

WILD APOTHECARY

Reclaiming Plant Medicine for All

Amaia Dadachanji

with Claudia Manchanda

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With Claudia Manchanda

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Amaia

“For all the baby, growing, and elder herbalists, healers, witches, and folk searching for meaning, understanding, and connection. And, especially, for anyone who didn’t fit in, who was a little bit different, who felt on the edges or outside as I did as a light brown girl growing up in a community that didn’t see her or her radiating light . . . this book is for you.

I hope this book inspires you to connect with the plants around you, to find a greater sense of yourself within landscape, flora and fauna, elements and spirit. I hope this book encourages you to tend yourself and know your worth.

And I would like to send all my love to my babies, my fire wren and my tiger rose. You have been patient watching Mama write and draw. May this work guide you when you need guidance and grow as you do so you find love, connection, resilience, fun, friends, skills, and plant allies. You know the fairies are there.

Thank you to all you who are already connecting people, plants, communities, elements, and land. To all the herbalists, activists, Land carers, and Indigenous folk who have spread their teachings, shared and cared.”



Amaia is a practising herbalist at the Wild Apothecary near Stroud, Gloucestershire. She sees patients, teaches herbalism, crafts botanicals, draws, and writes about herbalism and a wilder life. She is also an eternal student of ceremony, grief tending, and land practices. Her work Land Is She is centred in connecting women with land and healing through rewilding, intuiting, and tending through folk and flora kinship.



& ABOUT

Claudia

“This is dedicated to the memory of Belly Mujinga, (1970-2020) who was not protected. RIP”

Claudia Manchanda is a grandmother, radical herbalist, bioscientist, and lecturer who has a background in social justice activism, community cooking projects and cafes, and campaigns against deaths in custody. She lives in London doing patient advocacy, organising radical herb walks, and teaching integrated cancer care.





A WILD WELCOME

“What is the heart? A flower opening.”

Rumi



A *Begonia fusca* leaf, studied to enjoy the texture and green of the leaf.
Connecting with this little beauty.

Wild | \ 'wī(-ə)ld \

Living in a state of nature and not ordinarily tame or domesticated

Growing or produced without human aid or care

Related to or resembling a corresponding cultivated or domesticated organism

Not inhabited or cultivated

Not amenable to human habitation or cultivation

Going beyond normal or conventional

Indicative of strong passion, desire, or emotion

Characteristic of, appropriate to, or expressive of wilderness, wildlife, or a simple or uncivilized society

Apothecary | \ ə-'pā-thə-ker-ē \

A person who prepared and sold medicines and drugs

“The growing presence of everyday medical practitioners, like apothecaries and druggists, made magic obsolete”

Apothecarius, from Latin apotheca, from Greek apothēkē (“storehouse”)



wild apothecary . . . have you dreamed of one? I am guessing you have picked up this book because you are attracted to learning more about plant medicine and the relationship between plants and people.

There was a sudden moment in my life when I realised I couldn't do anything else but walk that path. Read on to find out more about wild medicine, people, and connection.

An apothecary has two meanings – it is she, they, or he who knows plants and their medicines, or it is a place in which plant medicines are kept. You could be or have either.

You only need the tiniest apothecary to be an apothecary. You may have peppermint tea in your cupboard or marigold cream in your bathroom. You may well already have an apothecary at home and are looking to expand it.

In these modern times we need to look to the plants to learn more about their uses and our relationship with them and the environment in which they grow.

To be a wild apothecary is a dream of mine, to have a wild apothecary is another.

When I was but a child I would listen. Lie down and listen.

Hear the rustle of the grasses that lazily shimmered in the late afternoon
sunshine.

My squinty eyes making out shapes of oak and ash, beech and birch.

Slashes of red poppy and yellow hawkweed with splashes of green all around.

I did not know the names of those plants. But.

I didn't need to then. I was happy to listen and look and just be in nature. A
melancholic wistful dreamy child.

I did know some names though.

There was one I knew well. One I had fallen into many times, gently brushed
past many times and avoided many times if I wasn't wearing jeans.

One that stung.

