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Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*)

Part III



Pharmacological Data

• Primary Constituents:

Primary constituents include fatty acids, tannins, volatile oils (largely eugenol), camphor, flavonoids, triterpenes, and phenolic compounds (antioxidants). Holy Basil also contains several nutrients, such as vitamin A, vitamin C, beta carotene, iron, manganese, calcium, and zinc. Since there is such variety between Holy Basil plants, the constituents will differ slightly. However, these are the most commonly present constituents.¹

¹ Tewari, Devesh. "A Review on Phytoconstituents of Ocimum (Tulsi)." Kumaun University, Uttarakhand, India. 2012.

•Mechanisms of Action:

Holy Basil's volatile oils lead to its carminative, digestive stimulating, respiratory expectorant, circulatory stimulant, and antispasmodic properties. Camphor flavonoids contribute to Holy Basil's ability to improve respiratory system functioning, and its triterpenes may be the mechanism behind the prevention and reversal of insulin resistance while normalizing plasma glucose and insulin levels.² Phenolic compounds fight inflammation in the body, and the vitamins and minerals nourish the body.

Contraindications and Safety

•Contraindications:

Consult your practitioner before taking this herb if you are pregnant, as there has been conflicting evidence that it may damage embryos.³ Holy Basil may slow blood clotting, so avoid taking it for two weeks before and after a surgery. This is based on the presence of eugenol and COX inhibition properties and from what I can tell is relatively theoretical.

•Energetic/constitutional side effects:

Since Holy Basil increases heat and stimulates activity in the body, it can aggravate the *pitta* constitution or those prone to heat/excitation. If you see the vital force moving excessively up and out in a person, perhaps consider a different remedy as Holy Basil moves this way as well and can make people feel spaced out or ungrounded.

•Herb-Drug Interactions:

Holy Basil is contraindicated with anticoagulant and antiplatelet drugs. Although there is no conclusive evidence, Holy Basil should be used cautiously and with the oversight of a practitioner when taking medication that regulates your blood sugar since it has a blood sugar regulating effect. Also according to David Winston, some preliminary studies indicate that Holy Basil may increase the influence of the cytochrome P450 detoxification pathway in the liver, which metabolizes many drugs and can influence their efficacy—typically by enhancing their detoxification and elimination.

Preparations and Dosage

Infusion:

To prepare an infusion, combine 1-2 teaspoons of the dried herb with 8 oz. of water. Cover and steep for 15-30 minutes. Drink 2-3 cups a day. That's what most people recommend, I prefer at least 1 tbsp.

² "The role of triterpenes in the management of diabetes mellitus and its complications" <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4513225/>

³ Winston, David and Maimes, Steven. *Adaptogens: Herbs for Strength, Stamina, and Stress Relief*. Healing Arts Press. Rochester, Vermont. 2007. Page 170

Tincture:

For a fresh leaf and flower tincture, use a ratio of 1:2, with around 75% alcohol, which captures the volatile oils very nicely. For a tincture made with the dried leaf and flower, use a ratio of 1:5, at 50% alcohol.⁴ The standard tincture dosage is 30-60 drops, three times a day. As always, you can start with less and work your way up to find your ideal dosage range.

Succus:

An herbal succus, Latin for juice, is a preparation made with herbs that contain high water content. You prepare a succus by grinding, blending, or mashing the herb and pressing it through a tincture press to expel the liquid. Alternatively, you can use a mesh strainer bag (like for almond milk) to press the juice by hand.

Once you extract the juice, add alcohol to preserve it. For a basic formula, use the ratio of 3:1, which means 3 parts juice for 1 part 95% alcohol. After preparing your succus, leave it to rest for three days (after adding the alcohol), and then pour it through a cheesecloth or paper filter to catch any sediment. If done correctly, your succus can remain shelf-stable for two years. To learn more about how to prepare this medicine, refer to “*Making Plant Medicine*” by Richo Cech.

