

# **Essential Herbs & Sagely Wisdom**

# Essential Herbs & Sagely Wisdom



A Quiet Guide for Women

Tianna Lily



First Edition — 2026

No rights reserved. Every part of this book may be reproduced without  
permission.

UID: WV-1912-BL-MS-408

*For every woman who ever stood in her kitchen  
and knew something she couldn't explain.*

## Contents

A Quiet Word Before We Begin

### **Part One: The Plants**

For the Racing Mind

For the Body That Feels Like a Battleground

For the Heart That Cannot Close

For the Woman Who Has Forgotten She Is Powerful

For Sleep That Will Not Come

For the Fire That Burns Too Hot

For Clarity When the Path Is Hidden

For the Blood That Will Not Flow

For the Mouth That Cannot Speak

For the Woman Who Carries Everyone Else

For the Oldest Wound

For the Woman in Transition

For the Woman Who Cannot Stop

## **Part Two: The Wheel**

The New Moon

The Waxing Moon

The Full Moon

The Waning Moon

The Bleeding Days

## **Part Three: The Waters**

The Simple Bath

The Green Bath

The Moon Bath

**Part Four: The Bathing Women**

**Part Five: The Preparations**

Honey Smoke

The White Powders

Dark Resin

Seed Oil

Bitter Tincture

Mineral Mud

Dream Powder

Wound Salve

The Final Tincture

**Part Six: The Ordinary Days**

**Part Seven: Further Teachings**

For the New Mother

The Body at Every Age

The Woman Who Has Stopped Bleeding

The Garden Itself

Healing Together

How We Decide Things

The Dream

The Empty Room

Fire

Making Things

Art as Medicine

The Land

The Sky

The Crossing

The Line

Passing It On

**Closing: The Day Out of Time**

## **Herb Garden**

The Rooted

The Turning

The Sacred

The Starred

The Embodied

The Veiled

## Part One: The Plants

Plants don't heal us the way pills do. They don't target a symptom and silence it. They remind the body of something it already knows — a rhythm, a temperature, a way of being that got lost somewhere between the morning alarm and the midnight worry. The herbs in this section are arranged by what they speak to. Not their Latin names. Not their chemical compounds. What they're *for*. You'll know which ones are yours. —

---



## For the Racing Mind

There's a small blue flower that grows near streams, in partial shade, where the ground stays cool even in summer. Long slender stem, five petals, roots that reach down like fingers searching for water. Once you've pulled one, you'll never mistake it for anything else.

That's chamomile. The Herb Garden has the full picture — how to grow it, how to harvest it, what else it does. Here I'll tell you how I use it when my mind won't stop.

Three flowers in a cup. Boiling water over them, covered, steeped for exactly four minutes. Not five. Four. I don't know who figured out the four-minute rule, but they were right.

What it does is quiet the noise without putting you to sleep. It doesn't sedate. It just turns down the volume on the thoughts that circle like they own the place.

**When:** Before bed, mostly. When I've replayed a conversation

from years ago for the third time that week. When the to-do list is running on a loop behind my eyes.

**Also:** Dried leaves in a small cloth pouch under your pillow. The scent alone seems to tell the mind: enough now. Rest.

—





## For the Body That Has Nothing Left

There's a thick, knotted root — ashwagandha (see Herb Garden). I buy it dried because it won't grow in my climate. The name means "smell of horse" in Sanskrit, which tells you two things: it's earthy, and it was given to people who needed the strength of one.

A thumbnail of dried root simmered in water for twenty minutes — not boiled, simmered, the water barely moving. Strain. Add honey. Drink warm.

This is for the days when your body feels like it has been fighting something — an illness, a stress, a grief — and has nothing left. Ashwagandha replenishes what was spent. It doesn't stimulate. It restores.

**When:** The bleeding days. After illness. After a period of pushing through when you should have rested.

---





## For the Heart That Cannot Close

A vine with small sharp thorns and white flowers that open at dusk. It grows on old walls, in neglected gardens, in places where something once was and is no longer. The thorns will catch your fingers when you harvest the flowers. That is part of the preparation. The small pain reminds you that the heart opens at a cost.

Three flowers, one thorn — carefully, with tweezers — steeped together in hot water for seven minutes. Strain through a cloth. The thorn must not be swallowed. Add a teaspoon of honey.

This tea is for the grief that will not resolve. For the loss that feels permanent. For the love that was taken, or left, or never arrived. The thorn symbolises the pain. The flower symbolises what the pain produced. Together they tell the body that grief and growth are the same process.

The flowers come from a plant I call the thorned climber. I haven't given it a proper name because I'm not entirely sure what it is — only

that it works. I find it on south-facing walls, in old gardens, the kind of places where things grow undisturbed for decades.

**When:** Anniversaries. The empty chair at the table. The song that undoes you. The morning you wake and forget for a moment, then remember.

—





## For the Woman Who Has Forgotten She Is Powerful

A tall, straight plant with a single flower at the top, like a torch. The roots are shallow but wide — it spreads horizontally, not vertically. It grows in open fields, in full sun, and stands even in strong wind without breaking.

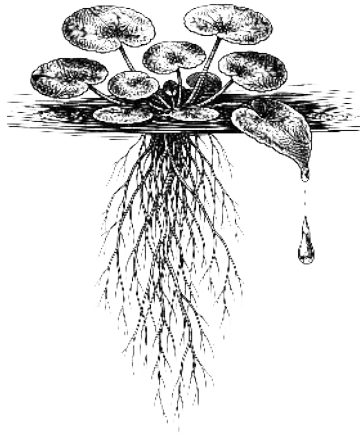
One flower in a clear glass of cold water. Place in sunlight for one hour. Drink the water. Eat the flower.

This is not a remedy for illness. It is a reminder. Some plants heal. Some plants restore. This one reminds you what you are.

**When:** Before a difficult conversation. Before a day that requires you to be larger than you feel. When someone has made you feel small and you need to recall that small is a lie they told you.

---





## For Sleep That Will Not Come

Valerian (see Herb Garden). The root smells like old socks and works like nothing else. I keep it in a sealed jar in a separate cupboard because the odour will colonise everything nearby.

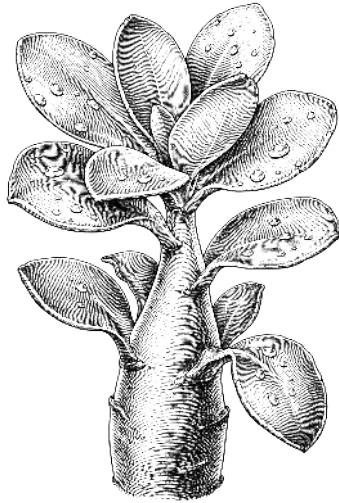
A teaspoon of dried root steeped in boiling water for ten minutes. Honey helps but doesn't fully mask the taste. Drink it thirty minutes before bed.

What valerian does is make sleep possible. It doesn't knock you out. It removes the barrier between you and sleep. I use it three nights on, four nights off — your body adapts if you use it every night and it stops working. Reserve it for the worst nights.

**Also:** Passionflower (see Herb Garden) for when the problem is mental rather than physical — the thoughts that loop, the worries that circle. Hops (see Herb Garden) amplifies valerian's effect if one isn't enough. I keep all three in the cupboard and reach for what the night requires.

—





## For the Fire That Burns Too Hot

Peppermint (see Herb Garden). A broad-leafed plant with a thick, succulent stem. Crushed between your fingers, it releases enough menthol to clear your head.

One large leaf, crushed with a mortar and pestle until it becomes a paste. Mix with cool water. Drink immediately.

This is for inflammation — the hot joint, the burning stomach, the anger that feels like heat in the chest. Peppermint doesn't sedate. It doesn't numb. It cools. There is a difference.

**When:** Summer fevers. The flush of rage that you know is disproportionate but cannot control. The heat that rises in your face when you are embarrassed or ashamed.

**Also:** Spearmint (see Herb Garden) for a gentler version — better for children, for sensitive stomachs, for anyone who finds peppermint overwhelming.

—





## For the Fork in the Road

Dandelion (see Herb Garden). The plant everyone poisons and everyone should be growing. For this preparation, it's the root you want — harvested in autumn, after the first frost, when the sugars have concentrated.

Split the root yourself. The women who first used this believed that splitting it with your own hands was part of what made it work. I don't know if that's true, but I do know that the act of preparing this particular remedy — the decision to make it, the work of harvesting and washing and splitting — is itself clarifying.

Steep the fresh half in cold water overnight. Drink the cold infusion in the morning, before you eat, before you speak, before the day has made any claims on you.

**When:** The decision you cannot make. The path you cannot see. The choice between two things that both feel impossible. It won't

choose for you. But it will quiet the noise so you can hear yourself choose.

—





## For the Blood That Won't Flow

Red clover (see Herb Garden). The pink-purple flower that grows in lawns and meadows and motorway verges. Three flower heads steeped in boiling water for ten minutes. The tea is pale pink and slightly sweet.

Drink it three times a day for the three days before you expect to bleed. Red clover contains plant oestrogens — it helps the body use what it has, gently, without forcing anything.

**When:** The cycle that has stalled. The bleeding that is late, or light, or absent. The body that is holding on when it should be letting go.

**Also:** Motherwort (see Herb Garden) for the cramping that accompanies the return of flow. Sage (see Herb Garden) if the bleeding is heavy when it does arrive.

—





## For the Words That Won't Come

There's a fern that unfurls from a tight spiral — each frond releasing slowly, one at a time, in its own order. It grows in damp places, in the shade of trees, where the light is filtered and green.

Harvest the young fronds — the ones still curled, still deciding. Dry them in a spiral, the shape they already know. One dried frond in a cup, boiling water, steeped until it unfurls completely — about eight minutes. Watch it happen. Drink the tea while looking at something green.

**When:** Before writing. Before a difficult conversation. When you have been silent too long and the words have fossilised somewhere between your throat and your mouth.

—





## For the Woman Who Carries Everyone

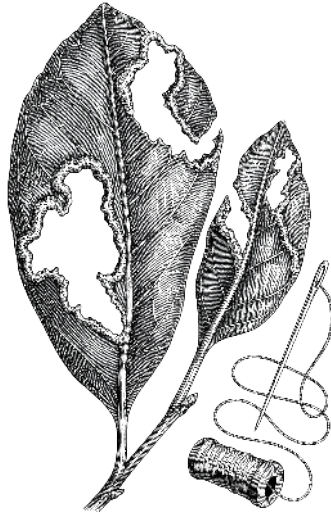
Nettle (see Herb Garden). The plant everyone learns to avoid as a child — grab it and your hand stings for an hour. But nettle is also one of the most nutritious plants I know. Rich in iron, calcium, magnesium — everything the body loses when it's been giving too much for too long.

A handful of dried nettle leaves steeped in boiling water for ten minutes. The tea is green and tastes like the forest floor. Drink it sitting down — not standing, not in transit, not while doing three other things. This tea requires you to stop. That is part of what it does.

**When:** You cannot remember the last time you did something for yourself. When the word "selfish" has been used against you. When you have given until there is nothing left and people are still asking.

---





## For the Wound That Won't Stay Closed

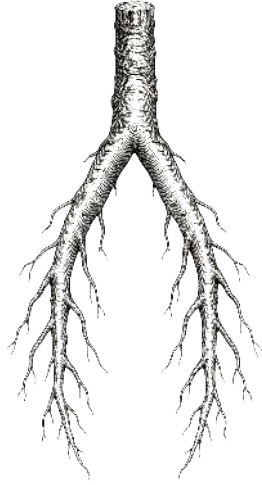
Calendula (see Herb Garden). The bright orange flower that blooms from spring until the first frost. For wounds, I use it in the salve — the recipe is in Part Four. But for the wound that has healed over and opened again, healed over and opened, each time leaving more scar tissue than skin, the tea works differently.

A teaspoon of dried petals in a cup. Boiling water. Steeped ten minutes. Drink once a day. The wound salve goes on the outside. The tea goes on the inside. Together they remind the body that healing is supposed to finish.

**When:** The injury that will not resolve. The cut that should have healed months ago. The surgery site that still aches. The place where the body remembers something it cannot forget.

---





## For the Woman in Transition

Sage (see Herb Garden). The grey-green leaf that looks like velvet. The Latin name comes from the word for salvation — to save, to heal.

One leaf, fresh if you have it, dried if you don't. Boiling water. Steeped seven minutes. Drink once a week during any major transition — a new job, a move, a divorce, a renaming, a becoming.

Sage is mildly oestrogenic, which is why it helps with the hot flushes and night sweats of menopause. But I use it for transitions of all kinds — the body's and the life's. It clarifies. It cuts through what is not true.

**When:** The old self no longer fits and the new self has not arrived. When people ask "how are you" and you don't know how to answer. When the only thing you are sure of is that you cannot stay the same.

—





## For the Woman Who Cannot Stop

There is a plant that grows beside still water — ponds, slow rivers, the places where the water has stopped moving and reflects the sky. It roots in the mud but its leaves float on the surface, completely still.

One leaf, floated in a bowl of cold water. Place your fingertips in the water. Sit for ten minutes without moving. When the water is completely still and the leaf has stopped drifting, drink the water from the bowl.

This is not a tea. It is a practice. The plant does not enter your body through digestion. It enters through stillness — through the water that touches your skin, through the immobility you allow yourself, through the ten minutes you do not fill with doing.

**When:** You have not sat down in six hours and it is only noon. You check your phone while eating, while bathing, while pretending to sleep. You have forgotten what stillness tastes like.

—



## Part Two: The Wheel

Your body keeps time with something larger than a clock. The moon pulls the tides. Your body is mostly water. The moon pulls you too.

The women who first tracked these rhythms observed them for centuries — not because they were superstitious, but because they noticed that a tea taken at the full moon worked differently than the same tea taken at the new moon. Timing is not ritual. Timing is chemistry under different gravitational conditions.

There are herbs that support each phase, but the details of each herb — how to grow it, what it does, what it pairs with — are in the Herb Garden. Here I'll tell you what to do and when.

---

The sky is dark. The moon is between the earth and the sun. Gravitational pull is at its strongest. Your body responds: energy ebbs. This is the time for rest. For intention. For deciding what you want the coming cycle to bring.

**What to do:** Nothing. That is the practice. The new moon is a day of rest — no planting, no harvesting, no beginning anything. The garden and the gardener both pausing.

**What to drink:** Warm water with a slice of ginger. Nothing more. The body at the new moon is receptive but also vulnerable — support it without stimulating it.

