

# Your Backyard Herbal Medicine Cabinet



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# Introduction

## Rediscovering Nature's Pharmacy

For millennia, human beings have turned to the natural world to find remedies for their ailments. Long before the advent of modern pharmaceuticals, our ancestors relied on the plants around them, discovering through trial and error which leaves, roots, and flowers could heal their wounds, alleviate their pains, and cure their diseases. Among these plants, some of the most potent and versatile medicines have come from an unexpected source: weeds. Weeds are often viewed with disdain, labeled as invasive, unwanted, and troublesome. Gardeners and farmers wage a constant battle against these resilient plants, seeing them as a threat to the crops and landscapes they cherish. However, what if we could shift our perspective and recognize the immense value that weeds bring to our lives? What if, instead of seeing them as adversaries, we viewed them as allies in the quest for health and well-being? This book invites you to embark on a journey into the world of weeds, where you will discover their hidden medicinal properties and learn how to harness their power for healing. From the common dandelion pushing through the cracks in city sidewalks to the red clover thriving in the untamed corners of our gardens, weeds offer a treasure trove of medicinal benefits that are often overlooked.

## The Science Behind Weeds as Medicine

Modern scientific research is beginning to catch up with traditional knowledge, uncovering the complex chemical compounds that make these plants effective in treating various health conditions. Weeds are often rich in vitamins, minerals, and bioactive compounds such as alkaloids, flavonoids, and tannins. These constituents provide a wide range of therapeutic effects, including anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, antimicrobial, and analgesic properties.

## A Sustainable Approach to Health

In an era of increasing environmental awareness, the use of weeds as medicine also promotes sustainability. These plants require no special cultivation, often thriving in poor soil and adverse conditions where other plants struggle. By embracing weeds, we reduce our reliance on industrial agriculture and the ecological footprint associated with pharmaceutical production. Harvesting weeds from our local environment connects us with nature and fosters a deeper appreciation for the ecosystems that sustain us. It encourages a holistic approach to health that considers the well-being of the planet as intrinsically linked to our own.

## Empowering Self-Care

One of the most empowering aspects of using weeds as medicine is the accessibility it provides. You do not need a degree in botany or a background in herbalism to start benefitting from these plants. With basic knowledge and a bit of practice, anyone can identify, harvest, and prepare simple remedies from weeds found in their own backyard or local community.

## Geography

I live in Kansas City, MO and the “weeds” that I discuss in this book are ones that I easily found in my own yard and on my daily walks. Depending on where you are located, not all of these plants may be available for you. I encourage you to check out the plants in your area and see what you can find. On the next page, you will find some resources for identifying plants so that you can continue to build your Backyard Medicine Cabinet.

## A Journey of Discovery

On the following pages, you will embark on a journey of discovery that redefines what it means to be a weed. You will learn to see the beauty and potential in these often-maligned plants and appreciate their role in our natural world. Most importantly, you will gain a new set of skills that empowers you to take charge of your health in a sustainable and meaningful way.

Welcome to the world of weeds as medicine. May this journey bring you healing, knowledge, and a renewed connection to the incredible power of nature.



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# A Word of Caution...

## Identifying Plants

There are many plants that look similar to each other. Please make sure that you are 100% sure you know what the plant is before you work with it. There are many great books that will help with plant identity. A couple of my favorites are:

- Peterson Field Guide to Medicinal Plants and Herbs, Steven Foster & James A. Duke
- Newcomb's Wildflower Guide, Lawrence Newcomb

I find the easiest way to identify plants when I'm out and about is a plant identifier app. My favorite is:

- Picture This 

This app allows me to take a photo of the plant and then it tells me what it is. It also gives me great information including care instructions, key facts about the plant, characteristics of the plant, and more. It will even diagnose the health of the plant.

So just be sure that you know what the plant is before you eat it, make tea out of it, tincture it, or anything else!

## Legal Disclaimer (for the lawyers)

The information in this book is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. It's for educational purposes only. Please understand that herbs ARE medicine and not all of them are safe for every single person every single time. Think about marijuana. I hope you wouldn't give your 3-year old brownies infused with pot (or maybe you would. I'm not here to judge). My point is that marijuana, like many other herbs, can be powerful stuff. The herbs that we are looking at in this little book are pretty safe for most people and most ages, but please pay attention to the cautions listed on each page. Your health is your responsibility. I'm just hoping to give you a little information to help you make some informed decisions about how to improve your health more naturally.

So go forth and eat some weeds and for goodness sake, stop spraying weed killer on them!! They are trying to make you healthier!

# Dandelion

**Botanical Name:** Taraxacum officinale

**Family:** Asteraceae

**Energetics:** cool, dry, tonifying

**Taste:** bitter, earthy, sweet, salty

**Parts Used:** root, leaves, flower

**Affinities:** liver and kidneys, urinary system

**Actions:** diuretic, digestive, cholagogue, choloretic, mild laxative (roots), nutritive, exhilarant (flowers)

**Preparations:** tea/ decoction, honey infusion, tincture, oil infusion, food

**Cautions:** Can be drying.

## Therapeutic Uses:

- Dandelion is a bitter herb that aids in digestion especially where the digestion is incomplete.
- Because of its drying and draining qualities, it can be useful in clearing out stuck junk in your liver and kidneys and helps clear out stones. This is also useful in cleaning and thinning the blood because it helps clean things out.
- Although it is a diuretic and will make you pee more, its high levels of vitamins and minerals will help you not get depleted. So basically it clears out the bad stuff and brings in the good stuff.



