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WESTERN HERBS

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SUSAN LYNN PETERSON, PH.D.

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in health food stores
everywhere!**

For bruises, sprains, strains,
breathing, dislocations,
adrenaline, and more!

FOREWORDS BY
CAROLYN DEAN, M.D.
DAVID H. PRICE, L.A.C., M.O.M., B.A.



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SUSAN LYNN PETERSON, PH.D.

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Wolfeboro, NH, USA

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ISBN-13: 978-1-59439-197-2

ISBN-10: 1-59439-197-1

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cover design by Axie Breen

Edited by Susan Bullowa

Photos by the author unless otherwise noted.

Publisher's Cataloging in Publication

Peterson, Susan Lynn, 1957-

Western herbs for martial artists and contact athletes : effective treatments for common sports injuries / Susan Lynn Peterson. -- Wolfeboro, NH : YMAA Publication Center, c2010.

p. ; cm.

ISBN: 13-digit: 978-1-59439-197-2 ; 10-digit: 1-59439-197-1

"For bruises, sprains, strains, breathing, dislocations, adrenaline, and more"--Cover.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Herbs--Therapeutic use. 2. Martial arts injuries--Alternative treatment. 3. Sports injuries--Alternative treatment. 4. Martial artists--Nutrition. 5. Athletes--Nutrition. 6. Herbals. I. Title.

RM666.H33 P48 2010
615/.321--dc22

2010933226
1009

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Printed in Canada.

WESTERN HERBS

for Martial Artists and Contact Athletes

To Laura Westbrook

Foreword

by Carolyn Dean M.D.

Most people treat pain and inflammation with medication. However, strong analgesics and anti-inflammatory drugs can have serious side effects, such as bleeding ulcers, fluid retention, and digestive problems. The vilified anti-inflammatories, Vioxx and Celebrex, also cause symptoms of heart disease. To offer my patients something other than drugs, I decided to learn acupuncture in medical school. I convinced a Chinese anesthesiologist to allow me to observe in his acupuncture clinic in my second year elective. I learned about all the incurable diseases in my morning class and in the afternoon I saw them cured.

I also wanted to learn about Chinese herbs for pain and inflammation. However, when I studied Chinese herbal medicine with Jeffrey Yuen in New York, I found the subject incredibly complex. The formulas used in martial arts alone required years of study to formulate and apply, a well stocked herbal formulary, and a knowledgeable herbalist to mix the ingredients. As a consumer, if you have to wade into your local Chinatown and purchase herbs without a single letter of usable English on the label, you aren't in do-it-yourself territory. I was surprised when the last wound plaster I got from a TCM practitioner contained acetylsalicylic acid (aspirin) when I read the fine print on the label.

Now, in this one volume you can access accurate and dependable Western herbs that are safe and effective treatments for sports injuries. Dr. Peterson had done a wonderful job of organizing the information and presenting it in an understandable and usable way. As a writer, I can only imagine the hundreds, no, thousands of hours that went into this volume.

As a clinician, I immediately gravitated to Chapter Four, which gives prescriptive advice for joint pain and inflammation, sprains, fractures, bruises, wounds, bleeding, puncture wounds, itchy sores, abrasions, chapped skin, old wounds, bruised lips, muscle cramps, aching muscles, scars and more. Active people suffer other symptoms besides musculoskeletal, so, Dr. Peterson also covers simple colds, anxiety, insomnia, digestion, motion sickness, and even fungal infections.

Chapter Two is a great herbal reference of over sixty herbs that answers the basic questions: What's it good for; How do you use it; How much do you use; and What should you be aware of before using it. Other chapters tackle the difficult topics of herbal side effects and herb/drug interactions. My bias, of course, is to use herbal remedies first before turning to drugs, but if you are already on a medication you need to know if a certain herb will accentuate the drug's effects or heal the condition and make the drug superfluous!

The book is called *Western Herbs for Martial Artists and Contact Athletes* but it has a much broader appeal. I'm going to recommend it to every athlete I know. Actually, to everyone I know because anyone can pull a muscle or fall and hurt himself on a curb or trip over a stone and benefit from Dr. Peterson's guidance.

