plants & pregnancy...

...by herbalist jim mcdonald

foundational herbcraft

. : the actions of herbs : .

In order to really understand the ways I which herbs express their virtues, it's not the plant's "active ingredient" that needs to be understood, or the results of this or that study which verifies or negates this or that use (especially considering that ever-shoddy nature of most studies on herbs). Rather, it is their traditional "actions", as defined by the system of herbalism in which they were used. As might be expected, this is a rather huge topic, and I've left a lot out so as to present mostly the actions relevant to pregnancy & birth…

Foundational Actions

These are the qualities in which are held the archetypes of a plant's medicinal use, and often these properties underlie the primary and secondary actions of the plant. They can readily be tasted, smelled, and felt… they are viscerally understood. In perceiving plants in this manner we can immediately know a great deal about the larger uses of a plant, without needing to "look it up". In truth, they are more than "actions" or "properties"… they are literally ways in which the plant communicates to us, telling us of its nature and virtues.

aromatics...

Aromatic herbs are those that contain strong smelling volatile essential oils. These oils tend to be anti-inflammatory, anti-microbial, and are "dispersive" in nature, which is to say that they help break up stagnation of all sorts. This can be respiratory congestion, intestinal gas, or even cluttered minds & cloudy thinking. Although not exclusively so, aromatics are often relaxants, acting perhaps as antispasmodics to help relieve tension and spasm, perhaps as calming nerviness to allay nervous stress and anxiety (and frequently both). Though it sounds strange to say, aromatic herbs are also very often stimulating, and some are both relaxant and stimulant (to wrap your head around this apparent contradiction, imagine a good but vigorous massage. You'll find that while any tension in the body is relaxed, the massage also stimulates increased blood & energy flow). Aromatics can often act as diuretics as well, as the volatile oils are processed by the kidneys, which find them irritating (the personified kidney's say, "Yick! Stinky oils!) and increase urine output to "flush" them out of the body. This is what provides aromatic's antimicrobial effect; the antiseptic oils concentrated in the urine bathe the tissues of the urinary system as they are swept out of the body. Examples are innumerable… the mint family contains a whole lot of them.

astringents...

Astringents are herbs that cause tissue to contract, and so are indicated when tissues are weak, atonic and/or "leaking" (the tissues don't have the tone they need to hold in fluids), swollen or injured (the tissues are still losing fluid, but it doesn't have anywhere to go and so pools and tissues swell). They may be used to stop bleeding (in which case they are called styptics/hemostatics). A good way to conceptualize tissues that need "astringing" is to think about a balloon that's been blown up and emptied out so many times it's lost its resiliency; the

latex is weakened and lax. Or, sometimes weak tissues get "spongy" (think of spongy, bleeding gums).

Most people are quite familiar with astringency… bite a green banana that you thought was ripe enough? That sensation of puckering and dryness is astringency. The strength of astringent herbs varies widely, from the very gentle strawberry to the moderate green tea to the significantly strong oak. All things that taste sour are astringent to some degree.

Astringents are generally considered “drying” in nature because of the sensation they offer, though they can help the body *retain* fluid on a larger scale by preventing excessive urination caused by weak renal tissues, excessive perspiration from lax skin, loss of fluid from loose stools, watery eyes, blood loss, ect ect ect. Maybe its helpful to see them as primarily acting to seal the surface of tissues, rather than just desiccating them entirely. They have a local anti-inflammatory action, and can also act as antimicrobials by toning tissues, they make it harder for bacteria to adhere to them. Applied topically while hot, they are excellent drawing agents. Cranesbill, sumach, oak, and most of the rose family are examples.

demulcents…

Herbs that moisten tissues are referred to as “demulcents” when used internally, and “emollients” when applied externally. Most of these herbs contain mucilage, a complex carbohydrate that, when moistened with water, becomes viscid and slimy. Michigan herbalist Joyce Wardwell calls these herbs “slimaceous”, which is both an appropriate and memorable term. Mucilaginous herbs lubricate tissues, ease dryness, and soothe inflammation, irritation and injury. Though it makes sense that demulcents coat tissues, the physical mucilage is actually very poorly absorbed by the body, and certainly isn’t traveling through the blood to the kidneys. Rather, the ingestion of mucilage seems to promote a systemic moistening of tissues throughout the body, with some demulcents being more specific to particular organ systems. Mucilages can help loosen/relax tissues that feel tight due to dryness (as opposed to constriction). Oregon herbalist Howie Brounstien elucidates that when only partially hydrated, mucilages can act as astringent drying agents by pulling moisture from tissues into themselves. Slippery elm and marshmallow are archetypal, being intensely slimaceous, but many plants, such as violets, mullein, sassafras leaves, plantain and purple loosestrife, contain enough mucilaginous virtue to manifest this action. Sweet tonics, like licorice or codonopsis also moisten tissues, though not through mucilage; they are still considered demulcents.

regarding astringents and demulcents…

Because astringents are generally considered “drying” and mucilaginous herbs considered “moistening”, it can seem confusing to use them together (which is often done) and even more confusing that some herbs are both astringent and demulcent (water lily roots come to mind). To wrap your head around this seeming contradiction, don’t view astringent/dry – mucilage/moisten as opposite ends of a polarity... that simplification doesn’t work. Instead, consider that astringents tighten and tone, and demulcents coat and soothe. The moistening effect of the demulcents is perfectly appropriate to balance the dryness that comes with astringency, and the lubrication offered protects the tissues as they are being strengthened. The interplay is complimentary, not contradictory.

relaxants…

Relaxant herbs ease tension, and are usually referred to as antispasmodics. This, however, isn’t a good way to perceive them… tension and spasms, for one thing, are different. Tension tends to be a “held” state, whereas spasm involves an oscillation between contraction and relaxation. Also, “antispamodic” certainly fails to convey the effect of relaxants on the mind and nervous system. I prefer to think of relaxants as working in the body to ease tension that

is causing resistance to the flow of the vital energy in the body. As mentioned above, aromatic herbs are often relaxant to some degree, but not all relaxants are pungent aromatics. Herbs with an acrid flavor, like kava kava and lobelia are also relaxant in nature, and more dramatically antispasmodic. "Skunky" or sickly sweet smelling herbs (think valerian) may cross from a relaxant to a sedative action. Relaxants are indicated when tension or spasm is an issue.

It is also important to remember that relaxants can work on both the nervous system and the sensorium (I love that word) as well. Usually, we refer to relaxants working in this manner as nervines.

Relaxants include cramp bark, wild yam, kava kava & lobelia. It's an important therapeutic point to recognize that magnesium deficiency can be a root cause of tension, and in such cases herbs should be used along with magnesium, not as an alternative to it.

regarding astringents and relaxants...