Yes, I knew stinging nettles. But not as well as I thought. That knowledge
came later, and more is still to come.

I knew daisies and dandelions.

I made daisy chains and learned how to tell the time with dandelion seeds
(though perhaps not that well).

I knew oak trees had acorns and I could eat bramble berries.

I knew that laurel cherries were poisonous but that I could climb to the top of
the trees and they would hold me.

I knew that crab apples were worth collecting but were not for eating raw.

I knew sycamore keys would act as helicopters and I could eat the beech nuts
on the way home from school.





I knew I could suck the white flowers of white deadnettle (though they were just honeydew flowers to me) and taste sweet nectar.

And I wished. I wished, really wished, I would have found little nature spirits at the bottom of those trees and hedges. I wished for the little robins and black crows to come and talk to me. I wished for the foxes to not hide and the hedgehogs to manifest. I contented myself with hedgerow searching. Not sure what for, but searching all the same.

Little hedge witches – children, as a witch to me is genderless, anyone connected to their natural world who sees the magic – are looking under hawthorn hedges and behind foxgloves as we speak, whether for fairies or caterpillars or for what I am not sure, but they are.

I was a child, you were a child, and it is so telling that kids have a natural curious bond with nature – with the plants and trees that surround us. They look to play.

Do you?

Do you remember your first plant connection?

Do you remember the first time you touched a flower, leaf or root?

Do you remember your first fruit, maybe eating a scrumped apple, a wild blackberry or picking a strawberry from the garden or allotment, or cheekily from a local urban farm (I was six years old!)

Or perhaps you remember sitting under a tree, later wondering about how that apple fell directly on Newton's head or hoping the big cones of a pine weren't going to fall on yours.

Perhaps you remember touching objects of wood in your home, or fashioning swords and bows out of sticks.

My little tiger rose finding her magic under the hedgerow. She asks if magic is real and if her spells will work and I tell her of a different kind of magic, one that is nestled right there under that hedge.

Perhaps you remember the incredible scents of bluebells, lilac, or roses.

Maybe you remember the realisation that cucumbers are plants and pineapples grow on top of strange looking shrubs (check them out if you've not seen one!)

If you lived outside the UK, where I grew up, I wonder what the smells of your landscape were, what the colours and feelings were, are. How the different fruits and flowers affected you as a child and how you connected with plants.

I dreamt of finding ways of connecting our wilds with our health. Of walking in the elements and finding medicine to ease our suffering.

I dreamt of slowly becoming more and more knowledgeable about plants and people and the relations we bear or have lost.

I wandered alone trying to listen and be heard.

Sometimes the wind would whisper, sometimes an oak would shiver, sometimes I would find my feet had led me to a tiny plant ally and I would try to learn about that ally as best I could. But . . . often I was consumed in my thoughts of everyday life and they were so loud that listening properly was too difficult.

As I carried on trying to fathom this relationship with nature, *my* relationship with nature, people would sometimes mock me, telling me my connection to nature was false, insincere, or pathetic. Their views perplexed me and made me wonder why and how we, as humans, hurt each other.

Despite their views of me and their hard to hear words, I couldn't help but carry on, and little by little tune into the great wild web of plants and trees and their medicines. Building my own wild apothecary and my own understanding of my landscape.

As I learned to hear and heed my own being, so I learned that my touch upon an apple tree or my stillness by an ash tree are mine to experience and no one else's.

That my own connection cannot be quantified or philosophised, it simply is. It morphs and grows and ebbs and flows but it is what sustains me.

I've grown into a herbalist and through me others will learn, perhaps you will, that they too have deep, superficial, loud, quiet, subtle, beautiful, difficult relations with nature and plants. That they, you, can relate and learn and change and then learn some more. That no one else's experience can dull your own – that we can share and learn and move but we each have our own valid connection.

A WILD WELCOME

In this book I would love for you to find the courage to be your own apothecary, or baby herbalist, or indeed find the time or inclination to connect with nature in whatever way you can.

So thank you for picking up this book – I hope you find words that help you become a wild ally of the plants, or that this book leads you to making your own apothecary. I have travelled down this road and it is a beautiful one that is so vast we can never stop learning.

