
ILLUSTRATED
BY SILVA DE MAJO
THE SEED SISTAS
POWER
PLANT
MEDICINE,
MAGIC
& RITUAL
POISON
PRESCRIPTIONS
FOREWORD BY NENEH CHERRY

ILLUSTRATED
BY SILVA DE MAJO

THE SEED SISTAS

POWER PLANT MEDICINE, MAGIC & RITUAL



POISON PRESCRIPTIONS

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This book intends to educate but does not prescribe treatment for any ailments. Be self-aware, self-respectful and conscious of all risks associated with these powerful plants. Consult with a practitioner before experimenting with herbs (especially if you are taking any medication), be sure to understand herb–drug interactions beforehand and always be extra cautious in pregnancy or while breastfeeding. Please be responsible and hold good intentions in your heart.

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Poison Prescriptions
The Seed Sistas
Illustrated by Silva de Majo

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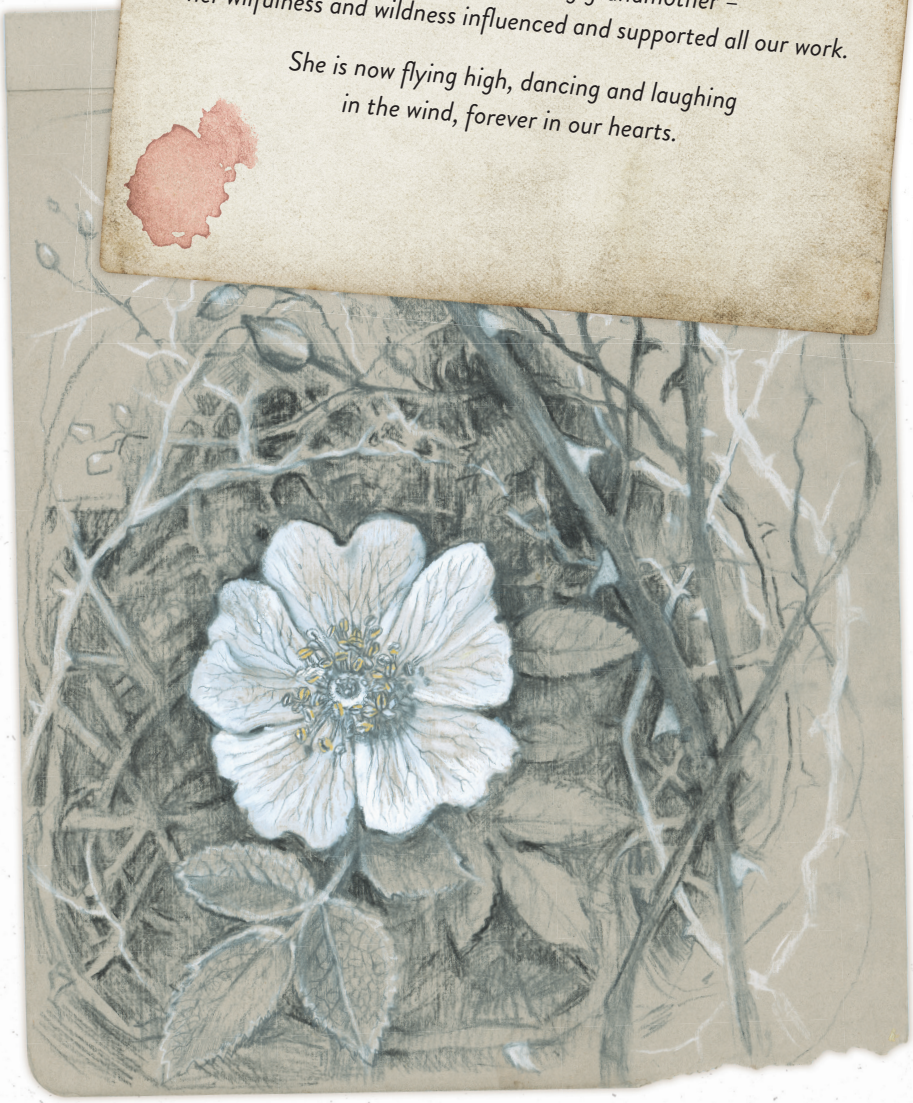
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Abbreviations used throughout this book:
CE Common Era (the equivalent of AD)
BCE Before the Common Era (the equivalent of BC)
b. born, d. died

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To Jaja, our kind and loving grandmother –
her wilfulness and wildness influenced and supported all our work.

She is now flying high, dancing and laughing
in the wind, forever in our hearts.



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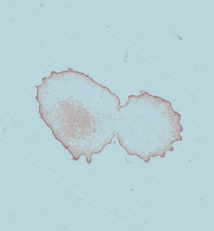
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FOREWORD BY NENEH CHERRY

I am so thrilled that you have found yourself in possession of this special book, which is in itself a little bit of magic, touching on the rediscovery of old ways of being and reintegrating medicine and ritual.

When I was growing up, any cold I caught would travel straight down to my chest and I suffered horribly from chronic bronchitis. Since this is absolutely dreadful for a singer, I sought the aid of witchcraft from one of my vocal teachers early on in my career.

She was a classical singing tutor, and I went to her weekly. In one session I was coughing and she said, "Listen dear, we need to do something about this." She instructed me to bring her some of my hair, which was whisked away to be miraculously tested with a pendulum. This mysterious dowsing led me to discover a wealth of alternative approaches to my own health needs – approaches that have served me well and opened my eyes to the fact that health is not only physical but also has emotional and spiritual aspects.

