

Medicinal Herbs in the City

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Medicinal Herbs in the City

- Why herbal medicine?
- Weeds: the herbs that are everywhere
- Growing in the city
- Medicinal herbs are already in your garden!
- Easy to grow medicinal herbs
- Working with the seasons: harvesting and processing



Medicine in the Garden

An annoying but necessary disclaimer

This presentation is for your education-- please don't take the info as personal medical advice. Herbs may interact with medications, may be less safe or unsafe in pregnancy, or have other cautions specific to you as a person. They're not 1:1 replacement for pharmaceutical medications.

Educate yourself! Do some research! See an herbalist! Get to know the plants in person! Trust me, it's fun.



Why herbal medicine?

Healing with plants

- Herbs offer types of healing that conventional medicine doesn't
- Can be an alternative to OR an adjunct to conventional medicine
- Growing and harvesting herbs is often easy and straightforward!



Why herbal medicine?

Community care

- Building community capacity for mutual aid
- Sense of community autonomy around healing and supporting each other
- Tending plants and gardens can help build relationships between people
- Plants are part of our city communities (whether we notice them or not)
- Plants are beautiful and make our neighborhoods nicer!



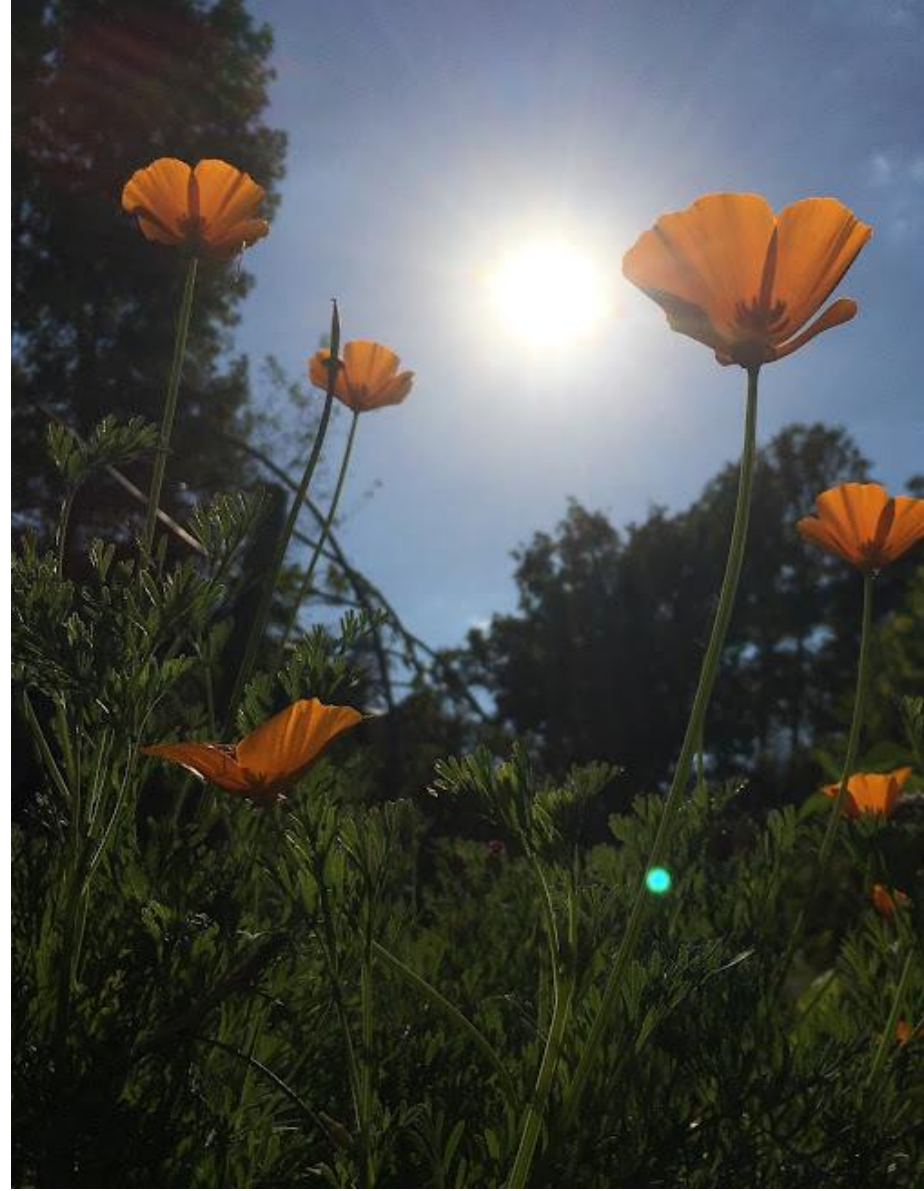


Local herbs

- Community accountability around labor, environmental sustainability, and other business practices
- Lower carbon footprint
- Control over environmental factors like heavy metal contamination
- Connection to local ecosystems and seasonal cycle

Respecting plant medicines

- Explore your relationship to land and ecosystems
- Observe and listen to wild plants
- Harvest with gratitude and offer gifts
- Advocate for wild spaces, large or small
- Create habitat for plants that are struggling in the wild
- Respect non-human relationships
- Interrogate and challenge the influences of



Herbs in the City: Caution

- Soil contamination (lead, motor oil, etc)
- Dog pee
- Air pollutants
- Pesticides
- Contaminated floodwater

