Materia Medica Monthly

Your Path to Mastery in the Art of Herbal Medicine

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Volume Five:
Blue Vervain (Verbena hastata)
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We all have particular herbal medicines that are close to our heart, those plants that seem to reflect a part of us back to ourselves—those plants that when we work with in a deep way we remember some essential part of the self. Blue Vervain is just one of those plants for myself, so I’m very excited to share it with you in this month’s issue of Materia Medica Monthly.

So far we have primarily been covering herbal polychrests, that is, plants which have a very broad spectrum of actions, uses and applications. Here with Blue Vervain we have a plant that is a bit more specific in it’s properties and will thus likely yield a slightly shorter monograph (though who knows how far we’ll go with it!).

Blue Vervain was one of the most sacred plants to the druids and is rich with deep symbolic meaning, esoteric properties and spiritual virtues, as well as being a very handy physical medicinal to know how to use properly. Its usage dates all the way back to the ancient Greeks and Romans and was a very popular medicine throughout European tradition, though it is not as commonly used in modern day herbal medicine. It’s one of those plants that I would truly like to see a resurgence in it’s use, for it is a highly valuable plant with distinct properties and great applications for the modern human.

From my perspective, any plant that is held in such high regard by ancient cultures is worth taking a deeper look at. When a tradition considers a plant to have a potent spiritual property
I’m always curious about it, as the core principle of Evolutionary Herbalism is that herbs not only heal the body, but assist in the evolution of the soul- which is ultimately achieved through the spirit of the plant. Naturally all plants have this evolutionary function, but some tend to be a bit “louder” than others, and Blue Vervain fits in this category nicely. According to Matthew Wood, “It was one of the seven herbs of Ireland that have power over forces natural and supernatural.” I find that rather curious and intriguing, so let’s explore Blue Vervain in more depth and unlock it’s physical and spiritual virtues.

- **Common Name:** Blue Vervain
- **Latin Name:** Verbena hastata is the North American species used, V. officinalis is the European species. Both are considered interchangeable in their properties.
- **Family:** Verbenaceae
- **Parts Used:** In modern day herbalism, the aerial parts in flower are the primary parts of the plant used medicinally. Though the older physicians of North America preferred to use the roots which are a much stronger medicine. The aerial parts themselves are pretty strong on their own, and many herbalists feel that the roots are actually too strong for many people, as they are extremely bitter and can provoke nausea or even vomiting. For our purposes, the aerial parts in flower are best.

### The 5 Keys of Blue Vervain

#### Tastes

First and foremost, this plant is bitter, and I mean really bitter!! If you want to know what the bitter taste is like this is probably one of our better examples of a pure and simple bitter. As always, this indicates it will have a stimulant action upon digestion and operate upon the sphere of the liver and gallbladder. But underneath that bitter taste there is a distinct acrid taste, sort of like bile in the back of your throat. All plants which have an acrid taste tend to be anti-spasmodic, relaxant, and have an effect upon the nervous system (such as Lobelia, Valerian, Kava-Kava, and Black Cohosh). The combination of bitter and acrid leads us to understand much of the properties of Blue Vervain.

#### Primary Actions

- **Bitter Tonic:** The bitter tonic properties of Blue Vervain are marked and I consider it to be in a unique class of remedies called “nauseating bitters.” These are basically bitters that are so bitter they can induce nausea and vomiting- thus you have to be somewhat cautious with your dosage. That being said it’s so bitter it’s sometimes difficult to get enough down to actually make you purge. This is a reliable plant anytime you need to stimulate digestion through a bitter tonic action (as opposed to using a warming carminative) or if you need to move any stuck energy in the liver (more on that later).

- **Nervine Sedative:** I love using Blue Vervain as a nervine. It’s effects are generally considered mild when compared to our strong nerve hypnotics like Valerian (Valeriana officinalis), Passionflower (Passiflora incarnata), Hops (Humulus lupulus), or Wild Lettuce (Lactuca virosa), but its effect upon the nerves is quite distinct. As it is so strongly bitter, it is excellent for use when the vital force is stuck up in the head and has a difficult time
moving down in the lower burner (pelvic region). It is one of those remedies that is nerve sedative yet also uplifts the spirit in a way and is commonly used for melancholy and depression. It has many specific indications for the nervous system and the specific personality/constitutional type for which it is specifically beneficial for which we will explore in more detail later.

- **Anti-spasmodic:** Many of our nerve sedatives and hypnotics are also beneficial anti-spasmodics, for they help to relax and settle an overexcitable nerve impulse which leads to over contraction of smooth or skeletal muscles. We see Vervain with it’s strong bitter tonic properties being a particularly beneficial antispasmodic for the stomach and digestive system. It is also considered a *very specific* remedies for tension and spasm in the neck and shoulders- almost as if there’s a “kink in the hose” preventing the vital force from moving up or down through the base of the head and neck region. The energy gets stuck there giving rise to tension in the neck/shoulder/occipital region. The Vervain person is oftentimes so tense and cannot unwind and relax mentally that it reflexes into the muscles and leads to chronic tension.

