SACRED HORSE
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Top 5 Herbs to Heal Pain and Inflammation in Horses

Discover the Top Herbs to Manage your Horse's Pain and Inflammation - Naturally

Why Herbal Medicine?

It is understood that animals have been self-medicating with herbs throughout time. In fact, the same can be said for humans. Did you know that many pharmaceutical drugs have been developed as a result of studying traditional herbal medicines, extracting what are considered to be the key chemical constituents, synthetically manufacturing those chemicals and prescribing them at high doses? In many developing countries, a large portion of the population still rely heavily on traditional practitioners and medicinal plants to meet their primary health care needs, even where more modern Western medical systems are available.

So why use herbal medicines when there are pharmaceutical alternatives? What we are unable to replicate in pharmaceutical drugs is the manner in which the multitude of different phytochemicals found in plant medicines work together synergistically to heal the body. Taking a single chemical component from a plant and prescribing it at a high dose often produces side effects that are not evident when the medicine is taken in plant form, as plants tend to contain just the right balance of a range of phytochemicals. This is not to say that plant medicines have no side effects, as some are toxic when prescribed incorrectly.

Another factor to consider is cost. Herbal medicines are often significantly cheaper than pharmaceutical medicines, largely because herbal medicines cannot be patented. In some cases, you can even grow fresh herbs in your own home. For example, parsley, peppermint and ginger can all offer relief from indigestion in place of a pharmaceutical antacid. Of course, self-medicating has a limit and if you have a more serious, long standing or underlying problem, consultation with a professional herbalist or medical practitioner is essential.

So is there a place for pharmaceutical medicines? Absolutely. There are times when pharmaceutical medications are a good choice based upon a variety of factors. It is also a very personal choice. Owner's of competition owners encouraged to check with their sporting regulator for a list of prohibited substances. For FEI International disciplines, a list of currently controlled substances can be found at http://prohibitedsubstancesdatabase.feicleansport.org.

A Selection of Herbs for Pain and Inflammation

Arnica

Scientific Name: *Arnica montana*

Alternative Names: Leopard's bane, Mountain arnica, Mountain snuff, Mountain tobacco, Wolf's bane

Administration:

Topical use **only**.

Uses for Pain and Inflammation:

- Use externally as a mild analgesic (pain reliever) and anti-inflammatory.
- Excellent applied topically in the management of pain and inflammation associated with arthritis, sprains, bruises, sore muscles and inflamed insect bites.
- Arnica also aids circulation, making it useful to assist venous insufficiency, such as varicose veins.

Other Uses:

- Nil.

Combinations:

- Combine with Witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) to treat bruises, inflamed swellings and varicose veins.

Contraindications:

- **Do not** apply to damaged skin or open wounds.

Interactions:

- None reported.

Frankincense

Scientific Name: *Boswellia serrata*

Alternative Names: Frankincense, Indian frankincense, Indian olibanum, Mastic tree, Salai guggul (Indian folk), Shallaki (Sanskrit). Ayurvedic: Gajabhakshyaa, Salai, Shallaki, Susravaa. Siddha / Tamil: Kungli, Paragisambirani.

Administration:

Orally and / or topically.

Uses for Pain and Inflammation:

- Frankincense is primarily used as an anti-inflammatory. The range of conditions treated include, but are not limited to, arthritis (osteo and rheumatoid), gastrointestinal ulcers, inflammatory conditions of the digestive tract, chronic prostatitis, psoriasis, equine asthma (heaves), laryngitis and bronchitis.
- Human clinical trials in patients with osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis have found that Frankincense reduces pain and the frequency of swelling, prevents the breakdown of cartilage, decreases pain and increases physical functioning.
- Frankincense is also useful in the treatment of pain by producing a sedative effect on the nervous system.
- The anti-inflammatory activities of Frankincense make it an excellent prescription for pulmonary disorders, including equine asthma (heaves) and laryngitis. Anti-microbial properties also make it effective in the management of pulmonary disorders caused by respiratory system infections, such as bronchitis and pleurisy.

- Frankincense taken orally and applied topically is useful in the treatment of inflammatory skin diseases such as eczema, dermatitis (including rain rot and Eosinophilic Granuloma) and psoriasis. It is also useful in the treatment of ringworm.
- Frankincense can be used to stimulate circulation, which is a key factor in the management of arthritic conditions.
- Unlike pharmaceutical non-steroidal anti-Inflammatory drugs (NSAID's), Frankincense has not been shown to result in irritation or ulceration of the stomach.

Other Uses:

- Anxiety (when used as an inhalant by heating the resin on coals or vaporising the essential oils).
- Basal cell carcinoma
- Breast cancer
- Diarrhoea
- Fever
- Intestinal infections
- Leukaemia
- Mouth ulcers
- Ovarian cancer
- Poor circulation
- Skin infections
- Vaginal infections

Combinations:

- The boswellic acids found in Frankincense are synergistic with glucosamine. Taken together, Frankincense and glucosamine can be highly beneficial in the treatment of osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis.
- Combine with Celery seed (*Apium graveolens*) in the treatment of arthritis.
- Combine with Skullcap (*Scutellaria laterifolia*) and Albizia (*Albizia lebbeck*) in the treatment of allergic conditions.

Contraindications:

- **Do not** administer to pregnant mares.

Interactions:

- May theoretically interfere with the absorption of pharmaceutical drugs.