Carolyn Dean, M.D., N.D. is a medical doctor, naturopath, herbalist and homeopath. She is the author and co-author of 17 books on health, an online newsletter, and online health programs at www.drcarolyndeane.com.

Foreword

by David Price

Over the course of several generations, the Pacific currents that have conveyed the Asian martial arts to the West have also carried with them bits and pieces of the Chinese medical tradition used in the treatment of traumatic injuries. Occasionally, the martial artist is fortunate enough to meet a master who has firsthand knowledge of the correct application of special liniments or training formulas. A friend of mine recounts a story of just such a master who would prepare a rare elixir, an efficacious formulation with the immediate effect of loosening stiff and painful joints to allow for continued training. The same individual, however, also impressed me by casually mentioning how he had sipped White Flower Oil, a toxic external-use therapeutic rub, to eradicate colds. Obviously, in between indecipherable characters and miraculous cures, lies a chasm fraught with pitfalls for the overzealous martial arts enthusiast who yearns to explore both the combative and medicinal wisdom of the East without adequate resources and schooling.

My study and practice of Chinese herbal medicine over the past 15 years has been both arduous and humbling. Building upon a lifelong interest in herbal medicine, I began in earnest with a distance learning program followed by four years of formal training in Chinese acupuncture and herbology. A few years after receiving my diploma, I took a position teaching Chinese medical theory to graduate students. With every course in Chinese herbal medicine I teach and every formulation I craft in my private practice, I gain a little more expertise and even more appreciation for both the brilliant minds of ancient physicians and the complexity and difficulties inherent in the practice of medicine. As Ms. Peterson remarks, the skillful and safe use of Chinese herbs demands much more than passing interest and access to popular literature—Chinese medicine is a refined and erudite blend of science and art.

The present text offers one solution for the intrepid martial artist with an interest in herbal therapies. Recognizing the challenges of procuring quality Chinese materials, grasping the essence of classical Eastern diagnosis, identifying appropriate traditional formulations and modifying them, and preparing and administering treatments, the author explores instead the myriad possibilities in our own native Western traditions of herbology. The result is a delightful and scholarly addition to both the herbal and martial arts literature. Pragmatically organized, the prose is, nonetheless, lively and enjoyable, avoiding the dry language found in many older herbals and making this a wonderful read.

It is crucial to spend some time reading through the introduction and the first chapter, “Using Herbs Safely,” a mandatory primer for smart herbal usage. Distilling good herbal practices into nine basic principles, Ms. Peterson has addressed many of the mistakes that lead to problems using herbs. Chapter Two, “The Herbal,” introduces a wide range of common herbs with meticulously researched information. One particularly noteworthy feature is a grading scale for the properties ascribed to the herbs, allowing readers to evaluate the credibility of actions and indications associated with each substance. In the subsequent

chapter, "Preparing the Herbs," detailed information is given regarding the various, and sometimes complex, preparation methods and their benefits and disadvantages. This section takes you a bit closer to considering actually working with herbs. In "Applications and Uses," we are introduced to more sophisticated uses of herbs in synergistic mixtures. The book concludes with "Herbal Contraindications," "Further Resources," and the "Glossary," rounding out the text with clear lists featuring details on key terminology and the general properties of the herbs, as well as the best places to continue educating yourself regarding effective and appropriate herbal therapeutics.

Motivated by a sincere interest to assist other martial artists in making wise choices about how and when to use or not to use herbal treatments to augment their martial arts practices, the author has utilized her considerable expertise in research and her natural flair for writing to create a book destined to become an instant classic both for herbalists and martial artists. In fact, you need not fall into either category in order to enjoy and value this informative book. I have no doubt that you are holding in your hands a text that will quickly become a favorite for anyone fascinated by medicinal herbs, representing a step forward toward better understanding of the power, both for serious harm and for profound health and well-being, of our planet's immense and rich apothecary.

David Price, B.A., M.O.M., L. Ac. is a graduate of Pomona College with a concentration in Asian Studies. He received a Master's degree from the International Institute of Chinese Medicine and trained at the Chengdu University of TCM. He is currently Clinical Dean at the Asian Institute of Medical Studies in Tucson, Arizona, and operates White Pine Clinic of Classical Chinese Therapeutics (www.whitepineclinic.com).

Acknowledgements

Writing involves spending a surprisingly large amount of time alone in a room with stacks of books and a computer monitor. These acknowledgements are mostly of those people who were always there when I poked my nose out from my cave.

First—always first—is Gary, my husband. Without his steady support for the last twenty-nine years, I could not do what I do and probably would not be who I am.

Thanks also to: Laura Westbrooks, friend, helping hand, and moral support; the brains behind the dojo, and a good part of its heart as well. I'm glad our paths have crossed. My life is much richer because they have. Shawn Koons, friend and fix-it guy, always generous with time and resources. My mom and dad, Don and Shirley Johnson, for growing a few of the herbs for me to photograph (and for everything else as well). The folks at KoSho Karate Pantano—students and parents. You've been great company along the way. David Price, who opened my eyes to the possibilities of Chinese herbalism, and who helped patch me together after too many hours of sitting in one place looking at a computer screen. Don Brandenburg, whose career advice and guidance have always gone above and beyond the call of duty. Krista Goering, my literary agent, for heart and head both offered in service of the project. The generous folks of Wikimedia Commons and Flickr, especially Renate Eder. Many of the illustrations in this book are available thanks to these good citizens of cyberspace.

Acknowledgements for Herbal Illustrations. Thanks to those who let me use the following illustrations in Chapter 2. I have also included the illustrations I provided.

Alan Cressler (Goldenseal, *Hydrastis canadensis*); Anne-Miek Bibbe (Fenugreek, *Trigonella foenum-graecum*); Badagnani (Turmeric root, *Curcuma longa*); Barbara Studer (Arnica, *Arnica montana*); Björgvin Steindórsson (*Rhodiola rosea*); FloraFarm GmbH Katharina Lohrie (Ginseng, *Panax ginseng*); Foodista (Fennel, *Foeniculum vulgare*); Forest and Kim Starr (Gotu Kola, *Centella asiatica*), (Shepherd's Purse, *Capsella bursa pastoris*); Hans-Joachim Fitting (Flax, *Linum usitatissimum*); Henri Pidoux (Devil's Claw, *Harpagophyum procumbens*); Jappe Cost Budde (Tea tree, *Meleuca* genus); Joan Simon (Agrimony, *Agrimonia eupatoria*); Johannes Keplinger (Cat's Claw, *Uncaria tomentosa*); Karduelis (Coltsfoot, *Tussilago farfara*); Karel Jakubec (Evening Primrose, *Oenothera biennis*); Laura Westbrooks (*Echinacea purpurea*), (Horsetail, *Equisetum arvense*), (Valerian, *Valeriana officinalis*), (Yarrow, *Achillea millefolium*); Love Krittaya (*Ginkgo biloba*); LuckyStarr (A hops cone, *Humulus lupulus*); Marcia Martínez Carvajal (*Rosa Mosqueta*, *Rosa affinis rubiginosa*); Michael Thompson (Peppermint, *Mentha piperita*); Ohio Department of Natural Resources (Slippery elm bark, *Ulmus rubra*); PDPhoto.org (Catnip blossom, *Nepeta catarica*); Piouswatson (Ashwagandha, *Withania somnifera*); Renate Eder (European Elder, *Sambucus nigra*), (Feverfew, *Tanacetum parthenium*); (Goldenrod, *Solidago virgaurea*) (The leaves and nut of a horse chestnut, *Aesculus hippocastanum*), (Marshmallow, *Althaea officinalis*);