Herbs in the City: Where to grow

- Weeds already grow everywhere!
- Containers
- Yards and apartment building grounds
- Tree boxes
- Community gardens
- Gardens run by organizations, schools, and other agencies
- Houseplants





Weeds: Ubiquitous medicines

- **Root medicines:** dandelion, yellow dock, burdock
- **Medicinal leaves and flowers:** plantain, mugwort, red clover, cleavers, violet
- **Food as medicine:** lamb's quarters, chickweed, purslane, nettles



Weeds

Mugwort

- Often found in community gardens and edge habitats that are mowed occasionally
- Appearance is highly variable over the growing season
- Leaves and flowers harvested in summer
- Dry the herb for tea
- Can be made into tincture, vinegar, glycerite, infused oil, etc



Weeds

Mugwort

- **Internal use** as tea or extract
- **External use** as infused oil
- **Bitter and aromatic** digestive support
- **Supports blood flow** to the pelvic organs (menstrual cramps, heaviness, delayed cycle)
- **Dreamwork**: often used to help people engage in or enhance their dreams
- Burned for **ritual/ceremonial** purposes
- **Don't use** in pregnancy or when menstrual flow is very heavy



Container-friendly medicinal plants

Plants that thrive in containers have shallow root systems and are at least a little drought tolerant

Calendula

Rosemary

Tulsi

Borage

Lemon
balm

Motherwort

Yarrow

Hyssop



Container-friendly

Calendula

- Annual, cultivated cool weather plant
- Full sun, regular garden conditions
- Harvest flowers when open, daily if possible
- Several annual successions are possible
- Traditional use origins: Arab and European herbalism



Container-friendly Calendula

- **Internal use** as tincture, tea, or other extract
- **External use** as oil, salve, or poultice
- **Vulnerary:** helps heal damaged tissue
- **Mild antifungal**
- **Lymphatic** (helps lymph move through the lymph system)
- **Very safe** for all ages at appropriate dose
- **Use caution** with known aster family allergies



Easy-to-grow Garden

Perennials

Perennials are plants that live at least several years. Some do well in pots but these plants often increase in size each year and will spread out in a garden.

