

HOW TO MAKE A MEDICINAL MUSHROOM DOUBLE-EXTRACTION TINCTURE

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Although the art and science of making plant medicine can seem to grow ever more complicated the longer an herbalist maintains a practice, the accessibility of making full-spectrum medicinal plant extracts frequently remains within the grasp of do-it-yourself home medicine makers. Today I'm going to share with you how to make a medicinal mushroom double-extraction tincture.

This process, known as "double-extraction," is a method commonly used for immune stimulating herbs, including many of the known medicinal mushrooms such as reishi, maitake, chaga, shiitake, turkey tail, and Cordyceps.

Medicinal mushroom use has a long history in traditional medicine, a history which current research is only beginning to catch up with. Modern biochemical data shows an array of active constituents and compounds which assist the human body in the maintenance of health and in the healing process of ailments.

Fungal polysaccharides, actively researched since the 1950s, are long branching chains of complex sugars and have been shown to exhibit immune-modulating, anti-inflammatory, and anti-tumor activities (Hobbs, 1986), while compounds such as phenolics and terpenoids display a reduction in oxidative damage on the cellular levels (Mase, 2012).

These activities have indicated medicinal mushrooms in instances of under-active immune systems (such as in common cold and flu season), overactive immune function (such as in cases of autoimmune diseases), and carcinogenesis (such as in the growth of tumors and metastatic cancers) (Mase, 2012).

Because medicinal mushrooms contain this variety of constituents, both easily water-soluble (polysaccharides) and of lesser solubility (terpenoids and phenolics), the double-extraction process is necessary for making a full-spectrum medicine.

During the researching of this article, it became apparent that many highly-esteemed medicine makers and clinical herbalists differ in the particularities of making double-extractions of medicinal fungi. For this reason, we will offer an outline of the basic steps required during the double-extraction process, appended with more detail as to the options and variations recommended by a variety of experienced practitioners.

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5 Steps To A Medicinal Mushroom Double-Extraction Tincture

1. Wash, Chop, and Dry

After harvesting the mushroom bodies, wash and chop them into small pieces, and dry them on screen or in a dehydrator.

Most folks agree that making medicine with dried mushrooms is best for determining the final water content of the extract, which some folks say should be at least 25% alcohol for preservation purposes, although the common consensus is often higher for shelf stability (40% alcohol). Buhner (2012) suggests using 16 ounces of powdered reishi mushroom, 64 ounces of water for decoction, and 16 ounces of 95% alcohol for a 1:5 mushroom:menstruum extract resulting in 20% alcohol.

2. Single Marc or Double Marc?

Decide whether you will make the alcohol extract and water extract from two separate batches of dried mushrooms, or whether you will use the marc (leftover plant material) pressed from the tinctures to decoct during the water extraction process.

Some research suggests that high-proof alcohol destroys the water-soluble polysaccharides, so it doesn't make sense to use the tinctured and pressed mushrooms in the decoction (Hobbs, 1986). Stephen Buhner (2012) recommends making the decoction first, while many other herbalists advise the inverse.

3. Ethanol Extraction

Many herbalists make the tincture first, filling a jar with the dried and chopped mushroom, covering the material with high proof (80–95%) clear grain alcohol, and allowing it to sit for 2–6 weeks away from sunlight. Hobbs (1986) recommends putting chopped dried mushrooms into a blender with the menstruum (alcohol) in order to achieve the greatest surface area for extraction, noting that the marc will settle in the jar over time and leave one inch of clear fluid at the top, which should submerge the plant material enough to prevent fermentation. Some herbalists even add a small amount of glycerin to the tincture during the ethanol extraction process in order to maintain emulsification (MasÈ, 2012).

When using dried plant material, it is important to shake the tincture jar every day in order to encourage the constituents to venture out of the stiff cell walls.

If the tincture is made first, it should be pressed, bottled, and kept in a cool dark location where it will be stable and won't degrade.

If the decoction is made first and strained, it should be kept in the refrigerator while the tincture is steeping. Stephen Buhner (2012) offers a third variation, a combination method which recommends adding

high-proof alcohol to the cooled decoction, which still contains the mushroom marc and should sit for 2 weeks.

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4. Decoction

The word decoction refers to the slow boiling of plant material—usually woody roots, stems, barks, and seeds—over a long period of time.

Buhner (2012) recommends a half-hour decoction, while other herbalists suggest everything from 45 minutes (Green, 2000), several days of slow-cooking in the crock pot to whatever length of time it takes a slow boil to reduce the menstruum (liquid) by half. Some herbalists suggest adding water in order to maintain decoction process for 1–2 hours (MasÈ, 2012).

Hobbs suggests decocting the marc pressed from the tincture in a 1:5 marc/spring water ratio, simmering for 1 hour, pressing and composting the decocted marc, and then simmering the water extract further until it has evaporated to 1/5 of its original volume.

5. Strain, Press, Decant, Store

Be sure to strain and press the fluid out of the marc very well once the decoction is cooled and the tincture is ready. The alcohol percent goal for the combine ethanol–water extraction should be 25% (Hobbs, 1986), so the volume of the water extract should be adjusted according to the percent of alcohol of the spirits used for the tincture.

Using 190 proof (95%) ethanol makes the math the easiest—in order to get close to a 40% alcohol double extract, combine approximately equal parts alcohol extract (tincture) and water extract (decoction).

Sometimes the polysaccharides will precipitate out of solution while on the shelf, so it is a good habit to shake the bottle before dispensing.

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Medicinal Mushroom Double-Extraction Tincture Recipe

Medicinal Mushroom Double-Extraction Tincture

Ingredients

(adapted from Guido MasÈ (2012)).

Dried, chopped mushrooms
100 proof vodka
Food-grade vegetable glycerin

Directions

Divide dried and chopped mushrooms into two equal parts.

Prepare a tincture by covering half of the mushrooms with a menstruum composed of 70% alcohol (100 proof vodka), 20% glycerin, and 10% water.

Allow to steep 4–6 weeks, shaking occasionally

Strain

Prepare a decoction by combining the second half of the mushrooms with twice the volume of water than what you used for the total solvent volume of the tincture you made. Simmer the decoction for at least one hour, preferably 2 or more. Keep adding water as needed during the cooking time.

Strain the decoction and continued to simmer the liquid until it equals the amount of strained tincture. Remove from heat and cool completely.

Combine the liquids from the decoction and tincture, with the end product roughly 25% alcohol by volume.

You can learn more about medicinal mushrooms in The Herbarium!
medicinal mushroom

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