

**Herbal Tonics for Stress and Anxiety**  
**by Rosemary Gladstar for Sacred Science**

*“Sometimes all it takes is a warm cup of chamomile tea and a hug to make a miracle”*

~ Amanda McQuade Crawford, herbalist

Do you recall the last time you felt really peaceful? That deep calm feeling when you “*Woke up smiling and the world smiled back*”. Are you one of those rare people who have ample time for social events, gets everything done in a day that you wanted or needed to, and feels like their ‘to do list’ is under control? Do you sleep deeply, soundly, so that waking up is a joy, not a chore? If you’re like a majority of Americans, these feelings are pleasant but fleeting memories. Far too many people wake up each day, feeling rushed, ready to jump into the day with so many tasks lined up that they’re behind before they begin. Stressed before anything happens, people live in a constant state of agitation and stress. For some people, this state of stress, depression and anxiety are a natural response to the world around them. While we can’t control the world we live in, we can make simple changes that help us deal with stress in a more wholesome and healthy way. Nature is one of the best tonics for the nervous system ~ and using nature’s healing herbs can also bring soothing relief from the stresses of the day. I’d love to share with you a group of amazing herbs that have a long history of being used for nervous system disorders that include stress, anxiety, insomnia, depression ~ ***Herbal Nervines***.

***What exactly is an Herbal Nervine?*** Though you won’t find the term in a medical textbook or even a dictionary, it’s a common term among herbalists and natural health practitioners. An Herbal Nervine is any plant remedy that has a beneficial effect upon the nervous system. This is a rather broad definition for a large variety of herbs. To make it easier to determine when to use which Herbal Nervine for what situation, Nervines are generally broken down into several ‘action’ groups (i.e. how an herb works in the body or its pathway of action). There are many overlaps with the herbs listed in each category. For instance, an herb listed as a Nervine Tonic can also have relaxing and sedating properties or even mildly stimulating properties, so you might find an herb in one or more groupings.

- ❖ **Nervine Tonics** ~ Perhaps our most important group of herb, Nervine Tonics are those that nourish, tone, rehabilitate and strengthen the NS. They are often rich in important nutrients for the NS including calcium, silica, magnesium, B Vitamins, and protein. Though effective, most Nervine Tonics are mild in action and usually need to be taken over a period of time to have lasting effects. ***Examples include:*** Milky Green Oats, Lemon Balm, Wood Betony, Chamomile, Valerian (in small amounts)
- ❖ **Nervine Relaxants or Sedatives** ~ herbs that have a relaxing or sedating effect on the NS. These herbs are used to help reduce pain, ease tension, relax the muscles, and aid in sleep. ***Examples include:*** Valerian, Hops, California Poppy (the entire Poppy family, for that matter), Skullcap, Kava Kava, Cramp Bark

- ❖ **Nervine Demulcents** ~ Soothe irritated nerve endings, nourish and strengthen the NS. Have a very generalized action. **Examples include:** Milky Green Oats, Marshmallow Root, Licorice Root, Chia Seeds and other herbs that are rich in mucilaginous constituents. \* Slippery Elm use to be included, but due to its 'at risk' status, herbalists are limiting their use of this herb.
- ❖ **Nervine Stimulants** ~ While there are very powerful herbal stimulants (think coffee, guarana, kola nut), when we think of Nervine Stimulants we are often referring to the more mild acting, those that gently stimulate, and activate the NS. They also activate and catalyze other herbs in the formula for a more powerful and synergistic effect. **Examples include:** Rhodiola, Rosemary, Ginkgo, Gota Kola, Spearmint, Peppermint, Eluetherococcus, Ginseng, and Cayenne. Stronger stimulants that are usually avoided for Nervous System disorders include: coffee, guarana, kola nut, black tea and other caffeine rich herbs.

Let's look at a couple of Herbal Nervine blends and see if you can determine where each herb might fit in the category(s) above.

**Uplifting Hawthorn ~ especially good for depression, grief, and mild anxiety**

This is one of my favorite herbal blends when one is feeling grief stricken or depressed. Drink it as a tea or taken as a tincture. *See if you can guess what the primary action of each of the herbs is and where it sits in the above categories.*

2 part Lemon Balm

2 part Milky Green Oats

1 part Hawthorn (berries, leaf, flower, berries and stems if available)

1 part St. Johns Wort

\* Optional; spearmint or peppermint for added flavor.

