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A Cooling Sedative Plant Ally for Ultimate Relaxation

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This article is excerpted from the Herbal Self-Care for Stress Management Course at the Herbal Academy.

Unfortunately, the word stress has become commonplace in our day-to-day language. How many times have you felt stressed or said that you were “stressed out” this past month? We use the word “stress” for anything from a feeling of being run down to severe overwhelm to mild frustration. Though its overuse may diminish its meaningfulness, we should not underestimate the detrimental effects stress can have on our bodies, our minds and our emotions.

Fortunately, there are many herbs that can help with symptoms of stress and bring us to a more relaxed state. In the Herbal Self-Care for Stress Management Course, we have identified a number of herbal allies to support our overall health and well-being. Here, we take a look at California poppy, a helpful sedative herb that can be used to manage our stress response.

First, a Look at Sedatives

Herbs are often classified into actions — the effect that an herb is believed to have on the human body. A *sedative herb*, also known as a relaxant, calms and soothes the nervous system and can help induce sleep.

The stress response is likely to present as signs and symptoms such as increased blood pressure, increased heart rate, palpitations, poor digestion, insomnia and

anxiety — amongst others. Sedatives are often used to help a person who is unable to sleep because stress causes these aforementioned problems.

California Poppy for Relaxation

This delightful herb is a great choice for someone who is unable to stop overthinking and worrying about things or simply cannot switch off their thoughts. Being a sedative herb, California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica* Cham.) is commonly employed to improve sleep and rest. If you find yourself counting sheep at night, it might be time to add California poppy into your bedtime routine.

Interestingly enough, California poppy is in the same family as the opium poppy; however, California poppy contains different alkaloids that produce a mild sedative effect instead of a narcotic effect. The group of alkaloids in California poppy are much less potent than morphine and codeine.

California poppy has been used to address a variety of mental complaints including depression, anxiety, melancholia, nervous agitation, hyperactivity, restlessness, insomnia, neurasthenia and nervous tension.¹⁻⁵ It can be used to reduce stress, aid in relaxation and to calm the spirit.



California poppy is said to exhibit a dose-dependent effect, such that lower doses are predominantly anxiolytic and higher doses have a sedative effect,⁴ while excessive use may lead to a hangover effect.³ Many practitioners use California poppy in lower doses combined in formulations with other nervine herbs.⁶ In a clinical trial with over 250 patients, researchers studied the efficacy of a French formula (Sympathyl®), containing California poppy, hawthorn flower (*Crataegus laevigata*) and magnesium, for treating mild to moderate anxiety disorders. Participants taking the California poppy formulation had significantly improved anxiety symptoms after three months com-

flowers to break down the volume and expose the most surface area.

- Place herbs in a clean, wide-mouth glass jar. Fill jar approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ full of plant material.
- Add enough vodka (the menstruum) to cover the herbs by 1 inch.
- Cap tightly and give a shake to ensure that the herbs and alcohol are thoroughly mixed. Make sure herbs are covered by at least 1 inch of alcohol.
- Store the jar in a cool, dark location (such as a cupboard) and visit every few days, giving the jar a shake.

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pared to those taking placebo.⁷

There are some wonderful ways to use California poppy! The plant is typically harvested when it just begins to flower; some herbalists use the entire plant, root included, and some just the aerial parts (flower, leaf and stem). Tincture the fresh plant or use for infusions. A latex-like solution present in the leaf, stem, root and flower is the target to capture in tinctures and infusions.

Make a California Poppy Tincture

The folk method is a simple and accessible way to make an herbal tincture, as it involves just a few supplies. Follow the step-by-step instructions below to make a California poppy tincture.

- First, gather your supplies: you will need a knife and cutting board, a wide-mouth canning jar with lid, 100-proof vodka, a wire strainer, cheesecloth, a clean jar or bowl, funnel, a coffee filter and dark-colored tincture bottles.
- Chop fresh California poppy leaves, stems and

- Let macerate for 4-6 weeks.
- Line a wire strainer with a few layers of cheesecloth and decant the mixture into a clean jar or bowl.
- Strain the mixture through the cheesecloth and with clean dry hands, gather the cloth up and squeeze strongly so every bit of tincture is expressed from the herbs.
- Transfer the liquid into a clean glass jar and let settle overnight in a cool, dark location. Compost the leftover herbs (the marc).
- Strain the tincture through a fine filter such as a coffee filter.
- Transfer the tincture into dark-colored glass bottles using a funnel.
- Label and store in a cool, dark place.

****** For California poppy's dosage and safety considerations, please consult a clinical herbalist or reference the Herbal Self-Care for Stress Management Course by the Herbal Academy.

California poppy is just one of many herbal aides that can be helpful in overcoming symptoms of stress and



managing your stress response.

Herbal self-care is much more than just taking herbs when we are frazzled or blue or tired. It is a multi-faceted approach of supporting yourself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. €



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