

Medieval Remedies

Cures for the Plague and More

By: Murigheal O'Seannaig

Disclaimer (legal Stuff)

The following information contained in these pages is for educational and informational purposes only and is not intended as medical advice. The information herein comes from herbal and botanical sources throughout history and cannot be guaranteed the cause and effect in which these herbs and remedies create.

Disclaimer (more legal stuff)

All persons using this material as reference agree to accept full responsibility for any results experienced by using them. You are responsible for your own health. As with conventional medicine, herbal medicine is vast and complex, and must be used responsibly. People react differently to different remedies. Some herbs are contraindicated with certain pharmaceutical drugs. Further, some helpful herbs may be confused with harmful and/or deadly substances. There are many plants and mushrooms that can make you sick or are deadly poisonous. Be 100% of your identification before you harvest any plant or mushroom. Additionally, sometimes a new food, even properly identified, can cause an unusual reaction – ranging from gastric intolerance to a full-blown allergy.

Disclaimer (more legal stuff)

I am a medical professional and an Herbalist, but I am not a physician. Only a physician can diagnose, treat, and prescribe for illness or disease. **As an Herbalist, I neither diagnose nor treat disease. Nor do I prescribe remedies.**

Herbalists are people who dedicate their lives to working with medicinal plants. They include native healers, scientists, naturopaths, holistic medical doctors, researchers, writers, herbal pharmacists, medicine makers, wild crafters, harvesters and herbal farmers to name a few.

Disclaimer (more legal stuff)

FDA Disclaimer: These statements and products have not been evaluated by the FDA. They are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease or condition.

*All images copied within are not my own and have been acquired using creative common licensing or properly referenced. These images may be used for personal usage, but not for sale/reproduction as per their copyright.

In Service –

Lady Lasairfhíona inghean Tuathail

Apothecarist, Herbalist, Nurse



The Black Death

The Black Death wreaked havoc throughout Medieval England. The Black Death killed one in three people and was to have a direct link to the Peasants Revolt of 1381. ‘Cures’ for the Black Death went from the absurd to having a degree of common sense about them. Regardless of this, the casualty figures for the Black Death were massive.

The Black Death Timeline



1333 CE:
The plague breaks out in china, killing five million.

1347:
The plague spreads to Cyprus and into Italy, Venice, Egypt.

1349:
Thousands of Jews burned to death. The plague also reaches

1353:
35 million deaths from the plague in china.

1346:
Merchants go to Sicily and they spread the disease even

1348:
The plague reaches Paris and England. Persecution of the Jews start.

1351:
Plague reaches Russia.

60% of Europe's population died.

Modern boundaries are shown for reference.