I've spent many long nights pondering the way that herbs that are both tonifying astringents (cause tissue to tighten) and also relaxants (cause tissues to loosen) work. One of the things I came up with, and makes sense to me, is that sometimes the surface tissues/mucous membranes lose tone, and then the underlying muscle structure tightens/tenses up to try to compensate, resulting in a mixed state of laxity and tension. These herbs - and I'd consider cramp bark here, it being both astringent and relaxant - tighten and tone the surface tissues and relax the compensatory tension in the underlying muscle structure.

regarding relaxants and demulcents...

Sometimes people will mistake the "tight" feeling of dried out/atrophied tissues with tension, but relaxants won't ease this sensation… rather, by restoring moisture to tissues, demulcents will relieve this sensation. This is type of tightness is commonly experienced in dry respiratory conditions.

stimulants...

Obviously, stimulants stimulate activity; Paul Bergner writes that stimulants facilitate "the increase of vital expression in a tissue or organ". However, while nowadays people almost always associate stimulants with caffeine, ephedra and other cerebral or metabolic stimulants, most old herbal texts use the word stimulant to describe an herb that stimulates activity of any sort of tissue or process... sialagogues (things that make you salivate) are therefore also stimulants. Referring back to the discussion of "hot & cold", we mentioned that "hot" herbs were generally considered to be stimulating. This is indeed the case, but there are also plenty of cooling or temperate stimulants. For example bitters, which are on the whole cooling in nature, are all stimulating.

regarding stimulants and relaxants...

Again, it's easy to become confused if you see these actions as existing at opposite ends of a polarity. In fact, they do not (*sedatives* oppose stimulants). Think of stimulating plants as herbs that increase an activity (like circulation), and relaxants as herbs that resolve *resistance to* that increased activity (like muscle tension inhibiting blood flow). Understood in this manner, it becomes clear that stimulants and relaxants can work together, and are not in conflict with one another.

If this is still abstract and too hard to wrap your head around, do this: Hold your hands with your fingers like claws, put them on your head, and scratch vigorously. Ahhh… definitely

stimulating, but *also* relaxing because it relieves any underlying tension that may have been inhibiting good circulation to your noggin.

bitters…

Bitter herbs stimulate the secretion of pretty much all the digestive acids, juices and enzymes, which generally improves appetite & digestion, especially of fats/oils/lipids. They also increase absorption of nutrients by supporting the processes that breakdown and absorb nutrients. Bitters stimulate tissue repair in the GI, and also can have a mood stabilizing/"antidepressant" effect by increasing the production of mood related hormones by the enteric nervous system in the gut. They have a grounding, downward energy. You must taste bitters to receive their medicinal virtues, as they appear to act through a reflex action facilitated by the enteric nervous system. There are nutritive bitters (dandelion greens), aromatic bitters (bitter orange peel), warming bitters (calamus) and just plain bitter bitters (boneset).

I feel rather strongly that everyone needs to consume some bitters (think nutritive food bitters), and that our tendency not to is a direct cause of many of our most common digestive disorders. Yes, bitters are often cooling to cold in nature, and drying; things which are often stated as a reason that they aren't appropriate to all people. I think that it's more effective to recognize that there are more nourishing bitters and more medicinal bitters, and that formulas can be blended that balance any seeming constitutional incompatibilities. Also, small doses of bitters in tincture are less likely to aggravate inherently cold or dry constitutions.

I have a much more elaborate telling of the virtues of bitters that elaborates on all this here:

www.herbcraft.org/bitters.pdf

primary actions

affecting specific tissues, organs & systems

These actions exert the influence through a specific organ or system. Oftentimes, their effects arise from the workings of foundational actions, as we see in bitters acting as alteratives, or aromatics as diuretics. But there is also a "who knows?" factor at play, as always…

alteratives…

These herbs act on the body to promote a healthy and balanced state of functioning by supporting the liver, kidneys, lymphatic & immune system and adrenals. They are often referred to in herb books as "blood purifiers", "blood cleansers" or "detoxifiers". I personally dislike all these terms, as they don't clearly express what I think alteratives do… their affect on the blood is really the result of their action on the metabolism, and not a direct action upon the blood itself. So, alteratives might more accurately be called "metabolic tonics", as they coordinate and improve the efficacy of our metabolism. In fact, Matthew Wood has said that the root word "alteration" is old Greek for metabolism. When I say that these herbs are acting as metabolic tonics, what I mean is that they improve the assimilation and utilization of nutrition, and then clear the body of the waste products that result from this process. This is where I dislike calling them "detoxifiers"… it places emphasis on only a portion of their action. Most Alterative herbs also have special "niches" they excel in addressing. Cleavers and red root, for example, are excellent lymphatic tonics, while dandelion and yellow dock act more strongly on the lower gastrointestinal tract. Nettles and milky oats improve adrenal processes, and burdock seems to have a balanced action on all metabolic organs and processes. Alteratives require regular use to truly manifest their restorative potential.

carminatives…

Carminatives are aromatic herbs whose dispersive volatile oils initiate the expulsion of intestinal gas. They often relieve cramping as well… basically, a term applied to aromatics used for the digestive tract. Catnip, Fennel and Chamomile are carminatives.

diuretics…

Diuretics increase the quantity of urine expelled from the body. Some do this by increasing the blood flow to the kidneys (like scotch broom and caffeine containing herbs), others affect the secretion or reabsorption of fluids in the kidneys (dandelion), while still others contain aromatic oils that irritate the renal tissues and the kidneys produce more urine to try to "flush out" the irritant.

One very very important point needs to be specifically addressed here: People generally think about using diuretics to treat "water retention" or edema. It's *not OK* to just give a diuretic "for water retention", as this can be a symptom of more serious issues at play, including heart problems or perhaps the pre-eclampsia of pregnancy. To address water retention holistically and responsibly, the cause needs to be determined. Also, people with low blood pressure can sometimes get a bit woozy on diuretics; be sure that their use coincides with adequate overall hydration and watch for aggravations.

A better way to understand the proper use of diuretics than thinking that they remove water from the body is to see them as facilitating a "flushing" of the urinary tract. This can be used to deliver medicinal action derived from herbs, and also to help "flush out" bacteria, or debris like stones or gravel.

On the whole, diuretics should be chosen with reference to their other actions, not just because "it's a urinary problem so let's use a diuretic".

