

Herb Profiles:

****Before handling or growing new plants, it is wise to consider potential allergens, potential toxicity for humans or pets, and whether a plant is an invasive species in your area. These profiles contain growing information and information on their historic use and lore. These profiles are informational only and not intended to guide consumption. They are not intended as medical guides or advice. Please always consult a licensed physician for medical issues. ****

The Plants: Modern Name/Old English/Scientific

- 1) Mugwort/ mucgwyr̥t (*Artemisia vulgaris*)
- 2) Plantain/Waybread (*Plantago major*)
- 3) Watercress/Lombescyrse (*Nasturtium officinale*)
- 4) Wood Betony/Attorlaðe (*Betonica officinalis*/*Stachys officinalis*)
- 5) Chamomile/ mægðe (*Matricaria chamomilla*)
- 6) Nettle/Netelen/Stune (*Urtica* spp)
- 7) Crab Apple/ æppel (*Malus sylvestris*)
- 8) Chervil/ fille (*Anthriscus cerefolium*)
- 9) Fennel/ finule (*Foeniculum vulgare*)

Growing Medieval European plants in Southern California:

Excepting plants from the Mediterranean region, the climate in Europe is, of course, quite different to southwest America. This can cause some difficulties in raising plants from cooler regions. A couple tricks/things to know.

- 1) “Full sun” as written in plant guides means 6+ hours of sunlight. This does not account for the air temperature or sun intensity. 8 hours in SoCal summer heat is a very different beast. Just because the seed packet says “full sun” does not mean it can handle it here. I often find that “full sun” plants (that are not obviously succulents, natives, or otherwise drought tolerant) will actually thrive in partial shade.
- 2) Most European plants also are adapted to moist soil all year round.
- 3) The easiest way to provide shade and moisture consistently is by using shade cloth and drip irrigation (on a timer set for night or early morning is even better!)

Mugwort: (*Artemisia vulgaris*)

Family Asteraceae



~ 1300-1500 C.E. Tractatus de herbis contained in manuscript Egerton 747 – Held by British Library

Origin: Europe & Eastern Asia **Life Cycle:** perennial **Hardiness Zone:** 3-9

Germination: 14-21 Days **Days to Maturity:** 60-75 days

Invasive potential: Weedy especially on east coast- plant in a container. Prohibited in NY and IN

Toxicity: Slightly, in very large amounts, allergen potential

Care: This seed requires 2-4 weeks cold stratification. Press seeds into soil surface late fall. Light is required for germination. Full sun to partial shade. Requires well drained soil. Plant grows 4-6 feet tall

Folkloric Use: Mugwort was used in a variety of ways and was a “must have” in medicinal gardens. It was also used in household maintenance, for example, it was thrown on freshly cleaned floors. (Landsberg, 2003) In ancient China it was used as an insect repellent. (Wang et al 2006) It is of course listed in The Lacnunga, the well-known “Frommand” list of useful herbs (1525), and “Physica” By Hildegard Von Bingen (12th century.)

According to Von Bingen, Mugwort is very hot of humor. She suggests eating it cooked to heal ailing intestines or to purge rotten food from the intestines. It can also be used as a poultice to pull bad humors from a wound. (Hildegard, 1998) In the Nine Herbs charm it is “the oldest of herbs” and has power against infection and venom. (Niles, 2023)

Plantain: (*Plantago major*)

Family Plantaginaceae



Hand colored woodblock engraving of a botanical illustration from Adam Lonicer's Krauterbuch, or Herbal, Frankfurt, 1557. This from a 17th century pirate edition or atlas of illustrations only, with captions in Latin, Greek, French, Italian, German, and in English manuscript. . (Photo by: Florilegius/Universal Images Group via Getty Images)

Origin: Europe, Asia, Americas **Life Cycle:** perennial **Hardiness Zone:** 3-9

Germination: 21-28 days **Days to Maturity:** 120-140 days

Invasive potential: In Alaska **Toxicity:** No major toxicity issues, allergens possible

