**The Power of Plants Class**

by A.C. Fisher Aldag

**Topics**: Identifying, harvesting, preserving, preparing, using for purposes – healing, magic; a bit about growing plants.

**Identifying**: Good field guide with color pictures. Classes – nature center. Online. Learn *Latin Names* to prevent mishaps, as well as learning common or magickal names.

**Harvesting**: *Wild*: Caveats – make sure not endangered, get permission, no pesticides. Leave some plants / flowers to propagate. If harvesting from your *garden* – not required; from a *store* – ethically, magickal conditions. **Bane** plants – use gloves, do not ingest

 **Purpose** for magick – Spell or ritual, Healing, summoning, banishing, etc. Determines when to harvest – stronger at certain times. Sun sign / holiday; Moon sign – almanacs. Zodiac signs – fertile or barren, wet or dry. Legend not pick between Samhain/ Nos Calan Gaeaf and Imbolc /Calan Fair. In morning / early afternoon when juices have risen to leaves.

 What **part of the plant** do you need? Branch, stem, leaf, bud, root, fruit.

 Harvest / choose with **intent**, focusing on your purpose. – Or simply “to help in my arte”.

 **Thank** plant ally and woodland spirits, leave offering: song, poem, seashell, pennies, pretty stones, fertilizer.

**Use**: Fresh plants are best for immediate use – leaves & stems contain most oils when fresh. Wash first. Eat, steep in tea /infusion, boil root in decoction. Teas can last in refrigerator for a couple days to a week. Teas can be water-bath canned and may last a year or so – should still be refrigerated. Put herbs into (cold) tincture or (hot) ointment, let steep for a day or so. Tinctures and ointments can last a year or so if properly sealed.

**Preserving**: Fresh plants, if not used right away, need to be **dried** or made into an ointment or tincture ASAP. This is so they do not rot. Some funguses and mold can be bad for humans. Dried herbs can last for a year or two if stored away from heat, light, moisture.

First wash the plant, pat dry, then hang or dry on flat surface. *Techniques*: hang from hooks, cover with paper bags, muslin cloth, lie flat on muslin or paper towels. Air flow – turn over if lying flat. Should take 2-3 days for stems and leaves, a week or so for roots and fruits. Yes, food driers are OK.

**Preparing**: Remove dried leaves from stems. Leaves can be crushed in mortar & pestle to increase surface area for contact w/ hot water. Chop stems and roots. Stems and roots can be ground into a powder, but these are not so good for teas. Grind clockwise to invoke, counter-clockwise to banish. Store in glass jars or ceramic pots that seal. (plastic bags are OK, not great). The lids can be sealed with hot wax. **Label** everything clearly w/ date. Store in dark cool dry location, such as inside a cupboard.

**USE:**

**Caveats**: Do a “patch test” on your wrist to prevent allergic reactions. Do not ingest bane plants. Use entheogens with caution. Read side effects in a good herbal. Strain out leaves, stems, and particles from certain plants with “hairy” leaves or those that might cause nausea if ingested.

**Tea**: Thin leaves can be infused in a tea ball or tea bag (muslin cloth) with boiling water poured over it, left to steep for a few minutes. Thicker stems and roots should be boiled /decocted in liquid. The mixture of plant and water is then sipped as a beverage. Examples: Mint, Lemon Grass, Red Raspberry leaf, Stinging Nettle (strain out ALL plant parts), Chai, Echinacea. Note: Microwave not recommended.

 **Wash**: Like a tea, only used topically. All the plant matter is strained from the liquid. Example: Cleary Sage and Eyebright eye wash. Tansy, Pennyroyal, and Geranium spray to repel insects.

**Powder**: Can be sprinkled in food, added to an ointment, applied as a poultice, dissolved in hot water. Examples: Burdock root, Yellow Dock root, Goldenseal root. Check to make sure if it is edible!

**Poultice**: Fresh plant matter is crushed and applied directly to a wound or sore place, OR crushed leaves and stems are added to hot water, allowed to cool, and applied to skin on a clean cloth. Examples: Plantain for wounds, Yarrow for bleeding, Horsemint for arthritis.

**Steam**: Inhaling the steam of a boiling plant. Examples: Eucalyptus for colds, Motherwort in a Yoni steam which is applied to the nether regions.

