Herb Classification at a Glance

<table>
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<th>Plant Group</th>
<th>Major Phytochemicals</th>
<th>Primary Healing Actions</th>
<th>Single Herb Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>Aromatic/Pungent</td>
<td>Essential oils, resins, allyl-sulphides, glucosinolates</td>
<td>Stimulating (warming or hot), drying (disperse moisture and stagnation), diaphoretic (stimulates perspiration), carminative, expectorant, decongestant, antiseptic, cold and flu remedies</td>
<td>Aromatic: Eucalyptus, chamomile, peppermint, sage, rosemary, oregano, thyme, lavender, fennel Pungent: Capsicum, ginger, horseradish, clove</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bitters</td>
<td>Alkaloids, iridoids, anthraquinone glycosides</td>
<td>Detoxifying (enhance elimination), cooling (reduce inflammation and fever), blood purifying, laxative, liver protective</td>
<td>Goldenseal, Oregon grape, yellow dock, milk thistle, cascara sagrada, buckthorn, sarsaparilla, burdock, dandelion root, yucca, gentian, orange peel, lobelia, chocolate, myrrh gum, hops</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salty</td>
<td>Mineral salts</td>
<td>Nourishing (supplies minerals and nutrients), softening (breaks up hard masses), gently detoxifying</td>
<td>Red clover, nettles, alfalfa, horsetail, oat straw, dandelion leaf, chickweed, mullein, celery, barley grass, parsley</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sour</td>
<td>Organic acids (citric, malic and ascorbic acid), flavonoids</td>
<td>Cooling (reduces inflammation and fever), antioxidant, nourishing and refreshing, protect cardio-vascular system</td>
<td>Lemon, hawthorn, plantain leaf, schizandra, elderberry, grape, bilberry, mangosteen, lyceum, willow bark</td>
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<tr>
<td>Astringent</td>
<td>Tannins</td>
<td>Tightening (contract tissue and arrest discharge), styptic (stops bleeding), vulnerary (helps wounds heal), counteracts venom</td>
<td>White oak bark, uva ursi, bayberry root bark, red raspberry, yarrow, lady’s mantle, eyebright, kudzu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mucilant</td>
<td>Mucilage, gums, pectins</td>
<td>Soothing (reduces irritation and inflammation), absorbent (absorbs moisture and toxins), vulnerary (tissue healing), decongestant, bulk laxative</td>
<td>Psyllium hulls, slippery elm, marshmallow, dulce, gum arabic, guar gum, fenugreek, okra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet</td>
<td>Immune stimulating polysaccharides, fructans, saponins, phenylpropanoids, glycosides</td>
<td>Tonifying (strengthens body structure and function), adaptagenic (helps body adapt to stress), immune-stimulating, energizing (builds energy reserves),</td>
<td>Licorice, ginseng, stevia, dong quai, eleuthero root, astragalus, bee pollen</td>
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Classification of Herbs

The most important part of herbology is the combining of herbs to make effective remedies, yet it is the least understood. Part of the reason for this lack is the understanding the the lack of an effective classification system for herb use. Many systems have been tried, some classifying by plant part or by humoral theories or by botanical family or by color and morphology.

Regardless of the particular system used, however, it is apparent that herbs fall generally into five major categories based on their active constituents. These are: Aromatic (volatile oils), Astringents (tannins), Bitter (phenolic compounds, saponins, and alkaloids), Mucilaginous (polysaccharides), and Nutritive (food stuffs).
Understanding this classification system simplifies the analysis of herbal combinations and allows the herbalist to readily propose useful new ones, and it becomes easy to substitute one herb for another. Additionally, the categories are easy to identify using the senses of smell, taste, and touch.

**Aromatic Herbs**

Aromatic Herbs owe their properties mainly to volatile oils, and the name is a reflection of the pleasant odor that many of these herbs have. Most have a fragrant, spicy taste and stimulate the gastro-intestinal mucous membrane. They are used extensively both therapeutically and as flavorings and perfumes. Aromatic herbs are divided into two subcategories: stimulants and nervines.

**Stimulant Herbs** increase energy and activities of the body, or its parts or organs, and most often effect the respiratory, digestive, and circulatory systems.

Properties of Stimulant herbs include analgesic, antipyretic, antiasthmatic, antibiotic, antiseptic, carminative, diaphoretic, expectorant, galactogogue, parasiticide, rubefacient, stimulant, and stomachic.

Some examples of Stimulant herbs include capsicum, damiana, fennel, garlic, ginger, peppermint, sage, thyme, catnip, feverfew, lemon grass, penny royal, and damiana.

**Nervine Herbs** are often used to heal and soothe the nervous system, and often affect the respiratory, digestive, and circulatory systems as well. They are often used in teas or in encapsulated form.

Properties of Nervine herbs include analgesic, antipyretic, antiasthmatic, antibiotic, antiseptic, antispasmodic, carminative, sedative, and stomachic.

Some examples of Nervines include chamomile, crampbark, dong quai, ginger, hops, lobelie, scullcap, valerian, catnip, lady's slipper, and sarsaparilla.

