

Medicinal Herbs for animals

Dr Clare Middle BVMS, Dip.Ac.,Dip.Hom.

Introduction

Herbs can give great results for many animal ailments.

I have listed ten safe, well researched herbs which I use in my veterinary practice for treating dogs and cats.

1. St Mary's Thistle is so useful for animals with hepatitis of any kind, especially if your pet's blood test shows high liver enzymes, and a cause cannot be found. Conventional medicine simply does not have a specific treatment for liver disease. Much research and many animals have shown the effectiveness of this herb for healing liver disease. No dog should be on long term cortisone (prednisolone) treatment or longterm anti-epileptic treatment (phenobarbitone) without being on St Mary's Thistle continually, or a complex thereof, as this will help the liver withstand the side effects so much better.
2. Andrographis is equivalent to a "herbal antibiotic" and liver detoxifier, so is a good start for animals with skin allergy and infection who have been weakened by a lot of cortisone treatment. Add albizzia if itching due to allergy is severe. A natural diet and homoeopathic treatment are generally needed here also.
3. A combination of reishi and shitaki mushrooms can work wonders for chronic skin or sinus infections for genetically low immune systems. This often applies to such breeds as bull terriers, staffies, ridgebacks, cats with cat 'aids' or pedigree cats with long term sinusitis.
4. Kidney degeneration mix – buchu, couch, parsley, crataeva and withania can keep old cats and dogs with kidney disease going for months or years longer than without treatment.
5. Nervine herbs such as passiflora, skullcap, chamomile, valerian and St John's wort can be very beneficial and safe for treating stress, anxiety, phobias and tension from musculo-skeletal pain.
6. Gymnema has much research to show how it can help stabilize diabetic cats and dogs. Many diabetic cats can be treated without the need for insulin. The blood glucose must be monitored carefully by a vet until stable.
7. Comfrey can help broken bones to heal, so is a good help in difficult or slow to heal surgically repaired cases, or for young animals with greenstick (in-line) fractures which have been examined by a vet and do not need surgical repair.
8. Gastritis/colitis blend – slippery elm, marshmallow, agrimony, licourice are a frequently used combination for vomiting, diarrhoea, irritable bowel syndrome and colitis. Use psyllium husks for chronic constipation – it works magically. Put a pinch in each meal for cats, up to a teaspoonful for large dogs. It is safe to use this long term.
9. Sheep Sorrel formulas (sheep sorrel, burdock, turkish/indian rhubarb root and slippery elm bark) for cancers of all types can give remission times in about 50% of cases and can give pain relief, and is safe.
10. Ginko biloba is often useful for old animals who have suffered a stroke or who have behaviour change due to senile dementia.

This herb is very safe, and is commonly prescribed for such conditions for people by doctors in Germany, where the government researches and recommends herbs for doctors to use for their patients in preference to drugs, as it saves spending money on hospital care later!

Dosage

In general, the dose for herbs for dogs are similar to human doses per kg of total body weight.

Dogs generally need half a ml (15 drops) twice daily for a toy breed, up to a human dose for a giant breed (5ml twice daily). Therefore an average 20-30kg dog would need about 2 ml twice daily in food.

Cats need much less per kg body weight. I usually give cats 6 drops once daily in food of the alcohol tincture.

Mice, rats, rabbits and guinea pigs will often lap a drop of herb tincture off the end of a dropper twice daily. The most common herb I use with these little animals are sheep sorrel formula, noni juice (morinda berry) or the reishi/shitaki/maitaki mushroom extract for cancers or long term infections.

Most animals eat herbs in their food. If an animal strongly refuses herbs, lower the dose until accepted in food, or choose a different combination if totally refused. Animals will generally take herbs they feel are good for them, and if they do want to get better.

Herbs can be put in water for sick animals who are off their food, but drinking a lot of water, for example cats with kidney disease.

Herbal teas, ie made from pouring hot water onto the fresh or dry herb, and leaving to cool, are palatable enough to dose orally with a dropper or syringe. Chamomile tea is safe to give to anxious animals to calm them down, and peppermint tea is good for animals with a mild tummy upset.

Herb tablets can be given whole, or ground in a coffee grinder/pestle and mortar, and powder added to food.

Herbivorous animals such as horses, sheep and cows can much more easily be overdosed on herbs (compared to cats and dogs), as their ability to fully digest the active ingredients are far greater. This is true of horses to a lesser extent than cattle, sheep, rabbits, guinea pigs etc., but all these species have not had a lot of research carried out on them, so caution is required.

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