**Calm in a Cup ~ a wonderfully relaxing blend**

*\* Again, see if you can tell where each herb fits into the category(s) listed above.*

2-part Chamomile

2 part Lemon Balm

2 part Milky Oats

1 part Passion Flower

\* Optional: add ¼ hops and/or valerian for a stronger relaxing or sedating blend.

**Reflections on Stress....**

***Stress can be anything from the lash of a whip to a passionate kiss*** ~ Hans Selye  
Stress is nothing new to human beings, but the volume and variety of stimuli we're exposed to is truly unprecedented in human history. Through our flickering televisions and computer screens, our Blackberries and high-pitched cell phones, we process a constant flow of information. Add to this work deadlines and epic to-do lists, daily drives in rush-hour traffic, and the near total lack of silence. Whether joyous or tragic, welcomed or unwanted, every input signal is sent through the same intricate, delicate channels that make up our nervous system. The result of this bombardment, for too many of us, is a constant physiological state of alarm and

agitation, leading to migraines, insomnia, depression, as well as many of the chronic diseases of our day.

We can't make stress disappear, but we can ease its effects by using some of nature's simple and time-tested remedies. Many people find relief from stress by incorporating yoga and deep breathing exercises. Spending time in nature or 'forest bathing' is extremely helpful for many people. Exercise of any kind, especially those done outdoors is another great stress reliever. Finding quiet time... silence is such a rarity today that many people don't even know the sound of silence. And, then, we have our time tested that have been helping people deal with the stresses of 'modern life' through the ages. Incorporating even a few of these things for a few minutes each day ~ a few minutes of yoga and stretching, a short walk in the park or down a woodland trail, a few deep breathes, consciously breathing in deeply and exhaling fully, and a few cups of relaxing tea ~ can make a huge difference in the quality of one's life. Try it and see!

**What simple steps can you commit to each day that can help enhance a state of peacefulness?** Don't start with big leaps. It's wiser to start with small easy steps so as not to add more stress to an already overly stressed schedule. Here are a few suggestions that others have found to be helpful:

- \* A short walk each morning or evening. If weather permits and you're able to walk on earth not pavement, try walking barefoot so as to connect with the Earth. Even 15 minutes a day will make a difference
- \* Yoga, stretching, swimming, jogging; any kind of movement that allows your body to stretch and move. Even 15 minutes a day can be helpful.
- \* Meditation for those whom it's not too much work to 'quiet their brains'
- \* Herbal bathing; so deeply relaxing. Foot and hand baths followed by a short massage are also grounding and relaxing
- \* Drinking your herbal Nervines! 3-4 cups a day will be most helpful. And/or a daily dose of an Herbal Nervine tincture twice daily.

**Nervine Tonics:** Herbs that feed, tone, rehabilitate, and strengthen the NS are classified as nerve tonics and have been commonly used for centuries to help people deal with the stresses of life. These herbs feed the nerve tissue directly and are generally high in calcium, magnesium, and a variety of trace minerals, B vitamins and protein. Though very effective, most are mild in action and are generally recommended to take over a period of time.

### **Nervine Tonics**

In the following discussion, we will focus primarily on the **Nervine Tonics**. It's interesting to note that in allopathic medical terminology there are few references to tonics, other than substances used to tone contracting muscles. However, in herbal medicine, tonics are considered among the most important of remedies and often form the foundation of many treatment protocols. In Traditional Chinese Medicine tonic herbs are often classified as 'Superior Medicine'. Even though they are not as quick acting or as strong acting as some of the more medicinal herbs, these tonic

herbs which favorably alter the condition of the body with no side effects are generally considered 'superior' and are used as the basis for many herbal therapies. In western herbalism, some of the tonic herbs are also called Adaptogens, a term coined by a Russian scientist to describe plants that have the ability to help the body adapt to the stresses of modern day life.

In the beloved children's classic, *Peter Rabbit*, after little Peter barely escaped from his near-death encounter with Farmer John, his mother gave him a cup of warm chamomile tea to sooth his nerves, and, when he was well calmed, she spanked him soundly and put him to bed! Though you might not agree with her parenting techniques, Peter Rabbits mother knew something that many people have forgotten ~ a warm cup of chamomile tea can effectively sooth frazzled and anxious nerves and make the most frightening of life's experiences a little more bearable.