As I grew further into my herbalist self, I realised what an incredible journey this is. Of course, it doesn't have to be a huge journey for all folks – it may be simply that you would like to make some home remedies for yourself or kith and kin and that would be amazing. It is really important to me that we find wisdom and connection in the smallest of ways as well as in culture-changing systemic ways.

I wanted this book to also illustrate some of the challenges we, myself definitely included, need to rise up to within the world of herbalism. These include a sense of community, dismantling of the modern medicine paradigm and respect for and reconsideration of traditional medicines, the language used in botany and herbalism, cultural appropriation and learning from different cultures, racism and anti-racism, gender and sexual discrimination, and sovereignty. It turns out herbalism isn't immune to oppressive systems and it is up to us to challenge and change and all the while get our hands in the soil and listen.

This book serves to help you connect with nature, landscape, and community. It is a



beginner's guide to herbalism and the practical applications of plant medicines in your home or community.

The book moves through the tools and makes of a herbalist, baby herbalists included, and on to the different stages of life from babes to elders and how plant medicines may be incorporated.

Towards the end of the book I have included a small chapter on grief which comes to us all at some point. Following this is a closer examination of the deconstruction of herbal medicine that is needed under the system of colonialisation, patriarchy, and capitalism.

I have invited the wonderful herbalist and sister Claudia Manchanda to write that chapter for us with details of many of the issues that face herbalism as we try to find our way to decolonialise practice.

At the back of the book is a resources guide – people, organisations, books, websites, and more that I or Claudia have found helpful or inspiring.

WEAVING PLANT MEDICINE

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

From the page to the wilds and from the wilds to the page again . . . I hope this book will help you with wild harvesting, growing your own herbs, community, and herbal resilience, and of course making medicine and knowing some home remedies for you and your kin.

This book seeks to weave in the magic of the plant world, creating a volume that you can reference if you would like to use wild medicines in your lives.

It is also a companion for those who want to connect to nature more and feel pulled to explore the power of plants and connections with people.

There are so many plant medicines growing in this land and further afield and I want you, the reader, to be able to access some wild medicines that I, and other herbalists, use a lot in clinic.

I would love for you to become a little more empowered as to the best use, or common use, of plant medicine and how to make good remedies. So this book is by no means exhaustive but a prompt as to how and when to use herbs for common conditions.

Each chapter focuses on key herbs and common illnesses relevant to each stage of our lives – beginning with the emerging buds of babes and children

and ending with elderhood and grief. At the end of the journey, we move to the realm of herbalism in general as Claudia guides us through the potted history of colonialism and how this affects our practice.

In each section there will be:

- A description of the phase of life and what we may experience
- Common health conditions
- Remedies and blends which are useful for those conditions
- Key plant allies
- Exercises and ceremony which pertain to each phase of life

We will weave in seasons, elements, and energetics, bringing the interconnection of cycles and elemental wonder. I hope we might create a world wild web of herbalistas, radical herbalists, baby herbalists, folk herbalists, medical herbalists, gardening herbalists, foraging folk, medicine makers, wise folk, and wild beauties.

“BIPOC” HEALTH AND HERBALISM

The healthcare system in Britain is not equal for all and health disparities are apparent for marginalised people.


So when thinking of access to health care, treatment of people and the outcomes or even mortality rates among different groups, it is important to be aware that all is not equal.

There is clear and well researched evidence that racialised people have worse experiences or outcomes in our healthcare system at present. Here are but a few of these eventualities, highlighting the need for social justice but also reminding us that each person needs tending and herbal care in their own individual way and based on their experience, taking into consideration genetics, social care, health care, access, their story, dreams, family, support, the list goes on.

Within our national healthcare system a severe lack of support is reported by all ethnic minorities

GALACTIC DANDELION – MOST EXCELLENT “WEED” IN THE WORLD





and in particular people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin. “BIPOC” patients are more likely to be given a diagnosis of mental illness than White British people. People of Black Caribbean and African origin or descent are also less likely to access psychiatric care through health services and more likely to access it through the criminal justice system.