- **Relaxant Diaphoretic:** One of the traditional uses of Blue Vervain was in the treatment of febrile diseases. As one might assume, it is not considered a stimulant diaphoretic because it lacks to pungent, aromatic quality of herbs with this quality. Rather it is a relaxant diaphoretic, which lines up quite nicely with it’s nerve sedative and antispasmodic qualities. It will effectively relax tension in the peripheral vasculature and allow the blood to flow more smoothly and evenly to the surface in order to drive heat from the core outwards. The old North American physicians oftentimes compared it to Boneset, which is yet another nauseatingly bitter remedy, though it was considered to be a much more reliable relaxant diaphoretic in acute febrile conditions than Blue Vervain. Nonetheless, this is a useful action of the plant to understand. The relaxant diaphoretics are truly best used when the person is hot, irritable, writhing in pain, sore from muscle cramping, unable to sleep, nervous and exhausted. Stimulant diaphoretics on the other hand are typically best used in the earlier stages of a fever when the person feels cold.

- **Emetic:** While this is certainly not a commonly used herbal action in modern day practice, it is certainly useful to know which plants can generate vomiting. This is most likely due to the combination of the nauseatingly bitterness of the plant along with the nerve sedative and anti-spasmodic properties. You cannot purge if you are tense- for the sphincter between the stomach and esophagus will be contracted and the contents of the stomach will be unable to rise. Through stimulating the stomach secretions and relaxing the smooth muscles and nerves, Blue Vervain is quite effective at getting something out if you need to! According to Samuel Thomson, Blue Vervain was his second most valued emetic next to Lobelia (note they are both acrid). It was used by army surgeons as an emetic during the Revolutionary War. The only time I have used emetics clinically is in first aid type situations where someone accidentally eats a food that they are allergic to and needs to purge the contents of the stomach to avoid a major eczema outbreak, asthma attack, or even anaphylactic shock.
• **Diuretic:** While it is not necessarily considered one of the top #1 diuretics, Blue Vervain does exert an influence upon the renal apparatus. I have read some case studies where it has assisted in the removal of kidney stones, likely through it’s relaxant effect upon the smooth muscles, as well as the matching of the remedy to the psychological picture of the patient.

• **Emmenagogue:** Blue Vervain is a use emmenagogue for use in amenorrhea or dysmenorrhea. The relaxant effect upon the nervous system is great to support PMS symptoms and the bitter tonic effect helps to move any stuck energy in the liver which can get bogged down processing all the hormones, as well as having a general downward bearing energetic quality that most bitters have. It’s important to consider the differences in our emmenagogue materia medica here, as there are pungent warming circulatory stimulant emmenagogues, and more relaxant, cooling and bitter emmenagogues- making sure you match the right type to the person is critical for optimal therapeutic benefit.

• **Galactagogue:** Lastly we see that this is one of our great galactagogue remedies which assists in increasing breast milk production. It can be used as a simple in this regard, or combined with other common galactagogues, such as Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), Fenugreek (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*), Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*), and Goat’s Rue (*Galega officinalis*). What Blue Vervain holds as unique here is its other actions on the digestive, nervous and musculoskeletal systems, as well as it’s psychological picture which will be outlined in more detail later. If you see any other sub-symptoms such as nervousness, anxiety, insomnia, tension, etc. then Blue Vervain is likely the most specific galactagogue for use. In all selection of herbs it’s important to consider the total global actions it has upon the body and mind and to do your best to find the remedy that matches the person on as many levels as possible- for these are your specific medicines.

**Affinities**

• **Physical Organs, Systems and Tissues:** These are the primary organs, systems and tissues Blue Vervain has an affinity for. I will briefly mention these affinities as they relate to the actions listed above. More detail will be gone into the specific effects this remedy has on these organs systems and tissues later on when we explore clinical patterns and uses.

  - **Stomach and Digestive System:** The bitter tonic effects help to increase digestive function and stimulate gastric secretions. It also has a distinct emetic effect that would should exercise some caution not to trigger!

  - **Liver and Gallbladder:** The bitter tonic effects also help to move the liver as a gentle alterative, typically used specifically when there are nervous system complaints associated with liver stagnation.

  - **Febrile Mechanism:** The relaxant diaphoretic action gives it an affinity for the febrile response of the body. This is achieved through effects upon the vasculature, which is likely achieved through it’s effects upon the nerves and muscles which are the primary affinities.
• **Nervous System:** I consider this to be the primary affinity for Blue Vervain along with the liver. It is a distinct nervine sedative with specific psychological pictures outlines further below.

• **Musculoskeletal System:** It is a smooth and skeletal muscle anti-spasmodic, which is likely done through it’s relaxant effect upon the nervous system.

• **Female Reproductive System:** The effects upon the female reproductive system are a combination of it’s bitter tonic effects increasing downward baring energy (thus stimulating menses), relaxing smooth muscles (relieving cramping), calming the nervous system (settling PMS), moving liver stagnation, and increasing milk production in the mammary glands. It is also one of our chief remedies for hot flashes.

• **Kidneys:** The diuretic properties lend it an affinity for the kidneys where it helps to relax muscle spasms around kidney stones and can be used as a general flushing treatment.