I first met the Seed Sistas one midsummer at Glastonbury Festival. My bronchitis typically worsens when I am tired and working intensely, so unfortunately it makes an appearance frequently at gigs.

What a godsend the Seed Sistas, with their incredible potions, turned out to be. My daughter took me to meet those witchy women in their funky caravan. Without a pause they knew what I needed and had just the thing; their healing hands and energy instantly made me feel better.

This kind of alchemical therapeutic knowledge is so vital and rare in the modern world. I purchased a remedy they had in stock – something they called Tonsil Tickler. All the herbs were cultivated and cared for from their garden and the remedy was created in their kitchen. I sprayed the elixir into my throat, and miraculously my voice slowly returned and I was able to sing again!

The Seed Sistas are hopeful and brimming with the belief that we can create a more naturally connected world. I fully believe the sentiment and foundations of their work is much needed in the world right now.

I'm flattered to be writing this foreword for such an important work. Poison Prescriptions harnesses a way to start healing ourselves and improve our understanding that we are part of the whole and the cosmos. We are at a specific place and time in this world where feelings of helplessness are rife – this is a time for us to own and understand our own magic and fully possess these enchanting ways. We need to listen carefully to the messages of the cosmos. By craving dialogue with the universe and nature, we find ourselves at a starting point to help one another and ourselves.

I feel inspired by the Seed Sistas. What they've created here motivates and encourages deeper comprehension of the witching herbs, the incredible plants that have the power to heal and to poison, to give second sight and to alter consciousness, to alleviate pain and suffering and to turn us on. These awesome beautiful plants grace the gardens of the Earth and rouse greater connection with all of life.

May you find the inspiration and connection with nature you are looking for in these pages.

Neneh Cherry



Welcome to the Witching Herbs

Make yourself comfortable as we welcome you with open hearts to our story of the witching herbs, also known as power plants. We have selected three of our dearest plants that have long been associated with the darker and more mysterious arts: henbane, datura (we're referring specifically to our friend *Datura stramonium*) and belladonna. They are all part of the medical herbalist's *Materia medica*, yet have become scarcely used through lack of education and the fears that surround them. Here, we open a doorway into some of the forgotten herbal magical traditions, shining a light on a shady subject and offering access to deeply hidden spaces. We offer practical magic, spell-work, astrological influences, history, story and medicine.

We hope the wisdom in this grimoire assists you on your journey of discovery in the plant mysteries. Let these words and images support a deepening love for our shared Earth. Watch as the seeds of that love root, grow and flourish. Through nurturing an understanding of the power plants, you will gain intimate access to their long-forgotten history and potential.

Let us begin by asking our polka-dotted friend, the fly agaric toadstool, to interweave connective mycelial threads throughout this book, and, with each spore scattered to the winds, carry the message calling for the reintegration of medicine and magic. We call for a revival of the old ways and for the witching herbs to be reincorporated into the practice of modern herbal medicine and contemporary magic.



Fly Agaric
(*Amanita muscaria*)

Our Magical Intention

Within this book there is an intention woven into every word; a spell cast to proliferate ancient knowledge, to support trust and to offer security for the practitioners of this cunning craft. Abundance and protection are offered for this work, calling forth respect and reverence, revelry and irreverence for the mysteries of our native power plants, the witching herbs.

The spell sewn into the fabric of this book is an invitation to delve deep into the world of magical plants and to play a part in the reintegration of medicine and magic. We wish for strands of knowledge to embed into you, dear reader, inspiring you to create a healthy relationship with some of the witching herbs described in these pages.

We have written this book to support the changes that are afoot. Today, it is understood that our internal microbiome reflects that of the soil around us and that wherever we originate from or live, there is much to be learned from the plants that populate our local surroundings and grow in our gardens, parks and waysides. We cordially invite you to join us in this work of love and magic.

Throughout these pages, we mention the importance of intention in magical work. When we create our much-loved remedies, one of the key aspects is setting our magical intention – for where attention goes, energy flows.

Intention is the foundation of any magical practice and, as you will see, when working with plants it starts with the very act of growing these beauties, especially when working with powerful healing and potentially poisonous plants.

Our Mission

We are the Seed Sistas, clinical herbalists, wild and wicked witches of the fields, gardens and hedgerows and the tech-webisphere. Sensory Solutions Herbal Evolution is our social enterprise, a vast coven bustling with a community of Earth lovers, each one motivated to inspire others through sharing herbal wisdom.

We both feel lucky to have always had the sense that nature is alive and can deliver messages to us that will guide us, bring us strength and courage, and help us to make decisions in life. We were exposed to the wilds of nature from

our earliest years and given the freedom to explore them. It is because of this experience that we have been able to meet the plants in a magical sphere and share our knowledge of them. We have seen misconceptions of the poisons arise over the years, in particular regarding the witching herbs, the nightshade family of plants. We have set out to counter these misconceptions by creating profiles of their healing capacities to help us understand and be guided by each plant's unique spirits.

Nature expresses vibrations and initiates responses, indicating that everything forms part of the universal connection of living things. We know the plants hold a vital spirit; they are sentient beings. They possess souls – also referred to as spirits – which are living entities with volition, moods and the capacity to help or wreak havoc as they are wooed or offended. There is an exquisite uniqueness to each individual soul. With the witching herbs in particular, we hear their callings and songs. The energy that comes from working magically with these revered plants is essential to our herbalism.

Throughout our lives we have allowed the plants to lead our work and have followed the signs that they have gifted us. As we opened up our hearts and souls to the witching ways, henbane turned up, self-seeded in a pot outside our front door and growing from the rubble on the land next to where we lived. Datura filled the tool yard at a place where we gardened – a beautiful, deep purple variety that we've not seen since. Then we were gifted a mandrake at an event. One night, on a full moon, we found a huge belladonna plant growing between the cracks on the steps of a cathedral in Spain. We felt that nature had granted us access to another sphere of existence; a curtain had been drawn back and we glimpsed a state of being that was out of the ordinary.

It was vital for us to follow the signs and work more deeply with these plants. The more we worked with them, the more they appeared in our lives. We began growing them and researching their history, medicine and magic. By forming friendships with each of our native power plants, we discovered that these potent plants possess such a forceful nature that even just growing them is often enough to alter conscious reality. There is no need to use frighteningly large doses; including them in rituals even in tiny amounts can be extremely

potent. We have come to love including the nightshades in both our clinical and spiritual practices. They have enabled us to bring the magic back into the clinical setting.

The witching herbs have, on the whole, fallen out of fashion in the modern Western herbalist's tool kit, which means losing out on some extremely potent and life-enhancing medicine. All too often, modern clinical herbalism has been guided by a wish for its practitioners to be regarded as professionals, akin to doctors. Indeed, our comprehensive university training saw us in a hospital setting, complete with white coats and stethoscopes. While we learned detailed diagnostic and laboratory skills during our studies, the lack of reverence for the spirit and magic of nature left a palpable void.

We believe, as plant lovers, herbalists and healthcare professionals, that we need to rebuild relationships with the witching herbs. We aim to integrate a more receptive, less linear approach to both research into and spiritual practice with these valuable and beautiful plants. That is not to say that more analytical and measurable methods are obsolete, but that we could achieve a more balanced perspective when coupled with the revival of some ancient practices. We believe that these special herbs hold the key to a remerging of medicine and magic. While the physical medicine of these plants is obvious and well documented, the magic and power they bring cannot be denied any longer.

Naturally drawn to delving into the preparations attributed to witches of old, the myth of the flying ointment became fascinating to us – a concoction seemingly lost in the annals of time. Indeed, much of the past 20 years has seen us exploring the history and potential uses of the flying ointments of European witchcraft, which are made from *Solanaceae* (Latin name of the nightshade plant family) plant preparations. We refer to it as a myth because information is scant, and it is hard to establish credibility.

We have scoured the history books and contacted contemporary medical herbalists, as well as witches, magicians and travellers to the astral sphere (such as psychonauts). Our nights are often spent travelling into the dreaming space where conscious awareness has given way to incredible realms. Through studying the European history of the witching herbs, we learned that the cultural framing

of the plants used in the flying ointment as "deadly" and "evil" has created veils of fear and mystery that still surround them today. Now it's time to change the dominant narrative around these plants and their use in magic.



The Nature of Magic

This book is a tool to aid in the practice of Earth magic, or natural magic. For us, magic is a driving force of synchronicities, opportunities and even challenges. It can seem miraculous, a power that creates experiences outside of the mundane perimeters of life. It can help us to initiate change through listening to and uniting with the natural power of the Universe and the energies that flow through all life. When we say "listening", we mean tuning in to our surroundings with our whole body, with every cell, with every memory, with every emotional response and thought.

The truth is that magic and the imagination are woven together. Imagination and wonder are key ingredients in spellcraft, essential for magic to occur, while energy is what glues the whole kit and caboodle together. Directing energy through the use of magical intention can create fantastical transformations.

Magic is an art form, and by introducing herbs into your magical practice, another layer is added to this ancient craft. So it's time to start listening to the wild whispers contained within plant life, especially the so-called witching herbs.

Working with the Witching Herbs

The "Power Plants" or "Witching Herbs" – also known as the "Poisons" – encourage a re-wilding of the psyche. We humans share a common ancestry with plants, having evolved together over the millennia. We have receptor cells in our bodies that communicate directly with chemical constituents contained within plants. Today, modern science is proving what seemingly "far out" folk have been talking about for decades: plants can communicate



Henbane, Datura and Belladonna

both with each other and with people. They can also learn quickly from experience and adapt to stimuli in their environments.

All plants hold mysteries and stories, each one of them. For example, healing plants have the ability to shift our perceptions when we work with them. However, some more than others unlock hidden, possibly innate knowledge and reveal the secrets of the world around us. In learning to listen to the particularly potent messages of the more mysterious plants, there is a possibility that we can co-create a more balanced medical paradigm and honour the healing experience that they offer. Plants that work to alter consciousness cannot, at this stage, be entirely understood by modern medicine. Herein lies the beauty. We have to suspend belief to a certain degree to work in the sphere of altered consciousness and engage the power of our imagination.

As mentioned in the cautionary note at the start of this book, the witching herbs are very strong psychotropics – potential poisons that can bring on strong hallucinations when taken in larger doses. We do not work with them in this way, nor do we advocate others to do so. We work with them on much more subtle levels, such as by growing these wonderful allies and adding them to our balms, using only relatively minute doses. We are much more interested in the energetics of these herbs and how we can use them to support and promote healthy lifestyles and relationships, both with our own kind and with the plants themselves.

