

## Herbal Terminology

Herbalists have their own terms for different types of herbs, preparations and reactions. Here are a few of the more common definitions.

## Herbal Actions and Properties

**abortifacient** – induces abortion, miscarriage, or premature removal of a fetus

**adaptogen** – works through the endocrine system to modulate the physical, mental, and emotional effects of stress and increase resistance to physiological imbalances and disease by strengthening the immune system

**adjuvant** – aids the action of a medicinal agent

**alterative** – strengthens and nourishes the body, often through the removal of metabolic wastes

**amphoteric** – normalizes function of an organ or body system

**analeptic** – restorative or stimulating effect on central nervous system

**analgesic** – relieves pain

**anaphrodisiac** – reduces capacity for sexual arousal

**anesthetic** – induces loss of sensation or consciousness due to the depression of nerve function

**antianemic** – prevents or helps with anemia

**antibacterial** – destroys or stops the growth of bacteria

**antibilious** – eases stomach stress

**anticatarrh** – reduces inflamed mucous membranes of head and throat

**antidepressant** – acts to prevent, cure, or alleviate mental depression

**antidiabetic** – prevents or relieves diabetes

**antidiarrhetic** – prevents or treats diarrhea

**antiemetic** – stops vomiting

**antifungal** – destroys or inhibits the growth of fungus

**antihemorrhagic** – controls hemorrhaging or bleeding

**anti-infectious** – counteracts infection

**anti-inflammatory** – controls inflammation, a reaction to injury or infection

**antimalarial** – prevents or relieves malaria

**antimicrobial** – destroys microbes

**antioxidant** – prevents or inhibits oxidation

**antipruritic** – prevents or relieves itching

**antipyretic** – reduces fever (febrifuge)

**antirheumatic** – eases pain of rheumatism, inflammation of joints and muscles

**antiseptic** – produces asepsis, removes pus, blood, etc.

**antispasmodic** – calms nervous and muscular spasms or convulsions

**antitussive** – controls or prevents cough

**antiviral** – opposes the action of a virus

**anxiolytic** – reduces anxiety

**aperient** – relieves constipation; mild laxative

**aperitive** – stimulates the appetite for food

**aphrodisiac** – increases the capacity for sexual arousal

**aromatic** – a herb containing volatile oils, fragrant odor and slightly stimulating properties

**asepsis** – sterile; free of germs, infection, and any form of life

**astringent** – constricts and binds by coagulation of proteins

**aquaretic** – increases blood flow to the kidneys without increasing sodium and chloride resorption, thereby retaining electrolytes while increasing urine output; increases intravascular fluid volume which increases vascular resistance and blood pressure

**bitter** – stimulates appetite or digestive function

**bronchial** –relaxes spasms or constriction of the bronchi or upper part of the lungs, thereby improving respiration

**carcinostatic** –halts or inhibits the development or continued growth of cancer, carcinomas, or malignant tumors

**cardiotonic** – increases strength and tone (normal tension or response to stimuli) of the heart

**carminative** -- causes the release of stomach or intestinal gas

**catarrhal** – pertains to the inflammation of mucous membranes of the head and throat

**cathartic** – produces bowel movements

**caustic** – contains acidic compounds that have an escharotic or corrosive action that is capable of burning or eating away living tissues

**cholagogue** – increases flow of bile from gallbladder

**cicatrizant** – aids formation of scar tissue and wound healing

**counterirritant** – produces an inflammatory response for affecting an adjacent area

**demulcent** – soothes and protects inflamed and irritated mucous membranes both topically and internally

**deobstruent** – removes obstructions to clear or open natural ducts of the fluids and secretions of the body

**dermatitis** – inflammation of the skin evidenced by itchininess, redness, and various lesions

**detergent** – cleanses wounds and sores of infected or damaged tissue

**diaphoretic** – increases perspiration (synonym: sudorific)

**digestive** – promotes or aids the digestion process

**disinfectant** – destroys pathogenic microbes, germs, and noxious properties of fermentation

**diuretic** – increases urine flow

**ecbolic** – tends to increase contractions of uterus, facilitating childbirth

**emetic** – produces vomiting and evacuation of stomach contents

**emmenagogue** – regulates and induces normal menstruation

**emollient** – softens and soothes the skin

**errhine** – stimulates sneezing, increasing flow of mucus in nasal passages

**escharotic** – a caustic substance that destroys tissue and causes sloughing

**estrogenic** – causes the production of estrogen

**euphoriant** – produces a sense of bodily comfort; temporary effect and often addictive

**expectorant** – facilitates removal of mucus and other materials

**febrifuge** – reduces or relieves fever

**galactagogue** – promotes the flow of milk

**hemagogue** – promotes the flow of blood

**hemostatic** – controls or stops the flow of blood

**hepatic** – having to do with the liver

**herpetic** – treats skin eruptions relating to the herpes virus

**hypertensive** – raises blood pressure

**hypnotic** – strong-acting nervous system relaxant (nervines) that supports healthy sleep

**hypoglycemant** – lowers blood sugar

**hypotensive** – lowers blood pressure

**lactifuge** – reduces the flow of milk

**laxative** – loosens bowel contents

**lithotriptic** – a substance that causes kidney or bladder stones to dissolve

**masticatory** – increases flow of saliva upon chewing

**mucilaginous** – polysaccharide-rich compounds that coat and soothe inflamed mucous membranes

**narcotic** – induces drowsiness, sleep, or stupor, and lessens pain

**nephritic** – has a beneficial influence on the kidneys

**nervine** – a nerve tonic

**nootropic** – enhances memory, improves cognitive function and mood, reduces oxidative and ischemic damage to the brain

**nutritive** – a herb containing nutrients required to nourish and build the body

**orexigenic** – stimulates or increases the appetite

**parturfaciant** – induces contractions of labor at childbirth

**purgative** – causes the evacuation of intestinal contents; laxative

**refrigerant** – relieves thirst with its cooling properties

**relaxant** – tends to relax and relieve tension, especially muscular tension

**renal** –strengthens, cleanses or treats imbalance or disease states affecting the kidneys

**resorbent** – aids reabsorption of blood from bruises

**rubefacient** – reddens skin, dilates the blood vessels, and increases blood supply locally

**sedative** – exerts a soothing, tranquilizing effect on the body

**sialagogue** – increases the production and flow of saliva

**soporific** -- induces sleep

**stimulant** – increases body or organ function temporarily

**stomachic** – aids the stomach and digestive action

**sudorific** – increase perspiration

**tonic** – stimulates energy and increases strength and ton

**trophorestorative** – nourishes and restores balance to the body. Trophorestorative herbs typically have a strong affinity for an organ or organ system and correct deficiency and

weakness not only through temporary stimulation but by deeply nourishing that organ or organ system.

**vermifuge** – expels worms from the intestines

**vulnerary** – aids in healing wounds ([top](#))