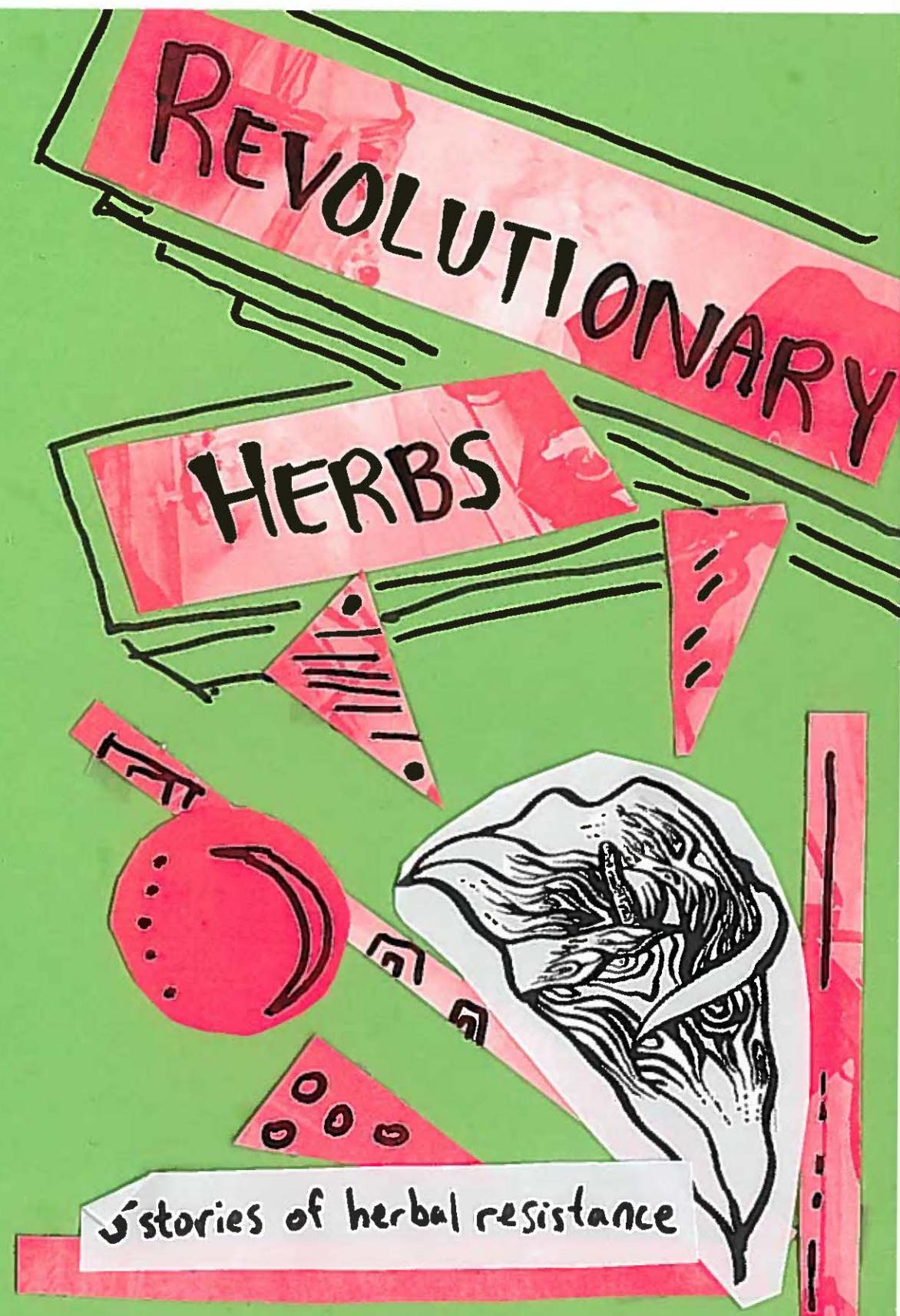


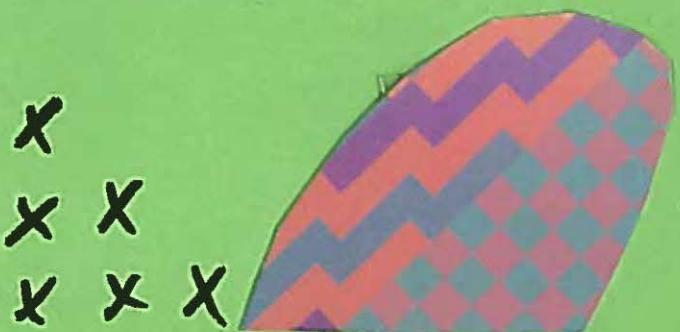
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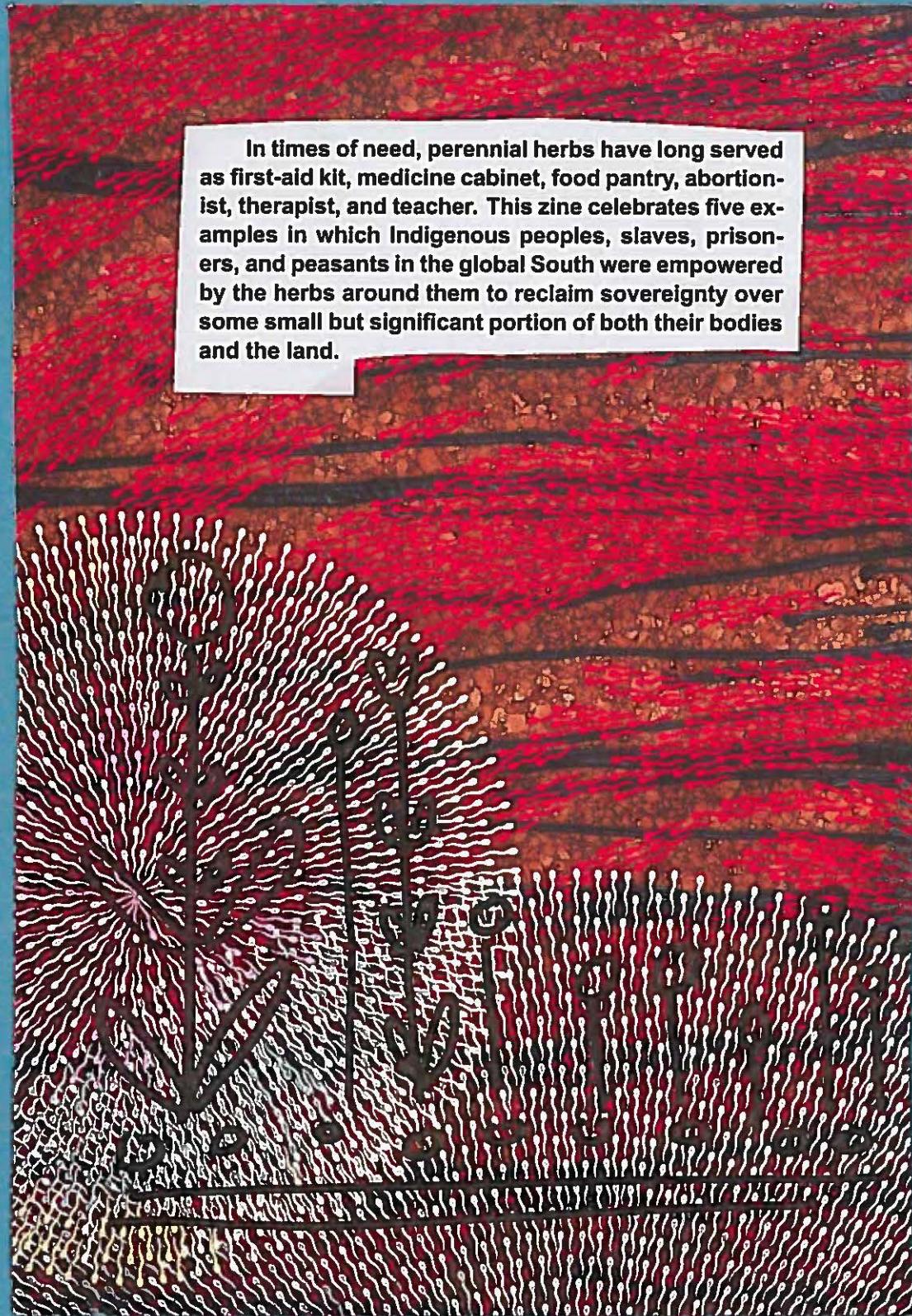


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In times of need, perennial herbs have long served as first-aid kit, medicine cabinet, food pantry, abortionist, therapist, and teacher. This zine celebrates five examples in which Indigenous peoples, slaves, prisoners, and peasants in the global South were empowered by the herbs around them to reclaim sovereignty over some small but significant portion of both their bodies and the land.

## Herbs for hard times

Since time immemorial, on every continent in the world, people have formed partnerships with medicinal plants to survive periods of material deprivation and to build resilience and self-sufficiency in difficult times.

Herbal abortions will never be able to replace safe professional abortions, free and on demand; and ginger and sage will never substitute for access to pharmaceutical antibiotics and other lab-made drugs, made inaccessible to people by illegal blockades, sanctions, trade embargos or colonial rule. Medicinal herbs will never serve as a substitute for ending the root causes of many of the world's health inequities, which are too often grounded in systems of capitalism and imperialism.

Nevertheless, reciprocal plant-human partnerships have much to teach us about resilience and resistance—and feeling good in our own bodies—as we fight against these systems of oppression. Medicinal plants can be found anywhere and everywhere—from refugee camps to prison court-yards—which is why “weeds” have long served as a symbol of defiance, tenacity, resilience, and survival against all odds.