Care: This seed requires 2-4 weeks cold stratification. Press seeds into soil surface early spring. Full sun to partial shade. Germinates in moist soil, prefers neutral to slightly acidic soil (6.6-9.0). Grows ~6-12 in tall. Tender young leaves can be used as a salad green. Good for pollinating insects and birds (eat seeds)

Folkloric Use: Plantain is known now, and was known then, as a very hardy weed that can handle stressful environments and disturbed ground. It was not cultivated, but foraged, or simply gathered as it would often show up in garden beds. (Landsberg, 2003) It is listed in the Lacnunga (900s), in "Physica" (1100s) and the Fromand list of 1525.

According to Von Bingen Plantain has humors that are hot and dry. She says it is good for gout and swollen glands but NOT for scrofula (Tuberculosis) It is good to lessen irritation for surgical stitches, itching, burning or bug bites. Drinking its juice can purge a love enchantment placed on oneself. It also speeds the healing of bone fractures. (Hildegard, 1998) In the Nine Herbs Charm Plantain is called the "mother of herbs" and is noted to be durable having been trampled over by chariots, queens, brides and oxen. (Niles, 2023)

Watercress: (*Nasturtium officinale*)

Family Brassicaceae



~ 1300-1500 C.E. Tractatus de herbis contained in manuscript Egerton 747 – British Library

Origin: Europe **Life Cycle:** annual/perennial in zone 9 to 11 **Hardiness Zone:** 3-11

Germination: 7-14 days **Days to Maturity:** 50-60 days

Invasive potential: Mixed opinions – contain to be safe **Toxicity:** Can cause gastro distress to cats & dogs in large quantities. *do not wild forage, can carry flukes (parasite)*

Care: Plant in winter or spring. This plant requires permanently moist (poorly drained) soil. It can tolerate full sun to partial shade (as long as it stays wet) Mature size it 6 inches tall and 6 inches wide. Prefers cold alkaline water.

Folkloric Use: Watercress has been used as a medicinal plant since the ancient world. Pliny the elder listed over 40 medicinal uses for it, some of which include anxiety, cough and intestinal worms. (Hayek, 2004) It is used in The Lacnunga (~900 C.E), as well as “Physica” By Hildegard Von Bingen (12th century.)

According to Von Bingen, watercress is of hot nature and “When eaten, is not much use to a person, nor is it harmful” She does say it is good for jaundice and fever, and because of its water content, it is good to eat if your appetite is low. (Hildegard, 1998) In the Nine Herbs charm it is referred to as a “striker” unyielding striking down pain and driving out the “wrathful one”. (Niles, 2023)

Wood Betony: (*Betonica officinalis*/*Stachys officinalis*)

Family Lamiaceae



Manuscript, Italy, 15th century. Herbal from Trento. Plate: Herba bertoniga (Betonica) - Heal-all, Self-heal or Woundwort (Stachys). Herb used for treatment of blood in urine, bleeding and wounds. Manuscript 1591, folio 6, recto. Herbal with dedication to Saint Mark. (Photo By DEA PICTURE LIBRARY/De Agostini via Getty Images)

Origin: Europe & Western Asia **Life Cycle:** perennial **Hardiness Zone:** 4-7

Germination: Irregular – 30-80 days, requires cold stratification

Invasive potential: No major red flags – however, mint family **Toxicity:** Not technically but, can cause nausea, vomiting and hallucinations in high quantities (Regina, 2022)

Care: This seed requires 2-4 weeks cold stratification. Soak seeds 24 hours before planting. Plant grows ~12 inches high. It prefers acidic to neutral soil well drained soil. Dappled shade to full sun.

