



THE MODERN WITCHCRAFT

Guide to

Magickal Herbs

Judy Ann Nock

YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE
TO THE HIDDEN POWERS
OF *Herbs*

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*To all those who practice medicine and magick,
to all whose cures were revealed by their wounds.*

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Throughout this endeavor, I was blessed with a powerful support network of truly magickal lightworkers. The creation of this book took everything I had. And decades before all those aforementioned beloveds who dwell so close to my heart stepped up and stood by me, a tiny seed was planted by Llis Jones, who, in a certain way, introduced me to Susun Weed and set a story into motion. The first true instruction in herbalism I received was through Susun Weed. I grew up in Florida and enjoyed immersing myself in nature. One day in 1991, I was hanging out with a dear friend and Alexandrian witch, Llis Jones, who showed me an advertisement for Susun's herbal intensives at the Wise Woman Center, located in upstate New York on Susun Weed's farm. The following year, I moved to New York City from the Florida panhandle, and my first independent excursion was to meet and learn from Susun. I found her to be a most generous soul, willing to barter with me and allowing me to stay in her house along with her apprentices, who were also there to learn the Wise Woman tradition. Susun taught us how to make simples and teas using oatstraw and nettles, how to forage for wildcrafted herbs, how to recognize edibles, and, most importantly, how to honor the earth, pay homage to the green goddess, and experience the intense link between herbs and magick.

I returned to the city, energized and inspired, and sought to continue my studies with one of Susun's protégés, an intensely intelligent woman named Robin Bennet. The New York-style workshop classes were starkly different from the immersive nature of the Wise Woman Center, and yet I was undeniably drawn to these knowledgeable, powerful women. I had the privilege of taking numerous classes whenever I had the opportunity and would continue seeking knowledge from wise teachers including Kathleen Gordineer at the New York Botanical Garden and the noted biochemical engineer Ursula Basch. Dr. Philip Barnett of The City College of New York, where I completed my master of science degree while working on this manuscript, helped me locate a wealth of research materials housed in the Marshak Library. And as before, I relied heavily on the institutions of the

New York Public Library and the New York Botanical Garden. Nicole Tarnowsky taught me how to access the specimens in the herbarium at the New York Botanical Garden, which was an incredible research experience. I write this not as some kind of herbal resume to justify my writing of this book but rather to acknowledge that I stand on the shoulders of giants, particularly women of power who were fearless in their pursuit and ownership of wisdom. I am but a delicate strand in a vast web, a tiny part of the sum of women's wisdom.

Nonetheless, thirty years as a practicing occultist has taught me a thing or two, and I recognize that my ability to share in this tradition is a true gift, a piece of magick in and of itself. It is interesting to note that the United States does not have a sanctioned herbal tradition. There are no officially recognized certifications, no governing body, nor state corruption of the herbal tradition of healing and magick that has spanned millennia. Every now and again, some government regulation will attempt to regulate and consequently stifle the wisdom and power of plants and witches' ability to use them. During these times, I quietly nod respect to the trailblazers who eschewed the medical industrial allopathic model of wellness and instead claimed, reclaimed, and disseminated the ancient wisdom of herbs. My immense gratitude extends to you all.

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Introduction

Plants are an embodiment of life and abundance on earth. We can learn so much from the myriad species of vegetation around us—resilience in the face of obstacles, the ability to continually renew and reinvent ourselves, and a desire to be of service to those around us. Within the enormous kingdom *Plantae*, herbs are particularly supportive companions to the modern witch. People have been harnessing the countless powers of herbs for sustenance, healing, and transformation for many centuries, even before the beginnings of witchcraft. Today, witches still turn to herbs to comfort and strengthen them on both a physical and spiritual plane. When using herbs and plants in magick, we do not view these entities as mere ingredients. They are our partners. They are living beings with awareness, reactions, and powers that they teach us and share with us. When a witch enters into a magickal partnership with herbs, healing and transformation take place.

