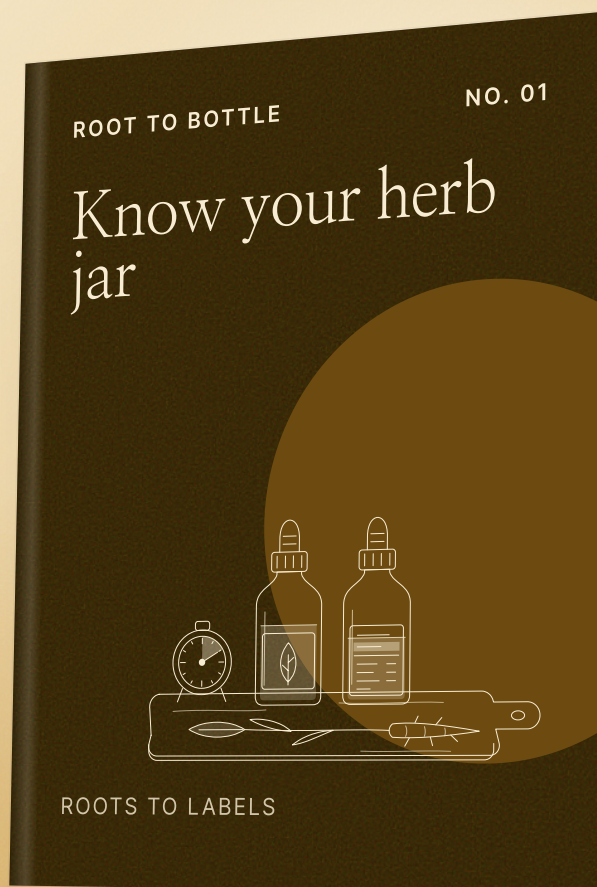




REMEDY GUIDE · HERBS

How to compare herbal jars with ten minutes spare

Two tinctures can share a plant name and still differ in part, weight and serving. This walkthrough shows how to read any back panel so the kitchen shelf holds what was intended.

- Serving first**
One line sets dose, cost and Daily Value.
- Plant part**
Root, leaf and extract change the meaning.
- Blend caution**
Grouped herbs hide single herb amounts.

By Jonah Rivera · Updated Jul 25, 2026 · 10 min read

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Two amber bottles stand side by side above a cutting board, both promising calm or strength from roots. One back panel names the plant part and the weight in plain lines, the other gathers herbs into a blend and leans on front label language. When the back panel can be read with confidence, the choice takes minutes and the story on the front takes its proper place.

01

Begin with servings before herbs

The panel starts with the detail that resets all figures beneath it. The Food and Drug Administration explains that serving size shows the quantity people commonly consume or drink and does not advise how much to consume or drink. All calorie counts, nutrient quantities and percent Daily Values on the label apply to that stated serving, so two servings call for doubling calories, nutrients and percent Daily Values.

A kitchen food case shows the sums clearly. In the FDA sample lasagna label, a single serving equals 1 cup with 280 calories and four servings in the package would equal 1,120 calories. The arithmetic for capsules and tinctures follows the same pattern, only the unit shifts. Under 21 CFR 101.36, serving size for dietary supplements has to use a phrase suited to the form, such as tablets, capsules, packets or teaspoonfuls.

Search for two lines placed together near the top of the panel. Supplement Facts panels have to carry names and quantities of dietary ingredients, serving size and servings per container, with an exception when quantity and servings information overlap. By that same rule, Servings Per Container may be left off the label when it already appears in the net quantity statement. A bottle marked 60 capsules with a serving size of 2 capsules gives the count already, even when the servings line is absent.

How to work it in under a minute

Study the form word first, then the figure. Record whether a serving means 1 capsule, 2 tablets, 1 packet or 1 teaspoonful. Confirm servings per container or calculate it from net contents. Scale each amount on the panel when the daily routine calls for more than one serving. Hold that scaled amount in view through the remaining read, because dose, blend weight and price per serving all depend on it.

The rule behind this design predates many bottles now sold. DSHEA in 1994 defined dietary supplements, set added label requirements and allowed for optional label statements. FDA put the DSHEA label rules into effect on September 23, 1997 for statement of identity, nutrition labeling, ingredient labeling and claims. That panel has held steady since then, which eases comparison across brands and years.

02

Read plants, weights and preparations

The central section of the panel names what the maker treats as dietary ingredients. Dietary ingredients include vitamins, minerals, amino acids, herbs and other botanicals, plus other dietary substances, concentrates, metabolites, constituents, extracts and blends. Each entry ought to present a name, a weight and a unit in Amount Per Serving.