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## Propaganda of the seed

By reducing dependency on oppressive global systems for basic foods and medicines, restoring local plant-human partnerships is a small but meaningful act of self-sufficiency. In some cases, medicinal herbs obviate the need to wait for a saviour in a white lab coat from some faraway land—they empower everyday people to take control over a small but significant portion of their material conditions in the “here and now.”

More than this, guerrilla gardening, seed-bombing, and tending to medicinal plants reminds us that the restoration of land and culture are inseparable. Cultural revitalization, land-based knowledge-sharing, and anti-colonial resistance are intimately tied to the flourishing of the land.

In the capitalist and imperialist system in which we live, building relationships of reciprocity with the medicinal plants that grow around us is a meaningful act of political resistance.

## Dandelion and plantain



Nicole Rose of the organization *Solidarity Apothecary* [1] has written a thorough herbal guidebook [2] for prisoners who are interested in learning more about plants commonly found in prison yards. As a formerly incarcerated person in one of Britain’s highest security prisons for women, the author recounts experiences of smuggling plants back into their room in books or underwear in order to make tea for stomach aches and period pains, to supplement bland and nutrient-sparse prison diets, or simply to have nearby for comfort.

Prisoners around the world routinely experience medical neglect. Knowledge of the wild, local plants commonly found in prison courtyards can make a world of difference, giving prisoners an opportunity to care for their health in small but meaningful ways.