Plant Magic and You

This book is written for anyone who feels a calling to the feral and who is interested in the revival of forgotten knowledge. It is for those of us who want to restore the wild traditions – to be touched by the sacred power plants and fungi of our lands. It is for those who sense the existence of other realms and who wish to learn to trust their intuition and be guided by the plants. And it is for those of us who want practical tools for working with the forgotten gifts of the otherworld and who wish to explore a new paradigm around altered states of consciousness and health.

This book is, at its heart, a celebration of some of the most feared plants of the nightshade family: henbane, datura and belladonna. However, no stars shine alone and we include a supportive cast of other herbs that have inspired us along the way and become an important part of our preparations and spells.

As these words have found their way to you, it is likely that you already have a sense that we are not entirely separate from nature – that nature is not just pretty decoration. Nature is not simply designed for us to observe and look at; it is something we are part of. We are nature. We all are born into this world with sheer wonderment, in awe of the green magic of nature if given the opportunity to experience it. However, our lives can lead us to feel disconnected from the green world around us.

When strengthening your connection with plants, a good starting point is to explore your local wild spaces, gardens and parks. Go plant hunting. In addition to reading this book, get a reliable plant identification guide and perhaps choose one plant and ask to be introduced to it. Take a walk and see what you discover – and don't ignore anything that comes to you on these wanderings, as nothing is linear in this interlaced world of magic. It may take moons of exploration and searching, but so much may be uncovered in this spiral of adventure.

The Landscape of This Book

Plant ritual, plant ceremony and plant magic are ingrained and intertwined with plant medicine. Our intention is to lead you on a journey through the parks and waysides into the wild, secret spaces of our lands. As a map of the terrain that we will be covering, this book is structured in three parts:

PART I: THE PATH OF POISONS



In Part I, we will explore the history of the witching herbs and why we humans have always been fascinated by altered states of consciousness. We will look at how these relate to magical work as well as personal development, and why witchcraft and the herbs are often given a bad press today. Then we will briefly consider witchcraft around the world, and introduce you to the art of Sensory Herbalism, before touching lightly on the subject of hexes, where you will find ideas for creating sacred spaces and magical protection. Finally, we will discover the importance of cosmic influences such as the planets and astrological signs, and how these can greatly enhance our magical work with the witching herbs. In particular, we will be focusing on the importance of the moon.

PART II: CONNECTING TO THE WITCHING HERBS

The second part of our story takes us to the stars of the show: the power plants themselves. We will focus on three of the witching herbs that are especially steeped in magic, mythology and medicine: henbane, datura and belladonna. Looking at the context, importance and reasons why these herbs have been so influential, we will look at each herb individually and explore the profound ways in which they can be used in clinical and personal practice. Finally, we will offer tips and tools to help you connect with the plant world on many levels, such as by creating your own grimoire, storytelling and spellcraft – and discuss how you can get to know plants through cultivating your own witch's garden.



PART III: THE FLYING OINTMENT

The final part of the book opens the doorway to one of our most treasured potions: the flying ointment. Infamous throughout history, we can see how it can be revived today for medicinal and magical practices. Looking at how this potent brew has developed through the centuries, we will share our studies into the ointment and a recipe we have been replicating for many moons, which can help us fly with the support of 13 wonderful plants. We will also be discovering the passion potion and its role in sacred sexuality, and how to use both the ointment and the potion in a range of practices such as divination and trance dancing. Finally, we will consider how power plants within the ointment such as henbane can help us approach death with grace and acceptance.