Preparation counts as strongly as weight for botanicals. A Supplement Facts panel may name the plant part and the form like as folic acid, while a Nutrition Facts panel may not. Parentheses commonly hold that specification. Calcium as calcium carbonate, magnesium as magnesium oxide, or vitamin C as ascorbic acid each identify a particular source material behind the nutrient name. Under 21 CFR 101.36, allowed synonyms cover Vitamin C as ascorbic acid, thiamin as vitamin B1, riboflavin as vitamin B2, and calories as energy. When two bottles name different forms, the comparison moves beyond weight against weight alone.

Weight calls for one further conversion in the mind. Under 21 CFR 101.36, amounts by weight must show the weight of the dietary ingredient itself like calcium rather than calcium carbonate. The figure refers directly to the nutrient itself. That standard keeps labels uniform, yet it also means the powder inside the capsule weighs more than the listed amount whenever the compound includes added mineral salts, waters of hydration or carriers.

Units merit a slow look. Milligrams, micrograms, grams and International Units cannot be matched by eye. Later price comparisons work only with identical units such as mg versus mg. Transcribe the unit precisely when making notes, especially for vitamin A, vitamin D and vitamin E where older and newer labels may differ in convention.

FROM THE EDITORS

Under 21 CFR 101.36, vitamins and minerals present at less than 2 percent of the Reference Daily Intake are amounts that can be declared as zero and shall not be declared, while Nutrition Facts panels must list zero amounts of nutrients and Supplement Facts panels cannot list zero amounts. Leaving it off the panel means little or none for labeling, not proof it is missing from the formula.

03

Use percent Daily Value lightly

Percent Daily Value occupies the right column and tempts fast conclusions. Regard it as a labeling benchmark, not as individual guidance. High and low figures help order bottles against one another. They do not prescribe intake for a particular person absent health professional advice.

Two details govern what lands in that column. First, Supplement Facts panels omit zero amounts and very small amounts, as mentioned above. A nutrient present at less than 2 percent of the Reference Daily Intake stays off the panel. Second, percent figures rise with serving size. Because all amounts describe the stated serving, doubling the serving doubles the percent Daily Values as well. A panel that looks modest at 1 capsule may look high at a 2 capsule serving.

Employ the column to sort, not to settle. When two bottles list an identical ingredient in an identical form and unit, the larger percent figure indicates more of that nutrient per serving. When forms diverge, hold back before ranking, because form shapes how ingredients compare in ways the panel alone does not settle. When a figure seems large enough to affect total intake from food and other products, maker records, lot testing and professional advice deserve greater trust than the panel.

The panel also observes boundaries that count. It cannot approve products, and no warning or a facility statement does not mean there is no risk. Whether a higher percent Daily Value fits a particular person stays beyond what the label can show.

04

Read the small print ingredients

Beneath the dietary ingredients rests a separate line, usually set in smaller type. Other Ingredients are inactive parts covering fillers, binders, disintegrants, lubricants and glidants, coatings, and flavors and texture modifiers. FDA asks supplement labels to carry a descriptive name saying it is a dietary supplement, maker packer or distributor name and place of business, ingredient list and net contents. The Other Ingredients list is part of that ingredient disclosure.

Length by itself reveals little. Other Ingredients can perform genuine roles such as flow, binding, disintegration, coating, stability and taste, so a long list does not by itself prove low quality. Capsule shells, tablet binders that hold powder under pressure, lubricants that keep high speed equipment running, coatings that control moisture, and flavors that make powders drinkable each meet a production requirement. A short list alone does not prove better quality either. Some sellers and commentators caution that excipients may trigger allergies, change dissolution, add bulk or hide full detail, so purpose counts more than count.

Scan the line for role instead of alarm. Gelatin or vegetable cellulose commonly forms the capsule. Cellulose, starch or dicalcium phosphate commonly supplies bulk or structure. Magnesium stearate or silicon dioxide commonly aids flow. Waxes, shellac or polymers often coat tablets. Colors and flavors shape how it looks and tastes. Where the label specifies a grade, such as a particular starch or coating, write it down. Keep in mind that individual excipient weights are not required where the label gives no amount, which limits how far comparison can go.

Front label language requires papers behind it. Phrases like no fillers may reflect one formula decision yet do not explain the role of the ingredients that remain. The Other Ingredients list, the lot number and third party paperwork tell more than the claim.