![Blue Vervain Flowers](image)

**Energetics**

• **Temperature, Moisture and Tone:** As mentioned previously, Blue Vervain is one of our stronger pure bitter remedies which lends it a decidedly cooling energetic action upon the constitution as a whole. In this way it is particularly suitable to conditions marked by heat signs, irritation of the tissues, and an overall excess of the Fire Element. This cooling effect is quite noticeable after prolonged usage, which naturally is very beneficial to some and detrimental to others. In larger doses it will typically send quite the shiver down your spine, which is common for very bitter plants, and shows it’s cooling dynamic. Remember, cooling isn’t just a temperature dynamic measurable in degrees, but rather is the overall *quality* of what coldness does. Heat rises, and cold sinks, and this movement down the central nervous system shows that descending quality of Blue Vervain, bringing the vital force down.
This downward bearing motion the plant offers we see in a wide range of its medicinal virtues: the bitterness helps to stimulate digestion and thus bowel movements, the diuretic effect drains fluids from the kidneys, the emmenagogue effect drains menstrual blood from the reproductive system, and the nervous system effects assist in bringing nervous energy down and in. Because it is stimulating the secretion of fluids that are ultimately leaving the body, Blue Vervain has a drying effect upon the constitution from long term use. Though in the short term because it is increasing secretions, it can have a local moistening effect, as Matthew Wood notes it “keeps the fluids from drying out.” We even see the slight “contradiction” within the biochemical profile, as it contains both tannins (which are astringent and drying) and also mucilage (which is moistening).

Matthew also mentions that from the Chinese perspective, it is well suited for the pattern of “yin not holding down the yang.” This would be seen as a lack of fluids, or the fluids drying out, and allowing the fires of the body to rise up and rage out of control. This pattern typically looks like heat symptoms, but cooling down the heat isn’t enough, the yin needs to be strengthened and tonified so that it can manage the amount of yang that is there. He describes this as “a lack of substance and nutrition to support an intense level of activity.”

But the most remarkable aspect of Blue Vervain is its relaxant energetic action. We see that it directly relaxes the nervous and musculoskeletal systems, which in turn effects a great many organ systems of the body, as the nerves and muscles innervate just about every organ system. The relaxant effect is used for the digestive system, liver, gall bladder, nervous system, muscles, urinary tract, uterus, and heart. That’s just about everything! This shows how widely applicable this plant is as a systemic relaxant, and I think that is probably the one word that describes Blue Vervain the best.

**Effects upon Doshas:** From our basic understanding of the cooling, drying and relaxant properties of Blue Vervain, we can assume it’s general actions upon the doshas- though it can be slightly confusing. We see that because it is cooling and drying it can be aggravating for vata, but at the same time it is a great relaxant which makes it highly indicated for vata type conditions. In fact, some of the primary ways it has been used throughout tradition is for treating vata disorders, such as epilepsy, convulsions, nervousness, anxiety, and insomnia. Vata is marked by tension and this is a great relaxant, so I consider it highly indicated for vata type issues, though we just have to be cautious that it doesn’t make someone too cold. This can easily be remedied by combining it with some warming herbs.

Due to it’s distinct cooling effects, Blue Vervain is well suited for pitta types, especially those that work hard, have strong willpower, and in general are very driven- to the point of completely exhausting themselves. This is a critical pattern with Blue Vervain that we will explore in more detail under the psychological indications, but for now know that this remedy is particularly well suited for a mixed pitta-vata constitution.

Because it is primarily a relaxant remedy, it can aggravate kapha, which is already a relaxed constitution. Kapha’s usually have lower levels of energy and tend towards heaviness and sluggishness- something a relaxant like Blue Vervain could potentially aggravate. The bitterness of the plant is nice for a kapha, for they typically need to drain fluids that have
become stagnant and accumulated and also need the drying action- but the combination of the coldness and relaxing effects make it contraindicated for kapha. There are better bitter and drying remedies to use for that constitution.

• Effects upon Tissue States: According to the 6 tissue state model, Blue Vervain is best suited for the wind/tension tissue state. This particular tissue state is essentially psychological and physiological tension, which manifests as cramping, constriction, and tightness. This primarily affects the nervous and musculoskeletal systems, the 2 systems I mentioned Blue Vervain is quite specific for. In fact, most remedies that are strongly sedative or anti-spasmodic work on both of these systems and this tissue state, because the muscle fibers are all innervated by the nerves- so when the nerves are overstressed and stimulated, the muscles become overly tense.

It’s worth mentioning here briefly that there is a pattern in Chinese medicine called “liver wind.” It’s important to remember that in Chinese medicine when they say “liver” they aren’t just talking about the physical liver, but an overall physiological/psychological pattern within the organism. The liver is responsible for the equal and even distribution of the vital force throughout the body. Whenever the liver is afflicted in this way, it tends to lead to spasm of the muscles. It’s interesting to remember that Blue Vervain is a strong bitter tonic, lending it a primary affinity for the liver, and that it is a relaxant- so I tend to think of it as a “liver relaxant.”