(Witch Hazel, *Hamamelis virginiana*); **Rob Hille** (German Chamomile, *Matricaria recutita*); **Stanislav Doronenko** (*Astragalus*, *Astragalus membranaceus*); **Stanislav Doronenko** (Leaves of the *Eleuthero* plant, *Eleutherococcus senticosus*), (St. John's wort, *Hypericum perforatum*); **Steve Hammonds** (Bilberry, *Vaccinium myrtillus*); the author **Susan Lynn Peterson** (Aloe Vera), (Anise, *Pimpinella anisum*); (Commercially prepared bromelain tablets); (An assortment of peppers of the *Capsicum* genus); (Caraway "seeds," *Carum carvi*); (True Cinnamon, *Cinnamomum zeylanicum* (left) and *Cassia Cinnamon*, *C. aromaticum*), (Cloves, *Syzygium aromaticum*), (Comfrey, *Symphytum officinale*), (Leaves and bark from one of the 733 species of *Eucalyptus*), (Commercially encapsulated fish oil), (Whole flax seeds), (Garlic, *Allium sativum*), (Ginger rhizome, *Zingiber officinale*), (Horseradish root, *Armoracia rusticana*), (Lavender, *Lavandula angustifolia*), (Dried licorice root, *Glycyrrhiza glabra*), (Myrrh, *Commiphora molmol*), (Nettles, *Urtica dioica*), (Rosemary, *Rosmarinus officinalis*), (Sage, *Salvia officinalis*), (Thyme, *Thymus vulgaris*); **Teo Siyang** (*Andrographis*, *Andrographis paniculata*); **U.S. Department of Agriculture** (Willow bark, *Salix alba*).

Introduction

Healing with herbs has long been a tradition in the martial arts. Liniments for bruises, tonics for energy, herbal infusions to strengthen connective tissue, warm muscles, even to heal broken bones—all are part of the martial arts legacy. Most martial artists are aware of that legacy. Not all have access to it first-hand.

It bears saying right here at the beginning of the book that if you do have access to a capable professional martial herbalist, you are most fortunate. Nothing this or any other book can teach you can compare with the hands-on expertise of a medical professional trained in traditional Chinese herbal medicine. Chinese herbal medicine is both more systematic and more comprehensive than Western herbal medicine, and a good Chinese doctor can be a martial artist's greatest boon. If that medical professional is also your martial arts teacher and can teach you as well as treat you, you are twice blessed. Yet few of us are fortunate to study with teachers who understand and can teach the traditional Chinese formulas. The rest of us pick up what we can, wherever we can. This book is for the rest of us.

The Quandary

In the last fifteen years, books about healing with Eastern herbs and traditional Chinese medicines have begun to be published in English. Though tested by time, these remedies often prove impractical for Western martial artists engaged in self-teaching. Traditional Chinese remedies fit into a larger system of medicine that is very different from the Western tradition of seeing complaints as “one-problem, one-treatment.” Chinese remedies tend to be systemic, treating the entire person to foster health rather than treating a symptom to fix pathology. The ingredients tend to be native to China, some being very difficult to obtain in Europe and North America. Those ingredients that do find their way across the ocean are sometimes of questionable purity.¹ Some ingredients mentioned in the traditional books—those made from animal parts (such as bear gallbladder and wingless cockroach), molds and fungi, and various other “exotic” materials—are off-putting to Westerners. Moreover, Western-style medical documentation about the safety of Eastern herbs and medicines is often sketchy. Without a teacher or other formal training in traditional Chinese medicine, many Western martial artists are left with little more than blind trust that the book in front of them is a faithful transmission of a legitimate tradition, and that the herbs they ordered online are, if not what the label says, at least not too toxic.

Western Herbs and this Book

Yet even if you are reluctant to log on to eBay and purchase and brew a packet of herbs from China, that doesn't mean you must turn your back on the martial tradition of healing with herbs. Though advances in chemistry in the nineteenth century steered Western medicine away from herbal remedies for more than a hundred years, we too have a tradition of healing with herbs. In recent years, that tradition has begun to be folded back into mainstream medicine. A new interest in alternative and complementary medicine has led

to studies investigating which herbs do indeed have healing properties. We know more now about the efficacy and dangers of Western herbal medicine than at any other time in history.

The purpose of this book is to investigate those herbs that are readily available to the West. Most of the herbs in this book are either native to Europe and/or North America or have become common in these continents. For each herb I look at evidence for its effectiveness, evidence for its safety, and how specifically to use it. In short, this book is a compilation and distillation of modern evidence for a traditional Western art.