Along with Chamomile, there are several other Herbal Tonics that gently help sooth away the stresses of our modern day life. As "tonic medicine" for the nervous system, herbs like oats (*Avena sativa*), lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*), and chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*, *Chamomilla recuita*, and related species) help counter the effects of stress by calming and strengthening the nervous system. Containing high concentrations of calcium, magnesium, a variety of trace minerals, B vitamins, and protein, nervine herbs feed the nerve tissue directly. As with all tonics, they are mild in action and are especially effective when taken daily over a long period of time.

The best thing about nature's nerve soothers is that the very act of preparing them can help reduce stress. What can be simpler and sweeter than brewing soothing, fragrant tea? You might make a double batch and add a quart to a warm bath, to let your whole body enjoy a "cup of tea." Or take a cup outside with you, take your shoes off, and walk barefoot through your backyard, a nearby field. Savor what silence you can, look up at the sun or the stars, and feel the embrace of nature herself, the best tonic of all.

**Here are a few of my favorite Tonic Recipes for the Nervous System for you to make & enjoy.** All are simple, 'stress free' and easy to make. A word of advise ~ let the plants guide you, direct you, and they will lead you to what works best for you.

### **Nervine Tonic for Soothing the Stresses of Everyday Life**

Try mixing up a quart or two of this delicious herbal tea and drinking it throughout the day for two to three days. See if you don't notice a difference in your sense of comfort and relaxation

2 parts Lemon Balm

1 part Oats

1 part Chamomile

1/8 part Lavender

¼ part Roses

\* A pinch of stevia can be added for sweetness

## **Calming Herbal Massage & Body Oil**

This homemade massage oil can add a healing touch to your own personal massage.

- Take two ounces of the Stress Release Herbal blend in a quart jar with a wide mouth (canning jars work well for this).
- Pour either/or almond oil, grape seed oil, or apricot oil directly over the herbs, covering the herbs by at least two full inches.
- Place the herb/oil mixture in a warm sunny spot in your kitchen and let sit for two to three weeks.
- Strain, discard the herbs, and rebottle your fine massage oil. Once strained, keep in a cool place for longer storage.

\* If you need your massage oil 'this evening' and don't have time to let it sit for two to three weeks, place the herbs/oil mixture in a double boil and slowly, over a low heat, with the lid slightly ajar warm the oil for approximately one hour. Strain and bottle. Add a drop or two of Lavender Essential oil per cup to the finished oil.

## ***A Relaxing Herbal Bath is like immersing yourself in a giant cup of tea ~***

Make one or two quarts of the mixture above, strain, and while still hot add to your bath water. Add several drops of lavender oil to the bath water, and stir or run the water faucet for a minute or two to disperse the oil.

Perhaps, you might wish to enhance your herbal bathing with some soothing music, a little incense, and candlelight all of which can be quite relaxing to the senses.

What! You don't have time for a bath? Try a 10-minute footbath after you come home from work or a busy day, or just before bedtime to help you sleep more soundly. Its amazing how restorative a footbath can be and deeply relaxing ~ especially if you can get a friend or family member to massage your feet afterwards (using your homemade Relaxing Massage Oil (see recipe above). Use the herbs suggested again, or your favorite combination.

## **Deep Sleep Tonic**

Having trouble sleeping soundly? Do you wake up during the time and have a difficult time falling back asleep? Try this Sleep Deep herbal tincture. Please note, not everyone reacts the same to Valerian. If you try this recipe and you become irritated or agitated, more awake than sleepy, chances are that you are one of a small percentage of people who don't tolerate Valerian well. Nothing to worry about, just discontinue use and the symptoms will go away.

Sleep Deep Tincture

1 part Hops

2-part Valerian

1 part Lemon Balm

Make into a tincture (see instructions in Medicinal Herbs, a Beginners Guide or online at [www.mountainrose.com](http://www.mountainrose.com).) Dose: begin to take ½ tsp. every hour two to three hours before your regular bedtime. Just before bed, take 1 tsp. of the tincture. Keep the bottle near the bed so if you wake up in the evening, you can easily take another dose or two. This tincture doesn't taste particularly good (some might even say it tastes

downright awful). You can dilute it in a small amount of water or tea (though not to much liquid before bedtime). Or add a small amount of maple syrup or vegetable glycerin to the tincture bottle of tincture to help 'mellow' the flavor.