This tissue state was also very common in the old days from malarial fever which had strong alternating chills and fever and oftentimes damaged the digestive system and the liver. Most of the remedies used in that regard are the nauseating bitters like Blue Vervain, as well as Boneset (Eupatorium perfoliatum) and Wormwood (Artemesia absinthium). Malarial fevers essentially create the “liver wind” pattern.

I would also say that this remedy is quite helpful for an excess of the heat/excitation tissue state. As mentioned earlier, this is more the heat from a lack of fluids and sustenance to the tissues themselves, allowing the fires to begin to rage out of control. It is such a cold plant that it is truly great at sedating heat patterns and calming the vital force which is moving too up and out. I tend to think of Blue Vervain being specific primarily for wind/tension, but that constriction prevents the fluids from entering the tissues as effectively and thus they get dried out, which the makes them more prone to heat. Conversely, it could be beneficial for too much heat in the system, which drives off the fluids and makes the nerves and muscles more prone to tension. As we will see next, Blue Vervain is quite specific for individuals that are very driven, motivated, and tend to overexert themselves to the point of burnout and creating a great deal of tension (oftentimes self produced).

**Prabhava/Specific Indications**

• Pulse and Tongue Indications: As is common to the wind/tension tissue state, the tongue will quiver immediately upon extension. As a remedy for mental stress, the tip of the tongue will typically be red, even with little “strawberry spots” on it. The pulse will feel like a taught wire under the finger, and if there is heat it will be rapid and superficial.
Psychological Picture: This is where we really see Blue Vervain come to a level of specificity unlike any other remedy. The genius of this plant was bought out by the late Dr. Edward Bach, visionary behind flower essence therapy. What we see with the psychological picture of the Blue Vervain type person is a combination of the pitta and vata doshas. The person is typically highly driven, motivated, and exerts their will upon the world in a powerful way because it is fueled by a vision, a dream, inspiration, or a calling. So they get to work…. and work they do. These types of people are the classic “type A” personality that burns the candle at both ends and pushes themselves behind the limits and capacities of their physical bodies.

In fact, the Blue Vervain person isn’t exactly very connected to their physical body. It’s not that they live in a world of dreams and are all spacey, rather, their vital force exists on the plane of ideas and ideals, and they exert an extreme amount of their willpower towards achieving that ideal or goal they have set in place for themselves. Unfortunately, they can never reach it fast enough because oftentimes they place unreasonable expectations on themselves and others. This can lead to very distinct psychological dynamics of being very overbearing and hard on themselves, never quite meeting the bar of standards that they have set way too high- so they push harder, work harder. So while they tend to live in their heads, they tend to also be quite practical and organized- I was always taught that Blue Vervain people tend to be list-makers to keep their thoughts organized.

In this way they tend to neglect themselves. They forget to eat, take showers, clean their house, loose sleep, don’t exercise or drink enough water. It’s as if they get tunnel-visioned where the only thing they see is the end goal they are trying to reach, which can be an internal state of being or some external accomplishment of some sort. Either way, they loose sight of other important facets of their lives which can fall by the wayside.

The net result of this is tension- both psychological and physiological. To quote Matthew Wood, "Verbena hastata is indicated in cases where people are intensely driven but do not have the energy to sustain their drive. They often are stiff-necked, metaphorically and literally. They suffer from extreme tension in the neck, yet the neck sometimes weakens and the head drops slightly. These people are often thin and lack the physical sustenance necessary to carry them through the intensity of their work habits and drive. They are constantly exhausted, yet constantly striving." From an energetic perspective, this is essentially an excess of pitta (drive and intensity) leading to an excess of vata (tension).

To quote Patricia Kaminski and Richard Katz from the Flower Essence Repertory, “Vervain is particularly an embodiment remedy, helping the soul to center and grind its tremendous enthusiasm. In this way, the body becomes a natural regulator and harmonizer for the abundant spiritual forces which pour out of such a person…. Such soul ardor is able to inspire, lead and heal others.”

These are some of the critical factors one has to take into consideration when determining whether Blue Vervain is a specific remedy for someone. Now of course it can be of benefit for tension and as a bitter tonic even if someone doesn’t match the above pattern, but if you find someone like this it will really have an effect on them. Oftentimes the aftereffects of working with the remedy on this more subtle level are shown as someone developing the ability to slow
down, pace themselves, take better care of their bodies and physical reality, learning how to give others space to contribute to projects rather than needing to control, allowing other people to have their own beliefs and not superimposing or projecting ones own ideals onto others, learning how to relax and unwind in a healthy way, and ultimately how the regulate and utilize the tremendous amount of vital force that flows through them to create positive change on the planet.

**Clinical Patterns and Uses**

1. **Digestive Stagnation and Tension:** As a strong bitter tonic, Blue Vervain is beneficial to consider for poor digestion due to lack of secretions and deficiency in the stomach, liver and gall bladder- as one would use any other bitter remedy. But this plant is unique in its synergy of bitterness and sedative/nervine/relaxant properties, making it useful for digestive issues when it is accompanied by nervousness, tension and cramping. I often like to combine it with other bitter nervines, such as Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*), Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*), and Hops (*Humulus lupulus*) for a cumulative effect- though it is worth noting that a formula of this nature would taste awesome and should usually be combined with more pleasant tasting plants. Blue Vervain is especially beneficial for bringing the vital force down, and can thus be beneficial for ulcerations (though be careful to not use too much so as to overstimulate gastric secretions), colic, dyspepsia, and all manner of cramping in the digestive system. It’s also important to remember that these bitter nervines will be contraindicated for those with cold constitutions and will typically have a drying effect upon the constitution.

