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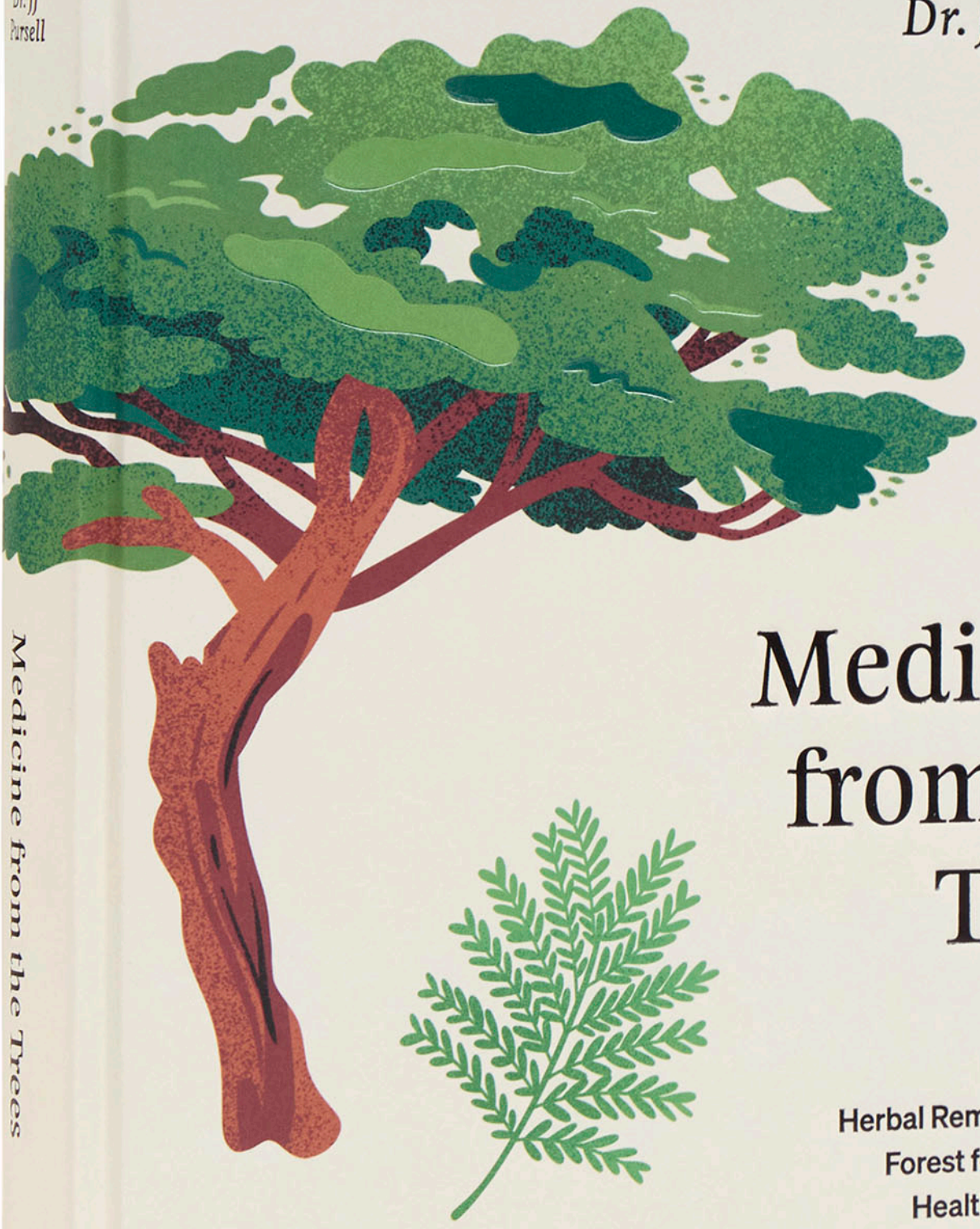
Medicine from the Trees



Medicine from the Trees

Herbal Remedies from the Forest for Whole-Body Health and Wellness

RIZZOLI NEW YORK

Making Tree Medicine

Making medicines from plants is based on ancient wisdom. A knowledge that at one time was passed down from generation to generation and deeply ingrained into the daily practices of many cultures. We can find proof of its existence on Sumerian tablets, Egyptian papyrus, cave art in France, and in the scrolls of China. But even before the first written documentation, there was the witnessing of practical application and the transferring of information through oral history. Families with knowledge of how and when to use certain plants to heal wounds or fight fevers possessed one of the highest types of commodity: survival.

I didn't have a grandmother from the Old World who knew these ways, but once I began to study herbalism it was like a sort of collective memory was switched on inside me. Learning the basics of herbal dynamics, such as the effects of a demulcent or how to identify an astringent by taste, felt like second nature. For the first time I felt connected to *something*, an origin place that provided me peace, comfort, and confidence. I've heard similar stories from students over the years—how herbal medicine information didn't necessarily feel new to them, but as if it was awakening after a long sleep.

As we are now learning, DNA consists of much more than a record of our physical traits. Therefore, I think it is more than reasonable to consider that ancestral knowledge can be passed down through generations at a cellular level. One of my early mentors, Linda Quintana, used to say that when we take in an herb, particularly one that is readily found and foraged across the globe, that our bodies remember its taste and function on a cellular level, too, providing recognition and action for the body. I love thinking about that when I cut and eat some chickweed from my garden. Is it possible that the chickweed on my salad triggers a part of my DNA that remembers my ancestors eating chickweed thousands of years ago?

Making plant medicines, to my mind, can awaken that same familiarity. Even the simple act of cutting a few small stems of yarrow and adding hot water to make a tea can elicit a reconnection point. In recent years there has been a resurgence in the power of plant medicine and earth healing. New books and articles on forest bathing, ion principles, herbal traditions, and earth grounding all remind us that connecting to the earth and the environment around us is just as important as connecting with other humans. Making herbal medicines is a bridge to both. I connect with the earth as I gather the healing plants and establish connection through the art of making medicine. Two tasks that are as old as the beginning of time.

Here is what I suggest in order to awaken your relationship with botanical medicine. First, find an herb that grows right around your house. Naturally you'll want to ensure it is free and clear of fertilizers or herbicides. Then, find a comfortable spot next to the plant and try to meditate for five or ten minutes. Getting present in that space will do wonders for opening up your intuition and inner listening skills. By sitting still, you might be lucky enough to have the herb tell you a story or offer up its medicinal knowledge. This experience alone has taught me more than most herb books.

Next, you'll want to look at the plant and do your best to correctly identify it. You can use books, the internet, or a tool like Google Lens. Correct identification is key but so is a healthy specimen. Does it look vibrant and full of life? If so, you are on the right track. Next, consider what color it is and what it looks like. As part of the process, it is best to write down all your thoughts in an herb journal and perhaps sketch a little picture of it. Then, take a little pinch of it and smell it. Does it smell sweet? Sharp? What does it remind you of? Does it evoke any memories? Write all of this down, even if it seems unformed or superfluous. The next part of the process is to make a cup of tea. Put a little sprig in a cup and pour hot water over it. Let it steep for a few minutes. While it is steeping, be sure to hold the cup under your nose and inhale the steam. What does this smell like? We often describe tea smells as grassy, strong, minty, or earthy. After you've written down your thoughts on smell, take a drink. What does it taste like? Does it have a flavor or quality? When you drink it, how does it make your body feel? Where does it seem to travel to in your body? Even though it is a warm cup of tea, does it make you feel hot, or does it cool you down? Going through this process gives you an immense amount of information and forms the building blocks of an herbal relationship. It is

also one of the best ways to strengthen inner confidence and intuition as a budding herbalist.

TYPES OF MEDICINE YOU CAN MAKE FROM TREES

In the recipe section for each tree in this volume, I've offered up unique recipes with clear instructions. This section on the other hand, is to remind you that, depending on the part of the tree we use, you can make any of the following medicine types as well.

The most common, and easiest, form of herbal medicine is tea. Collect a few needles, flowers, or a bit of bark and you can have medicinal tea in minutes. Herbal syrups can be produced with little to no cooking skills, and making an herbal oil is also a very simple process. Salves for topical use can be made quickly and poultices, fomentations, and herbal capsules are all easily attainable even for the inexperienced. Below I will go through each one to help familiarize yourself with the terminology and techniques.

TEA

When we make herbal tea, the first thing we need to consider is what part of the tree we are using. Typically the parts of the tree we might use are the needles, leaves, buds, flowers, seeds, and bark. The needles, leaves, buds and flowers are of a more delicate matter, which means they should be infused when making tea. This is in comparison to the seeds and bark, which often need to be decocted, or boiled, to release the medicinal qualities into the water.