While cultivating an herbal practice in prison is challenging, some prisoners are able to repurpose the oil, vinegar, salt, pepper, and chili powder available in canteens to make more potent tinctures and extractions. Moreover, learning to identify courtyard plants by their names can help counter the loneliness of imprisonment. Becoming acquainted

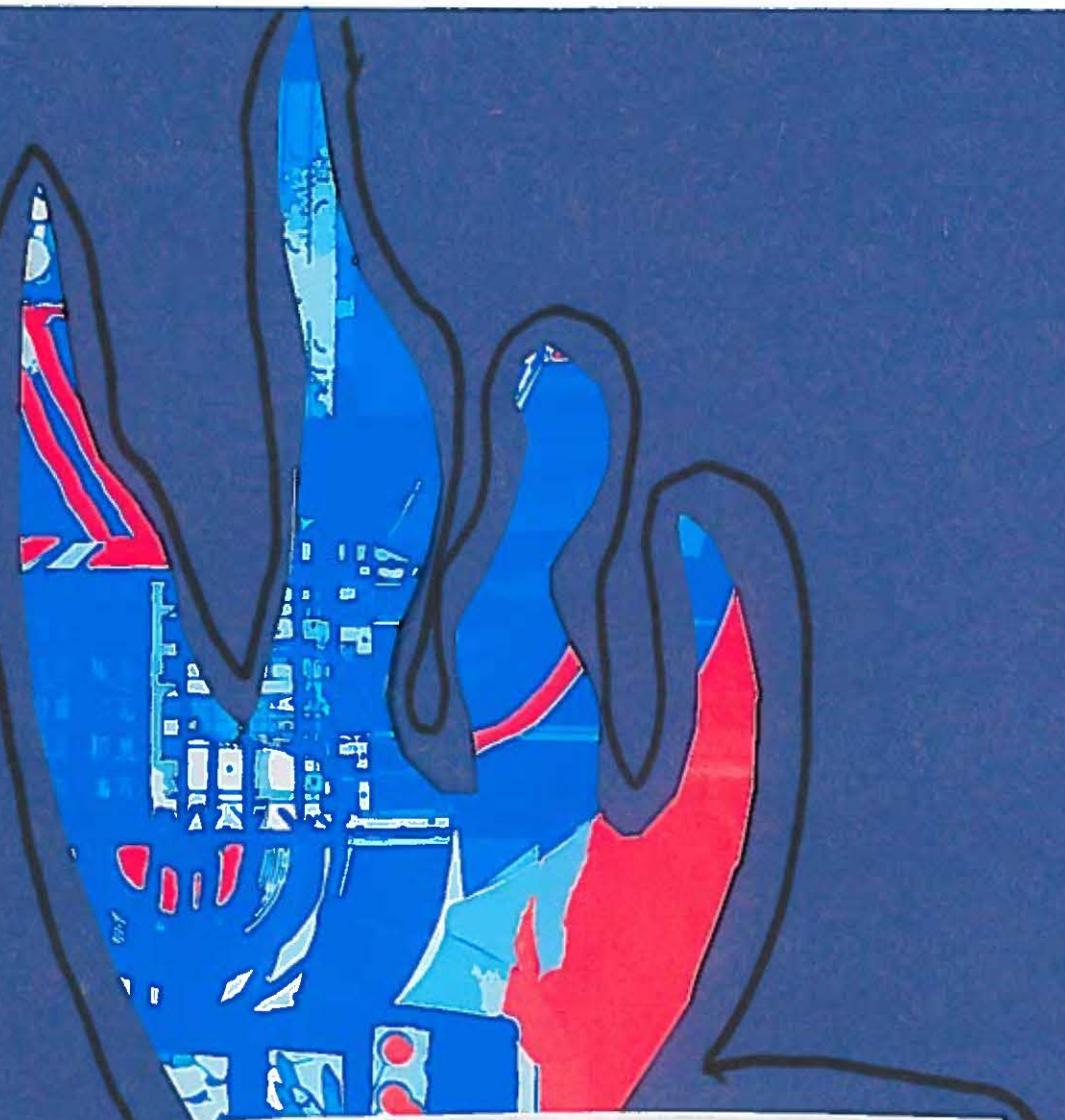
with the plants that grow through concrete cracks, observing their many qualities, and building a personal relationship with them can help keep prisoners physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually healthy.

## Herbs as “people’s science”

In keeping this traditional knowledge alive—by sharing it with others, improving upon it, and growing it through iterations of theory and practice—knowledge-holders of herbal medicine are advancing a long and venerated tradition of science “by and for the people.”

Western science has thousands of years of Indigenous and community-based plant cultivation to thank for countless pharmaceutical breakthroughs from painkillers (acetaminophen derived from willow bark) to anti-malarial medication (quinine derived from cinchona trees). Yet, scientists in the service of capitalism continue to engage in “bio-prospecting” and “biopiracy,” appropriating thousands of years of shared traditional ecological knowledge for profit.