**Pillow** or **Sachet**: Ground leaves are sewn into a cloth for magickal purposes. Example: A Mugwort dream pillow, Adder’s Tongue carried in a mojo bag /sachet for being eloquent at a job interview, Lavender to scent the clothes and impart calming properties.

**Ointment**: An herbal and fixative mixture for applying topically. For example: Vick’s Vapo Rub, sports cream, lip balm. The herbs are usually mixed into the heated & dissolved fixative, such as vegetable shortening or cocoa butter, then the plant matter is strained out with cheesecloth or muslin fabric. For stopping bleeding and healing /preventing infection, Yarrow leaf, Plantain leaf, and Goldenseal leaf can be mixed with cocoa butter and applied to a wound. Another example is the famous witches’ “flying ointment” made with entheogenic plants.

**Tincture**: An herb mixed into alcohol and left to steep for several days. The plant matter is then strained out. Example, Valerian for soothing nerves and restful sleep.

**Smoke**: Herbs are burned on a charcoal patty and inhaled, or in a bowl for smoking. Examples: Tobacco, Marijuana, Blue Cohosh, Coltsfoot for colds. Enhazeling or Sage – burning the plant matter for banishing entities, not inhaled.

 **Oils** & **Lotions:** Plant material is added to an oily or creamy base, used topically, either to smooth dry skin or for magickal anointing. Examples: Sandalwood oil for intelligence and communication, Rose oil to attract love, Frankincense and Myrrh for summoning holy beings.

 **Potions:** Plant materials mixed together with other ingredients, cooked in a cauldron, NOT ingested or applied to the body. These are used for sympathetic magick to attract or repel a certain condition. For example, a potion is made to summon ancestors using Hawthorn berries, Mullein leaves, Datura fruits, and Cinquefoil leaves.

**Herb Simple**: A single plant, used for a magickal or curative purpose, cooked or just carried. Examples: Garlic bulb to repel negative energies, a Daffodil flower for joy, Thyme carried in the pocket for success.

**Entheogens**: Used to alter the state of consciousness, usually through smoke or topical ointments. Use extreme caution.

**Bane** plants / poisons: Used to kill vermin and sometimes as an entheogen. Use extreme caution. These can also be used to control harmful entities – again, with extreme caution.

**Abortifacients**: Can end a pregnancy. Use with extreme caution. Example: Mugwort.

**Tools & Supplies** for using plants in magick:

**Gathering / Harvesting**: Basket or other containers, keep plants separate. Scissors or knife. A bronze knife, athame or bauline /boleen is often used for cutting magickal plants that would lose their power from touching iron. Many Wiccans and Traditional Witches use a white-handled knife. Trowel for digging roots. Strainer or colander. Source of washing water, preferably flowing.

**Drying**: Paper towel or muslin fabric, bread ties or string, hooks for hanging, small paper bags to cover the seedheads.

**Preparing**: Pure water. Mortar and pestle for grinding. Wooden spoons. Measuring cups and measuring spoons. Enamel or coated pot(s). Cauldron – iron for potions only. Strainers, preferably not iron, muslin fabric for straining. Jars and lids. Ceramic pots with lids. Wax for sealing jars or pots. Oils; shortening, fat, or cocoa butter for making ointments; pure alcohol such as 100-proof vodka or everclear for making tinctures. Canning supplies.

**Books**:

*Master Book of Herbalism*, Paul Beyerl – also the *Compendium of Herbal Magick*

*Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs* – Scott Cunningham (Llewellyn) also *Magical Herbalism*

*The Herbal Alchemist’s Handbook* – Karen Harrison

*Common Magick* – A.C. Fisher Aldag, also “The Power of Plants” in the *2023 Witches’ Companion*, coming from Llewellyn in Winter, 2022

Advanced: *Culpepper’s Complete Herbal* – Nicholas Culpepper

Baneful herbs – Bane Folk online

Get some good field guides with colored photos and Latin names!!!

**Glossary**

Here are some **terms** for preparing plants for use, with the disclaimer that some folks might define these words differently, or call certain things by other names.

**Allies:** Plants considered helpful to humans.

**Bane**: Plants that can be toxic to mammals, including humans – poisonous, or entheogenic.

**Bark**: The tough outer coating of a tree or shrub. It must be peeled from the pant, and chopped or ground in a mortar and pestle for use.

 **Brew**: One or more plant ingredients cooked in a liquid to extract the essences of the plant. Also called a decoction or elixir.