An infusion, the soaking of herbal material in hot water, can be made by the cup, or in larger quantities and consumed over two or three days. When you are using herbs to actively rebalance function in the body, drinking two to three cups per day for several weeks is often required. Herbal medicine is a slow and steady reorganization of dysfunction. It takes time to unpack the twists and turns of a knotted imbalance and return it to its healthy track. Keep in mind, if you have a chronic dysfunction, you likely realize it didn't just come on suddenly. It often took months or even years of slow building to physically reach the havoc it causes your body today. To reestablish health means you need to backtrack. What I mean is this: if it was a two-year process of dysfunction, it can easily take just as long to get back to baseline. With herbal medicines you typically feel relief of symptoms quite quickly, unweaving all of the damage that the dysfunction created takes time.
Infusion by the cup: Place herbs in a cup or tea strainer and pour (almost) boiling water over. Let it infuse for 8 to 10 minutes, unless you are working with a plant with a high bitter principle, such as hops, then just 3 to 4 minutes.

Decoction: Decoction is the simmering of heavy herbal materials such as roots, seeds, and barks. Place 2 cups of water in a saucepan and 1 tablespoon of herbs. Bring to a simmer and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes with lid ajar. Strain into a tea mug.

Medicinal-strength brew: I often make a 32-oz. mason jar of herbal tea when I know I want to drink 2 or 3 cups per day. This is basically an infusion process, but let the herbs infuse for over 4 hours. This is particularly handy if you have a blend that has both bark and needles, for example. Due to the long infusion time, the medicinal elements will be drawn from the plant material that normally would need to be simmered.

Put 4 or 5 tablespoons of herbal material into the mason jar and pour (almost) boiling water to the top. I cover the top but I typically don't close it up tight with the mason jar lid. I use a coaster or tea towel and then let it sit for 4 hours. Strain it and divide it into three cups for the day, or sip on it throughout the day. You can drink it hot (reheated) or cold.

TEA BLENDING

At some point the idea of blending herbs together to create your own tea blends will spark your curiosity. Perhaps it is because you want to blend a tea for sleep or a sore throat. This is one of my favorite things to do with students. Even those who say they have no palate for or experience in blending flavor combinations always seem to surprise themselves. Sure, you can stay the simple route and stick to using just one herb for your cups of tea, there is no fault in that. I, for one, drink straight chamomile almost every night. But, should you wish to get a little daring, try blending different herbs together and see how it comes out. This isn't without fail, by the way. I've blended plenty of herbs that ended up going right down the drain due to poor taste. Go into it as a learning experience and consider it a fun experiment.

One of the first things you need to consider is how certain herbs taste. This is similar to what many of us already do in the kitchen when adding spices to our foods. What is their flavor profile? If you have a bitter herb, consider balancing it with a sweet one, or a rooty earth flavor can be balanced with a little floral. You can learn flavor profiles by making a singular herb cup of tea and taking notes on what you think. Please keep in mind that everyone's thoughts on flavor are valid. Go with your gut, suss it out, and take good notes.

Another consideration with blending is the action of the herbs you are including. For example, if you want to make a tea to reduce a fever, it's best to not include spices such as cinnamon or cloves—these actually raise body temperature. When you understand the actions of what each herb does, you have the knowledge to create a tea blend with the intention to heal.

Blending is an art with a bit of science mixed in. You want it to produce the desired effect, but you also want it to taste good. There are three components of any good blend: healing potential, support of the body part affected, and flavor.

TEA BLENDING EXERCISE

Start with a healing intention, such as reducing fever or reducing digestive upset. Choose three herbs you want to include in your tea. For digestion, you might consider dogwood as your main herb because of its ability to support the entire digestive process, reducing bloating and gas. Then as a supporting herb you might consider elm because of its rich lignan content and ability to soothe the digestive tract. Now for flavor. In this example I would probably reach for peppermint, a natural digestive aid with great flavor. It also has a stimulant action, which means it will stimulate the other herbs, dogwood and elm, into action.

Next you'll need to play around with how much of each herb to put into the blend. The main herb, the one driving the healing intention, usually has the highest volume. Then the supporting herb, and then the flavor herb. Sometimes the supporting herb and the flavor herb are equal, but many times they have different ratios, depending on which herbs you use. Flavor herbs are usually very aromatic so they don't require much to add a lot of flavor. Keep it simple and use a ratio, say 2:1:0.5 for example. Start there and then you adjust to your preference. Another important consideration is that all blends should be made in small amounts until you get the hang of it. There is nothing worse than having to compost a pound of herbs you blended up because the flavor wasn't palatable. As for storage, I prefer glass mason jars. They keep the herbs fresh and free from oxygenation.

Exercise

Think of a tea blend you'd like to make. Some examples would be a tea for a head cold, sore throat, or one to drink after dinner to support digestion. Consider these three questions:

1. What is the focus of the tea, or the healing intention? What is this tea blend for?
2. What herb do you want to use as the main herb, the supporting herb and the flavor herb? Once you get more familiar with herbs and what they do in the body, this will get easier.
3. What should be your starting place for amounts? You can always add more of something but you can't take it away once the herbs have been blended together.

SYRUP

Roots, barks, and berries all make excellent syrups and can be made in the traditional stovetop way. The more delicate parts of plants, like leaves and flowers, can also be made into a syrup, but works better with an infusion method. See below for the directions for both.

Traditional Syrup Method

Great for tree berries, bark ,and roots such as hawthorn berries, elderberries, and poplar bark.

Specific amounts aren't given here as you will determine that by determining how much final product you wish to have. Instead I'll give you ratios. I like my syrups to be flavorful and bursting with medicinal potential, so I use the ratio of 1 cup of water to 1 tablespoon herb. The other ratio you need is the ratio of water to sugar, which is 1:1.

1 cup water : 1 tablespoon herb: 1 cup sugar
2 cups water: 2 tablespoon herb : 2 cups sugar
4 cups water : 4 tablespoon herb : 4 cups sugar
8 cups water : 8 tablespoon herb : 8 cups sugar

In this method you are using heat to dissolve the sugar as well as to reduce the liquid by half. This is what's known as a reduction. You are reducing the water to half of its original amount to yield a concentrated medicinal syrup.

Why use sugar? Honestly I asked this myself early on in my career and made syrups with various sweeteners including honey, maple syrup, and monk fruit. The reason sugar is used isn't to make the syrup sweet (although that is a great side effect) but because it's an effective preservative. Organic cane or turbinado sugar is a great preservative and I've ended up returning to it time after time when my syrups have gone off in short periods of time. Sugar alternatives can definitely be used, but I would suggest making small batches versus making and storing it until a time when it's needed, to reduce the risk of spoilage.

Place herbs in a thick-bottomed saucepan or smaller Dutch oven. Add water and bring to a boil. Boil it on

medium or medium-low until the water is reduced by half. You don't want to boil it off too quickly, as that doesn't give the plant time to fully break down; similarly, too high of heat can damage the herb's medicinal properties.

After the mix has been reduced, strain the herbal compounds out once it is cool enough to handle safely. I like to set my strainer over a large glass measuring cup so I can accurately know how much sugar to add. Then return the liquid to the pot, measure out your sugar, add it and gently heat while stirring until sugar is completely dissolved.

If you want to ensure preservation for a long period of time, add food-grade citric acid, ½ teaspoon per cup of syrup.

Allow the syrup to cool and then store it in amber-colored bottles in a cool, dark place, or the refrigerator. Be sure to label the vials. Once opened, keep the syrup in the refrigerator and use it within 2 to 3 weeks.

INFUSION SYRUP

Great for blossoms like elderflower, lilac, and linden, and while they *are* all medicinal, they are perhaps more often considered a syrup to be used in the culinary world.

1 cup water : ½ cup herb : ¾ cup sugar : ¼ tsp. citric acid
2 cups water : 1 cup herb : 1½ cup sugar : ½ tsp. citric acid
4 cups water : 2 cup herb : 3 cups sugar : 1 tsp. citric acid
8 cups water : 4 cup herb : 6 cups sugar : 2 tsp. citric acid

In this method, first gently heat the water, sugar, and citric acid until dissolved. There is no need to boil with this method, so ensure you are using a gentle heat. Once dissolved, turn off the heat and let the mixture rest, covered, for 10 minutes.

In the meantime, trim and brush off all the debris from your herbs. I've found washing them reduces the flavor of the syrup, so I don't recommend that.

Fill up the appropriate-sized mason jar with the herbs and pour the sugar mixture over the top. Lay a kitchen towel over the opening and let it sit for 1 to 2 hours. Then move it to the refrigerator and let it steep for 4 days.

