

kitchen pharmacy

Max Drake is a practising medical herbalist in Bristol and has recently set up a new venture, *Urban Fringe Pharmacy*, to promote Western herbal medicine using locally sourced herbs.

HORSERADISH FOR YOUR SINUSES

The bushy dark green leaves of horseradish (*Amoracia Rusticana*) are often found growing wild in city allotments, parks and gardens, and it is best known for its hot, pungent and fleshy taproot, which can grow up to 60 cm long. You can harvest it from early Autumn through to Spring, leaving a bit in the ground, so the plant will grow again next year.

The key to horseradish root's many medicinal properties is a compound called sinigrin. When the root's cells are damaged by cutting, grating, or chewing, enzymes convert sinigrin to allyl isothiocyanate – otherwise known as mustard oil, and this accounts for the pungency and heat. The oil is destroyed by cooking, so horseradish is only really beneficial when used raw, and the fresh root is way hotter than the stuff you get in bottles. The oil also breaks down, and loses its pungency after about twenty minutes exposure to air, so it needs to be prepared quite soon after chopping if you want to preserve it.

Like all herbs, the root contains many different compounds, some of which work in harmony with the strongly stimulant oils in order to produce a therapeutic effect. It is particularly beneficial for sinusitis and sinus type headaches, as well as being useful for treating coughs and colds.

Research has demonstrated anti-bacterial activity, and this may account for why it is so effective in helping with sinus problems. The pungency seems to irritate the mucous membranes that line the nasal passages and sinuses, and can cause you to stream a bit - but hidden in there is something that, over time, can heal the problem by getting to the cause of it.

When preparing horseradish – a word of warning here – proceed slowly. It will make your eyes water. After thoroughly cleaning the roots, scraping off the outer cortex, I put it in a blender. I usually wear a swimming mask and breathe through a snorkel at this point in the proceedings, particularly when taking the lid off the blender.

For treating sinus problems such as headaches and colds, I prefer to use a syrup, as this will keep for several months in the fridge, preserving the properties of the fresh root.

TO MAKE AN EASY SYRUP:

Grate/blend fresh root let it sit for three minutes to allow enzymatic reaction to occur. Put it in a sterilised jar and add sufficient raw honey to cover. Allow to stand at room temperature for four weeks and then strain through muslin cloth. Keep it in an airtight jar in the fridge, using about a tablespoon whenever you feel like you need it.

It is best to avoid using horseradish if pregnant or breastfeeding. ■

To find out more about Max's medical practice, workshops and events, visit www.maxdrake.co.uk and www.urbanfringe.org.