2. **Liver Constriction:** This is likely the critical pattern for using Blue Vervain holistically. The constriction or tension tissue state typically influences the nervous system which then reflexes into the circulation of the blood, impacting the flow of the vital force into the various organ systems. The liver itself is not directly innervated by the nervous system, but rather the relative degree of constriction and relaxation of the hepatic artery which brings fresh oxygenated blood to the liver. This is important, as the liver is constantly getting flooded with “dirty blood” from the portal vein which feeds everything absorbed from the intestines into the liver. In order for it to effectively be able to process all of this digestate, the liver needs a constant supply of fresh clean oxygenated blood.

When the nervous system is overly stimulated, blood is shunted from the core to the periphery of the body and in this case, results in the hepatic artery in constricting to reduce the flow of fresh blood into the liver so it can be used elsewhere in the body. When this becomes chronic, the liver is less able to effectively process the digestate and reaches a relative state of stagnancy. This fresh oxygenated blood could be seen as the yin of the liver, and when it is deficient in this way it is less able to control the yang of the liver- that is, the water is less able to buffer the fire of this all important organ. This results in “deficiency of liver yin with the rising of liver yang,” as a result of “liver wind.” Matthew Wood describes the symptomatic pattern, “The principle symptoms of this kind of liver wind are sudden unconsciousness, convulsions, deviation of the eye and mouth, one-sided paralysis, aphasia or indistinct, speech, dizziness, a dried red, peeled, and deviated tongue, and a superficial, empty, or tense, fine and rapid pulse. This condition can be caused by severe fever injuring the yin and causing uprising of yang.”
Other common symptoms here associated with liver tension would be tension or spasm in the musculoskeletal system leading to cramping, especially in the region of the neck and shoulders, as well as headaches. These last 2 symptoms are **hallmark symptoms** for the use of Blue Vervain. It is as if the vital force is stuck in the liver and it needs to go somewhere so it shoots up and gets bottlenecked in the neck and shoulder region and doesn’t flow smoothly. It can also result in tension headaches.

Whenever someone has a tension headache with heat signs, rapid pounding pulse, and a stiff neck and shoulders, the first remedy I consider is Blue Vervain. It effectively relaxes the tension in the vasculature, the bitterness drains the vital force down and in, opens up the hepatic artery, moves stuck energy in the liver, and calms the nervous system. As Matthew noted, this constellation of symptoms can occur from high fever damaging liver yin, which is another one of our primary clinical patterns to consider when using this remedy.

3. **Fever:** Blue Vervain is considered a relaxant diaphoretic. This is a critical distinction amongst our diaphoretic materia medica, as the relaxants have a distinctly different mechanism in the treatment of fever than our more hot, pungent stimulant diaphoretics. The latter influences fever by stimulating the circulation of blood to the surface of the body, actually increasing body temperature slightly so that the fever can be broken. They are best used when the patient feels cold but has a fever, typically in the earlier stages of a fever.

But a relaxant diaphoretic like Blue Vervain works differently. Rather than stimulating circulation of the blood to the surface, they relax tension in the neuro-vasculature junction allowing the blood to flow more evenly- meaning that they relax the nervous system which reduces tension around the blood vessels thus letting the blood circulate more evenly. Most of our relaxant diaphoretics are bitter and acrid plants that move the liver, relax the nervous, open up the circulation, and drain the heat from the system. They are best used during the mid to late stages of a fever when the patient feels hot, irritable, tense, can’t sleep, and has red flushed skin but dryness of the skin.

Typically during fever people will fluctuate between the different phases of a fever- from cold to hot etc. This is why most formulas for fever will combine both stimulant and relaxant diaphoretics- one increases the circulation, the other relaxes the “kinks in the hose” so the blood can flow more evenly. Some of our other great relaxant diaphoretics
include Lobelia (*Lobelia inflata*), Boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*), Pleurisy root (*Asclepias tuberosa*), and Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*).

4. **Nervous System Disorders:** As a reliable nervine, Blue Vervain is applicable in a wide variety of issues involving the nerves. This tends to cover a broad range of complaints, from anxiety, nervousness, stress, irritability, depression, and insomnia, to more severe disorders such as epilepsy. The latter was one of the most common reasons for administering this plant, a usage developed (or more aptly realized) by Dr. O. Phelps Brown in the mid 1800’s. He used this plant very reliably in the treatment of “the fits” or severe epilepsy, and systemic spasm, contraction and tension of the muscles and nerves. It was from his usage that it was adopted into use by the Eclectics and Homeopaths, though they did not use it quite as much as many other remedies in their materia medica. Interestingly enough he said it worked best in those patients where it would start in the neck.

