

Extract from

Weeds in the Heart

This book is not intended to be a literal, systematic, how-to book. It is intended to be a lyrical, metaphorical invitation to become fascinated by these vibrant beings that surround us. Every word and picture is a response to our own personal experiences of the plants, and is in no way intended as an objective generalisation or statement of 'truth'. Rather, if our experience touches something in you, the invitation has been received.

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School of Intuitive Herbalism

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This book is intended as educational and to be used as one source of herbal knowledge amongst many. It is not intended to replace expert medical advice. The authors urge you to research any herb thoroughly before using it, and ask advice of a **herbalist** or suitably **qualified healthcare professional**. This is particularly important if you have other health issues, if you are on prescription medication, if pregnant, elderly or if the herbs are intended for children. Any herbal remedy is taken at the risk of the person who chooses to consume it.

A number of herbs are poisonous and cause adverse reactions. Positive identification is critical, as well as an awareness of potential side effects and drug interactions. This book explicitly **does not** include botanical identification keys since this is covered in more depth, and with more thoroughness, in appropriate field guides which should always be used if wild harvesting.

Please also be aware that there are significant dangers when attempting to self-diagnose and self-prescribe. Without experience, important signs and symptoms can be missed. It is also very hard to develop the objectivity to observe oneself in a holistic manner. The authors disclaim any liability or loss, personal or otherwise, resulting from the information in this book.

All that said, we very much hope you find our words and pictures an inspiration on your path into herbal wisdom.

Mugwort

Artemisia vulgaris

Mugwort is a powerful yet elusive herb. Often herb books miss her out entirely yet many, including me, hold her in high esteem as one of their greatest teachers.

She taught me the art of courting. She showed me that my previous approaches to plants, though I felt them to be slow, careful and respectful, were brash and indifferent to her. There is a mystery at her heart that cannot be unlocked easily and it was more than five years from my first meeting to the first glimmerings of real understanding of this beautiful native being.

The Lacunga Manuscript, one of a small number of old English herbals dating from the 10th Century, writes respectfully of Mugwort as the first of the 'Nine Herbs Charm':

Remember, mugwort, what you revealed, what you set out in might revelation. 'Una' you are called, eldest of plants, you have might against three and against thirty, you have might against poison and ill wind, you have might against the evil that travels around the land.

Adapted translation from Stephen Pollington in
'Leechcraft, Early English Charms, Plantlore and Healing'

Mugwort's power lies in her ability to challenge our limited and blinkered perception. We all live within limited bubbles of consciousness yet can easily fall into the illusion that all that we perceive is all that there is. When our ego and sense of self becomes overly calcified, closing us off from new growth, Mugwort may have wisdom for us.

Fortunately, life reliably brings us events or wisdom that challenges the edges of this bubble. When this happens, the ego desperately holds on to what is known and safe, whilst the soul craves growth and new vision. If we allow ourselves to stagnate in the bubble of consciousness we consider normal, we may achieve some temporary comfort. However, the very same stagnation can also be a space of despair or illness.

You may have seen this '*mother of all plants*' yet instantly forgotten her. Her grey green leaves, subtle flowers and evasive scent are easy to miss. She grows near movement - rivers, canals, paths, roads. This itself is a great metaphor for the movement that she can induce in us. Mugwort can uniquely soften and open parts of ourselves that have been forgotten or become too fearful to grow. Inviting her into your life will not necessarily be an easy ride, yet this is precisely her gift, to challenge us deeply and within this offer warmth, strength and growth.

I once treated a lady in her sixties who expressed that she had never dreamt her entire life. This absence struck us as a potential doorway into strong medicine. After two weeks on mugwort tea, she returned with a new glimmer in her eye and the observation that 'the past few weeks have been most strange, may I have some more?'



