

Backyard Medicine

Herbs Growing
Near You and How
to Use 'Em!

by Magic Nocks





ABOUT MAGIC

- Folk herbalist, zinester, witch, educator
- Queer white able-bodied cis-passing non-binary femme, currently working class with proximity to upper-middle class wealth
- Located on Awaswas-speaking Ohlone land, CA Central Coast/ California Floristic Province, Mediterranean climate

I am a folk herbalist, not a doctor. All information discussed is solely for educational purposes and is not meant to treat, diagnose, or cure any ailments. Anything you do to take care of your health is your decision and your responsibility.



MY WORK

- Community/folk herbalist - supported by Patreon patrons
 - Community outreach/education
 - Donated medicine
- Medicine making assistance
- Classes and workshops
- Herbal remedies
- Plant walks and land surveys

OVERVIEW

- Safe harvesting guidelines - aka weed rescue tips!
 - A note about wildcrafting and cultural/ecological destruction
- Getting to know a plant
- Plant section
 - Intro guide
 - the plants!



Weed Rescue Tips



RESCUE WEEDS!

- Avoid gathering near roadways
 - General guideline is 10 feet, further for major highways
- Be sure what you're gathering doesn't get sprayed
- Hit up ALL your acquaintances with yards or gardens
- Technically illegal to gather on public land
- Some plants will happily transplant to your garden
 - long term plant relating!
- Use soon after gathering - fresh is best





ABOUT WILDCRAFTING

- What is it? Taking plants from wild places
- The general consensus among my teachers and herbalists I trust: don't do it
- Cultural and relational concerns
- Conservation concerns
- What is your personal stake?
- Alternatives, weed rescue vs. wildcrafting
- A cautionary tale

Getting to Know a Plant



HERB OF THE MONTH

- Working with an herb in various forms over a period of time (month or week)
 - Waiting until after you've had time to taste it and work with it to do the research
- Different ways of working with a plant:
 - Different types of medicine-making: tea, tincture, salve, oil, etc.
 - Sitting with the plant in-person or image search
 - Working with the flower essence
- Slow and steady approach allows you to build deeper relationships with plants, each plant has so many actions!
 - Apothecary of 10 herbs just as powerful as an apothecary of 100





CHOOSING HERBS

- Choosing an herb of the month can depend on many factors:
 - Your access to the the living plant/sources to harvest from
 - Energetic or spiritual pull toward it
 - Relation to a condition you're experiencing (practice herbal safety!)
 - Family history/ancestral significance

The Plants



COMMON NAME

Scientific name, Family name

- **Where it Grows:** growing locations and conditions most common in my experience
- **When to Harvest:** when plant is in season
- **Parts Used:** part of plant used for medicine-making
- **Special Qualities:** "what this plant is good at" - actions and energetics
- **Preps and Uses:** my top 3 ways to prepare and use this plant
- **Considerations:** any reasons to avoid this herb

Please note: a glossary of herbal terms and tutorials on how to make preparations included in the resources page





WILD CALENDULA

Calendula arvensis, Asteraceae

- **Where it Grows:** Disturbed ground, road margins, sunny spots
- **When to Harvest:** as soon as it starts blooming in February!
- **Parts Used:** flowers
- **Special Qualities:** Internally, great for GI inflammation and moving lymphatic fluid. Topically, soothes dry and irritated skin, heals wounds. Drying and antimicrobial.
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Tea - infusion 2. Infused oil 3. Tincture
- **Considerations:** No internal use if pregnant.

CHICKWEED

Stellaria media, Caryophyllaceae

- **Where it Grows:** Cool moist disturbed ground
- **When to Harvest:** early spring (Feb-April), and shortly after first rainfalls in autumn
- **Parts Used:** aerial parts
- **Special Qualities:** Cooling, moistening, nutritious. Helps digest fats, soothe fevers, rashes, and UTI's, helps coughs produce mucous, and moves lymphatic fluid to soften lymph nodes
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Chickweed salve. 2. Food! 3. Fresh juice
- **Considerations:** Considered safe. High saponin content may cause nausea or diarrhea in some.