Complications in pregnancy and childbirth including pre-eclampsia, as well as dying in childbirth, are vastly higher for Black women. Long-standing illnesses affecting the way we live our lives are most often experienced or reported by Pakistani women and Bangladeshi men. There are many more examples we could list here.

Being acquainted with the prevalence of social, genetic, cultural, and imposed health disparities for racialised people can inform your way of working with plant allies and tending your patients, family, or friends.

In the final chapter, Claudia explores the stories of Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour within herbalism.

ASTROLOGY IN HERBALISM

In the sections on plant allies in each chapter I’ve included the planet that the plant may be ruled by. I say “may” because there is some discussion about which plant is ruled by which planet.

In all traditional systems of medicine a connection to the astral bodies is significant in terms of diagnosis, cultivation, harvesting and preparation of herbs. Herbs are governed by astral bodies such as planets, the sun, and the moon, and each plant ally mentioned at the end of the chapters has a reference to its astrological affinity. Do find out more about this if it piques your interest.

An example which is commonly used is nettle. Nettle is governed by Mars, the red planet, which is hot and fiery and, thereby, considered masculine. The plants governed by Mars often have spikes or stings for protection and have an association in the body with the colour red. This may be, for example, a red nettle rash or the redness on our skin from the stings, urticaria (a rash which looks like nettle stings), a red face if a plant is heating, red berries, or its action on the blood.

Planets and timing may influence the herbalist to make a remedy with certain plants. You can harvest plants at certain times to increase alignment with planetary forces, according to the astrological charts each month, decade, or

even century. Indigenous cultures often harvest this way with a complex knowledge of each plant and its vibration in the world.

A little aside

My name, Dadachanji, most likely means “chief astrologer, with respect” (Dada being chief, chan being moon, and ji, with respect) and while I haven’t studied plants and planets in depth, it is something which calls me and there is a wealth of wisdom to be gained. Amazingly, Claudia’s name, Manchanda, means “heart of the moon”. She has studied planetary forces, alchemy, and medical astrology. I wonder, as I write, whether celestial forces (including the moon) brought us together at our chance meeting a few years ago at the beautiful memorial service for our friend, teacher, and mentor Christopher Hedley.

JOURNALING AND EXERCISES

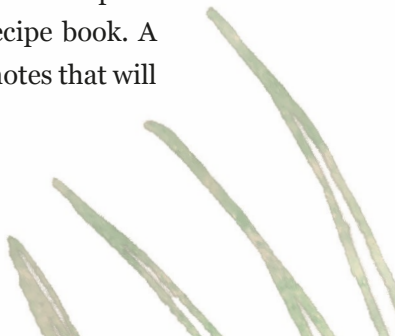
As well as looking at various ways of approaching health and rewilding with wild medicines at different times of life, we will also explore exercises to help you connect with nature and self.

If you can, get or make yourself a journal just for plant connection in note form, drawing, or prose.

See how it feels to remember your first plant connections or interactions. A simple and yet very telling exercise is to jot down what you remember – any thoughts, feelings, images, colours, family or cultural connections, etc. Get a cuppa and take a little time to connect with that part of yourself. Whenever I think of my first plant experiences, I think of “my” apple tree, sucking dead nettles, and making my feet reach the tops of the “cheese trees” when I was pushed on a swing in the park. See what comes up for you.

When you have a journal, you can write all kinds of observations, from experiences with plants or tastings to medicines that worked well or totally failed (like my rosehip syrup into which I hadn’t put enough sugar and bam! – explosion) and to new plants noted on the path to the local shop.

Consider having two books – one journal for writing about your connections with plants, your experience of the exercises we will do, and notes of experiments that you undertake by yourself, kind of like your own recipe book. A second book could be simply for medicine making – with all the notes that will help you in the future.



I am a sucker for a nice notebook so that might just be my own privilege talking. You don't have to spend a pretty penny on a pretty journal – I sometimes staple paper that has only been used on one side to make little notepads. Remember most little pads are made from plants, ink comes from earth . . . we are already connecting.