# Red Clover

**Botanical Name:** Trifolium pratense

**Family:** Fabaceae

**Energetics:** cool, dry, relaxant

**Taste:** bitter, vegetal, slightly sweet

**Parts Used:** flowers, leaves

**Affinities:** lymphatic, respiratory, and integumentary systems

**Actions:** nutritive, alterative, lymphatic, diuretic, antispasmodic, anti-inflammatory, galactagogue, phytoestrogenic (leaves)

**Preparations:** tea/ decoction, honey infusion, tincture, food, vinegar

**Cautions:** Be mindful that other types of clover are not a substitute for red clover. Due to its blood-thinning quality, it's best to avoid red clover if you are taking prescription blood thinners and also the week leading up to surgery. Consult a qualified herbalist for use during pregnancy.

## **Therapeutic Uses:**

- As a nutritive, a long infusion of red clover can help supplement a diet lacking in vitamins and minerals.
- Red clover is helpful for sinusitis and for red, weepy, irritated eyes due to seasonal allergies.
- It is a favorite among herbalists for menopause complaints including hot flashes and other hormone imbalance issues.
- Used internally, red clover is helpful for varicose veins, edema, hemorrhoids, etc.





# Plantain

**Botanical Name:** *Plantago major*, *rugelii*, *lanceolata*

**Family:** Plantaginaceae

**Energetics:** cool, moist, tonifying

**Taste:** slightly bitter, earthy

**Parts Used:** leaves, seeds

**Affinities:** digestive system; mucosal and integumentary tissues

**Actions:** vulnerary, demulcent, astringent, anti-microbial, anti-inflammatory, emollient, expectorant, hepatoprotective

**Preparations:** tea, honey infusion, tincture, oil infusion, vinegar, topical preparations, food

**Cautions:** The husked seeds are a bulking laxative, and should not be taken in the two hours before or after swallowing prescription drugs -the pharmaceutical constituents can get bound up in the mucilage and render the drug less effective

## Therapeutic Uses:

- As a vulnerary, plantain can help speed up the healing of wounds. This works both externally and internally meaning that it can also help heal wounds in the digestive tract aiding in issues such as leaky gut syndrome.
- Plantain is also useful for external scrapes, cuts, bites, stings, etc. It is an excellent herb to have in your herbal first aid kit.
- Plantain is very useful for breaking up biofilms which is what happens when bacteria join together.
- As an expectorant, plantain is useful for breaking up the mucous in dry, lung conditions. It is helpful for varicose veins, edema, hemorrhoids, etc.





# Violet

**Botanical Name:** Viola odorata

**Family:** Violaceae

**Energetics:** cool, moist, relaxant

**Taste:** sweet, vegetal

**Parts Used:** leaves and flowers

**Affinities:** lymphatic, respiratory, and cardiovascular systems

**Actions:** demulcent, emollient, lymphatic, antispasmodic, sedative, hypotensive, nervine, mild laxative

**Preparations:** tea/ decoction, honey infusion, tincture, oil infusion, topical preparations, vinegar

**Cautions:** Considered very safe for all ages.

## Therapeutic Uses:

- Violet is very useful as a sedative when you are feeling anxious or unsettled. It is a gentle nervine and can be taken as a sleep aid. A nice cup of violet leaf tea with some warm milk and honey will put you right out.
- For use in cardiovascular issues, violet is useful for palpitations, angina, etc.
- As a cool and moistening herb, violet will help get your lymphatic system moving without drying you out.
- Violet is excellent for dry, irritated skin issues like eczema and dry psoriasis. A nice violet tea bath is lovely for this if you have the time, but you can also use the cooled tea as a compress.
- Infusing the leaves and flowers into honey makes a nice syrup to be taken for constipation and is gentle enough to use for children.
- The leaves and flowers can be added to salads.



# Purslane

**Botanical Name:** Portulaca oleracea

**Family:** Portulacaceae

**Energetics:** cool, moist

**Taste:** sour

**Parts Used:** leaves, stems, flowers, seed capsules

**Affinities:** digestive system and integumentary tissues

**Actions:** analgesic, antimicrobial, antispasmodic, demulcent, diuretic, laxative, nutritive, vermifuge

**Preparations:** food, poultice, tea, compress

## Cautions:

- If you are pregnant or prone to kidney stones, avoid eating large amounts of raw purslane. It's fairly unlikely that you are going to eat a whole, huge plate of raw purslane, but be aware that there may be issues if you do.
- Be sure that what you are harvesting is purslane and not poisonous spurge. Spurge has thinner stems and is sometimes hairy. If you break the stem and a milky, white sap comes out, you have spurge not purslane.

## Therapeutic Uses:

- Purslane is a very nutritious plant and every part of it can be eaten. It can be thrown into soups, stews, stir fries, and even salads. I love to use purslane in my shepherd's pie because of its natural thickening abilities.
- It is extremely high in omega-3 fatty acids having 5 times as much as spinach. It is also high in vitamin A, vitamin C, vitamin E, potassium, magnesium, calcium, phosphorus, and iron.
- Purslane is great for hot, irritated skin conditions and is perfect for stings, bites, burns, and heat rashes.



# Broadening Your Herby Knowledge

Now that you are completely hooked on herbal medicine, it's time to expand your knowledge. The Curious Herb DIY Herbal Subscription Box is a fun and easy way to take back control of your own health and live in harmony with our beautiful planet. Each month you will receive a box containing recipes, instructions, and ingredients to make your own herbal remedies. Some boxes are more culinary and some are more medicinal, but rest assured that you will have so much fun learning about herbs from all over the world and those right in your backyard. From ashwagandha to yarrow, learn about Mother Nature's medicine from the comfort of your own home.

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