Some common herbal diuretics include parsley, celery seed, nettle, dandelion leaf, burdock leaf/seed, cornsilk, goldenrod, queen anne's lace, yarrow, & juniper.

emetic/anti-emetics…

Emetics induce vomiting (lobelia, syrup of ipecac), and anti-emetics help relieve nausea (ginger, peach leaf, most mints).

nervines/sedatives/hypnotics/soporifics…

Nervines are herbs that act on the nerous system. Technically, there are stimulating nerviness (such as kola nuts and other caffeine containing herbs) and relaxing nerviness (scullcap, valerian…). Nowadays, the term is most often used to refer to nervous system relaxants. To further delineate, there are herbs considered to be "tonic" nervines (herbs that when taken long term improve nervous conditions, such as wood betony) and "sedative" nerviness (herbs that actively sedate the central nervous system, and should be used short term to manage acute problems, like hops). Both "soporific" and "hypnotic" are terms that specifically refer to herbs that induce sleep (hypnotic does not refer to hypnotic trances). To make matters confusing, "sedative" may also be used to refer to herbs that sedate activity of tissues (and not necessarily the central nervous system)… so an anti-inflammatory herb might be called a sedative in an old Physiomedical book. It should be noted that the word "*sudo*rific" is not the same as "*sopo*rific"… even though they look the similar and rhyme. Sudorifics promote sweating, and while some may be soporific as well, not all are.

oxytocic…

Oxytocic herbs stimulate uterine contractions, and mimic the action of naturally produced hormone oxytocin. Michael Moore taught that they were useful for getting tired, post partum

parents more receptive to intimacy when the mind was willing but the body was pooped. Blue cohosh and cotton root bark come to mind.

“Trophorestorative” isn’t so much an action, but a term that applies to the result obtained upon certain organs/tissues through the use of certain herbs. Trophorestoratives are herbs whose use resulted not only in restored structure (as in astringents) but in restored function as well. Beyond that, a trophorestorative will create lasting improvement in structure in function that persists even if the herb itself is discontinued. Many people would be inclined to use the word “tonic” here, and although perhaps appropriate, there are so many different kinds of tonics (blood tonics, bitter tonics, astringents…) that using the word unmodified often proves to be problematic (this is elborated on below).

Nettle seed is an incredibly important trophorestorative to the kidneys and adrenals; goldenseal and yerba mansa act as a trophorestorative to mucous membranes throughout the body, including urinary tissues; milk thistle for the liver, hawthorne for the heart (probably cactus too); perhaps stone root for the vasculature.

tonics...

"Tonic" is a dreadfully problematic term, because it has so many meanings and can be applied in so many different ways. Really, without using an adjective to qualify what kind of tonic it is, the noun "tonic" is close to useless. To be practical, most people intend to convey that a tonic is an herb that builds up your energy and health and is good for you.

Herbalist Matthew Wood, in a draft copy of his *Practice of Traditional Western Herbalism*, offers the one of the better definitions of the word “tonic”, unique in that it allows for all the different manifestations this vague category may take:

“A tonic is usually an herb or food that acts on the body in a slow, nutritive fashion to build up the substance of the body. In this sense, the term "tonic" might be considered synonymous with "trophorestorative". It can also be defined as a substance which (like an astringent) restrains loss from the body by "toning" tissues. Matt offers the following categories tonics may fall into: Bitter tonics were used to strengthen and nourish the liver and metabolism (alteratives, for the most part), Sweet tonics acted primarily on the immune system and adrenals (adaptogens). Oily tonics supplied fixed oils and essential fatty acids to tissues to ensure hydration, cell permeability and to prevent atrophy; fixed oils also insulate, explaining why fats are important when exposed to cold temperatures. Mineral tonics (do I really need to say?) provide essential minerals, and sour tonics are rich in bioflavinoids. Protein tonics are rich in protein… not lots of plants here, for the most part, but nettle is a good example.

In Chinese Medicine, there are chi tonics, blood tonics, yang tonics, yin tonics, and a slew of other types of tonics, each with their own unique indications and contraindications.

the "-agogues"

herbs that stimulate secretion

Actions ending in “-agogue” indicate that the herb will increase the secretion of whatever is implied by the term that precedes it. Long term use of them can be considered constitutionally drying, as they cause the release of fluids from the body. This can be seen as a contraindication in dry states, but is perhaps better addressed by ensuring the increased consumption of fluids and demulcent herbs that also restore and preserve moisture (since you obviously wouldn’t tell a woman with a tendency towards dryness to avoid breastfeeding because it would aggravate her constitution). Pertinent to our topic:

emmenagogue

Emmenogogues stimulate menstrual flow, and are used to help bring out scanty or suppressed menstruation. They generally should not be used during pregnancy, but claims that emmenogogues are likely to induce miscarriage are, in my opinion, exaggerated, if out of well intended conservancy. Emmenogogues may also be seen as bringing an increased flow of vital energy to the reproductive tract, in men and women, and this can help conditions where stagnation and pelvic congestion is an issue. Yarrow, black cohosh, and motherwort are among many examples.

galactagogue

Galactagogues increase the supply of breast milk in nursing mothers (unlikely to work for the guys, but I won't rule out the possibility entirely…). Interestingly, many of the herbs that promote lactation are also herbs that ease colic in infants. Wisdom of nature clearly displayed. Fennel, borage and fenugreek are examples.

Galactagogues also help exemplify that sometimes an action may seem energetically contraindicated, but just needs to be balanced with other herbs/diet/protocols to avoid aggravations. Galactogogues are drying by nature, but I don't think it would make sense to advise new mothers that maybe they shouldn't nurse their children because they're already constitutionally dry. Instead, you'd work to create a protocol that compensates for this by increasing fluids and demulcents.

As mentioned above, this is only a partial listing, but I feel it offers an important insight into how one holistically approaches the use of herbs.

nourishing mothers with herbs and (just a few) supplements

Foundationally, the use of herbs in pregnancy shouldn't be medicinal, but nourishing. Many herbs are nutritionally supercharged, and best offer their virtues as strong teas, decoctions, & syrups…

a nourishing infusion for nine months and after…

Combine:

1 part nettle leaf

- 1 part raspberry leaf
- 1 part oatstraw
- 1/2 part red clover blossoms
- 1/2 part rosehips

This blend can be steeped in hot water as a simple "tea", infused more fully by adding an ounce of the tea to a quart mason jar, filling with boiling water and letting it steep for four hours or more (overnight is easiest), or simmered for 10-20 minutes on the stove. The longer the herbs are steeped, the more of the mineral nutrition is extracted, but shorter infusings still do possess significant virtue (though less mineral nutrition).

This is really a "base recipe", and I frequently add a bit of alfalfa, maybe some lemon balm, mint and add or substitute other herbs as they're around or as they seem indicated.

The nourishment provided by this tea will bring benefit far beyond pregnancy, into nursing or daily life for moms, dads and children.

The chart below is from an article by herbalist Paul Bergner, but the info comes from Pederson's Nutritional Herbology. The nutrient levels were, I believe, assessed by burning the herbs down to white ash and then assessing the nutrient levels; hence, an infusion of the plant won't offer all of the nutrients indicated here at these levels, but it does show how immensely mineral rich they are.

