

Let's make an...

# HERBAL PAIN-RELIEF SALVE!



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# SOME CONTEXT...

## The world hurts

Many people are in pain right now! Beyond the basic vulnerability of having a body, pain is a social justice issue. All the effects of injustice – violence, stress, poverty, work, isolation, long covid, etc – cause pain or make it worse. Very few of us are fully immersed in the care we need and deserve.

Without dismissing the importance of formal healthcare, I love the role that plants can play in caring for us when we hurt. Plant medicine is abundant and accessible, making it well-suited to do-it-yourself/do-it-together, mutual aid, and community care projects. Medicine for the people.

## A salve that works



I want to reassure readers with serious pain that this zine is for you. I started experimenting with hops salves while on medical leave for endometriomas, and when one worked for me I shared it with loved ones dealing with other conditions on “most painful” lists, like fibromyalgia, frozen shoulder, arthritis, and kidney stones. I kept being surprised when it helped! For me, this salve plays in the same league as opiates and cannabis. I’m sure it doesn’t work on everything, but it provides strong pain relief for a lot of conditions.

Hops salve works almost instantly, but each application lasts under an hour. Many of us find that is a meaningful medicine. A pain-free hour or half-hour provides a mental break, time for another drug to kick in, or time to finish a necessary task.

I hope it helps you too, and that it invites you into growing solidarity with plants. As Mary Siisip Geniusz says, plants have so much to give us, all we have to do is ask.

# INGREDIENTS...

To make a salve, first infuse herbs in oil. Then mix herbal oils with wax to create an in-between texture that is solid enough to work with but soft enough to rub in.

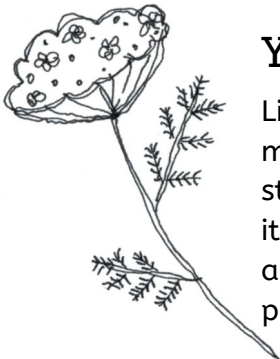


## Hops

You may know hops, or *Humulus lupulus*, as the usual flavouring for beer. Medicinally, it is most known as a strong sleep aid but it is also a muscle relaxant and pain reliever in the Cannabaceae family, like cannabis. Any home brewing shop can sell you 30g of beautiful dried hops for a few bucks. I like to use “lighter” hops so the final salve doesn’t smell like beer.

## Rosemary

My old friend rosemary, or *Salvia rosmarinus*, contributes an uplifting scent and makes the salve feel warm when you rub it on, by stimulating blood flow.



## Yarrow

Like hops, yarrow aka *Achillea millefolium* is mostly known for other gifts, in this case, stopping bleeding and supporting fevers. But it is also a strong anti-inflammatory and analgesic. Yarrow tea in a bath is potent pain treatment by itself.

# Oil

For skincare preparations, we need to use skin-friendly oils. At a minimum, we need to use an oil that won't clog pores, which means something with a comedogenic rating of 2 or below. It is also good to think about cold-pressed and organic oils.

Some good and easy-to-find options include olive oil and grapeseed oil. Special skincare oils include almond kernel oil, jojoba oil, and apricot kernel oil.

Oils to avoid for salves unless you know they suit your skin include coconut oil, palm oil, and soybean oil.

# Wax



The recipe in this zine uses beeswax or soy wax, which have similar textures. Other waxes have different hardnesses and the recipes would have to be adjusted. For all waxes, be sure to get food grade or cosmetic wax, not candle wax.

## Caution

When used internally, hops and yarrow are strong herbs that should not be used by children, pregnant people, while bodyfeeding/breastfeeding, or while taking blood thinning or muscle relaxant medications. But for occasional topical use on smaller areas, they are generally safe. For frequent use or larger areas (e.g., entire back), consult an herbalist first. As always, watch for allergies.

# MAKE INFUSED

## Folk method vs Pro method

Much like making tea, you do not need to measure this unless you want repeatable results. I am giving measurements for people who want some guidance, but it's ok to be approximate or to use the folk method (aka just eyeball it).



### Step 1: add dry herbs

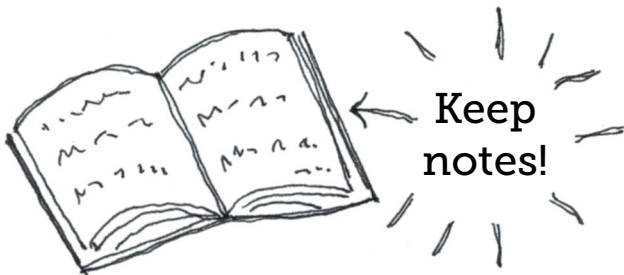
Crumble or cut 30g dry herb into tiny bits and put it in a 500ml jar. Or if you are freestyling, fill a jar half or less with herbs so they have room to expand. I like to infuse each herb in a separate jar of oil so I can make different mixes later, but you can also infuse one big blend of pain herbs.



### Step 2: add oil

Add 150ml of skin-safe vegetable oil to the jar to make a 1:5 strength herbal infusion. To calculate a different amount, add a volume of oil that is 5 times the weight of your dry herb. Or, in the folk method, just ensure your dry herb is fully covered with oil and check it each day for a few days to see if you need to add more oil.

# HERBAL OILS



## Step 3: steep

Put a lid on your jar and shake it up to mix well. Keep it in a warm, dark place like a cupboard above the fridge, and shake it up every few days. Steep it for about 4 weeks, at which point it should be aromatic. This long steeping is only safe with dry herbs.



