

FORESTRY FIRST AID

THIS SECTION IS for those who cannot easily get to a doctor or a pharmacy while living in or venturing into the forest.

When we step out of town and into the woods to go hiking, camping, cross-country skiing, canoeing, and more, or even if we move into a cabin/homestead/cottage in the woods, we are visitors in the neighbourhood of the Trees of the forest. When a malady or injury occurs, our neighbours often can help us, if we ask; and if we know whom to ask and for what.

Problems with plant medications are often due to improper gathering, preparation, or dosage. It's not as easy to overdose from plants as it is from drugs, since one's body will usually bring forth its natural rejection system, which a pill can bypass. One of the aids with plant preparations is the simple fact that you are in the woods, and thus the stresses of a city life are not outwardly affecting you.

I'm listing below some situations and needs that might arise while in the forest (a.k.a. "The Bush"), along with the names of the Trees that can help if asked. The choice of Tree usually depends on which one is nearby when the need arises.

More information can be found in the "Guide to Tree Uses and Properties" section of this chapter and in the chapters on each individual Tree, especially which part of the Tree to use and how to use it. Then look at the chapter on harvesting Tree parts, to learn how to harvest what you need with the least amount of injury to the Tree.

(Matthew Wood has written an excellent article titled "Herbal First Aide," which I have found to be very clear and helpful to understanding this subject:
www.woodherbs.com/FirstAidHerbs.pdf.)

Abrasions A strong tea of Hemlock inner bark and/or twigs can be used as a compress; or, wash with the tea to ease the pain of an abrasion and help begin the natural healing process. Apple, Pine, and Poplar Trees also offer aid with abrasions, scrapes, and scratches.

Antiseptics A strong tea of Hemlock inner bark and/or twigs can be used as an antiseptic wash while cleaning a wound. Other Trees that have antiseptic properties are: Ash, Balsam Fir, Basswood, Beech, Birch, Oak, Tamarack, and Willow.

Band-Aids Balsam Fir resin and Pine sap/resin will completely cover and seal a wound. Let it dry, then cover it with clean leaves and a cloth tie to keep everything else from getting sticky, while it holds on the resin. Or peel some inner bark from a Basswood Tree; its fibrous qualities will allow you to use it as a light rope with which to tie any bandage or poultice in place.

Broken Bone The outer bark of Paper Birch has been used as a splint or rudimentary cast to stabilize a broken bone until one can get to a hospital. Bur Oak bark has been used as an astringent poultice and/or wrapping for broken feet or legs.

Bruises Herbalist Matthew Wood points out that all bruises need to be treated, rather than just left to heal themselves. In Chinese herbalism, Native American herbalism, and homeopathy, bruises are called “stagnant blood” or “congealed blood” and treated as such. Their belief is that untended bruises can lead to cancers. Be that as it may be, the following trees all can be used as poultices or salves applied to the bruise: Alder, Balsam Fir, Balsam Poplar, Birch, Spruce, Tamarack, and Willow. A strong decoction of Oak bark or leaf tea can help stop internal bleeding.

Burns Teas of these Trees can be used to make a poultice to put on burns: Alder, Balsam Fir, Balsam Poplar, Basswood, Beech, Cedar, Hemlock, Oak, Pine, Poplar, Spruce, Tamarack, and Willow. The resin of Balsam Fir can be applied directly to ease a burn. Some Indigenous schools of thought encourage heat for a burn, rather than cold, in the belief that cold will just drive the burn further in.

Constipation All of these trees can be made into a laxative remedy for constipation: Apple, Ash, Balsam Fir, Birch, Maple, Poplar, and Tamarack.

Cramps Basswood tea helps with cramps. As do teas of Alder, Cherry, Birch, Maple, and Willow.

Diarrhea A handful of Hemlock’s inner bark, or a comparable amount of its twigs, boiled for ten minutes in two cups of water, then strained and drunk in small, frequent doses, will usually stop diarrhea. It is preferable to take it in small, frequent doses. If there are any red raspberry leaves available, a tea made from these would be a better and gentler relief for children with diarrhea.
