

Bio-Regional Healing

by Peeka Trenkle

Burdock in flower



“Your meadows and pastures shall be your pharmacies.”

- Paracelsus, 16th century herbalist

Herbal medicine is not a new thing. It has been in use for thousands of years and each culture has its own unique system of healing based on the herbs of its bio-region. The unique needs of a region are always met by what naturally grows there. Here in the Northeast, if we lived 100 years ago and had to gather our own water, we might easily run the risk of ingesting bacteria and amoebas that thrive in shallow bodies of water. But along every riverbank, on the shores of every lake and in low-lying wetlands, certain plants grow which have an astringent, tonifying effect on the bowel and can help in the treatment of diarrhea. These plants grow spontaneously without being planted. They simply exist in order to meet the medicinal and nutritional needs of the region.

Over the last few generations we have steadily lost our ability to use herbs for nourishment and healing and have forgotten how to use local flora to treat acute illness. It is common, when faced with serious conditions, to believe that herbs are quaint but impotent and that pharmaceutical drugs are the only effective treatment for illness. All of the work of healing has been relegated to the ‘experts’ in both mainstream and alternative fields. But the real expert is Nature herself, and one only has to begin to look and listen closely in order to begin to understand the immense beauty and intelligence of our environment and the plants that live here with us.

Plants grow not only for us, but also in order to heal the planet. One plant that most suburban dwellers love to hate is the dandelion which proliferates in areas that are polluted with toxic petrochemicals and heavy metals. One of the purposes of the tap root of the dandelion is to pull toxins out of the soil and restore it to health, the

same way dandelion-root tea can help to detoxify our livers. Likewise burdock, another common weed, sends down a long taproot in areas like construction sites in which the topsoil has been disturbed or depleted of nutrients. It draws nutrients from deep under the surface soil and brings them up into the large green leaves. At the end of the growing season, these leaves die back down and release their minerals into the topsoil.

No one plants the seeds for this to happen; it is an example of the self-healing intelligence of the earth - and we can learn a great deal about our own healing by watching what happens naturally in our local areas.

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