Strain the syrup with a very fine-mesh strainer or cheesecloth. Be sure to squeeze the herbs to liberate all of the syrup. Then bottle it up, label it, and enjoy.

HERBAL OIL

When a tree's medicinal parts are soluble in oil, their medicinal properties can be extracted into what is known as an herbal oil. This is *not* an essential oil. Essential oils are made through a distillation process using water and steam. Herbal oils are made by infusing plant material in oil using a heat source. The heat source can even be the sun, as long as it is hot enough, or the oven.

Oil types to consider:
Olive, grapeseed oil, apricot, castor, jojoba, or almond oil.

Sun Method
Fill a mason jar with freshly harvested tree material, such a birch bark. You want the jar to be packed with the bark, but not so tightly that oil can't seep down in between the pieces. Next, simply pour the oil over the bark, to the top of the jar. Cover the jar with cheesecloth and a rubber band to hold it in place.

Set in a very warm and sunny place. The cheesecloth allows for any water in the bark to evaporate and reduces the risk of contaminating the oil. The outside temperatures must reach mid-80s F, or above, for this process to be successful.

Remove the cheesecloth every 4 or 5 days to evaluate and give a stir. Be sure to smell it also to ensure everything is on track. The alternative to stirring is to remove the cheesecloth and put on a mason jar lid and give it a shake. Then remove it and put the cheesecloth back on.

Infuse the oil for 2 to 3 weeks and then strain with a fine-mesh strainer and/or cheesecloth, ensuring you are squeezing all of the oil from the herb.

Store in a dark-colored container in a cool, dark place. Be sure to label it with name and date of production.

Oven Method
The oven method is great when you need to make an herbal oil in the winter, such as with poplar buds. I suggest dedicating one of your old glass baking dishes to your herbal endeavors because getting it completely clean can be challenging. Residue from resins and such is common but because they are antimicrobial/antibacterial.

Line the bottom of your baking dish with your herb of choice and then pour the oil over the top, filling it until you see 1 to 2 inches of oil below the herb. Give it a good stir to saturate the herb; it will begin to sink to the bottom of the pan.

Turn the oven to 150°F and "bake" the oil for 4 to 6 hours. I like to check on it every hour, giving it a stir. This probably isn't necessary, but being part of the process is enjoyable. The best part is the lovely aroma that begins to fill the house. Be sure to let it cool before you strain the oil with a fine-mesh strainer and/or cheesecloth, ensuring you squeeze all of the oil from the herb.

Store the oil in a dark-colored container in a cool, dark place; be sure to label and date it.

SALVE, MUSCLE RUB, BALM

Now that you know how to make herbal oil, you are ready to make an herbal salve. Herbal oils and salves are also used as the base to make body butters, muscle rubs, and balms. Salves are the old-fashioned term for a spreadable medicine that is often put on cuts, burns, and wounds.

Traditionally, lard was used to make the balm thicker but today the most common base is beeswax. There are also vegan waxes available. As a beekeeper, I always have excess wax around from cleaning hives, so that is what I use.

3 milliliters herbal oil : 1 milliliter melted beeswax
300 milliliters herbal oil : 100 milliliters melted beeswax

Gently heat your herbal oil and add the beeswax, stirring with a metal spoon until completely dissolved.

Immediately pour it into your tins, jars, or container of choice and allow it to cool completely before putting the lid on top. If you put the lid on while it is still cooling you'll get condensation on top of the salve and a concave dip in the center of the salve.

The Tried-and-True Spoon Test
If you aren't sure if you've added enough or too much beeswax, try the spoon test. Using a metal spoon, scoop up some of the salve mixture and set the spoon on a piece of wax paper in the refrigerator for 5 to 8 minutes. Pull it from the fridge and test the hardness of salve on the spoon. Is it too soft? Add more beeswax. If it is too hard, add more herbal oil.

POULTICE

A poultice is a paste or soft moist mass of plant material with healing properties. They are quick and easy to apply and often yield fast results. Taking a leaf with known astringent properties, chewing it up in your mouth and then placing it over a wound can be imperative at times when out in the wilderness. At home, we can use a mortar and pestle with a bit of warm water to make a macerated paste and then apply it as needed. I often spread the poultice on the affected/wounded area, cover it with a piece of medical gauze, and tape it down to hold it in place.

In a mortar and pestle grind and macerate 4 to 6 leaves of choice. Transfer this to a small mixing bowl and add teaspoons of hot water until a thick paste forms. You don't want to add the water to the mortar because they are often made of porous material and best kept dry. Apply the poultice to the intended area and leave on for 30 minutes or overnight if wrapped well.

Poultices are great for bug bites, sprains, strains, colds, sinus issues, wounds, cuts, headaches, relaxing, and so much more.

FOMENTATION

A fomentation is similar to a poultice, but instead of applying the plant material directly to the skin, you are making a very steep herbal infusion, soaking a cloth in that infusion and then wrapping the affected area.

Set the kettle to boil and put 1 cup of herbs into a large stockpot. Add three cups of hot water, cover and let steep for 30 minutes. Remove the cover to allow steam to escape. Once it is cool enough to touch, soak a cotton cloth or towel in the tea. Wring out the excess and then wrap the area. You can cover it with another towel or plastic wrap to hold it in place if necessary.

This is great for broken bones, rashes, sore throats, sprains, and strains.

CAPSULES

A popular choice for obvious reasons, capsules are convenient as there is no taste and they are great for traveling.

If you'd like to experiment making capsules, I recommend you invest in a personal capsule maker, something like the Cap.M.Quik or the Capsule Machine. These handy tools make it easy to make homemade capsules. But if you prefer to do it by hand, you certainly can.

You'll need to grind your herbs in a nut, seed, or herb grinder until a very fine powder, then put it into a bowl.

For the capsule tools, you'll start by pulling apart the number of empty capsules you want to make. Put the tops in a bowl and line the bottom tray with the bottom capsule. Next pour the powder over the tray and use the spreading tool to fill up all the capsules. Then you'll put the tops on and voilà, you've got capsules.

Otherwise, by hand, you can pull apart one capsule at a time and, holding either end in either hand, dip each into the bowl of powder and then push the capsule halves together. It's a bit more messy but easy to do.

TINCTURES

Herbal-based tinctures are an old folk remedy where the plant material is macerated (soaked in liquid) to pull the medicinal properties out of the plant and into the liquid. The traditional solvent, the liquid used to macerate, is alcohol. Alcohol is primarily used because it can easily break

down the plant parts and often pulls more medicinal constituents out than water and/or oil. The other advantage of an alcohol-based medicine is that it bypasses the digestive tract. Tinctures are absorbed sublingually, which means they immediately enter the bloodstream when taken. This is very handy when you need your medicine to work quickly.

The two types of tincture production are maceration and percolation. And then you can make a maceration tincture in two different ways. The two ways are the folk method, which I'll describe below, and the standardized method. The standardized method is great for when you want to duplicate exact results or you wish to control the solvent range. It is also required for commercial production. This method can be used by anyone, but for the home herbalists, the folk method works great and is much simpler. If you want to learn about percolations and/or the standardized method, check out my book *The Herbal Apothecary* for step-by-step instructions.

Folk Method

I've made tinctures in all sorts of ways and quite honestly, the folk method is my favorite way. So many of our modern ways have replaced the older traditions, but some things just don't need to be reinvented. You can use fresh or dried tree parts to make tinctures, but when you use the fresh parts there is something magical in seeing the colors change and catching the scents as it macerates.

Fresh vol. 1 herb : 2 alcohol
Dried vol. 1 herb : 4-5 alcohol

Glass mason jars work best for making tinctures and having the measuring marks on the side of the jar makes it easier to identify the ratios. If you have a 16-oz. jar and want to make a fresh tincture, fill it up halfway with fresh plant material. Be sure to pack it somewhat but not too tight. Don't stress—there is no wrong way here; you'll still wind up with some medicine even if the ratio isn't perfect.

With fresh plant material you'll need to use a slightly higher percentage of alcohol because you need to account for the water still in the plant. I typically use a diluted cane alcohol at 60-75%. Fill to the top of the jar and tightly close. Be sure to label the name and part of the plant being macerated, the day's date you processed it, and a date 3 to 4 weeks in the future. The future date is the day you'll be straining and pouring this into storage bottles. Store the tincture in a dark, cool space but make sure it is accessible because daily agitation of the jar is necessary. Every day, pull out the jar and give it a good shake for 60 seconds. At the end of 3 to 4 weeks, strain. Again, there is no hard-and-fast rule here. Some herbalists will say 2 weeks is plenty but one thing we seem to all agree on is that after 4 weeks, there is nothing more to extract from the plant. Macerating it longer does not produce a stronger tincture.