The Mineral Content of Selected Herbs (per ounce)*

	Calcium (Mg)	Chromium (mcg)	Iron (mg)	Magnesium (mg)	Potassium (mg)	Selenium (mcg)
Alfalfa	299	30	0.87	76	400	0
Burdock	244	10	4.9	179	560	50
Catnip	205	90	4.6	69	783	410
	Calcium (Mg)	Chromium (mcg)	Iron (mg)	Magnesium (mg)	Potassium (mg)	Selenium (mcg)
Chickweed	403	40	8.4	176	280	140
Comfrey leaf	600	60	0.4	23	566	40
Horsetail	630	10	4.1	145	520	40
Kelp	1013	20	0.5	289	703	60
Licorice	292	60	2.9	321	380	0
Marshmallow	272	50	3.8	172	403	110
Nettle Leaf	966	130	1.4	286	583	70
Oatstraw	476	130	0.4	400	90	40
Peppermint	540	0	2.0	220	753	40
Red Clover	436	110	0.0	116	666	30
Raspberry	403	40	3.3	106	446	80
Skullcap	151	20	0.8	37	726	30

(paul bergner ~ the mineral content of herbal decoctions)

Aviva Romm's Iron Syrup…

This syrup not only provides iron, found both in the herbs and in the molasses, but it also improves the assimilation and utilization of iron by the body. It's easy and inexpensive to make, doesn't cause the digestive distress that many iron supplements do, and also contains folate.

- Put 1/2 ounce dry yellow dock root and 1/2 ounce dry dandelion roots into a sauce pan with a quart of boiling water. Cover and steep overnight.
- In the morning, bring to just shy of a boil and simmer for 30 minutes or so.
- Strain out the roots, return the tea to the saucepan, and simmer uncovered (low heat) until the liquid is reduced to 1 cup.
- Add 1/2 cup of blackstrap molasses, stir well, and remove from heat.
- Pour into a jar, cool to room temperature, label the jar, and store it in the refrigerator.

It will keep for many months. Dosage is 1 to 2 tablespoons daily.

B 12 deficiency…

B12 is easily supplied by modest meat consumption, and if it is present in someone consuming meat, there could be problems with absorption due to sluggish metabolism or deficient secretion of intrinsic factor. Bitter flavored herbs can often be of great herbs. Many leafy green vegetables such as mustard greens, collard greens, endive, radicchio, dandelion greens supply both immense mineral nutrition and bitterness, which impacts digestive secretions and functions when the bitter taste receptors send signals to the digestive system via the enteric nervous system. These nutritive bitters are of foundational importance, and are an important part of the diet. Though not a replacement for nutritious greens, a simple bitter extract can also be used, and would be especially indicated if sluggish metabolism, gas, cramping or general indigestion is present:

Combine the tinctures of:

- 3 parts dandelion root
- 1/2 part orange peel
- 1/2 part ginger root

Take 5-10 drops before meals.

If B12 deficiency is associated with lack of intake (for example, from a vegan mother), supplements (I generally suggest the methylcobalamin form) may be used preventively, but B12 shot is probably the most efficient in cases where the deficiency is already present and symptoms have manifested; B12 supplements can be used as follow up, or in less severe cases. Despite information from seemingly reliable sources, while B12 *does* exist in spirulina and some other plants/algae, these also contain B12 analogues that actually block B12 absorption and can make the deficiency worse (while providing misleading tests results). It's important to me that this information doesn't come off as being "anti-vegan", so please do look into the detailed and pro-vegan information here and here (the latter link is from Gabriel Cousens, who states that the information he had previously offered in "Conscious Eating" about B12 being available from plant sources was inaccurate).

This is a very important consideration, as maternal B12 deficiency (and deficiency while breastfeeding) can have long term health effects on children. Jack Norris writes at VeganHealth.org "If the mother is B12 deficient during pregnancy, the baby may have low B12 levels and some have developed clinical signs of deficiency as young as 2 weeks of age."

magnesium...

Adequate magnesium, for a number of reasons (high among them being soil depletion) is very hard to obtain dietarily, and most Americans are sorely deficient in this vital mineral, a condition aggravated by increased need during pregnancy. Magnesium deficiency can be characterized by increased muscular tension, spasm, charlie horses, restless leg syndrome, and often hypertension and palpitations.

The RDA of 400mg a day is often clinically inefficient to restore a person from a state of deficiency; generally, 600-800mg of a chelated form of magnesium is required. This should be taken in divided doses to prevent loose stool, which is not a sign you're getting too much magnesium, but too much at one time. Magnesium citrate is a common chelated form.

Chelated minerals, though, require adequate stomach acid to break down and make available, and sometimes can pass through a person with little to no absorption. While obviously restoring proper acid levels is important (bitters are indicated here), ionic forms of magnesium can be taken and are completely absorbable. Good products would include Pure Essence Labs' Magnesium Plus Ionic Fizz, Peter Gilham's Natural Calm or Trace Minerals Research's Ionic Magnesium (this is an excellent product, but many people find it rather harsh tasting).

Because supplements can be expensive, and magnesium is less commonly available outside of health food stores, I offer this recipe (well, and also because it works as good as or better than any form I've ever used):

Paul Bergner's formula for magnesium acetate...

Combine:

- 2 ounces Milk of Magnesia (look for a form without added flavors or creepy stuff)
- 7 ounces apple cider vinegar (organic, ideally)

When these two liquids are mixed, the acetic acid acts on the milk of magnesia to form an ionic form of magnesium acetate. Does is a tablespoon twice daily, diluted in water of juice.

Vitamin D & Omega 3 Essential Fatty Acids...

Both of these nutrients are essential, and often deficient in modern diets. Vitamin D is best utilized as cholecalciferol, or Vitamin D3. This can be created naturally via 20-40 minutes of sun exposure on bare skin (as much as possible), generally when the sun is high in the sky, between, say, 11 am and 1pm (or, as folk tradition goes, when your shadow is shorter than you are). If sun exposure is lacking, supplementation is the most reliable way to ensure adequate levels. The most effective and cost efficient form is drops; usually these are pure D3 in olive oil, and they have no taste. One drop may have as much as 2000 IUs. The RDA – 400IUs, is insufficient to do any more than prevent rickets, and doses for adults ranging from 4000-6000IUs are safe. Some people need much more to restore them from a long standing deficiency; in such cases, tests are ideal. Shoot for levels between 50 & 80 ng/mL. Extensive information on Vitamin D can be found here, and info specific to pregnancy here.

Omega 3 Essential Fatty Acids are likewise, as the name suggests, essential, but too often deficient. Perhaps the best most widely available plant source is flax seed. Because flax seed oil is incredibly unstable, I strongly recommend against using the extracted oil, or pre-ground seeds. The best way to use it is to grind seeds as needed in a coffee grinder, and use liberally on and in food. Freeze any excess to prevent rancidity. Another issue with flax seed is bioavailability. Flax contains the short chain Omega 3 alpha-linolenic acid (ALA). This must be converted to the long-chain omega-3 fatty acids eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and

docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) to be optimally utilized, and most people seem only to be able to muster a 5% -10% conversion. I've heard it reported that some people lack entirely the ability to make the conversion at all. This doesn't prompt me to recommend anyone avoid flax seed, but it may prompt the need for animal based sources, which include fatty fish like salmon, herring and sardines (these must be wild and not farmed), or free ranging animals like deer, elk, or caribou, and to a lesser extent buffalo and grass fed cattle. Insects are also an excellent source of Omega 3 EFAs.

