

Foreword to The Sensory Herbal Handbook

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I first met the Seed Sistas on one of their famous witches' brew circles and was instantly struck by their unique mix of knowledge and wisdom, respect and irreverence. Over the course of a day brimming with mythology, science, anecdote and fun we were collectively enlightened and informed, reassured and transformed. Here was real magic at play. Here, indeed, I was in the company of modern-day alchemists and herbalists who could leap between worlds with confidence and dexterity.

As we stirred agaric with nightshade, mugwort with henbane, we explored the origins of lycanthropy, enchantment, flying ointments and broomsticks, and I was left in no doubt as to who I was with and the power that they held.

What I love most about these contemporary witchy herbalists is that beneath their exuberance and playfulness is a solid understanding of plants. Their pharmacological and ethnobotanical knowledge, Latin nomenclature and letters after their names offer the credibility that many of us in today's urban worlds (sadly) need in order to relax, trust and open up. But what is so special about these wonderfully wicked witchy sistas is that they have gone way beyond this structured, linear, disenchanted realm into something much more profound. In our world of categories and pigeonholes, labels and certainty we are in desperate need of those who know how to skilfully break out of the confines of our narrow way of thinking into the realms of embodied feelings and the deeper understanding that can come through intuition, myth, storytelling and the wisdom of experience.

To my mind, the best healers and shamans are fully grounded beings who live in this world but can journey into the other realms. It is the moving between the worlds and finding that balance which is the real test and testament of wisdom today. It is all too simple to abide in one space or another. Everything can be a poison, and everything can be a medicine – it is all about context and degree, relationship and dose.

Relationship is key. Plants exist within us and outside of us. Plants nourish and cure us, they propel and sustain us. An important element of the Seed Sistas' approach is the understanding that plants also have character and are imbued with an essence or spirit, just as we are. Each herb is unique while also being a part of the whole. If we can get to know the plants around us, make friends with them, honour and respect them, listen to them and see ourselves as akin to them, then the real journey of relationship can begin. With this book as a guide we can discover how we each individually relate to the world of plants and herbs.

We were all great herbalists once, and many an indigenous person still is today. I have met with people who are fully embodied in the subtle realms of communication, who can listen to and commune with the plant world. For them, the knowledge they receive in this manner is as real as any spoken or written word.

What appeals to me about the Seed Sistas' approach to herbs is that it uses the tools we all have – our own senses. Through engaging them and exploring with them, we can experience herbs and their ability to heal in new ways, and the world opens out to us, afresh, vibrant, alive. It is a deeply personal yet universally accessible pursuit. And as we learn to trust and deepen our senses, we also begin to come into contact with the hidden senses that our forest friends live by.

Intuition is not something mystical, it is within us all if we can build a relationship with our physical body, our spiritual edges and our inner realms. Meeting the plants in this way is enriching, a tonic for our times, in which we seem so disconnected from our feelings and environment.

This book contains a wealth of wisdom and will be a great companion to us all in our tentative explorations into these otherly realms. We are all already gifted with the tools we need for this exploration – our own hearts, senses, bodies and minds – and this book will guide us on this important journey of reconnection.

I wish you well on this important venture. I am full of gratitude to the wonderful Seed Sistas for compiling this book and sharing some of what they have learned. Go well on your investigations, be safe and, above all, enjoy the trip.

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<www.seedsistas.co.uk/product/the-herbal-handbook>

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