

Calendula Light in the Dark

Lisa Wujnovich



I've noticed that people who need a certain herb will appear in my life in synchronistic streams. It's as if the universe decides to illustrate an herb's uses and personality a few times over, just in case I don't get it. That's what happened this summer with calendula. Four different women in their twenties, crossed my path, four different women with different ailments: 1) eczema, cystitis, and a history of depression 2) a long standing case of bacterial vaginitis 3) painful menses with a recent bout of sore throat and swollen glands 4) acne with lingering digestive disturbances from overseas travel. What they did have in common, were scattered raised red dots on the edges of their tongues, indicating a systemic infection. William LeSassier sites a flabby tongue with pink small spots around the sides as an indicator for calendula. I suggested calendula, but kept searching for other remedies for each of their ailments. It seemed too easy to just give them calendula, but the more I learn about calendula, the more I see how this bright hardy herb is good for so many conditions, and suited for all of these problems.

Calendula is a top-notch lymphatic cleanser, particularly for conditions that have a lingering infection. It works well for damp conditions like lymphatic stagnation, thrush, viral herpes. It is used with parasitic infections like amoebas and worms. It is an astringent, as well as a vulnerary, which improves circulation, healing with an influx of blood. Matthew Woods describes it as slightly warming and stimulating. It softens old swollen glands, as well as cleans old pus.

Calendula has more than earned its centuries' old reputation, as a wound healer, especially for red, sore, oozing wounds. Calendula was used extensively in the Civil War for serious wounds. It's one of the best remedies for skin ailments, cuts, scalds, sunburn, eczema.

I've made calendula salve for both of my children's bottoms when they were infants. I've given new mothers this gift numerous times. Its simple to make. Add two

ounces of beeswax to one cup of olive oil that has been infused with calendula flowers for six weeks. (The plant matter is strained off). Heat the two over a double boiler, pour into jars and watch it congeal into magic salve. It also works well on adult diaper rash, "butt burn" as a friend of mine says. I make a personal jar for this person, who swears by it.

Calendula's brightness is cheery and unique. Unlike other composite flowers like daisies or dandelions, calendula blooms vary, from flower to flower. One may be pale yellow, the other bright orange; one center burgundy red, the other almost yellow. They all are coated with a sticky resin, wherein lies their medicinal wonder. It is concentrated in the center of the flower and under the petals, but it spreads along the stems and onto the leaves. The resin is a signature for sticky conditions, often pus filled, that are deeply ingrained or have spread systemically. Because of the gluey sap, extra care must be taken when plucking the blossoms; they must be completely dry, so they don't mold. Also, the barely opened blossoms, have the most intense medicinal qualities.

Myths including calendula abound. For the Aztecs, she appeared as a blood speckled bloom after the Conquistadors murdered their people. In Greek tales, Apollo's rays melted a smitten girl; in her place a marigold grew.

The first time I ever used calendula was long before I met the live plant. I was living in New York City and had a friend who had a stubborn ear infection. She had been overzealous in her use of Q-tips, and had created the perfect condition for a stubborn ear infection. At the time I did not know that calendula had been described as a remedy for places where the sun does not shine. I've since used and suggested it for earaches, always noting that the ear canal is

just such a place. Mullein flower oil works well with calendula in these cases.

Many healers (such as Culpeper) and writers (such as Shakespeare) have coupled calendula with the sun, recognizing her ability to bring joy, soothe pain and grief. Her yellow color is another indicator for her ability to stimulate action of the liver and the gall bladder. A yellow look around the eyes heralds calendula as a remedy.

Calendula's ability to penetrate deeply, suits the female reproduction system. She regulates menses, reduces uterine tension. As an astringent, she checks excessive bleeding. Her oestrogenic qualities relieve menopausal symptoms. She promotes contractions, so she shouldn't be used during pregnancy.

I planted a large patch of calendula late this year, at the end of the summer, in hopes that it would mature in time for me to harvest the blossoms in the fall. I'm doing just that now. I see visions of gallon sized jars of the hardy golden blossoms that have weathered early morning frosts, coming to life steeped in hot water, or added to soup bases. British peasants did this in times of old, to strengthen their immune system throughout the winter.

Being a farmer, herbalist, writer, and mother, the sunny months are my busiest times. When many people are relaxing and soaking up the summer's energy, building reserves for winter's time of darkness, I usually overextend myself. Come the heart of winter, my fuel supply runs low. This is when I look forward to slowing down, and digging deeper in my life. This first day of Autumn, I cherish my growing stash of calendula. I've already started using calendula to nourish and heal my tired farm family and myself for the cold season ahead of us.

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