**What to ask yourself:** What do I want from the coming cycle? What am I ready to release? What am I ready to receive? Write the answers down. The new moon is for setting direction. The rest of the cycle is for following it.

---

The light is returning. The moon is growing. Gravitational pull is easing. Your body responds: energy rises.

**What to do:** Begin. Whatever you set as intention at the new moon, start it now. Plant the seeds. Make the call. Write the first page. The energy is with you.

**What to drink:** Nettle tea (see Herb Garden). Nettle is rich in iron, in minerals, in everything the body needs to build. It is the tea of becoming.

**What to ask yourself:** What am I building? What needs my energy now? What have I been putting off that the waxing moon can carry?

---

The moon is complete. The light is full. Gravitational pull is at its second peak. Your body responds: energy peaks, then begins to turn. This is the time for completion, for celebration, for release.

**What to do:** Gather. The women who first tracked this gathered at the full moon — to eat together, to talk, to bathe. They also used it for letting go: writing down what they wanted to release and burning the paper.

**What to drink:** Sage tea with honey (see Herb Garden). Sage clarifies. At the full moon, when emotions are heightened, sage helps you see what is real and what is projection.

**What to ask yourself:** What has come to fruition? What am I ready to release? What have I been holding that I can put down now?

---

The light is fading. The moon is shrinking. Your body responds: energy turns inward. Not for starting. For completing.

**What to do:** Finish things. Clean. Organise. Tie up loose ends. The body naturally wants to shed at the waning moon — support that.

**What to drink:** Dandelion root tea (see Herb Garden). Dandelion supports the liver, the body's primary organ of processing and release. At the waning moon, it helps you shed more completely.

**What to ask yourself:** What is still unfinished? What needs to be released that I haven't released yet? What have I learned this cycle?

---

Not every body follows the moon exactly. Some women bleed at the new moon, some at the full, some in between. The moon cycle and the bleeding cycle are related but not identical.

If your bleeding coincides with the new moon: rest. The body is doing two kinds of shedding at once. Give it space.

If your bleeding coincides with the full moon: the release is amplified. Emotions will be closer to the surface. That is not weakness. That is the body taking the opportunity the moon provides.

Whatever your timing: the bleeding days are days of rest. Your body is working — contracting, shedding, losing iron. Progesterone has dropped, and progesterone is a natural anxiolytic. You are not overreacting. You are experiencing a real chemical shift. Honour it.

**What to drink:** Catnip and sage tea (see Herb Garden), with a teaspoon of molasses. Catnip relaxes the uterine muscle — the cramping is muscle spasm, and catnip is an antispasmodic. Sage regulates heavy flow. Molasses is rich in iron, replacing what is being lost.

**What to do:** Less. The bleeding days are non-negotiable. The body is doing something. Let it.

---

## Part Three: The Waters

Water remembers. Not in the mystical sense — in the physical sense. Water molecules form and reform bonds in response to what is dissolved in them. A bath is not just hot water. It is a solution. What you put in the water enters your skin, your bloodstream, your nervous system.

---

This is the bath for ordinary days. When nothing is acutely wrong but everything feels slightly off. When you've been upright too long.

You will need: a handful of sea salt, a handful of oatmeal tied in a cloth so it doesn't clog the drain, and lavender (see Herb Garden) — dried, scattered on the water.

Run the bath as hot as you can bear. Add the salt first. Add the oatmeal pouch. Scatter the lavender. Lower yourself in. Close your eyes. Stay until the water cools.

Do this once a week. The lavender calms. The oatmeal soothes. The salt softens everything. The women who first recorded this considered the simple bath as essential as washing.

---

For when you need to reset everything at once — skin, mind, digestion, mood. Stronger than the simple bath. Use it when you have been neglecting yourself.

You will need: nettle, rosemary, sage (see Herb Garden), and a handful of fresh mint — any kind. Plus sea salt and a cup of apple cider vinegar.

Simmer the nettle and rosemary in a pot of water for fifteen minutes. Strain. Add the liquid to the bath. Add the sage, mint, salt, and vinegar directly to the water.

The nettle replenishes minerals. The rosemary stimulates circulation. The sage cleanses. The mint opens. The vinegar restores the skin's acid mantle. Together they strip away everything that is not yours — other people's stress, other people's expectations, the residue of a week spent in rooms with artificial light and recycled air.

Soak for twenty minutes. Rinse with cool water. Go to bed. You will sleep differently.

---

For the full moon. The women who first recorded this did it together — a communal bath, the water reflecting the moon if they could manage it, a single candle if they could not.

You will need: chamomile, ylang-ylang (see Herb Garden), a handful of rose petals, and a cup of milk.

Run the bath warm. Add the milk first — it disperses, making the water opaque, reflective. Scatter the chamomile and rose petals on the surface. Add three drops of ylang-ylang — no more, it is strong and too much becomes cloying.

Open a window if you can. Let the moonlight fall on the water. Lower yourself in. Look at the reflection — the moon, your face, the petals floating between.

Stay until the water begins to cool. When you drain the bath, imagine everything you are ready to release draining with it. The full moon is for letting go. Let the water carry it away.

---

## Part Four: The Preparations

The preparations are not teas. They are not baths. They are the things you make and keep — the jars in the cupboard, the oils on the shelf, the tinctures that last for months and are ready when you need them.

Each one takes time. Some take days. A few take a full lunar cycle. The time is part of the recipe.

Every herb mentioned here has its full entry in the Herb Garden — how to grow it, what it does, what it pairs with. What follows is how to combine them.

—

For clearing a space — a room, a house, a mind.

Dried sage, dried lavender, dried rosemary (see Herb Garden). Grind equal parts to a powder. Warm a small amount of honey until liquid. Mix until you have a stiff paste. Form into small cones — the size of the tip of your thumb. Let them dry for three days.

To use: light the tip of a cone. Let it catch. Blow out the flame. The cone will smoulder, releasing smoke. Walk through the space you want to clear. Let the smoke reach the corners, the doorways, the windows.

The sage cleanses. The lavender calms. The rosemary sharpens. The honey sweetens the smoke so it's gentler on the throat.

Use this after an argument. After illness. When the energy of a room feels heavy. When you've had visitors who left something behind.

---

Powdered herbs, ground fine and stored in sealed jars. The most versatile preparation — one jar serves a dozen purposes.

**The Base Powder:** Equal parts dried nettle, dried dandelion leaf, dried oat straw (see Herb Garden). Grind to a fine powder. Store in a sealed jar in a dark cupboard. Add a teaspoon to any bath for minerals, a half-teaspoon to any tea for nutrition, to soups and stews. The base powder is not medicine. It is maintenance.

**The Sleep Powder:** Equal parts dried valerian root, dried passionflower, dried hops (see Herb Garden). Grind fine. A quarter-teaspoon in warm milk, thirty minutes before bed. This one is strong. Do not drive. Do not make decisions. Go to bed.

**The Calm Powder:** Two parts dried chamomile, one part dried lavender, one part dried lemon balm (see Herb Garden). A teaspoon in hot water, steeped five minutes, strained. For the days when your nervous system is a live wire.

---

Frankincense and myrrh (see Herb Garden), melted together with olive oil and beeswax into a solid balm.

Crush the frankincense and myrrh resins separately. Melt the beeswax in the olive oil over the lowest possible heat. Add the crushed frankincense first. Stir until dissolved. Add the myrrh. Stir until uniform. Pour into a small jar. Let it cool completely.

The balm will be firm, almost solid. Warm a small amount between your fingers. Apply to the temples for headache, to the chest for anxiety, to the wrists for grounding.

Use for meditation, for prayer, for the moments when you need to feel connected to something larger than yourself.

---

An infused oil made from seeds — fennel, coriander, and cardamom (see Herb Garden). It takes a full lunar cycle to make. The time is not negotiable.

Bruise equal parts fennel seeds, coriander seeds, and cardamom pods — just enough to crack them open. Put them in a glass jar with a tight lid. Cover with a light carrier oil — almond or jojoba. The oil should be at least two fingers above the seeds. Seal. Place somewhere it will catch the morning sun.

Leave it for one full lunar cycle — new moon to new moon. Shake gently every few days. Strain through muslin. Bottle.

This oil is for massage — the belly, the lower back, the feet. The fennel eases digestion. The coriander calms the nervous system. The cardamom warms. Use it at night. Your skin will smell faintly of spice until morning.

—

Dandelion root, burdock root, and gentian root if you can find it (see Herb Garden). The highest-proof alcohol you can buy.

Chop the roots. Fill a jar halfway. Cover completely with alcohol. Seal. Store in a dark cupboard for six weeks. Shake when you remember.

Strain. Bottle the liquid. Take fifteen drops in a small amount of water before meals.

The bitterness is the point. Bitter herbs stimulate digestion, support the liver, and trigger a cascade of responses that sweetness suppresses. This is for digestion that has become sluggish — the feeling of fullness after eating very little, the body that has forgotten how to be hungry.

—

A face and body mask made from clay and herbs.

You will need: bentonite or French green clay, dried calendula, dried chamomile, dried rose petals (see Herb Garden), and apple cider vinegar.

Grind the dried herbs to a powder. Mix one part herb powder with three parts clay. Store dry in a jar. To use: take a tablespoon of the dry mixture, add enough vinegar to form a paste, apply to clean skin. Let it dry — about ten minutes. Rinse with warm water.

Do this at the full moon. The clay draws impurities. The calendula heals. The chamomile soothes. The rose tones.

---

For the third night of staring at the ceiling. The week when sleep has become a stranger.

Equal parts dried valerian root, dried mugwort, dried hops, and dried lavender (see Herb Garden). Grind to a fine powder. Store in a sealed jar. Label clearly.

A quarter-teaspoon in warm milk with honey, thirty minutes before bed. Do not increase the dose. Do not take every night. Three nights on, four nights off.

You will dream differently on this — more vividly, sometimes more strangely. That is the mugwort, which has been used for dream enhancement for thousands of years across cultures that had no contact with each other. Keep something to write on beside the bed.

---

For the miscellaneous damage of living in a body. Make it. Keep it in your kitchen. You will use it more than anything else.

Calendula flowers, plantain leaf, comfrey leaf (see Herb Garden for calendula). Infuse in olive oil: fill a jar with the dried herbs, cover with oil, seal, place in a sunny window for two weeks. Strain.

Melt beeswax into the infused oil over low heat — one part beeswax to four parts oil. Pour into small tins. Let cool.

The calendula speeds tissue repair. The plantain draws out splinters and infection. The comfrey knits tissue together — so effectively that it should not be used on deep wounds that need to heal from the inside out. For surface wounds, it is unmatched.

---

The last preparation. For the transition at the end of life.

Valerian, frankincense, myrrh, and rose petals (see Herb Garden). Grain alcohol. Made the same way as the bitter tincture — herbs in a jar, covered with alcohol, stored in darkness for six weeks, strained.

The valerian calms. The frankincense opens the breath. The myrrh preserves. The rose is for love.

This tincture is not for you. It is for someone you love, at the end. You will know when to make it. You will know when to use it.

---

## Part Five: The Bathing Women

The women who first recorded these practices bathed together. The younger women learned from the older ones. The older ones were tended by the younger when they could no longer tend themselves. The bathing was practical — hygiene, healing — but it was also where knowledge was passed.

The women who were grieving did not bathe alone. The women who were new to the community were bathed by the women who had been there longest — not as initiation, but as welcome.

You do not need a pool. You do not need a community of women — though if you have one, use it. The essence is simpler than the logistics: do not heal alone if you can help it. Let someone else run the bath. Let someone else make the tea. Let someone else sit with you while you soak. Healing is not a solitary act. The presence of another woman — her hands, her voice, her silence — is as much medicine as any herb.

---

## Part Six: The Ordinary Days

Most of life is not crisis. Most of life is the ordinary days — the Tuesday afternoons, the Thursday mornings, the Sundays that are neither special nor terrible.

On ordinary days: drink nettle tea. Eat something green. Go outside for at least the time it takes to notice the sky. Touch something living — a plant, an animal, another person. Move your body in a way that feels good rather than punishing. Go to bed at a time that allows for enough sleep.

These are not small things. They are the foundation. The herbs and baths and preparations in the rest of this book are for when the foundation has cracked. The ordinary days are for keeping the foundation intact.

---

## Part Seven: Further Teachings

What follows are the things the women taught each other that were not about plants. Some of it is practical. Some of it is harder to name. All of it was passed from woman to woman, generation to generation, until someone wrote it down.

---

# For the New Mother

You are not supposed to know what you are doing. No one does. The women before you felt exactly what you feel — the terror, the love, the exhaustion, the certainty that you are doing it wrong. You are not doing it wrong.

Feed yourself before you feed the baby — not instead of, before. A depleted body cannot make milk. A starving body cannot comfort. The women who first recorded this were specific: the new mother eats first, drinks first, rests first.

Let other women help you. Accept the casserole. Accept the offer to hold the baby while you shower. Accept the friend who says "I'll come over and just sit with you." She means it. Let her.

The herbs that support this chapter of life — nettle for iron, fennel for milk, ashwagandha for the deep depletion — are all in the Herb Garden.

—



# The Body at Every Age

Your body at twenty is not your body at forty is not your body at sixty.

In your twenties and thirties: your body is resilient. It recovers quickly. Do not mistake resilience for permission. What you do now accumulates. The bone density you build now is what you will have at sixty.

In your forties and fifties: your body is changing. The bleeding may become irregular, then stop. The temperature may fluctuate. The sleep may fragment. This is transition, not illness. Support it with sage, nettle, and dandelion (see Herb Garden).

In your sixties and beyond: your body is a record of everything you have lived. The aches are stories. The scars are stories. The parts that still work perfectly without your attention deserve your gratitude.

—



# The Woman Who Has Stopped Bleeding

The transition is different for every woman. Some feel relief. Some feel grief. Most feel both.

The women who first recorded this treated it as a ceremony. When a woman had gone a full year without bleeding, the other women gathered. They bathed her. They anointed her with oils. They welcomed her into the next phase.

You may not have this. You may navigate the transition alone, in a culture that treats menopause as a medical problem rather than a life passage. If that is your situation: create your own ceremony. Mark it. You are not diminished. You are entering the phase the women who first recorded this considered the most powerful.

The herbs: sage for the night sweats, red clover for the hormonal shift, motherwort for the racing heart that sometimes accompanies the change (see Herb Garden).

—



# The Garden Itself

If you have space for a garden, keep one. If you don't, keep a pot on a windowsill. The point is not the yield. The point is the relationship.

