

# *Clinical* HERBALISM

PLANT WISDOM FROM EAST AND WEST

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# Preface

*“We do not become healers. We came as healers. We are.”*

**Clarissa Pinkola Estes, from *A Simple Prayer for Remembering the Motherlode***

## The Call for More Clinical Herbalists

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Herbal healing is one of the oldest practices on the planet, yet one of the newest up-and-coming professions. Reliance on healing botanicals has gone in and out of fashion and acceptance over its long history. The good news for present day herbalists is that there is an increased interest in wellness and willingness to modify lifestyle for the sake of health.

Although *herbalism* is not listed as one of the top ten career paths on popular websites or in the press, health care professions certainly are. There is a reported growing shortage of nurses, doctors, and home health aides as more people, especially the elderly, get sicker and sicker. Modern medicine keeps them alive longer, but quality of life decreases with chronic illnesses, dementias, Alzheimer’s disease, and depression. Furthermore, diseases such as diabetes, obesity, and hyperactivity disorders are creeping into our children’s lives due to poor dietary and lifestyle choices and peer pressure, among other factors.

An herbalist’s intention has historically been to keep people healthy, to use preventative measures, and to be proactive. Maintaining optimum health is our mantra, rather than chasing symptoms and diseases around later. So, who says that herbalism is not, once again, a legitimate up-and-coming profession? If you are trying to become a millionaire, this isn’t it. But if looking for a rewarding career, with a chance to heal yourself and others while helping the planet survive, then proceed full speed ahead.

## Intentions of the Text

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This herbal textbook is the one I always wished for. It is meant to be a practical and understandable user-friendly tool for solo seekers, formal students, educators, herb schools, and colleges. I set out to provide the foundations needed for the modern herbalist and to explain things step by step in a clear and understandable manner. It is meant to help launch into whatever next step appears along the herbal journey. If starting from scratch, welcome. This guide, along with a good teacher or herb school, is a way to go. At the other end, schools will find this a useful text to augment their programs. Perhaps you have already taken herbal classes, gone to a school, found a mentor, or studied on your own. Then this text is aimed at being a good reference to fill in a blank spot or help with memory. Say you forgot the proportions for putting up a tincture or are wondering, “What was that herb, again, for menstrual cramps?” Just flip open this reference to find the answer.

A message to educators: for the all the wonderful herb schools, trainings, and teachers already out there, I know from experience that finding a good text to augment existing curriculums is a challenge. Most herb schools are small, and they typically piece together handouts from their own experience, past classes, and other sources. The volume of herbal information is daunting. A college program, especially, needs a good solid text.

I thought it would be lovely to present what is needed under one tree, so to speak. I certainly would have loved it, had this resource been available for me, way back when. Therefore, I provide what I believe is a beginning and not so beginning guide for school use. In that vein, an *Instructor’s Manual* containing suggested lab activities and pop quizzes with answers is available online for instructors. Selections for the hands-on lab sections actually work. I have successfully used those very formulas, gathered from all over, and tested out the activities in my own school. Every class needs some breakout lab time to provide hands-on time—to mix up the medicine and to smell, taste, and experience the plants. Otherwise all you get are a lot of glazed-over eyeballs.

This text is very thorough. My intention is to take nothing for granted and to cover all bases. My hope is that at the end of the day, those with a passion can go out there with enough confidence to carry on as a competent clinical herbalist. This textbook will always be around in a pinch, an old familiar friend. It is a reference to return to for reminders, review, and support when faced with the sometimes scary task of devising a challenging formula and health plan for a complicated client. Nobody is an expert right away, if ever.

Every herbal program or class needs the personal take and touch of its instructor. Exposure to different points of view is enriching, much more interesting, and fun. I believe we all bring our own wisdom and life experiences into the mix of whatever endeavor we embrace. I respect that and you.

## The East-West Format

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One of the pitfalls of a lot of Western herbal programs and books is that there is really no method provided to make a good assessment of a client’s individual condition, nor to determine the best herbal choices from a laundry list of possibilities. It embraces a *take this for that* approach or, one could say, a cookbook mentality.

Other ancient herbal traditions such as Ayurvedic, Unani-Tibb, and Traditional Chinese Medicine have honed assessment skills for patients that are elegant and earth-based. These are incredibly successful in a clinical sense, having evolved over thousands of years. They provide a holistic approach that includes the planet we live on, its elements, the weather, seasons, plants, and animals. These ancient healing traditions appreciated what is referred to as the qualities of a plant, its energetics. They include qualities such as heat, cold, dry, or damp, or some version thereof.

