see page 2), setting aside any bags that include special instructions (i.e. add the last 5 minutes of cooking). Cover the herbs by about an inch with filtered water. Let soak at 15-20 minutes. Give them a stir then place, uncovered, on the stovetop and bring to a rolling boil. Once the herbs are boiling, place a lid slightly ajar on the pot and turn the heat down to a simmer. Occasionally stir the mixture. Allow the herbs to cook down to about half their original volume. If herbs need to be added towards the end of the decocting process, add them now. Strain the decoction through a fine mesh sieve. You have completed your first decoction.

The second cook involves the same steps as above, straining the final decoction into the same jar. If you have herbs that are indicated to be “*strained into final decoction*”, add them now. Divide the total volume by 4, this will be enough for 2 days or 4 doses. Store your herbal formula in a covered, glass container (such as a Mason jar) in the fridge.

## Clearing Method

This method is similar to the one outlined above, but involves only one round of cooking and straining. You will generally be prescribed this type of formula for shorter durations, so be sure to divide the final volume appropriately. For instance, a formula that is only to be taken for one day should have its final volume divided in half for a total 2 doses.

## Special Instructions

If your formula requires the addition of ginger slices, simply take a knob of ginger, slice thinly quarter sized slices and add during the initial soak process of the entire formula and cook with the rest of the herbs.

For Ren Shen or Ginseng, cook separately and add its strained decoction to the final decoction. Do not cook together. Ginseng is an expensive and revered herb and is cooked accordingly.

## Cooking Vessels and Storage

It is best to cook herbs in a stainless steel, glass, ceramic or traditional clay pot, if you have one. It is best to avoid aluminum, teflon, cast iron or copper cooking vessels.

When straining the herbs, use a fine mesh strainer and funnel, if necessary, to pour your decoction into a large glass jar. This can then be stored in the refrigerator for up to 4 days.

### When, How and Why?

It is best to consume your formula away from mealtimes (30 minutes – 1 hour) and the taking of any prescriptions. It is also advised to not consume your formula right before bedtime.

The first dose can be taken right after cooking. Subsequent doses can be poured into a mug and warmed with boiling water. The ideal temperature is slightly above room temperature, unless otherwise instructed.

Herbs taken via decoction represent the most potent method of obtaining the myriad of healing properties these herbs contain. It also allows the maker of the formula to be more acquainted with the herbs in their natural state (albeit dried and not alive) as well as to control for various cooking times during the formula making process. The disadvantage to cooking one's own formula, of course, is time. However, this is time well spent, as I believe one will gain greater ownership over their own personal healing process.