



## OXY-MELDING: working with herbs, vinegar and honey

An oxymel is a very old form of herbal medicine. The word is a combination of greek words: *OXY* = acid, as in vinegar, and *MEL* = honey. It can be traced back further than ancient Greece all the way back to Mesopotamia where some recipes are still used daily as a beverage in that area.

Oxymels were made for several reasons:

- Preserve herbs and fruits, especially for travel as in sailing.
- Extract medicinal components from plants that would otherwise be left behind in a tea or brew.
- Hydrate the body by drinking it recreationally as a beverage.
- It was used by both peasants and clergy as a way to preserve and combine healing herbs. This is why it resonates with me as a universal medicine.

Oxymels can be very strictly made with precise measurements, or they can be kind of thrown together eyeballing portions. There are several ways to make an oxymel, it is a very creative process. Let's look at the parts:

**VINEGAR:** it is an acidic liquid produced as the result of fermentation caused by bacteria eating sugar. Due to the acidic nature of vinegar, it becomes an excellent solvent that breaks apart the fibers and structures in a plant and allows the minerals to become extracted into solution. Vinegars are just plain awesome at extracting minerals from plants and putting them into a form that our body can easily digest and assimilate. One of the dangers of this is that vinegars can extract the minerals of the containers they are in. That is why it is advised to always put them into a non-reactive container with a non reactive lid. If you are using a mason jar, make sure to place some wax paper or plastic wrap under the metal lid, otherwise the lid will corrode and the creepy metals from the jar lids will be in your medicine.

There are so many types of vinegars. Anyone can easily find apple cider vinegar, white wine vinegar, rice vinegar, balsamic vinegar, but what about pineapple vinegar or cucumber vinegar or elderberry cinnamon vinegar? You can get really creative making your own vinegar from scratch. All you need is some fruit scraps, water, and some sugar. I'll tell you a little bit about it, but it is beyond the scope of this class to make one today. You can also infuse berries and other fruits into vinegar to have an infused vinegar. This really brings out the bright flavors of the fruits and preserves the vitamins. For our examples today I created a

### ***Blueberry Balsamic Vinegar:***

- 1 cup of berries
- 1 cup of white wine vinegar
- 1 cup of balsamic vinegar

Blend them together in a food processor or blender. Put them in a non-reactive container with a non-reactive lid and let steep for 5-7 days, stirring once a day. After the time has passed, strain out the solids and put back into a clean container. Will store on the shelf for about a year or more.

**HONEY:** Honey is such an amazing preservative. Bees are like nature's finest chemist. It has the perfect balance of water and sugar to keep it last for...well we don't know how long it can last for: there's honey that was found in Egyptian tombs from thousands of years ago that was still preserved. When we start to add herbs or vinegar or heat to this perfect balance, it begins to become unstable. But an oxymel will still last up to and over a year on the counter, and depending on the bottle and contamination and other factors, sometimes much longer. Honey in its own right is highly beneficial containing hundred of enzymes and antimicrobial compounds. Heat begins to destroy these enzymes, and it happens rapidly. Once the honey is filtered out from its raw stage it loses over 200 of these beneficial enzymes alone. Heating honey over 104 degrees causes it to lose invertase, often thought of as the most beneficial enzyme in honey.

**HERBS:** Herbs can be macerated or soaked in honey just like they can in vinegar. Here is where you can get really creative. You could macerate sage in honey and rosemary and thyme in vinegar and combine them both after they've been strained. You could add all three of those herbs to one jar and fill it half with vinegar and the other half with honey. You could add all those herbs just to the honey, or just to the vinegar. When you add certain herbs that have a lot of water and starter culture present to honey, herbs like garlic, it ferments the honey and changes the properties even more. There are so many possible ways to make an oxymel. I'll tell you about some of my favorites.

### *Cooked vs Cold:*

Have you calculated all the ways to make an oxymel yet? Well, now it is time to decide which way we want to prepare it.