 **Boiling**: Heating water to 212 degrees Fahrenheit/ 100 degrees Celsius. Boiling water is either poured over the thinner portions of the plant and steeped (an infusion), or the thicker parts are placed into water that is brought to a boil (a decoction or brew).

**Concoction**: A mixture of plant-based ingredients, added to a liquid, usually cooked.

**Decoction**: One or more plant ingredients cooked in a liquid to extract the essences of the plant. Stems and roots are usually boiled in a liquid to extract their juices into the liquid.

**Dream Pillow:** Plants that are said to have hypnotic qualities, or be good for astral travel, are sewn into cloth and placed beneath a sleeper’s head.

**Drying**: Removing the moisture from herbs to preserve them and prevent mold from growing. The leaves are often rehydrated in a tea, added to foods, or burned as incense.

**Elixir:** See Brew or Decoction.

**Entheogen**: Plants that can alter a person’s state of consciousness.

**Fresh**: Recently picked, not dried or preserved. Ideal for use, as the plant’s natural oils and essences are the most potent in the freshest state.

**Herb simple**: One plant, alone, fresh or dried.

**Incense**: A mixture of plants and resins, which is burned for its pleasant smell and ability to attract or repel specific conditions or entities. Incense can also be dried plants which are burned on a charcoal patty.

**Infusion:** One or more plants added to boiling water to extract their juices. Also called tea.

**Leaves**: The green growing part of the plant, which contain essential oils. These are often dried, then rehydrated in water (think tea), added to foods, or placed within a container for a spell. The leaves interact with sunlight, and thus have a brighter, “lit” magickal aspect. It is easiest to extract the essences from the thinner leaves, as they don’t need as much grinding as other, thicker parts of a plant. Be aware that boiling leaves in water can sometimes degrade them – placing them in hot water and steeping them for a brief period often works better.

 **Oil**: One or more plant ingredients fixed in an oily base, often with the solid parts strained out. Usually not ingested, frequently used for anointing. Also includes lotions, which can be applied topically. The words “essential oil’ are also used to describe the natural juice or sap of the plant itself.

 **Ointment**: One or more plant ingredients fixed in a semi-solid, such as a gel, lard or animal fat, vegetable shortening, or cocoa butter. Usually applied topically. Also called a salve.

**Potion**: A mixture of plants in a liquid, cooked or not, which is *not* to be ingested. The properties of the plants attract or interact with certain conditions, such as astrological signs, or spiritual beings. A potion can be disposed of after a spell or ceremony.

**Poultice**: One or more herbs, fresh or powdered, applied externally, topically to a wound or sore part of the body.

**Powder:** Parts of a plant have been ground into a fine powder, usually in a mortar and pestle.

**Rehydrate**: To put water back into a dried plant, to help release its natural oils, by brewing, boiling, or steeping.

**Resin**: The sap or “blood” of the plant, dried or concentrated.

**Root**: The underground part of the plant, which takes nourishment from the soil. These have a darker, more chthonic aspect than the leaves. It is more difficult to extract the essences of a plant from a root, as it might require grinding or boiling.

**Sachet**: Dried herbs wrapped or sewn into a cloth bag. Sachets can be used to scent clothing, kept under a pillow to affect dreams, hung in a window to attract or repel certain conditions or entities, or used as an offering.

**Smudge or Smoke-cleanse**: Burning plants for the purpose of removing unwanted conditions or beings.

**Seeds**: The reproductive part of the plant. Sometimes they have their own properties, different from the other portions of the herb, often a more fertile aspect than the nourishing roots or workmanlike leaves. Seeds might require shelling and grinding to crack them open to release their essences.

**Steep**: To let plant materials sit for a time in a liquid.

**Stems**: The thick, woody part of the plant. While they have a bright nature, interacting as they do with sun and wind, they require more grinding than leaves, and sometimes boiling to extract their essence.

**Tincture**: One or more plants steeped in alcohol; 100-proof vodka works well.

 **Tisane**: A tea, usually one or more plant ingredients steeped in hot water or the water is poured over a strainer containing the leaves. Different than a decoction in that the herb is not actually cooked on a stovetop. Also called an infusion.

 **Topically**: On the skin, not ingested.

 **Wash**: One or more plants, in a liquid, used topically. Often the plants are steeped or brewed, then strained out.