## Step 4: decant

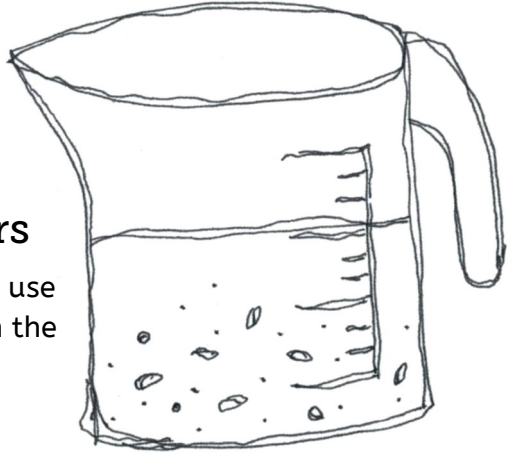
Listen, this part is usually messy. Some options for straining your mixture to get the final oil:

- put it in a clean french press and plunge
- strain it through a coffee filter or several layers of cheese cloth
- press it through a potato ricer lined with a coffee filter
- pour it through a fine sieve
- let the jar settle and carefully pour the oil off the top

Store your infused oil in a sealed, labeled container away from light and heat.



# MAKE A SALVE



## Step 1: label the jars

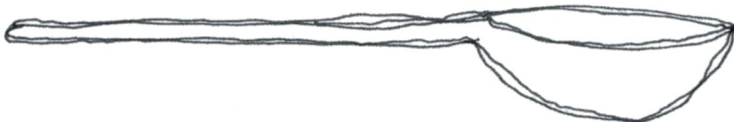
I like 30ml jars but you can use any size. Lay them out with the lids off.

## Step 2: measure

To make just under 90ml of salve, combine the following in a glass measuring cup:

- 30ml yarrow oil
- 30ml rosemary oil
- 15ml hops oil
- 13g beeswax or soy wax, grated or chopped

The ratio is 100ml oil to 17g wax, which is on the softer side since we want the medicine to absorb into the skin.





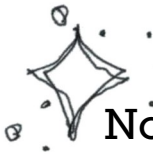
### Step 3: melt

The easiest way to do this is in a microwave if you have one. Zap it ten seconds at a time until the wax is mostly melted, and then swirl it until fully melted and mixed.

Alternately, you can put your measuring cup in a hot water bath on the stovetop or in a slow cooker and melt it that way.

### Step 4: pour

Pour the liquid mixture into the jars and let them sit until they firm up. Put the lids on. Done!



### Now you are a smerlerer

Lyre's Dictionary, which generates new English words from existing word roots, defines "smerlery" as "a place where ointments are made". Sure, why not!



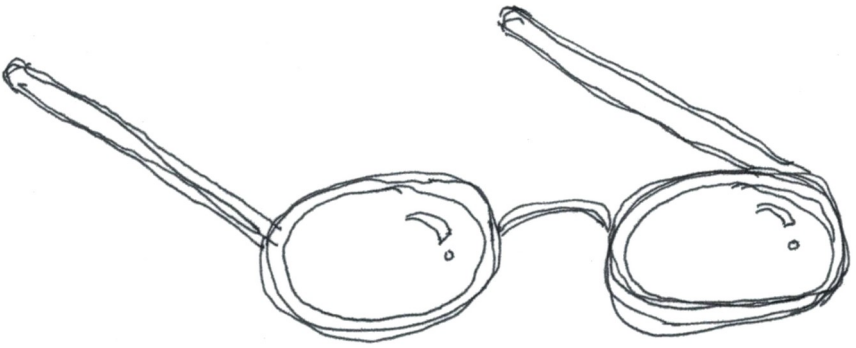
# REFERENCES

- Richo Cech, **Making Herbal Medicine**, Chapter 10 (on making salves)
- Mary Siisip Geniusz , **Plants Have So Much to Give Us, All We Have To Do Is Ask**, p 181 (on using yarrow for strong pain relief)
- Patri Hernandez, **Oils and Butters Comedogenic Rating List:**  
[OhMightyHealth.com/comedogenic-rating-list](http://OhMightyHealth.com/comedogenic-rating-list)
- Kami McBride, **Hops Oil: Uses and Health Benefits** (on making hops oil for period pain relief):  
[youtube.com/watch?v=ov\\_kSq4O7b8](https://youtube.com/watch?v=ov_kSq4O7b8)

# MORE RESOURCES

Just some faves:

- Mildew Amyx, **An Anarchist Free Herbal:**  
[ko-fi.com/s/9c5998e50b](http://ko-fi.com/s/9c5998e50b)
- Maria Noel Groves, **Body Into Balance**
- **Planting Medicine:**  
[kpfa.org/program/planting-medicine](http://kpfa.org/program/planting-medicine)
- Karen M Rose, **The Art & Practice of Spiritual Herbalism**
- Nicole Rose, **Solidarity Apothecary:**  
[SolidarityApothecary.com](http://SolidarityApothecary.com)
- Nancy J. Turner and Richard J. Hebda, **Saanich Ethnobotany**



## Design notes

There are a lot of theories and not a lot of hard data about accessible fonts for low vision, dyslexia, and new readers. For this zine I've gone with ABeeZee by Anja Meiners for the main font. It's free and open source, and features high X-height, single-story a and g forms, and non-mirrored letters like p and q. Let me know how it works for you!

# WORKS ON

(add yours)

**YES**

period pain

endometriosis

ovarian cysts

carpal tunnel

tendonitis

headaches

arthritis

kidney stones  
(somewhat)

frozen shoulder

stiff neck

fibromyalgia

**NO**

PEM

fever aches