05

Approach blends that group herbs

Blends make comparison more difficult. In a proprietary blend, the blend weight and each ingredient in the blend must appear, but not the amount of each ingredient in the blend. Proprietary blends may read as blend, complex, matrix or proprietary formulation, with only the total combined amount shown and ingredients in descending order by weight. The exact dose of any one ingredient in such a blend, when only total blend weight appears, is something the evidence does not show.

This arrangement appears often. In the NIH Dietary Supplement Label Database as of April 2022, 34 percent of labels listed dietary ingredients in blends and 21 percent listed them in proprietary blends. A reader who finds several botanicals clustered under one total weight is therefore meeting a normal industry practice, not an anomaly.

What to check when doses are grouped

Find the blend name and its total weight first. Verify that every ingredient inside the blend is named. Verify order, because ingredients must appear in descending order by weight. Observe which ingredient opens and which closes, because the first ingredient dominates the blend even when its exact milligrams stay hidden. Handle stimulant blends with extra caution, since grouped amounts prevent dose comparison, intake estimates and trial dosing checks.

Proprietary blends protect formulas yet hide single doses, which limits dose comparison, intake estimates and trial dosing. That compromise belongs in the buying decision. When dose matters for comparison between two bottles, the bottle with per ingredient weights permits sums that the blended bottle does not. When the maker releases lot level certificates or third party details that quantify blend components, that paperwork narrows the gap.

FROM THE EDITORS

The maker must submit proof to FDA within 30 days of marketing, and structure function claims describe the role of a nutrient intended to affect normal structure or function, require a disclaimer that FDA has not evaluated the claim and that the product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent disease. Take that disclaimer as a note on review status, not as a view on whether the product works.

06

Weigh price, seals and wording

Cost comparison begins once dose is understood. Price per unit can be found by entering price, servings per container and units per serving, with units aligned such as mg with mg. The manual method needs only two divisions. Divide bottle price by servings per container to get price per serving. Then divide by units per serving to find price per mg or gram. Compare identical units only.

A simple illustration keeps the method honest. A jar priced at 30 dollars that holds 30 servings works out to 1 dollar per serving. If each serving shows 500 mg of the ingredient of interest, the cost is 2 dollars per gram. A cheaper bottle with a smaller serving weight can cost more per gram, and a larger bottle with more capsules per serving can cost more per day. Blends stall this math at the second step, since single ingredient units are missing and only total blend weight appears.

Documents follow. Seek third party seals, lot numbers, maker name and address, and structure function disclaimers. FDA does not approve dietary supplement facilities or makers and there is no official FDA Approved seal for products. A seal that hints otherwise misleads. A lot number links the bottle to a batch and to any certificate of analysis the maker can supply. The full safety and quality history of a specific bottle cannot be known from the panel alone without lot testing, maker records or third party certification details.

Front claims finish the circuit. Structure function language must bear the FDA disclaimer noted above. Labeling rules require that identity, net contents and contact details appear on the package. When any of those marks are missing, or when the seal cannot be verified with the named certifier, set the bottle aside until the maker supplies documents. Traceable bottles earn the shelf. Opaque bottles wait.

07

The checklist

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- ☐ Transcribe serving size along with form wording
 - ☐ Confirm servings per container or net contents
 - ☐ Scale each amount to servings actually used
 - ☐ Record each dietary ingredient name plus unit
 - ☐ Log parenthetical form for every nutrient
 - ☐ Confirm weights mean nutrient, not source
 - ☐ Use percent Daily Value for ranking alone
 - ☐ Interpret Other Ingredients through function, not length
 - ☐ Note blends, complexes, matrixes and proprietary formulas
 - ☐ Confirm blend order falls by descending weight
 - ☐ Work price per serving out from jar price
 - ☐ Compare price per mg or gram using matched units
 - ☐ Spot maker name, address, lot and seals
 - ☐ Inspect disclaimers and refuse FDA Approved seals
-

08

Sources and further reading

- How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Label · [fda.gov](https://www.fda.gov)
- Dietary Supplement Labeling Guide · [fda.gov](https://www.fda.gov)
- Perspectives on the Use of Proprietary Blends in Dietary Supplements · [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)
- How to Read Dietary Supplement Labels · labelsunwrapped.org
- Proprietary blends: What does this mean? · opss.org
- 21 CFR 101.36 – Nutrition labeling of dietary supplements. · [ecfr.gov](https://www.ecfr.gov)

For information only, not medical advice. Herbs and supplements can interact with medicines and are not right for everyone, especially in pregnancy; check with a doctor or pharmacist before you start one.



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Jonah looks after the brands Root to Bottle works with and makes sure every sponsored page is labelled as one. He spent five years buying for an independent herb shop in Philadelphia, where he learned to ask for the certificate of analysis before the price list.
