

Bay Area Clinical Herbalists Association Newsletter

Spring 2006

Volume 1, Issue 2

Special Interest Articles:

- Help for the victims of hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
- Everything you want to know about what a western herbalist does.
- A variety of plants to grow, harvest and eat, or use for medicine.

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Western Herbalism Defined

In the time I have been working as an herbalist, one thing has become clear to me: while many people are interested in using plants as medicine, most understand little of what herbal medicine is—especially western herbal medicine. In fact, I am among many western herbal practitioners who have trouble defining the profession.

The best explanation I can muster is that western herbal medicine is the act

of using plants that grow in the western world as primary therapeutic agents. It is influenced by the concepts and myriad cultural beliefs that inform practitioners and users of what is happening in the body, how it interacts with its environment, and how plants can be used as agents of positive change. That being said, this definition includes a wide array of practitioners, all with very different styles. The difference in

each western herbalist's style lies in the role science plays in the conceptualization of their work. On one end of the spectrum are those who believe that any use of plants for medicine should be "proven" using the scientific method. On the other end are those who feel that having an intuitive understanding of how plants act medicinally is the truest path of the herbalist.

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Brother Burdock

Early in my herbal apprenticeship, our class learned the percolation method to make extracts. While reading through the handouts, I noticed several potential booby traps; would I be able to do the math? Could I coordinate packing the modified glass bottle with adjusting the screw cap so it would drip just right? I didn't know the answers but was eager to learn. I chose burdock root because it was safe to

handle and if I failed my assignment, I would not be too much out of pocket. The class experience sent me on a path of curiosity about this plant called burdock; *Arctium lappa* in Latin, gobo in Japanese. I did not recognize it then, but now I can see how burdock came to be my teacher.

In my curiosity, I headed to Rainbow Grocery and bought the powdered burdock root. Pale yellow,

it smelled wild, and had me wondering what it had looked like before it was ground. Knowing the Internet could provide a wealth of information, I accessed the Google portal as soon as I returned home. I learned that burdock is a biennial and takes two years to complete its growth cycle.

(Continued on page 4)



Holistic Disaster Relief in New Orleans



“Common Ground is a nonhierarchical model for integrative medicine that exceeds other local health care clinics in the area.”

A model for making a better world possible

After hurricane Katrina flooded New Orleans, the world watched the humanitarian disaster and the scandalous emergency response that followed. Some, however, could not watch the unfolding tragedy any longer and began providing what the government did not: help. Malik Rahim and Sharon Johnson, two community activists in Algiers, put out a call for emergency medics to run a first aid station and help develop a permanent health clinic.

In response to that call, herbalists, doctors, nurses, acupuncturists, social workers, massage therapists, and more began showing up in Algiers with supplies in hand, ready to contribute their efforts. A local mosque offered up by community members became a well-functioning

first aid clinic called Common Ground Collective. It was the first organization to open a medical clinic in Algiers and provide immediate assistance to the thousands of low-income residents who were unable to evacuate.

Common Ground is a nonhierarchical model for integrative medicine that, despite its challenges, exceeds other local health care clinics in both patient load and essential infrastructure maintenance. It is guided by two simple principles: holistic community health driven by providing free and professional care, and democracy and solidarity through answering to community needs. Volunteers work to make the space a professional and effective primary-care clinic, providing home visits to the elderly and handicapped and offering free treatment, along with

supplies like vitamins, baby food, and health and hygiene goods.

Unlike many of the surrounding clinics, Common Ground runs an operation free of weapons or barbed wire. Starhawk, an author, activist, and visionary involved in the clinic, wrote this about her experience: “The clinic is a month old, and in that time, with no federal or state assistance, has served over two thousand people, many of whom have no regular medical care because they can’t afford it and there is no permanent clinic that serves this neighborhood. It’s warm and friendly—in contrast to the official clinics which, when they finally did open, are under armed guard.”