My research is a survey of the various strands of Western herbalism. That research pulls from five main sources:

- British herbalism (which had a heavy influence on North American herbalism)
- Continental European herbalism (especially from Germany's Commission E)
- Traditional Native American herbalism
- Folk uses in Europe and North America
- Standard scientific research from around the world (especially the United States)

It is a combination of tradition and new research, practical experience and scientific method, and it pulls from literally hundreds of sources in an attempt to get the "big picture" for any given herb.

Among the references regularly cited are these:

- The 1918 U.S. Dispensatory. This volume is the twentieth edition of a reference book used mainly by pharmacists back when you could still get an herbal remedy made up for you by your local pharmacist. It is the last of the dispensaries to deal in depth with herbal medicine, and it represents the best science of its time.
- "The Eclectic School" was a branch of American medicine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This school believed in merging traditional herbalism with other treatment methods. Eclectic physicians reserved the right to choose whatever methods most benefited their patients, hence the name "eclectic" from the Greek *eklego*, meaning "to choose from." The last Eclectic medical school closed in Cincinnati in 1939. Two authors have passed down to us the knowledge of the Eclectic School. Harvey Wickes Felter authored *The Eclectic Materia Medica, Pharmacology and Therapeutics*. And John William Fyfe, a teaching physician in New York, authored three manuals for physicians detailing how herbs can be used to treat specific conditions. They are *The Essentials of Modern Materia Medica and Therapeutics* (a.k.a. *Fyfe's Materia Medica*), *Pocket Essentials of Modern Materia Medica and Therapeutics*, and *Specific Diagnosis and Specific Medication*.
- Commission E monographs. The Commission E monographs are analyses of various herbs, commissioned by the German government to assist in the national regulation of herbs. These monographs, written by health professionals are some-

times detailed and carefully reasoned. They sometimes read like “medicine by committee.” But they do reflect a modern take on traditional European herbalism.

- *The PDR for Herbal Medicine*. The herbal counterpart to the *Physicians Desk Reference*, it is a reference book for modern mainstream physicians. It contains information on therapeutic properties and drug interactions.
- *A Modern Herbal*. *A Modern Herbal*, despite its name, isn’t modern. The edition cited here was published in 1931 by Maud Grieve, president of the British Guild of Herb Growers. She was one of the leading experts in British traditional and folklore uses of herbs during and after World War I.

The Purpose of this Book

It is not my intent here to investigate every possible use of every herb, but to focus on those herbs that may be of particular use to martial artists. I look at herbs that may help with bruises, scrapes, and cuts, sprains, muscle strains, and breaks and dislocations. I look at those that help with breathing. I look at those that deal with management of “adrenaline” and other products of the fight-or-flight system such as anxiety and insomnia. And I look at a couple of minor issues that tend to plague martial artists: battered feet, skin chafed from gear, plantar warts, jock itch, athlete’s foot, and for those who commonly kick or grapple after supper, flatulence.

Those familiar with Eastern herbs will see a couple of large gaps. I don’t deal with herbs for conditioning of hands and feet or herbs for regulation of *qi* before or after martial injury. Why? Western medicine has no equivalent for these uses. The typical Westerner has no need to condition hands. As for *qi*, because its very existence is questioned by Western doctors, it’s not likely to pop up in Western clinical trials. I omit these topics not because they are unimportant. I omit them because of a complete lack of available Western information about them.

Apart from those particular gaps, the research here is eclectic and wide-ranging. I have investigated insights from Europeans, North Americans, and Native Americans about what has worked for their people throughout the centuries. But I’ve also gone digging into the research: clinical trials, animal trials, and chemical analyses. I’ve gone looking for herbs that would impress not just the grandmother who learned herbal lore from her mother, but also the granddaughter training in modern biochemistry.

