Safety of Herbs in Pregnancy

Unless you are under the care of a knowledgeable Naturopathic Doctor, herbalist or Integrative Medical Doctor, it is unadvisable to use any herbs during pregnancy. Health Canada currently recognizes SIX herbs that can safely be consumed as teas during pregnancy. They are:

- Ginger
- Lemon balm
- Linden flower*
- Orange peel
- Citrus peel
- Rose hip

*Not for use in women with a pre-existing heart condition

The issue with the use of herbs during pregnancy is the lack of safety information. It is unethical to do product safety studies in pregnant women so few of these studies exist. We need to rely on other types of information in determining the safety of herbs during pregnancy.

Herbs that are considered safe in pregnancy are those that:

- Have a long safety record of traditional use in pregnancy
- Are free of poisonous and toxic biochemical components
- Do not cause uterine contractions
- Do not alter blood flow to the uterus
- Do not lead to birth defects
- Do not cause nutrient deficiencies that could negatively impact pregnancy
- Have no actions that could be harmful to either a pregnant woman or her fetus (i.e. laxative, sedative, purgative, etc.)

The herbs listed below are considered to be generally safe for pregnancy. However, it is best not to take any medication (herbal or otherwise) during the first trimester of pregnancy as this is the most sensitive time of development for the fetus. Only take these herbs under the supervision and guidance of a qualified health care professional.

Herbs That Can Be Used In Moderation In Pregnancy

This list refers to plants that may be used in moderation in pregnancy. Essential oils should be avoided.

HERBS THAT CAN BE USED IN MODERATION IN PREGNANCY	
Althea officinalis (marshmallow root)	Mentha piperita (peppermint)
Balotta nigra (black horehound)	Pimpinella aniusm (anise)
Dioscorea villosa (wild yam root)	Urtica diocia (nettle)
Echinacea species	Viburnum opulus (cramp bark)
Gallium aparine (cleavers)	Viburnum prunifolium (black haw)
	Zea mays (corn silk)

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Herbs To Be Used With Caution In Pregnancy

This list refers to plants which may be used occasionally as mildly flavored beverages, teas, seasonings, or as food. Extracts (i.e. tinctures) of all of these plants, even in small doses should be avoided.

HERBS THAT CAN BE USED WITH CAUTION IN PREGNANCY	
Allium sativa (garlic)	Mentha spicata (spearmint)
Allium cepa (onion)	Myristica fragrans (nutmeg)
Apium graveolens (celery)	Nasturtium officinalis (watercress)
Armoracia lapathifolia (horseradish)	Ocymum basilicum (basil)
Artemesia dracunuclus (tarragon)	Oreganum vulgaris (oregano)
Beta vulgaris (beet)	Oreganum magorana (marjoram)
Brassica spp. (broccoli, cabbage)	Petroselinum sativa (parsley)
Capsicum fructescens (cayenne)	Piper nigra (black pepper)
Caryophyllus aromaticus (clove)	Prunus persica (peach seed)
Carica papaya (papaya)	Rosemarium officinalis (rosemary)
Cichorum intybus (chicory)	Satureua hortensis (savory)
Cinnamomum zeylanicam (cinnamon)	Silybum (marianum (milk thistle)
Crocus sativa (saffron)	Thymus vulgaris (thyme)
Daucus carota (carrot)	Trigonellum foenumgraecum (fenugreek)
Equisetum arvense (horsetail)	Ulmus fulva (slippery elm)
Ferula asafetida (asafetida)	Zingiber officinale (ginger)
Foenicumlum vulgare (fennel)	Mitchella repens (sqaw vine) – 3rd trimester only
Equisetum arvense (horsetail)	Rubus idaeus (red raspberry)
Ferula asafetida (asafetida)	Trifolium pratense (red clover)
Foenicumlum vulgare (fennel)	Zingiber offinale (ginger)

Disclaimer

The advice provided in this article is for informational purposes only. It is meant to augment and not replace consultation with a licensed health care provider. Consultation with a Naturopathic Doctor or other primary care provider is recommended for anyone suffering from a health problem.

Resources

1. American College of Naturopathic Obstetricians: Home Obstetrical Care, A Handbook for the Practitioner.
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8.Yarnell, Eric. “Botanical Medicine in Pregnancy and Lactation”. Alternative & Complementary Therapies. April 1997. P. 93-100.