When you strain it, be sure to really squeeze all of the plant material to collect every last drop. If you prefer not to do it by hand, there are herbal tincture presses available to purchase. Pour it into storage bottles and keep in a cool, dark place. Tightly sealed and unopened, tinctures can be stored forever. While the FDA will put a number on it of 5 to 10 years, as long as it is stored properly, what can go bad if it is preserved in alcohol? But if you've opened it and it has been exposed to oxygen, then yes, after a couple of years it is best to dispose of it and start fresh.

Dried Herbs

Making a tincture with the folk method for dried herbs is the exact same process but with two considerable differences. One is the herb-to-alcohol ratio. Most herbals will recommend a 1:5 ratio, and most of the time I agree. But sometimes, I switch to a 1:4 ratio with certain blends. I mention this only because if you want to try it, or feel intuitively that it should be a bit stronger of a tincture, then go for it. The other difference is the alcohol percentage. The dried material has all of the water evaporated out of it and therefore doesn't need a high alcohol percentage. If too high, it can burn the plant material and destroy the medicinal properties. Using a 80- to 100-proof vodka is perfect for dried folk method tinctures.

Last note: I am all about flavor when I make tinctures. I really don't like tinctures that taste like lighter fluid and to be honest, there is no need for that. One thing to remember is that when you go to buy vodka at the liquor store, the higher it sits on the shelf, the better the quality. If you choose a bottom-shelf brand, be prepared to breathe fire.

Some tree parts can be macerated in apple cider vinegar or vegetable glycerin in place of alcohol. The key here is to know which ones. Be sure to do your research or check out the list in *The Herbal Apothecary*.

A little tip: Leave a little room in your tinctures and add a touch of vegetable glycerin and/or apple cider vinegar. Both of these soften the alcohol flavor and can provide a more pleasurable taste.

HERBAL BATHS AND STEAMS

Using herbs in baths and steams was once a pivotal component to nature healing. In our modern era we tend to believe that baths take too long, which is a bit of an oxymoron because that is precisely the point! We should slow down, especially when we aren't well.

A full bath is when your entire body is in the bath and there are herbs infused in the bath water.

A half bath is usually in a Japanese-style tub, where you are only submerged from the navel down.

A sitz bath is a bath performed in a smaller tub that only submerges your bum, hips, and lower belly.

An eye bath is helpful with eye infections, sore eyes, or hayfever.

A footbath is when just the feet are submerged up to the ankles and is great for sore feet, infections, rashes, yeast, cuts, or wounds.

A vapor bath (steam) is utilized when the head is full of congestion and mucous, or to help clear the skin of rash, infection, or acne.

Dogwood

Cornus nuttallii,
Cornus kousa

Family: Cornaceae
Parts used: bark, flower
Medicinal actions: antiperiodic, astringent, cathartic, febrifuge, laxative, stimulant, and tonic
Native geography: *Cornus nuttallii:* western North America from British Columbia to California, New York, and North Carolina. *Cornus kousa:* Japan, China, Korea

They call her Queen of the Forest.

My first herbal mentor, Linda Quintana, used to walk me around her big, beautiful herb garden, pouring out copious amounts of information that I desperately tried to scribble down in my notebook. One day, she insisted I put the notebook down. She wanted me to take everything in more intuitively as we meandered down paths and in and out of garden beds. We did this once a week; she exchanged knowledge for gardening help. Our sessions always ended with a plant meditation. This involved me doing my best to follow my intuition and selecting a particular plant that was "speaking" to me that day. I would set my little mat down close by the plant I had chosen and do my best to meditate. Over time, it got easier. The idea was to try to listen to what the plant had to say.

The funny thing was, most times, what I thought I'd "heard" in my meditations turned out to be the same information that I would later read in my herbal medicine books. My process was this: I would work in the garden, learning from Linda throughout the day, and before heading home I would do my meditation. Then I would go home, write in my journal what I'd gathered from my meditation, and then grab my herb books and read up on the plant. At first I thought it was a fluke, but it kept happening, week after week.

Dogwood often came into my mind when I would meditate. There is a relationship that grows when you are invested in studying herbal medicine. As with most relationships, it begins with genuine enthusiasm. There is a joy that you can feel when you participate in your first herb walk or herbal conference. I often say this is an ancient knowledge, embedded deep within a cellular level that suddenly awakens. Similar to when a gene turns on or off with epigenetics, the DNA that has held this knowledge for generations gets turned back on. We all naturally want to be able to care for ourselves and those around us—for centuries, herbs have helped us do that.

This led to me developing a personal motto: you can read about herbs all day long, but until you sit with them, you really don't know much at all. You need to smell them, taste them, and feel what they do inside your own body. Herbs are classified in different ways, including bitter, sweet, and slick, but the experience of working with them yourself is how you truly learn herbal medicine. This was how I truly got to know dogwood in a wild and rugged forest in Arkansas.

Although it was a warm spring day, I felt cold whenever the sun dipped behind the clouds. I wrapped my sweater around my chest tightly and went stomping into the woods on a new trail I'd discovered on an old map. A trail that wasn't overly developed like in so many state parks. Brown was still the dominant color, but green was poking out everywhere and it was obvious it would soon overtake the color palette. I came to a clearing and, almost like a fairy tale, there stood the most perfect light pink dogwood I'd ever seen. When dogwoods are in full bloom there is something magical and mythical about them, the unicorn of the forest. I had a sudden urge to sit beneath its branches and settle up

PLANT DATA
USDA hardiness zones: 7 to 9
Water: if rainfall is insufficient, water enough to soak several inches into the soil once a week
Light requirement: part shade; bark damaged by hot sun
Soil: well-drained acid soils high in organic matter
Temperature: cold hardy, but temperature swings in spring can cause stress which may result in in fewer flowers
Wildlife notes: Deer and elk like the leaves; many small mammals and birds eat the fruit, particularly band-tailed pigeons and pileated woodpeckers
Pollinator friendly: attracts the azure butterfly
Pests: anthracnose, powdery mildew, dogwood borer, dogwood club-gall midge

against it with my back on its thin trunk. I opened my backpack to pull out a thermos of hot water I had with me, added a handful of dogwood blossoms, and let it steep for a few minutes. After pouring myself a cup of tea, I began my plant meditation ritual. I inhaled deeply to smell the steam wafting up from the cup, and I let the thoughts it elicited roll through my brain. Slowly bringing it to my lips, I filled my mouth and held it there before swallowing the floral bouquet. I recognized a slightly warming quality to the tea and felt its energy settle in the middle of my back. After taking a few more sips, I got out my notebook and wrote down all the thoughts I'd just experienced. Some made sense, others seemed random, but I never filter my journaling experience. I pressed a couple of the blossoms in my book, gave gratitude to the dogwood, and walked myself out of the woods. I was ready to go home and read all about it.

A spring-blooming dogwood is one of life's simple pleasures. They can be easily cultivated and with proper pruning and care can fit in almost any landscape. The leaves bud out in spring once temperatures consistently reach 55° F. At first they don't look like much, just a slight extension of the branch stem. They appear opposite on ½ inch petioles with blades that are ovate-elliptic and taper to a point. If you look underneath the leaf, you'll see and feel soft little hairs growing there. And while the flowers steal the show in spring, the leaves do produce a nice fall display along with bright red-orange fruit.

A few years ago, I had to make the unfortunate decision of whether to remove my gallbladder. A polyp had been detected on a routine ultrasound, and while it wasn't quite big enough to be labeled a concern yet, it was close. As someone who tries to avoid invasive medical treatments unless they're absolutely necessary, I hemmed and hawed about this for quite some time. The thought of losing a whole organ seemed concerning, especially one that plays such a part in healthy digestion. On the other hand, I would always worry that the polyp was there.

In the end I decided to have it removed. There probably isn't a right or wrong here, but my biggest concern was how to rebalance my digestive process in the absence of my gallbladder. The liver produces bile, which breaks down dietary fats into fatty acids; the gallbladder stores it. Some fatty acids are beneficial for the body, such as olive oil and fish. Others, like trans fats (from fried food, or processed foods) can hurt the body in many different ways. Without a gallbladder, your body will still have access to bile as the liver makes it, but there isn't a stockpile ready to go. If you are eating a relatively balanced diet, that typically is okay. But what about when you eat a marbled steak or something else with a higher fat ratio?

This is when I reach for dogwood. The bitter principle in the bark and flowers stimulate bile from the liver to move into the small intestine, specifically the duodenum. The duodenum is where food and liquid goes after leaving the stomach. This is a crucial stopping point in digestion. The food, liquid, bile, and digestive enzymes from the pancreas all meet here and get to work to determine what should be absorbed as valuable nutrition and what excreted. The former continues on down the track for eventual reabsorption; the latter heads to the waste department (the large intestines and kidneys).