#### COOKED:

pros:

- you can make a potent remedy on the stove in a matter of hours.
- the vinegar goes deep into certain plants like nettles and horsetail and brings out tough minerals.
- with mushrooms, heating is the only way to get through the super hard fiber called chitin and into the cells.

cons:

- you'll lose a significant portion of the medicine.
- the active culture that is helpful for the gut flora and assimilation of the plants also gets destroyed.
- loss of vitamins
- evaporation of antimicrobial volatile oil in aromatic herbs.
- loss of bright flavor of fruity herbs.

#### COLD METHOD:

pros:

- the flavors stay intact.
- The vitamins from the plants are preserved.
- Aromatic plants really pop and shine and the medicine of the aromatic plants does not evaporate.

cons:

- It takes 2-6 weeks.

Ideally we want to make a formula with the ratio of 1:4. 1 part herb by volume to 4 parts solvent (vinegar+honey) by volume. Example: let's say we are just adding herbs to vinegar and will add our honey later after it is strained. If we have 1 oz of herbs and just 2 oz of vinegar, then we will need to add 2oz of honey once the herbs are strained to bring that ratio to 1:4.

For this exercise we are scaling it down to teaspoons as to roughly weigh our parts:

6 tsp of total herbs  
2 fl oz of vinegar.

- Cap it, label it, let it set, shake it every so often, and give it encouraging words by telling it that it is going to be such awesome medicine and that we love it and that it is very beautiful and so on.
- In 2-6 weeks, after the vinegar has mixed with the herbs and feels really good about itself, strain it. Sometimes a mother will develop. This can look like a film on the top: it is actually a colony of the bacteria and a visual example of the probiotic benefits that the oxymel can provide.
- Once strained, add up to 2 fl oz of honey.

My preference is to start with less honey than vinegar and adjust the quantity as I am mixing. Once you found the perfect flavor, take note of the ratio of vinegar to honey. Every recipe is different, so play around. It doesn't have to be an exact science, but it can be if you're into taking notes and experimenting.

Here are a few recipes to try:

**Cough Syrup Oxymel:**

- 1 tsp Elecampane: warming, antimicrobial expectorant, bitter herb
- 1 tsp Hyssop: relaxant, antimicrobial
- 1 tsp Cinnamon: moistening, spicy expectorant
- 2 tsp Mullein Leaf: moistening, nutritive expectorant
- 1 tsp Thyme: broad spectrum antimicrobial including fungal infections
- half handful Blueberries: yummy and anti oxidant and familiar  
(option, elderberries, wild cherry bark)

**Anti-oxydantymel:**

- 2 tsp Cranberry: detoxifying and enzyme rich
- 2 tsp Goji Berry: superfood, super yum
- 1 tsp Hibiscus: high in vitamin C, moistening
- 1 tsp Holy Basil: adaptogenic, and rounds the flavor

**Mediterranea ox Vinegarettymel:**

- 1 tsp Sage: helps with sore throat
- 1 tsp Thyme: spicy antimicrobial
- 2 tsp Rosemary: improves circulation and memory
- 1 tsp Holy Basil: improves energy
- 1 tsp Lemon balm: lifting to the mood

**Nutritive Oxy-mineral-mel:**

- 1 tsp Dandelion Root: liver restorative
- 1 tsp Burdock Root: for healthy skin
- 2 tsp Nettle Leaf: packed with minerals
- 2 tsp Chickweed: improves metabolic function

**Simplex Easymel:**

- 2 tsp Lemon Peel: fires up digestion
  - 2 tsp Basil: reduces bloating
  - 2 tsp Thyme: antimicrobial
- Try this one with the pineapple vinegar

**Spicy Det-oxymel:**

- 2 tsp Coriander: mild spice, helps move heavy toxins
- 2 tsp Ginger: anti-inflammatory spice
- 1 tsp Angelica: stimulates bile
- 1 tsp Milk Thistle: liver restorative
- \*optional: 1/4 tsp Cayenne: heating, purifying

**Rel-oxing Sleepymel:**

- 2 tsp Chamomile: calming and digestive
- 2 tsp Passionflower: lets go on circling thoughts
- 1 tsp Lavender: gentle relaxant
- 1 tsp Valerian: heavy relaxant, diffuses tension.