CLEAVERS

Galium aparine, Rubiaceae

- **Where it Grows:** Cool moist disturbed ground, riparian and runoff areas
- **When to Harvest:** Spring, before seeds set (May-July)
- **Parts Used:** aerial parts
- **Special Qualities:** Cooling, moistening. Soothing diuretic especially helpful for UTI's, moves lymphatic fluid.
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Fresh juice or succus 2. Infused oil for lymph massage 3. Ice cubes
- **Considerations:** Considered safe. Due to diuretic effects, not recommended for those with diabetes.

CLEAVERS ICE CUBES

Galium aparine, Rubiaceae



COMFREY

Symphytum officinale, Boraginaceae

- **Where it Grows:** Disturbed ground, garden margins
- **When to Harvest:** throughout growing season, when leaves are larger than your hand
- **Parts Used:** leaves
- **Special Qualities:** Cooling, moistening, mucilaginous. Helps heal wounds/repair skin, calm irritation, and knit bones and sprains. Also great for the garden!
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Oil 2. Lotion 3. Poultice
- **Considerations:** Considered safe for topical use. Now avoided for internal use due to pyrrolizidine alkaloid content.





DANDELION

Taraxacum officinalis, Asteraceae

- **Where it Grows:** Disturbed ground
- **When to Harvest:** throughout growing season
- **Parts Used:** root, leaf, and flower
- **Special Qualities:** Root and leaf stimulate digestion, regulate kidney and liver. Leaf is diuretic. Flower is nourishing food.
- **Preps and Uses:** **1.** Root decoction **2.** Leaf and flower in salads **3.** Digestive bitter (tea or tincture)
- **Considerations:** Not for those with allergies in the Aster family. Extremely drying - can lead to chest pains, other symptoms. Hydrate! For flowers - be cognizant of food supply for pollinators when gathering!

HOREHOUND

Marrubium vulgare, Lamiaceae

- **Where it Grows:** Disturbed ground, garden margins, dry scrub
- **When to Harvest:** throughout growing season, no more than 1/3 of top growth
- **Parts Used:** leaves, flowers
- **Special Qualities:** Bitter, cooling remedy for coughs and breathing difficulties. Stimulates digestion.
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Cough candy or syrup 2. Tincture 3. Tea - infusion
- **Considerations:** Use with caution if pregnant.





LEMON BALM

Melissa officinalis, Lamiaceae

- **Where it Grows:** Disturbed ground, moist areas
- **When to Harvest:** throughout growing season (tops)
- **Parts Used:** leaves
- **Special Qualities:** Pleasant, soothing lemony leaf calms hyperactivity, anxiety in heart/GI tract, and acts as a local antiviral on herpes cold sores. Helpful with cold/flu and mood issues.
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Sun tea/strong infusion 2. Tincture 3. Hydrosol
- **Considerations:** Can lower thyroid function, not for those with hypothyroidism.

WILD LETTUCE

Lactuca virosa, L. canadensis, L. serriola, Asteraceae

- **Where it Grows:** Disturbed ground, garden margins, moist areas, alongside food crops/garden plants
- **When to Harvest:** Throughout growing season
- **Parts Used:** leaves, stems, sap
- **Special Qualities:** Cooling, relaxing, sleep-inducing and pain relieving. Leaves act as a digestive bitter and pain relief. Antimicrobial.
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Tincture of latex from stem 2. Tea - infusion of leaves and stem 3. Latex "bandaid"
- **Considerations:** Not appropriate for people with existing kidney issues.



MALLOW

Malva spp., Malvaceae

- **Where it Grows:** Disturbed ground, garden margins, moist areas
- **When to Harvest:** harvest leaves throughout growing season, roots from mature plants (~2-3 yrs)
- **Parts Used:** leaves, flowers, roots
- **Special Qualities:** Nutritious and mucilaginous. Soothing for the respiratory tract, GI tract, skin, helpful for colds and flus. Close relative of *Althaea officinalis*.
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Food 2. Tea - infusion of leaves 3. Poultice
- **Considerations:** Considered safe.





MILKY OATS

Avena fatua, Poaceae

- **Where it Grows:** Grasslands, sunny open areas
- **When to Harvest:** Mid-spring while seed is milky (Mar-May)
- **Parts Used:** Immature "milky" seed, grass stalk ("oatstraw")
- **Special Qualities:** Nourishing to depleted nervous systems, mineral rich. Tonic for mental and physical exhaustion.
- **Preps and Uses:** **1.** Oxymel **2.** Tincture **3.** Tea -infusion of stalk and milky seeds
- **Considerations:** Use caution with gluten allergy or sensitivity.

