

COW MANURE TEA

While folk medicine has become popular in recent years, many elder people don't follow the popular trends. Some elderly people who are now more affluent and live in nice homes "don't remember" any folk medicines that were used. My mother-in-law explained to me many years ago that people didn't talk about their home remedies for fear they would be thought of as "backward." This may be why many people who were interviewed didn't know of any. When the researcher asked one elderly man who was interviewed if his mother had ever given him any home remedies when he was ill, he said, with what seemed to be a bit of mischief in his eyes, "My mother gave me cowshit tea!" This was one the researcher had not heard of before, so that can fall into the category of "Questions she didn't know to ask."

How prevalent was tea made from cow manure? The researcher asked a Black female professor who is head of the Women's Studies Program at the University of Alabama if she had ever heard of such a tea. The woman grew up in Selma. She said that the older people in that area had used it. Another Black female professor who teaches in Mississippi but grew up in the Tuscaloosa area was asked, and she was very familiar with its use in the days of her elders. A blue-collar worker (Black female) was asked the same question. She is a native of the Montgomery area, and she also gave an immediate positive response to knowing of its use and described her mother putting the cow manure in a white bag and boiling it. Since cow manure tea was immediately acknowledged by Black women who had been raised in three different rural areas of Alabama, it was concluded that it was probably used by a number of people in the pre-arsenal communities.

However, further information about cow manure tea was sought, and it was found in an article printed in the June 30, 2002 edition of *The Huntsville Times*, page A-17, entitled "In rural areas, old-timers swear cow manure tea cures colds, fever," written by Tom Gordon and reprinted from *The Birmingham News*.

Gordon interviewed 78-year-old Mary Surles. She said the beverage is commonly called "Many Weed Tea," and its main ingredient is dried cow manure. The other ingredients in it improve the taste. Surles is from Lowndes County, and she said that there and elsewhere in Alabama people her age and younger claim the tea "puts their colds and fever to flight." The tea is called Many Weed Tea because the chips contain grasses and weeds, which cows commonly graze.

Gordon said Mosses Mayor Walter Hill whose grandmother made it for him called the tea a "miracle cold drug." Gordon also quoted veteran state Senator Hank Sanders of Selma who said his mother served it to him when he was a boy, and "It often tasted different, depending on what the cow had been eating."

Gordon said a Perry County resident, Beatrice Harris, said she drinks some when she has a bad cold.