If food sources prove insufficient, then fish/cod liver oil is probably the best supplemental source. Carlsen's, Nordic Naturals and Green Pastures are high quality sources (I, and many others, find Nordic Naturals to be less offensively fishy than Carlsen's or Green Pastures; I like and use their Arctic Cod Liver Oil; of that).

Because different products have widely varying EPA/DHA levels per serving/dosage, its hards to give a suggested dose in teaspoons. Nordic Naturals Arctic Cod Liver oil has a bit over 1000mg per teaspoon, and 1-2 teaspoons is an adequate dose, so you can use that as a guideline.

Another plant source of Omega 3's I'd recommend (because it's delicious) would be the rather tasty green and common weed purslane, though this as well contains ALA and not EPA, and I don't currently know how much you'd need to consume to provide adequate Omega 3s. For vegans/vegetarians, I'd advise the use of one of the algae-based DHA supplements along with (not instead of) plants containing ALA.

Extensive links to research on Omega 3s in pregnancy can be found here.

the importance of leafy greens...

Perhaps one of the most important additions to one's diet during pregnancy (or, well, for anyone) is the liberal inclusion of leafy greens. Dark, leafy green vegetables are among the most important foods we consume, and I frequently see them undereaten by both omnivores and vegetarians/vegans. Kale, collards, spinach, arugula, as well as wild green like dandelion, chickory, purslane, and nettle are among the most deeply nourishing foods available to us, offering a host of minerals and nutrients. A mix of hard/earthy (kale, nettle), sour (spinach, sorrel), spicy (arugula, pepperweed) and bitter (dandelion, radicchio) greens can be enjoyed in more than just salad; try them in omelets, stir fries, soups & stews, over sandwiches, in pasta or as their own side. If you're not used to eating anything wilder than romaine, you might add them in conservatively at first, but as your tastes awaken to recognize them, you'll find that they're not only deeply nourishing, but equally satiating.

Ann Arbor herbalist Linda Diane Feldt has a spectacular book on bitter and other greens called Spinach and Beyond: Loving Life and Dark Green Leafy Vegetables that I highly recommend.

Herbs contraindicated in pregnancy...

This is, understandably, information considered to be immensely important. And yet, whenever lists such as these appear, I feel they lack nuance, and always seem to include herbs liberally, even when contraindications are more theoretical in nature. Perhaps the best advice is that herbs used during pregnancy should on the whole be those that are nourishing, food-like nutritive tonics, or on the gentle end of the medicinal spectrum. The more active a plant, the more need for consideration, and input from someone knowledgeable in their use.

That all said, here's a list by Aviva Romm:

herbs to avoid during pregnancy

The lists of herbs under each category constitute representative examples and are not exhaustive. Additional herbs may fall into any of these categories.

Abortifacients and Emmenagogues

Angelica
Mugwort
Pennyroyal essential oil
Rue
Safflower
Scotch Broom
Tansy
Thuja
Wormwood
Yarrow

Essential Oils and Volatile Oils*

Oregano
Pennyroyal
Peppermint
Sage
Tansy
Thuja
Thyme

Alkaloids*

Barberry
Borage (PLAs)
Coltsfoot (PLAs)
Comfrey (PLAs)
Goldenseal
Oregon Grape

Teratogens

(can cause developmental malformations)
Conium spp
Datura spp
Ferual spp
Lupinus spp
Nicotiana spp
Prunus spp
Senecio spp
Solanum spp
Sorghum
Trachymene spp
Veratrum spp

Stimulating Laxatives

Aloes
Buckthorn
Cascara sagrada
Castor Oil
Rhubarb

Stimulants/Depressants

Coffee
Ephedra
Guarana
Kava

Phytoestrogens

Hops
Isoflavone extracts
Red Clover

**Avoid internal use; external use may be acceptable under the guidance of an experienced practitioner of botanical medicine*

Honestly, there are some herbs I don't think belong here; red clover being one I don't feel is forceful enough in its action as a phytoestrogen to merit exclusion. And in reality, it is probably unlikely that many of these herbs would induce a miscarriage. Ginger is an emmenogogue, after all, and there are alkaloids in tomatoes, green and black tea. And while most of the herbs listed as teratogens are outright poisonous (some deadly, and best avoided not just when pregnant but when alive), "prunus spp." would include wild cherry bark, which I'd consider fine as a syrup in coughs and peach leaves and twigs, which is a traditional remedy for extreme nausea and heartburn.

But this is not to say that this list is a bad one; it is indeed really quite a good one because it explains a bit about the rationale for inclusion, rather than just being a list of names of plants

all lumped together. The two considerations I think make sense to temper lists like this is that some exceptions should be made as need indicates (ideally when *why* the exception is being made is clearly understood), and that one shouldn't necessarily go into an outright panic when they see something they've used (like perhaps red clover in tea or oregano used sparingly in cooking).

Despite written info to the contrary, I would absolutely avoid the internal use of comfrey or other herbs containing potentially toxic pyrolizidine alkaloids (PLAs) in pregnancy, as there are documented cases of veno-occlusive liver disease in newborns attributed to PLAs. Yes, rare, but possible nonetheless.

The bottom line rule of thumb is to ask an experienced herbalist or midwife before using any herbs listed as contraindicated during pregnancy.

While, as mentioned above, the ideal use of plants during pregnancy is as nutritive tonics, need for medicinal preparations do arise. In these cases, women seeking natural remedies have access to a slew of options, and herbs are one among many. Quite often, I here homeopathy cited as being ideal, as its remedies are considered benign and without the possibility of side effects. This is on the whole true, though it perhaps ignores the possibility of aggravations, or the possibility that if the wrong remedy is chosen it won't work at all. But my preference for herbs has little to do with any antipathy towards homeopathy, or any other choice or modality. It has to do with the simple fact that the use of simple herbal preparations is what our body is made (or created, or evolved, or whatever) for. Since before our kind walked on this earth, herbs have nurtured, sustained pregnancy, and eased its discomforts. As herbalist Rosemary Gladstar reminds us, "Herbalism is the oldest system of healing on the planet".

Another important consideration is that to a great degree, using simple herbal preparations can remove financial barriers and the consumerism that is associated with so many options. There is little you can buy at a health food store that you can't make better in your kitchen, and bulk herbs, if purchased, are usually quite affordable.

So, using herbs medicinally can be an empowering option, provided one remembers to stick with gentle, tried and true herbs, and seek out adequate counsel if seeking to apply any plants of a more overtly medicinal nature, or if they in any way lack confidence in dealing with the problem at hand.