Example:

1. Mash and press 500 grams of Holy Basil to expel 315 ml juice.
2. Divide 315 ml by 3 to determine how much alcohol you need. In this case, you will need 105 ml of alcohol.
3. Combine 315 ml Holy Basil juice with 105 ml alcohol to yield 421 ml succus.

According to Richo Cech, succi “are commonly used as a direct and undiluted external application to mucous membranes or oily skin, acne, or wounds.” To reduce the sting of the alcohol, you can dilute it further by creating a wash of 60 drops succi in 1 cup water and applying that to the affected area. Internally, you can use succi like you would a tincture.⁵

⁴ Cech, Richo, and Sena Cech. *Making Plant Medicine*. Herbal Reads, 2016. Page 280

⁵ Cech, Richo, and Sena Cech. *Making Plant Medicine*. Herbal Reads, 2016. Page 273-275



Formulation Strategies

Melancholy Formula

- 20% Milky Oats (*Avena sativa*)
- 20% Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*)
- 15% St. John's Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)
- 15% Hawthorn flower (*Crataegus monogyna*)
- 15% Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*)
- 10% Black Cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*)
- 5% Pulsatilla (*Anemone pulsatilla*)

This formula features a wide variety of remedies that attend to the heart and strengthen a weakened and burned out nervous system. It is gently calming and sedative, yet uplifting to the mind and heart. Black Cohosh and Pulsatilla are featured again here (I personally like these two together) as they match the psychological indications for depression very well, but also help to open up the nervous system to receive the nervine tonics on a deeper level.

Spiritual Heart Formula/ Exhilarant Formula:

- 25% Gotu Kola (*Centella asiatica*)
- 25% Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*)
- 25% Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*)
- 12.5% Cinnamon (*Cinnamomum cassia*)
- 12.5% Sweet Violet (*Viola odorata*)

This formula comes from Paul Bergner and is said to “gladden and delight the vital heart.” Here we have Holy Basil and Gotu Kola, which gently calm the nervous system while simultaneously uplift the spirit with a *shen*-tonic action. These two plants are interesting in the ways they relax the mind while providing clarity and uplifting consciousness. Coriander and Cinnamon lend it a pleasant flavor while at the same time stimulating the circulation of the blood and stimulating digestion. Violet is said to be a remedy that acts upon the heart physically and spiritually, and balances the net energetics by bringing in a sweet, moistening property.

Nervous System Uplifting Formula

- 40% St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)
- 20% Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*)
- 20% Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*)
- 10% Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)
- 10% Damiana (*Turnera diffusa*)

This formula is based on the Lemon Balm and St. John’s Wort pair, which I see as a universal melancholy herbal pair. The herbs in this formula yield a warming, stimulating, and uplifting effect. Rosemary and Holy Basil warm the body and volatilize stagnancy to uplift the mind, stimulate the senses, and help you out of dark places, especially when you are feeling sad, lonely, fatigued, and have brain fog. Damiana is also a very nice floral, aromatic, volatile nervine with a stimulant effect on the nerves (though not like caffeine containing plants). Another remedy that’s nice in a formula like this is Lavender.

Daily Nervousness Formula

- 20% Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*)
- 20% Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*)
- 20% Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*)
- 20% Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*)
- 20% Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*)

This formula unites carminative nervines with volatile oils (Chamomile, Lemon Balm, Holy Basil) along with bitter nervines (Skullcap, Motherwort, Chamomile). These remedies are mild enough that they can be used throughout the day and not make one overly groggy.

Because these are all carminatives and bitters, they will support digestion as well. Since Motherwort is pretty potent in its emmenagogue effects, it may be replaced with a different bitter nervine, such as Bugleweed (*Lycopus virginicus*), Blue Vervain (*Verbena hastata*) or Hops (*Humulus lupulus*)- though if using Hops I would decrease it to 10% to prevent the formula from being too strong.