Of course, epilepsy is a quite severe condition that not too many herbalists face in our modern world, but it does give testament to how strong this plant can be for treating that junction between the nerves and muscles. Nonetheless, it can certainly be used for more minor nervous system complaints, especially those associated with stress due to ones work, career, and the inability to slow down to take care of ones self. It’s specific for those folks that tend to burn the candle at both ends (see psychological indications above). I really like to use it for people that have a difficult time unwinding at the end of the day and transitioning from work life to home life. I have found it to be quite effective even at very low doses (1-3 drops), but certainly larger amounts can be taken (20-30 drops). I also like to specifically use Blue Vervain for people with stagnant liver type depression and melancholy.

5. **Female Reproductive System:** Blue Vervain is one of our great remedies for use during menopause. This time in a woman’s life marks a great spiritual and physiological transformation, most notably on the endocrine system due to the atrophy of the ovaries and thus radical decrease in the production of estrogen which is ultimately taken over by the adrenal glands (the body still requires a certain amount of estrogen). During this great hormonal turning, the liver can certainly take a “hit” in its need to process the metabolic waste products of the endocrine system. Classically these hormones take a lot of vital force to process and the liver can sometimes become stagnant and tense as mentioned above under the liver constriction section.

The headaches, irritability, and hot flashes that are sometimes experienced during menopause are a perfect match for the liver pattern mentioned above, and Blue Vervain is a great specific remedy here by relaxing the tension, cooling down excess heat, bringing the vital force down, and helping support liver detoxification. I have used a simple 3 herb for a client that was experiencing crippling hot flashes where she was unable to go to work, sleep at night, or function as she normally does (she had a few hot flashes an hour). This formula was equal parts Blue Vervain (*Verbena hastata*), Black Cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*), and Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*). 10-20 drops 3x a day and she was back to normal within a week.
But we also see Blue Vervain having applications for women who are still in the menstrual phase of life as well. It is a useful emmenagogue to move a stuck period, especially when there is a lot of stress, tension and irritability type PMS symptoms (which are usually signs of liver overload). Matthew Wood notes that many women that Blue Vervain is well suited for women who tend to have strong food cravings before period, act very irrationally, and feel like they want to kill someone, “The drive found in the vervain or blue vervain person can often be hormonal. It is often a specific for hormonal food craving during menstruation. This was discovered by LeSassier, who also notes that it is a specific for many of the problems occurring in the last half of the cycle, the progesterone half. The sis a remedy for what Michael Moore calls “progesterone stress.” Women cannot handle extra progesterone.”

On a separate note, Blue Vervain does have a specific application for the male reproductive system- specifically for impotence. It brings the vital force from the head down to the pelvic region, helping guys achieve what I call “getting out of their head and into their feeling.” It is great for men that struggle in relationships because they have very high ideals for their partner that they can never live up to and have a knack for always seeing what is wrong, unattractive, or not ideal in their partner, rather than focusing on their positive qualities.

These are some of the general clinical patterns that you want to be aware of whenever you are considering the use of Blue Vervain. Each of these are relatively general and there are many remedies that can be used for each one above (digestive stagnation, liver tension, emmenagogues etc.), but where Blue Vervain shines is when any of the above clinical patterns are combined with the specific psychological picture of the plant. Anytime someone has that overdriven, highly idealistic type mindset it is a great remedy that should always be considered.

**Pharmacological Data**

**Primary Constituents:** Iridoid glycosides (verbenalin, hastatoside); phenylethanoid glycosides (verbascoside - acteoside); flavonoids (flavones: luteolin); tannins; mucilaginous polysaccharides; traces of volatile oils

**Mechanisms of Action:** The primary constituents found within Blue Vervain are the iridoid glycosides, of which we see it contains some constituents that are named after the plant itself- primarily verbenalin and hastatoside. I always find it interesting when I find a plant that has chemicals that are named after the plant, as these are likely highly unique chemical compounds. What we see with iridoid glycosides is that they are extremely bitter in their taste, and are thus responsible for some of the primary properties found in the plant: the bitter tonic effects, digestive/stomach affinity, liver/gallbladder action, and the net cooling effect.

According to Gazmund Skenderi in his Herbal Vade Mecum, “Iridoids have shown bitter tonic, choleric, liver protective, laxative, diuretic, anti-inflammatory, antibacterial, antiviral,
anti fungal, and immunomodulant effects, among others. Verbenalin has shown parasymphathomimetic activity and European vervain may affect organs that are innervated by parasympathetic nervous system (heart, bronchi, gastrointestinal tract, uterus, urinary bladder, etc.). A parasympathetic stimulation decreases heart rate, increases gastrointestinal secretions and motility, and contracts smooth muscles of bronchi, uterus, and urinary bladder, among others. Verbascoside has shown anti-inflammatory (by inhibit the biosynthesis of leukotrienes) and liver protective effects.

It’s a littler confusing that he says that a parasympathetic stimulant would contract smooth muscles of the bronchi, uterus and urinary bladder. I actually think this must be a typo in his book, as activation of the parasympathetic nervous system tends to relax smooth muscles.