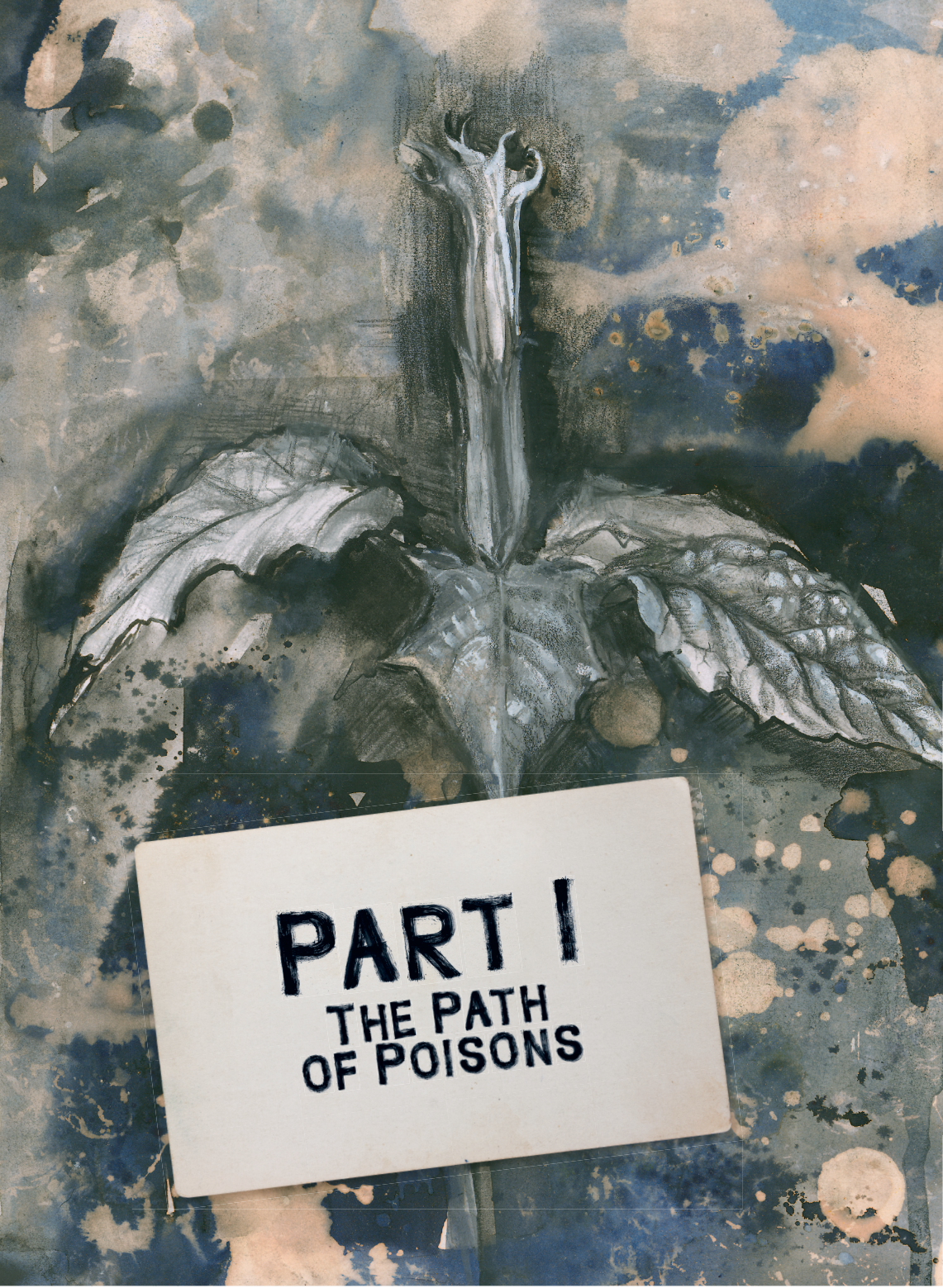
We recommend that you read the whole book before embarking on any of the practices within it. This will give you a clear understanding of the ways in which we invite you to work with these herbs.

As you plunge into these pages, you will discover new perceptions of sacred sexuality, dream work, death walking, spell-casting and meditative magic. The chapters are full of different ways to connect with the witch or magician within and the green world around. We invite you to explore the witch's medicine cabinet, make magical tools, learn how to create spells and make magic. As you work your way through each chapter, you will glean insights into the forces of an archaic realm that is tapping on your shoulder and asking for your recognition and respect.

We are keen to support your use of witching herbs on an energetic or subtle level, and to dispel any fears and myths that might hold you stuck in a place of self-doubt. We will share our secrets, hopes and dreams of a more connected and compassionate society, with applications and exercises for you to explore on your own therapeutic journey, rebuilding and restoring any fractures or schisms you wish to soothe and bridge.

And now it is time for us to begin.




PART I
THE PATH
OF POISONS



"IN ALL THINGS THERE IS A POISON, AND THERE IS NOTHING WITHOUT A POISON. IT DEPENDS ONLY UPON THE DOSE WHETHER A POISON IS POISON OR NOT."

PARACELSUS, SWISS PHYSICIAN AND PHILOSOPHER (1493–1541)

Here in Part I, we are introduced to the history of the witching herbs and, specifically, their relationship with altered states of consciousness. We will walk the path of the poisons and explore attitudes toward witchcraft, past and present, around the world. We will discover how the witching herbs relate to astrological influences, and how we can use these correspondences in our craft for added potency.

– 1 –

POWER PLANTS, POISONS AND ALTERED STATES



All herbs hold medicinal gifts and all plants are teachers with the ability to alter our consciousness in some way. We touched on this in the introduction, but you might be asking yourself what we actually mean. Even the most seemingly innocuous herbal combinations can have profound effects in the right environment; for example, we've seen people dance for hours in ecstatic bliss having simply taken drops of elderflower and plantain together. This does partly relate to the individual's ability to tap in to the subtle nature of herbs – and the more you work with them, the more this sensitivity improves to any medicinal herb that you encounter. You learn to observe what is happening in the body and any subtle shifts that may be occurring.

There is no absolute hierarchy whereby one plant is ranked as more important than another. Yet some definitely shout louder to us humans, exerting stronger physical, psychological and spiritual effects on us. These herbs have a greater ability to transport us to other realms and to open pathways, both ancient and new. When used with care and attention, these plants are potent enough to elicit massive shifts in perception, bringing about positive health changes both on an individual and societal scale.

These herbs, the strident ones, are the ones that we will be referring to as the "witching herbs" or "poisons" in this book. They are part of a wider group of plants and plant combinations that have in recent years been labelled "power plants". Some of them have been known about for centuries and have a long lineage of use, although methods have changed in recent years due to

worldwide demand. Although there are reported cases of adverse reactions and injury while under their influence, and they can leave lasting emotional damage if not approached with care and adequate after-support, many of them are regarded as being relatively physically safe to use. Ayahuasca (a combination of plants) and magic mushrooms can be considered part of this group. In contrast, the witching herbs are considered by many to be potentially physically unsafe. These herbs are also the ones that have a broken lineage of common use and in larger doses can have unpredictable effects.