There are other herbs that are helpful for insomnia, including: Skullcap (especially good for those who have 'restless mind syndrome', where they just can't stop going even when very tired), Passion Flower, Kava Kava, and, of course, perhaps the most famous of all, Cannabis. There are definitely strains of Cannabis that are excellent for helping people to sleep deeply. If nothing else works for you, then it's worth a try.... Be sure to talk to someone knowledgeable who can guide you to the right strain and dose, otherwise, you might be up all night either 'tripping' or sick, or both.

***It's important to stop to consider what's most important in our lives....***

We each would do well to remember that taking the time to nourish and relax our nervous systems is as least as important as answering every incoming call, responding to each email or reading the morning news before work. Perhaps we'd all be better off with a cup of chamomile tea and a long stroll through with nature as she knits us back together into the beautiful calm and loving beings we are meant to be.

*As the pace of life quickens, we more deeply need calm, uninterrupted moments for the renewal they impart to our spirit. Leisurely walks, afternoon naps, the opportunity to stop and inhale the fragrance of a flower ~ these small interludes, once commonplace, are increasingly rare", Svevo Brooks*

**COMMON HERBAL NERVINES**

*For further information on herbs for the Nervous System, see **Herbs for Stress & Anxiety** by Rosemary Gladstar (Storey Book Publications).*

**Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*)** ~ An ancient Ayurvedic herb, Ashwagandha is among the most widely used and respected herbs in India. It is often erroneously referred to as "Indian ginseng". Though not related to Panax ginseng in any way, it does have similar adaptogenic properties and is a tonic for the nervous system when used over a period of time. It is both energizing and calming. As an adaptogenic herb, Ashwagandha increases the body's overall ability to deal with stress, anxiety and depression. It promotes general well being and enhances stamina, and is very popular with athletes. Ashwagandha is also considered a sexual tonic and is used in many reproductive and aphrodisiac formulas for men, though it's also equally helpful for women as well. . It is especially useful for those sexual problems associated with nervous stress and debilitation and is often used by men in their elder years to increase sexual energy.

Recent scientific studies in India suggest that Ashwagandha may help counteract immune suppression associated with chemotherapy and radiant therapy.

Ashwagandha seems to encourage stem cells growth, which increases white blood cell activity.

Suggested uses; Ashwagandha is indicated for reduced levels of energy, insomnia and sleep

**Chamomile (*Anthemus nobile* and related species)** ~ The main constituent of chamomile is a volatile oil obtained by steam distillation. Distilled from the yellow and white chamomile flower, azulene, a beautiful azure blue, contains a whole complex of active principles that serve as anti-inflammatory and anti-fever agents. The medicinal action of chamomile is most obvious in three major areas: the Nervous System, the Immune System, and the Digestive System.

**To Prepare:** Pour 1 quart of boiling water over 1 ounce of chamomile flowers and let steep for twenty minutes. Keep lid on tightly. Drink 3 to 4 cups daily or as often as needed. This herb has long lasting effects if used over a long period of time. It is nice to blend with other nervine herbs, and is recommended for infants and children. \* There are some reported allergies to chamomile.

**Lavender (*Lavender officinalis*, *L. angustifolia*, and related species)** ~ Lavender is a deeply relaxing, calming herb that is uplifting and strengthening to the spirit. It has long been used as an antidepressant and is helpful in dispelling depression and melancholy. It is one of the best herbs to use in herbal baths to relieve tension, stress, headaches and insomnia. An herb used traditionally to imbue courage and strength, lavender is still a favorite herb to strengthen the heart and mind during stressful situations. In ancient Greek and Roman times, lavender was the herb of choice used by women in labor. They would hold sprigs of lavender in their hands to squeeze during labor as it was said to calm and strengthen through the pains of childbirth. If lavender can ease the pain of childbirth, it can ease the pain of anything.

After a long, stressful day, try a bath with a few drops of lavender essential oil added to the bath water and/or tie one or two ounces of dried lavender in a muslin bag and add to the bathwater. Don't have time for a bath? Then rub 2 or 3 drops of lavender on your fingertips and massage the nape of your neck, head, and your feet for calming relief. Lavender's effectiveness as a traditional antibacterial, antifungal and antiseptic agent has been confirmed by numerous clinical studies.

**Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*)** ~ Melissa, a member of the mint family, not only is a gentle and effective nerve tonic but also tastes delicious. One can blend Melissa with those not so pleasant tasting nervines for a more drinkable blend. The leaves of Melissa when crushed smell like lemons and contain most of the medicinal value of the plant. The flowers and leaves contain volatile oils, tannins, and bitters, which work directly the stomach and NS. The medicinal effect of Melissa is primarily sedative, relaxing, and mildly anti-spasmodic. It is excellent for stomach distress and general exhaustion. For a delicious nervine tonic, blend with chamomile and oats. This is one of our most important anti-viral herbs and helps protect the body against

viral infections. It is one of the most effective herbs for treating herpes and is often used in combination with Licorice for this purpose.

**Feverfew (*Chrysanthemum parthenium* and *Tanacetum parthenium*) ~** Demonstrates value in alleviating migraine headaches, inflammation, common headaches, and stress related tension. The major active ingredient in feverfew, parthenolide, controls chemicals in the body responsible for producing allergic reactions and migraines. It also inhibits the production of prostaglandins which are implicated in inflammation, swelling, and PMS.

Feverfew must be taken over a period of time to be effective. Though it will help to alleviate the pain of an active migraine, it is far more effective taken over a period of 1 to 3 months as a preventive for migraines. Its action is similar to aspirin, with a stronger but slower effect. Though feverfew can be taken over a long period of time by most people with no side effects, it does require some cautionary measures when used. Not recommended to use during pregnancy, menstruation, or by people taking anticoagulant drugs.

Parthenolide is highly sensitive to heat and will be easily destroyed if feverfew is exposed to high heat in the drying or preparation process. If the product you are using is not effective, try another brand. It is important to purchase feverfew from reputable herb dealers or to grow your own. A lovely chrysanthemum-like flower, it grows quite easily and will naturalize under the right conditions. I prefer blending feverfew with lavender and other nervine herbs for an effective remedy for migraine relief.

**Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) ~** Ginkgo is the sole survivor of the oldest known tree genus, Ginkgoaceae. Though the fruit has long been used as an herbal remedy in China, more recent studies have focused on the leaf and its use as a memory tonic and to improve brain function. There have been several hundred clinical studies done, primarily in Europe, over the past forty years in Europe that presents convincing evidence that Ginkgo is an effective brain and memory tonic among other things. The active compounds though to be most effective are found in the leaf; three flavone glycosides (quercetin, isorhamnetin and luteolin) and bio-flavones. These compounds in combination with the other active ingredients of Ginkgo leaf improve circulation and vasodilation. Though this action is evidenced throughout the entire body, it is most noted in the cerebral region. Regular users of Ginkgo have reported improvement in memory, mental and emotional stability, and increased energy.

To be most effective, Ginkgo must be used with consistency for a period of 2 to 4 months. Though the effects of Ginkgo are not sudden or dramatic, if taken over a period of time there is a noticeable increase of memory and vitality. Ginkgo works as a nutrient, not a drug, so it is necessary to be consistent and to use an adequate amount. Ginkgo leaf has a mild flavor and mixes well with other herbs. It is commonly used as tea, tincture, or extract. Suggested daily dose is 3 cups of the tea daily and/or 1/2 teaspoon 3 time's daily of the tincture/extract.



Ginkgo leaves are generally not favored as tea because the compounds in the leaves are considered not to be water-soluble. Ginkgo is generally made into tinctures (with a higher percentage of alcohol) and/or taken as standardized capsules. However, I do find the tea to be effective, though as potent or strong as tinctures. To make tea, try blending or grinding the leaves first so there is more surface area available. Try simmering, instead of steeping.

*Which is better, green or gold ginkgo? Like so much about herbalism, it depends on whom you talk to. Let's have a conversation about 'green versus gold'....!*

### **Brain Tonic Tincture ~ for increased memory and focus**

For increased memory, emotional stability, and energy

- 2 parts Ginkgo Leaf
- 1 part Gota Kola
- 1 part Rosemary
- 1 part Peppermint

Make into a tincture. Take ½ teaspoon 3-4 X daily for a period of 2 - 3 months. Take breaks every couple of months for a few days or a week, and then repeat cycle.

**Gotu kola (*Centella asiatica*)** ~ This beautiful violet like plant is native to tropical and subtropical regions of the world. It grows easily in the warmer areas of the United States and can be grown in pots indoors and in greenhouses in colder northern regions for a fresh supply of the tasty little leaves. Considered one of the best nerve tonics, Gotu Kola has been used successfully in treatment programs for epilepsy, schizophrenic behavior, and Alzheimer's disease. It is especially recommended for memory loss and steadily increases mental alertness and vitality by feeding and nourishing the brain. Gotu kola is also an excellent stimulating nervine and is used in formulas for nervous stress and debility.