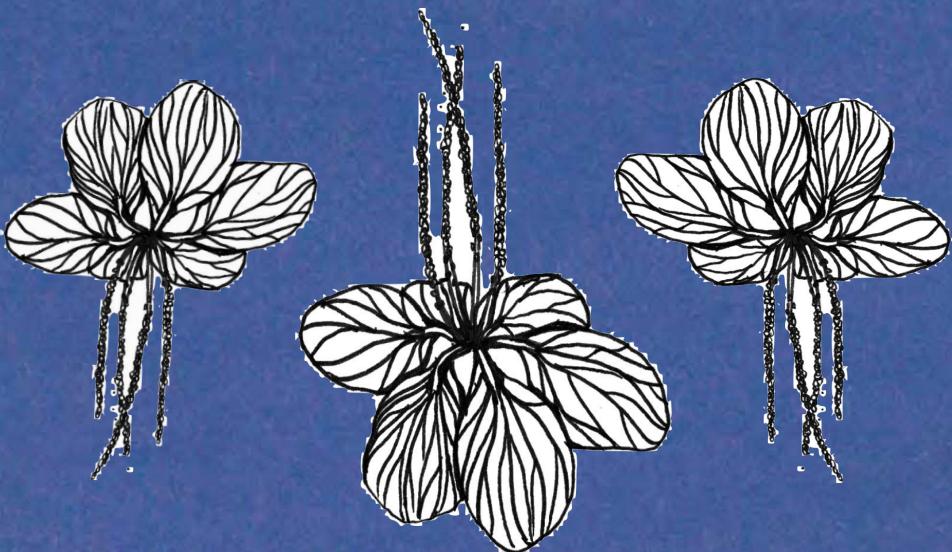
Under capitalism, intellectual property protections can be applied to medicines derived from plants that have otherwise been freely used and traded for centuries. In the vast majority of cases, the identification, processing, and production of these medicines would not have been possible without centuries of community-based plant cultivation, agroforestry, ecological management, and informal traditional knowledge-sharing. And yet, the very communities whose work enabled the development of these modern medicines find it increasingly difficult to access pharmaceutical treatments in a for-profit model of medicine production.



The herbs highlighted in this zine are a reminder that science is not and has never been a process that takes place exclusively at formal institutions. Scientific progress (including the discovery, processing, and production of medicines) has never been the exclusive domain of credentialized experts and lab coat-wearing scientists. Both traditional and modern botanical knowledge is rooted in the ingenuity and resourcefulness of everyday people who tend to the land and pass down their knowledge over tens of hundreds of generations. They do this work sometimes out of sheer material necessity— not for profit, but to empower both themselves and their communities. Above all, people build and refine these traditions of herbal medicine out of a genuine care for and gratitude to the people and the plants that surround them.



Plantain is a nutritious supplement to prison diets, and can be applied topically as a poultice or its astringent and vulnerary properties. A plantain poultice can be made by grinding up plantain leaves and roots and mixing it with just enough distilled water or apple cider vinegar to turn it into a paste—it can be spread on skin for a number of ailments like boils, blisters, and bug bites. Plantain seeds have helpful properties that may aid in constipation, respiratory tract infections, and UTIs. [3] It can be found just about anywhere there is grass, and often thrives in sandy, stony soil.



## Plantain ❤

<b>Latin name</b>	<i>Plantago major L.</i>
<b>Alternate names</b>	Plantain, broadleaf plantain, white man's footprint
<b>Constituents</b>	Mucilage, iridoid glycosides (aucubin), tannins. [4]
<b>Ethnobotanic uses</b>	Plantain has long been used as a demulcent (soothing inflammation), vulnerary (applied externally to help wounds and cuts), astringent (drying agent), diuretic (helps induce urination), anti-microbial, and liver aid. [2, 3]
<b>Contraindications</b>	No known contraindications.

000 — . . .  
Sweetgrass!

<b>Latin name</b>	<i>Hierochloe odorata</i>
<b>Alternate names</b>	Sweetgras, vanilla grass, holy grass, Seneca grass, alpine sweetgrass
<b>Constituents</b>	Coumarin (natural anticoagulant)
<b>Ethnobotanic uses</b>	<p>One of the four plants (in addition to tobacco, sage, and red cedar) considered sacred to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.  [33]</p> <p>May help reduce high-protein edemas, like lymphedema.</p>
	<p>Used ceremonially; dried and braided grass stems burned as incense, used in smudging ceremonies, or weaved into baskets. Smoke is used for purification and for carrying prayers to the Great Spirit.</p>
	<p>Used as a flavouring agent, perfume, or in combination with tobacco.  [34]</p>
<b>Contraindications</b>	Coumarin may have toxic properties, causing liver injury and hemorrhages. 27

Sweetgrass



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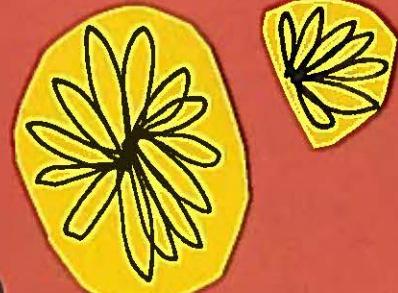


Like plantain, dandelions are often among the first weeds that many kids learn to identify—they can be found just about everywhere, including prison courtyards, and are unmistakable in colour and shape. Dandelions are a useful ally against malnutrition, indigestion, headaches and menstrual pain. In addition to supporting the digestive system, teas and cold infusions can be taken to support liver function and stimulate bile flow. Dandelion root has diuretic properties in addition to supporting muscle and joint health. [5] All parts of the plant—from flower to root—are edible and nutritious—the leaves are high in vitamin A, vitamin C, potassium, calcium, iron, phosphorous, and B-vitamins, and the roots are high in protein and iron. [2] The flower florets and leaves can be sprinkled into salads or soups, and those with access to a kitchen might even be able to make sauteed greens.

