

## Moonhawk's Musings

Greetings.

This month I am writing about the herb Echinacea. It is commonly known for assisting in reducing the severity and/or duration of various viral infections. Some people choose to take it throughout the cold and influenza season to help protect them against viral infections.

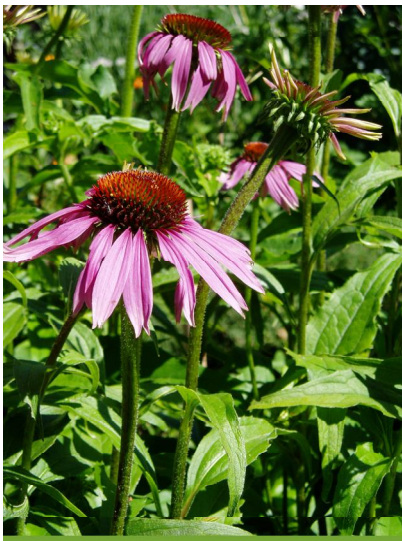
The recipe I have chosen is Carter's Style pasta. It's an easy sauce to prepare and freezes well – always a bonus for those with a busy lifestyle.

Next month I plan to tell you about the herb St John's Wort and provide a recipe for cheesy herb muffins – a delicious alternative to the sweet muffins most commonly eaten.

## Wishing you many good things

### Moonhawk

#### Echinacea



Echinacea is an immunostimulant and an immunomodulator. It is anti-viral, anti-fungal and anti-inflammatory.

The plant Echinacea originated in North America. There are 3 types of Echinacea:

- *Echinacea purpurea*
- *Echinacea angustifolia*
- *Echinacea pallida*

Some of you may know it better as coneflower or purple coneflower. It makes a pretty addition to any flower garden, producing single flowers on long stems, that look quite spectacular even when dried. The flowering tops, leaves and roots are all used in the production of herbal preparations. So which Echinacea is best? Each has a slightly different function, so my preference is to prescribe

a product that combines all three species.

Echinacea works by stimulating non-specific cellular immunity, particularly that related to macrophages and phagocytes. Echinacea increases T-cell activity and B-cell leukocytes. T-cells in particular have a role in hunting down and destroying abnormal cells, including those infected with viruses. Remember viruses are sneaky little suckers that cannot reproduce. Instead they invade our own cells, take over, reproduce and spread throughout the body.

Our immune system is clever in that it recognises 'self' from 'not-self' i.e. it knows a virus when it sees one because it isn't familiar. The immune response is quite complex and I won't attempt to explain it here. Using Echinacea to stimulate the immune system assists in the destruction of cold and flu viruses.

The key with Echinacea, and any other immune stimulant, is to start taking the herb at the **first sign of viral infection**. This is before you've reached the "head full of snot feel like death warmed up stage". It's the very early signs such as a tickle in the throat, a slight headache,

maybe a low grade fever, and feeling a little off. Taking Echinacea at this stage increases the likelihood that it will reduce the severity and duration of the cold or flu.

If you choose to take Echinacea as a preventative, then only take a minimum dose each day. This dose can then be increased to a full dose at the first sign of viral infection. I prefer to prescribe Echinacea with other immune stimulants, such as *Andrographis paniculata*, *Astragalus membranaceus*, *Withania somnifer* and *Eleutherococcus senticosus*. Which combination depends on the stage of the virus, the patient, and the symptoms. Herbs that provide symptomatic relief may also be included in the mixture.

You'll note by this stage that I haven't mentioned dosage levels. This is because I firmly believe that herbs should only be prescribed by those people who have been trained in herbal medicine. In Australia, contact the [Australian Traditional Medicine Society](#) (ATMS) or the [National Herbalist Association of Australia](#) (NHAA) to find a naturopath or herbalist who can correctly prescribe vitamin supplements. If you choose to buy Echinacea from a Health Food Shop or Chemist, ask what training the shop assistant has had in prescribing herbal preparations. You may be surprised that they have had none, or just done a manufacturer's course that allows them to recommend rather than prescribe herbs.

### **Safety considerations**

If you have a known **allergy** to the *Compositae* family of plants, do not take Echinacea.

People with **auto-immune** disorders should not take Echinacea.

People taking **immunosuppressive drugs** e.g. **transplant patients**, should only take Echinacea for a short time and only under medical supervision.

Echinacea is considered safe during **pregnancy** and **lactation** provided it is taken only in recommended doses.

Reference: Herbs & Natural Supplements: An evidence based guide (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition), by Lesley Braun and Marc Cohen. The Essential Guide to Herbal Safety, by Simon Mills and Kerry Bone. Medicinal Plants of the World by Ben-Erik van Wyk & Michael Wink. .

### **Dense Fruit Loaf**

This recipe makes a delicious dense, low fat fruit loaf. It can be served as is, or spread with cream cheese or butter – which means it is no longer low fat. I like freeze it in slices, making it an easy addition to the lunch box or afternoon snack.

Line a 24cm x 12cm loaf tin with baking paper.

Preheat the oven to 180c

200g, dried apricots, roughly chopped	200g dried figs, roughly chopped
200g pitted dates, roughly chopped	100g raisins
500ml water	1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda
240g gluten free self raising flour	2 teaspoon mixed spice
115g brown sugar	2 eggs
80ml (2 tablespoons) olive oil.	

Put the dried fruit and water in a heavy based pan. Bring slowly to the boil simmer uncovered for 5 minutes, or until most of the water has evaporated. Remove from the heat and add the bicarb. Allow to cool.

In a medium sized bowl mix together the flour and spices.

Mix the brown sugar and eggs into the fruit mix. Pour this into the flour and mix well.

Pour into the lined loaf tin, bake for 50 minutes, or until the skewer comes out clean.

Cool for 5 minutes, then turn onto a wire wrack to cool completely. Slice and eat. I usually get between 12 to 14 good size slices from a loaf, but feel free to cut thicker slices.

For a spicier fruit loaf, substitute 50g of the raisins for 50g of finely chopped glace ginger, and add 1 teaspoon of ground cardamom.

You can also use dried cranberries instead of raisins.

You can also sprinkle sesame or poppy seeds, or pepitas, or sunflower seeds, or even a mix of seeds, on top of the loaf before baking.