

Before there was modern medicine, before there were co-pays and deductibles, and specialist referrals, there were plants and the traditions of plant medicine.

Plants have been used as medicine since before recorded history. In the covered wagons moving west during our pioneer days, there were chests of plant medicine used by families. Since the 60's we are in the midst of a vigorous herbal knowledge renaissance.

Today, I will provide you with accessible and affordable starting points to create an initial foundation in beginner's herbalism.

What is Herbalism? A Brief Overview

Herbalism is the study and practice of using herbs and plants to nourish the whole person and support overall well-being.

- treat the whole person vs treating symptoms (Western Medicine - AMA style)
- what makes herbalism different from the current medical model is the use of plants vs. drugs as the building blocks, supporting the body's homeostasis or dynamic equilibrium.

Various forms of traditional herbalism have been practiced for millennia throughout the world.

Some traditional herbalism practices that remain popular in Eastern and Western countries today include:

- **Western herbalism:** This is a melting pot of herbal wisdom drawn from the indigenous use of herbs grown in North America and wisdom from European settlers.
- **Ayurveda:** The traditional wellness practice of India that combines herbalism with bodywork, nutrition, yoga, meditation, breath work, and other wellness practices.
- **Traditional Chinese Medicine:** Includes various herbs, mushrooms, acupuncture, bodywork, meditation, and Qigong.

There are many other examples from around the globe, including various African, Asian, Australian, South American, Middle Eastern, and Central American herbalism practices.

Wherever people have lived, survived, and thrived, you'll find evidence of geographically specific herbalism.

What Herbalism Looks Like Today

The practice of herbalism was traditionally passed down from generation to generation, village herbalist to village herbalist, Shaman to Shaman, midwife to midwife, and so on through mentorship, apprenticeship, and hands-on experience.

Today, there are many ways to get an herbal education—from eclectic online or in-person courses to apprenticeships or even university-level training.

There are also several ways to practice various forms and levels of herbalism. Here are a few examples.

Home Herbalist

Someone who practices herbalism at home to support their health and their family's health. At home herbalist may be self-taught, learned from a relative, or undergone formal training. Home herbalism is typically the best place to start if you want to learn more about herbs.

Community Herbalist

Also known as a certified herbalist, master herbalist, or traditional herbalist.

This typically requires online, on-site, and/or apprentice-based education, but some people are self-taught. Coursework may or may not be completed through an accredited institution.

It is considered a more traditional or “informal” education in most cases. However, that doesn't mean these herbalists are lacking in knowledge or skill about folklore, traditional use, and evidence-based herbalism.

Depending on the coursework and training, they are often some of the most knowledgeable about traditional Western herbalism.

These types of herbalists work with the public and may grow and produce their own herbs and herbal products.

Clinical Herbalist

These herbalists go through in-depth formal training in evidence-based, folk, traditional, and other forms of herbalism plus clinical training to work with clients.

Herbal Educator

This type of herbalist focuses solely on providing herbal education versus seeing clients for specific health needs. This designation allows herbalists to freely share their knowledge without concerns about regulations regarding herbal products and health claims.

Herbal Formulator

Herbal formulators focus on formulating herbal products for market. They typically have a background in some type of herbalism training and practice. They may also make or manufacture herbal products.

Herb Farmer or Grower

Farmers or growers who grow herbs to be used in products, personal care and other products. They typically have a background in herbalism and may grow for their own product line, herbal practice, or for market.

Herbalism is also practiced by various doctors and healthcare practitioners, including:

- Acupuncturists or Doctors of Oriental Medicine
- Ayurvedic doctors or practitioners
- Medical doctors or Osteopaths
- Naturopathic Doctors
- Certified Traditional Naturopaths
- Integrative functional medicine doctors or practitioners
- Nutritionists
- Holistic Health Practitioners
- Health Coaches
- Nurse Practitioners
- Midwives, Doulas, and other birth workers
- Chiropractors
- And more

Herbalism is a vast and exciting field of study that can take you almost anywhere in the health, wellness, and natural products spectrum.

Plus, learning about herbalism will empower you to take better care of yourself, your family, and the environment.

How To Get Started Learning About Herbalism

As previously mentioned, herbalism is a vast field with many formal or informal education options.