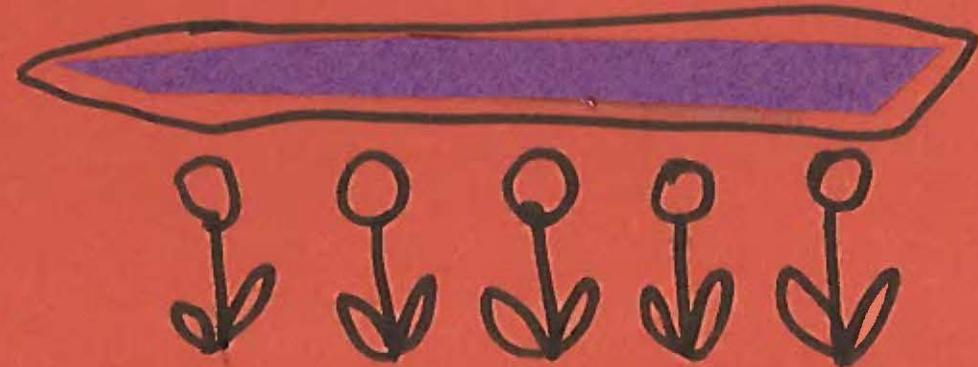
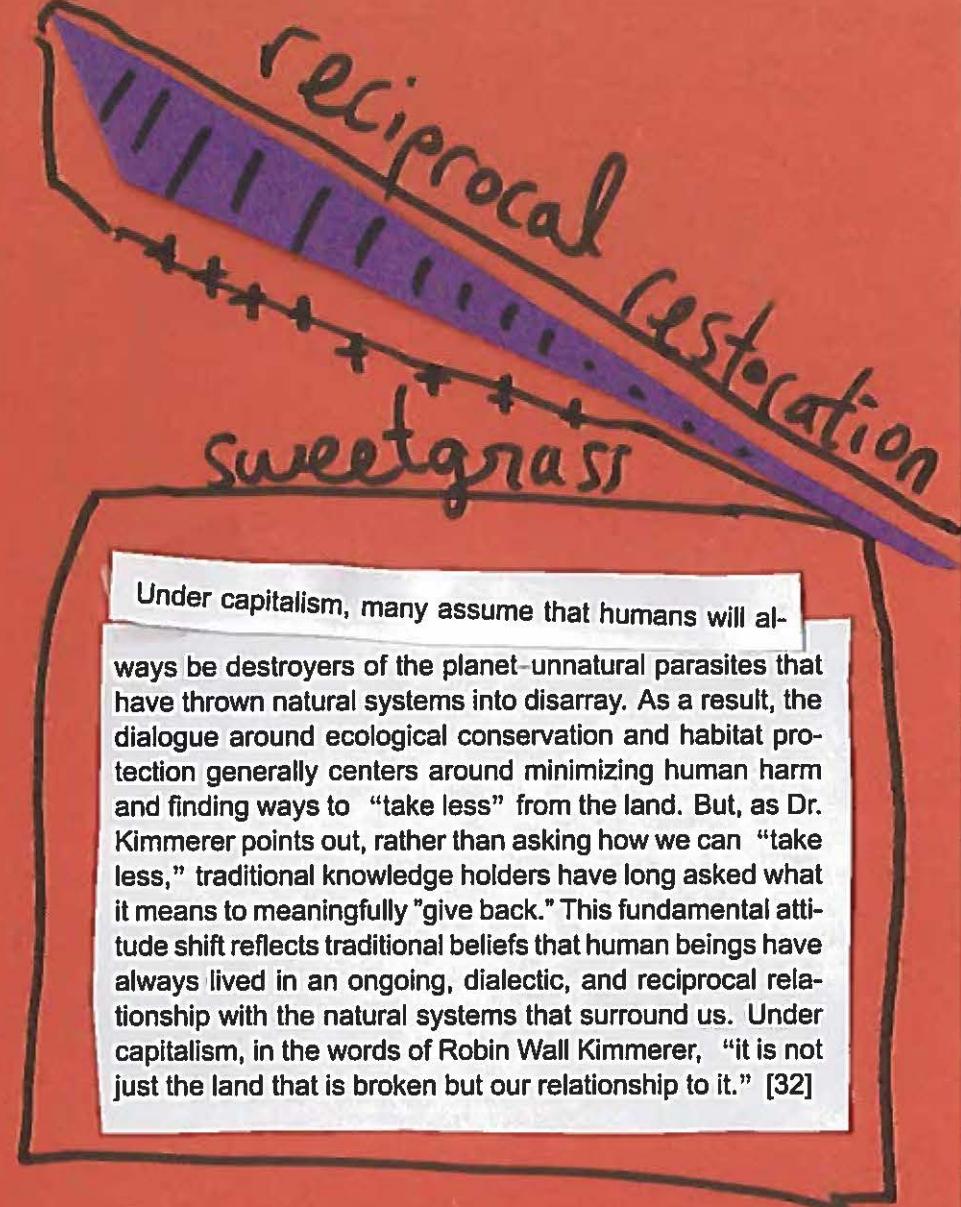




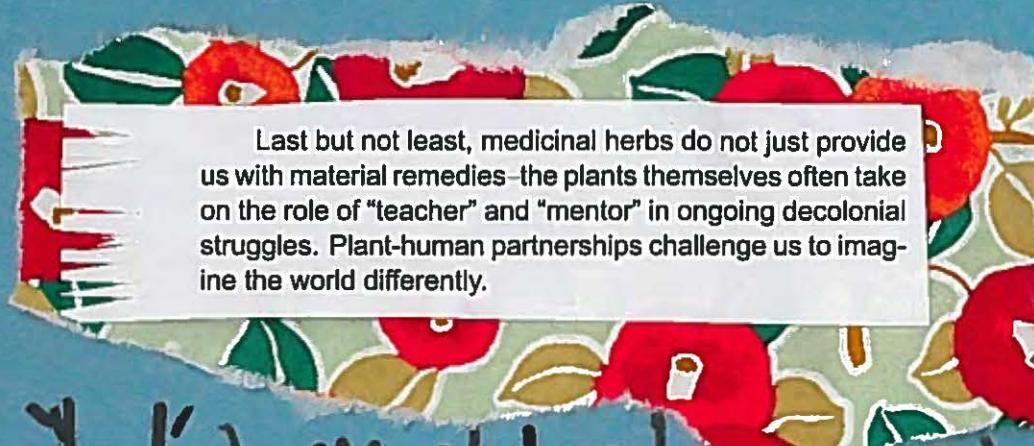
dandelion



8



# Sweetgrass



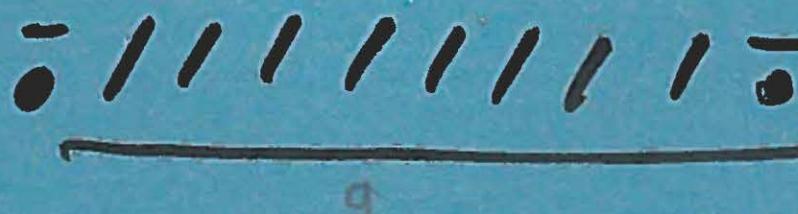
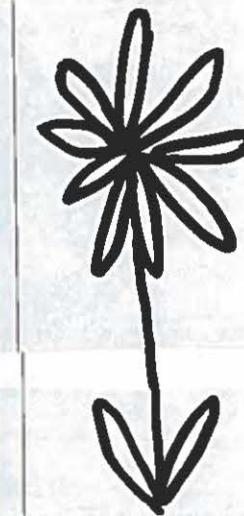
Sweetgrass

Last but not least, medicinal herbs do not just provide us with material remedies—the plants themselves often take on the role of “teacher” and “mentor” in ongoing decolonial struggles. Plant-human partnerships challenge us to imagine the world differently.

For example, in recent years, the disappearance and reappearance of sweetgrass has taught us a valuable lesson about “reciprocal restoration.” Contrary to the popular notion that the best way to conserve a plant is to simply leave it alone, experiments by Indigenous ecologist Robin Wall Kimmerer and others have shown that using and harvesting sweetgrass respectfully actually enables it to “stay with us and flourish.” [30] Pinching the grass above its roots and harvesting it regularly actually increases the density of sweetgrass stems. [31] It thrives when attended to and disappears when ignored—when the plant knows that it is wanted and needed, it returns. Sweetgrass gives humans its medicine, and humans give sweetgrass our attention and care. In decolonial ecological thought, the flourishing of plants and humans is always reciprocal.

# dandelion!

Latin name	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>
Alternate names	Dandelion, pissemil, blowball
Constituents	Nutrient constituents include manganese, potassium, zinc, copper, selenium, vitamin C, B vitamins, polyphenolic antioxidants, carotenoids. The flowers are rich in polyphenols, flavonoids, and xanthophylls. [5]
Ethnobotanic uses	In addition to being a fantastic nutrient source, dandelion can support the liver as a digestive bitter and alterative. It is a diuretic and liver tonic that can help relieve water retention, thin fluids, cleanse the liver and gallbladder, and increase bile production. It can also stimulate the kidney and facilitate the proper elimination of uric acid; meanwhile, its high potassium content can help offset mineral loss due to urination. [6]
Contraindications	Dandelion may be contraindicated for those taking antibiotics, blood thinners, diuretics, heart or blood pressure medication, sedatives, or lithium. [7]



In addition to the "Prisoner's Herbal," Solidarity Apothecary is engaging in on-the-ground work with refugees fleeing the war in Ukraine, [1] providing herbal support for families struggling with stress, insomnia, colds, diabetes and other basic health ailments. In the spirit of revolutionary medicine and mutual aid, anarchist herbalists are helping to distribute sedatives and anxiolytics to aid children and families placed in refugee camps, and even blood sugar-stabilizing herbs for those who cannot access pharmaceutical medications for diabetes.



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Latin name	Panax ginseng (Asian) / Panax quinquefolius (American)
Alternate names	Chinese ginseng / American ginseng
Constituents	Ginsenosides (a kind of triterpene saponin).
Ethnobotanic uses	<p>g i n s e n g</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both Asian and American ginseng are used to treat "adrenal burnout" and mental and physical exhaustion. Serves as an adaptogen and general tonic (increasing resistance to general stress), while having antioxidant, liver-protecting, antispasmodic, antiviral, and antifatigue properties.</li> <li>• Increases stamina, memory, appetite, and treats general weakness and anemia. May also increase cellular sensitivity to insulin and be a useful aid for diabetics.</li> <li>• [27, 29]</li> </ul>
Contraindications	While generally well-tolerated, ginseng may be contraindicated in cases of high blood pressure, acute asthma or infections, or excessive menstruation. 23



ginseng

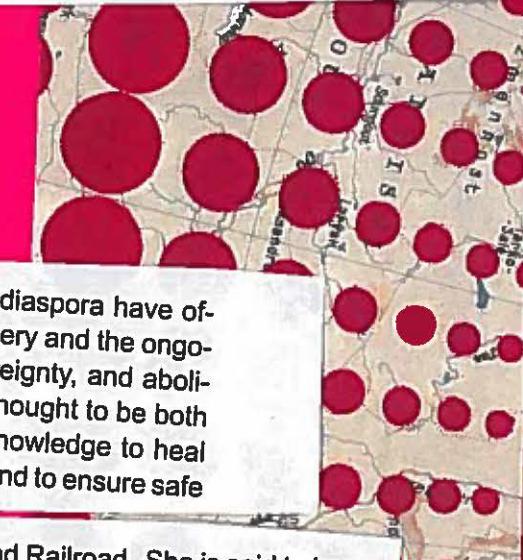


## Cotton Root Bark

**TW/CW: sexual assault/ rape.** People have always found ways to practice reproductive resistance as a strategy for survival and as a way of fighting back against their oppressors. In cotton plantations in the South, slaves often chewed fresh cotton root bark as a way of preventing or terminating pregnancies that were the result of rape.