**Contraindications and Safety**

- **Contraindications:** Because of its emmenagogue effects and strong downward bearing mechanism of action, Blue Vervain is contraindicated in pregnancy. Some sources say that it is also contraindicated during lactation, but this doesn’t make sense as the herb itself is galactagogue and stimulates the flow of breast milk. Excessive dosing can lead to nausea and vomiting.

- **Energetic/Constitutional Side Effects:** As mentioned under the energetics section, Blue Vervain is a distinctly cooling remedy and is contraindicated in constitutions and tissue states marked by coldness, depression and relaxation. It is specifically used for heat signs, overstimulation, and most specifically tension.

- **Herb-Drug Interactions:** There are no known herb-drug interactions with Blue Vervain, but it could be assumed that it would have a synergistic effect with any form of relaxant or sedative.

**Preparation and Dosage**

- **Infusion:** It is commonly mentioned to administer Blue Vervain as an infusion, in the amount of approximately 1-3 tsp per 8 oz of water. That being said, this is an incredibly bitter plant and most people will not drink it as a tea. It’s a great way for herbalists to get to know the plant in more depth and to really experience it, but for the most part any client you want to administer it to as a tea will push it away with a disgusted look on their face. Because of this I consider it best administered as a tincture.

- **Tincture:** Blue Vervain extracts quite nicely as a tincture. As usual, I tend to prefer the fresh plant material over dried any day, prepared from the aerial parts of the plant when it is in flower. The flowers of Blue Vervain hold important signatures for the plant, thus the leaves alone will just not do. The iridoid glycosides are soluble in a mid-range alcohol- I prefer the fresh plant material in about a 60%-70% alcohol. This will yield these compounds quite nicely and make for a pretty bitter/acrid medicine. The lower the alcohol, the more astringent the medicine will be, as the water will extract more of the tannins. There is some mucilage in there, so really low alcohol could potentially yield for a slimy or thicker tincture which is not quite as ideal. A good Blue Vervain tincture is very dark in color. Dosage can be quite low for this plant, I’ve seen it be quite effective in the range of 1-5 drops- though higher doses can be
used, up to 30 drops. One has to keep in mind with the dosage of the tincture that the higher you go, the more likely you are to overstimulate the digestive system and create some nausea.

• Flower Essence: Personally, I do not use flower essences very often because the nature of the spagyric process yields a medicine which acts both physiologically as well as energetically/psychologically/spiritually like flower essences do. That being said, Blue Vervain is one of the original Bach Flower Remedies and has been used on the archetypal pattern described under the “Prabhava” section of this monograph, which translates into some of the physical symptoms of which this remedy is virtuous for. Thus the flower essence of Blue Vervain is a pretty traditional method of preparation and is quite useful, though I have found low doses of the tincture and spagyric to work in a very similar way to the flower essence—especially of course if the preparation itself contains the flowers (which is why I always recommend using the aerial parts while in flower). Dosage for the flower essence is 1-3 drops.

**Formulation Strategies**

**Liver Constriction**

Blue Vervain (*Verbena bastata*) 20%
Wood Betony (*Stachys officinalis*) 20%
Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) 20%
Peony (*Paeonia lateriflora*) 20%
St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) 20%

This is nice formula to help relax tension in the liver, or “liver wind.” It’s a wonderful formula for headaches, specifically when the vasculature is overly tense and the head is pounding with heat signs.

**Bitter Nervine**

Blue Vervain (*Verbena bastata*) 33%
Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) 33%
Hops (*Humulus lupulus*) 33%

This is a nice place to start for a digestive formula that has associated nervous system signs. These 3 plants are all bitter, cooling, sedative, relaxant and anti-spasmodic for the GI, liver, and nerves. Because it’s so bitter, it will have a net cooling and drying effect on the tissues, so adding some warming carminatives could be beneficial here, such as Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) or Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*). It’s also worth considering remedies of that nature too in order to make the formula more palatable.

**Nervous Digestion**

Blue Vervain (*Verbena bastata*) 30%
Hops (*Humulus lupulus*) 30%
Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) 15%
Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) 15%
Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) 10%
This is a nice combination of bitter and carminative nervines to settle digestive issues associated with nervousness, anxiety, tension and cramping. The formula is predominantly cooling in nature, but the addition of the Ginger helps to balance the constitutional effects. If there was severe cramping, a stronger anti-spasmodic for the GI such as Wild Yam (Dioscorea villosa) could be added or replace one of the other herbs. Licorice (Glycyrrhiza glabra) could be added to remedy the drying effects as well.

**Relaxant Diaphoretic Triplet**

Blue Vervain (*Verbena hastata*) 40%

Boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*) 40%

Lobelia (*Lobelia inflata*) 20%

This is a nice relaxant diaphoretic triplet to settle tension in the neuro-vasculature and help promote sweating. These 3 herbs also have emetic properties, so dosing should start low so as to not provoke vomiting. It could be combined with stimulant diaphoretics to balance it out slightly, such as Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*). It could be made a little more mild by replacing some of the stronger herbs with something more gentle like Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) or Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*).