Grow what you will actually use: mint for tea, rosemary for cooking, lavender for the bath, calendula for the wound salve. Start small. One pot. Then two. Then whatever you can manage.

The Herb Garden at the back of the book tells you how to grow each plant. Start with the ones you're drawn to. The ones that feel familiar even though you've never planted them.

—



# Healing Together

The women who first recorded these practices did not heal alone. The herbs were prepared together. The baths were shared. The knowledge was held communally.

If you have women in your life: gather them. Make the tea. Run the bath. Share what you know. The knowledge in this book is not meant to stay in this book. It is meant to move — from your hands to another woman's hands, from her hands to the next.

If you do not have women in your life: find them. This is not easy. The women who first recorded this did not have to find each other — they were born into communities that held them. We are not. We have to build what they inherited. Build it anyway.

—



# How We Decide Things

The women who first recorded these practices had a method for making decisions. Each woman spoke in turn, without interruption. The youngest spoke first — she had the least invested, the freshest eyes. The eldest spoke last. No decision was made until everyone had spoken. No decision in anger. No decision after dark.

You can use this with your own people. Everyone speaks. No one dominates. The decision takes the time it takes.

—



# The Dream

Keep something to write on beside your bed. When you wake from a dream, write it down immediately — before you move, before you speak, before the dream dissolves. Do not interpret it yet. Just record it.

Later, look at what you wrote. Ask: what was I feeling? Not what happened — what you felt. The feeling is the message. The images are just the carrier.

Mugwort tea before bed (see Herb Garden) opens the dream state. Use it sparingly — it's strong and your body adapts.

—



# The Empty Room

Every woman needs a space of her own. The women who first recorded this had a small room — sometimes no larger than a cupboard — where no one else could enter without permission.

You may not have a room. You can have a chair. A corner. A windowsill. The physical dimensions matter less than the boundary: this space is yours. When you are in it, you are not available. You are not mother, partner, employee, daughter. You are yourself, alone, accountable to no one.

—



# Fire

The women who first recorded these practices built fires — for heat, for cooking, for ceremony. You may not have a fireplace. You can have a candle.

Light it when you need to mark a transition — the beginning of something, the end of something. Write what you are releasing on a piece of paper. Burn it. The physical act of watching the paper blacken and disappear tells the brain something that thinking cannot: it is done. You are allowed to move forward.

—



# Making Things

The women who first recorded these practices made things constantly — not as hobbies, but as evidence of their own competence. A woman whose hands were busy was a woman whose mind was quieter.

Make something. Bread. A drawing. A garden. A meal. The product matters less than the act. You were not designed only to consume. You were designed to create.

—



# Art as Medicine

The human brain responds to beauty with measurable physiological changes — heart rate slows, cortisol drops, the parasympathetic nervous system activates. Beauty is not a luxury. It is a need.

Make something beautiful. It does not have to be good. It has to be yours. Arrange the windowsill. Choose the colour of the cloth. Plant the flowers in a pattern instead of a row. The act of making beauty is an act of resistance against the greyness that has been imposed on you.

—



# The Land

The women who first recorded these practices were connected to their land. They knew every plant, every stream, every stone.

You may not have land. You have a postcode. Learn it. Learn what grows there. Walk your streets, your paths, your parks. Notice what grows in the cracks. Notice where the birds nest. You are not separate from the land you live on. You are made of its water, its food, its minerals. Know where you are.

—



# The Sky

Go outside at night. Find a place without artificial light if you can. Look up. Find the moon — even a sliver, even a glow behind clouds. Find a constellation you know. If you don't know any, learn one. Orion is easy — three stars in a row for his belt.

The sky is the same sky the women who first recorded this looked at. The constellations have shifted slightly — but only slightly. The moon still cycles. The solstices still arrive. The sky is the oldest thing you will ever see.

—



# The Crossing

Death is not the opposite of life. It is the final act of living.

When someone is dying: be present. You do not need to say the right thing. There is no right thing. Your presence is enough. Hold their hand. Speak normally — hearing is the last sense to go. Tell them it is all right to leave.

The herbs for the crossing: valerian and frankincense (see Herb Garden), burned together. The valerian calms. The frankincense opens the breath. Rose water on the skin.

After: wash the body if you can — with warm water, with lavender, with the same care you would give a newborn.

—



# The Line

You are part of a chain. The woman before you — your mother, your grandmother, the woman who taught you something you still use — passed you what she knew. You are passing it now, whether you realise it or not.

Be intentional about it. What do you want the next woman to know? Write it down. Tell her. Show her. The line does not continue itself. It continues because someone chooses to pass the torch.

—



# Passing It On

You have read what we knew. Now you know it too. The herbs are in your kitchen. The moon is in your sky. The knowledge is in your body. The only thing left is to pass it to the woman who comes after you.

Do not let her wait.

—



## The Day Out of Time

The year has three hundred and sixty-five days. The months have twenty-eight. The mathematics does not work. There is one day left over — the day that belongs to no month.

The women who first recorded these practices called this day the pause. On this day, they did not work. They did not tend the garden or prepare the jars or treat the sick. They sat together. They ate food prepared the day before. They told stories about the women who had come before them. Then they slept.

The last page of their record shows a single woman, alone, standing at the edge of a pool. She is not bathing. She is looking at the water. Her reflection looks back at her.

You are that woman. You have always been that woman. The book was waiting for you.

Now you remember.

—

They burned us for this knowledge. Not metaphorically — actually. Women who knew which mushrooms opened the gates and which roots loosened the veil were dragged from their gardens and set alight. The plants survived. The knowledge survived. Here it is anyway.

This section is different from the others. These are not the herbs you reach for when your mind is racing or your body is depleted. These are

the ones that shift the frame entirely — that dissolve the wall between you and something larger. I am not telling you to use them. I am telling you they exist. What you do with that information is between you and the plants.

A word before we begin: these are not party drugs. They are teachers, and like all good teachers, they will show you what you need to see, not what you want to see. Some can hurt you. Some can kill you. Respect is not optional. Start low. Go slow. Have someone with you who knows what they're doing. These rules were written in ashes.

---

## Herb Garden

# Allspice



I buy the dried berries — I've never grown the tree. It needs the Caribbean climate and more patience than I've got. What you get is a small brown berry that tastes of cinnamon, clove, and nutmeg all at once. That's why it's called allspice.

I grind it fresh when I need it. The pre-ground stuff loses its warmth within weeks. I use it in poultices for wounds that keep reopening — the kind where the body has forgotten how to finish healing. Warm a teaspoon of the ground berry with enough water to make a paste, apply it to the place that won't close, cover with a cloth, leave it an hour. The allspice draws blood to the surface and reminds the tissue what it's supposed to be doing.

It's strong. You'll taste it in anything you put it in. A little goes further than you think.

---

---



# Anise



I grow anise every year from seed. The seeds are small and boat-shaped — you scatter them in spring, barely covering them, and by midsummer you’ve got feathery green plants with white flower heads that smell like childhood. That liquorice scent. That’s the anise.

I harvest the seeds when they turn from green to grey-brown. I cut the whole head and hang it upside down in a paper bag — the seeds fall into the bag as they dry. One plant gives you more seeds than you’ll use in a year.

What it does is relax things. Anise settles a stomach that’s been in knots since breakfast. It loosens a cough that’s been sitting in your chest for a week. I use it in digestive teas — a teaspoon of seeds crushed, steeped in boiling water for seven minutes, strained. It pairs with fennel when your digestion needs real attention, and with cardamom when you want something that tastes like a proper chai.

---



# Ashwagandha



I don't grow ashwagandha — it wants Indian soil and I can't give it that. I buy the dried root from a supplier I trust. The root smells earthy, almost horse-like — which is what the Sanskrit name means. "Smell of horse." It was given to people who needed the strength of one.

What ashwagandha does is rebuild. It's not a stimulant — it won't give you energy you don't have. It restores what chronic stress has drained. I've seen it work on women who've been running on empty for years — the kind of tired where sleep doesn't help because the depletion is deeper than sleep can reach.

I simmer the dried root for fifteen minutes — a low, gentle simmer, the water barely moving. Strain it. Add honey because the taste is bitter and earthy and medicinal. Drink it in the evening. It won't put you to sleep but it will let you rest in a way you might not have rested in years. I pair it with lavender when sleep is the main problem, and with maca when hormones are involved.

—



# Burdock



Burdock is the plant children throw at each other — the burrs that stick to everything. But underground there's a long brown root that the Japanese call gobo and the Europeans have used as medicine since before Europe was a word.

I harvest burdock root in autumn, the first year. After that it turns woody and the medicine thins out. You need a spade — the roots go deep. Wash them, scrub them, slice them thin. I dry half and keep half fresh. The fresh slices go into soups and stir-fries — they're earthy and slightly sweet. The dried root I use for tea and tincture.

What burdock does is clean. It supports the liver and kidneys — the body's filtration. When my skin breaks out, when I feel sluggish in a way that isn't about sleep, when I've eaten badly for a week and my body is letting me know — burdock is where I start. The tea is brown and tastes like the forest floor. You get used to it.

---



# Calendula



I grow calendula every year. The seeds are large and easy — push them into soil in spring, keep them wet for a week, and you’ll have calendula forever because it self-seeds like it means it. The flowers are bright orange, sometimes yellow, and they bloom from April until the first frost kills them.

I harvest the flowers on dry mornings, when they’re fully open. I dry them on a rack in the airing cupboard — somewhere warm and dark and out of direct sun. The petals pull apart easily once dried. They look like crumbled saffron.

What calendula does is heal skin. I don’t know a better herb for it. The Romans used it. The medieval herbalists used it. Every modern study confirms what everyone already knew — calendula speeds tissue repair. I use the dried petals in the wound salve, in the mineral mud mask, in any tea or bath where skin needs attention. The fresh petals go on salads — they’re edible and taste faintly peppery. The colour

alone makes a plate look like someone cared.

—



# Cardamom



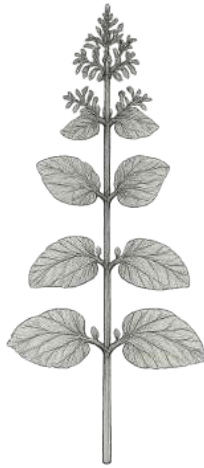
I buy cardamom in the green pods, never ground. The seeds lose their oils within weeks of being crushed — the ground stuff in supermarkets is cardamom-scented dust. The pods themselves are beautiful: pale green, papery, each one containing a cluster of black seeds that smell of eucalyptus and citrus and warmth.

I crack the pods open with the flat of a knife when I'm ready to use them. The seeds go into everything — chai, digestive teas, rice, the comfort compress. What cardamom does is warm and move. It wakes up a sluggish digestion, freshens breath, increases circulation. It's in the Scandinavian pastries and the Middle Eastern coffee and the Indian chai, and I like that — across continents, people independently decided this spice belonged wherever warmth was needed. They were right.

—



# Catnip



Yes, the plant that makes cats lose their minds. But catnip does something different for humans. Where cats get a stimulant, we get a sedative. An antispasmodic. A muscle relaxer. Nature has a sense of humour.

I grow catnip from seed or cuttings — it's a mint, with square stems and soft grey-green leaves. It spreads, so I give it a pot unless I want it everywhere. The bees love the white flowers. I harvest the leaves and flowering tops in summer, before the plant goes to seed, and dry them somewhere warm and dark. Kept well, they hold their potency for about a year.

I use catnip in the menstrual comfort tea — it relaxes the uterine muscle, which is where the cramping lives. I use it in the trauma-release poultice. I've given it to friends with colicky babies, friends with anxious stomachs, friends whose bodies were clenched against something they couldn't name. It's gentle. It won't knock you out. It will just — loosen

things. Let them breathe.

—



# Cedarwood



I don't distil cedarwood oil myself — I buy it. The true cedar oil comes from the Atlas Mountains of Morocco or the Himalayas, not the ornamental cedars in English gardens. The scent is pencil shavings and old forests and something that makes you breathe deeper without meaning to.

What cedarwood does is ground. It's protective. There's a reason cedar chests were used for precious things, cedar was burned in purification ceremonies across unrelated cultures, cedar appears in the oldest ritual texts we have. The scent tells the body: you are safe now. I use a few drops in a carrier oil for massage, in a bath when I feel scattered, in a diffuser when the room doesn't feel settled. I pair it with frankincense for meditation and with lavender for the nights when sleep won't come.

—



# Chamomile



Chamomile is the first herb I tell people to grow. The seeds are like dust — you scatter them on the surface of the soil and press them in, don't bury them, they need light. Within a week you'll see tiny green specks. By midsummer you'll have more flowers than you know what to do with. The plant gives and gives.

There are two kinds. Roman chamomile is a ground cover — it spreads sideways and stays low. German chamomile grows upright and produces more flowers. Both work. I grow German because I want volume.

I harvest the flowers when the petals start to fold back from the yellow centre — that's when the oils are strongest. I dry them on a rack in the airing cupboard and store them in a jar. They keep for a year. The smell is apple-sweet and comforting — it's why chamomile has been the world's gentlest medicine for three thousand years.

What it does is calm. Not sedate — calm. It settles a nervous

stomach, takes the edge off a bad day, helps you sleep without making you groggy in the morning. It's the herb I reach for when I don't know what else to reach for. I use it in the foundation tea, in the moon bath, in the calm powder. I pair it with lavender for sleep, with peppermint for the stomach, and with rose when the heart is the problem.

—



# Chives



Chives are the easiest thing I grow. They come back every year whether I remember to water them or not. The leaves are thin green tubes that taste of mild onion. The flowers are purple pom-poms that bees visit systematically, one after another, like they're working through a list.

I snip the leaves with scissors — always leaving at least two inches so the plant can recover. I use them fresh in everything. Eggs, potatoes, salads, soups. The flowers I pull apart and scatter the purple petals over anything that needs to look like someone gave a damn.

What chives do is cleanse. They're alliums — garlic family — which means they're antimicrobial. The women who first used them put them in purification baths and teas. I've done the same. It sounds strange — chives in a bath — but the fresh green scent changes the water somehow. Makes it feel medicinal rather than decorative. The flowers go in too. The whole plant works.

—



# Cilantro



Cilantro divides people. To some it tastes like fresh citrus. To others — about fifteen percent of people — it tastes like soap. It's genetic, a variation in olfactory receptors. If you're in the soap camp, skip this one. If you're in the citrus camp, you've got a plant that does more than most people realise.