• Cities with repeated plague outbreaks, 14th to 18th century

← Spreading of the plague by marine routes

Approximate date of the first outbreak



1347



1350



1348



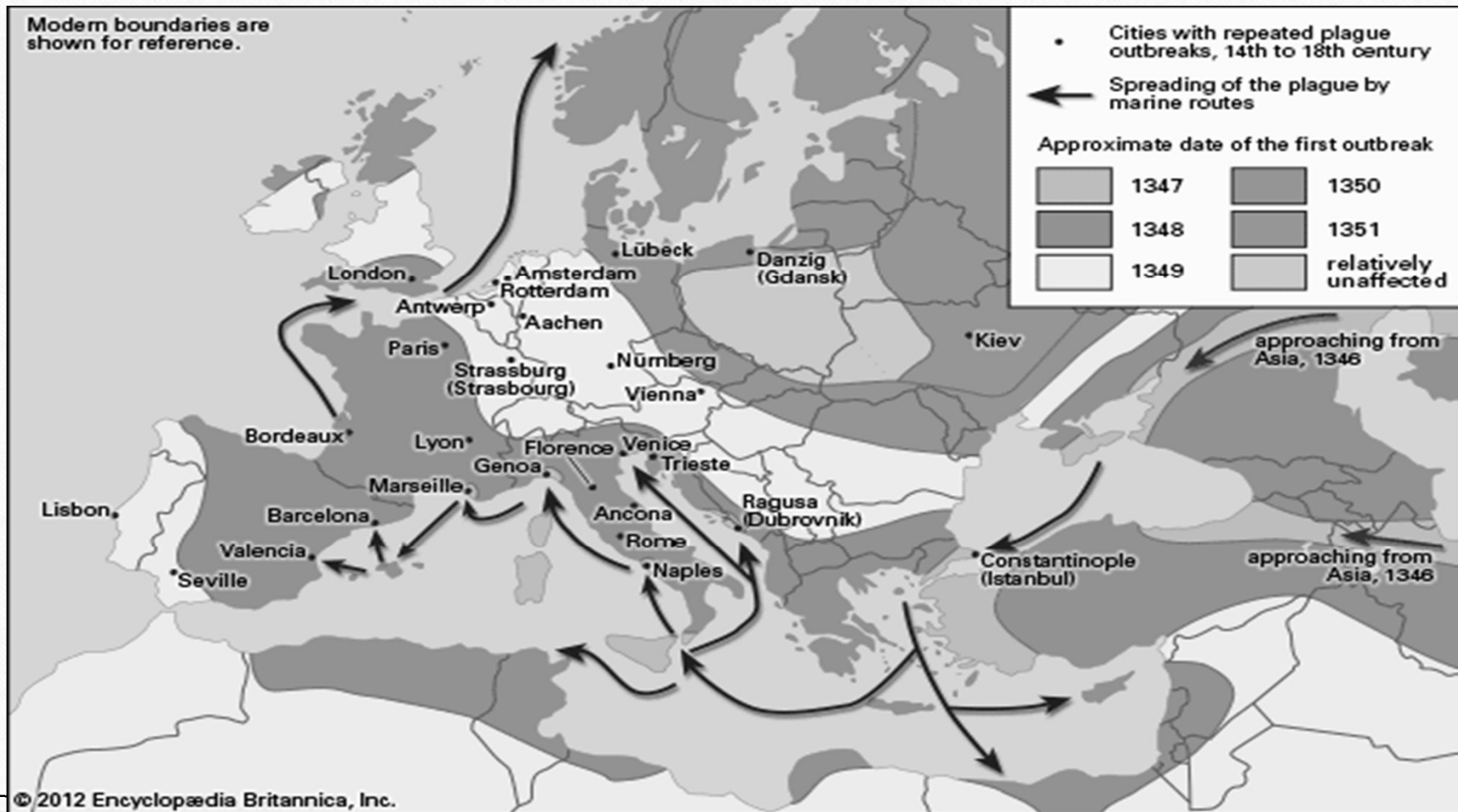
1351



1349



relatively unaffected



The Black Death Cures

**Vinegar and water
treatment**

If a person gets the disease, they must be put to bed. They should be washed with vinegar and rose water

Lancing the buboes

The swellings associated with the Black Death should be cut open to allow the disease to leave the body. A mixture of tree resin, roots of white lilies and dried human excrement should be applied to the places where the body has been cut open.

The Black Death Cures

Bleeding

The disease must be in the blood. The veins leading to the heart should be cut open. This will allow the disease to leave the body. An ointment made of clay and violets should be applied to the place where the cuts have been made.

Diet

We should not eat food that goes off easily and smells badly such as meat, cheese and fish. Instead we should eat bread, fruit and vegetables

The Black Death Cures

Sanitation

The streets should be cleaned of all human and animal waste. It should be taken by a cart to a field outside of the village and burnt. All bodies should be buried in deep pits outside of the village and their clothes should also be burnt.

Pestilence medicine

Roast the shells of newly laid eggs. Ground the roasted shells into a powder. Chop up the leaves and petals of marigold flowers. Put the egg shells and marigolds into a pot of good ale. Add treacle and warm over a fire. The patient should drink this mixture every morning and night.

The Black Death Cures

Witchcraft

Place a live hen next to the swelling to draw out the pestilence from the body. To aid recovery you should drink a glass of your own urine twice a day



Aromatherapy

One popular treatment method that has actually survived until today was aromatherapy. That is, the treatment of the body using different smells. Back during the Black Death, people were instructed to carry sweet smelling flowers with them wherever they went. If they couldn't get flowers, they were told to carry around packets of herbs.

It was in this time that the French pomander—balls of perfume—became popular with the upper class. Others closed their windows so that the bad smell in the winds wouldn't enter their homes. Note to aromatherapists: it didn't work then; it doesn't work now.

Religion

In an even more religious world than today, it comes as no surprise that most people turned to religion. Some people believed that the dreaded disease was a punishment from God, and others thought that God was testing them. When the plague spread to the Middle East, Muslims were told to sit back and suck it up because it was God's will.

Not that the European response was any less extreme. Devout Catholics took to the highways and whipped themselves while crying out for God's mercy. Because when God is punishing you, the only obvious thing to do is punish yourself . . . a lot.