### Cotton root bark

The root and seeds of the cotton plant were sometimes taken in a decoction, and cotton root tea was common. The popularity of herbal reproductive resistance was such that slave-owners began forbidding women from possessing cotton roots, and some white doctors even forced enslaved women to ingest black haw (*Viburnum prunifolium*) in retaliation. Black haw may prevent uterine contractions, therefore contributing to the forced maintenance of a pregnancy. [8, 9]



The herbal traditions of the African diaspora have often been overlooked in the history of slavery and the ongoing struggle for racial justice, food sovereignty, and abolition. For example, Harriet Tubman was thought to be both a herbalist and wildcrafter, using plant knowledge to heal Union Army soldiers during the Civil War and to ensure safe

passage on the Underground Railroad. She is said to have cured a dying soldier of dysentery using an infusion of water lilies and cranesbill, and to have carried a poppy-based sedative with her to help children sleep as families made the dangerous journey north. [10]



Today, Black herbal resistance is alive and flourishing through organizations like *Harriet's Apothecary*[11], which offers herbal remedies for stress and trauma, paying tribute to Harriet Tubman's legacy as both a freedom fighter and an herbalist. *Farming While Black* [12] and *Freedom Farmers* [13] are two recent books that spotlight ongoing work towards food justice and food sovereignty in Black communities, situating current projects like *Soul Fire Farm* [14] in a long legacy of land-based Afro-Indigenous empowerment.

## ginseng

During this time period, health clinics were set up in impoverished countryside villages, and “barefoot doctors”—healthcare workers who had been trained at hospitals or clinics, typically in the city—were sent to the peasant villages to treat colds and sore throats, and to deliver birth control

and immunizations, making use of whatever limited tools and medical materials they had on hand in a rural context. [24] Through the tumult of the cultural revolution, a positive feature of this massive policy experiment was the serious attempt to integrate traditional medicinal knowledge (passed down through generations of villagers) and state-of-the-art, modern medicine (advanced in the laboratories and clinics of cities like Beijing). [24, 26]



Panax ginseng is a prime example of the many traditional Chinese herbs that peasants were encouraged to cultivate during this time period, both as a “cure-all” remedy and as a cash crop. Traditional use of ginseng in China dates back 5000 years, and it is still a highly valued herb around the world today. [27] American ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*) is a related plant native to North America’s deciduous forests, widely used by Indigenous peoples as a digestive aid, vulnerary, fever aid, and general cure-all by the Ojibwe, the Muscogee, and the Meskwaki. [28]

# Ginseng!

In 1960s China, amidst the political chaos of the cultural revolution, peasant farmers were encouraged to grow and gather local herbs that had medicinal value according to traditional Chinese medicine. [24] Cold War-era Soviet scientists were similarly among the first to rigorously experiment with Rhodiola rosea, Siberian ginseng, and schisandra berries in the search for adaptogens that would help enhance energy, allow individuals to adapt to physical and mental stress, and help soldiers endure frostbite at high elevations. [25] During this period, it was common for students in the Chinese countryside to learn the names and uses of the herbs that grew nearby. Health classes would also typically include acupuncture lessons in which children practiced techniques for stimulating key pressure points. The use of herbs and acupuncture occasionally obviated the need for more expensive therapeutics from America or Europe. [24]

