

## Celebrate Herbal Medicine Awareness Week!

By Naomi Boldon, RM/T, CHT, RH

Join us in celebrating Herbal Medicine Awareness Week during the first week in May! Since time immemorial, herbal traditions have long been honoring the symbiotic relationship that they share with the plants of their bioregion. It seems that perhaps we are slowly forgetting about the imperative importance of this symbiotic relationship, most especially within the boom of the scientific era and the pharmaceutical industry. It is easy then to understand that herbal medicine is really nothing new, but rather an art form seldom practiced today. Look around you – those weeds growing in your backyard might actually be the medicine that you need most! Not any one remedy will work for everyone because everyone's body chemistry and the way that they react to each plant's unique vibration is as individual as they are.

Many of you may be asking, "But what is herbal medicine anyway?" According to Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary, an herbalist is defined as "one who uses herbs to promote healing." Furthermore, herbals are defined as "herbs used for preventative or therapeutic purposes. Herbals may be prescribed individually or in combination as dietary supplements or as medicinal preparations. Some may be chewed or ingested directly; others are prepared in capsules or pills, or are brewed, extracted and administered as lozenges, ointments, compresses, liniments, or put into baths." Some practitioners use just one herb at a time, referred to as a "simple" remedy; while other herbalists will use multiple herbs together in a single formula, commonly referred to as "compound herbalism."

Herbalists themselves can be as diverse as cultures they represent. There is no right or wrong, no one way that is better than the next, as they all have much to teach us. When you hear the word "herbalist," what comes to mind? Perhaps you too were born with a green spark in your blood, or you spent your summer vacations with your grandmother soaking up all that she had to teach you about communicating with the plants. Anyone who has ever used herbs to increase the benefit of another could be classified as an herbalist, technically speaking. What sets one herbalist apart from the next has much to do with their training and education, but experience is a timeless teacher not easily refuted in any instance.

When we talk about experience and herbal medicine, nothing comes close to the age-old traditional disciples such as Traditional Chinese Medicine, ayurveda from India, the village shamans of Peru, or Tibetan and Native American herbal medicine to name but a few. These traditions were sculpted and formed over thousands of years; the remedies can sometimes be intensely complex or coated with magically charged substances.

Folk herbalism is another very popular school of thought, especially in the U.S. Its roots lie very deeply engrained in experience as well, but it tends to be less disciplined, less "ruley" in nature. The information gleaned may have been passed down from generation to generation or from one villager to the next. Through a direct connection with the plants themselves and from Mother

Earth as a whole, the use or cautions thereof are constantly compounded upon. Rather than reaching for the pill bottle or the scalpel, they would wander into the fields and meadows to gather their medicines instead.

Another distinct classification is that of medical herbalism, which strives to bridge the gap between traditional or folk herbalism and today's scientific medical model. Their training has been expanded to include concepts such as laboratory diagnosis, physical examinations and pathological processes. So when you go to visit a medical herbalist, they may listen to your heart with a stethoscope or look into your ears with an ophthalmoscope.

Within the realm of herbal medicine, you are left to contemplate what is best for you and what you're most comfortable with. It could be as simple as a cup of chamomile tea to help you relax at night or some turmeric to help reduce inflammation. Listen to your heart and use your innate intuition to gravitate you to that which suits your highest good and will allow you to grow and flourish to the utmost highest vibration possible.

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