Tinctures:

Tinctures extract the chemical constituents in alcohol, vinegar, or vegetable glycerin. Alcohol is most effective and therefore most commonly used. Vinegar or vegetable glycerin can be used where there is a reason not to use alcohol, such as for children. Tinctures are invaluable, as water will retrieve only some of the medicinal properties.

Factors in Preparing a Tincture:

There are two factors that need to be considered when preparing a tincture:

- Strength of the solvent
- The herbal material.

Alcohol is the strongest solvent and two weeks is the minimum time - fours weeks maximum. If the plant material is hard and woody, such as root, the more surface area that is exposed to the solvent the better and this will influence both speed and the quantity of active constituent extraction.

What solvent to use depends on what you want to extract. Alcohol tinctures are useful for alkaloids, tannins and bitter principles. Colchicine and ephedrene are two alkaloids however that are soluble in water as are tannins to some degree. Glycosides and saponins are best extracted by soaking the herb in warm water. Covered hot water infusions are an effective solvent for essential oils and vitamins and minerals but distillation is the usual method for removing essential oil from plants. Mucilages are prepared by extraction in cold or warm water.

Basic Recipe

1-2 oz/30-60 gm of powdered or chopped herb
1 pint/600 ml of alcohol such as vodka or even cider vinegar
Mix herb with alcohol or cider vinegar.

Keep the tincture in a tightly closed jar in a warm spot (but not in the sun), for approximately two weeks. Shake the tincture two to three times every day. Strain, through pharmaceutical filter paper, a coffee filter, cheesecloth, or muslin. You may need to strain your tincture two or even three times to remove all of the herb.

Store your tincture in a dark bottle or cupboard. Half a pint or 300 ml of tincture should equal the medicinal potency of 1 oz/30 gm of the fresh herb, so approximately one teaspoon will equal the medicinal strength of one cup of infusion. Dilute at least one teaspoon of tincture to one-quarter cup water. Another formula is to add one part herb to five parts of alcohol.

Try the Tincture Making Kit available in the Apothecary Shoppe!