Apprehension remains prevalent around these witching herbs of power, as acceptance of unpredictable or unmeasurable outcomes is not generally encouraged in Western society. Misinterpretation of them is therefore rife. Much of what little information remains about them consists of annotations gleaned from the witch trials of the Inquisition (a powerful office set up within the Catholic Church to root out and punish heresy throughout Europe and the Americas), when recipes would have been gathered under duress. This was a horrific time in history when just growing plants such as henbane or belladonna in your medicine garden could have been dangerous. With the subsequent lack of information available, there became the potential of losing the true knowledge from the past.

All of these powerful plants need to be approached with respect and understanding if we are to engage with them. Their effects can be insightful and profound; it would be difficult to ignore the experiences and tutoring that they can offer. They can teach us a multitude of lessons and show us that we are not separate from nature; we are part of it. These beauties open secret doorways into magic.

Magical practices and traditions develop in response to people's surrounding flora, fauna and physical environment. The essence of each plant holds in its energetic body the experiences of those people and places that have gone before – a resonance of the past. This means that it is possible to recreate a picture of ancient rituals through working with and being inspired by our local plants. Yet much has been lost through the neglect of ritual itself in our modern society – ritual that enables connection beyond the self, and helps us to realize that we

thrive as part of a collective. With the help of plants that alter the everyday conscious patterns that we exist in, ritual can take us beyond our individualist nature and create a sense of community. We can then flavour this with our contemporary knowledge and the current circumstances in which we now live. Connecting with these plants of power can help deepen the understanding of what is currently needed for ourselves, our communities and local environment.

Be Conscientious About the Plants You Use

Life is very different in our modern era to anything that has gone before. Access to plants is much easier, as is information about them, with the existence of books, magazines, travel and of course apps and the worldwide web. This presents the potential to be misled by the vast array of information at our fingertips. Intense marketing of psychotropic "experiences" can complicate our motives and can distort a sense of our own place in the world of plants.

When undergoing any work with plants, be supported and guided by people you trust, be discerning about your choices, and feel free to ask questions. Promise yourself that during your explorations you will be conscientious about what plants you take, where they have been sourced and how and by whom.

If taking part in medicine circles and shamanic workshops and retreats, questions to think about include:

* Where did the plant medicines grow?
* Are they wild harvested?
* Who harvested them?
* Are they cultivated and, if so, who grew them?
* Who created the medicinal preparations?
* Do you know what those herbs look like when they are growing?

If the answers are unclear for any of these questions, we would suggest getting connected to the source – the plants themselves. We will talk about the growing plants in Chapter 4 and about the three individual witching herbs in Chapters 6 to 8. This is a route to personal knowledge: trust in your own discernment and find the confidence to ask questions. When you have connected with herbs as they grow, you will start to feel truly connected to nature and emboldened to ask questions of others.

Humans have always walked besides plants, animals and fungi that offer us the route to expanded consciousness through their individual chemical make-up. We have historically enjoyed opportunities to enter other states of being through these other species of life. Compounds within certain plants interact with receptors within our nervous system to initiate these little-understood, altered states. This is evidence enough that we humans and these plants have developed and evolved together; we contain the same compounds and can merge together to experience something beyond the physical self.

All the natural world is full of mysticism. Some plants in particular hold keys to unlocking and awakening pathways in our minds, hearts and souls – pathways that guide us into a multiverse of opportunity and magic.

DOORWAYS TO OTHER WORLDS

There are many reasons why people through the ages have intertwined their existence with powerful plant substances that alter consciousness. Plant ceremonies and rituals have historically been held at auspicious times such as births, puberty, marriages and healing, as well as to mark hunts and death, and to improve psychic abilities. Plants have been used to connect with the divine, to give thanks and to create community cohesion. Many are still in use today, albeit sometimes in different circumstances.

In recent years, for example, substances such as iboga from Africa and toad medicine of the Amazon have been successfully used in addiction therapy. At the time of writing, there are cutting-edge trials in allopathic medicine looking at

the use of psilocybin (a naturally occurring psychedelic compound produced by fungi), among other psychoactive agents, to support anxiety and depression. Effects that have been known about since early humans first reached for power plants and fungi are now entering the field of mainstream medicine.

One part of our mission as healers is to educate people around the recreational use of chemical drugs. We wish to see a move away from destructive drugs such as cocaine and heroin. Yet when people move away from more readily available and commonly used drugs such as these, it doesn't necessarily mean that they don't want to experience altered states anymore. Yet with a societal approach of excess, it becomes challenging to apply a more moderated, conscious way to reaching altered states and having connected experiences. People who choose to diverge from familiar but harmful lifestyles often feel isolated when making distinct choices from their peers.

Not only have rituals with exotic psychotropic herbs become commodified in many cases, they can often be extremely prescriptive or even hierarchical, leaving little room for wildness at heart to be fully expressed. There are arguments in support of this approach, in that structure helps to guide and direct the experience, providing an anchor if things get tough while somebody is under the influence of the plant or substance, which is especially valid for those with little experience of powerful psychotropics. However, there is also scope for this attitude to be misinterpreted, as it suggests power needs to be handed over to another authority in order for us to have these experiences.