Because the issues that can arise during a pregnancy are myriad, and can range widely from influenza to cystitis to allergies, I can't possibly cover even most of the potential issues that might occur. I'll therefore try to address the most common, with some thoughts on differentiating how different plants might be appropriate in individual situations. This differentiation is done by trying to assess the qualitative nature of the problem and treating that, rather than just associating the name of the problem with the names of herbs that are supposed to be good for it.

morning sickness, nausea and heartburn...

This is perhaps one of the most common complaints, and can range from an inconvenience to endure to an incapacitating woe. Of foundational importance is diet and nutrition.

Ginger is one option, but not everyone likes or does well with it - it's very stimulating, and better for overall sluggishness (in digestion, in circulation…). If given it to someone who already feels hot and flushed, and it can aggravate. Look at the person… do they look pale, or flushed? Do they need something warming and stimulating? If not, then perhaps ginger isn't the first place to start.

Peach leaf & twig, as well, is excellent for morning sickness, and cooling in nature. I like the tincture in small doses, but the tea can work as well (soak organic peach leaves in cool water overnight). If the person seems "hot" and agitated, it's more clearly indicated than ginger. Peach also excels at easing heartburn/reflux, and so is useful if this is aggravating or causing nausea. The old Appalachian herbalist Tommie Bass had a formula for tea that was equal parts red clover, peach and passion flower. This is a nice blend, cooling and calming. As peach leaf is close to impossible to obtain commercially (you'll not find it in any local health food store); a suitable substitute is umeboshi plum paste, which, like peach, is cooling in nature.

Many mints can be helpful - not just spearmint or peppermint, but also some other mint family plants - perhaps a small dose of lemon balm if there is a lot of tension and stress, or skullcap with moodiness and irritability. Catnip is specific for a nervous stomach.

Of course, you'll often see it stated that most of these mints are contraindicated during pregnancy, as most possess some degree of emmenogogue action, but so does ginger, no? I think these herbs, for the most part, are made out to be more intimidating than they are. Someday I pray that someone will write something on this topic, so that some distinction is drawn between the herbs you certainly wouldn't want to use during pregnancy (say, large doses of blue cohosh tincture) and things that are mild enough not to likely be a problem (say, a few drops of catnip tincture diluted in water and sipped on). I've had a couple instances when herbs on "do not use if pregnant" lists caused panic, like where a woman called because she found out she was pregnant but had drunk catnip tea and wondered what she could do to save the baby. While liberal caution is indeed merited, these can be overreactions, and the intense anxiety can be more problematic than the plant. Of course (again), these assessments are best made with the help of someone knowledgeable about herbs… I'm not advocating anyone disregard information found on such lists without good reason.

A very important consideration isn't just which herb to use, but how it should be consumed. Even, for example, if ginger was clearly indicated, if someone makes a cup of tea and tries to sit down and drink it in a sitting, it may very likely aggravate their nausea (or materially manifest it). It's far better to start off very subtly, initially just smelling the rising steam from a cup of tea, or wetting the lips with it. Maybe a small sip. Then, breath, relax, and sip more when you feel up to it. Let how you feel guide you. It may be that several sips over the course of a day do wonders, when that same quantity of tea (or diluted tincture) in one sitting would've had you running for the loo.

constipation…

Constipation can result from several causes, and is best treated with those causes in mind.

Lack of bowel tone can be an issue, you'll often (though not always) find constipation alternating with loose stools, usually more one than the other. Most of IBS falls into this category. Astringents (cranesbill, blackberry, avens) & healing mucilages (marshmallow or slippery elm) are used, more astringents if loose stools predominate, more mucilages if constipation does. Probably good in both cases to add tissue healers like plantain and calendula.

Sluggish digestion/metabolism with difficultly digesting fats and oils is a common cause of constipation. Bitters (like dandelion root) and warming aromatic spices (like fennel, chamomile, or orange peel) help here; more aromatic spices is gas and cramping predominate.

Tension could cause constipation if the intestines are all tense & cramped and inhibit peristalsis; there's often griping and gas pains involved. Aromatic bitters and antispasmodics (wild yam, cramp bark) would help.

Dryness from lack of fluids (both water and oil based) can be a big issue, and may be clearly indicated by hardness of the stools. If you grind up flax seeds and mix it 50/50 with slippery elm powder, you can mix a tablespoon of this in some warm water and drink it without straining (after the slippery elm has hydrated). This provides both bulk and lubrication, and I've frequently seen it do miracles. If you use plantain tea instead of water, it will heighten its healing influence to the digestive tissues. If chamomile tea is used, it'll help lessen tension and resolve inflammation. This dryness could arise from deficient bile production; if so, use bitters, perhaps a formula like the dandelion/orange peel/ginger one given above.

If adding fiber increases pain, that's likely a sign that the tissues are enflamed, and mucilages like slippery elm and marshmallow are super important.

If the problem is a chronic one, I'd advise (strongly) to consider would be doing an elimination diet to check for food allergies; if the problem is ongoing rather and episodic, these are likely at play. Don't remove a whole bunch of foods at once; pick one possible food group (casein containing dairy or gluten containing grains) and start with that. If the elimination diet is too hard during pregnancy, don't force it, but rather limit suspected allergens as best you're able.

bleeding/spotting and cramping...

While these distressing conditions do not inherently imply a serious condition, an immediate call to a midwife is warranted, and an appointment as soon as possible to assess the situation. Cramp bark tincture or tea can be very helpful here, and is a traditional remedy for both minor issues related to cramping and bleeding, and to threatened miscarriage as well. It should be noted that cramp bark cannot be used to stop a miscarriage that needs to happen, not does it, to my knowledge, address threatened miscarriage associated with deficiency progesterone levels. Still, use of cramp bark would likely be indicated between the time symptoms start and you can see your midwife. Wild yam is another consideration here, though works more on the cramping than bleeding. Despite the abundant claims, there is little evidence that wild yam possesses any progesteronic activity when used herbally. Its history as a precursor to progesterone requires a lab to make this conversion.

If low progesterone appears to be the causative issue, you may find suggestions to take chaste berry, *Vitex agnus-castus*. There does indeed seem to be a progesteronic activity present in this plant, but remember that progesterone needs raw materials to be produced; herbalist Paul Bergner states that "Vitex probably affects the hormones by stimulating dopamine in the hypothalamus. This in turn suppresses prolactin and favors progesterone. That's the best we know from science, though there may be more to come. So the question is why is somebody dopamine deficient in the first place. The following are all required for dopamine manufacture: Magnesium, B-6, Zinc, essential fatty acids, vitamin C, and iron. In our clinic we have repeatedly corrected hormonal imbalances with such a fundamental dietary and supplement program, within 2 cycles, and this also helped with addictions, which may also be related to low dopamine. And, BTW, chocolate and orange juice are also dopaminergic, so by all means include that in your program. A 1-ounce dose of dark chocolate affects dopamine." I'd add Vitamin D3 to Paul's list and state that cholesterol is the building block of hormones. Low fat, low cholesterol diets are not a great (or even good) idea.

