

The Garden by Night

The Materia Medica

The Moon rides the night sky, pushing and pulling the tides of our ocean planet on Her journey, reveling in both brightness and darkness as She waxes and wanes. I find myself in my small urban garden, surrounded by potted and feral plants, some drowsily aware of my appearance in the yard, others stretching and yearning to touch the moonlight with fervent devotion. I am one of those seeking the moonlight with the hunger of the tide and the blissful engagement of night-blossoming blooms. I'm an herbologist and wortcunner having dedicated myself to the cunning work of herbcraft.

My journey as an herbologist has been anchored to the course of the Moon's orbit around our sacred ocean planet. Some of my earliest attempts at magickal herbology were creating herbal teas to connect with the vision-inducing pull of the Full Moon and since then I have continue to incorporate medicinal astrology alongside medicinal herbology.

"It is my belief that relearning herbal wisdom connects us to the women throughout the ages who have used plants for medicine. It does not matter whether you have ever known an herbalist; reconnecting with this timeless tradition of women herbalists can help us





feel whole again. Too many of us have been uprooted from our homes, our motherlands, our blood ancestors, and their traditions. Making relationships with plants and trees reunites us with Earth and reminds us to acknowledge the women who went before us and gathered the herbs on the land we now walk upon.”

- Deb Soule, *The Roots of Healing:
A Woman's Book of Herbs*

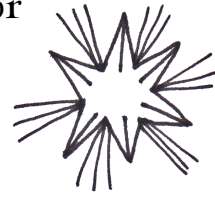
Our relationship with plants is incredible. We rely on them as a source of food, shelter, and medicine. They grow feral in old growth forests and crack the concrete of sprawling cities. Some of us grew up exposed to the legacy of plant medicine passed down generation-to-generation in our families, whether advice to drink Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) for an upset stomach or Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) for a sore throat. More often, though, many of us learned about plant medicine later in life whether from a place of wanting to live more holistically or after an illness. I came to plant medicine because the herbs called me and I felt the truth in their song. Years on, I am still learning what it means to be an herbologist and serve the plant and humyn communities in the mutual work of sustainable healing.

I also hold beloved in my heart the interplay of plant culture and womyn's culture. In my collection of herbals, I have a few feminist and lesbian press books printed in the 1970s and 80s that embody the fight for the emotional,

mental, and physical sovereignty of womyn. These books, which emerged in response to the need of womyn's communities to be able to heal themselves, are not only full of useful herbal remedies, but firmly centered womyn as healer, as autonomous, and as worth every drop of their wellness.

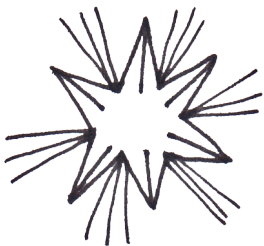
“Remember that for women to self-medicate is for women to take power for themselves. I see the use of plant medicine as a seditious act.”

- Elisabeth Brookes, *An Astrological Herbal for Women*

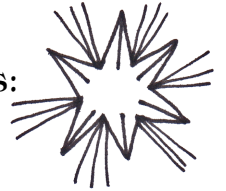


The Lunar Apothecary taps into the subversive nature of womyn and herbs by simply being a space for and by womyn who are seeking their wholeness in ways that recognizes their inherent healing power. When planted firmly within the context of womyn's culture, the medicine and magick of lunar herbology becomes a tool of revolutionary wellbeing.

We recognize that our minds, bodies, and spirits are sacred and we treat them in a holy manner with sacred plant medicine of Earth, Moon, and Star.



Our Lunar Apothecary Materia Medica is comprised of 15 herbs along with nearly 50 additional plants that we will explore as part of the course. We will investigate the medicinal and magickal qualities of each plant, as well as remedies and charms that employ each plant's unique qualities. Every Materia Medica profile will contain the following components:



Folk Names: A list of common names that the herb is known by.



Planet: The resonating or ruling planet(s) of the herb.

Element: Each herb has an elemental quality of Earth, Air, Fire or Water. The elemental tradition of Western Herbalism has its roots in ancient Greek humorism and is part of the Traditional Western Herbalism energetic tradition of classification.



Moon Phase: The Moon Phase that the herb most strongly resonates with.

Zodiac: Like the elements, each herb is also associated with one or more signs of the solar zodiac.

Parts used: Physical parts of the plants used.

Habitat: Traditional and modern habitats that the herb is found in.

Growing conditions: Recommendations for growing the herb.

Collection: When to collect the herb.

Flavor: The energetic and physical flavor of the herb.

Stemming from Traditional Chinese Medicine and Ayurveda, flavor classification is an important marker of a plant's healing qualities. Herbs with a bitter taste that stimulate saliva and bile, for example, are usually digestive aids, while herbs with an astringent taste, which dry the mouth when chewed, are good for drying up excess flow such in the case of hemorrhage.

Temperature: The energetic and physical temperature of herbs, describing the way that their healing qualities act in regards to heat or cold in the body. Cayenne (*Capsicum annuum*) is a classic hot herb, while Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) has a cooling quality.

Moisture: The energetic and physical moisture signature of herbs from a scale of wet to dry. Astringent herbs like White Willow Bark (*Salix alba*) and Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) are considered dry in moisture, where mucilaginous herbs like Marshmallow Root (*Althaea officinalis*) are quite moist.

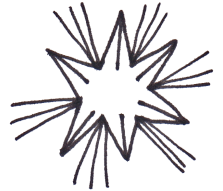
Tissue State: A system of energetic classification in Traditional Western Herbalism. There are six Tissue States:



Hot/Excitation, Cold/Depression, Tense/Constriction, Damp/Stagnation, Damp/Relaxation, and Dry/Atrophy. I discuss the Tissue States in my book, *Morning Mischief: Fully Enchanted Herbal Remedies for Delicious Awakenings + Resolute Magnificence*, and I highly recommend Matthew Wood's incredible work on Traditional Western Herbalism Energetics, *The Practice of Traditional Western Herbalism: Basic Doctrine, Energetics, and Classification*.

Constituents: A list of specific constituents found in each herb, including vitamins and minerals.

Actions: A list of terms describing the herb's actions.



Main uses: We'll look at the medicinal qualities of the herb, both internal and topical use, as well as suggestions of use. Most herbs have extensive uses and each herb could easily have an entire book dedicated to its medicinal uses. We'll look at the more common uses of each herb and how I use herbs in my own life and practice.

Magickal uses: We'll look at the magickal qualities of each herb, both historical and modern, including suggested uses.

The Herb Personality: Herbs have their own unique personalities, just like all creatures on our sweet ocean planet, but this section describes the personality of the folk that such an herb would be most beneficial for. Blue Vervain (*Verbena*

hastate) folks, for example, tend to be quite Type A, and benefit from Blue Vervain's chill-out energy as the herb softens tension in the muscles and mind.

Contraindications: A listing of common contraindications for the herb's use. As always, be aware that you are your own beloved healer, and be mindful of what herbs you use. I generally consult 3 – 4 Materia Medicas for a widely used herb's contraindications when creating new recipes and more Materia Medicas if the herb is less used. Research is fun and a necessary skill of the herbologist!

Dosage: A general recommended dosage for the herb as medicine. Dosages vary widely depending on what school of thought you adhere to. I practice a low-dose form of herbal medicine, for example, and typically recommend only a few drops of a tincture at a time. Be guided by your research and your intuition when exploring dosage guidelines.

Remedies: Recipes, rituals, charms, and amulets using the herb's medicinal and magickal qualities.



As you explore the Materia Medica of the Lunar Apothecary, add your own notes, experiences, recipes, and charms to the information I've already provided. We are only able to grow as herbologists if we add our stories to the narrative of herbal medicine and magick through the ages, strengthening the legacy of healing wisdom for our descendents.

Growing your own personal Materia Medica is a lifelong practice. To begin, I recommend reading a vast variety of works by other herbologists, wortcunners, and plant folk, not only to improve your plant knowledge, but to gain exposure to the myriad of ways that we can record plant wisdom. I can know all of the ways that an herb is anti-bacterial, anti-fungal, anti-toadstool, but if I do not know the personality of a plant, my relationship is limited. Therefore, I tend to seek out herbals that include the voice of the plant along with the stories of the herbalist. I also make sure to have a healthy dose of scientifically standard texts in my Apothecary library, so that I maintain my multilingual skills between the many ways we talk about medicine, healthcare, and healing.

For many years, I have kept herb notebooks and, because I *attempt* to keep things organized, different notebooks are for recipe-making, class note-taking, and sketching. I also keep a binder or two for especially important printed material and hand-outs. Since I do attempt to keep paper to a minimum in the Apothecary (I say this knowing that I own more books than anything else in my life), I digitize quite a bit of my material to be accessed via computer and digital reader. I have also begun

to work on my own hand-illustrated Materia Medica, like the herbals of old, but in the meantime I have my collection of notebooks keeping my heart and hands busy.

If you have an opportunity to learn from a teacher in person, it is always fascinating to have a glimpse into their own Materia Medica and note-taking process - if they'll allow it! I have seen herbals filled with calligraphy worthy of medieval texts to notebooks filled with illegible swirls and lines of formulation. What we notice of herbs and record about them says a great deal about us, where we are in our lives, and what we need to learn.

Finally, grow a Materia Medica of your very own as both a practical tool for your herbcraft and as an act of devotion to the healing ways you hold sacred and in honor of the plants who keep us so well. Your Materia Medica may be a series of illustrations, original pieces of music, herbal chants, or every herb may have 20 pages of extensive, fine-print investigations. Keeping a Materia Medica from the beginning of your studies will benefit your practice for years to come .