Plant connections are the beginnings of the herbal journey. Knowing your plants, in some way, is such a good way to get back to health or walk the path of the herbalist – be it as a professional or lay person.

A simple way to get back to your wild self is to spend time communing with and in nature, whether that's your local park, woodlands, the wilds of remote Scotland, a canal path, cracks in the pavement, or a community garden. Of course you can connect and enjoy the green with a plant in a pot or windowsill box.

There are lots of exercises you can do to tune back into plants, natural landscapes, etc. – in each section there will be opportunities to explore how you feel about the season, the elements, and exercises to help you try to connect to the plants around you at those times.



For example, a simple exercise might be:



Rewilding exercise – drawing maps

Take a walk next time you go out, or now if you have the time. Just a short one.

See if you can note down any of the plants you meet in ten minutes. You can do any of the following to get to know your area:

- Note down the plants you know
 - Make a map of the plants you know
 - Make notes on the plants you don't know – of course you can add them to your map without knowing them – describe them, how they look, how they make you feel (do you like them?)
- 
- 

This is the first of a few exercises in this book encouraging you to get to know your area and the plants that surround you. You could do it of your garden, of the local park, of the woods, of the local plants growing from the cracks in the pavement, etc. and make a map book of plant maps!

If you aren't able to walk, or find going outside challenging or impossible, you can do all of these exercises from your home, even your bed, if you use your senses to feel out to the elements and plants all around the area. You can also ask others to bring you plants and work with them. Adapt any exercise to your own body and ability (movement, senses, emotional needs).

WILDING YOURSELF . . . A LITTLE MORE

This book is a small part of the (re)wilding of ourselves that many of us need. It may be the result of privilege that we need to rewild ourselves – we have infrastructure, technology, urbanisation, transport, money . . . all things which inevitably take us further and further away from nature. While not everyone living in a city disconnected from nature could be called privileged by any means, privilege is certainly wildlessly abundant.

The need to rewild – or wild – ourselves may also be from our loss of connection and culture, our loss of tradition and understanding of the cycles of our land on which we live.

Getting to know our plants, our landscape, our feelings, our connection . . . The rewilding side of herbalism is so important to herbalists like me who find the biggest joy in life comes from the natural world but it is so often put aside to make money, entertain, fit in . . . we all need to reconnect and rewilding is a way of doing this.

What does rewilding yourself mean to you?

What do the words

wild

ancestors

apothecary

wild medicines

roots

plant allies

natural

land

forage

rewild

resilience

herbalism

bring to you?



What do you see in your mind's eye?

How do they make you feel?

Take a moment to see if any excite you or fill you with hope or dread, anger, or wonder. Just a little time spent feeling out these words might illuminate the path you may be instinctively drawn to. It may be that you find wild a difficult word, unsafe and savage (in French *sauvage* is wild, in Spanish *salvaje* is wild . . .) you may find these words too woo woo or crass. Take some time to consider where you're at with them and just notice.

Rewilding. Not to be confused with the now more commonly used term for rewilding the land. No, I'm talking "rewilding the self". Getting to know yourself and your connection in and to nature. We are, of course, part of nature and not distinct from it but we often think of "us" and "nature" as separate. This may be especially true if we live in towns or cities and spend a great deal of time inside, sitting in cars, buses, or trains, and eating food wrapped in plastic or made for us.

Small steps to honour our natural selves is all it takes to become more in tune with natural cycles, local plants, seasonal flora, and the rhythms that nurture us. One small step might be going outside today or tonight and breathing in the scent of the local plants around you, listening for any birdsong, and touching some soil. Cooking, or growing, your own food or using natural products may be another small step.

Each time you spend a little wild time with plants or elements you become a little more rooted or grounded and connected with the magic of the plant world.

In our view (myself and Claudia), there is no such thing as an expert herbalist, there are many experienced and learned herbalists and we try to learn as we grow. We learn and unlearn, then learn some more and then unlearn again. We have tried to make this book inclusive, inspiring and informative and we are aware that language is constantly evolving as is our understanding. We would welcome constructive criticism.