There is a balance to be struck here. If we are equipped with the knowledge and support we need – and adopt good, balanced practices using fairly traded, responsibly transported and consciously nourishing means – we may find personal fulfilment and enjoyment when experiencing altered states of consciousness. Delving into the sphere of altered states of consciousness in this way gifts us with alternative ways to craft a more inclusive, warm, loving society; it also empowers us to revive playfulness and magic, and indeed investigate a whole new paradigm for medicine.

PSYCHEDELIC MEDICINE

There has been a huge resurgence of scientific interest in power plants over the past 20 years or so. It's a wonderful area of modern medicine that deals directly with all of the unknowns that surround the inclusion of psychedelic medicine in healthcare. The positive effects of psilocybin have been demonstrated in clinical settings, but there is still relatively little understood about exactly how states of altered consciousness are generated. While modern medical science now accepts the therapeutic value of psilocybin, it also acknowledges that many of the mechanisms and effects are currently scientifically unexplainable.

Much of modern medicine remains mechanistic; it relies on putting things into boxes in order to understand, define and categorize them. However, with the incorporation of psychedelic therapies into the field of modern medicine, something very special is happening: it seems that in addition to relying on predictable outcomes, medicine is increasingly prepared to enter the labyrinth and draw on the unknown. Of course, these experiments and therapies are conducted in a controlled way with measurable outcomes!

When British psychiatrist Humphry Osmon first coined the word "psychedelic" in the 1950s, he based it on the Greek word for "mind-manifesting". Over the decades of ethnobotanical and psychedelic plant research, it has been replaced by a stream of other words that have come in and out of fashion. One of these was the term "entheogen", thought up in 1979 by a group of ethnobotanists and scholars of mythology. *Entheos* is Greek for "full of the god, inspired, possessed", and is the root of the English word "enthusiasm", while "gen" comes from *genesis* – to create. This description seems more fitting and less specific when referring to the vast array of experiences that can be created when utilizing plants for magic, ritual and connection. They can indeed induce a feeling of connection to the divine, ideas and aspirations, or, on the flipside, a sensation of being possessed!

The term "hallucinogen" denotes substances that will induce hallucinations. This may be true of many of the witching herbs we will look at in this book, but – as we hope will already be clear – we are not suggesting that they be

taken in doses that would induce this state. Nor do we think the common understanding of the word "hallucination" is strictly accurate. It is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as "an experience involving the apparent perception of something not present". This is a narrow and biased definition of altered states of consciousness, which we personally reject, for it results from our society's cultural disconnect from ancient magical practices. We believe that hallucinations can be perceived as messages for healing from Spirit, and those who receive them may be regarded as lucky or even revered.

As you will have noticed by now, we often refer to power plants as "psychotropics". The word "psycho" (which also relates to being psychotic) has had bad press but originates from the Greek terms *psykho*, meaning "mind, mental; spirit, unconscious", and *psykhē*, denoting the soul or spirit, the invisible animating principle or entity which occupies and directs the physical body. So "psychotropic" means bringing forth the soul and the unconscious, and is a word that closely links to the way we encourage you to connect with these plants.

Learning From the Poisons

As we have seen, henbane, datura and belladonna are included among the group of herbs that are referred to as the witching herbs or the poisons. These baneful herbs draw many to them in fascination and trepidation, in the spirit of seeking knowledge and connection with mystery. Long associated with touching the mystical, the *path of the poisons* aids in unlocking hidden entrances, encouraging courage and opening novel avenues for exploration.

Poisons are usually defined as substances that are capable of causing the illness or death of a living organism when introduced to it or absorbed by it. To paraphrase the words of Paracelsus, quoted earlier, everything has the potential to be a poison, for there is nothing without poisonous qualities. It is only the dose that determines whether or not something is toxic. However, there is a much smaller margin of error between a medicinal dose, a psychotropic dose or a toxic dose of our three Solanaceae, or nightshades, than when working with other plants. An informed understanding of any of these plants with a



narrower poison margin is therefore essential when creating and taking those medicines and potions that use them. This is why walking the path of the poisons is cultivated over many moons and must be deeply understood on an individual level before administering treatments to anyone else.

Confidence, respect and understanding are needed when using these magical substances. Their potential toxicity is what makes them such valuable medicines. The compounds are extremely powerful. For clinical herbalists like us, these plants provide strong physical medicine, yet today these herbs are little understood and are in danger of dying out of our medicinal consciousness. We have been documenting, gathering knowledge from our peers and working closely with these herbs, reviving their cultivation and deepening our medical understanding of them, developing medical preparations for both subtle, internal physiological shifts and powerful external changes. With their ability to poison, and in most extreme cases cause death, these herbs deserve and indeed command the upmost respect. Demonization and fear are enemies of education and connection, so we counsel careful and slow observations of all these commanding medicinal poisonous herbs – which have been familiar to many down the millennia.

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE POISONS

The witching herbs have long been associated with power and poison. The term *venefica* means "a female who poisons" in Latin, and referred to a Roman sorceress who used drugs, potions and poison. The path of the poisons is itself synonymous with the art of *veneficium,* referring to the creation of a substance that, when imbibed, alters a person's nature in some way. This medicament, potion or poison can be formed through magic, witchcraft, sorcery or enchantment. It's the place at which poisoning, medicine and magic meet.

