BIG HEALING from HUMBLE PLANTS

Folk herbalist J.E. Bradley explores the benefits of dandelion and chickweed.

Wild vigorous health and vitality—do these words describe your state of well-being? If not, perhaps you are overlooking some very important sources of nutrients right in your own backyard!

Perhaps you were taught as a child that “weeds” were bad…that dirt was—well, dirty and somehow bad too. Is it any wonder that we have forgotten not only the healing aspects of the earth but those of the plants as well? Imagine that some of those weird plants that are not grass in your lawn have showed up to help you learn something and to heal you as well. I have had many experiences where my friends’ health concerns were addressed by the weeds growing in their yards. Of course, if you are chemically treating your lawn, you will not want to eat the weed, and you may even choose to stop poisoning the ground. It is prudent to think about what kind of inheritance we are leaving to future generations in the land. Learning the many wonderful uses of weeds is a good place to start. If you think about these persistent, hardy, vital containers of life, wouldn’t you choose to emulate a life like theirs, rather than the life of the fragile grass needing man-made chemicals and constant care?

Let’s look at some of the weeds in our backyards and see what they have to offer. Our first specimen is a weed the Chinese consider to be one of the six most important plants in the herbal medicine chest. Europeans eat it, drink it, and make money from it in innumerable ways. It ranks ahead of both broccoli and spinach in nutritional value. What amazing plant can this be? The DANDELION! Yes, the very plant green to brown as the seeds mature. All parts of the plant, including the seeds, are edible.

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Plants are what my family uses instead of an over-the-counter antibiotic cream. When my two-year-old hurts himself, he knows where to find plantain and a band-aid. A day later, as he takes off his band-aid, his heart warms as he delightfully, “Mommy, it’s healed!” The problem made a better.

Corinna Wood is director of Red Moon Herbs in Black Mtn, NC, where she has opened the hearts of thousands to the wisdom of the plants, the earth, and their own bodies. She can be contacted at (828) 669-1310 or by visiting redmoonherbs.com.
Plaintain: First Aid in Your Backyard

Discover the saving grace of this common weed with herbalist Corinna Wood.

**Plantain (Plantago spp.)**

T here once was an old woman who walked barefoot with a friend in the Catskill Mountains, she stepped on a bee. Suddenly, I remembered my last encounter with a bee—restless nights and over a week of pain and itching. My friend, who was walking barefoot with me, suggested plantain, which was growing right at our feet. I said, “Sure, plantain may be good for skin stuff, but this it a bee sting! How much good could it do?”

Still feeling sorry for myself, I decided to try the plantain poultice. After just a minute or two, the swelling began to go down. No more itching. No restless nights.

A few weeks later, as I was walking barefoot with a friend in the Catskill Mountains, I stepped on a bee. Suddenly, I remembered my last encounter with a bee: restless nights and over a week of pain and itching. My friend, who was walking barefoot with me, suggested plantain, which was growing right at our feet. I said, “Sure, plantain may be good for skin stuff...”

The easiest way to make a plantain poultice is to chew up the fresh plantain and apply it to the wound, and cover it with a band-aid to hold it in place. Saliva actually contains many antibacterial properties (which may be why animals lick their wounds). If a plantain poultice is considered necessary, it can be applied to a wound several times a day until it is completely healed.

So how do you find plantain? Luckily, it is one of the top three weeds in lawns, along with dandelion and grass. There are two types of plantain: lance-leaved plantain (Plantago lanceolata) and round-leaved plantain (Plantago major). The easiest way to identify both types of plantain is that the leaves of lance-leaved plantain are parallel to one another down to the base of the plant, while the leaves of round-leaved plantain have side veins and a midrib which all run parallel. Most plants have leaves with veins that fork outward from a central midrib. Plantain, on the other hand, has side veins and a midrib which all run parallel. If a plantain poultice is considered necessary, it can be applied to a wound several times a day until it is completely healed.

Try making plantain oil. To make plantain oil, choose a dry, sunny day and harvest the plantain in the afternoon, once the dew has dried. Tightly pack a clean, dry jar full of plantain leaves. Then pour olive oil over the leaves until it is at room temperature for six weeks. Every day for the first week, top off the oil with plantain leaves. Then every other day for the next six weeks. After six weeks, strain out the plant material, and now you have your own green, medicinal plantain oil!

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**TRY IT! Making Plantain Oil**

Choose a dry, sunny day and harvest the plantain in the afternoon, once the dew has dried. Tightly pack a clean, dry jar full of plantain leaves. Then pour olive oil over the leaves, to the top of the jar. Place the jar out of direct light and let it sit at room temperature for six weeks. Every day for the first week, top off the oil with plantain leaves. Then every other day for the next six weeks. After six weeks, strain out the plant material, and now you have your own green, medicinal plantain oil!