

Kid Friendly Herbs Dr Mary Bove

Parents often ask are herbs safe for kids and if so which herbs might that be and what might they be used for. Next question might be How to start?

Let's take a look at six herbs which have a reputation for being kid friendly both from a traditional herbal medicine sense as well as from an evidenced-based aspect. These plants include Black Elderberry, Chamomile, Echinacea, Ginger, Lemon Balm, and Valerian.

Black Elderberry a long-established tonic for immune support this flavorful berry finds its way into many jams, jellies, syrups, and beverages. High in many flavonoid compounds including anthocyanidins which are known for their protective effects against oxidative stress and anti-viral action that has been shown effective against some influenza viruses.* (Zakay-Rones Z, Varsano N, et al. Inhibition of several strains of influenza virus in vitro and reduction of symptoms by an elderberry extract (*Sambucus nigra* L.) during an outbreak of influenza B Panama. *J Altern Complement Med* 1995;1:361-369. Zakay-Rones Z, Thorn E, et al. Randomized study of the efficacy and safety of oral elderberry extract in the treatment of influenza A and B virus infections. *J Int Med Res* 2004;32:132-140.)

Compounds in Elderberry deactivate the virus and prevent it from taking hold in the body.* This action makes Elderberry the perfect herb to use during cold and flu season both as a prevention and a quick action syrup which has shown to significantly improve the symptoms of flu in 2 days.** (*J. Altern. Comp. Med* 1995)

One of the most kid friendly Elderberry preparation is a good quality syrup which can be used neat off a spoon, mixed in juice or made into a fun gummy form. Elderberry can be used once a day to support the immune system during the winter or 3 to 4 times a day for the flu. I think of the "Elderberry Kid" as the kid who always has a runny nose and cough most of the winter, tends to get every little thing that comes along,

is prone to allergies, and may have some digestive challenges. This child would benefit from several weeks of Black Elderberry syrup.

Black Elderberry Gummies (please add this in here, it could be set aside in a separate box?)

A second immune supporting herb is Echinacea. There are two popular species of Echinacea that are used for their medicinal value, the root of Echinacea angustifolia and the flowering plant, root, and seed heads of Echinacea purpurea. Science has helped us understand that the plants have different uses as well as the various parts of the plant. If using Echinacea for its virtue to fight off a cold be sure to use preparations made from the root or seed head which contain the compounds needed to support the immune response to the common cold. Preparations made from the flowering plant act to support ongoing immune function and are best-used long term for immune system building. Many kids are challenged with respiratory infections, sore throats, swollen tonsils and ear infections which can be a source of great concern for parents. Echinacea offers a safe effective prophylactic to cut down on ear infections, colds, recurring tonsillitis and respiratory infection. *(Taylor Et al study, JAMA 2004) (** Evid Based Complement Alternat Med (2012) 2012:841315, ISSN: 1741-4288)*** (Cohen HA Varsano I Kahan E Sarrell EM Uziel Y.,: Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med (2004 Mar) 158(3):217-21)

It may be used once daily during the cold and flu season for general immune support or several times during the day at the first signs of a cold. Include this in your air travel plans since taking Echinacea before and during travel, may have preventive effects against the development of respiratory symptoms during travel involving long-haul flights. * (Evid Based Complement Alternat Med (2012) 2012:417267,ISSN: 1741-4288)

Chamomile Flowers and Essential Oil distilled from the flowers are by far one of the most popular children's herbs famous as a tummy ache remedy for Peter Rabbit this plant has many helpful virtues for children. The pleasant taste of this herb makes it particularly nice as a tea before bed relaxing body, mind and spirit. The tea may also be used as a soothing mouthwash for inflamed gums and canker sores.

Clinical studies indicate the benefits of chamomile in such conditions as sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, nervousness, irritability, and stress related dermatitis.* (Chamomile Herb Profile, Engels and Brinckmann; Herbalgram, Issue 108, Nov. 2015, p 8-17)

Drinking a pleasant tasting tea of chamomile flowers in the evening will help to induce a deep and restful sleep or infusing 5 drops of chamomile essential oil into a room produces an uplifting calming feeling in an irritable child.

A word of caution about Chamomile, avoid use of this plant with children who have hypersensitivity to the Aster family.

Lemon Balm is one of the most uplifting and calming plants I know, the zesty lemon aroma bursts from the cup when made into a tea. The essential oil of lemon balm has a direct effect on our nervous system through the olfactory nerves in the nose which connects to the limbic area of the brain, "our happy center". Diffusing the essential oil into the air helps to aid sleep, calm restlessness, and improve mood. Lemon Balm has long been thought of as a traditional kid's herb used for digestive ailments and spasms, sleep issues, restlessness, fever, and for its soothing action for babies with colic. In modern day herbal medicine this herb is indicated for children who have trouble falling to sleep, to calm restlessness and hyperactivity, to reduce mild anxiety, nervousness, or agitation, to improve cognitive function and focus, and as a pain reliever for stomach discomfort, colic, or constipation. (Often combined with fennel seed and chamomile for this last complaint) Scientific research on lemon balm has upheld traditional use, showing data that it improves mood, can significantly increase calmness and

alertness within the short time of a week.* A second trial showed improved memory task performance, focus, and cognitive function* While other studies have looked at the use of a combination of lemon balm herb and valerian root for restlessness, nervous insomnia, anxiety, and hyperactivity with promising outcomes and good safety margins for use with children***. (***)Muller SF, Klement S, Phytomedicine (2006 Jun) 13(6):383-7)

Think of using lemon balm tea for soothing your child when uncomfortable from a tummy ache, sore gums when teething, or to help bring on a restful sleep. To make lemon balm tea use 1 tsp dry organic lemon balm herb to 8 ounces boiling water, cover and steep for 5 minutes, strain and serve, hot, cold, or sweetened. Or adding it to your child's bath it will fill the air with a wonderful lemony scent while calming and relaxing the body and spirit.

Ginger, the common kitchen spice, famous for the flavor found in ginger ale also has a long history of medicinal uses particularly focusing on digestive complaints such as nausea and vomiting. The root contains aromatic volatile oil, which are responsible for ginger's pungent odor and taste as well as the medicinal qualities of the plant. Recently ginger has been researched in medical science as an anti-inflammatory agent, a strong anti-oxidant, and for the anti-nausea effects in relationship to nausea of pregnancy, motion sickness, and chemotherapy induced nausea.

Ginger makes a perfect herb for children as they often get tummy upsets or bugs that include nausea and vomiting. Another common childhood complaint is motion sickness when driving in the car using a dose of ginger 30 minutes before getting in the car.*

**(*Efficacy of ginger for nausea and vomiting: a systematic review of randomized clinical trials. Ernst E, Pittler MH.
Department of Complementary Medicine, School of Postgraduate Medicine and**

**Health Sciences, University of Exeter, UK.
Br J Anaesth. 2000 Mar;84(3):367-71.)**

Ginger root has a warm pungent flavor making it a good addition to many beverages, baked goods such as ginger bread or cookies and other culinary recipes ranging from pickled ginger to ginger peanut sauce. Warm ginger tea makes a pleasant soothing drink for any upset stomach with or without nausea sipping it slowly over 15 minutes. An extract or tincture preparation of ginger given in 1-2 ounces of water or juice can be used instead of tea, just use 2-4 drops of extract for a child under 5 years old and 5-10 drops for an older child. Ginger Syrup can be found at many markets offering an alcohol-free option for kids.