

**The Power of Common Plants:
Medicine is Everywhere**
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Plant life is beaming around us abundantly, blooming from cracks in sidewalks and thriving in the grimmest city scapes. We have been socialized to recognize these tenacious plants as “weeds” and assume they should be disregarded or destroyed due to their abundance and often humble appearance. Yet, all around us there is a secret world of medicine bursting through concrete and garbage just begging to be noticed! What medicine do these common plants offer us? Medicine is more than what we ingest in a tea or tincture; it is the vibrational essence and wise intelligence of these green beings. Though one would never want to ingest dandelion root from a dingy city street, noticing and engaging with the presence of the plant is a healing experience. As we walk together through the crowded Somerville streets, I invite you refine your attention towards the subtle presence of these powerfully abundant plants.

When living in a city full of pollution and pesticides, it’s very important to consider how we source and engage with the plants around us. The sad fact is, it would not be healthy for us to harvest plants from the side of Highland Ave. and make them into a tea. We would be ingesting car exhaust, lawn pesticides and who knows what else? This is why it is important for the city dweller to shift their idea around what it means to work with plants. They communicate with our bodies and psyches in far reaching ways beyond ingestion.

How can you safely engage with plants in a city setting:

Meditation: People and plants have been communicating for a long as they’ve been on Earth together. Sometimes sitting with a plant can be one of the best medicines of all. The plant can show us things we may not have noticed because we’re distracted by our phones and busy schedules. Slowing down and quieting the mind enough to listen to plants connects us to the Earth in ways we are often devoid of in a city.

Flower Essences: These subtle vibrational preparations of plants can aid in meditation and enrich our lives emotionally and spiritually. Since the mind and body are inextricably connected, using the gentle medicine of flower essences can positively impact our bodies without needing to use much plant material at all. If making a flower essence from a potentially contaminated city plant, it’s best to only use them internally in a spray with essential oils instead of taking them internally.

How to Make a Flower Essence:

- *Find some flowers of your choice*
- *Fill a glass bowl or jar with pure spring or well water*
- *Remove them gently with tweezers or scissors, making sure your hands do not touch them*
- *Cover the entire top of the water with flowers*
- *Allow the sun to shine upon this preparation for at least an hour, preferably two*
- *Remove the flowers and preserve the water with about 1/3 brandy*
- *Now you have a “mother essence”. Use a few drops of this in a spray bottle with pure water, a bit of grain alcohol to preserve and your favorite essential oils*
- *If making flower essence from a clean source, this essence can be taken internally in a few drops*

Some Common Plant Allies

Dandelion (*Taraxicum Officinale*): An unmistakable symbol to resiliency and survival.

Dandelion is unstoppable and spreads prolifically. The bright yellow flower shines as a beacon of hope amidst the ills of the city. If dandelion can beam from concrete, perhaps we can too. Medicinally, dandelion root is a wonderful hormone balancer as well as a digestive aid. The bitter taste stimulates digestion and assimilation. The roots are most beneficial to the hormones, liver and is believed to regulate blood sugar. Roots contain inulin, an indigestible beneficial food for healthy gut flora. The leaves are diuretic while balancing and retaining electrolytes. Leaves are also nutritive and a lovely spring food!

Plantain (*Plantago Major and Lanceolata*): Like dandelion, this is a very prolific plant that grows along hard packed soils. This is why both species are often called the “path plant”. This is fortunate because Plantain can provide much needed first aid to us along paths. The leaf can be chewed into a poultice and applied directly to insect bites and stings. It is not only soothing, but also draw out poison. When harvested in a clean setting, plantain can be used in tea to heal and draw toxins out of the GI tract and can be used externally in a similar way in an infused oil. I have had success using it as a poultice for abscessed cysts and it’s also referenced for abscessed teeth. It physically draws out toxins and poisons. Perhaps this is why it’s so abundant in cities. Could the plant be telling us it’s time to clean up our air and soils?

Burdock (*Arctium Lappa*): A wonderful plant for food and medicine. The root can be eaten in stir fries as often prepared in Japanese cuisine (gobo). Like dandelion, burdock root contains inulin and is beneficial for supporting digestion. Though not as bitter as dandelion, it stimulates bile and has a beneficial effect on the liver, therefore balancing hormones. It is used as an alternative, or “blood purifier”. Makes a wonderful spring tonic.

Yellow Dock (*Rumex Crispus*) This is also known as “Curly Dock”. There are several varieties of dock that grow around that have similar medicinal properties but tend to vary in their bitterness. I find the root medicine can be used interchangeably. The yellow in the root indicates it’s beneficial liver properties. It stimulates bile and supports the gallbladder as well. Very beneficial in the spring to speed up a sluggish winter digestion. Assists in the breakdown of fats. Leaves are an early spring bitter food.

Rose (*Rosa spp*) The medicine of rose is in the beauty and smell. Roses are used in all matters of the heart, be it grief or romantic love. Petals and hips can be dried and used for tea. The rose hips are nutritive and high in vitamin C. Rose petals are gently astringent and cooling so they’re great to add to iced teas in the summer!

Chickweed (*Stellaria Media*) Cooling and soothing, also gently moving to the lymphatic system. Excellent spring food to get the system going. Used externally, chickweed can be soothing for eczema and other skin ailments.

Cleavers (*Gallium Aparine*) Another great herb to gently stimulate the lymph. The plant practically begging us to pay attention to it with its velcro nature and joyful whorled leaves.

What other plants have you discovered along this walk?

Meditation notes: