



GOOD FOR WHAT AILS YOU

Vermonters had to be resourceful to stay alive in the Green Mountain wilderness of two hundred years ago. Doctors were hard to come by so settlers cared for their sick in their own homes with medicines they made themselves. A good understanding of herbs was **essential**. The woods and their barnyards were their pharmacies, providing the necessary ingredients for their home cures.

With information learned from the Indians and passed on from grandparents, boys and girls gathered the proper roots, barks, buds and berries to cure colds, fevers, and complaints of the liver, lungs and heart. **Receipts** for homemade drugs appeared in cookbooks and in the annual almanac that hung on the wall of most homes.

The women suspended collected plant materials from the kitchen rafters to dry. Later, they crushed them in the family's mortar and pestle, and stored them in crocks or cloth bags until they were needed.

People tried to practice preventive medicine as well. A thin strip of red wool cloth or yarn tied around the neck (if for a girl) or the waist (if for a boy) was supposed to ward off mumps. A **garland** of onions or garlic worn around the neck kept influenza at bay. But when prevention failed, as it so often did, people turned to home remedies.

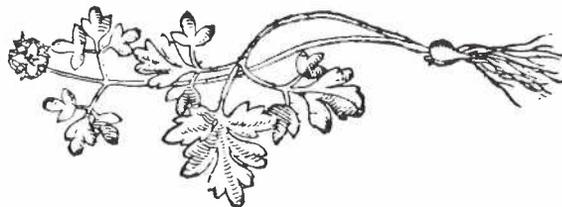
Dried blueberries and chestnuts soaked in urine were a sure cure for the **croup**. The receipt neglects to say how one was supposed to take this unpleasant sounding medicine. For upper **respiratory** infections the patient was well greased, both inside and out, with skunk oil. Black sheep's wool dipped in rum and placed in the ear was widely known to soothe ear aches.

A recipe for a cure for fever and **ague** instructs, "Make six **middling** sized pills of cobwebs. Take one a little before the cold fit; two a little before the next fit; the other three if need be a little before the third

fit." A **salve** made from worms mixed with warm **mutton tallow** soothed aching joints. To dissolve bladder stones patients drank goldenrod tea in which honey bees had been simmered.

For the stomach upsets caused by **dysentery**, one receipt directs the reader, "Take the white of hen **dung**, **pulverize** it fine, and mix it with molasses. Give a child a teaspoonful at a time." To cure asthma one took the liver of a "beef creature", split it open, set both naked feet upon it and wrapped the rest over the feet till it was cold. **Puncture** wounds were treated in the same way using salt pork.

Cures of this kind may seem strange to us today. Many of the herbs and barks our ancestors collected, however, are now sold in our pharmacies. Witch hazel is an example. We can only guess what our great-great-grandchildren will think of the remedies we use.



VOCABULARY

essential - necessary

receipt - old spelling of "recipe"

garland - a wreath of flowers or other materials worn around the neck or hung as a decoration

croup - ailment, characterized by a harsh cough, affecting children

respiratory - having to do with the process of breathing

ague - fever attack with recurring chills and shivering

middling - medium size

salve - a medicinal ointment

mutton tallow - lamb fat

dysentery - infection of the lower intestinal tract

dung - manure

pulverize - to pound, crush or grind into powder

puncture - to make a hole in something with a sharp object