So, where should a beginner start?

People typically begin by studying herbs for personal use as a home herbalist. From there, they may choose to expand into community or clinical herbalism.

Regardless, here are some tips and resources to help you begin your herbalism journey.

Start By Getting To Know Some Herbs You've Used Or Are Curious About

The best way to get started learning about herbs is to choose a few to research and play around with.

These could be:

- Herbs you've used before
- Herbs (weeds) that grow in your yard or local area
- Or even an herb you've heard of and want to learn more about

There's no wrong way.

Just pick five to ten herbs you're curious about, harvest or order them, start researching their benefits, and use them to make teas, tinctures, salves, poultices, vinegars, culinary dishes, and other elixirs.

Here are some herbs to begin your herbalism journey & incorporate into your Herbal First Aid Chest:

These herbs are easy to find in your local grocery or health food store, or in your garden or in the wild, provide a range of potential benefits, and are easy to transform into different herbal preparations.

1. Blackberry Leaf
2. Calendula officinalis
3. Cinnamon
4. Chamomile
5. Chickweed
6. Clover Flower
7. Dandelion root & greens
8. Elderberries or Elderflowers
9. Echinacea/Cone Flower
10. Garlic
11. Ginger
12. Lemon balm
13. Lavender
14. Mullien Leaf
15. Nettles
16. Oregano
17. Peppermint
18. Broadleaf plantain leaves
19. Raspberry Leaf
20. Rosemary
21. Sage - *Sativa officinalis*
22. Sage Brush - *Artemisia tridentata*
23. Spearmint

24. Thyme
25. Yarrow

Since all herbs have nuances and different uses, it is essential to do your research before ingesting any unfamiliar herbs.

Therefore, it is best to start by listing the herbs you wish to work with, then read up on their properties and applications.

What are the best resources to learn about different herbs?

Let's start by looking at helpful books to build your herbalism library.

A good herbal reference guide remains invaluable because the authors can give greater detail on the history, traditional uses, research, uses, growing tips, foraging advice, and applications of specific herbs.

Here are a few tried and true books and free online resources to start building your herbalism library.

Prescription for Herbal Healing, 2nd Edition: An Easy-to-Use A-to-Z Reference to Hundreds of Common Disorders and Their Herbal Remedies

Rosemary Gladstar's Medicinal Herbs: A Beginner's Guide: 33 Healing Herbs to Know, Grow, and Use

Medicinal Plants of the Pacific West by Michael Moore - herbs commonly found in the wild

Medicinal Plants of the Desert and Canyon West by Michael Moore - herbs commonly found in the Deserts

Herbal Materia Medica by Michael Moore - This free download from the Southwest School of Botanical Medicine provides detailed information on 500 major botanicals, with the preferred forms and methods of preparation, strengths, solutions, the most common adult dosages, environmental status, and potential dangers.

All of Mathew Wood's Books are excellent!

Mathew Woods's school and extensive herbal website: <https://www.matthewwoodinstituteofherbalism.com> - only \$8 per month!

The Modern Herbal Dispensatory: A Medicine-Making Guide - This is an excellent, full-color guide on turning fresh and dried herbs into various tinctures, capsules, salves, vinegars, ear drops, poultices, tooth powders, essential oils, flower essences, and more. The authors are both herbalists with years of experience and have included 250 herbal recipes you can make at home.

Crystal Rae, Herbalist,
Horticulturist & Nutrition Educator

crystalraeherbalist@proton.me

Peterson Field Guide to Medicinal Plants & Herbs of Eastern & Central N. America: Third Edition - This best-selling field guide is a must-have for those interested in identifying herbs and plants. The authors offer detailed information, including over seven-hundred images, on the key traits, habitats, uses, and warnings for more than 530 of the most significant native and alien species of medicinal plants in eastern and central North America.

Growing Plant Medicine (and other books by Richo Cech) - If you're interested in growing herbs, this is a fantastic book. Richo Cech, is an archaeologist, ethnobotanist, seed saver, and expert on the cultivation, processing, and usage of medicinal plants.

Topics covered include:

- Theory and practice of natural and organic garden techniques
- Bioregional medicinal plant recommendations
- Garden plans and materia medica
- How to arrange herbs by plant families for optimal growth
- And other herb growing advice, tips, and techniques

Other books by Cech include *Making Plant Medicine*, *Growing At-Risk Medicinal Herbs*, and *The Medicinal Herb Grower*.