Many famous instances of *veneficium* have been noted throughout history. In Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, written in approximately the 8th century BCE, datura has been indicated as the plant used in the mass poisoning on Odysseus' ship, when the crew was driven mad. Odysseus managed to avoid the poisoning with an antidote referred to as "moli", which is a name that relates to the snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*). (See page 112)



Snowdrops (Galanthus nivalis)

Around 50 CE, the Roman empress Agrippina the Younger requested the services of the infamous Locusta, who had already been imprisoned for poisoning. Agrippina wanted to murder her husband, Claudius, and asked Locusta to supply the poison. Belladonna was supposedly used in this instance. Locusta was apparently loved by Nero, Agripinna's son, who later employed her skills to murder his rivals to the throne. A useful ally for an emperor.

The late 16th-century English herbalist John Gerard referred to deadly nightshade as "Solanum" or "Sleepy Nightshade" in his herbal, where he also

talks of the poisonings he witnessed. He warned his readers "to banish these pernicious plants from ... gardens. Otherwise," he notes, "women and children will lust after the shining black berries which are so beautiful." He concludes that the berries are "vile and filthie". What a strange way to write about plants, women and children.

In the 17th century, Catherine Monvoisin, known as "La Voisin", led an organized association of poisoners in Paris. This infamous network provided poisons, aphrodisiacs and abortions, among other practices. They were employed by high-flying figures of the French aristocracy and were said to have killed thousands of people. Herbs used by the network included belladonna, foxglove and mandrake.

In the 18th century, Haitian Maroons used poisons in their attacks on plantation owners and their families. They combined bamboo shoots with poisons from the bush as ammunition in their battles. The famed François Mackandal, immortalized on Haitian coins, was a Maroon leader with a vast knowledge of botany and plant poisons, and organized a plot to poison slave owners through the water supplies. His work and that of other Maroon eventually led the Haitian enslaved peoples to victory.

More recently, in 1910, Dr Crippen was an American homeopath and medicine dispenser who obtained hyoscine to poison his wife. He allegedly poisoned her in England, dismembered her body and eloped to Canada with his mistress. He was hung in Pentonville prison in London after being caught when a telegram was sent from Canada to the London police by a suspicious employer. It was thought that the hyoscine was extracted from henbane.

From these examples, we can see the power of the poison plants being wielded for more power: for revenge, for freedom from oppression or more simply for the purpose of running away with your lover. Women have often featured in connection to poisons throughout the ages, suggesting that knowledge of these plants is associated with the feminine. However, their use of power plants – whether for good or for ill – was forced underground by persecution. The stage was set for patriarchy to run amok in the spiritual realm of ordinary lives.

It is time, now, to reclaim the power represented by these herbs, their archetypes and related deities. After all, the witching herbs are associated with the crone archetype, the goddesses Hekate, Atropos and Kali. These herbs all have a connection with the dark times, the winter, madness and death – the wild, feared, empowered woman.

Hekate the Untameable

Heqat or Hekate, the powerful goddess of Nubian and Greek myth, is a paradox, capable of both good and evil. She is known as both the Queen of the Dead and the protector of thresholds. Originally worshipped as the Mother Goddess responsible for the fertility of all, over time she became much maligned. Triple-faced and bearing flaming torches, she is connected with witchcraft, magic, the moon, doorways and creatures of the night such as hell hounds and ghosts.

Dogs, especially puppies, were typically sacrificed to Hekate. Her connection with dogs may be due to the fact that dogs were known to eat the dead if left unburied. The three-headed hound of Hades, Cerberus, may be an earlier form of Hecate. It is important to note that Hecate may in turn be an earlier version of Artemis, who also has three faces, carries a torch and is surrounded by dogs.

The offerings to the goddess were made each month during the night of a new moon. Female sorcerers often appealed to her for aid in their magic and spells, and she also appears on surviving examples of curse tablets.

In his epic *Fasti*, the Roman poet Ovid wrote about Hekate's triple faces watching over three-forked crossroads. She is the guardian of such crossroads, which were often burial sites for folk whose restless spirits were thought to torment villagers after their deaths, such as those who had died by suicide.



Cerberus

Nurturing Your Relationship with the Witching Herbs

Understanding the witching herbs of the Solanaceae, or nightshade family, can lead to great humility, self-understanding and awareness. Once you have been lured into their realm, you're invited to embrace exploration with open-hearted curiosity. As we will discover, the incredible Solanaceae plants have the potential to open up doorways of perception, shift consciousness, illuminate alternate spheres within ourselves and offer powerful medicine.

In the course of our own studies, we discovered that the smaller the dose of these plants the more profound the experience and long-reaching its effects. There is absolutely no need to work with heroic and potentially damaging doses. Using these plants in what might be viewed as micro-doses helps to blow away any terror of toxicity that surrounds them.

These beautiful, medicinal plants, when grown and included in rituals, can bring great insights and wonderful experiences. Cultivating them invites their spirits to enter into our dreams and whisk us up in a whirling waltz of magic. Investigation into the properties of these herbs is exciting when entered into with self-awareness and respect for them. It is completely safe when approached as an exercise in getting to know each plant energetically.

Through the use of these herbs, we can harness the dream-state to discover information about the health of us and others. We can also form strong connections with our tribes, connected through ceremony, common experience and understanding. We can become more conscious and caring human beings, in the knowledge that humanitarian actions and compassionate aims are of paramount importance for all life.

Reciprocity and being conscious of exchange is applied to all our practices with our green friends. What will your gift be to return back to the plant world?

