



SELF-SUFFICIENT HERBALISM

A GUIDE TO GROWING, GATHERING AND
PROCESSING HERBS FOR MEDICINAL USE

LUCY JONES

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Photo by Mark Tiberius Jones

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A Guide to Growing and Wild Harvesting
Your Herbal Dispensary

Lucy Jones

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I am truly blessed.

SELF-SUFFICIENT
HERBALISM



INTRODUCTION

This is a guide to being more self-sufficient in your herbal practice. I have been in practice since 2006, and I have always felt that to grow and gather my own herbal dispensary is one of the most wonderful aspects of being a medical herbalist. It connects me with the plants that I work with, the ancient traditions that I come from, and the land where I am settled. It grounds and nourishes me. It provides balance to the demands and challenges that I face while carrying out patient consultations. I thoroughly recommend it.

Whether you are an established practitioner with a full patient list, newly qualified, someone who uses herbs at home to treat family members, or a small-scale herbal processor, you will find that this book offers a clear and practical guide to being more self-sufficient in terms of your herbal dispensary. Over the years I've learnt such a lot. Sometimes the learning was joyous and smooth, at other times it was the result of mistakes that seemed like frustrating obstacles at the time, but I know that the mistakes that I made have helped me to learn how to do things better. Much better, in fact. I want to share all of this hard-won knowledge with you. Within these pages I have included down-to-earth, practical guidance about growing, gathering, and preserving medicinal herbs for a working dispensary, but it does not stop there. My aim is to offer an insight into a way of practising that is much more than just sourcing herbs. I want to show you that the practice of self-sufficient herbalism can be transformative.

I have deliberately avoided writing about herbal properties or about how different herbs can be used in a clinical setting. There are many excellent

books focusing on these subjects, and if that is what you are looking for, this is not the book for you. However, if you are intrigued by working traditionally and building a closer relationship with the plants that you work with, then I hope that this book will guide and inspire you.

The book is divided into three sections. The first, Part One, explains ‘why’ self-sufficiency in herbal practice is a good thing to move towards. The second, Part Two, goes through the main principles of ‘how’ to achieve self-sufficiency, divided into the different processes involved and the factors to consider. The third, The Herbal Harvesting Year, is a glossary of detailed notes on the cultivation, harvesting, and processing of 108 particular herbs. It is arranged by the seasons, so you can use it as a reference when you are starting out. Everything that I write here is based on my own experience.

Before beginning, what I should say is that very few medical herbalists will be able to be truly 100% self-sufficient in herbal medicines. Self-sufficiency is something to aim for: it is a way of working and a move away from large-scale cultivation and wildcrafting practices. It is a broad aim. It is the keeping alive of a vibrant and grounded connection with the herbs that we find ourselves working with. Even if you decide that you can only practically be self-sufficient in two or three herbs, I would encourage you to make this happen and feel proud of yourself for achieving it.

I reckon that in my busy full-time practice I achieve 75% self-sufficiency in terms of the herbs that I prescribe. I can say, however, that I do make every single litre of tincture, every capsule, and every topical treatment that I use.

So why only 75%? I grow and gather as much as possible, but I do choose to buy in, in some bulk, herbs from responsible and environmentally sustainable sources. I like to make and use some traditional Tibetan medicines, which contain herbs like Cloves, Cardamom, and Nutmeg, none of which I have a way of cultivating in this country. I can, in theory, grow Ginger and Turmeric in a heated greenhouse, but I do not have access to one. I have only a very small garden and an allotment in which to grow my herbs, so I need to prioritize which herbal crops I grow. As a result, if there are certain things that would take a lot of space to grow but I can buy in from good-quality sources, I will do so. Caraway and Garlic are two examples of these.

With such limited growing space, I wildcraft as many medicines as it makes sense to. Occasionally there will be a bad year for something, and I will find that I need to buy additional supplies to last until next gathering or harvest season. To be honest, I cannot remember when I last had to do this. It is a rare

occurrence. I prefer to travel further afield and spend more time searching for suitable populations of the plants that I need. If wildcrafting sufficient for my needs is unreliable or potentially unsustainable, I will establish a population of that species at my allotment or in the garden. This usually gives me plenty of what I need the following year, especially as I can manage it like a horticultural crop and take a heavier harvest than I would do with a wild population.

Having said all of this, the last thing I want to imply is that herbal wholesalers are to be avoided or that they are in some way undesirable or untrustworthy. There are many really lovely wholesalers out there who make every effort to source high-quality, sustainably sourced herbs. I have a good relationship with the wholesalers that I buy from, and I appreciate their integrity, efforts, and customer service. I just do not want to rely on them for the majority of the medicines I use for my patients.

It is also worth mentioning that a busy herbal practice needs bottles, jars, bags, and other packaging materials. I minimize the need for these by recycling medicine bottles, but they still need to be bought in the first place. I also purchase 96% proof alcohol, printer paper, ink cartridges, and packaging materials for postage. There is no way that I can claim to be fully self-sufficient, but that is not my aim. My aim is to be as self-sufficient as possible in terms of herbs.

Let me take you on a journey to explain why I do this and how this can be achieved within your own situation.

Note

This book uses metric and Imperial units. The equivalent units in the United States are the following:

1 litre	=	2.1 US pints
1 Imp. gallon	=	1.2 US gallons
1 Imp. pint	=	1.2 US pints
1 Imp. cup	=	1.18 US cups
1 Imp. fl oz	=	0.96 US fl oz
1 Imp. tbsp	=	1.2 US tbsp
1 Imp. tsp	=	1.2 US tsp

