

How To Prepare Your Chinese Herb/Formula Decoction

All the medicinal herbs we offer at the OICC are organic, lab tested, and of the highest quality.

Purpose

The purpose of steeping or decocting raw medicinal herbs in a formula is to draw out the therapeutic properties of the herbs into the water. The preparation process is similar to making a vegetable broth.

The Tea Pot

The recommended container is **ceramic or glass**, or **stainless steel** and it is important that it **has a lid**. You should avoid metal or cast iron, or aluminum pots as herbs can react with the metals altering their therapeutic properties.

Water

Room temperature spring water or purified water are the best choices for cooking herbs.

Cooking the Herbs

The water should cover the herbs by about 2 inches or more and they should be soaked for at least 30 minutes before turning the heat on. Bring the water to a rolling boil, then reduce the heat down to a low simmer. Typically the average time to cook your herbs is around 45 minutes from the boiling point, unless otherwise instructed.

If you are using a pressure cooker or the pack of herbs weights less than 50g, or the herbs are finely cut the soaking time can be skipped and the cooking time shortened.

Avoid lifting the lid when cooking as the important properties can evaporate and escape.

Straining and Drinking the Tea

Once cooked, strain the herbal decoction through cheesecloth, a metal strainer, or with the lid of the teapot.

The taste of medicinal herbal teas can be unpleasant to some people, but with time patients will usually build an affinity for the formula they are drinking. If necessary, the tea can be watered down and consumed more dilute in taste. Always read the prescription you are given, occasionally there will be a recommendation to add ginger, goji berries, cinnamon, honey or other ingredients.

When To Take Herbs

Herbal formulas are best taken 1 to 2 hours before eating or between meals to allow for maximum digestion and absorption of the herbs. Make sure when you drink that the liquid is warm.

FAQ - Frequently asked questions

What is a decoction?

A herbal soup, it is similar to preparing a soup broth. The purpose of a decoction is to draw out the therapeutic properties of a set of herbs into the water.

How should I prepare the decoction?

You prepare it like you would make a broth. Preparation of ONE PACK of herbs, yield enough drink for TWO DAYS, unless otherwise prescribed. The steps are:

1. rinse,
2. soak, for about 30 minutes (if only small amount of herbs are finely cut, you can skip this step)
3. add water, typically about 2 inches or more above level of herbs
4. bring to a boil then reduce to a simmer, keep the lid on during this process
5. typically you will simmer for 45 minute from the boiling point, unless otherwise instructed
6. strain and discard the herbs and keep the broth only. This liquid is what you will consume.
7. divide the liquid into two equal amount; one will be for one day, the second will be for the next day. The portion for the second day can be kept in the fridge overnight to ensure freshness. Remember to consume warm, even the second day.

How much water should I put in?

The amount of water is not greatly important since the goal of this process is extraction. Make sure you use enough water to cover the herbs for the whole duration of the herb extraction (usually about two inches above the herbs). Also ensure that you have enough liquid to split into two days worth of portions, keeping in mind that the preparation of herbs is generally for two days unless otherwise instructed.

Note that herbs start as dried herbs and the soaking is part of the rehydration process. Once you soak them, the volume of water may be less. You may have to add in more water to cover the herbs so they do not boil down during the boiling/simmering time.

What if I do not have time to soak?

The soaking time during preparation is to rehydrate the herbs from their dried state. If you are short on time, you can skip the soaking but you will have to boil for longer if your herbs are thick, dense or in large pieces (approximately 15 extra minutes). If your herbs are small, light, or less than 50g you can skip the soaking and not worry about extra boiling time.

Why is there is a smaller baggy of finely cut herbs in my package of herbs?

Sometime you will find a smaller baggy inside of the package of herbs. This smaller baggy generally has herbs which are finely cut, or light herbs such as leaves. This smaller baggy will be added to the whole decoction for the last 15 minutes of simmering only. This is to avoid the finely cut herbs from getting too soggy and mushy.

I have finished the extraction of the herbs. I strained them and I have too much of water. What should I do?

Discard the herbs. Put the decoction liquid back in the pot. You can continue to simmer the decoction until it reduces to a desired amount of liquid. Keep in mind that the more reduced the formula, the more potent the taste.

What if the decoction taste is too strong and I cannot stomach it, or there is not enough water to divide for the two days?

If you find the taste of your decoction is too strong and you cannot bare to drink it, you can add more water. This will dilute the taste. Keep in mind that by adding more water you will have to consume more liquid in order to drink all of the extracted properties of the herbs. In some cases other ingredients such as lemon or honey can be added, only do this after talking to the prescriber as some ingredients can change the properties of the formula and therefore may change the effectiveness of the formula.

Should I take in small sips throughout the day or all at once?

Like anything new in your diet, you should gradually introduce herbs to your body. When you first start herbs, or when a new herb has been added to your formula, it is recommended that you take the tea in small sips (warmed) throughout the day. This is to monitor for any allergies, or adverse reactions, although this is very rare. Once you are used to a formula you can take in larger drinks fewer times in the day.

Can I prepare multiple packs and store for later days?

We do not recommend that you prepare for more than two days in advance. This is like making a soup, you want it to be as fresh as possible. After two days, the taste may change and it will not be as fresh.

Cost is an issue to me. How can I optimize the use of the herbs?

Usually, herbs are boiled once if you simmer long enough. You can always combine two sets of dredges into one to form a third one if cost is an issue to you. The taste will be lighter; the ingredients will be less active. This approach is adequate for the maintenance phase.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, please contact a member of our staff at 613-792-1222 ext. 0 or via info@oicc.ca Thank you.