

Flower Essence Therapy with Temple Professor Charlene Briggs
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“Today was the plant lab,” Professor Briggs announced as she held out tiny bottles filled with salve in her office last week. The salve was made of chopped up beeswax and herb-infused oil. At first glance, the bright yellow hue and gooey-looking texture were not exactly appealing, but Professor Briggs claimed that salves can be extremely good for many different skin conditions. To students taking The Environment, making beeswax-salves may have seemed like just another day in the lab, but plant-based medicines are extraordinarily special to Professor Briggs. When she’s not helping students pass their Science and Technology requirement, she’s aiding clients through Flower Essence Therapy at her office in Downingtown.

You’ve probably never been to a doctor who prescribes Holly, Aspen, or Larch to cure what ails you. If they did, you would probably think they were crazy; however, Professor Briggs uses these plants with her clients on a regular basis. I should clarify that Professor Briggs is not a doctor. She’s a scientist and one of only 110 Bach flower practitioners in the country. Her job is to use the healing properties of plants to help clients solve emotional issues. “In my practice, I listen intently to the constellation of emotions that someone is experiencing,” said Briggs. Based on what her clients tell her, Professor Briggs has been trained to create a formula of flower essences that will best suit her client’s needs.

According to Briggs, “Flower Essence Therapy is the art and science of using plants to restore and maintain emotional vitality and balance.” To most people this probably seems a bit odd, and that’s a perfectly normal response considering the world we’ve all grown up in. When I hear the word weeds or wildflowers, I picture a homeowner spraying Roundup on a meticulously groomed suburban lawn, tackling their greatest landscaping enemy. “Our culture is not accustomed to eating our backyards,” said Briggs, whose students were surprised to learn that plants had such a plethora of medicinal properties.

Professor Briggs told her students about her work as a Flower Essence therapist because “[she] wanted to emphasize the connection between personal health and planetary health. The relationship that humans have with plants is very longstanding. We don’t just eat them ... Cultures all around the world still use plants for medicine.” The idea of plant-based medicine may seem unconventional, but it’s really a practice that is steeped in history. Humans have been utilizing plants for their medicinal qualities since the dawn of time.

Professor Briggs has been a practitioner of Flower Essence Therapy for 16 years, and though her only advertising has been through word-of-mouth, she’s accumulated an impressive client base. “I have clients from around the country. I’ve

also had clients from Argentina, Russia, China, and Germany. I can skype and work by phone, but its best in person. Clients come to see me for the education and for their formulas, and I encourage them to keep them on hand.” And her clients aren’t limited to humans. She’s also administered her essences to dogs, horses, cats, birds and even pet goats. Animals have emotions too.

Her clients find flower essences beneficial in many ways. First and foremost, it’s completely safe. You can’t overdose on it, or have an allergic reaction. It can be used safely by people of all ages, including infants, which is rare among most over-the-counter medications. A second benefit to the essences is how quickly clients see results. Professor Briggs was happy to report that “Usually within the first bottle people sense a shift, either they’re sleeping better or breathing more deeply or feeling more relaxed.”

When asked whether people can do Flower Essence Therapy on their own, Professor Briggs said, “Well, you can cut your own hair, but generally it looks better if someone who is a professional does it. So, I teach people how to use the essences when they come in. We talk about their specific conditions, but I also teach them which essences are good for different conditions.”

Some common problems that her clients have include: anxiety, depression, grief, relationship challenges and many different kinds of stress. Professor Briggs leaves the diagnosing up to clinical psychologists. She is trained to analyze the energetic pattern of a client’s emotional state and match that with the energetic patterns found in the flowers she uses. The whole process sounds quite scientific, especially if you have something simple like a headache. Can’t you just take an aspirin and forget about it? Professor Briggs explained that for some people this might work, but for others this only suppresses the symptoms and does not fix the real problem at the root of it all.

Professor Briggs’ students were quite receptive to the idea of using plant-based medicines, and many of them were interested in learning more about them. As college students, we are certainly familiar with stress. Whether you’re a freshmen who’s still adjusting to college life, or a senior preparing to take your final exams and enter the job market, we all have unique ways of surviving under pressure. However, if your coping method includes bingeing on caffeine or comfort food, Flower Essence Therapy would be a healthy alternative. If you’re still skeptical about whether plants can really have healing properties, the only way to know for sure is to try it. As Professor Briggs says, “The proof is in the pudding.”

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