**Astringent Herbs**

Astringent Herbs owe their properties mainly to their tannins, which have the ability to precipitate proteins, and this "tightens," contracts, or tones living tissue, and helps to halt discharges. They effect the digestive, urinary, and circulatory systems, and large doses are toxic to the liver.

Properties of Astringent herbs include analgesic, antiseptic, antiabortive, astringent, emmenagogue, homostatic, and styptic.

Examples of Astringents include bayberry, comfrey, eyebright, golden seal, pau d'arco, peppermint, red raspberry, slippery elm, white oak, white willow, black walnut, crampbark, mullein, and penny royal.

**Bitter Herbs**

Bitter Herbs owe their properties to the presence of phenols and phenolic glycosides, alkaloids, or saponins, and are divided into four subcategories: laxative herbs, diuretic herbs, saponin-containing herbs, and aloaloid-containing herbs.

There are three basic types of **Laxative Herbs**: bulk laxatives (see mucilaginous herbs), lubricant laxatives (such as mineral oil), and stimulant laxatives (the antraquinone type). The laxative herbs of the Bitter Herb type mildly stimulate contraction of the intestinal system and stimulate bile secretions rather than acting as irritants to the bowel. Purging the digestive tract of toxins is one of the oldest and most common forms of self-medication.

Properties of Laxative Bitter herbs include alterative, anticitarrhal, antipyretic, cholagogue, purgative, hepatonic, sialagogue, vermifuge, and blood purifier.
Examples of Laxative herbs include aloe, cascara, licorice, pumpkin, senna, yellow dock, yucca, barberry, gentian, safflowers, and golden seal.

**Diuretic Herbs** induce loss of fluid from the body through the urinary system. The fluids released help cleanse the vascular system, kidneys, and liver.

Properties of Diuretic herbs include alterative, antibiotic, antcatarrhal, antipyretic, antiseptic, lithotriptic, and blood purifier.

Examples include asparagus, blessed thistle, burdock, butcher's broom, buchu, chaparral, chickweed, cornsilk, dandelion, dog grass, grapevine, hawthorn, ho shou wu, hydrangea, juniper berries, milk thistle, nettle, parsley, peach bark, and uva ursi.

**Saponin-containing Herbs** are known for their ability to produce frothing or foaming in solution with water. The name “saponin” comes from the Latin word for soap. They emulsify fat soluble molecules in the digestive tract, and their most important property is to enhance the body's ability to absorb other active compounds.

Saponins have the ability to effectively dissolve the cell membranes of red blood cells and disrupt them. However, when taken internally they are comparatively harmless or not absorbed at all. Saponin-rich herbs like yucca and sarsaparilla give root beer its foamy properties.

Their properties include alterative, antcatarrhal, antispasmodic, aphrodisiac, emmenagugue, cardiac stimulant, and increased longevity. Some are also diuretic and antispasmodic.

Some examples of saponin-containing herbs are wild yam root, schizandra, black cohosh, blue cohosh, devil's claw, licorice, alfalfa, yucca, ginseng, and gotu kola.

An alokoid means any organic compound that contains nitrogen and has physiologic activity. Since each group of alkaloids has very different physiological effects, **Alkaloid-containing herbs** are difficult to classify. Thus many alkaloid-containing herbs, such as valerian and capsicum, are also found under additional classifications.

Properties of Alkaloid-containing herbs include emetic, astringent, expectorant, antiseptic, respiratory tonic, stimulant, and nervine. Examples include ephedra, golden seal, lobelia, pau d'arco, valerian, and capsicum.

**Mucilaginous Herbs**

Mucilaginous herbs derive their properties from the polysaccharides they contain, which give these herbs a slippery, mild taste that is sweet in water. All plants product mucilage in some form to store water and hydrates as a food reserve. Since most mucilages are not broken down by the human digestive system, but absorb toxins from the bowel and give bulk to the stool, these herbs are most effective topically as poultices and knitting agents, and are also used topically in the digestive tract. When used as lozenges or extracts, they have a demulcent action on the throat.

Mucilaginous herbs produce four major effects. They:
- reduce bowel transit time
- absorb and eliminate toxins from the intestinal system
- help regulate intestinal flora
- produce a demulcent/vulnerary action

Properties of Mucilaginous herbs include antibiotic, antacid, demulcent, emollient, culnerary, and detoxifier. Herbs in this classification include althea, aloe, burdock, comfrey, dandelion, echinacea, fenugreek, kelp, psyllium, slippery elm, dulse, glucomannan from Konjak root, Irish moss, and mullein.

**Nutritive Herbs**

These herbs derive both their name and their classification from the nutritive value they provide to the diet. They are true foods and provide some medicinal effects as fiber, mucilage, and diuretic action. But most importantly they
provide the nutrition of protein, carbohydrates, and fats, plus the vitamins and minerals that are necessary for adequate nutrition.

Examples of Nutritive herbs are rosehips, acerola, apple, asparagus, banana, barley grass, bee pollen, bilberry, broccoli, cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, grapefruit, hibiscus, lemon, oatstraw, oniono, orange, papaya, pineapple, red clover, spirulina, stevia, and wheat germ.

Source: http://www.theherbdoc.com/consumerEducation/Herbology/Classification.htm