Dr. Michael Kozart, a Bay Area physician who volunteers with the organization, states,

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Yarrow: An Herbal Ally For Emergency

Bay Area residents have paid more attention to disaster preparedness since hurricane Katrina. Having an emergency supply of water and food, and being able to identify key local plants can make a big difference in times of unexpected disaster.

Yarrow, (*Achillea millefolium*) is an essential plant to grow in your backyard (or to identify in the wild). An exceptional trait of yarrow is that it grows in so many diverse ecosystems. I have seen it at every altitude from seaside cliffs to high mountain forests.

Yarrow has soft, feathery, fern-like leaves that appear in the springtime. Later in the season, the plants produce white, umbrella like flower tops. All parts of the yarrow plant are used for herbal remedies.

(Continued on page 3)



Yarrow: An Herbal Ally For Emergency (...continued from page 2)

Yarrow is outstanding for situations needing first aid. For millennia, yarrow has been a well-known herbal remedy for wounds and bleeding. The Dakota people called it tao-pi pezu'ta, or "medicine for the wounded." Yarrow has been used in many battlefields, including those in the Civil War, and is known for its magical power of protection. The name *Achillea* refers to the great Greek warrior Achilles. According to mythology, when Achilles was an infant, his mother held him by the ankle and dipped him in a bath of yarrow. Years later, during battle, the spirit of yarrow protected his entire body except for his legendary, vulnerable Achilles' heel.

Yarrow is an excellent remedy to help stop bleeding. It can be used to treat conditions such as ulcers and menstrual flooding. It is also antimicrobial, which makes it an excellent wash for cuts and wounds and can also be used to treat bacterial infections of the gut. Since it is also astringent, yarrow can help arrest diarrhea. When traveling to other countries, I always bring yarrow to help defend my GI tract against foreign bacteria. A hot tea of yarrow, peppermint and elder can be used to break fevers and induce sweating and thus it has been traditionally used for colds and flu to induce fever.

Additionally, yarrow has been used to treat many other conditions, including high blood pressure, prostate conditions, arthritis, cancer, colitis, herpes, and cystitis.

Yarrow is safe for children and elders; however it is not advised during pregnancy. It is an amazing and reliable herb when you do not have access to medicinal help. Grow some in your garden today!

Atava Garcia Swiecicki
Clinical Herbalist



“According to mythology, when Achilles was an infant, his mother held him by the ankle and dipped him in a bath of yarrow.”

Dandelions Are Here — Eat Your Weeds!

Spring is flying toward us, the days are getting longer and the Bay Area hills are bursting with new green growth. Spring is a traditional time to do “spring cleaning” and this means our bodies as well as our homes. After a winter of eating heavier, warming foods, spring is the time to start eating the abundant greens.

Dandelion greens (*Taraxicum officinale*) help gently clear our livers of excessive winter eating, while nourishing us with vital nutrients, vitamins, and minerals. Calcium, iron, magnesium,

manganese, phosphorus, potassium, selenium, zinc, vitamins B1, B2, B3 and C can all be found in dandelion.

Dandelion is a timeless food and medicine. Some other names for this abundant weed are blow ball, lion’s tooth, swine’s snout, priest’s crown and puffball. It is used medicinally as a diuretic, liver cleanser and digestive aid. The high iron content can help prevent anemia. Certainly those with high blood pressure should consider integrating dandelion into their lives. Check with a

clinical herbalist before using dandelion medicinally if you are on prescription diuretics.

Though dandelion is often bitter, I have found that making a salad and mixing in a crumbled hard boiled egg is a great way to cut the bitter of the fresh greens and eat a great meal. See page 6 for the recipe.

Jennifer Adams
Clinical Intern



Brother Burdock (...continued from page 1)

“The burdock was waist high and producing huge elephant-ear leaf forms. I hadn’t imagined how bold this plant could be!”



“It seemed to me more like an exotic unnamed animal than a medicinal plant.”

The root is harvested at the end of the first year, the seed at the end of the second. I knew if I wanted to harvest both, I would need more than one plant, a minimum time investment of two years, and a packet of seeds.