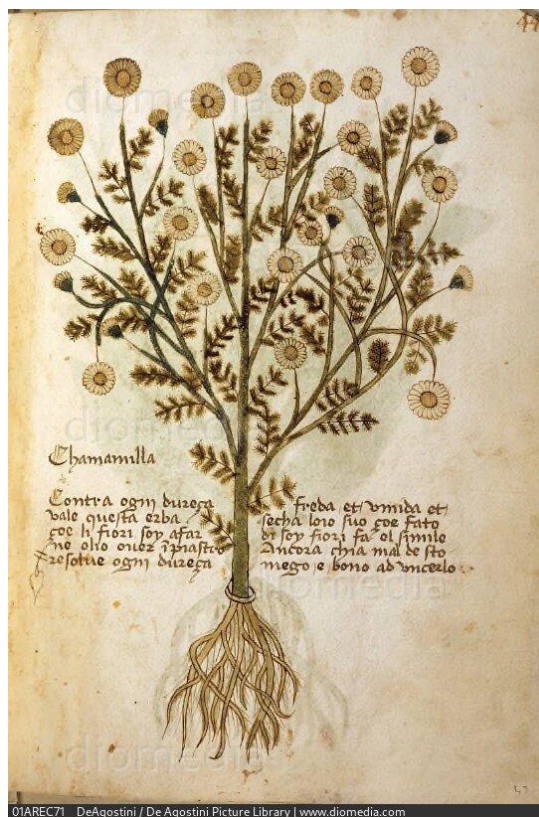
Folkloric Use: Wood betony is a native plant to Britain and was considered both a medicinal and magical plant going back to the ancient world. Pliny the elder says “It is more highly valued than any other healing plant.” If planted in a home garden that home will be safe from all dangers. It also reveals anything malicious or deadly. Among medicinal purposes, Pliny also claims many uses including afflictions of the eyes, the heart, the lungs, the stomach and bowels, the kidneys, and the uterus. It is also recommended as “efficacious in reducing the spleen, stimulating the appetite, treating paralysis and epilepsy, reducing fever and violent chills, healing carbuncles, curing jaundice, and lightening a leaden complexion.” (Larkin, 2011)

According to Von Bingen, Betony is hot of humor. It is used to improve the intellect, return your senses, or remove magic which affects your mind. (Hildegard, 1998) In the Nine Herbs charm it has power against infection and venom. (Niles, 2023)

Betony is listed in Pliny’s “Natural History” It is in the poem/book “Hortuculus” by Strabo. (847 C.E) The Lacnunga, the Fromand” list of useful herbs (1525), and “Physica” By Hildegard Von Bingen (12th century.) just to name a few.

Chamomile: (*Matricaria recutita* syn. *Matricaria chamomilla*)

Family Asteraceae



Manuscript, Italy, 15th century. Herbal from Trento. Plate: Erba Chamamilla - Chamomile (*Matricaria Chamomilla*). Herb to cure pimples and stomach ache. Manuscript 1591, folio 43, recto. Herbal with dedication to Saint Mark. (Photo By DEA PICTURE LIBRARY/De Agostini via Getty Images)

Origin: S. Europe, E. Europe, W. Asia **Life Cycle:** Annual **Hardiness Zone:** 2-9

Germination: 7-14 Days **Days to Maturity:** 50-120 days

Invasive potential: No. The species Roman chamomile can be **Toxicity:** No. FDA approved for food use. Daisy (Asteraceae) family for allergies

Care: Chamomile requires 4-6 hours of sun. In my experience, in SoCal it would much prefer partial shade and is not particularly heat tolerant. It prefers a nutrient rich, neutral PH soil. Press seeds into surface. Keep moist. Seedlings like to be babied. Plants grow more sturdy and drought resistant with age.

Folkloric Use: chamomile was, and still is, one of the most widely used medicinal herbs. As a native plant in Europe that grew and spread easily, it was often not planted, but allowed to grow naturally. It was also often used as a ground cover. (Landsberg, 2003) In the ancient world it was used for treatment of stomach problems, cramps, dermatitis, and minor infections. (Dai et al, 2022)

According to Von Bingen, Chamomile is hot. It is a “gentle ointment” for painful intestines. It is also useful for women to “clear fetid material” and bring on menses. (Hildegard, 1998) In the Nine Herbs charm it is said that if chamomile is mixed into a food, no infection will turn deadly. (Niles, 2023)

Nettle: (*Urtica* spp.) Aka Stinging Nettle

Family Urticaceae



Handcoloured woodblock engraving of a botanical illustration from Adam Lonicer's *Krauterbuch*, or *Herbal*, Frankfurt, 1557. This from a 17th century pirate edition or atlas of illustrations only, with captions in Latin, Greek, French, Italian, German, and in English manuscript.

