

Herbs and Diet Supplements

Alternative remedies grow in popularity

BY REBEKAH BELLE
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Prescription prices are putting the bite on household budgets. The recession is amplifying the pain as workers lose health coverage and employers cut back on drug benefits. More Americans are being forced to choose between buying food and buying medicine.

But in the herbs and diet supplement market, sales are increasing despite the bad economy, according to an Associated Press review of recent data from market-watchers and retailers.

Medicines, both herbal and pharmaceutical, are big business. These days, Americans spend \$200 billion per year on prescription drugs and \$20 billion on herbs and other dietary supplements (Britannica Online Encyclopedia).

Bob Hodges, the owner of the Emerald Forest Herbarium, agrees. His store at 315 N.E. Wygant St. has seen a real increase of people seeking alternative remedies from all walks of life

Hodges has been in his shop for over seven years and has grown with the times. He carries over 500 herbs as well as other health supplements like essential oils, extracts, and amino acids; along with products from the Life Extension and NOW brands.

While striving to provide the best herbs available on the market, he also offers a research library to help customers make the best decisions when choosing herbs. He also will provide consultation and research on herbalism and related studies.

"There is a real empowerment when taking control of helping yourself," Hodges said. "In some cases herbal remedies for simple ailments such as acid reflux, can be soothed with a very simple and inexpensive combination of herbs including marshmallow, licorice and slippery elm."

Hodges is also seeing a unification of Eastern Chinese herbalism and Western herbalism giving consumers a wider vari-



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Despite a poor economy, business is increasing for the herbs and diet supplement market as witnessed by Bob Hodges, owner of Emerald Forest Herbarium, located at 315 N.E. Wygant St., one half block from Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

ety of herbal aids.

Although many people feel herbs are unscientific, primitive, unproved and ineffective, there is another side of the story to these commonly accepted beliefs about herbs. Over 130 million prescription drugs come from plants. 75 percent of the hormones used in medicine today are derived completely from plants.

For example, digitalis is a drug used to stimulate the heart and comes from an herb called foxglove. Another example is the effective anti-clotting agent called coumarol that comes from an herb--sweet clover.

Though herbal supplements are an alternative to pharmaceuticals, herbs actually receive less governmental regulation, so it's important to be aware of how both industries are regulated.

When choosing the best remedy or preventive medicine, most of us simply want the safest, most effective option available, whether it's food, herbs or a pharmaceutical drug.

Do your homework to find out all you can before making any herb or drug a regular part of your health routine. Also be sure to speak with your doctor before taking supplements.

So many people are taking alternative medicines these days that some conventional medical practitioners are becoming better informed and more accepting of these treatments. It's important to be aware of any interactions between herbs and pharmaceuticals. Your doctor should be able to help you avoid complications between herbs and any other medications you might be taking.

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