In *The Modern Witchcraft Guide to Magical Herbs*, you will explore this practical and potent knowledge of herbal applications and preparations as they relate to spells, potions, rituals, and more. Part I explains the history of herbal magick; the many ways to use herbs in magick, such as infusions, poultices, tonics, and sachets; and simple instructions for cultivating your own herb garden. Part II features profiles and illustrations of 100 common herbs so you can learn their characteristics and magickal properties. In Part III, you'll put all your knowledge to use via rituals and spells that use herbs to encourage good luck, divine your future, attract love, and much more. For example, you'll learn how to amplify your rituals by weaving an herbal

crown of bay laurel, sage, and savory to wear during them. You'll concoct a love potion to encourage intimacy using orange blossoms and clary sage. You can protect your home by hanging a handcrafted herb broom made from mugwort and rosemary on your front door and see what's in store for you in matters of money and fortune by reading Moroccan tea leaves. You can even adorn your skin with a decoction of the ground-up leaves and seeds of the henna tree, then conduct a spell to invoke prosperity and health.

You'll also discover that this book is very hands-on: You will taste, smell, and understand herbs on many levels. Whether you are highly attuned with being a witch or are just getting in touch with the magickal part of yourself, you'll find wisdom in these pages. If you do not have experience working with herbs, you will find accessible step-by-step preparations to get you started on a lifetime path of discovery and practice. If you have been using herbs for years, you may learn a different ratio and proportion for scent, discover a new herbal tool, or come across a delicious recipe that can complement your thriving practice.

Herbal magick isn't just for individual use—these powerful plants also connect us to each other and to the past. It is comforting to know that the cycle of seed to leaf and flower to fruit will still hold sway and inform witches years from now, just as those who came before. As you discover and grow in this sacred path, know that the power of herbs has been here all along, ready to enchant, seduce, empower, inspire, and enlighten. Revel in the wisdom of ancient folk medicine that is still in use today.

Welcome to the magickal part of kingdom *Plantae*, where the mosses breathe and every blade of grass and the fruits of every tree sing the sweet heartsong of the great earth mother goddess. The conifers, the seedlings, the tender new leaves of spring, and the powerful dormancy of the sleeping trees—all these energies combine to vibrate the strands of the web of life. May you see this world anew. May this work harm none, and may it be of benefit to all beings. So mote it be.



PART I

AN OVERVIEW OF HERBS

The use of herbs has a long and storied history, both for healing and magickal purposes. Herbs were the first medicines, the original pharmacopeia used by healers, shamans, wise women, witches, cunning folk, and early doctors to address ailments of myriad varieties. This part will explore the origins of herbal use and the close relationship between herb use and witchcraft. You will also find information on the terminology associated with herbs and herbal uses for supporting your own health and wellness, as well as sustainable and responsible ways to cultivate your own magickal herb garden.

Chapter 1

MAGICK AND MEDICINE: AN OVERVIEW OF MAGICKAL HERBS

There is nothing more humbling than the study of herbalism. With more than 15,000 different types of culinary, medicinal, and poisonous herbs, the list of their properties, uses, and effects is almost endless. Herbs are also undeniably connected to witchcraft—in fact, herbs are the embodiment of magickal essence. They are our living, breathing, working partners in magick. And they give up their lives for the benefit of all beings, to nourish, to heal, and to become an integral part of magick. Immediate lessons that we can take from herbs are to put down roots, turn toward the light, create what we need to survive, and to give back to those around us. We are in a symbiotic relationship with the denizens of flora upon the earth. In magick, we work together to bring about change.

HERBS AS SENTIENT PARTNERS IN MAGICK

Think of the life cycle of the plant. It begins as a seed, nestled in the dark, moist earth and then arises into the realm of air and sun only when conditions are right. An herb seeks nourishment by extending delicate hairlike roots down into the soil to extract water and minerals from the earth while simultaneously extending its energy upward, unfurling leaves to the sun, accepting light and changing it into food. This remarkable ability to transform the energy of light into sustenance connects the elements of earth, air, fire, and water.

As Above, So Below: Sacred Soil and the Root Connection

Plants are constantly reacting to their environment, particularly at the root level. In fact, a 2018 study published in the journal *PLOS One* showed that plants are able to communicate with each other through the vast networks of their roots. Unseen by human eyes, the plants and trees are busy recognizing their offspring and pushing nutrients toward them, sending out distress signals and issuing warnings when danger is near. Plants will create many different organic compounds through chemical reactions and secrete them through their roots. In this way, they are able to recognize each other as family or strangers and will respond accordingly.

