

The Herbal Book of Making and Taking



Christopher Hedley and Non Shaw

A HERBAL BOOK
OF MAKING & TAKING

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Non Shaw*

AEON

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Contents

<i>Read this First</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Guidelines for Using this Book</i>	xi
<i>Introduction to Making and Taking by Guy Waddell</i>	xiii
<i>Introduction</i>	xix
<i>A Note on Virtues</i>	xxiii
<i>Common and Botanical Names</i>	xxv
<i>Equipment</i>	xxxi
<i>Keep a Record Book or Books</i>	xxxv
<i>Introduction to Tasting Herbal Medicines by Non Shaw</i>	xxxvii
Sourcing Materials	1
Internal Medicines	11
Water Based Extracts	15

Glycerites and Vinegars	45
Miscellaneous Internal Medicines	57
Tinctures and Fluid Extracts	61
External or Topical Preparations	83
Miscellaneous Remedies	111
<i>Introducing the Authors</i>	155
<i>Appendix, Sources and Resources</i>	159
<i>Herb Index</i>	169
<i>Preparations & General Index</i>	173

Read this First

This book is intended as a companion for herbalists and for herbal students at established schools of herbal medicine and universities. We assume our readers have a sound and practical knowledge of the virtues of the herbs mentioned here; their properties, appropriate dosages, contraindications and interactions with other herbs and with drugs. If you are unsure on any point, double-check with your mentor or with a more experienced herbalist.

Any suggestions for uses and doses are just that, suggestions taken from many sources from ancient Greece until now. They should be applied or modified according to your skill and to the individual needs of the person being treated.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to the plants themselves, who are our ultimate teachers.

Thanks to the Earth our mother, the source of life.

Thanks to all our fellow herbalists, past and present, root and branch, who have contributed.

Long may all blossom.

Guidelines for Using this Book

THERE ARE ONLY TWO RULES IN HERBAL MEDICINE

1. Do not eat anything until you have seen me eat it first (for use on herbal walks).
2. Label everything and keep notes on what you have done (in case you are asked to repeat it).

THERE ARE NO OTHER RULES, ONLY GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THOSE PRINCIPLES

Take any advice or instructions from other herbalists (including from ourselves), from books or from websites as provisional guidance only. Test everything for yourself before deciding. There is no substitute for hands-on, practical experience. Follow our recipes as a start and then develop your own. Keep notes on your changes.

- ▶ *This symbol indicates exercises that we recommend you try, to enhance your learning experience.*

Introduction to Making and Taking

by Guy Waddell

A *Herbal Book of Making and Taking* by Christopher Hedley and Non Shaw is primarily a pharmacy book in the Western herbal tradition, one that rolls up its sleeves and gets to work quickly in clearly describing and explaining how to make herbal medicines for modern herbal practice. The authors have produced both a wonderful resource and a great pleasure for herbalists and herbal medicine students. Non and Christopher passed away in 2017, Non in July and Christopher a few months later on the autumn equinox, and are sadly missed by many. They had a nourishing mycorrhizal influence on herbal medicine in the UK, having been gently pivotal in so many herbalists' lives, my own included, and in so many patients' journeys to becoming well and more like themselves. There is a Romany saying that we have two deaths, one when our bodies die and the other, more significant death, when no one remembers us. In this way, and in many others no doubt, Non and Christopher are still with us, with their presence felt partly through the resource that this book provides.

One of the pleasures to be found within these pages is the variety of preparations and recipes that are awaiting the budding or mature herbalist to try out, work with, and amend as necessary for the benefit of their patients or clients. Internal

medicines include, but go beyond, the normal macerated tincture preparations and teas, to encompass, for example, fruit leathers, honey syrups, oxymels, vinegars, salt pickles, hydrosols, and percolated liquid extracts. Similarly, aside from the usual creams and ointments are included a multitude of external preparations: plasters, pessaries and suppositories, liniments, baths, steams, gargles, poultices, and compresses, highlighting the value of treating the site directly through therapeutic contact with plant medicines. As Christopher used to say, "There is always something that can be done," and these pages provide that essential pharmacy resource for effective clinical herbal practice. Woven within the practical utility of the book is the pleasure of herbal medicine making, where all senses are employed in the creation of something therapeutic.