In turn, determinations were made about patients by examining aspects such as the tongue, urine, pulse, personality, or body type, which were then matched up with remedies to heal a given condition. Later, the American Eclectics borrowed from these various systems to develop their unique energetic format.

The modern Western medical approach has pretty much abandoned all this wisdom in favor of a single-minded obsession with science and technology. When this works, it is lifesaving. But it often doesn't work, especially with chronic illness. Throughout history, Western herbalism has always been entangled, often at odds, with the prevailing and dominant medical philosophy of the times. In the modern era, Western herbalists have tended to follow the allopathic lead, perhaps in an attempt to appear more *credible* and respected.

Western herbalism has now come full circle. We are getting back to our roots. It makes for a more successful practice and healing system. Therefore, I have chosen to combine Chinese botanicals with traditional and beloved Western herbs. This is how I learned. I have included Chinese syndromes or disease patterns with a close-as-possible comparison to Western disease names. I am a nurse, after all. I have included Chinese assessment methods of pulse and tongue examination, along with tools that a Westerner might use, such as how to take a blood pressure.

This provides the best of both worlds. It is not the easiest route, because there is a great deal to learn. For a Westerner not trained in Chinese Medicine, it's like learning another language. Even Chinese organs have different meanings than their corresponding Western anatomical parts. But in the end, it's worth it.

## Overall Organization

A huge amount of material is organized in what I deem a logical sequence, one that actually makes sense. Any way material is juggled, there is arguably a better order. I placed this material in a sequence that worked for myself and my classes, but as I went along, I would switch things around in real time to fit a unique classroom need. So, I recommend that any school or individual looking to create their own curriculum start here, and then expand, mix or match, and reorganize as needed.

For instance, at first I put the medicine-making segment near the end, but I later discovered that students wanted to get their hands into the nitty gritty of remedy-making much earlier. If it was late spring, a logical time for an herb walk, everyone itching to be in the great outdoors with the baby plants popping up, what good would botany, plant families, and proper identification be tucked in at the end of the program, not yet covered? With these considerations, the text is divided into five parts.

### Part I The Basics

This comprises the basics of herbal medicine complete with history, botany, wildcrafting, herbal preparations, and instructions on medicine-making. Chemical constituents come next, providing a scientific segue into traditional plant energetics. Then comes what seems the most challenging topic for Westerners untrained in Chinese Medicine: namely the foundational elements of Western and Chinese Medicine, how they mesh, how they don't, and why this understanding is essential to obtaining good results as an herbalist. For example, a lot of practice time and class labs must be devoted to Chinese pulse and tongue assessment, so it may be used effectively in clinic.

### Part II Materia Medica

The all-important Materia Medica, the basic plant information section, is divided into two chapters—the first being a well-rounded selection of individual herbs, and the second comprising groups of similarly acting botanicals, such as a group of cooling demulcents with the nuances between them. Each botanical follows the same format, making the information consistent. I have chosen twenty-five basic herbs that *I think* all herbalists must know. Then come a few important groupings. The Materia Medica includes Western and Chinese botanical selections.

Choosing a good basic Materia Medica always boils down to personal favorites. There are some indisputables, such as the need for Licorice root and at least one berberine, such as Western Oregon Grape root or Chinese Coptis Huang Lian (Goldthread root). But after that, possibilities abound, with what has worked either historically or from personal experience. A beginning Materia Medica should be chosen from common plants that are readily available and not too expensive. There should not be too many. It is best to include a couple of versatile representatives of each body system or energetic quality. For example, a good warming or neutral anti-infective, such as Osha root or Echinacea root, and a cooling antibiotic or antiviral, like Usnea thallus or Andrographis Chuan Xin Lian (Heart-Thread Lotus leaf).

### Part III The Herbalist in Action

This is the practical preparation for student clinic. Here we stop being theoretical or intellectual. Instead it's what is needed to know in real time, in a real live clinic setting. A chapter is involved with herbal safety and herb-drug interactions—important information, not necessarily requiring memorization, but still essential. Above all, do no harm. Then comes how to put any given formula together, proportioning out each herb—called *dispensing*. Proper dosing is an essential aspect.

Finally, comes the interview—taking a health history, making an accurate assessment using all described tools, and devising a feasible, effective plan. At the end comes documentation. Health forms are provided to copy and use at will. These appear in the text and in Appendix A.

### Part IV Case Histories: Therapeutics and Formulations

This is approached in Western style by body systems. General information is presented about each system. Included are *functional medicine* concepts, with basic understandings that help herbalists get to the root of chronic health problems, including gut health, inflammation, oxidative stress, and liver detoxification. Chinese syndromes or disease patterns with typical pulse and tongue examples are given and are correlated as much as possible with Western diseases.