Lemon balm

Black cohosh

Yarrow

Marshmallow

Passionflower

Thyme

Peony

Monarda



Easy-to-grow perennials

Passionflower

- Perennial, native warm-weather vine
- Full sun, support with trellis
- Harvest leaves and flowers when fresh and vibrant
- Favorite of bumble bees!
- Traditional use origins: Indigenous American, appropriated by white American doctors in written history



Easy-to-grow perennials

Passionflower

- **Internal use** as tea, tincture, or powder
- **Nervine:** helps calm the mind
- Specific to obsessive / circular thinking
- **Mild antispasmodic:** some people find it helpful for mild asthma and/or menstrual cramps
- **Sleep support:** taken before bed
- **Very safe** for all ages at appropriate dose
- **Use caution** with sedative medications and in pregnancy



Tree box gardening

If you don't have access to garden space, tree boxes offer a public zone for planting. Shrubs and trees are a good choice for these spaces because they are large and tend not to be mowed by landscapers and maintenance workers

Shrubs/small trees:

Hawthorn

Elder

Sumac

Thicket willows

Large trees:

Oaks

Wild cherry

White pine

Arbor vitae

Tree box gardening

Elder

- Multi-stemmed spreading shrub
- Full sun to part shade
- Harvest flowers in spring and berries in late summer
- Important food for birds
- Traditional use origins: Indigenous American, European, North African



Tree box gardening

Elder

- **Flowers** as tea or tincture/extract
- Diaphoretic: use in febrile conditions
- **Berries (cooked)** as syrup, extract, or food
- Support for innate immunity
- Nourishing and blood-building
- **Leaves** are toxic unless thoroughly cooked
- **Flowers and berries are very safe** for all ages.
Can be used as food.



Medicinal Houseplant

In general, plants prefer to grow outside. These two plants will tolerate growing in a sunny window indoors:

- Gotu Kola
- Vulnerary (helps heal damaged tissue)
- Supports cognitive function
- Can help with brain fog
- Gynostemma
- Calming adaptogen
- Gentle immune tonic
- May lower triglycerides and LDL cholesterol





Cultivating threatened plants

- The combination of colonialism and industrialization has been deadly for many plants, including lots of medicinal plants
- The herb trade has contributed to the decline of many North American plants
- Habitat destruction is the biggest tangible threat to sensitive forest plants
- In the city, we can provide tiny areas of habitat for plants whose natural habitat is dwindling



Cultivating threatened plants

These plants are threatened by overharvesting and habitat destruction AND are somewhat easy to cultivate in our area:

- Black cohosh
- American ginseng
- Goldenseal
- Blue cohosh
- Solomon's seal
- White sage
- Butterfly weed
- Echinacea
- Wild yam

Learn more:

<https://unitedplantsavers.org/species-at-risk-list/>

Trillium



Herbal preparations

Options for preserving, storing and using medicinal herbs

- Teas (steeped) & decoctions (boiled): made with dried herbs
- Tinctures: concentrated extracts preserved in alcohol, made with fresh or dried herbs
- Vinegars, glycerites, and honeys: extracts made without alcohol (fresh or dried herbs)
- Powders: pulverized dried herbs
- Oils & salves: herbs infused into oils
- Syrups & elixirs: sweetened concentrated decoctions or tinctures

Working with the seasons



Seasonal harvesting connects us to plants' annual cycles

- .Spring:** rapid growth-- harvest new leaves, tree bark, and some flowers
- .Summer:** reproduction-- harvest leaves, flowers, and early fruits
- .Fall:** fruition-- major fruit harvest in addition to leaves and flowers
- .Late fall through very early spring:** dormancy-- harvest roots

Imperatives for herbalism on colonized land

•Read these guidelines for being a guest on Piscataway/Nacotchtank land:
<https://piscatawayindians.com/projects>

•Learn to tend land and plants with respect, treating them as kin instead of commodities

•For more on this: Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer

•Pay monthly land tax



Piscataway land tax can be paid in the following ways:

Landback/land tax

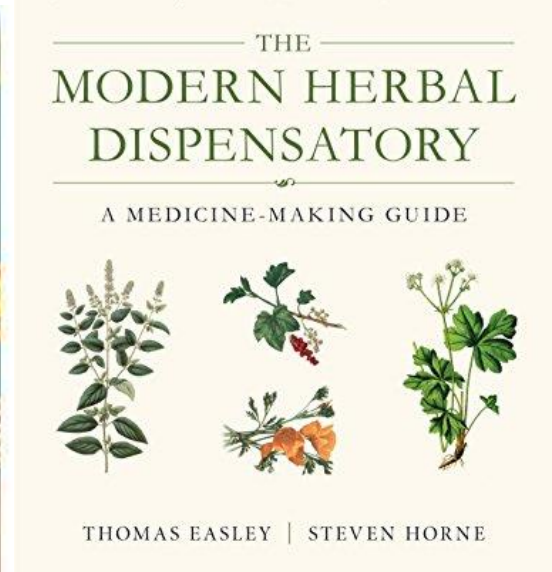
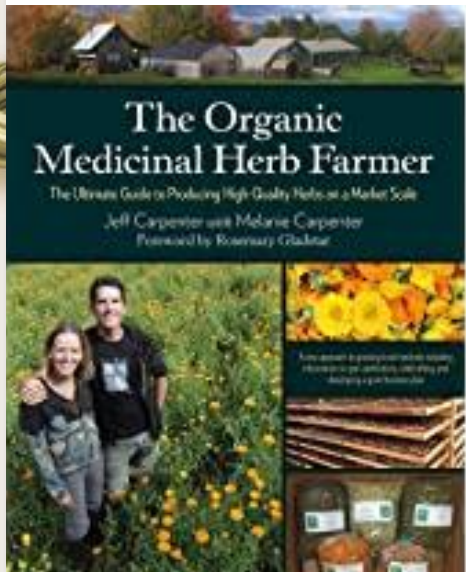
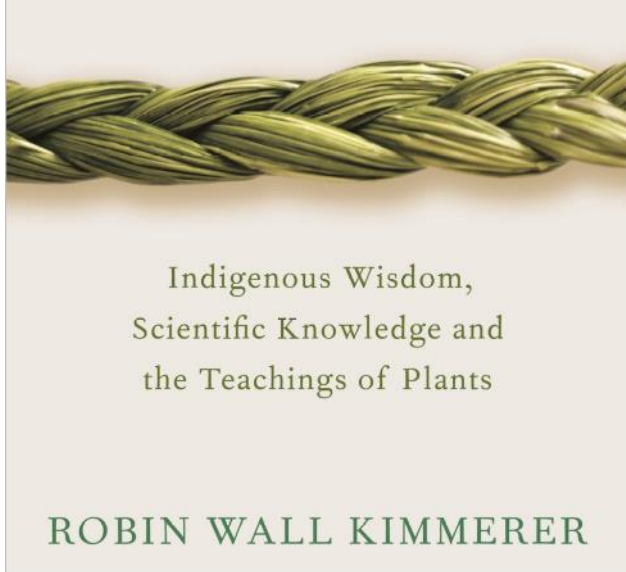
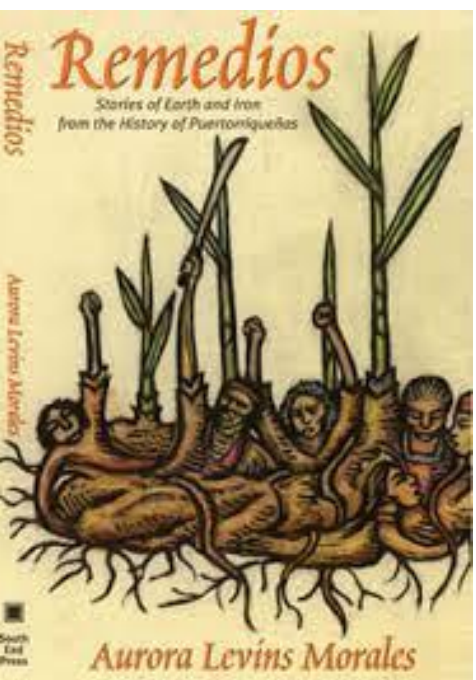
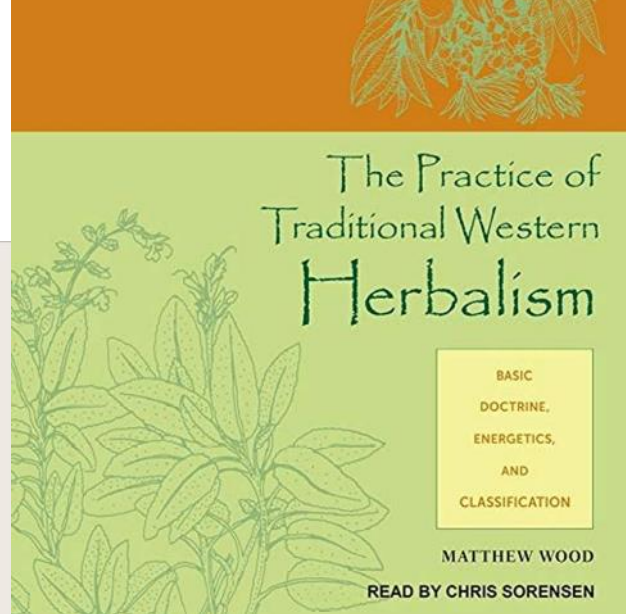
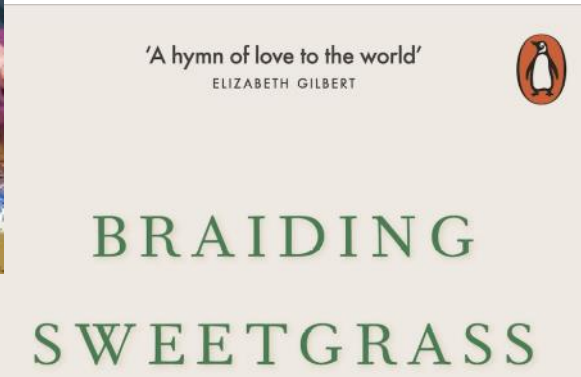
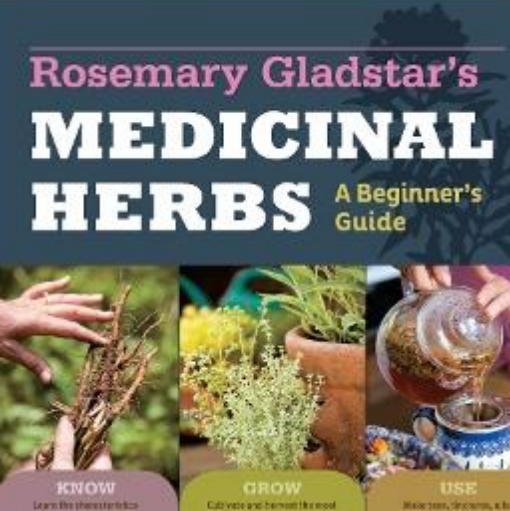
CashApp - \$KikeokanFoundation

PayPal - @landtax23

Zeffy (fee free credit card payments) -
<https://www.zeffy.com/en-US/donation-form/5a1624af-a651-4aa0-9a0e-2b6e7ab71e31>



A few good books



Little Red Bird Botanicals

Herbal CSA

Membership is open for 2024



- 6 months of locally grown herbal care packages
- Classes on medicine making, plant ID, and using local herbs
- Located in Takoma DC May-November

Little Red Bird Botanicals Community Apothecary

- Appointments for health support with clinical herbalist
- Locally grown herbs: tinctures, dried herbs, salves, vinegars, etc
- Open Wednesdays 4-7pm or by appointment



Upcoming classes

www.littleredbirdbotanicals.com/events

- Home apothecary program at Common Good City Farm
- Trees in Four Seasons
- Wild Plants! An exploration through the year