Happy Formula*

45-50%	Mimosa bark (<i>Albizia julibrissin</i>)
20-25%	Skullcap (<i>Scutellaria lateriflora</i>)
10%	Holy Basil (<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>)
10%	Hawthorn leaves and flowers (<i>Crataegus spp</i>)
10%	Rose petals (<i>Rosa spp.</i>)

This comes from Thomas Easley's book, "*The Modern Herbal Dispensatory*," and is an example of a nervous system restorative/anti-depressive formula. The Mimosa and Skullcap are the key herbs in this formula, helping to gently calm and nourish the nervous system. Holy Basil is an excellent supportive remedy in the way it both calms and uplifts the nerves (Mimosa is similar in that regard). I love the supportive pair of Hawthorn and Rose at the end, as so often depression is not just something of the mind, but of the heart. The heart and mind are intimately and intricately connected, and these plants balance the formula. This is for stress-induced depression and can be taken as 1-4 ml 3 times a day.

Nervine Trophorestorative Formula

20%	Milky Oats (<i>Avena sativa</i>)
20%	Skullcap (<i>Scutellaria lateriflora</i>)
20%	St. John's Wort (<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>)
10%	Lemon Balm (<i>Melissa officinalis</i>)
10%	Damiana (<i>Turnera diffusa</i>)
10%	Lavender (<i>Lavandula angustifolia</i>)
10%	Tulsi (<i>Ocimum sanctum</i>)

Skullcap and Milky Oats form an incredible foundation for restoring a burned out nervous system and is a traditional herbal pair in western herbalism. St. John's wort is added for its uplifting influence on depression. The addition of Lemon Balm, Holy Basil, Damiana, and Lavender to this pair helps "volatilize" it and drives the herbs deeper into the nervous system by balancing their general sinking quality (Skullcap is bitter = sinking, and Milky Oats is sweet = building). Damiana works through the sacral plexus/pelvic region, Lemon Balm orients around the heart, Lavender in the head, and Tulsi throughout the entire body. This formula can be taken relatively long term to effectively restore what the old doctors called neurasthenia, or nervous system burnout.

Blood Sugar Balance*

- 20% Devil's Club (*Oplopanax horridum*)
- 20% Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*)
- 20% Goat's Rue (*Galega officinalis*)
- 15% Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)
- 10% Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*)
- 10% Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*)
- 5% Blue Flag (*Iris versicolor*)

This formula contains herbs that are designed to support healthy blood sugar levels, specifically the lead triplet of Devil's Club, Holy Basil, and Goat's Rue. The rest of the formula is focused on supporting damp accumulation, detoxification, the liver, and increasing circulation. If supporting someone with blood sugar issues you absolutely have to make sure they are testing their blood sugar levels consistently. If they're on prescription medication for blood sugar management, they need to be overseen by a doctor so you don't drop their levels too low.

Nervous Digestion Triplet

- 33% Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*)
- 33% Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*)
- 33% Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*)

This simple triplet is composed of carminative nervines, which have a net warming action. This formula is ideal for cold, *vata* constitutions with tension and can be enjoyed as an infusion or tincture. This formula tastes really quite nice.

Simple Cough and Cold Tea

Decoct:

- 2 part Elderberry (*Sambucus spp.*)
- 1 part Osha (*Ligusticum spp.*)
- 1/2 part Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)
- 1/2 part Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*)

Infuse:

- 1 part Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*)
- 1 part Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*)

Decoct the first part of the remedy for 30 minutes (Elderberry, Osha, Ginger, and Licorice), and then add the remaining herbs. Let the combination infuse for 15-30 minutes before straining.

This formula is a nice broad-spectrum antiseptic and antiviral formula. It has immunostimulant, circulatory stimulant, demulcent, stimulant expectorant, and slight nerve

properties. Adding herbs that mellow out and settle the nerves is nice because being sick can feel stressful. The Holy Basil, Lemon Balm, Ginger, and Osha also lend it some diaphoretic properties.

This formula can also be made into syrup if you add equal parts honey to the final tea to preserve it. A little brandy in there is nice too since it preserves it and adds its own slight expectorant property.