Many Pacific Northwest tribes also used *Cornus nuttallii* as a digestive aid and blood purifier. Herbalists call the blood-purifying action an "alterative," which is defined as an herb that produces gradual beneficial change in the body, usually by improving nutrition. We can infer, then, that an improved digestion process is one that leads to increased nutritional uptake from the foods we eat. This results in improved mental function, increased energy, and better physical performance.

Dogwood Recipes

INDICATIONS

- Acne
- Bile regulation
- Body aches and pains
- Constipation
- Digestive tonic
- Eczema
- Intermittent Fever
- Headaches
- Malaria
- Stress from repressed emotion

**Due to aspirin-like salicylates in dogwood, a percentage of the population might experience stomach irritation after taking.*

DOGWOOD MUFFINS

Cornus nuttallii is typically what you'll encounter in a medicinal tincture, but the fruit that the *Cornus kousa* produces has endless potential. They are easily collected in the late summer and early fall. These little fruits are packed with powerful antioxidants and are known to support liver detoxification and increase energy levels. Mix up a batch of these muffins for a healthy addition to any breakfast.

Items needed:
Oven, preheated to 400° F
12-cup muffin tin
2 mixing bowls
Food mill

Ingredients:
2 cups of all-purpose flour
2 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. salt
1 ½ cups kousa dogwood berry purée
⅔ cup light brown sugar
⅔ cup unsalted butter, melted
1 large egg
1 tsp. vanilla extract
Sliced almonds and raw cane sugar to sprinkle on top of the muffins

Making the purée is the first step, and having a food mill is the easiest way to accomplish this. The food mill removes the skin, seeds, and pulp while creating purée at the same time. Make the purée, set aside.

Combine flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together in the mixing bowl. Set aside.

In a different bowl, whisk together the purée, sugar, butter, egg, and vanilla extract. Gently fold in your flour blend, just until mixed. Do not over stir.

In a greased muffin tin, scoop out the batter and divide evenly. Sprinkle each muffin compartment with sliced almonds and a touch of sugar.

Bake for 20 to 25 minutes. Cool before removing from the pan.

APERITIF FOR DIGESTION

Using *Cornus nuttallii* to stimulate the digestive system before meals can help process food efficiently and reduce gut inflammation. Just a touch is needed to trigger the bitter response, which wakes up the stomach and alerts the lower digestive tract. With so many of us eating on the go, we are losing the important bodily cues needed to spark digestion. Without them, we don't have the necessary enzymes pumping needed to break down our food. A dose of dogwood aperitif revs the system to be ready to go.

Items needed:
Mason jar
Wax paper
Rubber band

Ingredients:
¼ cup *Cornus nuttallii* bark
½ cup apple cider vinegar

Add the bark to the mason jar and cover it with apple cider vinegar. Cut a square of wax paper to put over the top, and secure it with a rubber band. Then put on the mason jar lid, both top and screw band. The wax paper protects the lid from the vinegar, but you still need the lid affixed so you can shake the jar without making a mess.

Store in a cool, dark place for two weeks, shaking vigorously daily.

Strain and store in a dropper bottle. Be sure to label with the date and contents.

Take 2 dropperfuls before each meal.

Elder

Sambucus nigra

Family: Adoxaceae
Parts used: fruit, leaf, bark
Medicinal actions: *Bark:* diuretic, emetic, purgative. *Leaves*: diuretic. *Flowers:* diaphoretic. *Fruit*: antiviral, aperient, immune stimulation, tonic
Native geography: Europe as far south as Turkey, some parts of Asia. Present in the US except in Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, and Hawaii. Canada from Manitoba east through New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Nova Scotia

I remember the first time I went to wildcraft elderberries. I had been working in my first herb shop, Wonderland Tea and Spice, for a while, and finally built up the courage to try foraging myself. As a newbie, it can be extremely intimidating to head out into the woods in search of a particular plant. Sure, I felt confident in the morning with my guidebook and map in hand, but when I finally parked the car and headed into the woods, doubt inevitably began to creep in. An acquaintance had shared a location where she'd previously harvested elderberries, so I was 90 percent sure I was in the right place. But that 10 percent of uncertainty kept my mind asking, "Are you sure you know what you are doing?" It reminded me of the time before cell phones, when driving directions would say "go about three miles." So you'd go what you thought were three miles, but start to think you must have overshot the next landmark, so you do a U-turn. You drive all the way back to where you started and do another U-turn only to drive thirty feet farther than you did for the first three miles and find where you actually needed to turn. That was a bit how I was feeling this first time wildcrafting for elderberries—looking for a specific tree in the woods felt equally vague.

It was October and one of those days where the clouds dominated most of the day, casting the forest in deep shades of green. When the sun came out for just a few moments, I'd stopped and turned my face upward to feel the last of its warmth. Somehow, that pause and dose of sun stopped time just long enough to let my intention for the day come back. I reviewed what I was looking for: a tall, shaggy-looking shrub with compound, pinnate leaves. I read and reread the description a dozen times in my field guide. I knew the leaves were pointed and sharply toothed. Elder is very easy to identify in the spring by its white showy display of flowers, but in fall it doesn't stand out in the same way.

As I continued searching, I spotted a few other herbal allies and decided to add them to my basket. That way if I came up empty-handed on the elder, at least I'd return with some hawthorn berries and rose hips for my ever-growing home medicine cabinet. Both those were easy to spot in the woods—their deep-red, tempting fruit popped out against the quickly turning browns and grays of the other vegetation.

I kept walking. Foraging is rarely accomplished on an established trail. You must often go off the path to find the treasures of an herbal bounty. As a woman in her middle twenties, I couldn't help but feel that my searching in the woods was a bit of a metaphor for my life. The inner me was a wild bramble of flowers and thorns that I had to tease apart to make progress toward where I was going and what I was hoping to achieve. I was someone who often jumped off cliffs while naively assuming I'd always land safely on soft earth. I considered boundaries helpful, but felt that stepping outside of them had also led me to some of the most exquisite rewards. So as I stepped off the marked trail in search of elderberries, I felt hopeful. But here is where the fusion of planned execution of my task and reckless abandon met. Through the trials

PLANT DATA
USDA hardiness zones: 4 to 10
Water: keep soil consistently moist to wet
Light requirement: sun to part shade
Soil: tolerant of many soils, prefers moist humus
Temperature: able to survive to -20˚F
Wildlife notes: 48 species of birds eat the fruit, as do dormice and bank voles; moth caterpillars feed on elder foliage
Pollinator friendly: pollinated mainly by flies
Pests: canker, powdery mildew, leaf spot, borer

and errors involved in learning to wildcraft, I adopted defined techniques, practices, and consistency. Because using these skills usually resulted in success, I began to apply a similar discipline to other areas of my life and suddenly found purpose and direction.

Back in the woods, I could tell I was honing in on where I needed to be. My friend had warned me about an elder look-alike, pokeweed, in the same area, so when I saw that, I knew I was close. And then, there it was. I could see reddish stems set off by abundant blue berries from afar. As I got closer, I noticed the white powdery covering on the berries: it was a *Sambucus cerulea*, or blue elder. It was a large and beautiful tree, loaded and dripping with berries. I felt a bit surprised that I'd actually accomplished this quest. I felt a sense of pride, but at the same time the journey had been humbling. Ultimately, I felt gratitude. Through all the zigzags it had taken to get there, the universe had ultimately led me to this exact spot.

I quickly got to work harvesting, as it had taken the better part of the morning to find the elder. As I clipped the twigs and berry bunches, I let them fall gently into my collection basket. Simple pleasures make life rich. And a basket full of foraged elderberries is certainly a pleasure.

I've always used elder in the wintertime. I was taught that all its parts offer aid for the ailments of winter: colds, digestive complaints, fevers, and nerve pain. Harvesting the flowers in the early summer and berries in the fall is one forage I never want to miss. I've been making my annual elderberry syrup for over thirty years, and everyone in the family knows to reach for it as needed. The aroma that fills the home while I'm cooking elderberries is sweet and reminiscent of my grandma. When my kids were young, I added a splash of elderberry syrup to their water bottles to fuel their bodies with extra flavonoids during the cold season.

In my thirties, I started to notice elderberry products popping up on the shelves at my grocery store, the nearby co-op, and drugstore. My first thought was, "Yay!" The population at large was finally ready to embrace another herb besides echinacea. But as with many things, poorly disseminated information in the form of commercial marketing has left the majority misled on how and when to use elderberry.

