**Intuitive Plant Medicine**

**History + Philosophy**

Plants have been our medicinal companions since the beginning of time. Whether we were gathering plants for food, fiber, fuel or healing, plants have been at the heart of humanity’s spiritual and physical survival for eons. In many ways, plants are our ancestors; plants themselves are the progenitors of human life. Indigenous people were intimately aware of how strongly our own lives were connected to the plant people. Plants have been the informants of many of our creation stories, myths, ceremonies, rituals and initiation rites.

The foundation of any plant medicine practice is the acknowledgement that all plants have a spirit, an innate essence. Like people, each individual plant has its own personality as well as community identity. In many indigenous plant medicine practices it was understood that, to connect with a single plant, is to open the gateway of access to that entire species. In other words, to interact with the spirit of one plant is to interact with the oversoul of an entire community of beings.

**The Plant Medicine Movement**

In the past fifty years there has been a deep resurgence of interest in plant medicine. It is clear to see that the plants are speaking with us. The urge to reconnect with the green and growing world arises from a deeper place of seeking ecological healing and wholism. Plant medicine works by calling us to reclaim right relationship—first to ourselves, then to the community of the entire living world. Plants themselves are a gateway, one that has begun to open quite wide in the past several decades.

**Where & How to Begin**

**Become a Witness**

The best way to begin to connect to plant medicine and receive their healing is to practice being a witness. Human beings often take the place of do-ers on our earth. We are constantly moving, planting, changing, manipulating. But the clearest communication and connection comes when we cease our projects and simply allow ourselves to witness. Let yourself sink deeply into the experience of a tree, for example, the ultimate watcher of the world. The more you observe the plants, the more you will notice, and the more you will receive.
**Introduce Yourself**

We take plants for granted, and yet plants are the very basis on which we survive as a species. Plants don’t need us to live, but our very lives depend on plants. Whenever you are looking to know a specific plant deeper or simply want to enter into a more fulfilling relationship with the green world, take time to stop and introduce yourself. Try it. Simply say your name, state your intention and share a bit about yourself with the plant. You will notice a warmth of connection almost immediately. Just by introducing yourself you will open so many doors of communication between you and the plant world.

**Initiate Intimacy**

The best relationships are those that are supported by an intimate connection and knowing. We can read all we want about plants or plant medicine in books or online, but the deepest learning will always come directly from the plant itself. Initiate intimacy with a plant. Touch, hug, sit, admire, pray. Try creating with a plant. Drawing, painting, free-writing, dancing or singing. Every good gardener knows the plants love to be sung to! If you have a garden or some free containers on your porch try growing a plant you’d like to know more deeply. There is no relationship so intimate as one of fostering each other’s growth!

**Start Right Here**

Many people who have been captivated by the idea of plant spirit medicine will travel down to South America or seek African traditionalists for training in a specific cultural tradition of medicine. If you are called to such apprenticeships, then, by all means, let the winds take you! But you do not need to make a pilgrimage to some far away land to begin. We are drawn to the places we currently inhabit for a reason, the ecology there is already speaking to us. Many indigenous peoples will say that the medicine you most need is already growing around you. The environment you live in is exactly where you are being asked to start. So being right here. What grows around your home? What plants do you notice along your path? What flowers have you always loved or had an affinity to? Start here.

**Terms + Definitions**

**Deva**- Originally from Sanskrit, Deva literally translates as “brilliant being of light.” Today, Deva is a word used to describe the concept of a non-physical nature consciousness. Devas can be connected to a specific plant, land feature or overarching landscape. Depending on the tradition, Devas are defined as beings who have co-evolved with humans, but who live on a more subtle plane. Contemporarily, when the term Deva (or Devic) is used it is often in reference to the archetypical spiritual intelligences inherent to a given species, or the oversoul of a group of plants.

**Fairy/Faery** - Also called the fae, fairies are beings who are closely associated with nature. Fairies are a rich part of European folklore and imagination. In the olden days the words Fairy and Elf were interchangeable. During the Tudor period, however, the two came to be seen as distinctive. There are many
different origin stories of who the fae are or where they came from, but cross-culturally the fae are understood to be subtle beings who live in a realm that is interconnected to our own earth, but that lies just beneath the perception of most humans. Although they are often associated with plant life and natural places, fairies are understood by folk traditionalists as having their own societies, feelings, moral codes and motivations. Fairy energy can be wild, mischievous, uncivilized and vastly kind.

**Homeopathy** – Homeopathy is a system of medicine developed in the early 19th century by Dr. Samuel Christian Hahnemann (1776-1843) that uses highly dilute plant material to treat both physical and emotional illness. Classical homeopathy is based on the Law of Similars, a theory that like cures like. Therefore a disease can be healed by a medicine that can create symptoms similar to those the patient is experiencing. The plant medicine used in homeopathy has been diluted to an almost infinitesimal amount. The theory behind such dilution is similar to that of a vaccine. If you are given a substance of similar likeness, but in such a small amount as to be innocuous, your body and spirit is taught to recognize the characteristic of such imbalance and thus develop better patterns or programs for effectively processing and releasing it. Homeopathic remedies are made with dilutions in the hundreds or thousands, punctuated with periods of succussing (or vigorous shaking).

**Flower Essences** – Flower essences is a form of energetic plant medicine developed by Doctor Edward Bach in the early 1900s. Flower essences are traditionally made by floating a bloom in pure water under direct sunlight for several hours. This water is then preserved and diluted to make an essence. Flower essences are predicated on the idea that the spiritual essence of a flower can be held by water as a medium. In traditional flower essence practice, a given flower is paired with a person based on personality similarities (another variance of the like cures like idea). While homeopathy often looks at physical symptoms as a basis for diagnosis, Flower essence practice focuses more strongly on the emotional/spiritual symptoms of a given imbalance in a person

**Doctrine of Signatures** – Originating with the sixteenth-century alchemist and philosopher Paracelsus, the Doctrine of Signatures is the idea that the keys to understanding a plant’s healing nature can be found within its very habit of being and growing. By examining how a plant grows, where is grows, its structure, colors, tendencies and affinities we can understand its medicinal resonance with our own bodies.

**Plant Spirit Medicine/ Shamanism** – The practice of contacting the spirit of a plant and asking that spirit to aid you in your healing work. This can be done through journeying with the drum or in meditation. In many traditions it is understood that, in journeying, a plant can decide to gift you with its power. Once a plant has given you such a gift, that power resides within your own energy field. In future healing you will not need the physical plant handy to invoke its medicine. In my experience, you can tap into the spirit medicine of a plant simply by invoking it in your mind. Try this next time you are stressed out or experiencing an imbalance. Think of a plant you love and feel what shifts occur in your emotional or physical body.
Practices For Connecting

Talismans - Talismans (sometimes called fetishes, amulets or charms by anthropologists and the like) are physical embodiments of a plant that are thought to carry its power. Roots, seeds, stalks, dried flower heads and carved effigies are all talismans. The use of plants as talismans dates back as far as our line of ancestry can reach. Ancient peoples recognized that the energetic power of a plant can be accessed through the physical embodiments of a plant’s presence and thus they carried talismans on them for a whole host of reasons—healing, luck, love and power. You can create your own talisman with a beloved plant quite easily. Jewelry, plant bundles and medicine pouches are a wonderful way to carry talismanic plant medicine on you.

Altars + Mandalas – Plants love being a part of our creations. One way to invoke plant spirit medicine in your life is to ask the plants to help you create altars or mark places of power. If given permission, try using beloved plants to create mandalas directly on the earth, joining your intention and power with that of the plants to create a sacred offering for the land itself.