Energetic Architecture

- Ruling Planet: Jupiter

Holy Basil is governed by Jupiter, which you can see in its morphology, energetics, herbal actions, and organ affinities. Morphologically, Holy Basil is a bushy plant that grows up and out. When Holy Basil is in full flower, you can practically feel its energy radiating outward. Its warming and drying energetics uplift patterns of cold and sluggishness. Jupiter is the planet of optimism, higher consciousness, and inspired thinking. Certainly, you can see how

Holy Basil dispels depression, connects you with your soul, uplifts your heart, and opens your mind. To me, its effects on the nervous system and heart speak volumes to its Jupiter-like qualities.

- Ruling Element: Fire

Holy Basil is ruled by the Fire Element, which you can see through its aromatic compounds, pungency, and oiliness. Morphologically, you can see the correspondence to the Fire Element with Holy Basil's serrated leaf margin and sharp hairs along the petioles. Holy Basil impacts the mind and nervous system as a gentle warming nervine relaxant, making it useful for the *vata* constitution, which needs warmth and relaxation to balance coldness and tension. With its net-warming effect and influence on circulation, Holy Basil is a valuable Fire Element medicine

- Ruling Principle: Mercury/Mutable

I consider this to be a Mercury governed plant, specifically as it has a strong affinity for the respiratory and nervous systems, as well as its contents of volatile oils. The unique ability for Holy Basil to stimulate and focus the mind while at the same time making it calm and relaxed is a notable Mercurial quality, as in a way its doing two opposite things at once. The relaxant/nervine effect is Mercurial, as well as its spasmolytic property.

Esoteric Significance

Considering the energetic architecture of Holy Basil, we have Jupiter-Fire-Mutable/Mercury. The combination of Mutable and Fire leads us to Sagittarius, the Archer, which is interestingly enough a sign associated with Jupiter. That makes this archetype strongly attributed to this plant. It makes sense on a number of levels: Sagittarius types can tend to be very intellectual, they are the philosopher and the traveler; those people that seek higher insights and knowledge through varied experience and perspectives. Emerging from the inner depths of Scorpio, Sagittarius wants to “climb the mountain” to seek something beyond and greater than the self.

To me, with Tulsi's up and out effect, it's ability to stimulate and uplift the mind out of the muck and the mire of melancholy, emotional stagnation, and depression, really fits with this pattern of the Scorpio to Sagittarius transition. Its influence on the mind is notably Sagittarian, in that it stimulates, awakens, and quickens, leading to a state of mind conducive to philosophizing. This sign also rules “long distance travel” and thus is associated with the arterial circulation, which as we've seen Holy Basil is a notable circulatory stimulant. As a mutable sign, it can be prone to the nervousness that this plant is remedial for, and with Jupiter liking it's excesses (ie insulin resistance) it's beneficial here for the liver- Jupiters main organ affinity.

The card associated with Sagittarius is XIV, Art, or Temperance. This card is associated with the uniting of the opposing natures within us. It follows the Death card XIII, so can be

likened to the emergence of the new self after the death of the ego, or the slaying of the untrue parts of the self. This card is the unification of primal Fire and Water, what are alchemically considered the most opposing elements. On the card reads “ *Visita interiora terrae rectificando invenies occult lapidem*” or *visit the interior parts of the earth; by rectification you shall find the hidden stone*. This is an innately alchemical phrase, speaking to the importance of us to go deep within the self to find the true parts of the self, which must be rectified (purified) and exalted into the personality and spirit so that we can live in accordance with our truth. In the end, this card is about our own internal transformation and the unification of seemingly disparate or opposing parts of the self.

How does Tulsi help us to do that? Well to me, it makes sense that this card would be highly revered in India and seen as divine or holy, especially if it has a property like this. For what is the spiritual path if not the seeking of the divine within, the true self, and bringing it forward to live in accordance with it? When I look at how Holy Basil is traditionally used and spiritually revered, and study this card, it makes a clear connection... to me at least.

This completes your free issue of *Materia Medica Monthly*! I truly hope you enjoyed it, and learned something new about how to effectively work with this important herbal medicine.

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