Through analysis of the compounds produced in the roots of plants, the researchers who conducted this study were able to establish a connection between stimuli that plants would receive above-ground and the way they react to it belowground. This is a scientific affirmation of the magickal tenet “As it is above, so be it below.” This tenet of witchcraft can be interpreted in many ways (perhaps most importantly to invoke the relationship between the witch and the divine mother goddess), but it can clearly apply to the power and communication abilities of plants and herbs as well.

What Is Hoodoo?

There is an entire magickal tradition that originated in Africa and is centered in the southern part of the United States called “root work.” Also called “hoodoo,” this tradition is also referred to as working roots, root doctoring, and conjure. Roots symbolize ancestry and the practitioner’s connection to the land. To perform root work is to explore an intimate connection to the land, the herbs, and the ancestral line. Roots are actual and symbolic, representing the spirit world and the herbal world. Some examples of roots used in hoodoo are licorice root, calamus root, lovage root, and High John the Conqueror root. Other botanicals commonly used in root work include bayberry, borage, clove, and celery seed, among many others. Herbs and roots are incorporated into charms, sachets, and powders and are used to transform the energy of a person, place, or thing.

Sensitive Souls

Plants are highly sensitive to vibration and touch high above the ground as well. They react to the wind, to encounters with leaves from other plants, and to any sort of contact or touch. Canopies of trees will actually stop growing when they begin to encroach upon the presence of other trees. This practice indicates an awareness of themselves as individuals and of others in their community.

Anecdotal evidence has long held that plants respond to kind words and even music. Those believed to possess the “green thumb,” a special talent for plant cultivation, were often known for speaking to their plants. Research now suggests that plants are even aware of when they are being eaten. Heidi Appel, PhD, professor of environmental studies at the University of Toledo, measured the responses of plants to different types of vibrations. In her quest to determine the awareness of plants, she re-created the acoustic patterns that a plant would encounter in the environment, such as wind, touch, or a caterpillar feeding on it. What she discovered was that not only could the plants distinguish between when they were being rustled by the wind or eaten; they would react by trying to defend themselves when necessary by secreting mustard oil, which caterpillars do not like.

Through the study of herbalism and its relation to magick, we seek to heighten our awareness of the relationship between a practitioner of magick and the herbs employed in spellcraft, rituals, and charms. We acknowledge the power of herbs and we honor them as potent teachers. Though it is impossible to master everything there is to know about herbs, we can still embrace this part of the natural world by putting the magickal bond between witches and herbs into practice. We can begin by learning how we define herbs.

WHAT IS AN HERB?

The most basic definition of an herb is a plant whose fragrance or taste lends itself to cooking, healing, or perfumes and colognes. An herb generally refers to the part of the plant that grows aboveground, mainly the leaves and flowers, but it can have alternate definitions depending on how the plant is both viewed and used. Herbs have many pleasing properties, including their taste, aroma, appearance, texture, and effects.

For most commercial purposes, an herb refers to plants used for culinary purposes. In this book, herbs will refer to either a plant or a specific part of the plant used for a specific purpose.

In the horticultural definition, an herb has a soft stem and does not have as much cellulose as other plants. Cellulose forms the rigid, outer wall of the plant cell. Herbaceous plants are most often used for their leaves and flowers and not so much for the seeds and roots (although all parts of a plant can be used for healing, culinary, and magickal purposes). Any nonwoody, vascular plant could meet the horticultural definition of an herb.

Herbs versus Spices

Also included under the umbrella term of herbs are spices, which are differentiated by their origin because they grow in a different temperate zone, the subtropical. When we think of spices, what most often comes to mind is the ground-up powder made from the dried seeds, bark, or roots of aromatic and savory plants.

Some other common terms you may encounter in your work with herbs include:

- **Annuals:** Plants or herbs with a growth cycle that lasts only one growing season. They germinate, grow to maturity, flower, and die within a year. As their name suggests, annuals need to be replanted each year.
- **Binomial:** Each plant is identified by two names in Latin. The genus name appears first. This is the name that categorizes the characteristics that are shared with numerous plants. Following the genus is the species name. This name is specific and singular. It is never applied to any other plant. For example, the binomial name of basil is *Ocimum basilicum*.
- **Forage:** Foraging is the act of locating and harvesting wildcrafted herbs.
- **Hardiness zone:** These are eleven geographical regions of the United States that delineate climate conditions that affect the growing of herbs. Each adjacent zone is either approximately ten degrees warmer or cooler than the zone it touches.