This book is born out of three and a half decades of experimentation with herbal preparations for the benefit of patients. The authors' practices drew on a wide range of influences, including folk traditions, humoural medicine—especially the work of Nicholas Culpeper, and the Eclectic medical tradition and physiomedicalism as well as plant chemistry and modern science. They also learnt, developed, and integrated counselling skills into their consultations with patients, with Non additionally resourcing bodywork for her patients. However, this book is arguably most deeply rooted in the transmission of what the plants have taught Non and Christopher over the years. As they say in their introduction, "Plants are our teachers. They teach us how to be in the world," and "The way a herb is in the world will inform it of the way to be in your body." For Non and Christopher, truly effective herbal medicine requires getting to know the living plants in your and their environments. They often emphasised that the herbs we need are found under our noses, growing between the cracks in the pavements.

One key way they explored our embodied knowledge of plant medicines was through tasting herbs. They developed

a simple yet sophisticated tea-tasting methodology (see page xxxvii), best undertaken in groups, to understand the qualities, appropriations, and applications of plant medicines, arguing that any disagreement among herbalists can be resolved by tasting the herb as a tea.

They were urban herbalists, seeing the city as offering up as many possibilities as meadows. They knew their patch like no one else, and they lived in the same basement flat in Primrose Hill, London, for 35 years. They saw herbs as having "virtues", with this term suggesting an expression of the plant's "vital spirit and of the way it is in the world" (page xxiii). They saw this as being preferable to understanding herbs as having "uses" with the implication that herbs are somehow instrumental to human needs and hence blinding us to the agency of herbs themselves as living beings. On herb walks Christopher would point out a particular plant and say, "And here we have the most beautiful plant in the whole known universe," before moving on to the next plant, "And here we have the most beautiful plant in the whole known universe." You get the idea. He loved plants, as did Non. They met in 1965 when Christopher was reading for a degree in physics at the University of Sussex and Non was studying art. After moving together to London, in the late 1970s Christopher enrolled on the herbal medicine course at the UK's School of Herbal Medicine near Tunbridge Wells. Non studied the course material alongside Christopher, who graduated in 1983 and became a member of the National Institute of Medical Herbalists (NIMH) at a time when it was still a professional body of physiomedical practitioners. He became chair of the Postgraduate Training Board and council member and in 1999 he was made a fellow of NIMH.

They were a team: learning, planning, writing, and living together, but with Christopher being the more visible partner, especially given his six foot five inch thin frame, white beard and gentle gaze, with Non remaining in the background,

working from home, often through the night, writing, drawing, painting, and making things. Christopher's relationship with Non was as central to his being a herbalist as was his relationship with plants. Christopher taught herbal medicine at all levels, particularly *materia medica*, therapeutics, and pharmacy, from adult education through to BSc at the University of Westminster and to both BSc and MSc levels at the Scottish School of Herbal Medicine, as well as supervising practitioners. He was also influential in America, travelling there to teach, and via an American-based internet discussion group for herbalists. His teaching was most often transmitted through wonderful and humorous stories, weaving a thread for remembering, that integrated his vast breadth and depth of knowledge of plant medicine. But most remembered perhaps will be his gentle, open, unassuming presence. These skills served him well in practice. "When with patients, look closely and listen closely: they will tell you what's wrong with them; listen longer and they'll tell you what to do about it. And then they pay you! It helps if you have white hair and look deep into their eyes: they will think you are wise!" His humour, of course, had a serious side, with both Non and Christopher having a firm belief that people get themselves well, with a little help from their herbalists.

I shall finish with a poem by a friend and patient of Christopher's, Brigid Shaughnessy, which she has kindly given me permission to reproduce. These words say it all, really. They apply equally to Non.

Better

I was better
after seeing him.
Better in health
in spirit
in humour -
better tempered
better balanced
In better shape.

He knew
about things I knew
nothing about.
Pungent brews,
earthy scents,
gnomic signs.

He understood
what to pick and pluck
and when
how to dry and press
mill and mince
when to use,
infuse, reduce, release.

May my better self
memorise the best of him.

Guy Waddell PhD fHEA MNIMH
was lucky enough to know Christopher
and Non for 23 years.
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Introduction

It's possible, these days, to practise herbal medicine without ever directly relating to the plants themselves. Believe it or not, people do. This is wrong. The plants are our teachers. They teach us how to be in the world. Listen to them, play with them, be with them. This must be your "path with heart". Such a path can only be followed properly and fully with the plants that grow around us, in our gardens or in the wider environment.