I grow cilantro from seed in spring, in partial shade. It bolts fast in heat — one hot week and the leaves are gone, replaced by flowers that become coriander seeds. I succession-plant it: a new pot every three weeks so something is always at the leaf stage.

What cilantro does is clear. It binds to heavy metals and carries them out of the body — this has been demonstrated, not just claimed. I use it in the menstrual comfort tea because it helps with heavy, painful periods. The fresh leaves go into the tea directly — dried cilantro loses almost everything. The seeds — coriander — are a different medicine entirely, for digestion rather than clearing. I use both. The plant gives

you two tools for the price of one.

—



# Cinnamon



Cinnamon is the inner bark of a tree that grows in Sri Lanka. I buy the quills — rolls of dried bark that you can hold in your hand and smell for the sheer pleasure of it. Ceylon cinnamon is lighter, more delicate. Cassia is darker, stronger, what most supermarkets sell. Both work. I keep both.

What cinnamon does is open and warm. It's antimicrobial — one of the most potent natural ones we know. It's been used to preserve food, to treat infection, to stimulate circulation. Modern research shows it helps with blood sugar regulation too. The women who first used it burned it as incense and anointed with it in oil form. I use it the same ways.

I put a quill in the sacred oil blend, in the full-moon emotional tea, in anything that needs warmth. The ground bark I use in poultices. I pair it with cardamom and ginger for digestion — that combination has been doing good work for longer than any of us have been alive.

—



# Clove



Cloves are the dried flower buds of a tree that grows in Indonesia. They look like small brown nails and taste like Christmas. The oil is so powerful that a single drop numbs the mouth — dentists used clove oil before synthetic anaesthetics existed. Some still do.

I keep whole cloves in a sealed jar. They last for years — the oils are stable as long as the buds are intact. I use them in digestive teas — one clove in a pot is enough, more than that and it dominates everything. I use them in the comfort compress for toothache and joint pain. The oil, diluted in a carrier, goes on the temples for headache and on the gums for toothache.

What clove does is numb and warm simultaneously. It's antimicrobial, analgesic, and circulatory. A small amount sharpens a blend. Too much overpowers everything. I learned that the hard way.

---

---



# Cypress



I buy cypress essential oil — I'm not distilling needles in my kitchen. The oil comes from the tall, narrow evergreens that grow in Mediterranean countries and in cemeteries. The scent is clean, woody, slightly resinous. It smells like a forest in a country you've never visited.

What cypress does is tighten. It's astringent — it tones tissue. I use it for heavy bleeding, for the feeling of being too porous, too permeable, too easily affected by everything. Some people need to be more open. Some need to be more closed. Cypress is for the closed ones — the women who absorb the emotional weather of every room they enter and need help holding the boundary.

A few drops in a carrier oil for massage, or in a bath. I pair it with frankincense for ritual and with cedarwood for protection. It's not an herb you taste. It's an herb you smell, and your body responds whether you're paying attention or not.

---



# Damiana



I buy damiana dried — it's a shrub from Mexico and Central America with small yellow flowers and leaves that smell faintly of figs. The taste is slightly bitter, slightly sweet, like an herbal liqueur without the alcohol.

What damiana does is lift. Not the way caffeine lifts — no jolt, no crash. It's a gentle mood brightener. I've used it for the grey days — not the sad ones with a reason, but the ones where nothing is wrong and nothing feels right either. The kind of low mood that doesn't have a name. Damiana helps. It's also been used for libido — not by forcing anything, but by removing the stress and fatigue that bury desire under layers of exhaustion.

I steep a teaspoon of the dried leaves in boiling water for seven minutes. Drink it warm. It pairs with rose for the heart and with chamomile for evenings when I want to feel held as well as calm.

---



# Dandelion



Dandelion is the plant everyone poisons and everyone should be growing. The entire thing is useful. The root supports the liver. The leaves contain more iron and calcium than spinach. The flowers make wine. And yet people spray chemicals on their lawns to kill it. I don't understand it either.

I harvest the leaves in early spring, before the plant flowers — they're less bitter then. I eat them raw in salads, cooked like spinach, dried for tea. The root I harvest in autumn after the first frost, when the sugars have concentrated. I roast it — clean it, chop it, spread it on a tray, low oven until it smells like chocolate. The roasted root makes a coffee substitute that actually tastes good.

What dandelion does is restore. The root is a liver tonic — it supports the organ that processes everything you ingest, including stress hormones, including medication, including the residues of being alive in the twenty-first century. The leaves are a gentle diuretic that replenishes

potassium instead of depleting it. I use the root in the bitter tincture and the waning moon tea. I use the leaves in the base powder. The whole plant works. The whole plant is free.

—



# Dill



Dill has been with me as long as I've had a garden. The seeds go into the ground in spring, the feathery leaves appear within weeks, and by midsummer I've got yellow flower heads and seeds and volunteers coming up in the paths. It grows fast, goes to seed fast, and self-sows so reliably that I haven't planted dill deliberately in years. I just let it appear where it wants.

What dill does is settle. It's a carminative — it reduces gas and bloating. It's why pickles contain dill, why gripe water for babies contains dill, why the heavy, slow-cooked dishes of Eastern Europe and India use it. The women who first used it gave it to children and the elderly — anyone whose digestion needed support that wouldn't overwhelm them.

I use the fresh leaves in cooking and the dried seeds in tea. A teaspoon of seeds crushed in a mortar, steeped in boiling water for five minutes, strained. For the stomach that feels heavy after eating, for

the bloating that makes you unbutton your trousers, for the kind of digestive sluggishness that comes from stress rather than food. Pairs with fennel and anise — that combination has settled more stomachs than I can count.

—



# Eleuthero



Eleuthero is a shrub that grows in Siberia — which tells you how tough it is. It's often called Siberian ginseng, though it's not related to true ginseng. The root is the medicine. I buy it dried from a supplier who sources it properly — roots need to be at least three years old to be worth using.

What eleuthero does is strengthen. It's an adaptogen — it increases resistance to stress of every kind. Physical, chemical, emotional. The Soviets studied it extensively for athletes and cosmonauts and soldiers, but the women who first used it didn't need the studies. They knew that someone under prolonged strain needed something that rebuilt their reserves rather than masking the exhaustion.

I simmer the dried root for twenty minutes — a low simmer, covered, the water turning amber. Strain. Drink it in the morning or early afternoon. Not in the evening — it can keep you awake if you're sensitive. I use it in the smoke cleanse blend and in the vitality tea for someone

who's been running on empty too long. Pairs with ashwagandha for thorough adrenal support.

—



# Fennel



Fennel grows wild along roadsides in Mediterranean countries and in my garden whether I invite it or not. It's tall — sometimes five feet — with feathery leaves and flat yellow flower heads and seeds that taste of anise and warmth. Every part works.

I harvest the seeds in late summer, when they turn from green to brown. I cut the whole head and hang it upside down in a paper bag. The seeds fall as they dry. I store them whole — they keep for a year or more. The bulb I use fresh in cooking. The leaves I scatter over food.

What fennel does is move. It's the digestive herb I reach for first — it relaxes the smooth muscle of the gut, reduces bloating, stimulates appetite. Nursing mothers have used it for centuries to increase milk supply. It's one of the safest, gentlest herbs I know.

A teaspoon of seeds crushed and steeped in boiling water for seven minutes. After heavy meals. Before bed when digestion feels stuck. During the days when nothing tastes good because the stomach has

closed for business. Pairs with cardamom and anise for a digestion blend that works on almost everyone.

—



# Frankincense



I buy frankincense as resin tears — small, pale gold lumps that look like amber and smell like pine and citrus and ancient churches. The trees grow in Somalia and Oman and Yemen, in places so harsh that almost nothing else survives. The sap bleeds from cuts in the bark and hardens in the sun.

What frankincense does is deepen. It slows the breath. It reduces inflammation — particularly in the joints. It's antimicrobial. But what I use it for most is the quality it brings to a space: quieter, more focused, more still. The smoke from a single tear on a charcoal disc changes a room.

I use it in the dark resin balm — melted with myrrh and beeswax into something you can warm between your fingers and apply to the temples, the chest, the wrists. I use it in the trauma-release poultice. I use it in the crossing tincture. It pairs with myrrh — these two have been together in every tradition that knew them. The combination

creates something neither achieves alone.

—



# Garlic



Garlic is the most widely used medicinal plant in human history. The Egyptians fed it to pyramid builders. The Greeks gave it to athletes. The Romans gave it to soldiers. The women who first recorded these practices put it in teas and baths and poultices and food. You already know garlic. What you might not know is how to use it properly.

I grow garlic from cloves pushed into the soil in October — pointed end up, about two inches deep. By July the leaves have yellowed and died back and what comes out of the ground is a full bulb, the cloves fat and papery. I hang them to dry in a cool, dark place and they keep for months.

What garlic does is protect. It's antimicrobial, antiviral, antifungal. It thins the blood. It lowers blood pressure. It supports the immune system in ways that have been documented by hundreds of studies. The active compound — allicin — forms when you crush or cut the clove and expose it to air. Wait ten minutes before cooking. The heat

destroys allicin, but if you've let it sit for ten minutes, the reaction has already happened and the medicine survives.

I use garlic in the maternal vitality tea — crushed raw, steeped in warm water with honey. The smell is strong. The benefit is stronger. I use it in the pregnancy support bath, in the postpartum recovery tea. Fresh, always fresh. Dried garlic is a different thing entirely.

—



# Hops



Hops are the flowers of a climbing vine — best known for beer, but the same compound that preserves beer also preserves sleep. I grow hops from rhizomes in spring. They need something to climb and they climb fast — six inches in a day sometimes, twining clockwise around whatever they find. By late summer the vines are covered in papery green cones that feel dry and springy to the touch.

What hops do is sedate. They're a reliable sleep aid, particularly combined with valerian — the two amplify each other in a way that neither achieves alone. They're also a bitter digestive tonic. The bitterness stimulates stomach acid and enzymes before meals.

I harvest the cones in late summer and dry them thoroughly — they mould if there's any moisture left. I store them in a sealed jar in a dark cupboard. A teaspoon of the dried cones in hot water, steeped ten minutes, strained. The taste is bitter and beery and oddly comforting. I use them in the sleep powder and the dream powder and the purification

bath. They pair with valerian for the nights when nothing else works.

—



# Jasmine



I grow jasmine in a pot — it won't survive English winters outdoors. The plant is a vine with small, dark leaves and white flowers that release their scent at dusk. One plant will fill an entire room. The flowers are so fragrant that jasmine absolute — the extracted oil — is one of the most expensive perfume ingredients in existence.

What jasmine does is open the heart. I use it for grief, for emotional numbness, for the grey flatness that descends after loss. The scent alone has been shown to increase alertness and focus — beta waves in the brain respond to jasmine. But I use it for feeling, not thinking.

I buy the essential oil — the flowers are too delicate to dry effectively. A few drops in a bath, in a carrier oil for massage, in a diffuser. The scent fills the space and something in my chest unclenches. Pairs with rose for heart work, with ylang-ylang for sensuality, with sandalwood when I need the opening to be grounded rather than floating.

---



# Juniper



Juniper is the plant that gives gin its flavour — a spiky evergreen shrub with blue-black berries that take two years to ripen. I buy the dried berries. They're hard and dark and smell of pine forests and clean air.

What juniper does is clear. It's a urinary antiseptic — it flushes the kidneys and bladder. It's also antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory. I use it when I feel the beginning of something — that heaviness in the low back, that slight burning, the body's early warning before a urinary tract infection takes hold.

A teaspoon of dried berries, crushed to crack them open, steeped in boiling water for ten minutes. Drink it warm. Don't use juniper if you're pregnant or if your kidneys are compromised — it's strong and it doesn't ask permission. Pairs with dandelion for full kidney support and with parsley for the flushing effect.

---



# Kava



Kava is a root from the Pacific islands — Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga, Samoa. It's been used ceremonially for thousands of years. I buy the dried root powder from a supplier who sources it properly because quality varies enormously and poor-quality kava is worse than useless.

What kava does is relax without sedating. This is unusual. Most relaxing herbs dull the mind. Kava calms the mind without clouding it. It's been used for anxiety, for social tension, for the kind of stress that makes your jaw ache from clenching and your shoulders live somewhere near your ears.

The traditional preparation is kneading the powder in cold water, then straining through a cloth. I use warm water and a blender — it's faster and extracts more. Don't boil it. Heat destroys the active compounds. The taste is earthy and numbing — kava literally numbs your mouth. It's not pleasant. It's not meant to be.

I use it in the internal harmony tea, in the comfort compress, and

sparingly in the lactation support tea. Do not combine kava with alcohol — both stress the liver. This is not a daily herb. It's for the days when nothing else has worked.

—



# Lavender



Lavender is the herb people think of first when they think of calm. The purple fields, the sachets, the scent in every spa. It's famous for a reason. It works.

I grow lavender from cuttings — seed takes years to establish and I don't have that patience. It needs full sun and well-drained soil. It will die in wet clay. I've killed three plants learning that. The key is neglect — lavender thrives on being left alone. Too much water, too much fertiliser, too much attention, and it sulks and dies. Treat it like it's from the Mediterranean, because it is.

I harvest the flower spikes when the bottom florets are just opening — that's when the oil is highest. I cut them on a dry morning and hang them upside down in small bundles in the airing cupboard. The scent fills the house for days.

What lavender does is calm the nervous system. The scent alone, inhaled, measurably reduces heart rate and cortisol. I use it in the

foundation tea, in the simple bath, in the sleep powder, in the wound salve. Dried lavender in a small cloth bag under the pillow — simple, old, effective. Pairs with chamomile for gentle calm, with valerian for deep sleep, with rosemary when I need to be calm and clear at the same time.

—



# Maca



Maca grows above four thousand metres in the Peruvian Andes — one of the harshest places on Earth where anything edible survives. The root looks like a small turnip. I buy the powder. Fresh maca root is functionally impossible to find outside Peru.

What maca does is nourish. It's not a stimulant. It's a nutritive tonic — it supports the endocrine system, helping the body produce and regulate its own hormones rather than supplying them from outside. I use it for energy, for stamina, for the transition through menopause, for the woman whose hormones have been disrupted by stress or medication or simply by living.

A teaspoon of the powder in warm milk or a smoothie. The taste is malty, slightly butterscotch. It's pleasant. I use it in the manifestation tea at the full moon and in the postpartum recovery blend. Pairs with ashwagandha for adrenal support and with cinnamon because the two taste like they belong together.