A small list of important Chinese and Western herbs not previously mentioned in the original Materia Medica section is highlighted here because they are pertinent, a *must* for that body system. Herbal categories are given along with numerous tables to help in creating a personalized formula.

Finally come various case histories showcasing conditions that an herbalist is most likely to encounter, complete with sample formulas and their rationales. The Western disease is explained, and its most likely Chinese syndrome given. The

presentation is given in S.O.A.P. format (Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan), a standard method of charting and organizing a treatment strategy.

## Part V Getting Out There

The final but highly important chapters include current entities and herbal organizations, such as Germany's Commission E, the American Botanical Council, and the American Herbalists Guild. Included are the legal aspects of herbal medicine and herbs. Where do we stand and what are the issues? How are legalities handled in other countries? The debate still rages about herbal standardization, an issue enmeshed in politics, the American Medical Association (AMA), the Federal Drug Administration (FDA), and among herbalists themselves. A discussion is included about Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) and what that means for us. If being a clinician isn't your bag, mention is made of the various and potentially lucrative other areas an herbalist might explore while still using their skills and love of healing plants.

## How to Use This Text

### Ground Rules

- *Some knowledge of anatomy and physiology.* The text assumes a basic understanding of each body system. If clarification is desired, obtain a simple beginner's anatomy and physiology reference, such as Cohen and Taylor's *Structure and Function of the Human Body*, listed in the Bibliography.
- *Herbal strengths.* The herbs used in this text are mild and medium strength only. None are very toxic or strong. *Mild* refers to a plant with minimum to no toxicity that is safe with proper use, such as Milk Thistle seed. *Medium-strength* plants have some potential toxicity. A few are listed, like Valerian and Comfrey root. Cautions and contraindications are clearly presented. *Strong* herbs are highly toxic and potentially life-threatening plants that should never be used without a lot of knowledge, experience, and courage, such as Foxglove herb or Henbane herb. None of those appear in our Materia Medica.
- *Commission E.* Refers to Germany's government-sponsored herbal compendium or monograph that enumerates benefits, approved use, dosages, side effects, cautions, and herb-drug interactions. Occasionally, some of that information is included in our Materia Medica, especially the cautions and contraindications. Commission E is considered an authority and is respected by herbalists worldwide. A lot of research and effort went into its creation.
- *Chinese versus Western.* Chinese organs are capitalized—Heart, Lungs, Spleen. Western anatomical organs are small case—heart, lungs, spleen. Chinese syndromes are capitalized, as in Kidney Qi Deficiency.
- *Herb names.* Nomenclature will be explored. Writing plant names follows a recognized form. Botanical names in Latin are italicized with first name (genus) capitalized; second name (species) italicized in small letters—*Taraxacum officinale*.

Common names are capitalized, followed by plant part used in lowercase: Dandelion root. Pinyin names, the official romanization system for standard Chinese, is capitalized—Pu Gong Ying for Dandelion root.

## Chapter Organization

Chapters begin with *Chapter Review*, a brief, bulleted outline of the contents therein to determine if that is the needed one. *Key Terms* list the important words presented. They are highlighted in the text, appearing again in the *Glossary*. Then come a few introductory paragraphs to further detail contents. The previewed information follows, concluded by a *Summary*. Sometimes just reading the summary alone can help jog the memory. The final section is a *Review* portion to help determine if the material was understood and retained or if reviewing a particular section might be in order. *Fill in the Blanks* follow, with answers in Appendix B. Finally come *Critical Concept Questions*, a group of open-ended queries with answers for the reader to decide.

## The Back of the Book Is a Treasure Trove

- *Glossary.* This part gives a quickie guide to important words and concepts used in the text. Think of it as a mini review. Kind of fun to read on its own.
- *Appendix.* This is a vital and quick reference with key information. *Conversions* contain the practical ones I have always used as an herbalist, such as how many drops to a teaspoon or how many milliliters fit in a four-ounce tincture bottle. Then comes average *Doses* to use for tinctures, teas, capsules, and syrups, for both adults and children. The handy *Forms* section follows. These may be reproduced and used if desired.
- *Abbreviations.* A self-explanatory list provides abbreviations used in the text.
- *Cross-referenced Materia Medica.* This is a convenient listing of all herbs I have used, plus others. They are cross-referenced into lists and alphabetized according to botanical name, common name, and pinyin designations.
- *Bibliography.* Listed are the amazing books I referenced, ones that might grace any herbalist's library.

So now with the game plan laid out, the time has come to delve into the specifics of becoming a credible and informed herbalist. Enjoy the ride.



Author Rachel Lord.  
(Photo courtesy of Sebastian Gorklo,  
Wolfeyemedia.)