The elderberry plant has been considered a valuable medicine since the ninth century. Charlemagne, ruler and Christian Emperor of the West, decreed that an elder plant should be planted at every home. Perhaps it had aided him in a time of need or he bore witness to its medicinal effects; either way, elder became a household staple. Events such as this firmly root some herbs' reputation, and the legacy lasts centuries. Elders have consistently remained in favor for more than 1,200 years now—a great example of how herbal knowledge has been shared through generations.

We use the berry, bark, and the flowers as medicine. Traditionally, the berry was used for nerve discomforts such as back pain, sciatica, and neuralgia. It was also given to children in the form of a jam when lower digestive issues arose. Today we mostly see it as a syrup or capsules to be used to boost the immune system and fight colds and flu. Modern research has established that elder has a high bioflavonoid profile and an ability to inhibit certain viral strains, so it's now sold for that target market.

It may be worth planting your own home elder. Several cultivars of *Sambucus nigra* are widely available, all of which have a medicinal value. Each individual flower has 5 delicate petals that are creamy white and produce a musky scent. It is best to prune dead stems in the late winter. Plant may need to be 1 to 2 years old before berries emerge. *Sambucus nigra* are monoecious so are able to self-pollinate, but it has been found that having different varieties planted close by increases bloom and fruit. The flowers are a diaphoretic and a good choice when fever is present. They open up the pores to gently allow the fever to do its job, but comfort the patient by promoting sweating. The flower also has been shown to increase phagocytosis, the killing of foreign microorganisms in the body. I also add elderflower to certain circulation formulas as it seems to open up smaller vessels and improve microcirculation. The bark is only to be used in small doses, as it is a strong purgative and diuretic, but there are times when this might be desired. The leaves are also brewed to increase urination, or act like a diuretic when excess water of the body needs to be released.

Elder Recipes

INDICATIONS

- Bronchitis
- Circulation
- Colds
- Digestive
- Edema
- Fevers
- Flu
- Inflammation
- Nerve pain
- Pleurisy
- Sinusitis
- Viral infections

**Generally regarded as safe for all populations. DO NOT consume raw berries, they need to be cooked or macerated to eliminate trace sambunigrin, a poisonous cyanogenic glycoside. Bark is only brewed fresh and should not exceed doses of 2 oz.*

ELDERBERRY SYRUP

Very few herbs have as long of a written history as elderberry. These eye-catching berries must have caught the attention of herbal healers many centuries ago. Even Hippocrates, known as the Greek father of medicine, considered the elder tree a treasure. Herbalists have collected the berry to incorporate into various concoctions as well as delectable food creations. Throughout Europe you can still find elderberry pies for sale in local bakeries, and we know many tribes of Indigenous peoples used them for various ailments. I consider making elderberry syrup a herbalist initiation of sorts.

Items needed:
Stockpot
Large glass measuring cup
Strainer
Muslin cloth
Glass storage bottles

Ingredients:
4 cups fresh elderberries
8 cups water
Honey or organic cane sugar
Apple cider vinegar (optional)

Put the elderberries in the stockpot and bring it to a boil. Stir, then turn the heat to medium-low. Partially cover the pot with a lid, ensuring that it is ajar to allow for evaporation. At this point, stir every few minutes and simmer until you have reduced the overall volume in the pot by half. Let cool slightly.

Place the strainer over the large glass measuring up and strain the berry decoction. Compost the discarded berries or better yet, give them to your chickens if you have them. Line the strainer with a muslin cloth and strain the liquid a second time. Measure the volume of liquid that has been collected.

Next, return the decoction to a freshly cleaned stockpot and add honey or cane sugar in a 1:1 ratio of elderberry decoction to sweetener. So if you have 2 cups of decoction, then you'd add 2 cups of sugar. Gently heat, stirring constantly until all sugar is dissolved. Be sure to not overheat or scald the liquid, especially if you are using honey, as this could kill the active enzymes. If you'd like to add apple cider vinegar, now is the time. Add a 1:4 ratio of decoction to apple cider vinegar and stir. Allow the syrup to cool, then bottle and store in a cool, dark place or the refrigerator. Shelf life is typically 2 to 3 months.

ELDERBERRY SAUCE

Do you have a favorite cake or scone recipe that needs a special spread? Or how about a yummy vanilla ice cream topper? Here is the perfect thing.

Items needed:
Ceramic saucepan
Immersion blender
1 16-oz. glass jar, or 2 8-oz. jars

Ingredients:
2 cups fresh elderberries
2 tbsp. freshly squeezed lemon juice
½ cup packed organic brown sugar
½ cup organic cane sugar
1 to 2 tsp. vanilla extract
¼ tsp salt
¼ tsp cinnamon

Begin by simmering the berries and lemon juice, covered, on low. Check every couple of minutes and stir to ensure they aren't getting browned on the bottom.

Next, stir in the sugars, extract, salt, and cinnamon and simmer for another few minutes to blend flavors and slightly thicken. Stir often and ensure heat is low but sauce is simmering. Turn off the heat and let it cool slightly.

With an immersion blender, give the mixture just a few zips. The idea is to have a slightly smooth consistency but with some lumps and bumps for texture. Scoop into jars, label, and store in the refrigerator.

Elm

Ulmus americana

Family: Ulmaceae
Parts used: phloem (the inner bark)
Medicinal actions: demulcent, diuretic, emollient, nervine, tonic
Native geography: concentrated in North Carolina in North America, but can be found from southwestern Maine west to New York, northern Michigan, central Minnesota, and eastern North Dakota, south to eastern South Dakota, central Nebraska, southwestern Oklahoma, and central Texas, then east to northwestern Florida and Georgia

When I was thirteen my dad, an economist, suddenly decided he wanted to be a farmer. He announced this at one of our awkward Tuesday night dinners. My mom and dad had divorced three years earlier, but they decided to have weekly dinners with the new blended families. These included dad, his new wife, her two teenage sons, and me. As a teen, I always found them uncomfortable, to say the least. It followed that Tuesday nights were also when "family" decisions would be shared. He told us he had already bought a farm outside of town and was moving in a month. I envisioned horses and cute farm animals, like pigs and chickens. I couldn't wait to see what kind of barn was on the property and instantly started a list in my head of all the cute farm activities we'd do. A few weeks later, we all loaded up in the car and drove thirty minutes south. As we drove through the town of Bennet, Nebraska, all I saw was a feed store, a few abandoned buildings, and a railroad crossing. Where were the quilt shop and the quaint general store? Where was the little café where farmers gathered around to drink their coffee and shoot the shit? Bennet was not the idyllic country town I'd imagined, but I was still sure the new farm would be charming.

I could barely contain my excitement as my dad drove over a drainage ditch onto our new driveway. We hadn't talked much along the way, my dad's preference while driving, so we did what we always did: listened to classical music. The only genre my dad ever listened to. When I got out of the car, I did not see a barn, or corrals, or green pastures. All I saw were huge swaths of overgrown shrubs and grass. It looked like a wild field littered with abandoned junk. Where was the white picket fence, the rolling hills? A tan house squatted on the property; it was neither pretty nor inviting. All I could think was, "But where am I going to put my horse?"

My dad brought out the Braunschweiger sandwiches he'd packed to "surprise" us for a picnic. Since he hadn't brought a blanket or chairs, though, we sat on the warm pavement of the driveway. It was here he laid out his plan. First, we'd all work the entire summer to clear the land. *Ummmm, excuse me?* We'd have to dig up all the grass and weeds and create pathways to the gardens he had planned. We'd mow, we'd rototill, we'd hoe fields and build pergolas. I wondered where I could look up laws about child labor.

I wound up being assigned to mow, which was fun at first, because I used a riding mower and so I got to learn to "drive," but for a teenager, the chore quickly grew tiresome. I learned how to use a rototiller, too. I only got sunstroke once. My dad's wife had collected thousands of heavy and thick concrete pavers, and she waved her hands around as we walked, showing us where she wanted pathways. "No problem," I thought. "I can just lay them where she wants them to go, and over time, with us walking repeatedly on them, they'll sink into place." I was quickly corrected and shown how we needed to dig perfect rectangles for each in the earth below, for stability. At this point, I began to wonder when my allowance was going to increase.

Then came building a vegetable cellar. On one side of a berm to the north of the

PLANT DATA
USDA hardiness zones: 3 to 7
Water: water sparingly
Light requirement: sun to part shade
Soil: Prefers well-drained soil but can be grown in sandy, loamy, or even clay soils
Temperature: Hardy to -35˚F
Wildlife notes: a food source for the question mark butterfly; is a larvae host for the mourning cloak moth and Columbia silkmoth
Pollinator friendly: pollinated by wind
Pests: susceptible to Dutch elm disease and elm yellows

house there was an old creepy hole—someone had previously had the same idea, but never finished the project. It had loads of cobwebs, which meant there were spiders I couldn't see. It smelled of damp earth, but not in the pleasant "petrichor" way—more like in the rotting abyss way. But my dad had long since closed the complaints department. We were each handed a shovel. I essentially spent my weekend visits digging dirt.