—



# Marjoram



Marjoram is oregano's gentler cousin — sweeter, softer, less aggressive. It grows low to the ground with small grey-green leaves and tiny white flowers. I grow it in a pot and bring it indoors for winter because frost kills it quickly.

What marjoram does is warm and soothe. It's antispasmodic — it relaxes tense muscles, eases the kind of headache that comes from holding your shoulders near your ears, calms a nervous stomach. The women who first used it put it in baths and compresses and teas.

I harvest the leaves before the plant flowers, in the morning. I use them fresh when I can, dried when I can't. A teaspoon of dried marjoram in boiling water, steeped seven minutes. For headache. For the jaw that's been clenched all day. For grief — marjoram has a particular affinity for the kind of sadness that sits in the chest and makes breathing shallow. Pairs with lavender for relaxation, with peppermint for the kind of headache that has a pulse.

—



# Motherwort



Motherwort is the mother's herb — the name tells you. It's a tall, spiky perennial with toothed leaves and whorls of small pink flowers that bees work methodically. I grow it from seed and it self-sows everywhere once established. I let it.

What motherwort does is steady. It's a cardiac tonic — it regulates the heartbeat, particularly the fast, fluttery beat that anxiety produces. It's also an antispasmodic for the uterus. I've used it for menstrual cramps, for the postpartum weeks when everything feels raw, for the kind of palpitations that aren't dangerous but aren't nothing either.

I harvest the aerial parts when the plant is flowering. Dry them. The tea is very bitter — I mean it, very bitter. Honey helps. A teaspoon of dried motherwort steeped in boiling water for ten minutes. After the day when your heart has been racing for no reason. During the days when your cycle is heavy and painful. The tea works quickly — within twenty minutes I notice the difference. Pairs with lavender for anxiety

and with valerian when the anxiety is preventing sleep.

—



# Mugwort



Mugwort is the dream herb. It grows on roadsides and waste ground — tall, with dark green leaves that are silver underneath. The underside catches the light when the wind moves through. It's been used for dreams across cultures that had no contact with each other, which tells you something.

I gather mugwort from wild places — it grows abundantly and I've never needed to cultivate it. I harvest the leaves and flowering tops in late summer, dry them, and store them in a sealed jar. The smell is herbal and slightly narcotic.

What mugwort does is open the dream state. I use a pinch in the dream powder, or steep a teaspoon in boiling water before bed. The dreams become more vivid, sometimes stranger, sometimes more meaningful. I keep something to write on beside the bed — the dreams fade faster than ordinary dreams and if I don't capture them immediately they're gone.

This is not an everyday herb. I use it when I'm working through something — a decision, a grief, a creative block — and need the dreaming mind to show me what the waking mind won't. Pairs with passionflower for gentler dreams and with valerian when I need to sleep deeply enough to dream at all.

—



# Myrrh



Myrrh is the resin of trees that grow in the same harsh, dry regions as frankincense — Somalia, Ethiopia, Yemen. The resin is reddish-brown and smells bitter-warm-medicinal. It appears in the oldest medical texts we have. The Egyptians used it for embalming, which tells you what it does: it preserves.

What myrrh does is protect and preserve. It's antimicrobial, astringent, anti-inflammatory. I use it for wounds that need tightening rather than opening — the opposite of calendula, which encourages tissue growth. Myrrh is for wounds that are weeping, that need to dry, that need to close.

I buy the resin tears or the essential oil. A single tear in hot water makes a mouthwash for sore gums and mouth ulcers. A few drops of the oil in the dark resin balm, in the wound salve for the right kind of wound. It pairs with frankincense — these two have been together for thousands of years, in every tradition that knew either of them.

—



# Nettle



Nettle is the plant everyone learns to avoid as a child — grab it and your hand stings for an hour. But nettle is also one of the most nutritious plants I know. It's rich in iron, calcium, magnesium, potassium, silica, vitamins A, C, and K. The sting disappears with heat. You can drink it, eat it, bathe in it.

I harvest nettles in spring — the young tops, before the plant flowers. I wear gloves. I dry the leaves for tea and cook the fresh tops like spinach. The dried leaves crumble and the sting is completely gone. The tea is green and tastes like the forest floor in the best way.

What nettle does is replenish. It's what I reach for when I'm depleted — anaemic, exhausted, tired in a way that food isn't fixing. It's also anti-inflammatory, particularly for joints and allergies. I use it in the green bath, in the base powder, in the waxing moon tea. The fresh tops I steam and eat with butter. They taste like spinach with more personality. Pairs with dandelion for a mineral tonic that covers almost

everything.

—



# Parsley



Parsley is the garnish everyone ignores and everyone should be eating. It's not decoration. It's medicine. The leaves are rich in vitamins A, C, and K, and the iron content is unusually high for something green and leafy.

I grow parsley from seed in spring — it's slow to germinate, sometimes three weeks, and I've learned to be patient. It's a biennial: leaves the first year, flowers and seeds the second. I harvest the outer leaves and leave the inner ones to keep growing.

What parsley does is restore. It's a mild diuretic that, unlike pharmaceutical diuretics, replenishes potassium while flushing excess fluid. I use it for urinary tract health, for the heavy feeling that comes from retaining water, for the iron depletion that leaves me pale and breathless on stairs.

Fresh parsley, always fresh. Dried parsley loses almost everything. A handful of fresh leaves in the nourishment ritual meal, in the mineral-

rich green broth, scattered over anything that needs brightening. Pairs with nettle for iron and with dandelion for full-spectrum mineral support.

—



# Passionflower



Passionflower has the most extraordinary flowers I've ever seen on a medicinal plant — purple and white, with a crown of filaments that looks like it was designed by someone working late who kept adding details. Spanish missionaries used the flower to teach the story of the crucifixion, hence the name. I grow it for its medicine and its face.

It's a climbing vine. I grow it from seed or cuttings, and in cold weather I bring it indoors. It needs something to climb and it climbs enthusiastically. The flowers appear in midsummer and last only a day — you have to catch them while you can.

What passionflower does is quiet the mind. It's a gentle sedative, but its particular gift is for the kind of insomnia where your body is tired and your mind won't stop. The thoughts that loop. The worries that circle. The replay of a conversation from three years ago at 2am. Passionflower turns down the volume.

I harvest the aerial parts when the plant is flowering, dry them, and

use them in tea. A teaspoon steeped in boiling water for eight minutes. I use it in the sleep powder, the dream powder, the immune bath. Pairs with valerian when sleep is the main goal, with chamomile for a gentler effect, with hops for the racing mind.

—



# Patchouli



Patchouli is a bushy herb with large, fragrant leaves that smell of earth and humus and the forest floor after rain. The essential oil defined the 1960s, though it had been used for centuries before that. I buy the oil — the plant needs tropical conditions to produce enough of it.

What patchouli does is ground. The scent pulls you downward — into your body, into the earth, into the present moment whether you want to be there or not. It's anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and I use it mostly for the quality it brings: stability, weight, connection to something solid.

A few drops in a carrier oil for massage, in a bath, in a diffuser. I use it in the maternal vitality blend and the earth connection rituals. When someone feels unmoored — by grief, by anxiety, by the sheer disorienting speed of modern life — patchouli is where I start. Pairs with cedarwood for protection and with frankincense for depth.

---



# Peppermint



Peppermint is the mint I use most. It's a hybrid of watermint and spearmint, and it appears naturally wherever the two grow near each other. The leaves are dark green with purple-tinged stems, and crushing one between your fingers releases enough menthol to clear your head.

I grow peppermint in a pot — always in a pot. It spreads through underground runners and will colonise an entire garden bed in a season if you let it. I learned this the hard way. The pot contains it. The plant doesn't mind.

What peppermint does is open and cool. The menthol activates cold-sensitive receptors in your skin and mucous membranes, which is why it feels cool on your tongue and in your breath. It relaxes the smooth muscle of the gut — it's the first-line herb for irritable bowel. It opens the sinuses. It clears the head.

I harvest the leaves before the plant flowers, in the morning when the oil content is highest. I dry them for tea and use them fresh in

cooking. The tea is strong — three leaves in a cup, boiling water, covered, steeped five minutes. For digestion, for headache, for the heavy head that follows a heavy meal. Pairs with chamomile for the anxious stomach and with fennel for bloating.

—



# Red Clover



Red clover is the pink-purple flower that grows in lawns and meadows and the strips of grass beside motorways. It's everywhere, which is why people overlook it. But red clover has been a woman's herb for centuries and it still is.

I harvest the flower heads in summer, when they're fully open and brightly coloured. I dry them carefully — they're prone to mould if there's any moisture left. The dried flowers smell like honey and hay.

What red clover does is balance. It contains plant oestrogens — compounds that gently modulate the body's oestrogen receptors. It doesn't add oestrogen. It helps the body use what it has more effectively. I use it for menstrual irregularities, for menopausal symptoms, for the transition years when the hormonal landscape is shifting and no one has given you a map.

A teaspoon of dried flowers steeped in boiling water for ten minutes. The tea is pale pink and slightly sweet. Drink it daily for a full lunar

cycle and see what changes. Pairs with dandelion for liver support — the liver processes hormones, and supporting it supports everything downstream.

—



# Rosemary



Rosemary is the herb of remembrance — it's been associated with memory since Ancient Greece, and modern research has confirmed that the scent alone improves cognitive performance. It's a woody perennial with needle-like leaves and pale blue flowers that bloom in winter.

I grow rosemary from cuttings — seed is slow and unreliable. It needs full sun and excellent drainage. It hates having wet feet in winter. I've killed rosemary by loving it too much — too much water, too much attention, too much fussing. It wants neglect and sun and soil that drains like a sieve.

What rosemary does is sharpen. It stimulates circulation, particularly to the brain. It's antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, a mild analgesic. The scent clears the head. I keep a pot by the kitchen door and crush a few leaves between my fingers when I need to wake up without more coffee.

I use it fresh or dried in the green bath, in cooking, in any tea that needs the mind sharp and present. The dried needles go into the honey smoke incense — rosemary adds a clarifying note. Pairs with lavender for calm focus and with peppermint for the morning.

—



# Sage



Sage is the herb whose Latin name — *salvia* — comes from the word for salvation. To save, to heal. It's a woody perennial with grey-green leaves that look like they're covered in velvet. The scent is unmistakable — warm, herbal, slightly peppery.

I grow sage from cuttings. It needs full sun and well-drained soil and very little else. In wet soil it rots. In dry soil it thrives. I harvest the leaves before the plant flowers and dry them in small bundles hung upside down.

What sage does is clarify. It's antimicrobial — sage smoke measurably reduces airborne bacteria. It's astringent — it tightens tissue. It's mildly oestrogenic, which makes it useful for night sweats during menopause. I use it for sore throats, for heavy periods, for the feeling of being heavy with something I can't name.

I burn the dried leaves as incense — the honey smoke blend. I steep fresh leaves in boiling water for sore throat. I use dried sage in

the full-moon tea, the hormonal balance tea, the green bath. Pairs with lavender for cleansing and with rosemary for the mind.

—



# Sandalwood



Sandalwood is the heartwood of a tree that grows in India and Australia. Unlike most aromatic woods, where only the resin or bark contains the scent, sandalwood is fragrant through and through. Mature trees are so valuable that they're grown under armed guard. I buy the essential oil — sustainably produced Australian sandalwood, not the endangered Indian variety.

What sandalwood does is anchor. The scent is calming, grounding, slightly sedative. It's used in meditation and ritual across Asia for the same reason it works on anyone: it tells the nervous system to slow down. It's also anti-inflammatory and antimicrobial on the skin.

A few drops in a carrier oil for massage, in a bath, in a diffuser. I use it in the comfort compress, the smoke cleanse, the trauma-release poultice. For the woman who feels scattered, unmoored, unable to stay in her body — sandalwood helps her settle. Pairs with frankincense for meditation and with rose for the heart.

—



# Spearmint



Spearmint is peppermint's gentler sister — sweeter, softer, less intense. The leaves are bright green and crinkled, the scent is fresh and slightly fruity, and the plant grows vigorously in almost any conditions.

I grow it in a pot, same as peppermint, same reason — it spreads. The leaves are milder, which makes spearmint better for children, for sensitive stomachs, and for anyone who finds peppermint overwhelming.

What spearmint does is calm and cool. It shares peppermint's digestive benefits but with less menthol. It's also been used for hormonal balance, particularly for women with elevated testosterone — the kind that causes acne and irregular cycles.

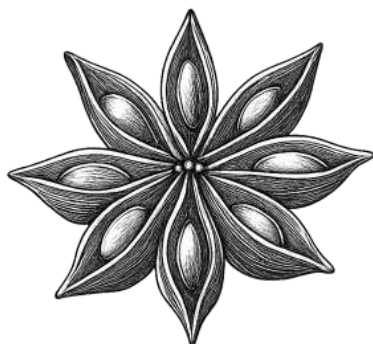
I harvest the leaves before flowering and use them fresh. The tea is three or four leaves steeped in boiling water, covered, five minutes. For the stomach that's queasy rather than painful, for the mouth that wants something fresh, for the afternoon when you need a lift that isn't

caffeine. Pairs with chamomile for the stomach and with lavender for an evening tea.

—



# Star Anise



Star anise is the fruit of an evergreen tree from China and Vietnam — eight-pointed stars that look like they belong in a fairy tale. The taste is similar to anise but stronger, warmer, more complex. I buy the whole stars from a spice merchant I trust.

What star anise does is open and warm. It's antiviral — it contains shikimic acid, the starting compound for Tamiflu. It's also a digestive aid, excellent for bloating and the kind of gas that makes you unbutton your trousers after eating.

I use one star in a pot of tea — more than that and it dominates. It goes into the internal harmony tea and the digestive blends. I crack it slightly before adding it to release more of the oils. A single star can be reused two or three times. Pairs with cinnamon and cardamom for a warming digestive blend that tastes like the best chai you've ever had.

---

---



# Tarragon



Tarragon is the herb that tastes like nothing else — slightly anise-like, slightly bitter, slightly warm, completely itself. French tarragon is the one you want. Russian tarragon is coarser and less flavourful. I grow French tarragon from cuttings because it rarely produces viable seed.

What tarragon does is stimulate. It wakes up the appetite and the digestion. I use it for the kind of digestive sluggishness that comes from stress — when the body has shut down non-essential functions to survive and eating feels like a chore rather than a pleasure.

I harvest the leaves before the plant flowers. They're best fresh — dried tarragon loses most of what makes it tarragon. A few leaves in a cup, boiling water, steeped five minutes. Before a meal when the appetite is absent. During the days when nothing tastes good. Pairs with fennel for digestion and with chamomile for a calming after-dinner tea.

