

The naturopathic advisor



Natural Lifestyle has teamed up with experts at CNM (College of Naturopathic Medicine) to answer some of your burning health questions. This issue, you asked:



Q Can I do a spring cleanse with herbs?

Nature is wise and provides us with all we need to revitalise our bodies coming out of a sluggish, hibernating winter.

Two wonderful and mild herbs which can each be successfully used to support a spring cleanse are dandelion and cleavers.

Dandelion (clockflower, *Taraxacum officinale*) is a ubiquitous herb and its French name, 'pis-en-lit'

(pee the bed) gives an indication what it's mainly good for; supporting and cleansing the kidneys. Far from being a stubborn weed, dandelion is invaluable in supporting the body after a hard winter. The flowers and young leaves are great eaten in salads and the flowers can be pickled in apple cider vinegar, producing both mouth-watering pickled salad titbits and a delicately flavoured vinegar. The dried leaves and the dried root can be taken as infusions – the leaves support the kidneys, the root the liver.

Another mild yet effective cleansing herb is cleavers (*goosegrass, Gallium aparine*) growing abundantly wild in springtime. Once the plant goes to seed (around May time), it's not usable for this purpose.

Cleavers is believed to support the lymphatic system, making it an effective spring cleanser. A

congested lymphatic system produces mucus and sluggishness, with oedematous swellings, headaches, skin irritation and persistent coughing, among other symptoms.

It's a prolific plant that grows throughout the world. In Chinese medicine, cleavers are used to disperse stagnant states and inflammation. Its traditional use centres on treating the skin and cleansing the liver, lymph and kidneys. It is a natural antiseptic, decongestant and diuretic so good for water retention.

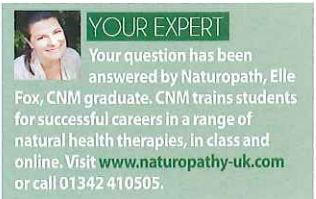
● **How to take:** Cold cleavers tea can be made by infusing a handful of freshly collected and roughly chopped young cleavers tops in cold water overnight; in the morning, strain the mild-tasting liquid and drink. The dried herb can be used to prepare a hot infusion. If you are not on any medication or

supplementation, you can drink three to five cups per day, for up to a week.

For longer use of cleansing herbs or if you are on medication, you should consult your health practitioner. Please note that diuretic herbs can affect potassium levels.

Always collect herbs away from polluted or pesticide sprayed areas and footpaths and be mindful of only taking what you need.

A spring clean with wild grown herbs is free, easy and beneficial. Herbs in general are wonderful aids to our health and wellbeing. They can have a potent effect, so it is advisable to consult a qualified herbalist for appropriate individual advice.



YOUR EXPERT

Your question has been answered by Naturopath, Elle Fox, CNM graduate. CNM trains students for successful careers in a range of natural health therapies, in class and online. Visit www.naturopathy-uk.com or call 01342 410505.

VEIN PAINS

Alison Cullen, Nutritional Therapist at A.Vogel, helps you to tackle varicose veins, naturally.

If you've got varicose veins, the summer sunshine may not be the only thing that has you breaking into a sweat. Many sufferers find the appearance of these problematic veins embarrassing, not to mention painful. With the spring and summer comes the seasonal fashion of shorts, skirts and dresses, all of which may get sufferers hot and bothered, rather than their intended purpose of cooling you down!

Veins carry deoxygenated blood back to the heart, from the organs and tissues all around the body. The veins in the lower half of the body have the tricky job of pushing blood upwards, fighting against gravity, using only the pumping action of the calf muscle. Furthermore, veins need to be able to expand to allow more blood through. If the veins don't manage to spring back into shape, they can end up swollen and contorted and, therefore, becoming varicose veins. There can be various factors which cause this to happen, including having a sedentary job, standing for long periods, being overweight/pregnancy (extra weight puts strain on the legs), frequently wearing tight clothing (restricting blood flow), wearing high heels and the one out of our control – genetics.

It's not all doom and gloom for sufferers. There are various options of treatment on offer. Surgery (phlebectomy), support stockings and laser treatment are some of the options. However, if a natural remedy is preferred, taking a horse chestnut (*Aesculus*) seed extract (available as a tablet or tincture) on a daily basis will often result in an improvement in symptoms within the first two to four weeks. Furthermore, smoothing horse chestnut seed gel on to the affected area could also help ease the tired, heavy feeling in legs. It is thought that horse chestnut can help tone the veins and make the capillaries less permeable. The tannins it contains may give it an astringent action on the vein wall. It is also thought to reduce the activity of an enzyme involved in the breakdown of the vein wall.

It's important to note that horse chestnut contains constituents that may irritate the gastrointestinal tract. It is, therefore, best taken in a gastro-resistant format (enterically coated to prevent it breaking down in the stomach).