Origin: Europe, North America, North Africa, and parts of Asia **Life Cycle:** perennial **Hardiness Zone:** 3-10

Germination: 10-14

Invasive potential: Weedy - Invasive depends on species. *U. dioica* is native. **Toxicity:** Stinging fibers, plant must be blanched, dried or otherwise appropriately processed. Some people are allergic to nettle.

Care: Grows as a weed, In SoCal we see a lot of *Urtica urens* (non-native) – dwarf nettle which is also usable but has a harsher sting than *Urtica dioica*. This plant can quite easily be foraged in late winter and early spring. Gloves and appropriate handling necessary. To grow from seed, cold stratify 2-4 weeks, press into soil.

Folkloric Use: Nettle is another plant that was weedy and not necessary to plant. It was foraged or *sometimes* allowed to grow in the garden. (Landsberg, 2003) In the poem “Hortulus” Strabo laments that they grow back no matter how much he pulls them. It has been used as food, medicine and even as fiber for weaving. In fact, when woven it is stronger than linen. Examples of nettle clothing have been found from the bronze age. The *Herbarius Latinus* (15th century) lists a medicinal application such clearing of chest phlegm; nettles as an aphrodisiac, to treat dog bites and ulcerations. The powdered seed could be snuffed to stop a nosebleed or open the sinuses, and an oil from the seeds formed an unguent for paralyzed limbs. (Larkin, 2011)

According to Von Bingen, nettle is “hot in its own way” It purges the stomach and treats worms, it can be used in a poultice to treat forgetfulness, and can also be used in remedies for horses. (Hildegard, 1998) In the Nine Herbs charm it “A torment to venom, but a cure to someone else.” (Niles, 2023)

Crabapple: (*Malus sylvestris*)

Family Rosaceae



Author: BOCK, Hieronymus (1498–1554)

Hieronymus Bock is one of the three German Fathers of Botany. The first edition of his herbal was published in 1546 with 550 woodcuts by David Kandel. Kandel's hand-coloured woodcuts Hagströmerbiblioteket, Stockholm Sweden

Origin: Europe & Turkey **Life Cycle:** Tree **Hardiness Zone:** 4-8

Germination: 1-45 **Days to Maturity:** 15 years

Invasive potential: N/A **Toxicity:** Seeds toxic – Can cause concern for pets if eaten in large amounts

Care: In its native habitat, this tree is threatened and becoming rare due to habitat destruction. Often apple trees are cloned using grafts, rather than grown from seed, as seeds are not true to the parent, and hard to predict/control traits. To grow from a seed, place the seed in moist soil in a bag and out it in the refrigerator for about 14 weeks. These trees can grow in shade but flower better in sun. They require 300-400 chills hours/year to fruit.

Folkloric Use: Apples have long been used in mythology and storytelling throughout many cultures, many stories of which still survive today. Medicinally, it was not only the fruit that was used, but the wood, bark, leaves and other parts of the tree.

