

Responsible, Organic, Simple & Earth-Friendly



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The Allies rose in herbal medicine

written by Kiva Rose

Common Name: Rose, Sweetbriar,

Botanical Name: *Rosa* spp.

Energetics: cool, dry

Taste/Impression: cweet, astringent, sour

Actions: Relaxant nervine, astringent, anti-inflammatory

'Vick's Caprice'

Growing up, I scorned garden roses for weedi-er, wild plants. Instead, I fancied berry brambles and nettles — rampant and untamed children that overtook gardens and yards, climbing fences and walls as they spread through waste areas and forgotten lots.

I was surprised then, by the wildness and ferocity of the first wild roses I met along the bank of a now forgotten river. The thorns snagged the hem of my long frayed skirt and held tight. I turned to untangle myself from them and found myself faced with obscenely pink petals unfurling in the morning sun, and the alluring scent of something both earthy and ethereal. The intensity and insistence of the plant amazed me.

The moment I arrived in New Mexico, with its red volcanic rock faces and lush green river banks, I knew I was home. Here in the Gila, wild roses grow in thick protective hedges along the river. Immediately, I loved their needle sharp thorns combined with the delicate vulnerability. Their long red canes shimmer come springtime, and they are one of the first woody plants to leaf out — providing a welcome splash of vibrant green.

There are as many varieties of rose as there are shades of green, and every kind holds some profound therapeutic value. My favorite variety is the New Mexico Wild Rose *R. neomexicana* — more commonly known as *R. woodsii* var. *woodsii*. The very same beau-

ty that graces the river banks and cliff bottoms of this wild canyon sanctuary deep in the heart of the Gila. Though her scent is subtler than some of her middle eastern sisters, I find her medicinal values to be myriad and powerful. In general, any strongly scented, old-fashioned or wild rose can be used medicinally, and the rest are still strong medicine through their gentle presence and lovely appearance.

The wild rose is my most important plant ally, and one that I am continually amazed by. If there is a single plant who has provided me with the most healing, it is this one. My relationship with this thorny beauty deepens each year, and every season the briar teaches me more about boundaries, vulnerability and self-expression. In hard years, her petals unfurl skewed and wrinkled but this doesn't mar her attractiveness. Rather, they add to an already complex character and give her more of the strongly scented medicine she's known for.

Tough, resilient and wild hearted, she springs back even after being beaten down by rocks, floods, droughts and deep cold. She is adaptable and stubborn, brazen and sensual. This wild rose is not a shy plant, she'll grab you by your skirt with curved thorns.

In the Southwest, roses are close companions of rivers. They ramble and spread across damp grassy banks in the dappled shadow of the Alders. My memories of every May harvesting the sweet petals of wild rose are entwined with the sensations of standing calf deep in mossy pools and scrambling up the cool cliff wall to reach an almost out of reach blossom. In the background of every photograph of the rose is the flowing thread of the Sweet Medicine River.

The canyon's wild roses have incredibly aromatic foliage as well as flowers. Musky and sweet, they smell like what all those overpriced synthetic department store perfumes want to smell like but can't quite achieve. The foliage also is rather intensely nervine, and the tincture is so lovely that I've started tincturing and oiling the flowers and leaves together for added power and flavor.

Rose hips are best known for their Vitamin C content and are indeed a widely available and abundant source of this necessary substance. Rose hips are also rich in vitamins A, B1, B2, B3, Niacin, Bioflavonoids, K and E as well as polyphenols and heart healthy pectin. And even rose petals are rich in polyphenols, B vitamins and bioflavonoids. The whole plant, including foliage and flowers, is jam-packed with anti-oxidants. If you currently drink a foreign tea like Green tea or *Honeybush* or *Roobois* for the anti-oxidants, well rose pret-

ty much meets or beats them in that department. Plus, they're a local, sustainable source for most people in the U.S. that can usually be gathered and processed absolutely free.

