

INTRODUCTION

Gardening is medicine for our spirit, mind, and body. When we grow a garden that is in tune with the elements and the earth's ebbs and flows, we're cultivating more than meets the eye. We are, in essence, cultivating medicine. Medicine travels in many guises: it can take the form of connection—to our bodies, to the earth, to the healing plants. This rootedness is potent, a remedy for our times. Herb gardening is profoundly empowering: by nurturing a plant from seed to harvest and ultimately into a healing remedy, we're practicing ancient skills that all our ancestors once knew. Of course, we're also growing medicine in the literal sense. Herbs are the most ancient form of medicine and their usefulness persists into modern life. Medicine abounds, underfoot, and towering above—healing plants range from lowly “weeds” to shrubs and trees. No matter where you live, there is an abundance of botanical medicine you can easily grow in your garden. Herbal medicine provides us with a natural and safe way to address everyday health challenges and minor upsets, along with plenty of tools for promoting vitality and overall wellness—it truly shines as preventative medicine.

Preparing homemade remedies from organic, homegrown herbs is one way we can tread more lightly on the earth. By that token, we're cultivating medicine for the earth as well as for ourselves. Our gardens beckon us outdoors and keep us moving, two vital foundations of happiness and wellness. Herbalism also provides a framework for gaining intimacy with our bodies and with wellness. When we grow and harvest our own medicine, the remedy is full spectrum—it contains the intangible and unquantifiable medicine of kinship.

CULTIVATING A RELATIONSHIP WITH HEALING PLANTS

In our modern era, it's easy to feel profoundly disconnected not only from nature but also from our ancestors, sustenance, and medicine. The antidote to this cultural chasm is a *connection to place*. This connection is a web with pulsing threads fastening you to your neighbors, garden, medicine, ancestors, and heritage, which in turn resurrects a sense of belonging—a deep knowing that you have a rightful place in the world. Imagine yourself as a bright patch of cloth sewn into a vibrant quilt that stretches far into the past and deep into the future.

Befriending living plants keeps me close to my roots, literally and figuratively. When I want to know more about a plant, I bring it into the garden. From there, we slowly begin the dance of plant-human reciprocity, a friendship of sorts, born of companionable silence throughout the seasons. We become acquainted as I weed around the plant's roots, pick insects from its leaves, and share water with it during dry spells. This communion ultimately brings me to a deep-seated and intimate knowledge of the medicine itself.

MEDICINE FOR THE EARTH

An increasing number of people in industrialized nations are using medicinal herbs for their health and well-being. Nearly one-third of Americans use medicinal herbs, and the World Health Organization estimates that 80 percent of people worldwide continue to rely on herbs as their primary form of health care. According to a 2017 study published in the American Botanical Council's peer-reviewed journal

HerbalGram, consumer spending on herbal dietary supplements in the United States has surpassed \$8 billion annually. Most of that medicine is being grown overseas, often in countries with appalling labor and agricultural practices. Just as locally grown food is key to long-term sustainability, so is locally grown medicine. By organically growing your own herbs and preparing medicine at home, you're reducing fossil fuel use by cutting out transportation and packaging. As long as you're vigilant about plant identification and cleanliness in medicine making, homegrown medicine also ensures that you have the correct herb and that your medicine hasn't been adulterated or contaminated, issues that sometimes occur with commercially sourced herbs.

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