

Hints on Administering Herbs to Animals

Compiled by members of the Veterinary Botanical Medicine Association

Medicating animals with herbs can often be a struggle, since many plants taste bad. Sometimes, the effect of the herb depends on the patient actually being able to taste it, but in most cases, we have the option of trying to trick our pets into taking herbs by disguising the taste in a 'herb delivery system'.

Medicating Dogs and Cats

Dogs and cats can be given powdered and liquid herbal extracts in their meals. *Don't ever 'sprinkle the herb over the food'* – it must be thoroughly mixed in the entire meal to cover the taste.

If the patient's appetite is poor due to illness or learned preferences, you may need to disguise the taste further by using especially strong-smelling foods, like tuna or braunschweiger. For some pets, baby food or canned cat food is such a novelty that they will take the herbs mixed into these foods. Other tasty treats to hide the herbs include cream cheese, Cheese Whiz, peanut or other nut butters, ground meat or liver, or fruit. Apple sauce is particularly recommended by some herbalists. One trick you can use is to have TWO treats, one in each hand, but only one of them medicated. Make sure your dog sees both of them, and offer the medicated one first. S/he will often be so anxious to get to the second one that is visible in your other hand that s/he will just gulp the first one down.

It may be easier in some cases to administer the powdered or liquid herbs mixed in a liquid, to be gently and slowly administered by syringe. Vehicles that have been recommended include meat or poultry broth, clam juice, flavored syrups or vitamin/mineral supplements (such as VAL syrup™ or Lixotinic™), and fruit juice.

You can take advantage of your cat's fastidiousness by mixing the herb in a hairball gel (such as VetBasis (petroleum free) or Laxatone™) or anchovy paste, and smearing it on his or her paws – only very sick cats will let that insult go unchallenged!

Some herbalists use traditional teas - these can be made using meat broth instead of plain water, and frozen in ice cube trays to preserve until the day of use.

Don't ever try to simply force a dog or cat to take undiluted herb tincture (which usually tastes terrible) - they generally never forget the experience and this makes it much harder to medicate them! In this case, you can use a dropper to put the extract in a capsule, close it, and administer to the animal in that form within a few minutes.

If herb capsules must be administered, they often 'go down' easier if one end is covered in butter. Be sure to administer water or broth afterwards to ensure that the capsule passes from the esophagus to the stomach quickly. You can even put herb tinctures in a capsule and administer them this way.

A final trick for medicating cats with herbs and supplements is to start at a very low dose. Try mixing the substance – 1 DROP or a small PINCH initially, and gradually working

up to the recommended dose. You can stop at whatever dose the cat will tolerate and still eat, but remember to alert your doctor to this change in recommended dosing.

Medicating Horses and Farm Animals

Horses and ruminant farm animals are herbivores – natural grazers, used to eating many different plant materials. They usually accept herbs mixed in their grain and pellet rations. If that doesn't work, apple sauce, molasses, or frozen concentrated fruit juices can be effective vehicles.

Final Cautions

Please consult your veterinary herbalist for information on the best quality of herbs, the correct doses and the best ways of giving them for your animals. Giving the wrong herbs, or giving the correct herbs at incorrect doses can damage your animal's health seriously. This is especially important if your animal is on other medication. Drug-herb interactions are real. Talk to your veterinary herbalist about this.

If your pet has food allergies or any other illness, check the herb delivery system with your veterinarian before using it.

Some animals will not tolerate herbs in any form, and we must accept that in some cases, insisting on the continued administration of these medications can adversely affect their quality of life. If your pet won't accept herbs, discuss this with your veterinary herbalist.