During that first visit to "the farm," after I realized there was no barn and ergo no future horse, I set my sights on the one thing that felt familiar: a tree. A big, beautiful American elm tree grew over what someday would be our flower garden. I'd always been a tree climber, finding peace and solitude among the branches. There is no better place to get perspective than from sitting up in a tree. This elm was tall, so I had to use a white plastic lawn chair to reach its lowest branch. I wrapped my arms around it, pretending I was on the monkey bars, then hoisted myself up and ascended three or four more branches. (I'd kill to be able to do that now, at my age.) I looked out over the land, and I could see that the neighbors down south had hundreds of beehives. I could see the tiny creek that bordered our property to the west. And I actually spotted a gray speckled horse up on the horizon to the north. To the east was the road that took me back to my mom's. I could see my second family milling around below me, looking this way and that, considering my dad's master plan. From up here I could almost believe in it and picture it, finished.

Ulmus rubra, otherwise known as slippery elm, is a tried-and-true friend in the medicine cabinet. It's safe enough for the entire family, from young to old. Slippery elm is the inner bark, often taken from smaller branches and fallen trees. It's an excellent choice any time you need to calm irritated mucous membranes. Think sore throats, heartburn, IBS, or Crohn's disease, just to name a few. Areas of the body along the digestive tract produce mucous when they are out of balance or inflamed. The natural production of mucous in these areas is meant to be protective, to soothe irritation caused by a virus, bacteria, food sensitivity, or allergy.

When acute illness occurs, as in the case of strep throat, the invading bacteria multiplies quickly. So quickly that the body doesn't have the means to eradicate it before it settles in. Other times, when chronic or recurring illness is present, such as with IBS, the intestines are in a constant state of inflammation, and the protective mucous production gradually declines.

In any of these situations, slippery elm is extremely helpful. It acts as a demulcent, an emollient, and a nutritive all at the same time. Herbs that provide relief from inflammation while at the same time offering nutritive benefits are definitely those you should keep on hand. A lot of the time we are targeting symptoms when we get sick. I have a headache = I want the pain in my head to go away. Or, I have a cold = get rid of my runny nose. But if you add in tonic or nutritive herbs for the headache or runny nose, while at the same time treating the symptom, you are making the affected systems stronger.

With slippery elm you not only have a symptom reliever, but a tonic as well. When we use it for digestive issues, it can alleviate pain by soothing the tissues, coating the area to ensure the inflammation isn't damaging the tissues, and nourishing the tissues with nutrients. I use slippery elm all the time. I add it to congee or porridge as a nutritive boost for those convalescing. I apply it topically mixed with plantain for any type of skin issue: wound, abscess, boil. And, blended with a touch of licorice root, it makes my kids' favorite tea. Slippery elm has calcium, which contributes to alleviating the previously mentioned complaints. But it also has been used in supporting emotional well-being. Those with a manic-depressive tendency have also benefited from it.

American elm and slippery elm look very similar; the best way to tell them apart is to look at the leaves. American elm leaves come to a rounded point, whereas the slippery elm leaf has a small, extended, pointed leaf at the end. Some have compared it to a little tail. It's best to harvest slippery elm in the spring, when the sap flow has begun. The outer bark will typically slip right off then, and the phloem will have a higher concentration of minerals and nutrients. Then you need to separate the outer bark from the inner bark. The outer bark is soft, whereas the inner bark is fibrous. Dry the inner bark for later use. If possible, harvest only from fallen trees or broken branches as the phloem forms part of the tree's active "circulatory" system, moving sugars produced in the leaves during photosynthesis to other parts of the tree used for growth or for storage, so cutting it away can damage a living tree.

Elm Recipes

INDICATIONS

- Bronchitis
- Constipation
- Cough
- Crohn's disease
- Diarrhea
- Diverticulitis
- Dyspepsia
- Heartburn
- Hemorrhoids
- IBS
- Mood swings
- Skin: abscess, boil, wounds
- Sore throat
- Stomach ulcers

*Ulmus rubra *is declining in the wild. Please be responsible if wildcrafting and harvest only from fallen trees or downed branches. Use for a period of 2-3 weeks if using for a chronic condition, then stop to evaluate effectiveness.*

SLIPPERY ELM JUICE

When I first started practicing herbalism, I was twenty-two years old. I didn't need slippery elm for digestive complaints and lumped it, along with a few other herbs into the "old person" category. Well here I am, thirty years later, lapping up the "old person juice."

This is a tried-and-true recipe for anyone suffering from almost any type of digestive issue. Chronic inflammation of the GI tract is soothed by the slippery elm and can help to heal the mucosal lining. If you are fighting a digestive bacterial infection, consider adding the optional goldenseal and licorice.

Items needed:
Saucepan
Strainer
Glass measuring cup

Ingredients:
2 tbsp. slippery elm bark
1 tbsp. comfrey root
½ tsp. cinnamon bark
1-2 tbsp. honey or maple syrup to sweeten
Optional ½ tsp. goldenseal powder, ¼ tsp. licorice root powder

Bring 2 cups of water to a boil, then add slippery elm and comfrey root. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, for 5 minutes. Turn off the heat and add optional goldenseal and licorice root if desired. Give a stir, cover, and let steep for 15 minutes.

Strain and return to the saucepan. Add sweetener if you'd like. The consistency should be a bit thick. Store in a glass bottle in the refrigerator for up to 4 days. Drink 1- to 2-tablespoon doses three to four times a day.

SLIPPERY ELM GUT HEALTH SMOOTHIE

This smoothie promotes gentle digestion by soothing the tummy and calming the gastrointestinal tract. Slippery elm is a nutritive natural emollient, supporting proper health all along the digestive tract.

Items needed:
Blender

Ingredients:
½ cup of yogurt, dairy or nondairy
½ banana
2 tbsp. pineapple juice or ¼ cup of diced pineapple
¼ aloe vera juice
1 tbsp. slippery elm powder
½ tbsp. psyllium husk powder
¼ cup water or milk of choice
3 or 4 ice cubes

Blend all ingredients together in the blender until smooth. Enjoy.

SLIPPERY ELM LATTE

When you aren't feeling your best and the throat is feeling sore, why not skip the coffee and help the body out? Try this latte to soothe the throat fire.

Items needed:
Saucepan
Bowl
Whisk
Immersion blender, if you have one

Ingredients:
1 tbsp. slippery elm bark powder
½ cup milk, dairy or nondairy
1 cup water
1 tbsp. maple syrup or honey
¼ cinnamon powder
¼ cardamom powder
⅛ clove powder
Sprinkle of nutmeg

Bring ½ cup of milk to a simmer and pour into a ceramic bowl. Add 1 cup of water to the pan and bring to a boil.

In the meantime, add the slippery elm to the milk slowly and whisk to blend. You can also use a few zaps of a drink mixer but either way, don't over mix.

Once the water is boiling, turn off the heat and add the milk/slippery elm blend to the water. Once again, give a quick whisk. Add the sweetener and spices and whisk again. Pour into a mug and sprinkle with nutmeg.

Note: you can also add the slippery elm to the water and froth the milk if you prefer.

Eucalyptus

Eucalyptus globulus

Family: Myrtaceae
Parts used: leaves
Medicinal actions: antibacterial, antiviral, antiseptic, decongestant, deodorant, expectorant, febrifuge, stimulant
Native geography: southeastern Australia; the species was introduced into California in 1856 and Hawaii around 1865 and has become naturalized in both states; it also grows well in the southern regions of Spain, Portugal, and Peru

Ollantaytambo sits at 2,792 feet above sea level in the Cusco region of the sacred valley in Peru. It is a warm, welcoming town, rich in cultural history. I fell in love with it the first time I visited. I had been making my way to Aguas Calientes, the entry point to Machu Picchu, and stayed with a friend next to the train station.

I've always loved places that have town squares. They create easy landmarks for meeting points and seem to function as a true heart of the town. In Ollantaytambo, many shops line the edges of the square, with plenty of places to sit in either the sun or shade to relax and say hello to passersby. Musicians sometimes play, and kids constantly run around, often kicking a ball between them. As a traveler, I find town squares the best place to sit, enjoy a tea, and write. Even with the periodic distractions, witnessing everyday life reminds us that we are actually living, and not just moving along in the construct of a life.

I'd heard of a hike outside of town that started at an archaeological site considered to be older than Machu Picchu. Pumamarca was once a fortress said to have been the gateway into the Sacred Valley. For five US dollars, a taxi would drive me up to the site, and then I could take my time walking down the trail back to town. I packed up my water bottle, a snack, my camera, and notebook. After a relatively quick drive, passing farms and driving up gravel roads, I was let out among crumbling structures and ancient rock buildings.

