
Introduction

By the time this second edition is published, the first edition of the *Handbook of Medicinal Herbs* will have been out more than 15 years. The second edition is designed to present most of the old information plus new information on the more important of those original 365 herbs. I submitted the first edition under the original unpublished title, *Herbs of Dubious Salubrity*. I intentionally left out many of the completely safe culinary herbs, spices, and food plants that are clearly medicinal. I also intentionally omitted some strictly dangerous herbs, such as foxglove, that were too unhealthy for use in unskilled hands. I did include several obscure hallucinogenic plants of dubious salubrity. I did, or should have, dropped some of these because they have little medicinal importance. Some poorly documented species, such as *Mimosa hostilis* and *Phoradendron leucarpum*, for example, were retained with fragmentary entries, so as to at least mention species from the first edition that might better have been dropped.

Now I think I have the most important herbs well covered here. In edition two, which I will refer to frequently as my Herbal Desk Reference (HDR), I have tried to concisely corral the data on some 1000 herbs in as little space as possible, striving to make a reliable, referenced resource to parallel the *PDR for Herbal Medicines*. I use the three-letter abbreviation, HDR, to indicate the second edition of my *Handbook of Medicinal Herbs*, because I compare and contrast it to other important sources, which are also represented by three-letter abbreviations. (See the reference abbreviation appendix.)

With this edition, I have tried to cover most of the widely mentioned medicinal plants, whether they are extremely salubrious or extremely toxic. Without counting them, I estimate we include more than 1000 of the most important herbs, including the more important herbs from the young Native American and the European traditions (including most of those approved by Commission E (KOM), and almost all of those included in the *PDR for Herbal Medicine* (PHR for the first edition, and PH2 for the second edition). Unlike Commission E and the Herbal PDR, which seem to stress European and American traditions, I include proportionately more herbs from the older African, Ayurvedic, and Chinese traditions as well, not wanting to slight any major medicinal plant from any major tradition.

Let me explain the new format for the second edition. First, a common name appears, usually but not always in English, followed by a recently accepted scientific name, with the authority for the scientific name. Then follows a safety score, X, +, ++, or +++. An X means I don't recommend taking it at all, or realize that it is so dangerous that it should not be taken without expert guidance. But for litigious reasons, I give some potent medicinal herbs the X (amateurs beware!). A single plus (+) indicates that I do not consider that the herb is, overall, as safe as coffee. I score two pluses (++) for those herbs I think of, overall, as being as safe as coffee. I score three pluses (+++) for those herbs I believe to be safer than coffee. In the first edition, I related the plus sign to a cup of coffee, figuring that 1, 2, or 3 cups per day of an herbal tea from the herb would be as safe as 1, 2, or 3 cups per day of coffee. I often drink more than 3 cups of coffee a day, especially while I worked on this project! Clearly, this is an oversimplification. Too often, some parts of a plant are more helpful or more toxic than other parts of the same species, and different ethnic groups or cultures may use parts differently. The safety scoring is a continuation of the same scoring system I used in the first edition. Some scores have been upgraded a bit, some have been downgraded.

Often, there are some comments on synonymy and other nomenclature difficulties that arose in completing this opus. I inject these following the nomenclature line. Here you may find some proven and/or suspected synonyms, or notes of related species that may be included in this species