Most of the gotu kola available commercially is of very poor quality. Buy organically grown gotu kola when possible. . If possible, grow gotu kola in pots and bring in cold weather climates indoors over the winter.

A favorite recipe for using gotu kola is in a tincture with ginkgo, rosemary and peppermint for memory and brain function. To be effective, it has to be used consistently for three to four weeks. Don't expect to wake up one morning feeling like Einstein. Rather, you may experience a subtle but noticeable increase in memory function and feel more mentally alert.

Is effective as a tea, in tinctures, and as a fresh green added to salads and soups. It has a pleasant leafy taste that lends itself to tea and salads.

**Hops (*Humulus lupulus*)** ~ It is the strobiles of the hops plant, which contain the inconspicuous green flowers and the golden pollen grains that are the medicinal parts of the plant. Rich in lupulin, volatile oils, resins and bitters, hops is a potent medicinal herb and highly valued for its sedative properties and relaxing effect on the NS. Because of its concentration of bitter principles, it is useful for gastric upset and nervous disorders of the stomach. Try blending hops with chamomile, also a digestive

nervine, for mild gastric stress and upset. Especially helpful for people who hold stress in the gut.

A mild sedative, Hop aids in deep, undisturbed sleep. It is often blended with valerian for this purpose. Hops, especially when fresh, are very high in plant hormones similar to estrogens. These plant hormones can have a marked effect on menstrual tension, especially amenorrhea due to stress. Fresh hops has been used effectively to aid in menstrual regularity and ease menstrual cramps and is useful for young girls beginning their moon cycles.

### **Hops Tincture For Nerve Stress/Insomnia**

2 oz. of high quality hops strobiles

Enough brandy or vodka to cover.

To Prepare:

Place the hops in a large mouth quart jar. Cover with enough brandy or vodka to completely cover hops by one to two inches. Cover jars tightly and place in a warm (about 85 degrees), shaded area. Let sit for 4 to 6 weeks, shaking occasionally to prevent the herb from settling on the bottom. Strain and bottle for use.

**Kava-kava (*Piper methysticum*)** ~ Kava is native to the warm tropical regions of the world and is found in Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. Though highly revered for hundreds of years in its native culture as a medicine and ceremonial herb, Kava only recently has become popular in the west. With nervous system disorders on the rise, Kava can be the herb of choice for those who are stressed and anxious. An old saying goes, 'where Kava is the heart opens and there is only love' Kava was used traditionally to sooth arguments and brings peace between individuals and communities. Kava has the unique ability to relax the body while awakening the mind. It produces a sense of relaxation and at the same time heightens awareness and mental acuity. Known for its relaxing properties, kava reduces tension, anxiety, and stress. It also has analgesic, or pain relieving properties. Kava is great to take before flying or traveling for those who have a fear of flying or driving. Kava is an excellent tonic for people who get anxious and worried. Rather than block neurotransmitters, Kava contains kavalactones, active chemical constituents that relax muscles and tone nerve endings.

*However*, Kava does come with a few cautions. It is considered a sacred herb in the cultures where it's found growing natively and was an herb used primarily in feasts and celebrations. When over used and/or with abusive use, i.e. drinking it to the point of intoxication, Kava can cause nausea, muscle weakness, and induce unconsciousness. It is not recommended to drive after drinking a lot of Kava as it can simulate 'drunk driving'. However, using kava in responsible amounts as a medicine and tonic is safe and non-toxic. There are studies that report that Kava can be toxic to the liver and cause skin disorders, but again, that is only when used in large amounts over long periods of time. Be respectful of the power of this herb. Used judiciously, it is a wonderful relaxant and stress reliever.

Kava is available as tincture, extract, and capsules. The tincture is a quick, effective, and handy form to use. It is helpful in times of stress when you need a quick relaxant, something that helps put the world in perspective. Capsules are effective

for long-term stress and anxiety. Kava has a unique flavor that may take getting used to. Don't be alarmed the first time you try it; it will numb the tongue and create tingling sensations throughout the mouth. These are temporary and are caused by the kavalactones. I often prepare and serve Kava Chai at conferences and classes as away of opening the heart and relaxing the body.

