

[Of the Collection and Curation of Simples] Dr. Lewis

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Type

Medicine

Ingredients

vegetables

fruits

herbs

flowers

woods

barks

roots

spirit of wine

oriental spices

lime

water

gummy resin

plaster of Paris

chalk

Places

Nova Scotia

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Description

Instructions for when to gather a variety of plants to be used in the making of medicinal simples, how to best preserve them, and then how to make simple. The instructions also turn to foreign resins, earths, and salts. nn.494_96. Microfilm Reel 8063.

Transcription

OF THE COLLECTION AND CURATION OF SIMPLES

[By *Dr. Lewis.*]

VEGETABLES should be gathered chiefly from those soils, in which they naturally delight, or in which they are found most commonly to rise spontaneous; for, though many of them may be raised, and made to grow with vigour, in very different ones, their virtue generally suffers by the change. A variation of seasons occasions also differences considerable enough to require, oftentimes, an allowance to be made in quantity;

plants in general growing weaker, though more luxuriant, in rainy than in dry ones.

--Herbs and flowers are to be gathered in a clear dry day, after the morning dew is gone off from them. Leaves for the most part, are in their greatest perfection, when come to their full growth, just before the flowers appear: flowers, when mode-

rately expanded: seeds when they begin to grow dry, before they fall spontaneously: woods and barks, as is supposed, in the

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winter: annual roots, before the stalks begin to rise: biennial roots, in the autumn of the first year, or in the following spring: perennial roots, before they begin to shoot. Though the perennial, as well as biennial roots, have been commonly directed to be dug up in autumn, when the leaves wither; they are both, generally found to be most vigorous when the return of spring has renewed their vegetative power. To most of these rules there are some exceptions, which are specified under the particular subject.

Of the vegetables which lose their virtue in being dried, the greater number, perhaps all, may be preserved for a considerable length of time, by impeding the exhalation of their native moisture; for so long as they retain this, they seem to retain also their medical activity. Thus

roots have their virtue preserved by being buried in sand, which should be dry, that

they may not vegetate; leaves and flowers, of a more corruptible nature than roots, by being beaten with about thrice their weight of fine sugar to prevent their corruption, and kept in a close vessel.

Plants which bear drying are commonly hung in a warm airy place, defended from the sun. The colours of herbs and flowers are for the most part changed or destroyed, in drying, by the sun's beams; but that their medicinal virtue suffers a like diminution, does not appear. Thus much is certain, that a heat of culinary fire, equal to that of the sun in summer, does them no injury in either respect: And that both flowers and leaves, when thus hastily dried by the fire, preserve the liveliness of

their colour, and their smell and taste, more perfectly than by slow [exsiccation](#). The leaves of moderately juicy plants are reduced, by drying, to about one fourth of their original weight.

Some roots, and some other parts of vegetables, how thoroughly soever they have been dried, are liable, in keeping, to grow mouldy and carious. This inconvenience might probably be obviated by dipping them, when dried, in boiling spirit of wine, or exposing them to its vapour in a close vessel. It is said, that some of the oriental spices are made less perishable, by being dipt in a mixture of lime and water.

The pulps of fruit are separated from the seeds and membranous parts, by forcing them through a strong hair sieve. If the fruit is unripe and hard, or if it is dry, it should be previously softened by boiling in a little water; and the pulp, after passing through the sieve, is to be [inspissated](#) over a gentle fire, with care to prevent its burning.

The concrete gummy-refinous juices

brought from abroad, which have usually a considerable mixture of bits of stalks, leaves, seeds, &c. are purified, by adding so much boiling water, as will so far soften or dissolve them, that they may be pressed, whilst hot, through a strainer; and then inspissating the strained liquid, in a gentle heat, to the original consistence of the gummy-resin. If the quantity of water is considerable, the resinous part commonly separates and subsides, and in this case is to be kept by itself till towards the end of the inspissation of the gummy, at which time they may be easily united again together into an uniform mass. Some of the gummy-resins, exposed to the heat of boiling water, melt thin enough, without any addition, to be pressed through a canvas strainer. In either process, the operator must be careful to prevent as much as possible, the dissipation of the more vo-

latile parts; an injury which cannot be wholly avoided, especially when the subjects are dissolved by water. The finer tears unpurified are in many cases preferable, for internal use, to those that have been strained.

Pulverable bodies of an earthy texture; or such as are brittle and not dissoluble in water, after being reduced to a powder of moderate fineness, are brought to an impalpable or very volatile state, by grinding them with a little water on some hard smooth instrument: The matter is commodiously dried on a chalk stone, or rather on a cake of plaister of Paris, which equally absorbs the moisture, without adhering to the powder like substances of the chalky kind. Powders thus levigated are still found to contain a quantity of gross parts; which may be separated by shaking the matter with water, till it is diffused through the fluid, and then suffering it to settle: The grosser parts soon subside; and the turbid liquor, being now poured off, deposits more slowly the finer powder. By this process, powders may be

obtained of any degree of fineness; the tenuity being in proportion to the length of time that they remain suspended in the fluid. On the same principle, the bolar earths may be separated from the gritty matter naturally mixed with them, metallic bodies from those of the earthy kind, and the calces of metals from metallic particles uncalcined.

Salts are purified from indissoluble admixtures, by solution in water and filtration through paper. Water dissolves, in a boiling heat, a much larger quantity of most kinds of salts than it can retain when cold: Thus, of nitre, it dissolves when boiling near three times its own weight, but in cooling a part of the salt gradually separates, till at length, when grown thoroughly cold, in frosty weather, it does not retain one eighth its own weight, or one twenty-fourth of the quantity of salt at first dissolved. The neutral salts, or those composed of an acid and an alkali; several of those which consist of an acid and an earthy or metallic body; and many of the acid salts of vegetables; in this separation from their solutions, concrete, unless too hastily forced together by sudden cooling, or disturbed by agitation or other causes, into transparent masses, of regular figures peculiar to each particular kind of salt, and thence called crystals-- There are two general methods of recovering salts from their solutions in a crystalline form; one adapted to some salts, and the other to others. The one is, by keeping the solution in a gentle and equable warmth, that the water may gradually

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exhale and leave the salt crystallized. The other is, by boiling down the solution, till, on dropping a little of it on a cold glass plate, crystalline filaments appear; then covering the vessel, and suffering it to cool very slowly: Some of the difficultly crystallizable salts are made to shoot more freely, by adding, after sufficient

evaporation, a small proportion of rectified spirit of wine, which weakens the dissolving power of water on most kinds of sa-

line bodies.--As different salts require different quantities of water to keep them suspended; when two or more are dissolved together, they begin to concrete at different periods of the evaporation, that which requires most water for its dissolution, shooting first, and leaving the more soluble dissolved: On this foundation, salts are purified, by crystallization, from admixtures of one another.

Annotations

inspissated

The OED defines inspissate (v.) as "transitive. To thicken, condense" and "intransitive. To become thick or dense, to thicken."

exsiccation

The OED defines exsiccation (n) as "The action of drying what is moist; complete removal or absorption of moisture; thoroughly dried condition, absolute dryness."

Of the Collection and Curation of Simples recipe from Early Modern Maritime Recipes:

<https://emmr.lib.unb.ca/recipes/53>