I bought the seeds near the end of summer from Horizon Herbs, a reputable company out of Oregon. The packet instructed me to plant in the spring and harvest in the fall. Spring was long gone, but I couldn’t resist the urge to push a few of the chunky seeds into the soil of my tiny urban garden. My yard faces north and receives direct sunlight only from March through October. After planting, to my surprise, the seeds sprouted readily and grew six inches before disappearing when the cold weather set in.

The remaining seeds I saved for spring planting in a sunny garden in Santa Cruz where I knew the burdock would happily bake in the Banana Belt summer heat. By midsummer the burdock was waist high and producing huge elephant-ear leaf forms, shading out the roses in the same bed. I hadn’t imagined how bold this plant could be! In contrast, the plants in my San Francisco yard did come up again from the previous late summer planting, but they were much more diminutive, looking more like the gobo found in Japanese markets. I couldn’t wait until the fall but wondered how I would know the right time to harvest.

I consulted briefly with Santa

Cruz organic farmer, Andy Griffin, on whether he had ever considered planting burdock as a cash crop. He informed me that because the root is so difficult to dig out of the ground, it wasn’t economically viable. His point became clear as soon as I began my own harvest. After clearing the first few inches of topsoil, I could see the taproot was quite thick and dove straight down, spreading lateral branches as it went. The deeper I dug; the topsoil turned to clay and became more stubborn. I finally resorted to a long steel crow bar as the tool of choice. Standing close to the excavation hole, I thrust the crow bar downward with as much strength as I could muster, prying up clumps of sticky clay. Belly down in the muck, I removed the soil a handful at a time. Nearby, a group gathering for a party became curious and volunteered to help me out. A couple hours later, we had uprooted most of it, washed it, and laid it out on the kitchen table, staring down at it in awe. It was as long as my arm and, at the crown, as thick as my wrist. It seemed to me more like an exotic, unnamed animal than a medicinal plant. I sliced a few thin pieces for tasting. It was bitter and smelled musty. Nobody was impressed. Andy was there amused by the city folk getting dirty for a root they were now wary of.

The following spring, the remaining burdock plants came right up again. This time, a long central stalk shot

up above our heads, flowering a deep purple which, in the fall, gave way to a sharp, thistle like burr on which the plant depends for propagation.

To harvest the seed, I clipped the burrs and placed them in a bag where they clumped together in tangled mats. The seeds were loosely attached to the inside of the burr and I had no idea how to extract them. With necessity being the mother of invention, I double bagged the burrs, took them out to the sidewalk and pounded them down with a madrone log, eventually lifting the matted burrs to recover the heavier seed underneath. By modifying a mesh strainer into a winnowing basket, I was able to toss the seed into the air, the wind carrying away the chaff. In total, I had harvested one pound of seed from four plants.

The two years I spent growing burdock sharpened my awareness of how plants respond to their earthly environment and our changing seasons. It was certainly no small task for a city dweller, but by focusing this awareness into the development of a single plant, I gained a deeper understanding of how wild plants are able to maintain their population.

Honey Lee Cottrell
Student



Western Herbalist Defined (...continued from page 1)

Most, however, don't subscribe to extremes, drawing instead from both intellect and intuition to best apply the craft. Indeed, where an individual herbalist might be on the intellect-to-intuition scale varies considerably. No one method is right or wrong; simply, some practitioners will be right for some clients, and not for others.

One commonality that links most western herbalists is a solid foundation of knowledge in medical science, without subscribing to a reductionist theory that many in the medical community gravitate toward. Rather than simply recognizing an illness by name and matching it with a predetermined protocol, western herbalists endeavor to recognize the interrelations between organs, understand how emotions can affect the physical body, and identify, using the body's subtle signals, which herbs would be best utilized for a given situation. There is also a tendency amongst herbalists to employ all the senses to gain insight beyond what the intellect can discern. This ability is often cultivated through direct experience with the plants. Indeed, one premise that distinguishes western herbalists from other practitioners such as those in Chinese or Ayurvedic medicine is the desire to build relationships with the living plants used as medicine. Whether in a cultivated or a wild setting, touching, tasting, smelling, and simply being with the plants, can provide an

understanding beyond what might be accessible through science.