Smudges + Smoke – Aromatic plants have been used in smudges + smokes to clear energy and focus intention throughout many indigenous societies. You can create your own smudge or smoke bundle by gathering leafy aromatic herbs that grow around you. Some easy to grow or find smudge plants in our area include garden sage, rosemary, thyme, spruce, fir, and pine. Harvest these plants at the peak of their aroma and tie into a bundle with string while they are still fresh. Put in a warm place to dry and keep your eye out to make sure they don’t mildew or mold.

Dreaming with Plants – Plant medicines will often work their way into our dreams. Pay attention to any plants that appear to you in the dreamtime or in the hypnagogic state. You can also invoke deeper dreaming by ritualistically taking certain plants before sleep (mugwort is a classic for this). Another way to interact with plants in the dream realm is to place a plant under your pillow before you go to sleep and ask for its energy to infuse your dreams.

Plant Meditations – Meditating with a plant can open up whole new avenues of subtle understanding. You can meditate with a plant simply by sitting with it, by taking a flower essence, or by holding a talisman of the plant. If you have a meditation practice already, see how your time with a given plant can change your experience. What feelings, ideas or images feel novel? How can this give you a better understanding of the essence of this plant’s energy?

Plant Spirit Journeys – Using Shamanic techniques of meditation we can journey to make contact with the spirit of plants for healing and power. Drums, rattles, repetitive movement and chanting are all wonderful ways to make this kind of journey.
How to Make a Flower Essence

**What You’ll Need**

Clear bowl (glass or crystal)
Water (preferably spring or well water)
Scissors or Pruners (if it feels necessary)
Funnel
Coffee filter or cloth
Jar or Bottle
Alcohol to preserve
Intention to heal and Intuition to hear

**The Process**

1. Let the flower call you in. It could be that you dreamt about a particular flower or just had a bloom really catch your eye. If a certain flower is seeming really beautiful, prevalent, or in any way “stand-out” to you, its probably because its medicine is pertinent at this moment. Also, pay attention to the conversations going on around you about flowers—is there any one flower in particular that keeps coming up over and over again?

2. Once you decide on the flower (or it decides on you) sit with the bloom and ask permission to make an essence. This would be a good time to make an offering or a prayer and to connect in meditation to the plant. Wait until you feel an affirmation of consent from the plant. This may be the way the breeze changes, a bee landing on the bloom, an audile sound, a daydream or simply a small movement. Be open to the diversity of communication, and trust your own inner knowing.

3. Fill your clear bowl with water. Use your scissors/pruners or hands to drop one or several blooms into the water and then set the bowl out under the full sun.

4. Let sit for as long as feels right. You may only feel that your essence only needs a couple hours in the sun or perhaps you want to let your bowl sit under the moonlight. It’s a feeling-sense more than anything else.

5. When the essence is done, siphon the water from the blooms through a funnel lined with a coffee filter into another jar or bottle. Take the blooms to a special place outside and give them gratitude.

6. Preserve your essence 50/50 with alcohol (brandy is traditional). Label your essence with the flower name (common and scientific if possible), location, date, any special details and the fact that it is the Mother Essence.

**Mother Essence** – Original flower essence water preserved with alcohol (50/50)

**Stock Bottle** – One to seven drops of the Mother essence in a solution of water and alcohol (typically 50/50, but could be made with less alcohol)
**Dosage Bottle** – One to seven drops of the Stock essence in water. To be taken as drop dosage immediately (within 2-3 weeks of bottling)

**General dosage:** Two to four drops (from stock or dosage bottle) up to 4x per day in water or directly on the tongue. You can also massage the essence directly onto your skin (the wrists, heart center, and temples are lovely places to try)

**Suggested Reading**

*The Secret Life of Plants* – Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird

*Plant Spirit Medicine* – Eliot Cowan

*The Secret Teachings of Plants* – Steven Harrod Buhner

*Plant Intelligence and the Imaginal Realm* – Steven Harrod Buhner

*Plant Spirit Healing* – Pam Montgomery

*Plant Spirit Shamanism* – Ross Heaven and Howard G. Charing