**Milky Green Oats (*Avena Sativa* & *A. Fatua*)** ~ Oats are among the best nutrient tonic herbs for the nervous system and are also an excellent cardiac tonic. While the entire aerial part of the oats is considered useful, it is generally the green milky oat tops, before they have ripened, that are used in herbal preparations. The ripened dried oats are what are used in oatmeal, and are also soothing and nutritious. Both milky green oats and oatmeal are indicated for stress and anxiety, and are soothing to irritated inflamed nerve endings. Oats are one of the principal herbal aids used for convalescing after an illness, as they are soothing, nutritious and easy to digest. They help soothe irritation and are often used for nicotine and other chemical withdrawals. Oats provide energy by increasing overall health and vitality. Oats are frequently used for NS disorders, depression and anxiety, low vitality, irritability, and urinary incontinence.

Though the stalks are rich in silica and calcium, it is the fruit or seed that is primarily used for nerve disorders. Oats contains several active alkaloids including trigonelline and gramine (found also in barley and passionflower), starch, and B vitamins. While oat stalks and oatmeal can be used, herbalists prefer the milky green oat tops harvested before they are fully ripened.

#### **High Calcium Tea**

- 1 part green Oats and Oatstraw
- 1 part Lemon Balm
- 1 part Raspberry Leaf
- 1 part Nettle
- 1 part Horsetail (Shave Grass)

\* Prepare as an infusion and drink 3 to 4 cups daily. Also, makes a nourishing tincture.

**California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*)** ~ This vibrant golden blossom, California state flower, grows in abundance in the United States. *Eschscholzia* has similar sedative and narcotic as its cousin, the opium poppy, but is much milder and non-addictive. It contains the alkaloids protopine, cryptopine, and chelidone but does not contain the phenanthrene alkaloids of the morphine and codeine type found in opium. *Eschscholzia* is altogether mild and gentle in its action and is excellent in establishing equilibrium and calming nerve stress and excitability. It has been found to be effective for some types of migraines and is often with feverfew and lavender for this purpose.

The aerial part of the plant is used. Seeds are best gathered after they have fully ripened but before the wind disperses them from their uniquely designed capsules.

**To prepare:** Use 1 teaspoon of the plant (including seeds and blossoms) per cup of water. Pour boiling water over the poppy, cover tightly, and let steep twenty minutes or overnight. Poppy can also be made into a tincture.

### **California Poppy & Feverfew Tincture for Migraines and other headaches**

1 part California Poppy Flower and/or Seeds

1 part Feverfew

1/3 lavender flowers

\* Prepare either as an infusion; take small amounts during the day. Or as a tincture; ¼ - ½ tsp. of tincture throughout the day until symptoms are cleared.

**Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*)** ~ This beautiful, shy member of the mint family is found growing in shady rich areas near streams and meadows in the mountains. Somewhat inconspicuous, you have to search to find it. Thankfully, it is readily available in most herb stores as it is highly regarded for its nervine properties. Skullcap is one of the most versatile of the nervines and is indicated for all NS disorders, especially headaches, nerve tremors, stress, menstrual tension, insomnia, and nervous exhaustion. The medicinal constituents of skullcap include the flavonoid glycosides scutellarin and scutellarein, volatile oils, and bitters.

**To prepare:** Use 1 teaspoon of the herb per cup of water. Steep in boiling water (**do not boil the herb**) for 20 minutes. Keep the lid on the pot while steeping. Suggested adult dose: 2 to 3 cups daily. Tincture: 1/4 teaspoon diluted in 1/2 cup warm water or tea, 3 times daily. \* It has been noted that fresh skullcap tincture (less than a couple of years old) actually works better than tincture that is more than 2 to 3 year's old. Please keep note of this and let us know if you notice the difference between a freshly made tincture and a Skullcap tincture that is more than a couple of years old.

**St.-John's-wort (*Hypericum perforatum* and related species)** ~ A classic herb for nerve damage and depression, St.-John's-wort has been used for centuries and has been held in high esteem by herbalists throughout Western Europe and the Mediterranean. It is primarily valued as a remedy for damaged nerve endings such as in burns, neuralgia, wounds, bruises and trauma to the skin. It is also often used for stress, mild depression and anxiety, seasonal affective disorder, fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue.

