

The
Green
Witch's
GARDEN



Your Complete Guide to
CREATING AND CULTIVATING
A MAGICAL GARDEN SPACE

ARIN MURPHY-HISCOCK
AUTHOR OF *The Green Witch*

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Dedication

This is for Ron, because, let's face it, you're the green thumb in the family, and this green witch would be sad without you. Thank you for our pretty gardens and for being patient when I send you to the greenhouse with a very specific list.

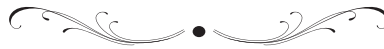
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As always, Ceri and Megan kept me sane during the writing process of this book. I would be a sobbing mess without them. Being writers as well, they know the trials of making a book into something that can be read coherently. They also shored up my confidence when I regularly wailed, "I have a black thumb, why am I writing this!"

Our garden tends to be a home for leftover plants, and I thank Megan for that particularly; she inevitably has too much success starting tomato seedlings. She is also always happy to go to the greenhouse with me and walk around looking at different varieties of everything; we enable one another delightfully. The houseplants I bought on our last trip are still alive, ten months later! (Allow me to knock on wood.)

I would also be remiss if I did not publicly thank Brett Palana-Shanahan, who has been a solid and supportive editor throughout the majority of my career in various ways. She makes my work better, and my books would all be the poorer without her guidance and suggestions. Thank you, Brett!

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Introduction

THE WAY OF THE GREEN

WITCH is the path of the naturalist, the herbalist, and the healer. As a green witch you work closely with nature and its gifts and strive to build a relationship with the natural world. The act of working hands-on in a garden offers you a deep, rich, and personal connection with the life cycle of plants, which benefits both you and your practice.

For the green witch seeking to have a hand in curating their spiritual interaction with plants literally from the ground up, *The Green Witch's Garden* provides a basic introduction to gardening while also offering a cross-section of gardening lore, folk traditions, and magic. Inside you'll find information about planning your garden (either inside or out), suggestions for what plants may be beneficial, and ways to use your harvest in your magical practice.

Perhaps you haven't had the opportunity or inclination to work with living plants before. It's possible that your only interaction has been with plants in their harvested forms, either fresh or dried. If you haven't had the chance to work with green growing things in various stages

from seed to plant, this book will help you think about how you can approach it. If you have worked with plants before, perhaps you haven't approached them from a spiritual direction, and this book can show you how.

You'll find that the experience of interacting with the energy of plants at different points of the life cycle is valuable for you as a green witch. For example, knowing how a seedling differs from a well-established plant gives you insight. Also, observing how the energy of a plant changes as it develops can help you examine ways to use those energies differently and further your practice.

Designed to support a green witch's exploration of creating a garden in any situation or location, *The Green Witch's Garden* allows you to experience the joy and reverence attached to overseeing life as it germinates, grows, and yields, and how to use the bounty in your magical practice.

How to Use This Book

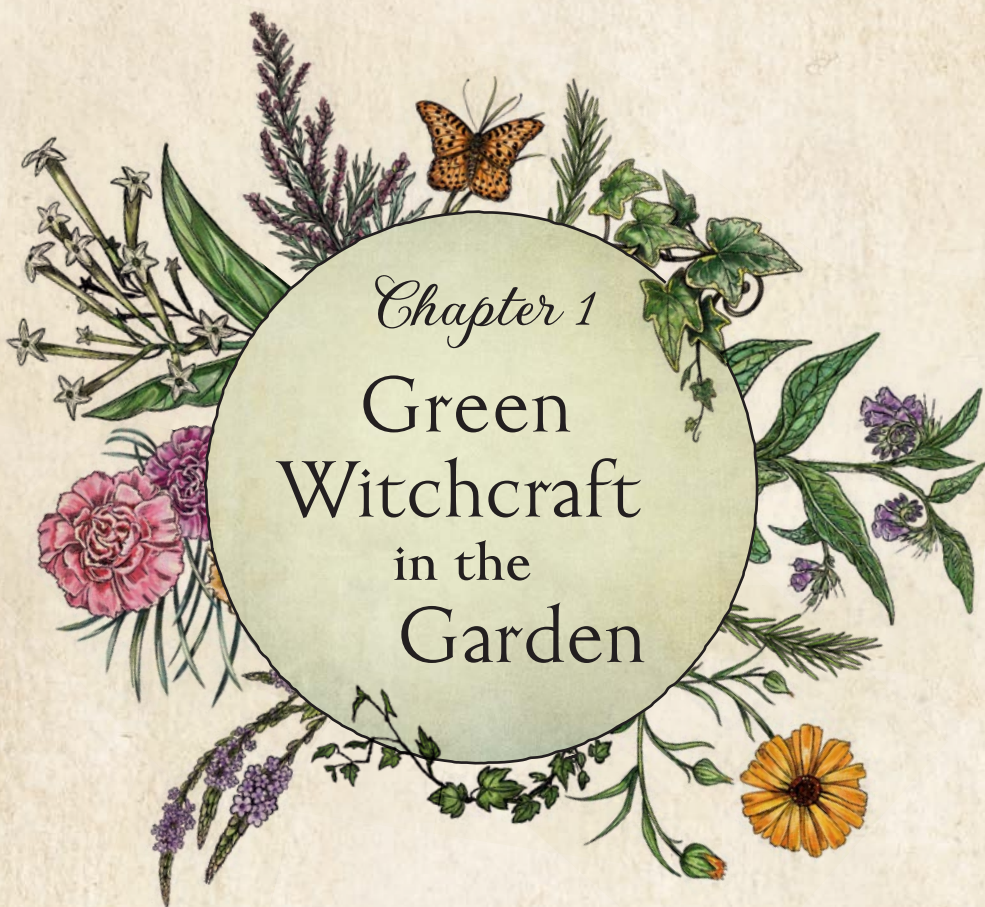
FIRST OF ALL, this can't be a step-by-step guide. Growing zones, climates, and geological composition all vary widely across the world. In that sense, this book has to be a bit vague. I can suggest and offer you choices, but ultimately, your decisions will be grounded in the realities of your location. It will also depend on your personal vibe within your practice, meaning that if you're a potions person, telling you to grow tomatoes in your container garden because you can preserve them as sauce isn't going to help you much. This is a much more free-form book than the previous green witch books I've written. You'll find this one to be less prescriptive and more of a guideline for working intuitively within your own garden, according to your own choices.

Read it for ideas, to fill in your background, to help you have a better idea of where your materials come from. Remember: The most powerful magic you can create comes from you and your connection to your local energies. Work with your land, not against it.

While it can offer valuable spiritual insight and experience to nurture

something from seed to healthy plant, this may not be possible for you. Taking an already established plant into your home can be just as beneficial to your practice. (Make sure to purify it; see Chapter 7 for ideas on how to accomplish this.) Not everyone has a green thumb. That's absolutely fine! You're not a failure as a green witch if you can't get seeds to start, or if you lose control over the process between germination and a seedling establishing itself securely. (If there's a stage that gives you a lot of trouble, however, meditate on it, and think about where it is in the life cycle of the plant. It may give you insight into your own spiritual insecurities or areas to strengthen in yourself.)

You don't have to have a greenhouse full of vibrant, fertile green things to qualify as a green witch. We all have different areas of strength. You can try growing all sorts of different plants, and you might discover that while you can't keep one kind alive, you do decently well with others. Find what you're best at and work from there.



Chapter 1

Green
Witchcraft
in the
Garden

Why You Need a Garden for Your Craft

The natural world sings. Its rhythms thrum throughout our lives, entwined with our daily steps. It inspires, soothes, supports; it heals, whispers, and calms. It is understandable that we want to draw that rhythm into our homes or participate more personally in that song. It is one thing to walk through nature in a wild or public setting; it is another sort of experience to tend to nature one-on-one, to carefully and lovingly nurture and care for the green things that offer us life in return.

Gardening demonstrates to us that gentle care matters, even if only for a few moments every day or two. It is glaringly evident when we forget to tend our plants. Without our attention, they either droop or dry up or grow aggressively wild and threaten other plants. Regular care tailored to the plant's needs is important. It doesn't have to be complicated, but it does require a few moments from day to day, with occasional longer, more involved activity.

If that last sentence sounds like it could apply to your spiritual practice, then you're in good company. Touching base briefly with the Divine, reaching out to connect with the energy around you momentarily, is a form of self-care that can ground you. Every once in a while we take time to do more involved things like rituals or meditations to explore aspects of our personal growth. If we don't regularly engage in the brief moments of spiritual self-care, then the frequency of the larger, more involved activity has to increase to account for the lack of care in between, as there is more (and more difficult) work to be done.

If you ignore your plants for too long, you'll have a lot of work to do to bring them back to vibrant life. In this way, taking a daily moment to touch base with your plants serves as a spiritual check-in for you as well; interacting with your garden allows you to equalize your energy. It's a mutually beneficial relationship.

Interacting with green growing things is a learning experience. It's something that every green witch should try at least once, and preferably several times at various points in your life. Hands-on work with

green living things is an incomparable way to connect with nature. Anyone can do it, and it can be done just about anywhere.

Working with a garden also offers you the chance to be mindful. The act of caring for your garden is an opportunity to be wholly in the moment, to disconnect from anxiety and stress to simply be and commune with another living thing. Handling and working with living

Research has been done on a bacterium that lives in soil, *Mycobacterium vaccae*, that shows it stimulates the body to produce proteins that result in a decrease in stress and anxiety. The ingestion of this bacterium may have the same impact, so handling or consuming produce from your garden could also benefit you in this way.

things can also be a welcome change of focus from the negativity swirling around us in the world. Witches, empaths, and people who work with energy tend to be very affected by the state of the world, from being exposed to negativity, fear, and hopelessness both in the news and in their social surroundings. Gardening offers the chance to lower your blood pressure and increase serotonin levels.

If your garden is outside—whether you grow in containers, window boxes, or outdoor gardens—the act of being in fresh air also brings health benefits. Sunlight stimulates the production of vitamin D, which aids in

the production of neurotransmitter regulators and thus helps stabilize moods; low levels of vitamin D may be associated with depression and anxiety. It also aids in calcium absorption and supports normal immune system function.

Managing your own garden also allows you the opportunity to influence and direct the energy development of specific plants. For example, lavender is often associated with purification, peace, harmony, and healing. As a gardener you may wish to encourage your lavender plant to lean specifically toward purification as it grows, in order to use it for that purpose later in your magical practice.

Other advantages of having your own garden include knowing that the plants you grow and use in your craft will be free of negative or unwanted energy, because they will have been grown in an environment

controlled by you. You can also feel confident that plants grown under your surveillance will be free of chemicals and pesticides.

Your Garden As a Spiritual Reflection of You

Like spiritual work, gardening takes time and patience. Nothing is instantaneous. It is a very slow magic, one that you participate in as a gardener and witch. There are rarely earth-shattering revelations during gardening. Instead, there is a slow growth, learning that takes place over a longer stretch of time. Observing it can be an enlightening experience if you allow yourself to think of the garden as a metaphor for yourself.

There's a balance between controlling a garden and allowing it to go its own way, and it's one that every gardener has to find for themselves.

Houseplants and windowsill plants have cycles regardless of seasons. Watch them, make notes in your garden journal (see Chapter 5), and look for the patterns in your records over time.

It depends on so many factors: what you choose to grow, the conditions, how you envision your garden, and so forth. Sometimes we expect order but can't keep up with the explosion of fertility and abundance. It's okay to revise your expectations and roll with what comes. The same applies to your spiritual journey: Sometimes unexpected things happen in your life that impact you and send you in a direction that you didn't foresee. Forcing yourself back to your original path can rob you of the growth that the new trajectory could have offered you. On the other

hand, sometimes that new path might cost you too much, and returning to your original path is the healthier choice.

The seasonal shift is slow, but you can really see it reflected in the changes of a garden. As the season unfolds, new tasks require your attention, and the opportunity to trace the shifts in energy throughout the continuous changes offers invaluable rewards. Likewise, you can better see shifts in your own energy as the season turns and you learn to predict how you respond to the larger cycle going on around you.

A garden also takes care and attention. You can't ignore it and expect everything to be orderly and perfect. The same goes for you. Self-care on physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual levels is essential, and it all starts with paying attention to yourself. Similarly, gardening requires different levels of care: Regular watering, weeding, and pruning are essential. Thinning out seedlings is important; if you don't cull some of the carrots that have sprouted, the others won't have room to grow. The green leafy tops will look lush, but under the ground, there will only be thin, spindly, pale roots.

On the other hand, leaving a garden to go wild yields a different kind of lesson. You'll get a result all right, and sometimes that result holds a message for you. There's a time for spontaneity, and a time for

exercising judgment. Sometimes you have to let go of obsessively monitoring things every moment and just let nature go its way. Trust in the process. Listen to your intuition and listen to your garden.

Don't get bogged down in linking your garden too strongly to your own personality and how you see yourself. Also, don't see your garden's health or problems as directly indicative of your own, either current or forthcoming. Instead, see it as a spiritual parallel, a series of lessons to internalize and support your next effort.

Gardening work also helps clear the clutter and chatter of your mind. The manual labor helps unplug the mind from overthinking and encourages it to slow down and just be. Open yourself to insight and messages, and cultivate gratitude for the natural delights you encounter while you work. Your efforts in the garden help you focus on something outside yourself that parallels your own growing cycle and needs. You can also use your garden work as a meditative process. As you weed

The basics of grounding and centering can be found in *The Green Witch*. Essentially, the process has you locate your energy center within your body, then reach out from that energy center to connect with the energy of the earth. Through this connection you can equalize your energy level, borrowing some from the earth if you are low, or shunting excess energy to the earth if you are overloaded. You can also connect to the energy of the sky and equalize that way, although many find this a more difficult visualization and exchange of energy. Linking to both can offer a very secure connection.

the garden, for example, think about the little things in your life that draw energy away from your main focuses, the way weeds use space and nutrients you've earmarked for your plants. For more about meditation and your garden, see Chapter 9.

Building Your Connection to Nature

As green witches, we're constantly looking for ways to enhance our connection to nature. Gardening is one such way. Gardening, in whatever form, allows you to interact with the energy of nature through the observation of and participation with the life cycle of a plant. It offers more, however. It offers you a place to communicate with the elements, the four building blocks of nature, magic, and life itself, according to classical philosophers. Following is a basic exercise that allows you to isolate each element and respond to it within your garden space. Remember, this can be indoors or out, and it can be done any time you need to ground or otherwise calm yourself.

Recognizing the Natural Cycle

Birth, life, death. There is no beginning or ending to the natural life cycle. At any point, several cycles are occurring, each at different stages. Any point can be a beginning too. "It's the first day of the rest of your life" is a familiar phrase, and it's true. You can step aboard the cycle at any time and interact with it. Every moment is an experience.

Working with living plants is to interact with the natural birth-life-death-rebirth cycle. Nowhere is the cycle more apparent than after the growing season, when plants have died off and leaves and other remnants are raked and cleared out. This brings us to a very important part of the natural cycle of life that we don't discuss as often as we talk about growing things: decomposition, what occurs after death to all organic beings.



EXERCISE

The Elements and Your Garden

This is an exercise you can repeat frequently to help attune you to how the four elements function within your garden space. It's a good way to calm yourself if you're agitated or stressed, and a nice way to begin or end the day. If you're indoors, turn off your phone and any other distractions that may interrupt you. Take your time with each step; don't race through all four elements. Rushing defeats the purpose of the exercise. Sometimes you need time to sort through the energy in your space, which can shift from day to day depending on the weather, your mood, what kind of traffic or activity your garden has seen in the last few days, and so on.

- 1 First, settle yourself comfortably in your garden area. You can sit on the ground, use a chair, or sit any other way you feel comfortable. You may lie down if you like, but be aware that you may fall asleep!
- 2 Close your eyes and take three deep breaths, exhaling slowly after each.
- 3 Begin by reaching out to sense the element of earth. How does the surface beneath you feel? Can you isolate earth energy in the space around you? What does it feel like?
- 4 After a time, move to the element of air. What scents do you pick up from your garden space? Does the air move? How does it feel against your skin?
- 5 Move to sensing fire energy. Is there warmth in your space? What is the light like? Are there pockets or small areas of vitality or creative energy somewhere?
- 6 Finally, reach out to sense water energy. What is the level of humidity like in your garden space? Can you feel a difference in disparate zones?
- 7 When you feel ready, slowly draw back the personal energy you have used to sense the elemental energies at play in your garden space. Take a few deep, slow breaths and open your eyes when you feel ready. Take a moment to stretch and move your hands, feet, and limbs to seat yourself fully in your body again.
- 8 The last step is to make notes about your observations and experience in your grimoire, meditation record, spiritual journal, garden journal, or whatever you use to record your spiritual or magical work. Compare and contrast your comments with past notes on this exercise. Do you see patterns or rhythms?



Composting and decomposition is an important step in the natural cycle that allows you to interact with natural energy in a different way. We all know what it's like to be in nature and to feel surrounded by life. But the energy involved in the steps that occur after death is important, and just as worthy of interaction.

Gardening books talk about the function of compost, and how it can enrich your garden and growing matter. City collection of organic refuse for disposal and conversion to other uses is becoming more pop-

ular. But have you ever really considered the energy of compost? What does it create, what does it release?

Compost isn't garbage. It's a function of decomposition. Decomposition occurs after death, releasing energy as organic matter transforms to less structured matter, a form with nutrients more accessible to new organisms to use as building blocks in creating new life. The compost serves as nourishment and enrichment for future plants.

In nature, this happens without supervision. Walk through untended forested areas and see the leaves and fallen branches on the ground; look at the fallen leaves that are crumbling and decomposing, hosts to fungi and mosses. Those plants plus bacteria, insects, and worms all work to break down the organic matter.

As green witches, we understand that decomposition is part of the natural cycle that should be worked with for insight. Many humans, on the other hand, tend to assume death is the end of the cycle, perhaps followed by rebirth in some form. This common belief overlooks and diminishes the importance of physical decomposition.

In some neo-pagan practices, Samhain, the third harvest, also marks the end of the cycle, a farewell, a release of what no longer serves us. The winter solstice marks the rebirth of the sun, and the cycle begins again.

Keeping a magical journal is very important. You can consult *The Green Witch's Grimoire* for an entire book exploring the ways you can organize and record information. See also the section in Chapter 5 on creating a garden journal, which can be part of your magical journal or a separate notebook, according to your preference.

But what happens in the weeks between Samhain and Yule? We think of fields lying fallow to recover energy, of incubating the seed that will manifest with the return of the sun. What is missing from this observance of the natural cycle? Decomposition.

It's not comfortable to think about or examine your life in the context of things breaking down and being reduced to base elements. But looking at the dark, uncomfortable parts of our spirituality and our practice of it is important. As witches, we know that dark things are not bad things. We know that darkness holds mystery and knowledge, secrets and revelations...if we are courageous enough to face them.

Decomposition releases energy, and transforms energy into simpler states, like untangling the building blocks that formed an energy structure. It unties and unravels, freeing the aggregate of energy to unwind and separate; the energy then becomes neutralized and ready to be reused.

This part of the cycle is introspective and meditative. It can be overwhelming, and there's nothing wrong with doing it a little bit at a time. You don't have to be shackled to the seasonal pattern, either, although working within the larger natural resonance of your geographical and agricultural location can make it easier. Composting happens all year long, with vegetable scraps in the winter, for example, or yard trimmings through the growing season.

Working with Plant Spirits

As witches, we honor the spirits of nature around us. Taking on care of a garden offers a new range of spirits to honor and work with. At the bare minimum, you should introduce yourself and welcome the spirit of the plant when you plant it or acquire it, or when it sprouts. (See Chapter 9 for more on working with plant spirits in your garden.)

As when you ask to work with a new animal spirit as a teacher, or choose to work with a specific deity to deepen your understanding of them

and their spheres of influence, working with one plant spirit at a time is important. Don't overload yourself. Allow your focus to be given to one plant spirit at a time, in order to be as open as possible to their wisdom.

What are your favorite plants? Is there an herb or flower that resonates strongly with you? Try one of those as the first plant spirit you work with. This basic technique for communicating with a plant spirit will help you get started.

1. Center and ground, in order to have a firm foundation for your own energy.
2. Spend a bit of time looking at the plant, familiarizing yourself with the details of its physical structure.
3. Reach out with your personal energy and touch the energy of the plant. What does it feel like? Ask yourself if it feels welcoming or not. If it doesn't, terminate the exercise and try again another time. If it feels neutral or agreeable, proceed.
4. Close your eyes and visualize the plant before you. Introduce yourself (aloud or in your visualization) and ask the spirit if it is willing to meet you and communicate. Again, if you get a sense of refusal or reluctance, thank it and withdraw. If the spirit is amenable, proceed.
5. Ask the spirit if it is willing to teach you. Be open to whatever messages it wishes to communicate. Remember to thank the spirit at the end of each session.

This sharing may take place over an extended period of time. Care for the plant as you learn from it, make it offerings of whatever it seems to like (water? shiny crystals? rocks? music?), and acknowledge your gratitude frequently. Also be aware that the plant may just want to hang out. It might not have something to communicate, but it may enjoy your company. As you get to know its energy, you may want to just hang out with it too.

As part of your deep dive into a plant's energies, whether you are communicating with the plant spirit or not, care for it with awareness. Don't just water it and turn its pot; allow your energy to reach out and touch the plant's energy every time you care for it. The spoken word creates sound waves, which plants can physically feel, much the way your eardrum vibrates when sound waves hit it. We project energy when we speak too; emotion and other kinds of energy infuse our words. Plants, being organic creatures with energy of their own, can respond to that.

Make it personal. Talking to plants is a cliché, but there's truth behind it.

Eco-Awareness

As green witches, we are caretakers and guardians of the land. We help nature's energy move and facilitate people's interactions with it. Understanding that we are inextricably entwined with the world of plants is essential to our work. Eliot Cowan, author of *Plant Spirit Medicine*, makes this observation about the relationship between humans and plants:

The most striking thing about this relationship is that we need them but they don't need us. We humans are utterly dependent on plants to cover all our needs: fuel, shelter, clothing, medicine, the petrochemical cornucopia, and, of course, food. (Even meat is made of plants.) In contrast, plant communities do just fine without people....What makes plants so generous? What makes us so brutal? Somewhere along the way we lost the experience of unity.

Nature does quite well without us, true. But the interference and stress humans put on the planet in general calls for us to contribute support to the natural world whenever we can.

How can you do this in your garden? Practice eco-awareness as much as possible. An awareness of environmental issues, both global and local, should inform your choices. This applies to choices made beyond your garden; it should influence the food you buy, the companies you support, and the activist groups you assist in whatever way(s) you can. For example:

- ☛ Does a vegetable gardener use harsh techniques that strip the soil and fail to nourish it in return, resulting in increasingly artificial methods to amplify harvest?
- ☛ Where are the ingredients in your favorite spreads sourced?
- ☛ Is an ingredient produced in a way that diminishes the environment it comes from? Is the cocoa you use in baking fair trade?

You can also support pollinators. This means having native wildflowers, perennials that are there for these beneficial creatures year after year, including milkweed, thistle, asters, and many others (remember to choose plants that grow in your unique environment). Try to plant things that attract specific pollinators too, like milkweed for monarch butterflies or wildflowers to support local honeybee populations. Which specific pollinators to support will depend on your geographic location, but in general, butterflies, bees, and insects function as pollinators, among other animals. A decrease in pollinator population can have significant consequences for the global food supply. Pollinator populations suffer when the native plants they prefer die or are no longer planted; their numbers also decline as a result of contact with pests, pesticides, and toxic agrochemicals. Habitat loss is another factor that challenges pollinator survival, and you can help to restore that habitat with your garden.

In addition to providing support for pollinator species, you can practice eco-awareness by being a good steward of the soil. Plant a diverse range of things to provide a good cross-section of plants that consume different minerals and nutrients from the soil, as well as