**Overwork and Stress**

Blue Vervain (*Verbena hastata*) 20%

Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) 20%

Agrimony (*Agrimonia eupatoria*) 20%

Ashwaganda (*Withania somnifera*) 20%

Shatavari (*Asparagus racemosus*) 20%

This is a very nice gentle nervine relaxant formula with a few mild adaptogenic plants to help restore the vital force. The Blue Vervain, Chamomile and Agrimony help to settle tension and nervousness, while the Ashwaganda and Shatavari help to replenish deficiencies in the endocrine system and build up overall vitality. If the nervous system is truly depleted, adding Milky Oats (*Avena sativa*) and Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) would be a beneficial addition. Stronger nervines such as Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) or Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*) can be used for a more marked sedation of the nerves.

**Hot Flash Compound**

Blue Vervain (*Verbena hastata*) 33%

Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*) 33%

Black Cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*) 33%

This is an excellent formula to use during menopause for hot flashes. This exact formula assisted a client of mine who had dozens of debilitating hot flashes per day to the point where she was unable to go to work. It relaxes liver constriction and move stagnation, relaxes the musculoskeletal system, calms the nerves, the brings the vital force down.
Nervousness Due to Liver Congestion

Blue Vervain (Verbena hastata) ~17%
Skullcap (Scutellaria lateriflora) ~17%
Chamomile (Matricaria recutita) ~17%
Valerian (Valeriana officinalis) ~17%
Oregon Grape (Mahonia aquifolium) ~17%
Ginger (Zingiber officinale) ~17%

This formula comes from Michael Tierra. This formula is essentially a formula of bitter nervines which equally help move the liver and relax the nervous system. The first 3 herbs are distinctly cooling in their effects, as is the Oregon Grape, though this is corrected by adding some Valerian and Ginger which warms the formula up quite a bit. The Oregon Grape helps to bring the quality of the formula more strongly into the liver, and the Ginger helps to make it taste better and balance the bitter effect with a carminative effect. He also recommends adding one part Chaste Tree berry (Vitex agnus-castus) to make it an ideal formula for the treatment of PMS.
Energetic Architecture

- **Ruling Planet:** The ruling planet of Blue Vervain is Venus. We see this correspondence in the relative daintiness of the plant and blueish-purple coloration (and sheer beauty) of the flowers, as well as it’s affinity for the female reproductive system and use as a relaxant. One critical quality of Venus is that she is relaxed- which can manifest in people as overly relaxed tissues and in plants which help to gently relax or sedate the body. Here we see that Blue Vervain is sympathetic to Venus in that it is a wonderful anti-spasmodic and relaxant for the musculoskeletal and nervous systems.

I find it interesting to note that the psychological picture of Blue Vervain is distinctly anti-pathetic (or opposite) to Venus. The type of person that Blue Vervain is indicated for is lacking in the Venusian qualities and tends to be overly expressing her opposer- Mars. Remember, the Vervain person has a very strong will power, pushes themselves and others too hard, and is very driven in their life as a whole. They tend to have a hard time relaxing into themselves and settling.

I see Vervain as being a Venusian medicine used to balance an excess of the opposite quality of Mars. She cools down his heat, irritation, and relaxes his tension. Interestingly we see that in men Blue Vervain helps with impotence and sexual difficulties, which are also associated with the Mars-Venus polarity.

- **Ruling Element:** Water Element. We can see the correspondence of the Water Element with Blue Vervain in the environments where it prefers to grow which is around swamps, bogs, and otherwise water rich ecosystems. The bluish coloration of the flowers also hold signatures of the Water Element. Much of it’s medicinal virtues are related to water as well, in the way it impacts the female reproductive system, water economy in fever, yin deficiency of the liver, and usage in kidney and urinary tract complaints.

But where I see really see Blue Vervain associated with the Water Element is the nature of it’s psychological indications, as these people tend to be attached to outcomes and are very controlling. They have a difficult time in letting go, surrendering, and being able to “go with the flow” of their lives and adjust to changing circumstances. The Vervain person is rigid, stiff, and tense, and lacks the ability to be fluid both physically and psychologically. The introduction of this medicine into someone’s life truly teaches them how to relax and become more aqueous in how they live their lives.

- **Ruling Principle:** With such a strong affinity for the nervous system and spasm, I consider Blue Vervain to be governed by the Mercury Principle. The plant itself is rather thin and shoots straight up into the air as if reaching as high into the sky as it can, which is very similar to the vata dosha in Ayurveda (composed of Air and Ether). It tends to be quite beneficial for the tension vata constitutions experience. The leaves themselves tend to stay low to the ground. Many see this as a signature for the high ideals that Vervain type people carry that are not necessarily grounded in reality, nor oftentimes practically obtainable (at least in the timeframe they want it to happen in). Thus the plant has a balance of
groundedness and expansion up into the sky, but the people it is beneficial for do not have that balance. Mercury is the principle of balance and bringing opposites together.

This plant has a very powerful influence upon the mind and psychological patterns making it an even stronger Mercurial remedy. The Mercury Principle represents our spirit on the one hand, but also our psychological and emotional layers of the self. As we have seen earlier, this remedy has a pretty significant psychological influence.