Web Watch

Herbal Medicine/Phytotherapy Databases

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As new scientific research continues to shed light on the application and efficacy of herbs, herbal preparations, and phytochemicals, the World Wide Web is increasingly providing instant access to critical updates and new information. And, as more patients work to become partners in their own health care, many of them will be browsing for materials about their own conditions.

Today, there are many excellent databases that are devoted specifically to herbs, herbal preparations, and phytotherapy. In a few instances, the user is required to register for access; this will then allow the user to log in. But most of the sites listed below are free. Here is a sampling of some of the better botanical sites.

Dr. Duke's Phytochemical and Ethnobotanical Databases
Also known as "Father Nature's Pharmacy"
www.ars-grin.gov/duke/

James A. Duke, Ph.D., the renowned ethnobotanist and retired U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) plant economist, built this comprehensive database. This is one of the best sites for practitioners because it allows searches in a variety of ways: [Plant Searches](#), [Activity Searches](#), [Chemical Searches](#), and ways to find ethnobotanical uses for particular plants. There is also a solid listing of useful links. A practitioner can also enter a symptom such as "wound" and search for an appropriate remedy. Best of all, there is a caveat for patients who visit this site: "The USDA does not recommend self-diagnosis or self medication."

HerbMed®—from the Alternative Medicine Foundation, Inc.
www.herbmed.org/

This is an excellent resource for both practitioners and their patients. Along the left side of the screen is an alphabetical listing of herbs and botanicals. The Latin binomials are first, then the English vulgar names follow, for example, *Taraxacum officinale*—

Dandelion. When one clicks on an herb, an analysis is displayed which contains six categories of information: [Evidence for Activity](#), [Warnings](#), [Preparations](#), [Mixtures](#), [Mechanisms of Action](#), and [Other](#). At the top of the portal page, there is a search box that allows you to jump quickly to virtually any herb known to science. From there, the six categories of information are displayed, with additional links and study references.

American Botanical Council
www.herbalgram.org/

The American Botanical Council (ABC) is a not-for-profit, Austin, Texas, organization with a mission is to educate the public on the use of herbs and phytomedicinals. The ABC publishes *HerbalGram* jointly with the Herb Research Foundation; and also provides the very useful and informative "HerbClip," a biweekly service summarizing articles drawn from the mainstream and medical media. An extensive [Herbal Education Catalogue](#) is accessible on the ABC Web site. On the opening page, doing a quick search for databases brings up a wealth of links to online herbal databases. This site requires a user to register in order access some of ABC's resources.

American Herbalists Guild—Health World Online
www.healthy.net/herbalists/

This is a very comprehensive site that allows a variety of searches via specific herbs, health conditions, and health centers. The site is updated frequently and has new information that practitioners and their patients will find helpful. An excellent menu of links includes [Herbs and Children's Health](#), [Herbs and Aging](#), and more.

Herbal Hall—Home of the of the Professional Herbalists Discussion List
www.herb.com/herbal.htm

As with similar sites, there is an array of links down the left side of the screen. These include: [Features](#), [References](#), [Books](#), [HerbWalk](#), [HerbMail](#), [HerbFiles](#), [Herbs](#), [Herb FAQ](#), [Search](#), [Links](#), and [HerbNews](#). However, many of the links do not function; and entering oregano, and then kava, into the search box,

brought about an error, without any results displayed. This site might be promising in the future because there were many links that seemed to be worth reading, but the Web master needs to fix a few things first. In any event, it is a site to watch.

MEDLINE Plus—Health Information

www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/herbalmedicine.html

This essential site contains very up-to-date information from a variety of sources, which may be of practical use. Down the center of the screen is an updated list of stories pertaining to herbal applications and usually cautions about the use of specific herbs in certain situations. Sometimes, these stories are from the mainstream media, such as the Associated Press, but others come from research institutions, such as the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, the National Institute on Aging, and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

Botanical Medicine Information Resources—Directory of Databases

www.cpmcnet.columbia.edu/dept/rosenthal/Botanicals.html

As an information database, this site is extremely good. Maintained by the Richard and Hinda Rosenthal Center for Complementary & Alternative Medicine, Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons, in New York City, the site provides a vast, comprehensive listing of searchable databases that relate directly to botanical medicine. This a page to bookmark!

Phytotherapies.org

www.phytotherapies.org/

This site includes editorial content, articles, and an extensive searchable database on current herbal therapeutics. Herbal practitioners are encouraged to register, free of charge, in order to gain full access to the site's massive database.

On the left side, after one scrolls down a bit, there is a tantalizing listing of the 20 most popular herbs as selected by Phytotherapies.org's regular users. Below the list are links to obtaining herbal extracts and other useful information.

MedHerb.com —“Where Medicine Meets the Herb.”

www.medherb.com/

At the top of the portal page of this site are a series of links, boxed, with a variety of offerings. However, the more interesting contents are a bit further down. These include such links as: Adverse Affects, Anatomy, Folk Uses, Plant Pharmacy, and approximately a dozen others. In many cases, these links are related to books that have been written about the topic (i.e., the use of witch hazel in the original formula for Pond's Cold Cream). This site seems inexhaustible, being that following a trail of links can lead you to very interesting book about sixteenth-century herbal preparations. □

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