- **Hydroponics:** A method of plant cultivation achieved without soil. Nutrients are dissolved into circulating water, and the plants are grown directly from the solution.
- **Organic:** The word “organic” refers to biological living matter, but in cultivation, it means that plants are raised without any additives such as pesticides or fertilizer.
- **Perennial herbs:** These are herbs that grow back year after year and do not need to be replanted.
- **Wildcrafted:** Wildcrafted herbs refer to herbs that grow in nature without human cultivation.

Before we move forward with your own cultivation and use of herbs, let’s look back to honor herbalism’s rich past.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF HERBALISM

Herbs were used by ancient people to address ailments and pain. Through trial and error, herbal remedies were created and passed down anecdotally through the generations. Monasteries were built around herb gardens to specifically cultivate herbs for their healing powers. These gardens became the first pharmacies and hospitals, where the sick would seek the healing powers of herbs. Meanwhile, wise women would cultivate other herb gardens and forage the hedgerows and woodlands, seeking remedies of their own.

An Early Monastic Mystic

Hildegard von Bingen was a theologian, musician, visionary, nun, and healer. She lived from 1098 until 1179. Among her published works were two medical volumes, *Physica* and *Causae et Curae*, which were inspired by her experience cultivating a monastic garden. Von Bingen’s work was significant for many reasons: She drew connections between the health of the individual and the health of the surrounding environment; she detailed the many medicinal uses of plants; and she even included references to the four elements, the four directions, and the four seasons. Her books give us a fascinating glimpse into how herbs were used to treat illnesses in medieval times.

Herbs in the Ayurvedic Tradition

Ayurveda is possibly the oldest recorded medical system. Originating in India thousands of years ago, the literal translation of “Ayurveda” is “science of life.” Ayurvedic medicine is a holistic practice, meaning that healing is focused on the entire being. This is very different from the Western tradition, which tends to focus on symptoms and treating them individually instead of looking at organisms as a whole. Ayurvedic medicine is highly personal and individualistic. Considered a traditional health system in India, Ayurveda incorporates treatments that may be derived from herbs, minerals, animals, and even metals. For example, turmeric is an herb used in Ayurvedic medicine to treat inflammation. Herbal extracts are administered along with diet and lifestyle interventions such as yoga.

Traditional Chinese Medicine

Dating back three thousand years, the use of herbs in traditional Chinese medicine, often referred to by the acronym TCM, is still widely practiced today. TCM incorporates a vast medicinal herbal component in its practice but also includes acupuncture, massage, exercise, and food to bring about therapeutic results. A holistic system, practitioners of TCM look for energetic interferences within the energy of the body. These imbalances are dealt with by looking at how the body is affected and the person is treated, not just the symptoms or the disease. The balance of yin and yang energies as well as a harmonious qi (or energetic life force of the body) is the goal of TCM. Herbs are used in preparations such as tonics, teas, tinctures, and encapsulated powders, and similar to Ayurveda, these herbs are combined with other treatments and lifestyle adjustments such as acupuncture and tai chi.

Western Herbalism: Dioscorides to Turner

The seminal herbal reference book by William Turner was published in England in three parts from 1551 to 1568. Turner was often called “the father of English botany,” and his book, *A New Herball*, finally confirmed in writing information that had been previously passed down by word of mouth and sought to correct the many misnomers of the previously held quintessential ancient reference, the Dioscoridean herbal by Pedanius Dioscorides. Considered to be one of the most important scientific works of its time, Turner’s book

contained several illustrations, some detailed and others not, and some colored but not all. What is most important about Turner's *A New Herball* is that it sought to identify and describe the medicinal plants from the surrounding regions. Previously, healers and physicians depended on the Dioscoridean herbal, which described plants from the Mediterranean. Many herbs and remedies described therein were either misidentified or didn't exist at all, but were the result of the collective imaginings of people who wrote about things they had never observed. In the absence of empirical evidence, the misidentification of herbs resulted in the exacerbation of health problems rather than alleviating them. Turner sought to address this, and in so doing, created a tome that would inform on the future of herbalism.

John Gerard and the Generall Historie of Plantes

What began as a personal fascination that manifested as a garden influenced hundreds of years of herbalism. John Gerard's 1597 publication, *Generall Historie of Plantes*, detailed over one thousand species of herbs, many of which he cultivated and tended himself. Gerard's work that was heavily informed by the Flemish botanist Rembert Dodoens became known as the first botanical catalog. Not only did Gerard's herbal contain lists of herbs and plants, their habitats, and growing cycles; he also included their "virtues" or efficacies as well as the folkloric traditions surrounding their use.

John Gerard's publication followed Turner's by thirty years and provided readers with a much greater account of visual representations. And while Gerard acknowledged Turner for informing upon his work, Gerard included over 1,800 detailed engravings, which was a remarkable contrast to Turner's partially illustrated reference.

Nicholas Culpeper, the Radical and Champion of the Poor

No herbal history would be complete without referring to Nicholas Culpeper. Culpeper was a radical in his day but later came to be recognized as the first medical general practitioner. Culpeper treated the poor people of London, creating and prescribing herbal remedies for them during a time when diseases ran rampant and could decimate people. Culpeper often found himself at odds with both his contemporary physicians and apothecaries. His contributions are apparent in his publications *The English Physician* (1652) and *The Complete Herbal* (1653).

Because Culpeper translated Latin medical knowledge into English, he was among the first to make herbal remedies accessible to a greater population. *The English Physician* was the first medical book published in the United States.

A Trailblazer in Many Categories

Culpeper was also a trailblazer in the field of women’s healthcare and was one of the first to recognize the role of women in conception. It was previously held that male semen alone was responsible for bringing forth human life and that women were the incubators of the seed. Culpeper suspected the egg’s role and was considered radical for his revolutionary hypothesis.

Another interesting aspect of Culpeper’s work was his widely known belief in astrology. Culpeper made strong associations between herbs and the planets and stars, which contributes to the magical associations of herbs still held today.

The Greater and Lesser Planetary Correspondences to Herbs

| Sun | Mars |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| • Mistletoe | • Garlic |
| • Angelica | • Onion |
| • Bay laurel | • Hops |
| • Chamomile | • Butcher’s-broom |
| • Lovage | • Nettles |
| • Rue | • Horseradish |
| • Rosemary | • Wormwood |
| • Saffron | • Broom |
| • St. John’s wort | • Tobacco |
| • Walnut | • Barberry |
| • Borage | • Hawthorn |
| • Marigold | • Hyssop |

Jupiter

- Dandelion
- Sage
- Betony
- Chervil
- Chicory
- Rose
- Endive
- Oak
- Chestnut
- Dock
- Sugar beet
- Fig

Saturn

- Oats
- Barley
- Rye
- Thistle
- Comfrey
- Elm
- Henbane
- Mullein
- Horsetail
- Hemlock
- Moss

Moon

- Chickweed
- Iris
- Cabbage
- Clary sage
- Willow
- Water lily
- Watercress

- Lettuce
- Poppy
- Cucumber

Venus

- Mint
- Violet
- Feverfew
- Mugwort
- Catnip
- Pennyroyal
- Thyme
- Tansy
- Burdock
- Marshmallow
- Vervain
- Plantain
- Lady's mantle
- Rose

Mercury

- Dill
- Clover
- Parsley
- Fennel
- Lavender
- Horehound
- Summer savory
- Valerian
- Marjoram
- Rue
- Caraway
- Oregano
- Clover
- Hazelnut

ANCIENT USES OF HERBS IN WITCHCRAFT

One of the most remarkably fascinating windows into the history of the magickal use of herbs is the *Lacnunga* (meaning “remedies”). Written in a combination of Latin and Old English, the *Lacnunga* dates from the tenth or eleventh century and contains a wealth of information on how herbalism was practiced with magickal intent. The author or authors of the *Lacnunga* also included methods for enchanting herbs with invocations and charms. This ancient pagan practice is the precursor to modern spellcasting, where words of power are combined with actions of intent in order to influence an outcome or event.

The *Lacnunga* also offers insight into how herbal medicine was practiced. Healing incorporated ritual, incantations, amulets, prayers, charms, and, of course, magick. One of the most significant entries is known as the “Nine Herbs Charm.”

The Nine Herbs Charm

The Nine Herbs Charm is intended to promote healing and protect against illness and begins with an invocation. Translated by Bill Griffiths, the nine herbs are:

- Mugwort
- Plantain, referred to as “waybread”
- Lamb’s cress
- Attorlape, believed to be either betony or cockspur grass
- Chamomile
- Wergulu, possibly nettle
- Chervil
- Fennel
- Crab apple

Before preparing any remedy with the herbs, a formal incantation is used to imbue the herbs with magick:

“THESE NINE STAND IN OPPOSITION AGAINST NINE POISONS.
RECALL {INVOKED THE NAME OF ONE SPECIFIC HERB FROM THE LIST
ABOVE}, WHAT YOU DECLARED,
WHAT YOU ESTABLISHED AT THE GREAT COUNCIL.
‘UNIQUE’ YOU ARE CALLED, MOST SENIOR OF HERBS.
YOU PREVAIL AGAINST THREE AND AGAINST THIRTY,

YOU PREVAIL AGAINST POISON AND AGAINST INFECTION,
YOU PREVAIL AGAINST THE HARMFUL ONE THAT
TRAVELS THROUGHOUT THE LAND.”

The Lacnunga instructs that a preparation may be made only after all the herbs have been spoken to. Each individual ingredient is to be ground into a powder as the aforementioned words of power are chanted or sung in repetition three times, creating a magickal charm. The powdered herbs are mixed with the juice of apples, water, and ashes, and then boiled with fennel and combined with egg in order to make a salve that can be applied to the body.

The importance of ritual magick combined with herbs is evident in the instructions because not only are the herbs sung to but the incantation is also sung to the person receiving the healing treatment. In fact, the incantation is supposed to be repeatedly sung into the mouth of the patient, into both ears, and also over their wound before the salve is applied.

The Land Ceremonies Charm

The Lacnunga also includes an elaborate pagan ritual known as “The Land Ceremonies Charm,” which is intended as a blessing of the land to imbue it with prosperity, abundance, and fruitfulness. The Land Ceremonies Charm includes Christian symbolism but is undeniably pagan in nature. The Lacnunga outlines instructions on how to ritually and magickally prepare the land for cultivation. For example, practitioners are told to dig up four sods of earth from each of the four cardinal directions of the land that will be blessed. This task is to be undertaken at night before the dawn lights the sky. The incantation “Grow and multiply and fill the earth” is chanted over the sods as a potion made from oil, honey, yeast, milk, and herbs is then dripped three times onto each sod. The sods were then believed to be carried to a henge or stone circle or other sacred place and allowed to be touched by the first rays of sun as the new day began. Later, the sods were believed to be taken to church and left there until four masses were said over them by a priest. The holes from which the sods were removed were filled either with a cross emblazoned with the word “Grow” or, as hypothesized by Dr. Brian Bates, with rune stones. This act created a magickal circle that protected and blessed the field.

After replacing the sods, the next act of the practitioner was to face the east, the realm of new beginnings, and bow nine times while finishing with another incantation:

“WE ASK THAT THE SWELLING CROPS
BE WAKENED FOR OUR WORLDLY NEED
THAT THE FIELDLED EARTH BE FILLED
AND THE GREEN FIELDS MADE BEAUTIFUL.”

Finally, the practitioner would lie upon the ground in supplication after turning sunwise three times around and continue the invocative charm, asking the earth to become fertile and green so that the work may benefit the owner of the land and all who were subject to the owner of the land. Before any actual ploughing was done, the tools were consecrated as well. A paste made of frankincense, fennel, and salt was rubbed onto the plough while a seed was placed within it, all the while a charm invoked the power of earth:

“ERCE, ERCE, ERCE, MOTHER OF EARTH, MAY THE ALMIGHTY,
THE ETERNAL LORD GRANT YOU FIELDS GROWING AND THRIVING.”

When the first trough of earth was turned over by the consecrated plough, a loaf of bread made with milk and holy water was placed within it, in a symbolic ritual of returning to the earth a portion of the blessed and desired yield. This act completed the elaborate ritual.