



THE WHOLISTIC HEALING GUIDE TO CANNABIS

UNDERSTANDING the Endocannabinoid System

ADDRESSING Specific Ailments & Conditions

MAKING Cannabis-Based Remedies

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WELCOME

I would like to introduce you to the plant cannabis.

My intention is for this book to offer meaningful, reliable information and insight about cannabis for the beginning explorer as well as the experienced practitioner of the healing arts. You may be an herbalist or acupuncturist; a nurse, physician, or massage therapist; or psychotherapist, addiction and recovery counselor, or dispensary worker; or a traveler on the path of being human in a challenging world. In any case, we are all looking for reliable information to help people who are suffering find relief.

Perhaps you've heard that CBD oil can cure almost everything. Or a loved one has been suffering from a long-term illness and you've heard cannabis might help. Perhaps you're a parent whose child has struggled with epilepsy or a person who simply feels stuck in a rut of negative thinking. You might have just discovered this plant or already be in a long-term relationship with cannabis. You may have come to this book in a hurry, eager to research cannabis's properties or to make a medicine. Or you may have wandered in with a mind full of curiosity about what's fact and what's mythology. Whatever brings you here, my first choice is to have you land in a comfortable spot in front of a warm fire or a sunlit window with the just-right fullness of a well-nourished body and time to spare.

Cannabis is a remarkable plant with a capacity to teach, to help alleviate suffering, and in some situations to transform and heal. This powerful and wise ally can influence our health and well-being in body, mind, heart, and spirit.

Cannabis is a friendly plant to people. It is no surprise that humans have been working with her for centuries. In this book, you'll discover how her gifts are uniquely matched and resonant with our physiology to make her such an easy and important ally.

Cannabis is also complex: multicolored and subtle, intelligent and diversely adaptive, gentle to use in one situation and requiring a low dose and mindfulness of cultivar-specific sensitivity in another. While chamomile, for example, is vastly talented as a healing herb, it is very difficult to drink chamomile tea with unwanted consequences. However, cannabis, while safe and friendly, is complex. For this reason, it's important to come to your relationship with her with curiosity and openness, with humility and patience and a willingness to listen — perhaps as you would with someone you want to form a meaningful relationship with.

This is not intended to be a drive-thru experience or a speed-dating session. While I've attempted to write in ways that are user-friendly and accessible across differences of experience and knowledge, this plant requires and deserves a more thoughtful inquiry, and I strongly encourage you to settle in for a journey. While some questions may be answered by a quick visit to the index or a glance at diagrams, many require a fuller exploration about intake methods, dose, context, and yes, intention.

As a scientist and herbalist, and as an ordinary learning, evolving human, I have been astounded by the spectrum of gifts this plant makes available to people. I'll spend time discussing the important benefits of cannabis in diverse physical health situations in the chapter on conditions (page 164). It takes my breath away to discover how many people in diverse situations have been helped by this plant through complementing other interventions or when other interventions have failed or created negative effects of their own.

Other benefits of cannabis are also addressed, such as helping us come into present time, letting go of destinations and goals, nourishing creativity and exploring new ideas, even connection and play, all within a container of safety. At a personal level, the most profound benefits for me have been to my mental, emotional, and spiritual self. The shifts made possible in my consciousness and self-awareness,

and the kind and insightful assistance cannabis has offered, have helped me transform limiting personal beliefs and response patterns with remarkable ease. I didn't understand the physiology at the time, but by creating a state of neurochemical safety, the plant supported me to reprogram habits and reflexes that I had learned as an adaptive child but that no longer served me.

There are other ways that cannabis is restorative to what is wise and healthy in us as children that has been forgotten or conditioned away. For example, as a child, I loved the wild world of nature and the experiences of exploration and adventure. My boundaries were set each year by landmarks within the woods. My mom would walk with me out there and say, "This is how far you can go this year." In the beginning, feet felt like miles and time had no clock. I still remember being facedown in the grass looking at bugs. The company of my favorite quiet hemlocks. The deer family walking by in their daily routine undisturbed by my presence. Out where I could be quiet and just listen. Out where I felt at home by the little vernal pool I thought of as a pond.

Eventually, the railroad tracks became my boundaries, and my wilderness area was replaced by a condominium complex. My friends and I tried to protect our sanctuary by removing all the boundary markers. Even then we knew the importance of wilderness and of natural states, of being open and receptive to curiosity and wonder, of exploration and peace of mind and heart.

Being in nature, as a part of nature, heals an underlying ailment of our culture — our disconnection with our true home. It enables us to remember who we are and what our place is in it all. Cannabis is gifted in helping us remember this and experiencing the states of aliveness of our deeper natures by being in present time.