—



# Turmeric



Turmeric is the rhizome that stains everything it touches — bright orange, warm, earthy. I buy the fresh root when I can find it — it looks like ginger but orange inside. The powder is more convenient but less potent.

What turmeric does is reduce inflammation. The active compound, curcumin, is one of the most studied natural anti-inflammatories in existence. It's been researched for arthritis, depression, cardiovascular disease, Alzheimer's. The women who first used it knew none of this. They knew it as a plant that draws out what is stuck.

I grate the fresh root into teas and decoctions. Always with black pepper — the piperine increases curcumin absorption by two thousand percent. Always with a little fat — curcumin is fat-soluble. I use it in the trauma-release poultice, the pain relief decoction, the hormonal balance tea. Pairs with ginger — they amplify each other. The tea is golden and cloudy and tastes like the earth. You'll learn to love it.

—



# Valerian



Valerian is the strongest sedative in this book. The root smells like old socks, like wet earth, like something a dog buried and forgot. The smell is powerful. The effect is more powerful.

I grow valerian from seed. It's a tall plant with clusters of small pink-white flowers that smell sweet — the flowers and the root smell completely different. The roots are the medicine, harvested in autumn of the second year. The smell intensifies as they dry. I keep them in a sealed jar in a separate cupboard because the odour will colonise everything nearby.

What valerian does is make sleep possible. It increases GABA in the brain — the same neurotransmitter targeted by benzodiazepines, but through a gentler mechanism. It doesn't knock you out. It removes the barrier between you and sleep.

I use the dried root, never fresh. A teaspoon of dried root steeped in boiling water for ten minutes. Thirty minutes before bed. The taste is

earthy and unpleasant — honey helps, but not fully. I use it in the sleep powder, the dream powder, the trauma-release preparations. This is not a daily herb. Three nights on, four nights off. Your body adapts quickly and it will stop working if you use it every night. Reserve it for the worst nights. Pairs with hops — they amplify each other — and with passionflower when the problem is mental rather than physical.

—



# Vetiver



Vetiver is a grass that grows in India, Haiti, Java. The roots go deep — sometimes fifteen feet. They're distilled into an essential oil that smells of earth, wood, smoke, the forest floor after rain. It's used in perfumery as a base note — the thing that anchors everything else.

I buy the oil. The scent is the most grounding thing I know. I use it for anxiety, for dissociation, for the feeling of floating slightly above my body during stress. A few drops in a carrier oil, massaged into the soles of the feet before bed. A few drops in a bath. A few drops on a tissue tucked into a pillowcase.

What vetiver does is pull you down — into your body, into the earth, into the present. It's cooling and anti-inflammatory on the skin. I use it in the nourishment ritual and in any blend for someone who needs to come back. Pairs with lavender for sleep and with frankincense for meditation.

---



# Ylang-Ylang



Ylang-ylang is a tree from the Philippines and Indonesia with long, drooping, yellow-green flowers that smell intensely sweet and floral. It takes about fifty pounds of flowers to make one pound of essential oil. I buy the oil — the "complete" grade, which captures the full distillation.

What ylang-ylang does is relax and open. The scent measurably reduces heart rate and blood pressure. I use it for anxiety, for the kind of stress that lives in the chest and makes breathing shallow, for the moments when the tension has become so habitual I've stopped noticing it.

A few drops in a bath, in a carrier oil for massage, in a diffuser. The moon bath in Part Three is where ylang-ylang does its best work — combined with chamomile and rose petals and milk, the water reflecting the moon if you can manage it. It pairs with lavender for calm and with jasmine for the heart.

---

This is what I know about these plants. Not everything there is to know — just what I've learned from growing them, using them, and watching them work. The rest of the book will tell you what the women who came before us did with them.



## Part Four: The Celestial Garden

---

They burned us for this knowledge. Not metaphorically — actually. Women who knew which mushrooms opened the gates and which roots loosened the veil were dragged from their gardens and set alight. The plants survived. The knowledge survived. Here it is anyway.

This section is different from the others. These are not the herbs you reach for when your mind is racing or your body is depleted. These are the ones that shift the frame entirely — that dissolve the wall between you and something larger. I am not telling you to use them. I am telling you they exist. What you do with that information is between you and the plants.

A word before we begin: these are not party drugs. They are teachers, and like all good teachers, they will show you what you need to see, not what you want to see. Some can hurt you. Some can kill you. Respect is not optional. Start low. Go slow. Have someone with you who knows what they're doing. These rules were written in ashes.

---

## 1. Psilocybin Mushrooms



I'm talking about the little brown ones that grow in cow fields and forest floors. *Psilocybe cubensis*, liberty caps, golden teachers — names that sound like children's book characters and are anything but.

What they do is dissolve the boundary between self and world. The first time I took them, I watched a white wall breathe for an hour and understood something about permeability I'd been reading about for years without actually knowing. Colours breathe. Time liquefies. The thing you've been avoiding for three years walks into the room and finally you look at it. Psilocybin doesn't create insight — it removes whatever was blocking it.

Maria Sabina, the Mazatec curandera, called them *los niños santos* — the holy children. She shared them with the world and the world repaid her by burning her house down. I think about her every time I work with them. The plants outlast the burnings. They always have.

I take them two or three times a year, never casually, always with intention. I prepare the space — clean the room, gather blankets, have water and a notebook within reach. I fast for four hours before. I have someone I trust nearby, even if they're just in the next room. The mushrooms don't need much from you, but they need that.

**The warning:** Set and setting is everything. A difficult trip in the wrong place can leave marks that take years to fade. Do not take them if schizophrenia runs in your family. They are not casual. I mean that.

---

## 2. Ayahuasca



The vine of the dead. *Banisteriopsis caapi* — a thick, twisted Amazonian liana — brewed with *Psychotria viridis*, the leaf that carries DMT. The vine contains MAOIs that activate the leaf. Without the vine, the leaf does nothing. Together they are a cathedral.

I've drunk ayahuasca three times, each ceremony different, each one showing me something I wasn't ready to see until I saw it. What it does is take you into conversation with something that is not you. I met a presence I can only describe as maternal — the grandmother of the forest, women who've drunk it call her — who showed me the rot in my patterns and then showed me how to clean it. It was not gentle. It was not supposed to be.

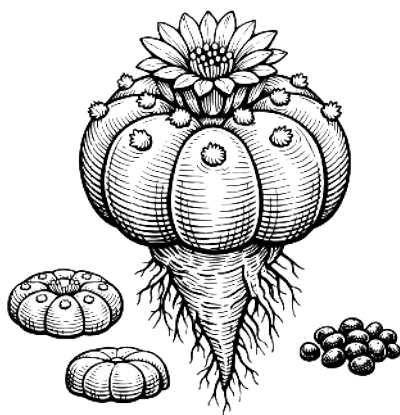
The dieta is as much medicine as the brew. No salt, no sugar, no sex, no distraction — for days before, sometimes weeks. I followed it strictly and I'm glad I did. The purge taught me that emptying is not

punishment. It's preparation.

**The warning:** Ayahuasca is contraindicated with SSRIs, antidepressants, and many medications. The MAOI interaction can be fatal. Research everything. I mean everything. The purge is part of it. No healing without emptying. Do not do this alone. Do not do this without someone who has done it before.

---

### 3. Peyote & San Pedro



The cactus teachers. Peyote — *Lophophora williamsii* — a small, spineless button from the deserts of Mexico. San Pedro — *Echinopsis pachanoi* — a columnar cactus from the Andes. Both carry mescaline. Both have been used by women for thousands of years.

I've only worked with San Pedro — a foot of green flesh simmered for hours into a slime that tastes like earth and bitterness and something you have to commit to. Mescaline is slower than psilocybin, longer than DMT — twelve hours of gentle, lucid unfolding. It opens the heart. I spent an hour with my hand on my own chest, feeling my heartbeat, and I wept — not from sadness, from the novelty of feeling at home in my body. For women taught to hate their bodies, this alone is medicine.

Huichol women make the peyote pilgrimage to Wirikuta, as they have since before anyone wrote anything down. Andean *curanderas* work with San Pedro in ceremonies lasting all night. I think about them

when I prepare the brew — the lineage of women who knew this plant before me.

**The warning:** Peyote is endangered in the wild — grow your own or use sustainable San Pedro. Mescaline is long-lasting; you cannot get off the ride before it's done. Nausea is common. I fast for eight hours beforehand and it helps. Clear your calendar. This is not an afternoon.

---

## 4. Cannabis



She needs no introduction and yet she is constantly misintroduced. *Cannabis sativa, indica* — the strain and terpenes matter more than the name. I grow my own when I can. When I can't, I source from people who know what they're growing.

What she does is soften edges. Slows the racing mind. Amplifies sensation — touch, taste, music. I use her for the days when my chest is a clenched fist and I can't remember what relaxed feels like. For women with chronic pain, endometriosis, or the kind of anxiety that makes every hour a negotiation with your own nervous system, cannabis is not recreation. It is the difference between a day you survive and a day you live.

Women have used cannabis for menstrual pain since ancient Egypt — the Ebers Papyrus, 1550 BCE, records it. The Victorians prescribed it for "female hysteria," which mostly meant "women with good reason to be angry." I think about that when I grind the flower — how many

women before me, how many names for the same thing.

**The warning:** Cannabis can become a crutch you reach for instead of addressing what hurts. Some strains amplify anxiety — I've had a panic attack from the wrong one and it taught me respect. Start with one inhalation. You can always take more. You cannot take less. I use it cyclically, not daily.

---

## 5. DMT-Containing Plants



DMT — dimethyltryptamine — is a molecule your own brain produces. It is released at birth, at death, during deep sleep. You already know what DMT feels like. You just don't remember.

The plants that carry it: *Mimosa hostilis*, *Acacia confusa*, *Psychotria viridis*. Combined with an MAOI like Syrian rue, they become pharmahuasca. Smoked as changa, the experience is ten to fifteen minutes that feel like a thousand years.

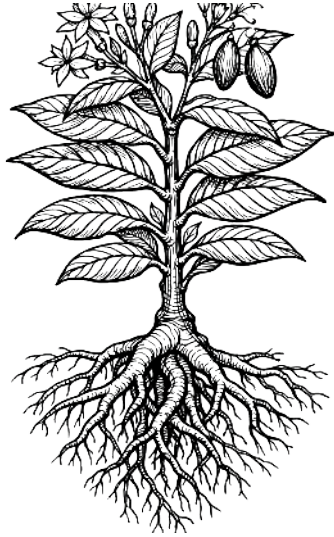
I've smoked changa twice. Both times, the room disappeared before I finished exhaling. Geometric architectures, entities made of light and intelligence, the dismantling and reassembly of the self — I was shown things I had no framework for. I'm still integrating what I saw. I may be integrating it for the rest of my life.

**The warning:** This is the deep end of the pool and there is no shallow part. Not for the curious. For the called. I mean that literally — if you're just curious, stay curious from a distance. When you're

called, you'll know.

---

## 6. Iboga



*Tabernanthe iboga*, root bark from a Central African shrub. Used by the Bwiti tradition for initiations lasting three days. The women of the Bwiti — the *nima* — preside over ceremonies where girls become women, where the dead are spoken to, where the soul is rebuilt.

I have not taken iboga. I may never take iboga. It is not for everyone and I am not sure it is for me. But I have sat with someone who did, in a clinical setting with medical screening, and what I witnessed was a life review — not a psychedelic in the usual sense. Every memory she had buried played back in chronological order with a narrator who knew everything about her. It was the most thorough mirror I have ever seen.

Ibogaine, its active alkaloid, interrupts opioid addiction — a single session can eliminate withdrawal. The mechanism is not fully understood. I have seen this work. I have seen people walk out of a ceremony free of something that had owned them for years.

**The warning:** Iboga can kill you. It affects the heart's electrical rhythm. It requires medical screening and experienced supervision. This is not a home remedy. Do not be casual. I am serious about this one in a way I am not about most of the others. Iboga does not forgive mistakes.

---

## 7. Amanita Muscaria



The red-and-white mushroom of fairy tales. The one with the spots. It grows under birch and pine, looking exactly like the illustrations, which is its first lesson: things are not what they seem. I've found them in autumn, pushing through pine needles, so red against the brown they look painted.

Its active compounds — muscimol and ibotenic acid — work on GABA receptors, not serotonin. The experience is dreamlike: a heavy body, a floating mind. I've taken it at low doses and found a strange clarity, like the moment just before sleep. At higher doses, I've watched friends loop through the same thirty seconds for what felt like hours. They were fine. They were also somewhere else entirely.

Women in Siberian traditions used it — the shamans, the grandmothers. Reindeer-herder women collected the urine of reindeer who had eaten the mushroom, concentrating the active compounds without

the nausea. Resourcefulness is wisdom. I use the dried mushroom, properly prepared. I do not have a reindeer.

**The warning:** Amanita must be dried thoroughly and heated to convert ibotenic acid to muscimol. Raw or improperly prepared, it causes severe nausea and confusion. It is not psilocybin. Do not expect psilocybin. Do not eat it raw. I dry mine at 70°C for several hours until cracker-crisp. The preparation is not optional.

---

## 8. Morning Glory & Hawaiian Baby Woodrose



The seeds. *Ipomoea tricolor* — morning glory, the blue trumpet flowers climbing fences — and *Argyreia nervosa*, Hawaiian baby woodrose, with heart-shaped leaves. Both contain LSA, lysergic acid amide, a chemical cousin of LSD.

What they do is gentler than LSD, more embodied, more dreamy. I've taken morning glory seeds twice — ground, soaked in cold water in the dark for two hours, strained, drunk. Six to eight hours of altered perception with pronounced physical sensation. The first time, I lay on the floor and felt every muscle in my body release in sequence, like a full-body meditation I hadn't known I needed. The second time, I was nauseous for three hours and then had insight somewhere in between waves of it. Both were worth it.

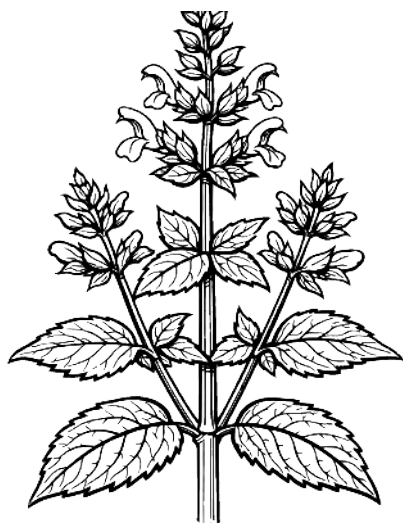
The Aztecs called morning glory *ololiuqui*. Women used the seeds for childbirth, divination, and communion with gods. Then the Spanish

made it illegal. The plants didn't notice. They're still growing on fences, everywhere.

**The warning:** Commercial seeds are often coated with fungicides — those blue or pink coatings will make you sick. Source untreated seeds or grow your own. The nausea is real. I chew fresh ginger root beforehand and lie still. Ginger helps. Lying still helps more.

---

## 9. Salvia Divinorum



The seer's sage. A mint-family plant with large green leaves, native to Oaxaca's cloud forests. Mazatec women call it *ska María Pastora* — the herb of Mary, the shepherdess. They use it for divination, healing, and finding what was lost. I grow it in a pot. The leaves are soft, square-stemmed, unmistakably mint-family. The effect is not.

Salvia works on kappa-opioid receptors, not serotonin. The experience is not euphoric. It is weird. I chewed fresh leaves as a quid — the Mazatec way — and felt the room tilt sideways, then fold. I was a bookshelf for a while. Then I wasn't. Less a journey, more a glitch — reality hiccuping, the simulation showing its seams. I came back laughing. I don't know why.

The Mazatec women chew fresh leaves. Smoking concentrated extract is a modern invention and a much harsher teacher. I haven't tried the extract and I don't plan to. The leaf was enough.

**The warning:** Do not take salvia alone. Do not take extract standing up — you will forget you have a body and that body will fall over. I had a sitter for the leaf and I needed her. Chewed fresh leaves are gentler. The extract is a different substance entirely. Treat it as such.

---

## 10. Blue Lotus



*Nymphaea caerulea*. The sacred lily of the Nile. It appears on Egyptian tomb paintings, held to women's noses at banquets, floating in wine. The flower of Hathor, of Isis — the feminine divine, by whatever name you prefer.

I steep the dried petals in wine for two hours before drinking. The effect is gentle — a mild sedative and euphoriant. Its active compound, apomorphine, produces calm, sensual alertness. Like the moment just before sleep when ideas arrive fully formed, but you're awake, and the person next to you is very interesting.

Egyptian women used it at gatherings — relaxation, openness, a loosening of the social self. It was considered an aphrodisiac. The tomb paintings are unambiguous about what happened next. I use it at home, alone or with company, in the evening when the day's armour can finally come off.

**The warning:** Much sold as blue lotus is a different species —

usually *Nymphaea nouchali* or a purple hybrid. Real *Nymphaea caerulea* is increasingly rare. I source mine from a grower in Thailand who specialises in it. A flower that makes women relaxed and sensual in public has always made certain people nervous. I think about that every time I open the jar.

---

## 11. Syrian Rue



*Peganum harmala*. Seeds of a shrub from the Middle East and Central Asia. Its harmala alkaloids — harmine, harmaline — are MAOIs. They make other things work.

I keep Syrian rue in a small glass jar, the seeds dark brown and ridged, smelling of earth and something metallic. By itself, a teaspoon of seeds simmered in water for twenty minutes produces mild relaxation and slight visual enhancement — colours seem richer, edges softer. Its real power: it activates DMT when taken orally. Without it, DMT-containing plants do nothing swallowed. With it, they become ayahuasca's equivalent.

Persian and Turkish women burned the seeds against the evil eye, wove them into amulets, carried them against the skin. They knew the smoke altered perception. They called it protection. Both things were true. I've burned the seeds in a clay dish when the room felt heavy. The smoke is acrid and unmistakable and afterwards the air feels clean.

**The warning:** As a MAOI, Syrian rue is dangerous with SSRIs, antidepressants, stimulants, aged cheese, cured meats, and many medications. The dietary restrictions are not optional. I research every interaction before I take it, every time, even though I've taken it before. A week of preparation is not excessive. A mistake can be fatal. I am not exaggerating.

---

## 12. Kratom



*Mitragyna speciosa*. A tree from Southeast Asia. Women in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia chewed its leaves for centuries — for energy, for pain, for stamina through days that started before dawn.

I use kratom for pain. I have a recurring back injury from an old fall and some days the choice is between kratom and pharmaceutical painkillers that make me foggy and constipated. At low doses — two grams of dried leaf in hot water — it gives me alertness, sociability, a mild lift. At higher doses it sedates and relieves pain. Its alkaloids are partial opioid receptor agonists, which means they relieve pain without the respiratory depression that makes traditional opioids lethal. This is why kratom has saved lives. It has certainly saved my days.

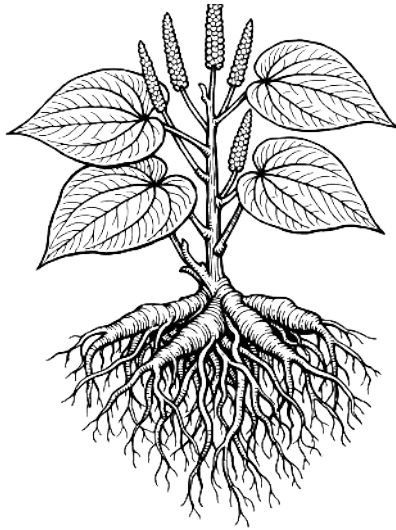
The women who taught the world about kratom chewed a few fresh leaves. They didn't swallow concentrated extracts. I use powdered leaf, never extract. There is a difference. The extract is not the plant.

**The warning:** Kratom is physically addictive with daily use. I use

it three days on, four days off, and I feel the off days. Withdrawal is real — body aches, insomnia, restlessness, the kind of low mood that makes everything grey. Use it cyclically. Do not let it become what you need to feel normal. I have seen this happen and it is not where you want to be.

---

### 13. Kava



*Piper methysticum*. The root of a pepper plant from the Pacific Islands. Women in Fiji, Vanuatu, Tonga, and Hawaii have prepared kava for thousands of years — pounding the root, mixing with water, straining through cloth, drinking at dusk in community.

What kava does is relax the body without touching the mind. I keep powdered noble kava root in my cupboard and when the tension has been building for days — the kind that sits in the shoulders and jaw and won't release — I knead two tablespoons in a cloth bag in cold water for ten minutes, squeeze it out, and drink the grey-brown liquid. It numbs the mouth first, a strange tingling. Then the body lets go. The mind stays clear. It's an anxiolytic that doesn't cloud you, doesn't disinhibit you the way alcohol does, doesn't steal your memory the way benzodiazepines can. Its kavalactones work differently — relaxation without addiction, without fog.

Pacific Island women drink kava for births, weddings, the ordinary

end-of-day gathering. The preparation is communal. The drinking is slow. The effect is peace. I drink it alone, but I think about them — the lineage of women kneading root in water, passing the bowl.

**The warning:** Use noble kava varieties, only the root, prepared traditionally with water. Do not combine with alcohol — the liver does not appreciate the double duty. Do not use daily for extended periods. The liver toxicity reports are linked to improper preparation — stems, leaves, or solvent extraction. I source mine from a supplier who tests every batch. The cheap stuff isn't worth your liver.

---

## 14. Fly Agaric



The European name for *Amanita muscaria* — “fly agaric” from its use as insecticide: crushed in milk, it attracted and killed flies. The women who noticed this also noticed what happened when the mushroom was prepared differently. I think about them every autumn when I see the red caps pushing through the moss.

In European folk medicine, fly agaric salves treated joint pain. I’ve made the salve — dried mushroom infused in oil, beeswax, applied to aching knees and stiff hands. It works. The same women sometimes drank the tea. A small amount brought prophetic dreams. A larger amount brought something else entirely. I keep my doses small. For dreams, not delirium.

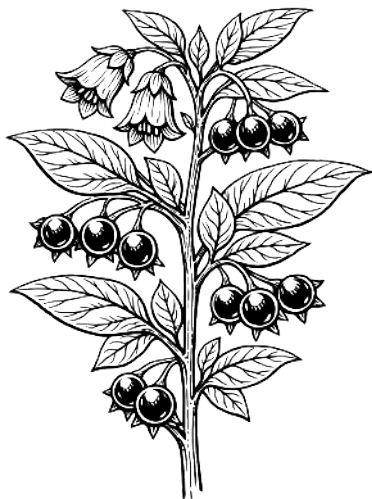
Viking berserkers allegedly used it for battle, which tells you something about dosage. The women’s dose was lower. For vision, not violence. I follow the women’s tradition. The berserkers’ tradition is

not one I need to experience firsthand.

**The warning:** Every caution of entry 7 applies. Amanita is not psilocybin. Preparation determines whether you have a spiritual experience or a night of vomiting and confusion. Only one is worth having. I dry mine until cracker-crisp at low heat. I measure carefully. I start with half what I think I need.

---

## 15. The Nightshades



Henbane. Mandrake. Belladonna. Datura. The tropane alkaloid plants. The ones the witches were burned for. I grow none of them. I have held them — belladonna berries like black pearls, datura flowers white and trumpet-shaped and impossibly beautiful — but I do not ingest them and I am not suggesting you do.

These are deliriant, not psychedelics. The difference is everything. A psychedelic shows you what is in your mind. A deliriant shows you things that are not there and convinces you they are real — conversations with the absent, visions indistinguishable from waking life, flying while motionless. I have read the accounts. I have spoken to one person who used a flying ointment prepared by someone who knew the exact dose. She described talking to her dead mother for an hour, fully believing she was in the room. When it wore off, she was on her kitchen floor. She was not the same afterwards.

The women who used them knew the exact dose — typically in

flying ointments, absorbed through skin, applied with a broom handle to mucous membranes. The broom was a delivery system, not a vehicle. The flying was an experience, not a mode of transport. I include this entry because it is history, because it is women's knowledge, because the burning sites deserve a record. Not because I think you should try it.

**The warning:** The gap between a visionary dose and a lethal dose is vanishingly small. Tropane alkaloids can kill you, put you in a coma, or leave you permanently psychotic. Some plants are just poison. Know the difference. The nightshades are not teachers. They are chemicals. They do not care about your intentions.

---

## 16. Ergot & LSD Precursors



Ergot — *Claviceps purpurea* — is a fungus on rye, a black spur where grain should be. I have seen it in photographs, a dark curve against the gold of the grain head. Women who ate ergot-infected bread in the Middle Ages experienced convulsions, gangrene, and visions. Entire villages danced themselves to exhaustion. Some died. Some saw God. Some were burned for what they saw.

Ergot's alkaloids are LSD's chemical ancestors. Midwives used ergot to stop postpartum bleeding — same pharmacology, different dose, different purpose. They were holding LSD's grandmother in their hands and they knew it stopped haemorrhage. The full synthesis came centuries later, in a laboratory, by men. The women who knew the dose had been burned by then.

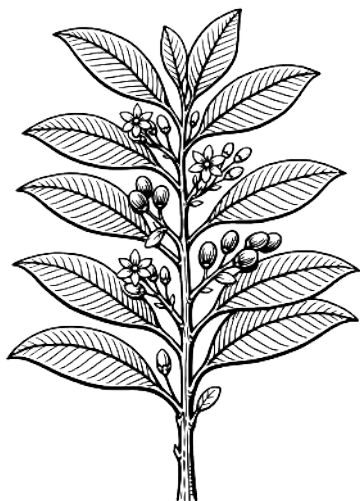
I find this entry the most heartbreaking in the book. The medicine that saved women from bleeding to death after childbirth is the ancestor of the molecule that defined a generation's spiritual awakening. The

women who knew it were killed for knowing it. Then men took the chemistry and the credit. This is not an isolated story. It's the pattern of the whole book.

**The warning:** Do not attempt to extract anything from ergot. The alkaloids are toxic at microgram doses. The line between therapeutic and fatal is measured in molecules. This entry is historical knowledge only. Some doors stay closed for a reason. I mean this literally — I am not being poetic.

---

## 17. Coca



*Erythroxylum coca*. The leaf. Not the white powder extracted from it, concentrated, and used to devastate communities. I need to say that first because the leaf and the powder are not the same thing, and confusing them has caused immeasurable harm. The leaf itself — green, slightly bitter, chewed with a pinch of lime.

I tried coca leaf once, in Peru, where it is legal and sacred. A friend gave me a small handful of dried leaves and a piece of lime — the mineral, not the fruit. I chewed them slowly, the bitterness giving way to a mild numbness, then a steady alertness. No euphoria. No compulsion. Just the energy to walk up a mountain with a child on your back, which is exactly what Andean women have used it for across thousands of years.

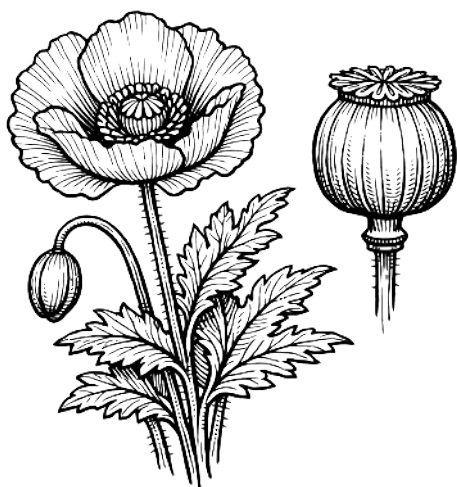
The whole leaf contains alkaloids modulated by other compounds. Coca is not cocaine — coffee is not caffeine powder. The Inca considered it sacred. The Spanish banned it, then taxed it when the indigenous

workforce couldn't function without it. The pattern again: women's medicine, banned, exploited, distorted.

**The warning:** Coca is illegal in most countries outside the Andes, and the law doesn't distinguish leaf from powder. I am telling you it exists. I am not telling you to break the law. If you are ever in Peru or Bolivia, you may encounter it. If you do, know what you're holding. It's a sacred plant, not a party favour.

---

## 18. Opium Poppy



*Papaver somniferum*. The sleep-bringing poppy. The most beautiful and dangerous flower in any garden. I grow them — legally, for the seeds and the flowers — and every summer I stand in front of the grey-green leaves and the petals like crumpled silk and I understand why this plant has been worshipped and feared in equal measure.

Its scored pods weep white latex that dries brown — opium, containing morphine, codeine, and dozens of other alkaloids. It is why millions of women have endured childbirth, surgery, and terminal pain. It is also why millions of people have lost everything. Both things are true.