## Ginseng

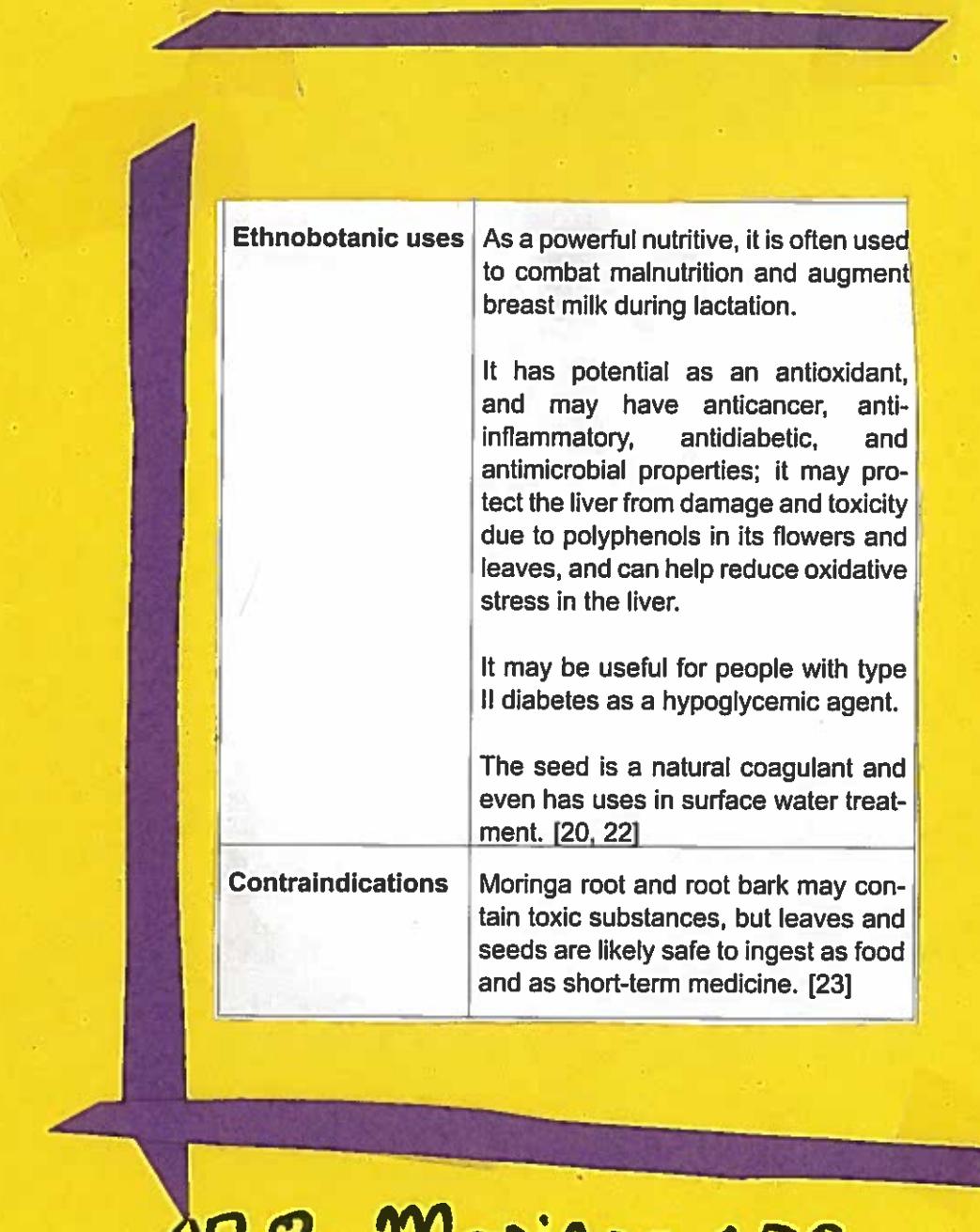


# Cotton

Latin name	<i>Gossypium herbaceum</i>
Alternate names	Cotton, cotton root bark
Constituents	Gossypol, gossypic acid (red resin from fluid extracts of the root)
Ethnobotanic uses	<p>Emmenagogue (may bring on menstruation), parturient (may induce labour), abortive (may induce abortion). [15–17]</p> <p>May promote uterine contractions.</p> <p>Fresh cotton root bark was chewed by enslaved women in the South to induce abortion, apparently without harming general health.</p>
Contraindications	Consult a health practitioner or experienced herbalist before using cotton root bark, especially if pregnant. Herbal abortions are not recommended—they are considerably more dangerous than legal abortions provided by qualified medical practitioners.



Ethnobotanic uses	<p>As a powerful nutritive, it is often used to combat malnutrition and augment breast milk during lactation.</p> <p>It has potential as an antioxidant, and may have anticancer, anti-inflammatory, antidiabetic, and antimicrobial properties; it may protect the liver from damage and toxicity due to polyphenols in its flowers and leaves, and can help reduce oxidative stress in the liver.</p> <p>It may be useful for people with type II diabetes as a hypoglycemic agent.</p> <p>The seed is a natural coagulant and even has uses in surface water treatment. [20, 22]</p>
Contraindications	Moringa root and root bark may contain toxic substances, but leaves and seeds are likely safe to ingest as food and as short-term medicine. [23]



# Moringa

Moringa

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Latin name	<i>Moringa oleifera</i>
Alternate names	Moringa, drumstick tree, horseradish tree, Indian horseradish
Constituents	<p>Leaves are rich in minerals like calcium, potassium, zinc, magnesium, iron, and copper, as well as vitamins like beta-carotene, vitamin A, B-vitamins (e.g. folic acid, pyridoxine, nicotinic acid), vitamin C, D, and E.</p> <p>Other phytochemicals include tannins, sterols, terpenoids, flavonoids, saponins, anthraquinones, and alkaloids, and anti-cancerous agents like glucosinolates, isothiocyanates, and glycoside compounds.</p> <p>Quercetin is found in flowers and roots, which is known to have liver-protecting properties.</p> <p>Pods are high in protein and fiber. [21]</p>

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## SANCTIONS

Cuarandero (traditional healers) and local Cubans often grow medicinal herbs in the countryside or in urban plots, and plant-based medicines are available for purchase both from government pharmacies or private outlets. Many ancestral Afro-Cuban folk cures were brought over from places like the Congo by slaves who were brought to Cuba

to work sugarcane plantations. Among the vast varieties of plants cultivated as part of the Cuban pharmacopeia are guava leaves (used topically to treat shingle rashes), tua tua leaves (for diabetes and gastritis), sage (for respiratory problems), wild heliotrope (for kidney stones), chamomile (for upset stomachs), and turmeric (for immune system stimulation). [18]

Heralded by Fidel Castro as the “miracle tree from India,” Moringa has caught on in Cuba and elsewhere around the world as a way of treating digestive system ailments, as a hypoglycemic agent for type-II diabetes, and as a rich nutritional supplement, capable of augmenting the quality of breastmilk during lactation. [20]



It has taken root in the national diet of Cuba over the past three decades, where many enjoy Moringa tea, Moringa corn stew, scrambled Moringa, sautéed Moringa served with onion, pepper, and butter, and Moringa salad. Like soy and quinoa, moringa contains all nine essential amino acids. In addition to being packed with protein, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, potassium, and iron (in greater concentrations than eggs, milk, bananas, and oranges) Moringa is also easy to grow, resilient to severe weather, and makes for a beautiful ornamental plant. [20]

Moringa,  
Moringa!



The miracle  
tree!