Some people find the taste of rose petals too perfume like, but I have found that it depends largely on the species used. My favorite rose of commerce to use for tea is hands down *R. centifolia*. It's lovely, spirited and sweet without the strong aftertaste of some other species such as *R. gallica*.

Its rich nutrition makes the rose, and especially the hip, a fine blood tonic for those experiencing fatigue, anxiety, vertigo, pallor, dry skin and hair and other signs of blood deficiency. If the individual is also experiencing feelings of coldness, I recommend adding warming blood tonics such as blackstrap molasses or *Dang Gui*.

The entire plant is incredibly anti-inflammatory. Scandinavian studies show that rose hips and seeds significantly reduced the need for painkillers in individuals suffering from osteoarthritis. I have found all parts of the rose to be strongly anti-inflammatory, and have used a liniment of rose petals for traumatic injuries, sore muscles and chronic musculoskeletal pain. I've had remarkable success treating dislocated discs with accompanying swelling, stiffness and pain with topical applications of rose petal liniment and infusion. Just this liniment, with no other treatment, recently resolved a dislocated disc with severe pain, swelling, tension and loss of movement. It's also been effective in less serious cases typified by inflammation and pain. The flower has also been long recognized as a primary medicine in Ayurveda and Unani Tibb, and has been found to significantly contribute the "good" bacteria in our bellies.

A wonderful relaxant to the liver, rose excels at moving stuck energy and relieving tension in the liver/gallbladder area. I use it frequently when treating cases of acute hepatitis or chronic/viral hepatitis where there's signs of inflammation. And of course, it makes a wonderful heart settling nervine suitable for nearly anyone, and gentle enough for a baby. In fact, the smell of roses significantly decreases over-activity of the sympathetic nervous system while also reducing adrenalin output in the body. Likewise, several different major systems of traditional medicine also consider the hips and flowers both a tonic for weak kidneys and adrenals. I frequently include some part of the plant in formulas for clients with adrenal fatigue with symptoms of heat, nervous exhaustion and internal dryness.

Rose can effectively balance hyperimmune disorder

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ders where the body overreacts to every perceived threat. It also generally enhances immune function through its cooling, cleansing effect. I use rose as a standard remedy for any cold or flu type illness — the hip is traditional for this, but I often use both hip and petal in my preparations. Many native tribes were known to use the root or bark in the treatment of cold and flu, and while I haven't yet tried this, I imagine it

liver can cause any number of digestive symptoms such as diarrhea, constipation, gastric inflammation, IBS, hyperacidity and conversely, food fermenting in the stomach from sluggish digestion (usually rooted in stagnant liver Qi).

Rose can help these symptoms through addressing the liver problem at the root, as well as cooling, healing and protecting the gut lining, assisting the di-



Rose hips

photos courtesy Pamela Greenewald

will be at least as effective as the petal or hip. I make rose petal pastilles with honey for sore or inflamed throats. Rose infused honey can be used as a syrup for the same symptoms. And an infusion of petal and leaf will also help symptomatically with sinus congestion, runny nose or damp heat in the lungs.

Partially due to blood moving decongestant properties, rose is also strengthening and healing to the heart and circulatory system. It is especially indicated in high blood pressure and/or poor circulation in individuals with Pitta symptoms such as inflammation, constipation, headaches, feverishness, red face, heart palpitations and hot flashes. Note that several of these symptoms can also be caused by a congested or inflamed liver, which rose also serves to relax and cool.

That same uptight, overworked and congested

gestive process to help things move a bit better and by generally nourishing the mucosa as well as the intestinal bacteria. I have personally found rose petal infusions to be a very effective long term treatment for IBS with signs of internal heat and inflammation (diarrhea, food allergies, nausea, burning/churning stomach, red, cracked tongue with anxiety and restlessness).