As a mild antidepressant, it seems to 'lift' the spirits and adds a 'bit of sunshine' to the day. However, St. John's Wort is not as effective for serious and/or long-standing depression. Exactly how St. John's Wort works is not clearly understood nor have the active chemical constituent responsible for its antidepressant activities been clearly identified. Early speculation targeted St. John's Wort as a monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitor but this information has not been scientifically confirmed and recent studies have rejected this premise. Hypericine, one of the chemical constituents of St. John's Wort has also been considered the primary active ingredients. But again, Scientists aren't in agreement and the information is often conflicting. Look to the whole wonder of this plant.

**Suggested uses:** Although St.-John's-wort is effective for depression, it is best used for mild forms of depression and also works best when used in conjunction with other holistic supportive therapies that include counseling, massage therapy, and foods that nourish the nervous system. St.-John's-wort combines well with other

herbs and is often mixed with hops and valerian for insomnia, with lavender and lemon balm for depression, and with chamomile for children and young people going through emotional upheaval. I frequently combine it with passionflower (*Passiflora incarnate*) for anxiety and stress.

**Caution:** Though some people claim that St. John's Wort causes sensitivity to the sun and can cause skin rashes in susceptible individuals, others find it's a helpful sunscreen and use it to protect their skin from sunburn. Be mindful when using St. John's in the sunshine. If you get a rash, discontinue its use. There was some earlier concern that St.-John's-wort worked similarly to Prozac as a monoamine oxidase (MAO) inhibitor but studies have proven this theory to be false. Therefore, the restrictions imposed on MAO inhibiting antidepressants don't really apply to St.-John's Wort.

**Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*)** ~ One of the most widely known and used herbal nervines, and also one of our most confusing. Valerian contains a high concentration of volatile oil, isovaleric and valeric acids. It has a wide number of indications for the NS and is highly recommended for nervous excitement, insomnia, muscle tension, and nervous palpitations. It has a very beneficial effect upon the heart especially cardiac palpitations and high blood pressure. Valerian is also an effective pain reliever, and in high doses helps to reduce and/or eliminate pain. It is used as a mild sedative and is often combined with Hops for insomnia.

To be effective, valerian generally needs to be taken in sufficiently large doses. A general recommendation might be 4 cups of tea daily or a teaspoon of tincture taken several times daily (adult dosage).

\* It does have a reverse action on a small percentage of people. Instead of acting as a sedative and calming the NS, it can be irritating and stimulating for some people. If you have an adverse reaction (i.e. you feel like you just drank a 'bad cup of coffee') and get irritated instead of relaxed, then stop using valerian. It's not the herb for you.

**To Prepare as a tea:** Valerian, though a root is infused rather than decocted because of its rich concentration of volatile oils. Use 1 to 2 ounces of Valerian root per quart of water. Pour boiling water over the root and let the infusion sit overnight. Keep the pot well covered. Strain and drink 2- 4 cups daily, generally in small amounts during the day. If using the tincture: use 1 to 2 teaspoons diluted in warm water or tea 3 times daily or as often as needed.

\* It is difficult, if not impossible, to mask the flavor of valerian. It has a very strong flavor that either people enjoy or don't. Cats LOVE valerian, often more than they love catnip.

#### **General Information about using Herbal Nervines**

1) In Order for herbs to be effective, they must be used with **Consistency**. Unlike some forms of medicine, herbs do not promise instant cures or relief. Rather, used with consistency over a period of time, they insure gradual but steady, long lasting results.

2) The quality of the herbs you use are important. Buy them from reputable herb companies that emphasize sustainability and ecological harvesting, or better yet, grow your own. Learn how to tell good quality herbs by their color, taste, scent, and effect. If an herb(s) is not effective it is often because of the quality, though it can also be because it's the wrong herb for the situation/person, and/or because of dosage.

3) Herbs are also available in many forms. The most common forms are herb tablets and capsules, tinctures, herbal powders, and the herb in its raw state for making tea. Tinctures and tablets/capsules are often preferred these days because of the ease in taking them. Herbal powders are also handy and easy to use; you can mix herb powders into blender drinks, salads, salad dressings, sauces, and mix them with nut butters and honey or coconut oil and cacao and roll them into little 'candy treats. I still prefer and recommend herb teas as part of every health regime. Why? Making herb teas helps us remain conscious of the essential part we play in our personal well-being by having us take an active role in preparing our medicines/foods. And tea is warming and soothing to our souls. It is as ancient as time itself; it captures the essence of fire and water and plant life; it is simple alchemy, the brewing of the elements.