

MOTHER NATURE'S HOME REMEDIES

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berries being used if the first lost their strength before the patient was cured. It had a mildly acid taste like weak limeade. But sometimes there were boils when no sumac was in fruit.

Prickly ash, a small, thorny tree, furnished bark that, when mixed with whisky, was thought to be fine for rheumatism.

Wild cherry bark was boiled and, with horehound, made into a tonic for those who had colds or coughs. It, too, often had whisky mixed in "to make it keep."

Slippery Elm

Slippery elm bark, soaked in cold water until a slimy mass resulted, was wanted for poulticing in erysipelas, affording quick relief in reducing the pain of the fevered portions of the body.

Digitalis grew in many gardens for making tea for heart trouble.

Tansy tea was highly recommended for dismenorrhea, but one was told to be careful, as the kind having single blooms was said to have a directly opposite effect from that with double flowers. Tea made of pennyroyal, which grew wild in abundance, was also much used for this trouble.

A vermifuge, horrible in smell and taste, was made from what we called Jerusalem oak, or wormseed weed.

Pitch from the new growth of sassafras bushes, sliced in cold water and kept until the liquid was slippery, made a delightfully soothing application for sore eyes.

Remedy for Colds

Horehound leaves were steeped in hot water which was drunk for colds; or, much more palatable, was used to flavor molasses candy which the patient was allowed to eat freely. Unless too bitter from generous quantities of horehound, this candy was the one pleasant thing about a bad cold. Spicewood tea reduced fever and did not taste so bad as many other kinds.

To avoid taking calomel, which was a standard remedy, some used the May apple root, locally called "poderphyllin" instead of podophyllum. Its use had little less of risk, except that there was no danger of salivation. But cases were known in which the infusion was made so strong that the patients were some time recovering from the effects.

For external application there were various salves, often compounded with an eye on the moon as well as the mixing kettle. Our family supply came in large part from co-operation with the wife of a distant cousin. She was both elderly and stout and found the gathering of wild herbs too difficult. The children in our family did the collecting and Cousin Judy, aided by her daughter, made the salves.

From small sprigs of St. John's wort, gathered at blooming time and combined with calves' feet oil (also homemade), came an ointment, red in color, that relieved the pain in aching joints. A salve for sores and boils required Balm of Gilead buds at the gummy stage, wild ginger leaves and beeswax, with other ingredients. Highland fern roots boiled thoroughly and resultant liquid boiled with hog lard until all water evaporated made a remedy for burns that was often a godsend.

Puffballs

When we made playhouses in the woods we used as part of the furnishings "Stoves" made from the fungus called "puffball." They grow to about the size of a small apple, are round in shape, and some kinds are said to be edible. When dry a small hole comes in the top of the puffball, and by pressure, the spores may be forced out. They look like smoke, and we collected them eagerly, taking turns at being cook and calling for more fuel whenever the insides were all pumped out of the puffballs on hand.

Mother's use of these fungi was different. She mixed the "smoke" with lard and made a salve to put on small legs and feet where scratches or cuts had become infected and would fester. It was soothing as well as healing.

But the queen of all salves was made in June when Madonna lilies were at their best. Cousin Judy and Mother agreed on the day for its making, which had to be postponed in case of rain, for the sun was a potent factor in this work. On the day appointed Mother would have ready a big yellow bowl of freshly churned, unsalted butter. This was set in full sunshine, usually on the horse-block, to melt. Cousin Judy's daughter would come down the hill from their house, bringing a basket covered with a clean towel and filled with lilies. Only the blossoms were used, stems having been removed. For hours a few lilies at a time were placed in the butter, which had become liquid from the sun's heat. It was fascinating to watch them melt away until what was left resembled wisps of tissue paper. More lilies were put in and the process continued, the butter's yellow becoming deepened as pollen added color. When all the blossoms had dissolved it was late afternoon. The mixture was carefully strained and put away for finer sores than mine. To this day I regret never having had any of it used for my ills.

To Draw Fever

Bread and milk made a poultice to "draw fever" from inflamed surfaces. Turnips roasted in ashes comforted frostbitten heels. Soot

was packed into a bleeding cut to stop the flow of blood. Dirt-dauber nests mixed with hot vinegar made an application that was said to relieve the pain from sprains. Or, if the mud nets could not be found, red clay from gully banks was second choice. Jimson weed and sheep mint cooked with wax made a treatment for hemorrhoids.

Other Remedies

Two remedies, learned in childhood and still used by some of us oldsters, are tobacco smoke, blown in the ear from a pipestem for earache, and heavy smoke made by placing woolen rags on live coals for stone bruises. The one for earache seems to have reason on its side; and no one who has seen the relaxation brought to a sufferer by placing the pipestem close to the external ear and gently blowing warm smoke into the opening would object to its use.

A cloth is placed over the partially filled bowl of the pipe.

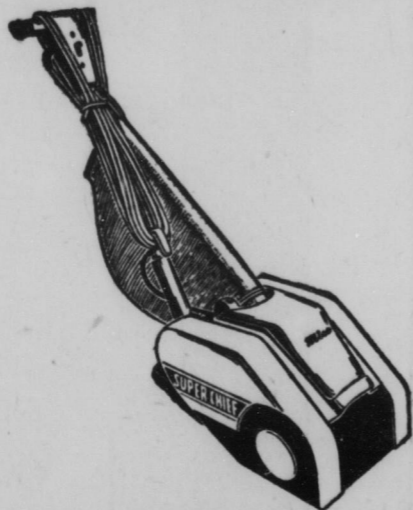
I confess to total ignorance as to the wool rag smoke. But I have seen numerous small boys, who had waked up crying from the throbbing pain of stone bruises, go quietly to sleep after having the foot held over a shovel of hot coals covered with scraps of either new or old wool and the foot held far enough above the shovel for the smoke to be just comfortably warm as it billowed up.

There is no pretense that some of these old remedies could stand the test of modern science. But we used them and a good many of us lived to tell the tale.

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