Devil's Claw

Scientific Name: *Harpagophytum procumbens*

Alternative Names: Beesdubbetje, Duiwelsklou, Grapple plant, Grapple thorn, Kanako, Kamangu, Kloudoring, Ouklip, Rankdoring, Sengaparile, Skerpioendubbeltje, Teufelskralle, Toutje, Tou, Tswana, Tubercule de griffe du diable, Woodspider

Administration:

Internal use.

Uses for Pain and Inflammation:

- Devil's claw is an anti-inflammatory and analgesic. It is particularly useful in the management of pain and inflammation associated with arthritis (both osteo and rheumatoid), back pain, neuralgia and muscular pain.
- May be administered to aid in the management of venous inflammation.
- Aids in the treatment of sore, itchy, inflamed skin.

Other Uses:

- Digestive stimulation
- Liver congestion.
- Lowering blood pressure and heart rate.

Combinations:

- Combine with Celery seed (*Apium graveolens*), Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) or Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) in the management of arthritis.

Contraindications:

- **Do not** administer to pregnant mares.
- **Not** to be used in competition horses.
- **Not** to be given to horses with gastric ulcers, as it may increase the secretion of gastric acid.

Interactions:

- Devil's claw may theoretically interact with the following pharmaceutical drugs: anti-arrhythmics, anti-coagulants, anti-hypertensives and cardiac medications
- Devil's claw is less effective when administered in conjunction with antibiotics, as it relies on intestinal bacteria for activation.

Turmeric

Scientific Name: *Curcuma longa*

Alternative Names: Haridra, Haldi, Indian saffron, Jiang huang (rhizome), Yu jin (root tuber), Yellow ginger.

Administration:

Can be administered orally and topically.

Uses for Pain and Inflammation:

- Turmeric is a useful anti-inflammatory in the management of arthritis (osteo and rheumatoid), skin disorders and equine asthma (heaves).

Other Uses:

- Anti-platelet activities offer protection to the cardiovascular system.
- Detoxifies and regenerates liver tissue, protecting against hepatotoxicity.
- Demonstrates anti-tumour / anti-cancer activities.
- Dyspepsia.
- Is highly toxic to Salmonella.
- Lowers cholesterol.
- Peptic ulcer
- Protects against DNA damage in lymphocytes.

Combinations:

- Combine with Frankincense (Boswellia serrata) in the management of arthritis.

Contraindications:

- High doses may cause skin rash and photosensitivity.

Interactions:

- Caution is advised if administered with anti-coagulant or anti-platelet drugs.

Notes:

- Curcumin (the active constituent of Turmeric) is not well absorbed orally. To improve absorption, administer in a lipid base (i.e. feed with a dietary fat such as canola or flaxseed oil).

White Willow

Scientific Name: Salix Alba

Alternative Names: White willow, Bail liu, Willow, Willow bark

Administration:

Administer orally.

Uses for Pain and Inflammation:

- The salicin in White willow is converted into salicylic acid by the body (a natural form of aspirin). As such, White willow is most commonly used to treat pain, inflammation, sciatica, neuralgia, rheumatism, osteoarthritis, headaches, colic, cramp, sprains, strains and tendonitis. Its analgesic effects are slower than aspirin, however its duration is longer and gastric side effects are avoided with correct dosage.
- The salicylic acid has also been shown to reduce fever without causing damage to the stomach, hence it is indicated in the treatment of influenza and other fever-producing conditions.
- White willow may be used for various forms of arthritis being specific for rheumatoid arthritis and other systemic corrective tissue conditions with inflammatory changes.
- Externally, White willow is used to treat wounds, ulcers, warts, calluses, bunions, corns and acne.

Other Uses:

- Acne (pyoderma)
- Pleurisy
- Respiratory catarrh
- Saddle sores / Galls
- Sore throat

- Toothache
- Ulcers (external)
- Warts
- Wounds

Combinations:

- Combines well with other herbal anti-inflammatories, such as Devil's claw (*Harpagophytum procumbens*).

Contraindications:

- **Do not** administer to pregnant and lactating mares.
- **Not** to be used in competition horses due to the presence of salicylates.
- **Not** to be taken by individuals sensitive or allergic to aspirin or salicylates. Respiratory side effects and skin rash may occur in these individuals.
- Due to the salicylate content, caution should be exercised in individuals with aspirin hypersensitivity, equine asthma (heaves), equine metabolic syndrome, diabetes, gastrosis, haemophilia, liver disease, impaired blood clotting, kidney disease and peptic ulcers.
- Side effects are uncommon, but may include nausea, gastrointestinal discomfort, dizziness and rash.

Interactions:

- Not to be co-administered with aspirin and other salicylate-containing substances, other pharmaceutical non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID's), anti-coagulants, barbiturates/sedatives, methotrexate, spironolactone, phenytoin and valproate medications.

Which Herbs Should I Choose?

As you can see, the selection of herbs will depend upon the cause of the pain and inflammation, e.g. arthritis, ulcers or respiratory distress, for example. It will also depend upon whether your horse is already taking pharmaceutical medications and whether they have any other medical conditions that need to be considered.

Professional herbalists use the concept of 'synergism' when preparing an herbal formula. Synergism involves the use of complementary herbs that address the whole being in a number of ways. For example, if a horse presents with arthritis and poor digestion/inability to maintain weight, I will select an anti-arthritic herb with a secondary action of stimulating the digestive system, plus a digestive system herb with a secondary function of treating pain or inflammation.

If you are ever stuck or unsure, the best advice is to call a professional Equine Herbalist who can develop a personal prescription based upon your horse's unique needs. Sacred Horse offers personal prescriptions to clients internationally. For more information or to make a booking, visit www.sacredhorse.com.au

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