Rotten Treacle

Treacle—a by-product of sugar production—would often be given to sick patients. Unfortunately, it had to be at least ten years old to be considered effective. The old, smelly, sticky substance was believed to combat not only the horrific effects of the disease, but to rid the body of it for good.

This remedy actually has a touch of sense to it: potentially disease-fighting moulds, yeasts and other cultures would have thrived in the syrup and matured over time. But we can only wonder who thought of this in the first place, and how on earth the victims managed to swallow.

Live in a Sewer

When people figured out that the Black Death was airborne, they began to visit—or even live—in foul-smelling sewers. It was thought that the sharp stench of rotting human waste would discourage the cleaner (but disease-ridden) air from coming near and infecting them. This didn't work, of course—and as well as being susceptible to the plague, they often died of other diseases.

Leeches

Bloodletting was popular all over Europe during this time, and it was used to cure everything from gout to goiter. If you were lucky, you could afford to have leeches do all the hard work for you. Leeches were actually a fairly painless method of blood-letting. But most people could not afford them, and had to go with the age-old method of cutting the skin open.

A blade would be pushed into a vein, and blood would be drained into a bowl. Without painkillers this procedure would have been agony—and with sanitation levels leaving much to be desired, gruesome infections were common. Just what you need when you have a life-threatening disease.



Eat a Spoon of Crushed Emeralds

Another edible cure was the powder of crushed emeralds. The precious stones would be ground down to a fine powder in a mortar and pestle, then either mixed with a liquid and drunk like a potion, mixed with food or in bread and eaten, or swallowed on its own as a powder. This would have been terrible to eat, with a taste and texture vaguely resembling that of crushed glass.

Incidentally, the desperate remedies of disease-ridden victims aren't too far removed from the fashionable meals of today's billionaires.

Wash Yourself With Urine

Urine enjoyed a good reputation in medieval Europe, and this was one case in which supply could happily meet demand. Victims of the Black Death would often be bathed in urine several times a day to relieve the symptoms of the plague.

Even more highly recommended was a glass of the stuff. Pee would be collected by non-infected members of the public, and given or sold to the diseased as naturally as we might offer a sick person a glass of orange juice today. Speaking of which, urine is still used today as a treatment for many issues, from acne to multiple sclerosis—and some people also wash their faces with urine during a solar eclipse.

Smear Yourself With Human Poop

Here's another solution that plague victims wouldn't have wanted to hear. The buboes (sores) were cut open, and a paste was applied. The paste was made from a mixture of tree resins, flower roots, and poo. Doctors loved the stuff.

Unfortunately for the weak-stomached, this smelly paste was pushed inside their open wounds, which would then be tightly wrapped to keep the disgusting concoction inside. I'm starting to wonder whether the plague itself was really responsible for the massive death-rate after all. . . .

Rub Your Wounds With a Live Chicken

Far and away one of the most bizarre was the Vicary Method—named after Thomas Vicary, an English doctor who invented the technique. People would shave a hen's butt and strap it to their swollen lymph nodes . . . while the chicken was still alive. Then, when the chicken got sick, they would wash it and repeat the process until only the chicken or victim was healthy.

Vicary's technique spread far and wide, with crazy people everywhere turning themselves into the hosts of plague-ridden chicken parasites. This Vicary guy was so popular that to this very day a special lecture is held annually in his honor by the Royal College of Surgeons in England. But then again, science is a religion after all.



Everything Else

When things got really bad, people decided to just throw whatever they could think of at the disease. This included—but was not limited to: drinking arsenic or mercury, not having thoughts about death in general, not having thoughts about the plague, not having sad thoughts, not eating figs, not eating meat, not running or walking outside, not exercising at all, not bathing, not sleeping in the day, and finally for good measure, not having sex. Effectively the worst possible kind of celibacy—the kind that leaves you covered in dripping sores and dead.

Saint Hildegard of Bingen's Medicine



Who was Saint Hildegard?

- Saint Hildegard of Bingen's Story. Abbess, artist, author, composer, mystic, pharmacist, poet, preacher, theologian, visionary, and so much more!
- Born into a noble family, she was instructed for ten years by the holy woman Blessed Jutta. When Hildegard was 18, she became a Benedictine nun at the Monastery of Saint Disibodenberg. Ordered by her confessor to write down the visions that she had received since the age of three, Hildegard took ten years to write her Scivias (Know the Ways). Pope Eugene III read it, and in 1147, encouraged her to continue writing. Her Book of the Merits of Life and Book of Divine Works followed. She wrote over 300 letters to people who sought her advice; she also composed short works on medicine and physiology and sought advice from contemporaries such as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux.