

# alchemy

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For my husband, Xavier,  
my constant source of love and inspiration.



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# FOREWORD



How wonderful it has been in my more than 40 years as a practicing herbalist to watch herbalism emerge from its place in the “underworld.” Interest in herbalism—the art and science of healing with plants—has grown in leaps and bounds, especially in the past few decades. This legitimate healing system had been marginalized and pushed deeply underground by the advent of modern pharmaceutical medicine and the “age of chemicals.” But from relative obscurity, it is now flowering and has taken its honorary place among other healing professions.

Herbs offer so much, not only in health and healing but also as a way of life. They provide beauty, balance, and sanity in a world that sometimes seems to have gone awry. Imagine a world without herbs . . . It’s impossible! Without plants, life as we know it wouldn’t exist. We need this chlorophyll-rich, carbon-dioxide breathing, nutrient-dense mass of green matter to breathe, live, and *be!*

Like the tenacious plants that this healing system is based upon, herbalism has rooted deeply in the consciousness of our communities once again—thank goodness! But questions and confusion come along with this rekindled interest in herbalism, as people try to sort through information on herb safety, how to use herbs, which herbs to use, how to prepare them, how much to take. Ultimately, each person is asking, which herb is best for *me?*

Over the thousands of years of herbal usage, people around the world have developed systems that help explain the hows, whens, and whys of using certain herbs. The best of these systems or traditions have been preserved and passed down. In India, Ayurveda medicine, known as the Science of Life, is a composite of over 5,000 years of recorded plant use for health and healing. Likewise, in China a very sophisticated system of healing evolved over several thousand years; the best of that wisdom was encapsulated into a highly effective system termed Tradition Chinese Medicine (TCM). In North, Central, and South America, many different systems of herbal healing were developed by the indigenous cultures that thrived on these plant-rich continents. All around the world in places as diverse as Africa, Western and Eastern Europe, and the Mediterranean, herbal traditions evolved and were passed down through the ages.

No wonder herbalism can seem so overwhelming, confusing, and sometimes even conflicting . . . Where does one start to begin to understand this ancient, complex, often contradictory and multifaceted system(s) of health and healing?

Enter Rosalee! In her brilliantly simple yet profound way of teaching, Rosalee captures the essence of some of these great herbal traditions, translates them for us, and makes them accessible for everyone to understand without years of study! At the core of her teachings is the art of matching herbs to individuals through the understanding of constitutional types—in other words, how to match herbs to people rather than to diseases. Often challenging and difficult to grasp, this concept is one that Rosalee presents with ease, calling it an “herbal sweet spot.”

Rosalee is a master at teaching the “energetics” of plants, so that we really grasp what these herbs do, how they work in our bodies, and how they affect us as individuals. In *Alchemy of Herbs*, we learn this not through studying chemistry or the complex constituents of plants, but by actually experiencing how the plants work through our senses, especially that of taste. I don’t know anyone who is able to teach or write about these concepts quite as simply or clearly as Rosalee does without sacrificing their diverse complexity.

Rosalee also reminds us that there’s no “One Solution” to our personal health. This is one of the main problems with modern medicine as well as “modern herbalism”: we’ve been taught that there’s a “silver bullet” approach to health where one solution will work for all. But Rosalee’s approach is different—and anything but dogmatic. There’s no set of rules with “shoulds” and “should nots.” Instead, she leads us on a “journey of discovery and awareness” where our personal observations and experiences are of utmost importance in discovering what works best for us as individuals. She reminds us that we truly are our own best asset when it comes to getting the most benefit from herbs. Most importantly, through this journey, we develop a deeply personal relationship with the plants we work with, which really is the heart and soul of herbalism.

In *Alchemy of Herbs*, Rosalee does more than give us facts to ponder; she inspires us to use herbs in our daily lives. She exudes joy and makes learning about herbs fun, practical, and hands-on. She brings herbalism into the kitchen and invites you to play with her as she concocts, mixes, and blends. Her recipes are fabulous; some are already well on their way to becoming classics. She proves that old adage that good health begins in the kitchen and that food is our best medicine.

Great teachers and great herb books, I feel, are those that teach us to think for ourselves and to be self-empowered. Rosalee does just that through all of her teachings and writing. In *Alchemy of Herbs*, Rosalee has hit the “herbal sweet spot” and given us a jewel to treasure.

—Rosemary Gladstar,  
herbalist, author, and founder of the Sage Mountain  
Herbal Retreat Center and Botanical Sanctuary