I spent the better part of two hours walking around. I like to feel spaces out. I like to touch the rock walls and sit in old rooms to journal. Pumamarca sits higher than Ollantaytambo, at 11,000 feet; you feel perceptibly closer to the sky. A flat plateau overlooks the valley below, and the view from there is transcendental. I focused on breathing in and out in the thin air while my eyes scanned the terrain taking in green mountains, rivers, cattle, llamas, dogs, people, laundry drying, crops…so much life.

But as with any hike, there comes a time to head back. It was difficult to leave, knowing that once I descended, I'd return to normalcy, losing the view and the feeling. With reluctance, I chose what I thought was the path. Here there are no neatly marked trails. Worn footpaths cut through pastures, past bulls who lazily look up as you move by, over creeks with banks full of unexpected flowers, trees, and plants. As I made my way, I kept seeing the most beautiful blue-green seed pods under my feet. I recognized them as belonging to the eucalyptus, or blue gum tree, and then noticed they were growing all around me. My first thought was confusion, because I know they are not native to Peru. But there they were, their aroma filling the air; they waved their sickle-shaped leaves at me as I passed by.

Suddenly, I remembered a poem by Robinson Jeffers. A prolific poet and environmentalist, he once penned fourteen beautiful lines giving gratitude for the eucalyptus tree. In one of the verses he recognizes the journey this global tree has taken, having made its way from Australia to far lands. I wondered whether these very eucalyptus trees had also been brought over as saplings, as offerings or gifts? Or had they actually originated here and

PLANT DATA
USDA hardiness zones: 8 to 11b
Water: happiest in moist soil but can tolerate drought
Light requirement: full sun
Soil: good drainage, low salinity, and a topsoil depth of 2 feet or more
Temperature: frost resistance increases with maturity
Wildlife notes: Koalas eat eucalyptus leaves
Pollinator friendly: in zones where eucalyptus blooms year round, it attracts bees and gives their honey a distinctive peppermint-like taste
Pests: beetles, psyllids, and beetle borers

made their way to Australia? I kept wondering about the intricate and strong seeds as I walked. Much like precious acorns, I couldn't resist picking up a few (or fifty). They are the most curious-looking things: a dimpled blue-white cone sits on top of a round, brown, button-like seed with four slits that make me think of the top of a pie. I kept envisioning them being used as the heads and hats of tiny nature dolls that my Waldorf-school kids might craft. When I reached the home again and opened my bag, the smell greeted me. I was instantly transported back to Peru. My mind, body, and soul were grasping to re-create the feeling I had looking out from Pumamarca.

Eucalyptus trees provide scent throughout the year, wherever they grow. It's a deciduous tree that sheds its bark annually. My favorite part of the tree is the fruit—they are cone-shaped and rough on the outside. Some refer to them as "warty," but to me that doesn't quite fit. When fresh they are blue, but later turn brown.

Eucalyptus leaves are a powerful antiseptic and astringent. They clear away gunk and pull tissues together. Because of the powerful constituent eucalyptol, modern medicine strongly advises not to consume eucalyptus. But in traditional herbalism, including small amounts in tea formulas was common. Eucalyptus alleviates head and respiratory congestion and can be a lifesaver for sinusitis. The confusion may lie with the popularity of eucalyptus essential oil, which is toxic when consumed. Essential oils are very concentrated; this has eucalyptol and hydrocyanic acid. Also, eucalyptus oil is rapidly absorbed into the bloodstream, so toxicity symptoms as severe as coma and death can arise quickly.

The leaves, however, have many beneficial applications. Making an herbal inhalation steam with eucalyptus leaves opens up the nasal passageways and relieves congestion pressure. Add some rosemary and thyme along with it and you've got a super-packed antiviral, antibacterial vapor that will attack almost anything in the respiratory tract. I often put some in a muslin bag, tie it around the spigot, and make a bath for my kids with it when they have a cold. The hot water from the bath creates a medicinal steam and as they splash around, it stimulates the release of the oil from the leaves.

Making an herbal oil with the leaves will produce a great addition to any type of homemade vapor balm. I grew up with Vicks VaporRub™ as a kid; the idea is similar, but as a mom and adult decided the petroleum base wasn't for me. I now make a beeswax-based vapor rub with eucalyptus oil as a main ingredient. Herbal oil is different from essential oil; it's created by slow-cooking the leaves in olive oil for four to six hours over a very low flame. An essential oil is created by heating the leaves in a distiller and collecting the oil from the vapor, which results in a much more concentrated solution. I typically rub my vapor rub on the chest and top of the back (where the top of the lungs are) before bed. Sometimes I'll lay a hot towel over that area to increase the vapor release. Eucalyptus leaves relax the respiratory tract to aid in the expulsion of phlegm and mucous.

Eucalyptus leaves are strongly scented, so if they're used in quantity in any tea blend, they can easily overtake the flavor profile. I recommend including leaves as no more than 10 percent of your total blend of tea ingredients. A simple example of a cold tea would be a mix of 40 percent elderflower, 40 percent peppermint, 10 percent hyssop, and 10 percent eucalyptus.

The essential oil is very useful too. If you happen to have an essential oil distiller around, I definitely recommend utilizing it with your harvest of eucalyptus leaves. I often put a little on my kids' feet before bed when they have a cold or add a few drops to a diffuser in their room. It is also known to aid in wound healing, for relieving aches and joint pain, balancing blood sugar, and soothing cold sores.

Eucalyptus Recipes

INDICATIONS

- Abscesses
- Balances blood sugar
- Bronchitis
- Circulation
- Colds
- Cold sores
- Congestion
- Coughs, especially spasmodic cough
- Fever
- Flu
- Joint pain
- Sinusitis
- Wound healing

**NOT FOR INTERNAL CONSUMPTION. Essential oil is toxic and ingestion of large quantities of leaf as tea can cause toxicity. Add to a diffuser or blend with a bit of olive oil and apply topically. Asthmatics should use with caution.*

EUCALYPTUS BATH SALTS

When I have a head cold, nothing feels better than taking a hot bath with vibrant scents. The hot water warms my bones and the aromatic oils travel up to my sinuses to offer relief from congestion. Eucalyptus shines in this scenario, and when you blend it with a few other herbs you can create a luxury spa experience right in your own home.

Note: if you prefer a recipe where everything dissolves and drains from the tub, consider either grinding the eucalyptus leaves or use 40 or 50 drops of eucalyptus oil instead. Be sure to use a drain strainer if using crushed leaves.

Items needed:
Large mixing bowl
Mixing spoon
Storage containers

Ingredients:
4 cups epsom salt
1 cup Himalayan salt
1 cup Dead Sea salt
2 tbsp. baking soda
4 tbsp. dried, crushed eucalyptus leaves
4 tbsp. olive oil

Mix all ingredients in a large mixing bowl, tossing and stirring until everything is well combined. Put the mixture in a large quart-size mason jar with a small scoop to keep in the bathroom. You can also put it into smaller jars, cosmetic pouches, or even test tubes to give as gifts.

EUCALYPTUS TABLE GARLAND

I love a decorated dinner table. While I am no Martha Stewart, it is my belief that little touches make a table beautiful and a meal memorable. A garland of fresh eucalyptus instantly transforms a plain table. As the base you can use a few long craft sticks, but if you have a long twig or small branch from an alder, cedar, poplar, pine, or even grapevines, use that. Basically any branch that is as long as you want your garland to be will do. Add whatever colors you or coordinate with the seasons.

Items needed:
Base stick(s)
Floral wire
Wire cutters

Ingredients:
8 to 10 eucalyptus branches, 1 to 2 feet long (these are especially pretty if they have gone to seed as the seed umbels give the garland dimension and texture)
10 to 20 flowers of choice, such as baby's breath, tea roses, or mums
3 or 4 willow branches

Begin by laying the stick down on a large surface. Place the eucalyptus next to it, trying different arrangements until you find one you find attractive. Use wire cutters to precut the floral wire into two to three dozen pieces, each 3–4 inches long. Having them ready to go makes the next step easier.

First, mark your stick halfway down its length. Then slide the stick underneath your arranged eucalyptus and begin to wrap your wire around the eucalyptus to secure it to the stick. Overlap the branches slightly to cover up the wire and to give it some dimension. Once you reach the halfway mark of the stick, stop. Repeat from the opposite end. This creates a center focal point where the opposite ends meet in the middle.

Next, add additional types of flowers or vegetation if you wish. Use the floral wire to secure flowers or willow branches to increase the volume and texture of the garland.