Very few conditions faced during pregnancy are as stressful as this. I highly recommend Aviva Romm's Natural Pregnancy Book, which has very good information on this topic.

hypertension…

The first considerations here should be nutritional: hypertension is correlated with deficiencies of magnesium, Omega 3 EFAs, & Vitamin D. These should be introduced along with or before turning to herbs, so you don't allow an underlying nutritional deficiency to persist and only treat the symptoms. Of course, it would be important to look for other signs that might indicate pre-eclampsia. This potential should not be ignored.

Hawthorne leaves, flowers, thorns, stems & berries are often indicated here, as they act as trophorestoratives to the heart and circulatory system. Hawthorne *may* be contraindicated if someone is on beta-blockers, or digoxin/digosin. It is good as a tea, a tincture, a jelly, a wine, or pretty much any other preparation. In addition to being good for the physical heart, hawthorne helps with emotional heart troubles, and would be indicated when the heart is guarded from previous emotional experiences, or when impacted by grief or loss.

Another excellent herb, perhaps best prepared as tea (it could be added to pregnancy tea blends) is linden leaves & flowers. This is a gentle but effective relaxant to both the heart and the nerves, and quite benign.

These herbs can be supported in their action by relaxant nerviness. Passion flower can be helpful either in tea or tincture form, especially when there's insomnia or anxiety with incessant circular thinking. Skullcap would be associated with moodiness and emotional reactivity (small doses of tincture as needed), and blue vervain, in 5ish drop doses of tincture, is helpful when anxiety arises as a result of frustration when one can't keep up and keep doing things at (sometimes) extremely high achieving levels… lemon balm is good here as well. Motherwort, in small doses of tincture (5 drops a few times a day) is good when worry and anxiety aggravate blood pressure, and maybe are associated with palpitations.

Hops and valerian are more overtly medicinal, and while I don't rule them out, I'm (far) less likely to recommend their use.

anxiety/moodiness…

This can correlate with hypertension, though it doesn't necessarily. Look over the supportive nervines listed under hypertension, as well as the nutritional considerations.

If chronic anxiety or stress states are involved, a tincture of fresh milky oat seed would be indicated; this acts as a trophorestorative for the nerves and adrenals, and is best used long term. I'll often combine this with fresh nettle tincture to address an underlying hypervigilance of the nervous system. More detailed thoughts on these two plants can be found here.

I might choose from many other nervines, depending on how anxiety of unease is manifesting in an individual person. If digestion was sluggish, I might also encourage bitters, which frequently help to stabilize mood (most mood related chemicals in the body are created in the gut, not the brain). In a pinch, the Bach Flower Essence Rescue Remedy is often very helpful.

sore breasts…

Topical infused oils are an excellent option here. Rather than using strong essential oils diluted in a carrier, herbs can be directly infused in a fixed/carrier oil (olive oil being most common, but by no means the only option – any fixed oil will do). Infused oils are extremely

effective preparations, and have none of the potential issues (or costs) involved with essential oils.

St. john's wort infused oil is very good are relieving the ache of sore tissues, as is dandelion flower oil, which also acts as a lymphatic decongestant. These two oils blended together would be an excellent application.

backache & sciatica...

This is a common issue, resulting from not only excess weight, but internal pressure and a shift in one's center of gravity. Massage can be very helpful, and the same oils good for sore breasts will be helpful for sore backs. Arnica oil can also be used here, as can goldenrod oil. Infused kava kava oil is nothing short of divine. I don't feel that limited topical use of these oils is problematic.

Again, magnesium helps with tension, and shouldn't be overlooked. Relaxant herbs that act as antispasmodics on the muscles can further help here. Cramp bark and st john's wort can be exceptionally effective. Solomon's seal root is useful for supporting the tendons, ligaments and fascia; it helps by soothing inflammation and providing moisture to them; this will ease discomfort, and at the same time it allows for the flexibility to shift needed during pregnancy and birth.

St. john's wort is perhaps the first herb to think of for sciatica, as it's one of herbalism's premier nerve remedies, soothing inflammation and restoring function to damaged or irritated nerves. Topical and internal use is ideal.

If the spine wants to keep slipping out of alignment (which may be what's aggravating the nerves), mullein root can be an invaluable remedy; 5-10 drop doses can sometimes help get the spine back into place, though exactly how it does so, I have no idea.

Much more information on using herbs to treat back and spinal issues can be found here.

leg cramps...

Leg cramps are very often associated with magnesium deficiency, and magnesium supplementation should be the first approach taken (note the magnesium section above). Some people have also had good results with calcium and potassium; these are more easily obtained via food sources, and my preference would be to use food before supplements when possible. Unless you aren't consuming foods containing calcium (like dairy and leafy greens), I don't advise using calcium supplements. Most people get enough calcium through the diet, and their issues with it are caused by lack of cofactors such as magnesium, D3, Omega 3 EFAs, boron and silica. Excess calcium supplementation (and excess might be any) may be correlated with kidney stones and heart disease.

Passion flower, skullcap and valerian can be useful, though generally I'd choose to avoid valerian unless other options fail, and ongoing use can occasionally lead to moodiness or despondency. Some people have a reverse reaction to valerian as well, being agitated rather than relaxed by it. Look for flushed faces, and avoid giving it to these women.

hemorrhoids...

One of the great herbs for the address of hemorrhoids is Stone Root, Collinsonia canadense. The old eclectic herbalist Finley Ellingwood wrote that "Collinsonia is of great value in the hemorrhoids of the pregnant female, with imperfect venous circulation in the pelvic viscera."

Topically, there are a few options that are good... a salve or oil of things that are astringent (periwinkle, oak bark, witch hazel), some yarrow, tissue healing herbs like plantain, calendula or comfrey, and specific to hemorrhoids (horse chestnut or stone root). You can also mix tinctures of those herbs into a base of distilled witch hazel, use that to wet a cotton ball, and tuck that up between the cheeks. Most people's butts should hold that in place, though it will sometimes sting initially; maybe add a bit of aloe vera gel to offset the drying action of the witch hazel. I prefer oils or salves. Sitz baths in some astringent/yarrow tea are an excellent idea, if practical.

post partum bath herbs...

Making a post partum bath blend is a delight. While recipes abound, I generally think of the properties I'd like the blend to have:

Something to help stop bleeding: these would generally be astringents, and could include shepherd's purse, uva ursi, witch hazel, raspberry, & lady's mantle or yarrow, which seems to stop bleeding by directly clotting the blood.
Something to help heal tissue: plantain (I'd make this a major ingredient), comfrey, calendula…
Something to help help soothe tissues: all the above, plus violet leaf, chickweed, mallow leaf, oats, evening primrose flowers/leaves…
Something to help help soothe the nerves: lavender, chamomile, rose petals…
Something antiseptic: the astringents and the aromatics (chamomile, lavender and yarrow) are all antiseptic. One could also add myrrh, echinacea, alder or a host of other antimicrobials.