Education is an important part of what many western herbalists offer. While getting help in a clinical setting is valuable, it is important that clients are also able to care for themselves. Through classes or individual conversations, western herbalists teach clients how to grow, identify, harvest, and process plants into medicine within safe and ethical parameters. Humanity has always had those who specialize in plant medicine, but historically, most civilizations had a general awareness of useful plants that grew nearby or they could grow themselves. Getting back to this concept gives people the natural health care resources needed, and also helps clear some of the confusion caused by the disorienting effects of modern life.

Generosity is another trait common among western herbalists. Many who get into this profession do so because they know the value the work offers, recognize it as a form of medicine not readily available, and want to make it accessible to those who need it. The financial rewards are minimal, so perhaps this lends assurance that those in the field are dedicated to the craft rather than monetary gain.

An initial consultation with a western herbalist can be a lengthy process, usually lasting between one and two hours, with most charging fair prices for their services. Most western herbalists make their own medicine—a time-consuming process, but

essential to the practice—and make it available at a price below market value. Western herbalists harvest plants in a way that ensures future generations will have access to them, guarantees quality control, and enables the infusion of healing intentions into the medicine making process.

When western herbal theory is applied correctly, many health issues can be shifted in such a way that a client can remove herbs from their daily routine and still maintain the health improvements gained through their use. This makes herbal medicine a good choice for many people with chronic illnesses such as lupus, Chron's disease, chronic fatigue syndrome, asthma, arthritis, and more.

By recognizing a pattern in a client's life that is contributing to their stated dysfunction, herbalists can offer recommendations that go beyond the scope of what medicinal plants can offer. In this holistic fashion, they facilitate change through good choices in diet, sleep patterns, and other lifestyle habits. Many think the term "holistic medicine" implies the use of any alternative medicine; however, it is more a matter of understanding the body's entire constitution and employing a variety of methods that allow it to find balance.

Using herbs to improve one's health can accomplish states of well-being in situations where conventional medicine often fails.

Joshua Muscat
Clinical Herbalist



"In addition to healing, western herbalists can teach clients how to grow, identify, harvest, and process plants into medicine within safe and ethical parameters."



“Dandelion is a timeless food and medicine filled with vital nutrients.”

Dandelion and Egg Salad

Take one bunch of dandelion (cutting out the bulky stems) and cut crosswise into thin slices. Place in a bowl. Crumble one hard-boiled egg in with the dandelion.

Make a simple vinaigrette with olive oil, rice wine vinegar, Dijon mustard, salt and pepper. Any white

vinaigrette will do. Some traditional recipes call for using hot vinaigrette to help wilt the salad, but that usually calls for crumbled bacon and drippings.

Feel free to play around with your dandelion salad. Some people like to add romaine lettuce to cut the

bitter. You can also add other types of greens such as young dock leaves, sorrel, plantain, watercress, young cleavers, and chickweed. Many of these are available at your local farmer’s market.

Jennifer Adams
Clinical Intern

Sign Me Up!

To send comments or questions, or to be added to our quarterly mailing list, please fill out the form below and mail it back to the address on the right. You can also email or call the herbalists listed on the back page.

Name: _____
Address: _____

Phone: _____
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Questions, Comments, Suggestions

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OUR
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TODAY!**



Common Ground Collective (...continued from page 2)

"Our collective hope is that Common Ground will become a sustainable clinic, setting a beautiful example for grassroots organizing, mutual aid, and self-sufficiency, and that it will also provide a case for activists to develop solidarity skills with the people of New Orleans and beyond who have been so marginalized by the deplorable U.S. health care system, and the whole grand corporate political structure."

