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Summer Solace: Fresh Herbs for Your Horse, and You!

by Jessica Lynn

With the summer well under way, most herbs are ready to use, whether for fresh use or to be dried for future use. There are many ways to utilize these naturally nutritious and medicinal wonders. Some I pick and feed to my herd while others I use to make tinctures or fly sprays, or dry them for teas ... for my horses, and for myself as well. There’s nothing better than iced mint tea on a hot summer day! Ah, solace. Here are a few of my favorites:

**Lemon Balm** – (*Melissa officinalis*) is a hardy perennial that will grow to the height of about 24 inches. One of lemon balm’s key medicinal qualities is it has a calming or almost tranquilizer kind of effect and is an antiviral. It can calm a nervous stomach, and is helpful if you have a suspected case of colic. Make the dried leaves into a tea and mix it into bucket feed or mash. I also chop some of the fresh green leaves and top my horse’s bucket feed. The leaves can be dried for later use.

**Rosemary** – (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is a woody, perennial herb with fragrant, evergreen, needle-like leaves. Rosemary can have white, pink, purple or blue flowers. This herb has many uses, including cooking, and I use it to freshen up my house by taking a few sprigs and boiling them in a pot of water. The main thing I use this herb for with the horses is making a tincture from the sprigs or infuse it in some grape seed oil for a week or two and add to my fly spray mixture. It seems this extra added ingredient really repels flies. It can also be picked fresh and rubbed onto a soft brush when grooming, to repel insects.

**Spearmint** – (*Mentha spicata*) is a great herb for flavoring tea for people and is also something the horses love due to its fragrance. You can add fresh chopped leaves or dry for later use to be sprinkled on hay or bucket feed or made into horse teas. A tea made from the leaves has traditionally been used in the treatment of fevers, headaches, and digestive disorders. The leaves should be harvested when the plant is just coming into flower, and can be dried for later use.
use. It can be grown in either partial shade or in full sun and grows to about 24” high. Mint can be invasive, so it is best to plant in a pot or separate area away from other plants.

**Fennel** – (*Foeniculum vulgare*) is a hardy perennial with yellow flowers and feathery leaves. Fennel can be seen growing along roadsides, creek beds and in pastures in much of North America and Southern Canada. It has an anise or licorice like fragrance and my horses happen to really love the smell and taste of fennel added to their feed stuffs. The fresh fennel leaves can be chopped and added to your horse’s feed, and the seeds can be made in to a tea for any colic or gassy stomach conditions in the fall and winter months. Fennel has naturally occurring gas-relieving and gastrointestinal tract cramp-relieving agents in its leaves.

**Chamomile** – (*Matricaria chamomilla*) is an herb with a daisy-like flower, which can be found growing in sunny places along roads, fence lines, or in fields. It can grow to 20” tall and can be grown in small bedding boxes. I mainly grow this herb to dry and make tea when needed for people and horses. For people it can help them sleep and for horses it has a calming effect.

**Sunflowers** – (*Helianthus*) are always a favorite, fun-to-grow plant. Birds love them and you can dry them for your horses if you feed whole sunflower seed. You can buy a variety pack of colorful sunflowers at most hardware or garden stores and they grow to a height of between 5’ and 7’ tall. There are nutritional benefits of feeding sunflower seeds to your horse as they are high in vitamin E, vitamin B complex and phosphorus.

**Lemon Grass** – otherwise known as “Citronella grass” (*Cymbopogon nardus* and *Cymbopogon winterianus*) is used in candles and pesticides to repel especially flying and biting insects. Its properties are also antiseptics, and can be used in natural household disinfectants and soaps. Lemon grass is native to India and Asia and can be grown in warm climates.

**Comfrey** – (*Symphytum officinale L.*) is a perennial herb cultivated for thousands of years as a healing herb; it has powerful antibacterial and antifungal properties, and is known to reduce swelling and inflammation, and can be made in to a poultice with bentonite clay. Its homeopathic form is “Symphytum” - otherwise known as “knit bone” - and I have used the homeopathic form to heal broken bones myself. Studies have also found that comfrey is beneficial in treating ulcers.

**Meadowsweet** – (*Filipendula ulmaria*) throughout history has been known as a remedy for aches and fever. The herb is gentle on the stomach; it was also used to treat stomach upsets, diarrhea and heartburn. I like this herb especially for older horses as it helps to soothe their aches and pains yet is gentle on their tummies.

**Marshmallow** – (*Althea officinalis*) grows in damp soil in parts of North America, Europe and Asia and grows wildly in the United States in marsh lands. Its roots can be infused in gels to make healing salves for skin irritations, and can be fed internally to help cleanse the liver and soothe upset stomachs.

You and your horse can both find solace in a variety of fresh summertime herbs. If you don’t have your own herb garden or pasture herb patch, now is a good time to plan one for next year! Having a healing herb/flower garden is not only good for your health, but also for your soul.

**Helpful horse herbal resources:**
*The Practical Horse Herbal* by Victoria Ferguson
*A Healthy Horse the Natural Way* by Catherine Bird

**About the author:**
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