Mugwort can plunge her hands deep into our unknown psyche, unlock our dreams and draw out strengths and fears we have long forgotten about. As she reveals these gems, it is neither with malice nor sympathy but gentle unassailable confidence and loving warmth. She can soften and dissolve the protective shell of a calcified ego. She is a plant of the moon, of deep feminine wisdom and surrender to Earth's cycles. She can be a powerful ally to reconnect us to our truth and strength.



Each rising tide brings repetition and rhythm, yet no two waves are identical. The gift of water is to be in constant flow, adjusting to its environment, surrounding, absorbing, being absorbed, shaping itself to the world that presents itself yet in the same moment letting go, reforming, renewing.

I have had many teachers..... but most of all, I have learned here from
this river and from my predecessor, the ferryman Vasudeva

Siddhartha, Hermann Hesse



The latin name given to Mugwort is *Artemisia vulgaris*. Artemis, goddess of the wild and childbirth, seems a particularly appropriate choice for this herb. The familiar bow and arrows of this virgin-midwife-huntress speak of a powerful being with a determined will. The name *Artemis* itself may well derive from *árktos* meaning bear, referring to her origins as a hardy female entity within ancient bear cults.

Mugwort's watery flow and surrender is only half of her story. Key to her gifts is a deep heat that has the capacity to warm the cold of our internalised fear. All our emotions tend to find their seat in our body, while fear is often to be found hidden in Kidneys ⁽¹⁾, themselves mistress of the water element.

In approaching Mugwort, it is the kidney's relationship with the womb that is of particular interest. In traditional Chinese medicine, the Kidneys are home to our ancestral essence (Jing), and are intricately linked with the wellbeing of bladder, womb, bones, teeth and hair ⁽²⁾. Fertility and the harmonious functioning of the womb requires well nourished blood and robust Kidney Essence. If the Kidneys are depleted, or the Blood is deficient, the body can present a number of symptoms of this

imbalance. Depleting one's Kidney Qi is one of the most common patterns of modern life, easily caused easily by overwork, overstress, lack of sleep and overuse of stimulants. A similar pattern of deficiency is also known as adrenal fatigue.



The experience of sensitivity to the cold (particularly the feet and lower back) and being particularly susceptible to drafts is one common sign of Kidney deficiency. Irregularity or deficiencies in the menstruation, some forms of PMS and reduced fertility are patterns seen in the womb. If cold feet and a problematic menstruation cycle are found alongside mild anxiety (*see cautions*), we have a perfect picture for Mugwort's medicine.

In my practice, the prevalence of adrenal fatigue is huge to the point of my suspecting it is virtually endemic to the Western world. It is increasingly being recognised as an important factor in chronic fatigue, ME and fibromyalgia. To put it simply, many of us are worn out through the constant alertness and low level stress needed to maintain normality in this 'civilised' world.

A deeper understanding of this can be seen when we realise that the Kidneys are best nourished by stability, rootedness, warmth, emotional security and lovingly prepared food. Where we feel a strong sense of our right to be here, a strong sense that we are safe, we also develop strong Kidney Qi. I have seen many examples of people who have suffered fear-provoking experiences in their childhood carrying this memory in their body. When exploring their habits and body-mind they often find that this conditioning affects almost every daily decision they make. If you have been conditioned by your experience of childhood to be always on the look out and on high-alert, it is perhaps no surprise that this can eventually manifest in the body as adrenal fatigue.

In the long term, Kidney Qi weakness can cause depletion of Kidney Jing. Jing is our ancestral 'juice', and that which gives us fertility. Some people are born with incredibly robust Kidney Jing; these are the people who seem to be able to constantly abuse their bodies and get away with it. However, it has long been observed in traditional medicine that the older the parents and the worse the health of the parents, the weaker the Jing tends to be in the child.

In a healthy, balanced life Jing is carefully preserved to support ovulation and pregnancy in women, and fertile sperm in men. Many suspect that the rise in infertility we are now seeing is strongly connected to us developing a bad habit of Jing deficiency. We appear to be suffering a cultural wounded impotence that will need far more than herbs to remedy it. However, perhaps Mugwort may prove a useful part of the picture as we move towards healing.