As for precautions, this book is full of them. Though I believe in boldness, I also believe there is another name for a beginner who would charge boldly into great risk for small reward. That other name is “fool.” This herbal is a beginner’s guide. It is written for people who don’t have enough experience to give them instincts about which herb uses are safe and which are not. For that reason, I’ve included even the most conservative cautions postulated for each herb. Some trained herbalists will scoff at some of them. I include them anyway, so the beginners reading this book may have as long a view as possible of the herbal landscape and its potential dangers.

The goal is to give the martial artist enough information to make an informed choice about which Western herbs to experiment with. In terms of “acceptable risk,” there are those herbs that nobody should use, those that only expert herbalists should use, those that only people with a high tolerance for risk should use, and those that just about anyone can use. The goal is to help you sort out which is which. On the other hand, there are herbs that scientific studies, herbalists, and medical doctors all agree work; herbs that only traditional herbalists acknowledge; and herbs that your Cousin Phil used once and now swears by. Again the goal is to help you sort out which is which. If you can come away from this book with a clear preliminary risk–benefit analysis for an herb that may meet a training need, the book will have met one of its main goals.

A word about my credentials and philosophy in using herbs: First of all, I am not an herbalist; I’m a researcher. My educational background, my work experience, and my writing for the last twenty years has trained me to sift through mountains of information, to pull out the useful bits, and to present them in a way that’s clear and immediately useful. That’s what I’ve tried to do here. This book rests not on my own personal ability to prescribe or use herbs, but on my ability to seek out the best of the best among those people who do. That’s why the book is heavily endnoted, so you can follow the trail of my research, dig deeper if you’d like, and draw your own conclusions. Most of all, I’m not telling you what you should use; I’m telling you what I have discovered about these herbs. If you chose to use any of the herbs presented in this book, it is your responsibility to go beyond my research until you yourself are convinced of the safety and efficacy of the herb you are using. It’s for that purpose that I have documented my sources and offered resources for further investigation. Any time you take a drug, supplement, or botanical, you must remember this: it is your body, your choice, your responsibility to bear the consequences. I wish you wise choices.

Throughout the book I use my own grading scale from zero, and one to five. One is “somebody, somewhere thought the herb might be useful.” Five is “pretty much everybody, traditionalists and Western scientists alike, thinks it’s useful.” Here are the criteria I used:



Universally recognized by both conventional medicine and alternative medicine as being a safe, reliable remedy. Large-scale clinical tests say this herb works. This level is the “holy grail” of herbal medicine. Few if any herbs or dietary supplements gain this kind of recognition. No remedy is a sure thing, of course, but this one has far fewer documented risks and far more documented success than the vast majority.



Recognized by several scientific studies as well as by ample tradition as being a reliable remedy. This herb is well on its way toward gaining the recognition of both conventional and alternative medicine. We are also beginning to get a firm handle on the associated risks. Only a small handful of herbs have

gained this level of recognition. No remedy is a sure thing, of course, but this one has more documented success than most.

◊◊◊◊ Research combined with traditional evidence is promising, but more results are required to draw definitive conclusions. Some studies show that the herb might be an effective remedy. Either these studies are solely on animals, are unduplicated, or are not up to the highest standards of research; or they test not the herb but only one active ingredient of the herb. Generally, research into the herb's safety is similarly sketchy. A worthy experiment, but with some risks.

◊◊◊◊ We have confirmation by more than one source of this herb's usefulness. Perhaps scientific research is unavailable, but anecdotal evidence is good. This herb has been used to treat this particular condition either throughout centuries or by at least two independent cultures. Or scientific research is preliminary, substandard, or contradictory but it agrees with some minimal anecdotal evidence. The herb might be worth an experiment, but with unknown risks.

◊◊◊◊ Minimal evidence. Some anecdotal or hearsay evidence says the herb might be useful in treating this condition. We have, however, no clear pattern to usage between cultures or throughout time. If you experiment with this herb, there are no guarantees regarding efficacy, risk, or safety. Proceed with caution and a bit of skepticism.

◊◊◊◊ Multiple tests indicate either that the herb does not work for this condition, or tests indicate that the herb does more harm than good for this use. Don't use this herb at all for this use without the guidance of a trained naturopath, herbalist, or savvy physician.

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