

9 Questions to Ask Any Herbal Manufacturer

1. Do you use certified organic or wild crafted herbal ingredients in your products?

Certified organic or wild crafted mean that the herbal ingredients were grown and harvested without pesticides, herbicides, synthetic fertilizers, or ethylene oxide gas. These chemicals are very bad for your nervous system. Ethylene oxide gas promotes cancer – it is a mutagen and can cause birth defects. Wild crafted herbs are grown wild and harvested without chemicals. This also implies that the herb was grown away from toxic areas such as landfills or highways.

2. Do you import any of your herbs from overseas?

Bulk herbs imported from overseas are cheaper for the manufacturer and cost approximately ten to twenty cents per pound compared to U.S. certified organic herbs (grown to Tilth Standards) which start at about \$10.00 per pound. Unless the herbs are certified organic, these herbs are not guaranteed to be free of chemicals. Many imported herbs are grown near toxic waste facilities and come over with E. Coli on them. Therefore, all bulk herbs are required to be fumigated and irradiated by the Department of Agriculture when they arrive on the U.S. dock. You should especially avoid herbs grown and harvested in China, Eastern Europe, Egypt, Mexico, and Spain.

3. & 4. Are your imported herbs in bulk or finished form? Does the overseas supplier guarantee that the ingredients in the finished form herbal product are certified organic?

If the manufacturer imports finished herbal products (already packaged and ready for sale) from overseas, ask if the herbal ingredients are certified organic. Also ask from what region overseas were the herbs grown and harvested.

5. Do you use heat in your manufacturing or packaging process?

Herbal products that are treated with heat (especially in manufacturing) will lose plant nutrition, will not be as potent, and can become an inorganic supplement. Inorganic supplements (especially those made with petro chemicals) will draw from your body's nutritional stores in an attempt to assimilate the supplement. Instead of providing nutrition to your body, you are actually depleting it.

Avoid processes that use artificial extraction. This process produces heat, sacrifices plant nutrition, and produces a weak product. Also avoid processes which add cooked ingredients. Cooked ingredients add only bulk to the product, and the plant nutrition is seriously depleted. Most large manufacturing plants use packaging machinery that can produce heavy bursts of heat. Products rolling by are exposed to heat that could singe your eyebrows. Herbal products exposed to high heat sources (no matter how brief) have the potential to become inferior.

6. How long do you allow your herbal liquids (extracts, tinctures) to age?

When it come to herbal liquids, known as extracts or tinctures, you want the old stuff. The longer the aging, the more potent the formula. It is important that the aging process be as natural as possible. You do not want products subjected to a forced or artificial aging. Today most large manufacturers will use an extraction process similar to processing pressure treated lumbar. This process forces plant nutrition from the herb with pressure. It is a process which

can make thousands of gallons of herbal liquids in a matter of hours, but plant nutrition is sacrificed in order to mass produce a product and get it to market.

A natural aging process, similar to aging wine, is one that takes a little longer but produces a superior product. All the plant nutrition is in tact. Not heat or cooked ingredients are added to this process. The best products will be aged at least two weeks or longer and are cold pressed – no heat.

7. Do you add flavorings to your herbal products?

Some manufacturers will add flavorings to their products for various reasons. Some may say to help preserve the product, or make it more palatable. The reason you want to be concerned with is that flavorings can hide the true ingredients in the product. Each herb has its own distinctive signature taste. For instance, lobelia (known to help with respiratory conditions) is bitter and will leave a scratchy feeling on the back of your throat for a few minutes. Flavorings can hide the fact that lobelia isn't in the formula at all even if it is listed on the ingredient panel. Also, know that when flavorings are added to an herbal formula, they weaken the herb's potency.

I say, go with what Nature intended. Nature knows best. It is in your best interest to be familiar with each herb and its signature taste. Become a connoisseur of herbs.

8. (For herbal liquids -extracts and tinctures) What is the percentage ratio of herb to catalyst?

The herb to catalyst ratio is very important and it will let you see just how cheap the manufacturer is on herbal ingredients. You really want an herb catalyst ratio of 1:1 or 1:2. This means the manufacturer is generous on the herbal ingredients and isn't using a lot of fillers or a lot of alcohol to extend batch volume.

For herbal liquids, the herb should soak (age) in a catalyst of alcohol. (Alcohol is best. It can naturally extract more plant nutrients out of the herb and into the liquid.) A good herb to catalyst ratio is three parts herb to four parts catalyst. The more herb in the mix, the stronger the formula will be. Don't be fooled with high tech talk. You need quality herbs, and enough of them, to produce a superior formula. All the high-pressure extraction processes in the world cannot make up for lack of ingredients, and the appropriate aging time.

9. Are your herbal products made and supervised by an herbalist or pharmacist?

Some of the largest pharmaceutical companies are breaking into the botanical market. It is my hope that they have employed herbalists who have the hands-on experience with herbs. Individuals who have no practical experience with herbs will lack the knowledge of making superior herbal formulas, recommending herbal doses, and using herbs in combination with other herbs for maximum results. It's like having a car mechanic show up to perform your heart surgery. When it comes to who is making your botanical products, be selective. After all, when you go to the hospital, you demand an M.D. So likewise, when you use herbs, demand an herbalist.