While the recent hurricanes devastated the city of New Orleans, they also exposed the long-standing injustices faced by residents of the lower-income, African American communities. On December 17, 2005, a New York Times article, "Dispute Over Historic Hospital for the Poor Pits Doctors Against the State," revealed how those without insurance in these communities have been underserved and without accessible health care for years. From a holistic standpoint, one can see that the realities and dis-ease that poor communities of color face are a symptom of both poverty and racism.

It is worth noting that most of the outside clinic volunteers are white, middle class, and well educated. This can present barriers to patients who may not have had similar privileges—especially if clinic volunteers act in a manner that excludes patient and community participation. To address this issue, Common Ground is committed to providing 'undoing racism' workshops for the clinic staff. These workshops serve as a reminder that the staff is helping build a community-

controlled clinic, and not operating "our" clinic for "their" community.

If the crisis in New Orleans demonstrates anything, it is that we must rely on ourselves for fundamental needs in the event of disaster. Clinical herbalist and author David Hoffman is currently embarking on a project to document plants and their actions in each bio-region around the country to ensure we know what healing plants are nearby in times of emergency. Hoffman encourages the professional herbalist community to step up, stating, "It is time we get together, embrace our social role, and come up with fliers, booklets, websites, use of the Internet. Wherever anybody is in the country, it would be easy for them to know where their local herbs are, which ones are going to reduce pain, reduce inflammation, etc."

Another remarkable grassroots effort currently under way in New Orleans is the use of bio-remediation to clean up toxic or contaminated soil and water. Starhawk writes in her on-line journal: "Bio-remediation is the process of cleaning soil and water and restoring it to health using biological allies such as beneficial bacteria, plants, and fungi. The restoration of New Orleans is an overwhelming project. Nevertheless, there are fairly simple and natural techniques that are applicable on a small scale, and Common Ground has been working on a proposal to fund and train a worker's cooperative that would be able to put them into practice." It is everyday people

taking action, such as those who are making it more possible for the people of New Orleans to come back home.

To become a continuing anchor in community development, the next challenge for Common Ground Collective is transitioning into a permanent community-controlled, primary-care health clinic staffed by local health professionals and residents.

Commongroundrelief.org states "Common Ground is in it for the long haul and we hope that you will join in efforts to ensure that historically neglected communities are able to come back together for a more just and sustainable future."

Other grassroots efforts are springing up everywhere. As herbalists and healers in many capacities, we are living in an exciting time of opportunity and great transition. Dr. Kozart states that when it comes to such a basic need as health care, the action taken by Common Ground Collective and organizations like it "inspires revolution and social justice through healing, and should be about the blending of health traditions, ancient and modern technologies, east and west philosophies, achieving solidarity, and moving forward." I wholeheartedly agree.

Common Ground Collective demonstrates the possibility of free health care run by and for the people. A better world is possible, and we are making it happen!

Dixie B.
Student



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Gathered
together to build
a healthy
community.

We're on the Web!

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Upcoming Classes:

Don't Panic! Herbs for Stress and Anxiety —Jennifer Adams

When:

Wednesday, March 29th
7:00 – 9:30 pm.

Where:

Ohlone Herbal Center
1654 University Avenue, Berkeley, CA
To reserve your space, call: (510) 540-8010

About the class:

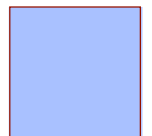
Occasional stress and anxiety are normal for everyone. For some folks, stress, anxiety, panic attacks or insomnia are the norm. In this class, learn how our nervous systems sometimes get "stuck" in a repetitive pattern of stress and anxiety and learn some useful herbal and lifestyle tools to help you manage stress and create calm in your life.

Events:

Join us April 22nd from 12pm to 5pm for Earth Day 2006 in Berkeley. For more information visit www.bayareaherbalists.net. (Booth sponsored by the Ohlone Herbal Center and Pam Fischer.)

About Our Organization...

The Bay Area Clinical Herbalists Association is a collective of qualified western herbalists gathered to promote health, to prevent illness, to restore health, and to alleviate suffering as well as to provide public awareness to the profession of clinical western herbal practice.



MAILING ADDRESS: