

# CONTEMPLATIVE PLANT STUDY & PRACTICAL HERBAL MEDICINE

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Wordsworth said “let Nature be your teacher” and in a recent article by Walter Kacera in the Canadian Journal of Herbalism, we are asked how many hours or days each week you spend with your teacher? Plant study is a way of recharging our senses by communion with Nature as much as possible. Walter Kacera suggests to “look at our personal connection with plants and their healing power”. He says we need to re-awaken our senses to experience the qualities of plants. As we are constantly changing so we need to revise our perception of our connection with plants.

**AIMS OF THE PLANT STUDY PROCESS:** To put people back amongst herbs, by re-introducing Goethe’s model of botany; exploring different formulations of commonly used herbs, and the use of personal tasting and assessment of herbs to establish the “energetic” level of activity.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES OF THE PLANT STUDY:

The participant will be able to:

1. Analyse common herbal plants according to family and habitat, using the Goethean approach to botany.
2. Interpret the natural phenomena encountered when closely observing different plants and samples using the naked eye, hand-lens and other tools available.
3. Explore the significance of different growth characteristics in leaf, flower, inflorescences, fruits, underground structures and barks of different plants.
4. Encounter the range of different chemicals in herbal remedies and be able to identify these in different pharmaceutical preparations by taste, and experiment with new pharmacy preparations.
5. Complete a mini research project based on a plant identified and selected during the study.

## SUBJECT AREA TO ENCOUNTER:

1. Introduction to Goethe’s botany: consideration of ‘the Archetypal plant’ and the plant as a living, changing being.
2. Metamorphosis in the leaf realm – expansive phase followed by contractile phase before flowering. The 4 principle formative principles: linear elongation, planar spreading, indentation and shorting or raying.
3. Leaf, flower and fruit as related stages in plant development – transformation of the leaf organ into the flower and further to fruit and seed formation, with an associated second expansion of the petal, contraction of stamens and pistils and a third expansion in fruit and contraction as seed.
4. Demonstrating the above making visual leaf sequences by lining up leaves from a plant according to the order they appear on the stem.
5. Exploring differences and similarities of the above by looking at leaf sequences of the same species growing in different environments.
6. The pictorial expression of the plant through the flower and the higher formative principle affecting the leaf organs. The flower as the clearest expression of the character of a species or a family i.e. the ‘gesture’ of the plant.
7. Looking at common themes specific to different plant families: number association with respect to number of petals, compound leaf or number of leaves to complete a 360° spiral rotation around the stem e.g. 5 in Rose family.
8. Observing processes with respect to movement looking at the different levels: root, stem. Leaf. Flower. Fruit and Seed. Comparison to human morphology.
9. Seven stage process to interpret the gesture of a plant: exact sensory perception exact sensorial imagination, inspiration, intuition, imprinting, growing and reproduction.
10. Using above process for plant study.

11. Exploring a new approach to pharmacology using taste to assess energetic and physical qualities.
12. Using different artistic media as expression of plant qualities e.g. drawing, painting, drama, sculpture, voice etc.
13. Use of range of physical media for making pharmacy preparations e.g. water, alcohol, glycerine, cream, oil, ointment, poultice, liniment, compress etc.
14. Reviewing and making more old fashioned, less well known preparations, to include chemical accountability of variations in plant preparations.
15. Field walks of local area.

### **TEACHING STRATEGIES:**

Although the emphasis of the plant study will be practical based, there will be a mixture of structured small group work and discussion. Set time will be allowed during the study for individual work.

### **RECOMMENDED READING:**

Bochenmuhl, J, 1992, Awakening to Landscape, The Natural Science Section, Dornach  
 Bochenmuhl, J, 1981, In Partnership with Nature, Biodynamic Literature  
 Buhner, S. 2004, The Secret Teachings of Plants, Bear & Co. US  
 Colquhoun, M & Ewald, A, 1996, New Eyes For Plants, Hawthorn Press  
 Cowan, Eliot, 1995, Plant Spirit Medicine, Swan Raven & Co.  
 Goethe, J. W. Von, 1989, Goethe's Botanical Writings, Ox Bow Press  
 Grohman, G, 1989, The Plant Volume I, Biodynamic Literature  
 Grohman, G, 1989, The Plant Volume II, Biodynamic Literature  
 Hedley, C. & Shaw, N. 1996, Herbal Remedies, Parragon  
 Pelikan, W, 1988, Healing Plants, Mercury Press  
 Steiner, R, 1988, Goethean Science, Mercury Press  
 Steiner, R, 2000, Nature's Open Secret, Introductions to Goethe's Scientific Writings, Anthroposophic Press

### **GENERAL READING:**

Bortoft, H, 1996, The Wholeness of Nature, Goethe's Way of Science, Floris Books  
 Chiej, R. 1984, The Macdonald Encyclopaedia of Medicinal Herbs, Macdonald Orbis  
 Eckerman, J. P. 1998, Converstation of Goethe, DeCapo Press  
 Fukuoka, M. 1997, The Natural Way of Farming, Bookventure, India  
 Fukuoka, M. 1992, The One Straw Revolution, Other India Press  
 Goodrick-Clarke, N. 1999, Paracelsus: Essential Readings, North Atlantic Books  
 Junius, M. 1985, Practical Handbook of Plant Alchemy – how to prepare medicinal essences, tinctures & elixirs, Inner Traditions International Ltd  
 Miller, R.A., 1983, The Magical and Ritual Uses of Herbs, Destiny Books  
 Naydler, Jeremy, 1996, Goethe on Science, Floris Books  
 Seamon, D & Zajonc, A, 1998, Goethe's Way of Science, State University of New York Press  
 Steiner, R, 1985, Goethe's World View, Mercury Press  
 Tomkins & Bird. The Secret Life of Plants, Penguin.  
 Vickery, R, 1995, Oxford Dictionary of Plant Lore, Oxford University Press

### **BOTANY:**

Barker, J. 2001, The Medicinal Flora of Britain and Northwestern Europe, Winter Press  
 Beckett, E. 1993, Illustrated Flora of Mallorca, Editorial Moll, Mallorca  
 Bonner, A. 2004, Plants of the Balearic Islands, Editorial Moll, Mallorca  
 Foster S & Duke JA 1990, A Field Guide to Medicinal Plants, Houghton Mifflin  
 Podlech D 2000, Herbs and Healing Plants of Britain and Europe, Harper Collins  
 Streeter D. 1998, Wild Flowers of the British Isles, Midsummer Books

### **PHARMACOGNOSY:**

Bruneton J 1999, Pharmacognosy, Intercept  
 Bruneton M, 1995 Pharmacognosy & Phytochemistry of Medicinal Plants, Lavoisier  
 Evans W C & Trease G E 1989, Pharmacognosy, Bailliere Tindall, Oxford