A friend on the path

Many old herbals speak of Mugwort to revive the traveller on their journey. This gave me the first hint that a Mugwort footbath could be a powerful way of working with this herb. I quickly made two very clear discoveries. The first was that a hot Mugwort footbath can have immediate and sustained effect for women suffering with cold kidneys - cold womb - anxiety picture. In many ways, people found this superior to taking the tea internally. The second was a surprising discovery. Sometimes when I'm working with a person, the protection, or 'armour'⁽³⁾ they surround themselves with has become so fixed and rigid in them that the usual range of naturopathic treatments do not seem to touch them. I found that if I start a session with a Mugwort footbath, it seems to significantly help catalyse the rest of the work we do.

On consideration this was not so surprising. If an armoured 'ego' structure is continually reinforced by a deep fear held within the body, it is only by meeting and addressing this fear that the rigidity will soften. The Mugwort footbath in a supportive environment did this admirably and I have yet to find its equal.



Also known as: *Artemesia vulgaris*, Ghost Plant (Japan), Felon Herb, St. John's Plant
Related species: Chinese Mugwort (*Artemesia argyi*), also see Wormwood (*Artemesia absinthium*). Sweet Annie (*Artemesia annua*) is an interesting relation that has received much research related to its use in Malaria

Parts typically used: Mainly upper parts

Harvest: Mid to late summer

Preparations: Infusion, Foot bath, Moxa, Sleeping pillow, incense, smoking herb

Great combinations: Mugwort + Cinnamon (increases heating effect), Mugwort + Wormwood (for deep energetic clearing work), Mugwort + Mallow + Liquorice (to increase nourishing qualities where there is Yin deficiency)

Culpeper's insight: Culpeper classes Mugwort a herb of Venus, thus particularly suited to ailments of the womb, though rather than fertility he talks of her use 'to help the delivery of birth, and expel the after-birth'. He also recommends it for 'breaking the stone' (thus a kidney medicine) and of particular interest as a 'special remedy upon the overmuch taking of opium'. The warming and loosening effect is suggested in his recommendations for sciatica, 'pains of the sinews and the cramp'.

CAUTIONS: Avoid in pregnancy unless experienced (it has been used historically to help induce miscarriage). Avoid where there are conditions marked by excess heat in the body. Caution is advisable if on psychoactive medicine or with a history of psychosis. If anxiety is severe/chronic, Mugwort can be an ally, but in addition to other therapeutic support.

⁽¹⁾ As is often the case within TCM, the organ 'Kidney' does not relate solely to the western notion of kidney, but to the entire kidney area including the adrenal glands. In this way the Kidneys are intricately connected with a range of endocrine secretions including adrenaline and cortisol. The kidneys themselves secrete calcitriol which may provide a link between TCM concepts of the effect of Kidney Qi on bones and a western understanding of the role of calcium deposition.

⁽²⁾ The main functions of the kidney include roles in bone, hair, urine, semen and vaginal fluid production. They are also considered to store the ancestral essence (Jing) which is critical to reproduction, to be dominant in water metabolism and house the will power. The kidneys are also intricately linked to the lungs in allowing the body to absorb Qi from the air.

⁽³⁾ The concept of 'armour' is important to much of my work, and is an expression of the social garb we inhabit partially out of habit, partially because we mistakenly identify our armour as ourselves and partially because we feel it's necessary to survive in the world. Though it does often serve us for a time in our lives, there always comes a point when our old habits sabotage rather than support us.

If you would like to register interest so that we can let you know when the book comes out (sometime in 2014) please contact us using the web page below and add 'Weeds in the Heart' in the subject line.

www.ruskinapothecary.org.uk/contact/

If you would like to find out how to discover this sort of plant wisdom for yourself, first hand from the plant, please see our courses in Intuitive Herbalism at:

www.intuitiveherbalism.org.uk

Thankyou for your love of plants and our Earth.