

kitchen pharmacy

Max Drake is a practising medical herbalist in Bristol and runs workshops and events with the *Urban Fringe Pharmacy*, teaching how to use herbs safely and effectively to treat common ailments.

REMEMBERING THE ROSEMARY

The Ancient Greeks had the idea that rosemary improves the memory, and they knew a thing or two. Rosemary has a general tonic effect on the circulatory and nervous systems, and is now thought to heighten concentration and improve memory by increasing circulation to the brain.

Rosemary is originally a Mediterranean plant, with a preference for growing by the sea. In fact its name comes from the latin *Ros-marinus*, dew of the sea, which refers to its liking for salty sea spray. Its fragrance is unmistakable. You can often sense a sharpness behind the initial waft of scent, and this is down to the presence of a mixture of highly interesting volatile oils, which are responsible for

rosemary's stimulating properties. The proportions of each individual volatile oil in the general mix varies according to the date, time of day, amount of sunshine and all sorts of other variables, and amongst herbalists it is generally agreed that it is at its best when flowering in the spring.

For anyone who has circulatory problems, or low blood pressure, I can recommend a very pleasant weekend activity, or rather, lack of activity, involving this magic herb. Soon after getting up run a hot bath, and throw in several sprigs of rosemary, or a few drops of rosemary essential oil. Lie there and luxuriate for a while, and then go back to bed for an hour or so. What's the hurry?

It's probably not such a good idea to have a rosemary bath at night, as it might stop you from getting to sleep – although there is a tradition of putting rosemary under the bed to stop bad dreams. Come to think of it, the same might apply for not washing your hair with rosemary shampoo at night.

I use rosemary a lot in my practice, particularly with older people for circulation, and for younger people who look pale and who easily run out of physical energy, or who get tired through overwork. I usually give it as a tincture, which is a strong liquid preparation, as it doesn't make a particularly pleasant tea. The essential oil is pretty good too, although variable in quality depending on when the original herb was harvested and how quickly after harvesting the oil was extracted. When buying the essential oil it's always good to have a quick sniff first just to check that it's got a bit of bite. Don't take the oil internally – just smell it whenever you feel the need.

In your kitchen you can take four sprigs about four inches long, steep them in white wine for four days, shaking the bottle daily. If using freshly picked sprigs, run a rolling pin over them just before placing in the wine. You can use this in cooking, or have a small glass as a daily tippie. It lifts the spirits, and is a great tonic for general fatigue.

Strong rosemary extracts and the essential oil should be avoided if pregnant, otherwise the herb is very safe for general use. ■

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