

## Plants used in jamaican folk medicine against the common cold, flu and Diarrhea

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The common cold is a virus-based disease that inflicts millions of people every year. More than 200 different types of viruses are known to cause the common cold, including rhinovirus (30-35% of adult colds), coronavirus, adenovirus, respiratory syncytial virus and parainfluenza virus. Flu is caused by the influenza virus. Diarrhea can also be caused by viruses, such as rotavirus and other enteric viruses. These viral infections are frequent and recurring in the Caribbean leading to many wasted hours away from school and work. These viral infections are self-limiting and resolve spontaneously but there is no accepted cure. Home remedies used to alleviate the symptoms include getting rest, drinking plenty of fluids, increasing vitamin C intake, chicken soup, gargling with warm saltwater, over-the-counter medications such as throat and cough lozenges, sprays, drops and syrups etc. Decongestants and antihistamines may be also be prescribed. Jamaican herbs are another possibility. Why they work has not yet been scientifically evaluated but there is plenty of folk evidence that they do work. Some have been found to be high in vitamin C; others contain rosmarinic acid which is a well-known anti-viral phytochemical. TRAMIL questionnaires given to individuals living in various rural and urban areas throughout Jamaica has revealed many plants used for colds and flu: Aloe, briar wist, calypso, cerasee, comfrey, eucalyptus, fever grass, five fingers, fresh-cut, garlic, ginger, gross stake, jack-in-the-bush, john's hall, joseph coat, king-of-the-forest, leaf-of-life, lime, marigold, medina, neem, pimento, pink sage, pudding wist, quaco, rice and peas bush, rice bitters, semi-contract, soursop, spirit weed, st vincent plum, tamarind, vervine, water grass. Bad colds in the chest are treated with John Charles and fever grass. Asthma herbs include ganja, spirit weed, bird pepper, John Charles, asthma weed, trumpet tree. Diarrhea herbs include coconut water, guava, rice bitters, quaco, arrowroot, mints, pepper elder, chicken weed, garlic, leaf-of-life, and lime. Some of these plants are pan-tropical, some are endemic and a few are still only known by their common names. The significance of this data will be discussed.

### Biography

Dr. Sylvia Mitchell completed her Ph.D in Biotechnology in 2000 from the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, Jamaica, West Indies and is presently research leader of the Medicinal Plant Research Group which she initiated in 1999 at the Biotechnology Centre, UWI. She has published more than 210 articles including 17 papers in reputed journals, 98 conference papers, posters and abstracts, 16 reports and books, 15 e-newsletters and 72 magazine/newspaper articles. She serves as reviewing editor for many tissue culture and medicinal plant journals.