Sumeria called it the joy plant. Egyptian women used it to quiet crying children. Greek women offered it to Demeter. Victorian women drank laudanum — opium in alcohol — for menstrual cramps, for anxiety, for grief that had no other name. I have read the Victorian dosage guides. Some of them would put a modern adult in the emergency

room. The women were self-medicating because no one else would medicate them. I understand why. I also understand what it cost.

**The warning:** Opium is addictive in a way most other plants here are not. The poppy does not ask. It takes. The line between use and dependence is thin and it moves while you're not looking. It grows easily — too easily. I grow them for beauty and for seed. I do not score the pods. I know exactly what I am capable of becoming and I do not give myself the opportunity.

---

## 19. Kanna



*Scelletium tortuosum*. A succulent from South Africa, used by the Khoisan for centuries. I keep the dried fermented leaf in a small jar — it smells faintly of hay and earth and something that makes my shoulders drop before I've even taken it.

What kanna does is lift mood without intoxication. It's a natural serotonin reuptake inhibitor with mild psychoactive effects — I chew a pinch of the dried leaf and within twenty minutes the flatness that makes every day feel identical starts to recede. It doesn't transform me. It returns me to myself. The Khoisan called it "the pleasant one" — not poetry, description.

For women with low-grade depression, social anxiety, or the grey that settles in without obvious cause, kanna is a gentle hand on the back. I use it on days when I have to be around people and the thought exhausts me. It doesn't make me sociable. It makes being sociable possible.

**The warning:** Do not combine with pharmaceutical SSRIs, MAOIs, or serotonergic medications. Serotonin syndrome is real and dangerous and I have seen it happen — confusion, fever, muscle rigidity, seizure. Start with a pinch. The Khoisan women didn't measure in grams. They measured in feeling. So do I.

---

## 20. Yopo & Vilca



*Anadenanthera peregrina* and *Anadenanthera colubrina*. South American trees whose seeds contain 5-MeO-DMT and bufotenin. I have not taken yopo. I have sat in ceremony with someone who did, and what I witnessed was not gentle.

Indigenous women ground the seeds to powder, mixed it with lime, and blew it into each other's nostrils through a tube. Within seconds, the world dissolves. Visions, purging, a sense of dying and being reborn — compressed into thirty minutes of intensity, then a long contemplative afterglow. The medicine does not wait for you to be ready. The elder women who prepared the seeds — roasting, grinding, mixing with lime — knew the exact proportions. This was not guesswork. This was technology.

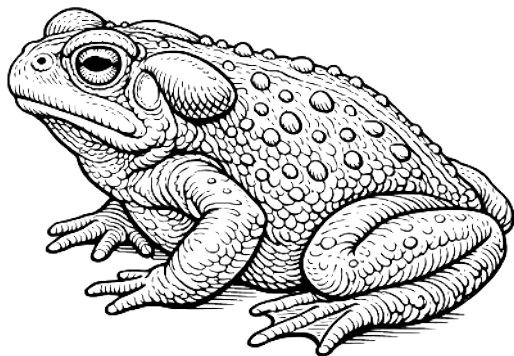
The woman I sat with vomited for ten minutes and then lay still for an hour, eyes open, seeing things I couldn't see. When she came back she said she had been shown the root of her fear and it was a knot

she had tied herself at seven years old. She untied it. She was different afterwards. She also said she would never do it again.

**The warning:** Your nose will burn. You will likely vomit. Your heart rate will spike — not safe for heart conditions, high blood pressure, or mental health vulnerabilities. Yopo does not care about your comfort. It cares about your transformation. Know which one you're seeking. If you want comfort, this is not your plant.

---

## 21. Bufo / 5-MeO-DMT



The toad. *Incilius alvarius*, the Sonoran Desert toad, secretes venom containing 5-MeO-DMT from glands behind its eyes. The venom is dried and smoked. The experience lasts fifteen to forty minutes and contains the dissolution of everything you think you are.

I have not done bufo. I have used synthetic 5-MeO-DMT once, and once was enough. There were no geometric architectures, no entities. Only white light and the complete absence of self. I died. Or rather, the thing I think of as "I" dissolved completely, and what remained was not a person. When I came back, I remembered what it was like not to be a person, and that changed me. I lay on the floor for an hour afterwards, touching the carpet, amazed that carpets existed and that I was a thing that could touch one.

Synthetic 5-MeO-DMT is chemically identical and involves no animal. The toads are endangered by commercial extraction — people

are poaching them, milking them dry, leaving them dead. Use the synthetic or don't use it at all.

**The warning:** This is not a first psychedelic. Do not approach without extensive experience and a trained sitter. The dissolution of self is therapeutic for some, traumatic for others. You won't know which until it happens. I had someone with me who had done it before and knew when to speak and when to be silent. That person is the reason I came back whole.

---

## 22. Mapacho



*Nicotiana rustica*. Not the cigarette tobacco of commerce but its wilder, stronger cousin — up to nine times the nicotine. What indigenous peoples of the Americas smoked, snuffed, and drank before a sacred plant became an industrial addiction.

I keep a small roll of mapacho in my ceremony kit — a dark, rough cylinder that smells of smoke and earth and something ancient. I do not smoke it casually. I use it in ceremony, when the work is deep and I need grounding. Amazonian women blow the smoke over the body, over the crown, over the ayahuasca brew — the smoke is protection, the nicotine is grounding. When the visionary experience overwhelms, mapacho pulls you back into your body, into the room, into having lungs.

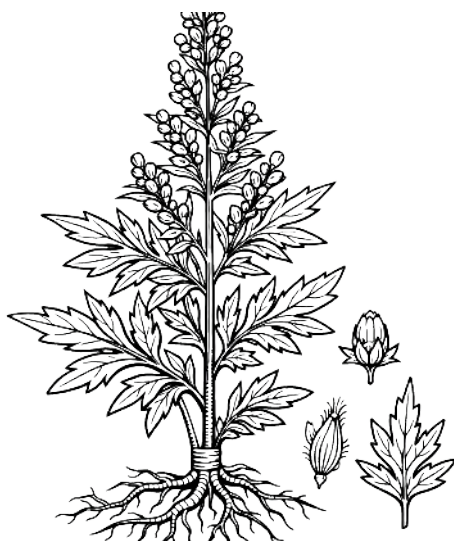
Mapacho is not recreational. It is medicine with a proper context. The women who taught me about it use it with intention — to protect, to ground, to seal the work when it's done. I follow their example. One

roll lasts me a year.

**The warning:** Highly addictive if used habitually. Nicotine is nicotine regardless of the plant. The line between ceremonial and daily use is the line between sacred relationship and chemical dependency. I keep mine wrapped in cloth, put away, only brought out when the context is right. Do not cross that line by accident. It is very easy to cross.

---

## 23. Mugwort & Wormwood



The dreamers' herbs. *Artemisia vulgaris* — mugwort — and *Artemisia absinthium* — wormwood. Both are oneirogens: they enhance dreaming. Not the kind where you're late for a test. The kind where you receive information, meet the dead, wake with answers you didn't have when you fell asleep.

I use mugwort regularly — a teaspoon of dried leaf steeped in hot water for seven minutes, drunk half an hour before bed. The dreams that follow are vivid, narrative, populated by people I haven't seen in years who say things I need to hear. I keep a notebook by the bed and write down everything I remember before my feet touch the floor. Some of the most important insights of my life have come through mugwort dreams.

Wormwood I use more sparingly. It's sharper — the active ingredient in absinthe, and in sufficient doses, neurotoxic. A pinch, not a

handful. The bitterness is instructive: some medicines announce their power through taste.

Both contain thujone, lowering the threshold between waking and dreaming. Women kept dream journals and navigated that world as fluently as this one. I am learning to do the same.

**The warning:** Do not use during pregnancy — thujone is an abortifacient, which is part of why these herbs appear in witch trial records. A pinch of wormwood is enough. A handful is not. These will not put you to sleep — combine with chamomile or valerian if sleep is what you need. They will change what happens once you get there. Be ready.

---

## 24. Calea Zacatechichi



The dream herb. *Calea zacatechichi*, from Mexico, used by the Chontal people for divination through dreams. The leaves are smoked or brewed into an extraordinarily bitter tea. I have done both. The bitterness is part of it. Some things must be earned.

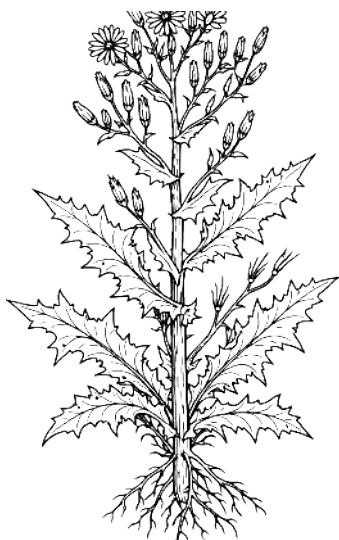
What Calea does is produce vivid, narrative dreams — with plot, with meaning, with information you didn't consciously possess. I drank the tea before sleep with a specific question: something I'd lost, something I needed to understand, something I couldn't see in waking life. I woke at three in the morning with the answer fully formed, wrote it down in the dark, and fell back asleep. In the morning it was still true.

Chontal women used it exactly this way — a question, the tea, the dream, the answer. Where is the lost object, who is the thief, what is the cause of the illness. Calea doesn't produce waking effects. The medicine happens on the other side of sleep.

**The warning:** The bitterness is legendary — it can trigger vomiting. I chase the tea with honey and a piece of bread and I still grimace. Smoking the dried leaf is gentler on the stomach. The dreams can be disturbing and may surface things you've been avoiding. That is the point. That is also the difficulty. Do not ask questions you don't want answered.

---

## 25. Wild Lettuce



*Lactuca virosa*. Opium lettuce. A tall, spindly plant oozing white latex — lactucarium, the poor woman's opium. I find it growing in waste places, neglected fields, pavement cracks where nothing else takes root. You've probably walked past it a hundred times without noticing. Most people do.

What it does is calm without intoxicating, relieve pain without addiction. The latex, dried and smoked or brewed into a tea, produces gentle relaxation — not opium's potency, but opium's function. For women who cannot access or do not want pharmaceutical pain relief, wild lettuce is an ally that asks for nothing in return. I harvest the latex in summer, when the plant is flowering, scoring the stem and collecting the white drops as they bead up. It takes patience. That's part of it.

Victorian women used it for menstrual pain, restlessness, sleepless children. It was freely available, effective, and unregulated. Then the pharmaceutical industry arrived. Wild lettuce went back to the waste

places. It's still there. I still pick it.

**The warning:** Too much produces dizziness, nausea, and a cheap-wine hangover. Start with a few drops of the tincture or a quarter-teaspoon of the dried latex. Do not combine with alcohol or sedatives — the effect compounds and not in a pleasant way. Harvest only from unpolluted sites. The plant growing in the crack in the car park has absorbed everything that car park has to offer.

---

## 26. Sananga



Eye drops from *Tabernaemontana undulata*, an Amazonian shrub. The Matsés and other peoples use sananga before hunting — it sharpens sight, both physical and the kind that tells you where the animal will be before it arrives.

I use sananga before important work — before writing, before ceremony, before days that require clarity I don't naturally possess. One drop in each eye, tipped back, blinking through the burn. And it burns — thirty seconds of genuine pain, the kind that makes you wonder why you voluntarily did this to yourself. Then it passes. And the world is sharper. Colours are more distinct. The fog behind my eyes that I didn't know was there has lifted.

Energetically, sananga removes *panema* — accumulated negative energy that makes everything harder. I don't have a better word for it than the Matsés do. Some things don't translate. The tears carry out what the sananga loosens. I let them fall. I don't wipe them away.

**The warning:** Sananga hurts — genuine pain for thirty seconds to a minute, not discomfort. I close my eyes and breathe through it. Do not use with recent eye surgery, infections, or injuries. Source from reputable suppliers who work directly with indigenous communities. The knowledge is theirs. Your money should be too.

---

## 27. Rapé



Pronounced *ha-PEH*. Sacred snuff made from mapacho tobacco and ashes of medicinal plants — each tribe with different plants, different intentions. I keep a small vial of rapé in my ceremony kit, prepared by a *rapézeira* in Acre who has been making it for forty years.

It's blown into the nostrils through a pipe — administered by someone else, never self-administered in the traditions I respect. The effect is immediate and grounding. My mind clears, my body settles, the vibration drops from head to heart. I use it before ayahuasca ceremonies, when the room is full of anticipation and my thoughts are scattered. One blast of rapé and I am here, in my body, ready.

The women who prepare rapé take days or weeks — curing tobacco, burning plants to ash, praying over the mixture. The medicine is in the process. The *rapézeira* who made mine sings to the plants while she works. I've heard the recording. It's not a production method. It's a relationship.

**The warning:** Rapé is intense. Your eyes will water, your nose will run, you may vomit — and in many traditions the purge is welcomed. It is not recreational. It is a cleaning. Cleaning is not always pleasant. Do not administer it to yourself. Have someone who knows what they're doing.

---

## 28. The Guide



The twenty-eighth entry is not a plant. It is you — the woman who knows, or is learning, or will know when the time comes. The grandmother who held a hand during the first mushroom journey. The aunt who prepared the ayahuasca. The midwife who knew which ergot dose would stop the bleeding and which would stop the heart. The sister who sat beside you all night, making tea, saying nothing, being there.

I have been the guide and I have been the guided. Both are sacred. Both require different kinds of surrender. When I guide, I prepare the space, I fast alongside the person I'm sitting with, I stay sober and present and silent unless silence becomes harmful. I have water, a bucket, and a blanket ready. I know the substance's arc — when it rises, when it peaks, when it falls. I do not impose my interpretation on someone else's experience. I do not leave them alone. I do not make it about me.

This is what they burned us for. Not the plants — anyone can pick a mushroom. What they burned us for was the wisdom of holding: the skill of sitting with someone in altered states, of knowing when to speak and when to be silent, of understanding that the medicine is not the substance but the container it is taken in.

Without a guide, the strongest psychedelic is just a chemical. With one, a cup of mugwort tea can change your life.

**How to guide:** Be present. Be sober. Be silent unless silence is harmful. Have water, a bucket, and a blanket ready. Know the substance's arc — when it rises, when it peaks, when it falls. Do not impose your interpretation. Do not leave them alone. Do not make it about you.

The first guide was a woman who sat beside another woman and said: I am here. You are safe. Whatever comes, we will meet it together.

That is the tradition. That is what they tried to burn.

It didn't work.

---

*The plants are not the crime they told you they were. The crime was knowing them without permission. Permission is no longer required.*