Even if you use bought-in and imported herbs be sure to follow this path as much as possible, to keep you grounded and connected with nature.

History is important. We all need to know where we have come from so that we can see where we can go to. This is especially true for herbalists. We need to be in touch with our roots so that we can grow strong branches.

SOME HISTORY

The original medicine must have been simply chewing leaves. Animals, left to themselves, will seek out plants to eat to ease their ailments. Look at www.natural-wonder-pets.com/do-wild-animals-heal-themselves.html for a few choice examples. Humans living in hunter-gatherer communities are

closer to their animal nature and they can do the same, even today. Shamans discover cures for diseases new to them by tuning in to nature. We have seen examples of this ourselves.

Extracts in water (decoctions, infusions, soups, and stews) were the first herbal preparations and are still the most popular in the world. Concentrated decoctions and powders, pills and tablets made from concentrated decoctions are an important part of global herbal traditions and are gaining popularity in Western herbal practice.

Low alcohol herbal beers (small beers) made from fruit, plant saps, or grains, allowed to ferment for a day or so, have also been around a long time. When we were young ginger beer was a popular home-made drink for the whole family. The alcohol content was low enough for children and it was fizzy!

The first alcoholic extract was tincture of opium used as a painkiller by Paracelsus (1493-1541). Since then tinctures have become increasingly popular and now occupy a place of exaggerated importance in Western herbal medicine, responding to our society's craving for quick and forceful solutions to illness.

Sugar was first extracted from sugar cane in India about 2,000 years ago. It was considered a spice and was expensive and little used except as an occasional medicine until the development of West Indian plantations. Large-scale cultivation and the use of slave labour made it cheaper and more available, until now we find it overused and a major source of chronic illness in the world. Most governments bow to the power of the food industry and allow this situation to go on, more shame on them.

The healing power of honey is making a comeback these days but it's a pity that hospitals will only use approved manuka honey. Local, raw honey works just as well.

Soap has been around since 2000 BCE. It was originally used for cleaning clothes and making medicines and only

became popular for cleaning bodies in the nineteenth century. It is hard on the skin, which prefers oils and creams for cleansing. Modern liquid cleansing preparations are even worse, being full of noxious chemicals.

In many societies topical applications including compresses, poultices, herbs crushed in oil and baths were the main healing modality. Applying crushed, fresh herbs to wounds is an obvious procedure. In ancient Babylonian pharmacopoeias topical remedies predominate, including remedies for headaches, chills, fevers, epilepsy, feeble-mindedness, frenzy, melancholia, and witchcraft. Topical preparations other than creams and ointments are out of fashion in Western society. We could do well to bring them back.

Inhaling the smoke from burning herbs through straws is an ancient practice all over the world. Tobacco (*Nicotiana* spp.) is native to the Americas and smoking with pipes is a Native American invention used in ceremony and in shamanic practice. Like many sacred traditions it was taken up and misused by Europeans as an indulgence from which the whole world now suffers.

The world is much smaller these days. Cultures exchange ideas, philosophy, music, cuisines, health regimes, and medicines. This cross-fertilisation has many benefits. Its main drawback is the downgrading of local traditional knowledge. Exotic ideas and medicines seem somehow more valuable than "what your granny did". This is not the case of course. To us the exchange is most useful when it throws light on our tradition and makes us look at it again. For example, taking powdered herbs in a drink was popular in European medicine but the practice died out. It has been reinvigorated by Ayurveda, especially by the use of Ashwagandha powder in milk.

We have talked with many herbalists from many different cultures and we have seen that all traditional medicine has the same roots. There is nothing special about any of them. We prefer to keep our links with our ancestors. Our readers

may feel called elsewhere. That is their privilege but we ask them to study their chosen path in detail and not to simply create a mishmash. Much damage has been done that way.

Finally we appeal to you all to consider the whole world when buying herbs and extracts. Think about air miles, fair trading, and sustainable practice. Put those points above any ideas you have been sold on the superiority of particular preparations and manufacturers.

Herbs and foods from around the world have been taken up by Western culture much to the detriment of their original environment. Ours is a greedy culture fascinated by quick gains and monetary compensation. Kava kava is a good example. Kava originates in the islands of the Western Pacific where many different strains are grown. Strains which are slow growing are being abandoned in favour of quicker, and possibly toxic varieties at the behest of market forces.