According to Von Bingen, Apple is hot and very moist. Its moisture “would not be contained” except for its heat. (Hildegard, 1998) According to Von Bingen, the leaves can treat fogginess in the eyes. Sap from a new shoot can help the kidneys and problems with urination, the shoots also help with illness of the liver or spleen, bad humors of the stomach, and migraines. The blossoms are good for pain in the shoulders, loins or stomach. In the Nine Herbs Charm Wood Betony and Apple “Make a pact” to not let the venom make a home. (Niles, 2023)

Chervil: (Anthriscus cerefolium)

Family Apiaceae



1300-1500 Tractatus de herbis contained in manuscript Egerton 747 – British Library

Origin: Middle East and Caucasus **Life Cycle:** Annual- biennial in 6-9 **Hardiness Zone:** 3-8

Germination: 10-14 Days **Days to Maturity:** 40-72 days

Invasive potential: No – Some relatives are **Toxicity:** No

Care: Plant spring to late summer in partial shade, as sun encourages the plant to bolt. Keep soil moist. Chervil develops a long tap root and needs deep soil and doesn't transplant well. Harvest can be as soon as 2 weeks after germination. Leaves taste better before bolting. Punch off flowers to prolong harvest.

Folkloric Use: Chervil has been used since the ancient world. It is a part of Pliny the Elder's work but is also mentioned by many healers and botanists throughout period such as John Parkinson, John Gerard, Fromand and Hildegard Von Bingen. Some of its purported uses include stopping hiccups, warming a cold stomach, digestive problems, eye inflammation, smoothing skin wrinkles and treating blood clots and the plague. (Readal, 2021)

According to Von Bingen, Chervil is more hot than cold, and dry. She suggests eating it cooked to heal ailing intestines or to purge rotten food from the intestines. She says it is not much use as a food, but is good as a medicine, healing wounds of the intestines. It also helps the spleen against evil humors caused

by eating raw foods. Topically it also treats ulcers or scabies. (Hildegard, 1998) In the Nine Herbs charm it is teamed up with fennel as a plant sent from heaven to cure all, rich and poor alike. (Niles, 2023)

Fennel: (*Foeniculum vulgare*)

Family Apiaceae



'Book of Simple Medicines' by Mattheus Platearius (d.c.1161) National Library St. Petersburg, Russia

Origin: Mediterranean **Life Cycle:** tender perennial (perennial in SoCal) **Hardiness Zone:** 4-9

Germination: 7-30 Days **Days to Maturity:** 90 days

Invasive potential: Yes, invasive in CA **Toxicity:** Could be unsuitable for infants/breastfeeding– Carrot family allergies

Care: Fennel is hardy, drought tolerant and likes well drained soil and full sun. It dies back in autumn then re-sprouts from its base in spring. It can grow up to 6 feet tall. Its native climate matches our coastal areas and it can be quite invasive. Fennel can spread from seed or from its crown base, allowing it to spread underground. Planting in a container or isolated bed can help control spreading from the crown. Flowers should be clipped to protect from seeds

Folkloric Use: Fennel has culinary, magical and medicinal uses going back to the ancient world. Another plant valued by Pliny the Elder, he lists over 20 different uses for fennel. Fennel is also associated with the origin of the marathon as Athenian Pheidippides was purported to carry a fennel stalk. Fennel is also good against “elf-shot” the magic of the elves and fair folk and was hung on doors to protect homes from

evil spirits. Medicinally it was used to treat snake bite in Ancient China. (The Herb Society of America, 2004) Strabo says of Fennel in "Hortulus"

*"Let us not forget to honor fennel. It grows
On a strong stem and spreads its branches wide.
Its taste is sweet enough, sweet too its smell;
They say it is good for eyes whose sight is clouded,
That its seed, taken with milk from a pregnant goat,
Eases a swollen stomach and quickly loosens
Sluggish bowels.?? What is more, your rasping cough
Will go if you take fennel-root mixed with wine."*

(Larkin, 2008)

According to Von Bingen, Fennel is mildly hot and is neither cold or dry. It makes a person happy, brings a gentle heat, brings on perspiration and good digestion. It diminishes phlegm and decaying matter, gives you good breath and protects your vision, but wait there's more! Fennel treats insomnia, foggiess of the eye (but only if your eye color is blue-grey) congested sinuses, melancholy, tumors of the genitals and provides pain relief in childbirth. It is also useful in treating sick sheep. (Hildegard, 1998) In the Nine Herbs charm it is teams up with chervil as a plant sent from heaven to cure all, rich and poor alike. (Niles, 2023)

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