MINT

Mentha spp., Lamiaceae

- **Where it Grows:** Disturbed ground, garden margins, moist areas, creek banks
- **When to Harvest:** throughout growing season, no more than 1/3 of top growth
- **Parts Used:** leaves
- **Special Qualities:** Delicious, uplifting tea herb. Stimulates digestion and release of gas and bloating, helpful during cold/flu/fever
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Tea - infusion 2. Oil/salve 3. Hydrosol
- **Considerations:** Can increase heartburn and acid reflux for some people.



MIMOSA

Albizia julibrissin, Fabaceae

- **Where it Grows:** Roadsides, forested areas, meadows
- **When to Harvest:** June & July
- **Parts Used:** bark & flowers
- **Special Qualities:** Bark supports adrenals, stress response, promotes sleep and mental calmness, switch between sympathetic & parasympathetic nervous systems.
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Tea/Iced tea of flowers 2. Tincture of bark or flowers 3. Flower essence
- **Considerations:** Not for use during pregnancy or lactation.





MUGWORT

Artemisia douglasiana, Asteraceae

- **Where it Grows:** Disturbed compacted ground, poor soils, riparian areas
- **When to Harvest:** harvest leaves before flowering in late summer (August-on)
- **Parts Used:** leaves
- **Special Qualities:** Famous as a dream herb. Enables sweating, helpful during fever. Antidote to poison oak. Digestive and menstrual tonic.
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Hydrosol 2. Topical vinegar or infusion rinse 3. Tincture 4. Flower essence!
- **Considerations:** Toxic in large doses. Only use up to 1 cup of tea in a blend with other herbs.



PINEAPPLE WEED

Matricaria discoidea, Asteraceae

- **Where it Grows:** Disturbed, compacted ground
- **When to Harvest:** Harvest flowers in mid-spring
- **Parts used:** flowers, leaves
- **Special Qualities:** Wild chamomile. Mild sedative, calms nerves and anxiety tummy. Settles stomach and dispels gas and bloating. Mucilaginous, use topically for wounds and irritations, internally for ulcers. Useful during cold/flu.
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Tea - infusion 2. Compress 3. Food
- **Considerations:** Avoid for people who have Aster family allergies.

PLANTAIN

Plantago spp., Plantaginaceae

- **Where it Grows:** Disturbed ground, sunny dry areas, meadows and lawns
- **When to Harvest:** throughout growing season, harvest individual leaves
- **Parts Used:** leaves
- **Special Qualities:** Cooling, mucilaginous, soothes wounds and bug bites. Moistening, helpful for coughs. Draws foreign objects out of skin (stingers, splinters, etc.). Classic trailside first aid plant.
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Spit poultice 2. Salves 3. Tincture
- **Considerations:** Use with caution if pregnant.





RED CLOVER

Trifolium pratense, Fabaceae

- **Where it Grows:** Meadows and lawns
- **When to Harvest:** Harvest whole top of plant in mid-spring and onward throughout growing season
- **Parts used:** flowers, leaves
- **Special Qualities:** Cooling blood and lymphatic cleanser. Vitamin- and mineral-rich. Useful for skin and respiratory conditions, menopause.
- **Preps and Uses:** 1. Tea - nourishing infusion 2. Wash 3. Food
- **Considerations:** Blood-thinning properties. Avoid for people using heart medications or with other blood-thinning issues. Discontinue use 2 weeks before & after surgery.

HONORABLE MENTIONS





RESOURCES

- [United Plant Savers to watch list](#)
- [Herbal actions glossary](#)

Tutorials

- [How to make an infusion and a decoction](#)
- [How to make an infused oil, salve, and tincture \(also includes more info on teas\)](#)
- [How to make a hydrosol](#)

Places to Learn More About these Herbs

- [Commonwealth Herbs YouTube](#)
- [Dina Falconi YouTube](#)
- [HerbRally Herb Monographs](#)
- [The Herbal Highway Radio Show Archive](#) - [this episode on wildcrafting](#) is great!
- *Medicinal Herbs of Santa Cruz County* by Levi Glatt

STAY IN TOUCH

Have herbal questions? Contact here:

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