[Medicine Making By Herbalista](#) - This free site offers a wealth of information, tutorials, recipes, and more from a practicing herbalist on how to turn herbs into tinctures, capsules, salves, poultices, and more.

Topics available include:

- Medicine-making supplies/gear list
- Measurement conversions
- Distillation basics
- Tincture instruction
- Hot glyceride extracts
- And various worksheets on maceration, oil infusions, topical preparations, and much more.

If you're looking for a free online resource to help you get started making your own herbal products, this is an excellent place to start.

Herbalism Organizations

These organizations are crucial in providing education, communication, research, watchdog services, and setting standards for herbalists and herbal products within the industry.

They're also helpful for finding herbal courses, mentorship, apprenticeships, workshops, community, and other education opportunities.

[#1: The American Herbalist Guild](#)

Crystal Rae, Herbalist,
Horticulturist & Nutrition Educator

crystalraeherbalist@proton.me

This organization was founded in 1989 by a group of dedicated international herbalists and is an excellent resource for herbal education.

They offer various herbalism training programs and educational resources. Plus, using their site, you can find:

- A directory of herbal schools
- A clinical practitioner
- Become a clinical herbalist through their membership programs
- Find apprenticeship programs
- View upcoming herbalism conferences
- Attend online herbal webinars
- Learn about legal and regulatory issues pertaining to herbalists
- And much more

#2: The American Botanical Council

The American Botanical Council, also known as ABC, was founded in 1988 to serve the public, researchers, educators, healthcare professionals, industry, and media.

This organization focuses more on research, monographs (official and detailed papers on herbs that are used as reference material by academia, healthcare, manufacturing, and regulation), publishing books, newsletters, and their peer-reviewed quarterly Journal: HerbClip; offering updates and commentary on events, media, and industry-related issues, botanical adulteration prevention, and sustainability versus herbalism training.

ABC information is available free and through various membership programs. This is an excellent resource to consider as part of your herbal education, especially if you plan on becoming a professional herbalist.

Herbalism Schools And Courses

There are many herbal education options available. The following are three examples of herbal schools that cater to all levels of aspiring herbalists.

[Science And Art Of Herbalism](#)

These are Rosemary Gladstar's herbal home study courses. Some are available online, and others, such as her original Science And Art Of Herbalism course, are in printed format.

[The Chestnut School of Herbalism](#)

The Chestnut School of Herbalism was founded by Juliet Blankespoor, a plant-lover with a degree in botany and over 30 years of experience teaching and writing about herbalism, medicine making, and organic herb cultivation.

Crystal Rae, Herbalist,
Horticulturist & Nutrition Educator

crystalraeherbalist@proton.me

Chestnut is a great choice for beginners interested in foraging, growing herbs, and making herbal elixirs.

[The School of Natural Healing](#)

Originally established in 1953, The School of Natural Healing has been educating home and community herbalists for decades.

Today, they offer various levels of home study herbalism courses from the Family herbalist program, intermediate classes, and a Master herbalist program.

This is a very small sampling of the herbal education courses available for budding herbalists. The organizations listed above also contain helpful directories.

Seed Resources for Growing Your Own Herbs

Many herbalists develop an interest in growing the herbs they use at home or professionally.

Here are some reputable suppliers of high-quality herb and botanical seeds.

- *Strictly Medicinals*
- *Johnny's Seeds*
- *Fedco Seeds*
- *Richters Seeds*

Where To Get Herbalism Supplies And Gear

www.mountainroseherbs.com/Official_Site

Best e-commerce site.

Some common gear for beginners may include:

- An herbal press (can make your own!)
- Candy thermometer for making lozenges
- Jars and containers
- Droppers
- Mortar and pestle
- A pressure cooker
- Alcohol or glycerine
- Funnels
- Raw materials

The seed retailers listed above may carry certain supplies, and stores that cater to homesteaders and DIYers, such as Frontier Co-op, Azure Standard, and Mountain Rose Herbs are good resources.

Crystal Rae, Herbalist,
Horticulturist & Nutrition Educator

crystalraeherbalist@proton.me