Traditionally considered one of the finest wound medicines in North America, rose is no longer a common remedy for wounds and injuries. In modern use, it often seems to be relegated to the ranks of simple astringents. It certainly does make a fine smelling astringent, but has a plethora of other properties adding to its wonderful wound healing abilities. The whole plant, but especially the root, has pain relieving properties when used externally, and is also a very good

antibacterial agent for treating nearly any kind of infection, inside or out — including UTIs, yeast and vaginal infections. Indigenous peoples use the hips for severe infections externally, making a mash of the hips and using it as a poultice. An acquaintance from Alaska recently told me a story of her mother using rose hips alone to successfully treat a severe wound on a dog. I've since used rose hip poultices on several infected wounds with great results.

Rose oil can be used externally for menstrual cramps, and Canadian herbalist Terry Willard recommends rose petal infused wine for uterine cramps and labor pains. I find that rose works best internally for cramps when both hip and petal are used and are appropriately combined with other herbs such as mugwort or peony root. Diluted rose petal vinegar is amazing for sunburns, clearing the heat from the skin and relieving a great percentage of the pain. A universal remedy for sore, inflamed eyes and even cataracts.

Petals are most often used, but many indigenous tribes used the roots. Rose leaf spit poultices are great for bug bites and cuts and scratches — rose petals will work too, but it's usually easier to get a leaf most times of the year.

Gentle enough for babies, many cultures have used rose petal infusions for teething, fussiness and diarrhea in infants. I frequently give our daughter rose glycerite when she gets into a overheated, hyperactive and irritable state that often results in a nervous stomach and diarrhea. I find that it helps to cool and calm her, and also helps settle her belly.

Also appropriate for delicate areas other herbs might irritate — finely ground petals or leaves can be used as a powder for rashes, itchy or inflamed areas and wounds anywhere on the body. A traditional recipe of the Mesquakies involves boiling down rose hips to make a paste to be used for itching anywhere on the body, including hemorrhoids. All parts of the plant will help the itching and pain of red, inflamed eczema, contact dermatitis, hives, poison ivy, etc. A diluted vinegar of rose petals and mugwort is my potion of choice for such cases.

While the healing power of the rose is pervasive in how it touches nearly every part of a person, perhaps the most remarkable aspects of this flower are found in its ability to affect the heart and spirit. Long praised for its anti-depressant qualities and ability to open the heart, it has been used across the world to raise the spirits and heal broken hearts. An amazingly uplifting herb, I often use it as an antidepressant/antianxiety agent.

Rose is very calming and balancing, assisting us in finding a ground level state from which we can access our real emotions rather than just react. In this way it can help those suffering from anxiety, anger, insecurity, grief and depression. It can be used as a baseline in any nerve strengthening, emotionally balancing formula including more specific herbs for the exact person and situation.

In my own time spent with this plant, taking in both her body as well as spending time with her spirit, I have found a great healing. She has the remarkable ability to allow vulnerability while reinforcing personal empowerment and freedom. This plant teaches a deep self love and knowledge that results in nourishment and wholeness. While the term rose colored glasses often applies to seeing the world in an unrealistically positive light, what rose really gives us is the ability to see the earth and ourselves in all of its true and inherent beauty.

Preparations and Dosage:

Rose can be prepared just about any way you can think of. As a nervine or heart medicine, I prefer a fresh plant tincture/elixir of the flowers, leaves or hips made with brandy, and perhaps 10 to 15 percent of honey or glycerine. The tincture will work great for mosquito bites, burns, sore throats and many other things as well. It also makes a fine liniment for nerve pain, muscle inflammation or similar issues. I use a dosage of anything from a drop or two as a nervine to a couple dropperfuls for a sore throat or upset belly. The infused vinegar is great for sunburns, salad dressing, headaches and sore muscles; it can be used diluted or straight, as needed.

The oil of the petals is trickier, and usually requires a high volume of petals, freshly dried and twice infused in oil to make something that really smells like rose. The hydrosol is great for many things and can be added to elixirs and potions to make them even stronger. The dried petal makes a wonderful tea or infusion for either external or internal use. Fresh petals or leaves make a great poultice. Rose petal mead is something every person should try before they die, it's amazing.

Rose infused honey is delicious and a wonderful medicine. Dosage on all of these is pretty much to taste and as needed.