Pick from herbs in each category and be creative (oh; and use plantain!). This same blend can also be used to fill a peri-bottle. Avoid using straight or mostly comfrey; I know of cases in which it started to heal the skin before the lips of the tear were brought together. A little in a blend is fine.

specific thoughts about the cohoshes and the idea of partus preparators...

Black cohosh (Cimicifuga racemosa) and blue cohosh (Caulophyllum thalictroides) are very often said to be used together at the end of pregnancy as "partus preparators"... things that "help ensure an easy birth". This usage is attributed to native americans, but if you go back into ethnobotanical literature the earliest mention you'll find of this is in an herb catalog under blue cohosh; it said something to the effect of native americans using this to make birth painless and easy. So basically, the earliest mention of this use is in advertising. I'm not quite sure how or why it got paired up with black cohosh, other than the similar common names and that they're both reproductively active. Paul Bergner gives a nice overview of the recorded uses of blue cohosh here.

The proper use of blue cohosh in midwifery is to address stalled labor; it'll stimulate contractions. Acting oppositely, it can also be used to ease nervous tension arising from weakness of tissues. You pretty much can't find a decent write up on it in ~any~ modern herb book because to a great extent, understanding of its use has been lost.

This, though, is an excellent write up by William Cook in his Physio-Medical Dispensatory:

> The root of this plant, as a popular parturient among the "medicine men" of the Indians. To Dr. Isaac Smith, of New York, is chiefly due its introduction to the profession. It is a moderate diffusive, stimulating and relaxing in about equal degrees, spending its main powers upon the nervous system. These qualities make it one of the very best of antispasmodics, to relieve nervous feebleness with irritability, as in crampings of the

bowels, twitching of the muscles in typhoid and parturient cases, hysteria, painful menstruation, colic, etc. Its efficacy in these cases is remarkable; and it is also a valuable adjunct to other suitable agents in the treatment of puerperal convulsions, epilepsy, and chorea. It enjoys deserved reputation in neuralgic forms of rheumatism, especially that form which passes with some as chronic inflammation of the womb. It sustains the nervous system, but at the same time soothes it; and is of especial service in strengthening and relieving painful functional difficulties of the female generative organs. It is one of the most valuable of all parturients, when the uterine action is becoming weary; in which case it may be combined with the Composition Powder; or with cypripedium, and a very little capsicum (or bayberry) added when depression is considerable. It promotes diuresis apparently by sustaining the pelvic nerves; and in the same way strengthens the uterus in leucorrhea and insufficient menstruation; yet can not properly be classed as either a diuretic or emmenagogue. By the same kind of action, it is useful in weak kidneys, albuminous urine, chronic difficulties of the prostate, nervous restlessness during pregnancy, and previous to parturition to give tone and comfort to the uterus. For these several purposes, it is generally combined with other suitable agents, such as aralia racemosa, mitchella, uva ursi, convallaria, liriodendron, etc. The real value of this article in these varied connections, is not fully appreciated; and it is too often laid aside on the decidedly false impression that it is a stimulating emmenagogue of harmful proclivities. I commend it as one of the choicest nervines and antispasmodics of the Materia Medica. E. H. Lowe, M. D., of Sandwich, Illinois, tells me its antispasmodic virtues may be used to much advantage in asthma, especially in combination with diaphoretic relaxants. It is a good addition to hydrastis and myrica, as a wash to aphthous ulcers; to dioscorea and ginger for all colics; and may be used with prunus and nymphea on weak and irritable sores. It is rarely used in powder, but mostly by infusion. An infusion of the berries is said to be almost infallible for relieving persistent spasmodic vomiting.

Its use in homeopathy is a bit more obscure to me; *I* think the main reason it was used was baseless... people said, oh, herbal blue cohosh (used improperly) is too strong, so lets use (improperly) the homeopathic blue cohosh.

Part of why I say this is because if you look at Boericke's Materia Medica, it says this under *Caulophyllum thalictroides*, Blue Cohosh:

This is a woman's remedy. Want of tonicity of the womb. During labor, when the pains are deficient and the patient is exhausted and fretful. Besides, it has a special affinity for the smaller joints. Thrush, locally and internally.

Stomach.--Cardialgia, spasms of stomach. Dyspepsia with spasmodic symptoms.
Female.--Extraordinary rigidity of os (Bell; Gels; Ver v). Spasmodic and severe pains, which fly in all directions; shivering, without progress; false pains. Revives labor pains and furthers progress of labor. After pains. Leucorrhoea, with moth-spots on forehead. Habitual abortion from uterine debility (Helon; Puls; Sab). Needlelike pains in cervix. Dysmenorrhoea, with pains flying to other parts of body. Lochia protracted; great atony. Menses and leucorrhoea profuse.
Skin.--Discoloration of skin in women with menstrual and uterine disorder.
Extremities.--Severe drawing, erratic pain and stiffness in small joints, fingers, toes, ankles, etc. Aching in wrists. Cutting pains on closing hands. Erratic pains, changing place every few minutes.
Relationship.--Incompatible: Coffea. Compare: Viol. Odor (rheumatic carpal and metacarpal joints); Cimicif; Sepia; Pulsat; Gels.
Dose.--Tincture to third attenuation.

Two things are interesting here:

First, it clearly states that the homeopaths were using a *tincture* of the plant (which would be the exact same kind of tincture herbalists were using), and only minimal dilutions (so the preparations they used traditionally weren't highly diluted) and second, *nowhere* is it stated to be used prior to labor... so this usage as a preparator isn't a traditional one in homeopathy.

Blue Cohosh was implicated in a heart attack in a newborn. *If* it was to blame, one consideration is that is was being taken in relatively large doses, in capsules, without the knowledge of the woman's midwife. Blue cohosh's traditional use refers to liberal use of the tea, or very small doses of the tincture. This indicates that the "active ingredients" are very soluble in alcohol, but not so soluble in water. If you take the herb in a capsule, you'll get a lot of it. More on this here.

An herbalist/midwife I know in Tucson, Sharon Rust, suggested to me that she felt that nervines and relaxants were far more appropriate herbs to use during labor than stimulants, as she finds that anxiety and tension are among the most likely factors to interfere with natural labor.

Beyond any of this, I think the best "preparator" is *nourishment* (which can include herbs like raspberry, nettles and oats) and trust in your body and nature, not medicinals. These are best left used when there is a particular need for them, not “just because”.

For even more related information, visit my article index here, and scroll down to the reproductive/pregnancy/birth headings…

Information on gathering and preparing herbs can be found here.

Sources for high quality bulk herbs are listed here.

Hope you enjoyed…

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