This kind of emotional/spiritual learning is best done by making informed and thoughtful choices about yourself and the plant cultivar, the context and setting for your experience, and by trusting your capacity to learn and unlearn and grow, to become your wisest self. These journeys are deeply personal and are enhanced by a respectful and humble relationship with the plant.

The Herbalist's Approach

One cold winter, I decided I wanted to learn how to make beer, so I went out and bought Stephen Buhner's book *Sacred and Herbal Healing Beers: The Secrets of Ancient Fermentation*. I read it cover to cover and jumped right in to homebrewing. The thing I appreciated most — in addition to the tons of research Buhner did — was a section at the back that essentially said, *Don't listen to the doubters; it's not that complicated. Go make beer.* I love this can-do attitude; it permeates the herbal world. My herbal elders and teachers — Rosemary Gladstar and Stephen Buhner — champion our ability to bring health and well-being into our own lives while also promoting right relationship with the plant world. Humans have been working with plant medicine since we've been on the planet. It's in our bones to be in direct relationship with the plant world and the healing it can offer. Learn the basics and go start making your own medicine. It is your birthright.

Whole-Plant Medicine

Whole-plant medicine means just that: the whole plant, and all of its constituents, is used for the medicine. Herbalists hope to preserve as many of the different constituents of a plant as possible, not just the constituents we pick and choose or deem important. We would do well to use the entire chemical profile of the cannabis plant rather than deciding that CBD or THC is the *one* constituent to use, or that the chlorophyll or lipids are not important and should be removed. The science shows what herbalists already understand: that whole-plant extracts are more potent. Study after study shows that whole-plant cannabis extracts are anywhere from 4 to 330 times more effective than single-plant extracts or synthetic medicines. Yes, 4 to 330 times more effective. This is true for the entire range of conditions cannabis works with. We could also say isolated extracts are 4 to 330 times weaker than medicine we make at home.

That doesn't mean we use all parts of the cannabis plant in our preparations. We use all of the parts that are medicinal and all the constituents of these parts. That is, the whole flower and sepal leaves containing the trichomes (the little crystal-like hairs on the buds)

for most medicines, or the roots, depending on what kind of medicine we are making. Whole-plant medicine for herbalists means we use all of the plant parts we are working with rather than chemically extracting out isolated constituents. It also means we know why we are using each particular part of the plant.

A Wholistic View

The wholistic approach to healing includes looking at the whole equation, including the person, the condition, the dosage, the cultivar, and the grow environment. Every part of the equation is important and contributes to healing. The practitioner must get to know a person in order to treat them effectively. My teaching philosophy is based on the premise that if practitioners understand *how* something works (herbs, diet, exercise), they can draw on their own creativity to come up with healing solutions that perhaps no one has thought of. Formulas can be a helpful starting place, especially if the *how* is addressed, but the collective wisdom of herbalists is far more intelligent than one person and their one formula.

Cultivating Relationship

Relationship with cannabis means you have spent time researching, working with, and perhaps cultivating and journeying with cannabis — however you relate best. The relationship also requires educated trust in the plant based on your experience with her. As an herbalist, relationship with my clients means not only do I know their history and the current conditions they are working with, but I also try to understand the whole of the person in front of me, including their mental, emotional, and spiritual selves, as well as their physical state. Like any relationship, all of these require time — lots of time. What we offer at the beginning of our relationship will look quite different than after we have spent years becoming intimate with both the plant and the people we work with.

How cannabis plants are grown is vitally important. Small-scale growers are a lot like small-scale beekeepers. Do you know a beekeeper? Ask them about their bees and watch their whole demeanor light up. They love their bees. I want my medicine to originate from



BEWARE: CANNABIS IS A GATEWAY DRUG . . .

to gardening! Many of my students have come to herbalism through cannabis. Cannabis was the first plant they worked with or grew and wanted to get to know better. What a beautiful thing it is to open people to the world of healing plants and how to cultivate relationship with them.

the hands of people who love their plants, who love working with cannabis, who sing and pray and create a healthy, sacred environment for the plants to grow in. People who light up when you ask them about their plants.

Our work with cannabis can also help us relate to the Earth in more respectful ways. In the western United States, where growing cannabis has been legal for a number of years, there is an emergence of consciousness around restoring health and vitality to the agricultural land, called regenerative farming. Working *with* the land to grow plants creates more biodiversity and brings health and well-being to the land — as well as to the animals, insects, microbes, and plants growing in our little gardens.

Practicing Humility

Herbalists recognize that we don't know everything. Knowledge of how plant constituents work together is complex, and Western science often doesn't understand how these combinations work. In the whole-plant herbalist paradigm, we don't need to shun or change the mystery of how plant constituents work together (even if we don't know all the ways). We trust the wisdom of the plant and our experience working with plant medicine. Experience and trust are valued characteristics.