

FALL IS THE TIME FOR ROOTS

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In the life cycle of a perennial herb, after the plant flowers and goes to seed, the energy of the plant descends back into its roots. This occurs during the autumn season and makes fall the best time to harvest the roots of your medicinal plants. Here are three herbal roots that you can easily grow in your Bay Area garden that will be ready for the fall harvest:

Echinacea *Echinacea purpurea*, *Echinacea angustifolia*

Echinacea root is powerful medicine for the immune system. It helps to stimulate the body's immune response and the production of white blood cells. Echinacea is antimicrobial and can defend the body against both bacterial and viral infections. Echinacea works great against upper respiratory infections and is also helpful against candida and staph infections. Echinacea is best for acute conditions and is most helpful to take at the first sign of a cold.

Harvest echinacea roots from mature plants that are at least four years old.

Yellow Dock *Rumex crispus*

Yellow dock grows as a weed all over the Bay Area and is easily cultivated in your garden. The best medicine comes from plants growing in dry, rocky soil. When making a tincture of yellow dock, use the dried root because the fresh root can be irritating to the digestive tract.

Well known as a "blood cleanser," yellow dock is tonifying to the liver and stimulates the production of bile from the gall bladder. It also helps to stimulate the bowels and can be useful to treat constipation. Yellow dock also helps the body to assimilate iron and can be helpful in treating anemia. Many skin disorders, including acne, eczema and psoriasis can be helped with yellow dock.

Valerian *Valerian officinalis*

A strong-smelling herb (some say it smells like dirty socks!), valerian root has been used for centuries as a tonic to the nervous system. Valerian is useful in a broad range of nervous system disorders, including insomnia, anxiety, and stress headaches. Valerian also relaxes the muscles and can be used to treat muscle tension, cramping, and intestinal spasms. Be aware that 5% of people are actually stimulated, not sedated by valerian; so if you are taking it for the first time, try a small dose at first. Furthermore, cats love valerian and have been known to break into your stash!

When making a tincture of valerian root, use the fresh root. The dried root can be too sedating and leave you feeling depressed and hung-over.

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