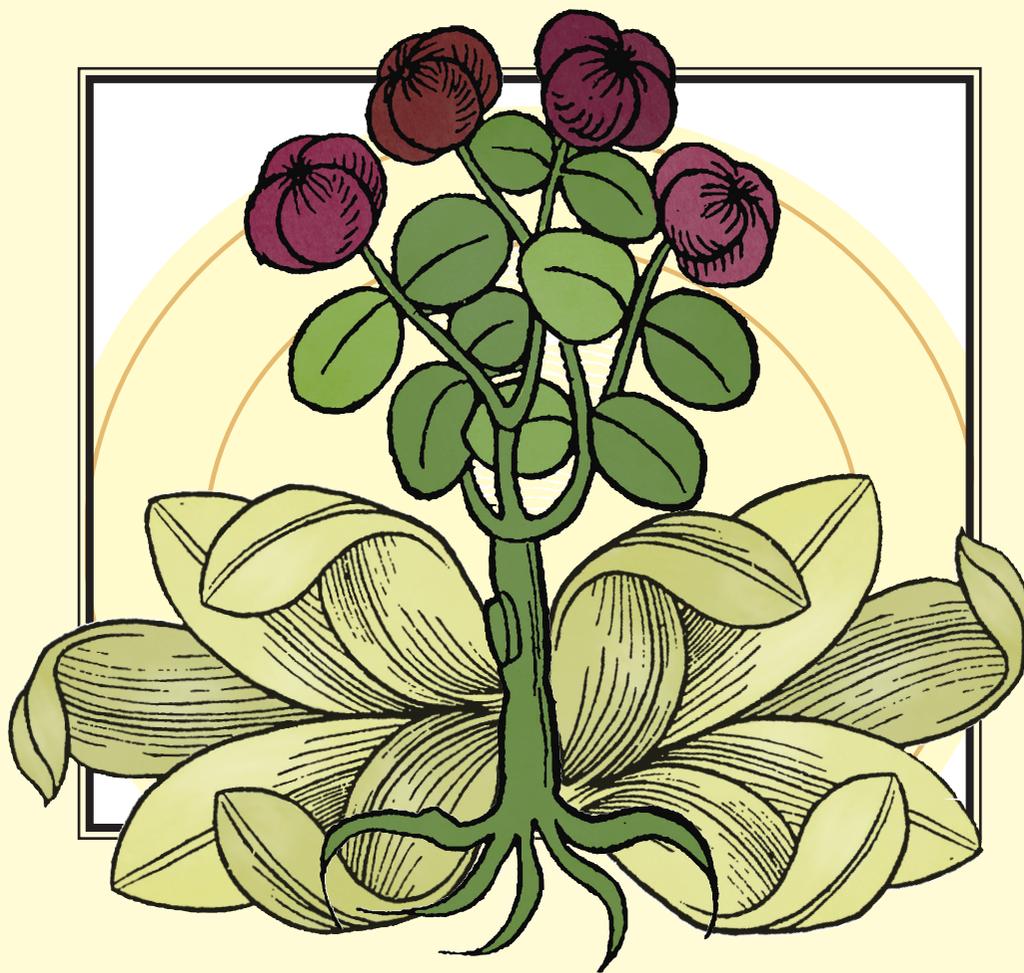


the
HERBAL KITCHEN

KAMI McBRIDE



50 Easy-to-Find Herbs and Over 250 Recipes to Bring
Lasting Health to You and Your Family

Foreword by Rosemary Gladstar, herbalist and author

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Conari Press



*This book is dedicated to my mother.
Her never-ending love and support
inspired me to follow my heart.*



Acknowledgments



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Foreword



Herbalism and herb books have become quite the hot topic these past few years, and there are herb books on any subject one could imagine exploring the broad territory that herbalism embraces. Quite the change from only a few years back, when one would want books on herbs and herbal healing and find they were far and few between. Today, quite thankfully, my library shelves are heavily stacked with books on plant spirit medicine, wild crafting and identification, herbal healing and herb lore, the latest most popular herbs, using herbs with drugs and medication and contraindications, and herbal medicine as a clinical practice. You name it, big book or small, colorfully laid out or plainly printed, each herb book holds at least a few gems and often many about this intriguing field of study that I have been impassioned with for most of my life. But few touch my heart the way Kami McBride's *The Herbal Kitchen* does. It embraces all that I love most about this ancient healing tradition and reminds me of how necessary our relationship to plants is in our world today.

“Herbs and spices are a gift from nature. We are nature and the plants have an affinity with our bodies...they are our allies.”
(from *The Herbal Kitchen*)

In *The Herbal Kitchen* sits the rich green heart of herbalism in all its abundance, simplicity, and practicality. Medicines are made, recipes exchanged, and wise adages passed along to the reader. One can almost smell the flowers, taste the cup of tea in hand, so homespun and real are the teachings that Kami shares. She artfully guides us through garden and field ripe with earth's abundance, then leads us back into the heart of the household, the earthy abode of the kitchen. There, amidst pots and pans, herb jars, and baskets overflowing with the lush harvest of fragrant plants, all that is best about the tradition of herbal healing comes forth, as Kami generously shares not only recipe and remedy, but wisdom passed down through time.

With the simplest of ingredients and always an eye for what is practical and doable, Kami guides us to create recipes for health and healing and weaves the

magic and power of herbs back into our daily lives. Every recipe embraces that wise old adage, “food is our best medicine.” Within the limitless range of the

“The culture of our kitchen environment is the space we create to nurture and care for ourselves and our families....”

kitchen lies the pathway to wellness. As Kami makes obvious, “this is a book about reclaiming the art of using herbs in our daily food routines and developing a deeper understanding of our relationship between food and wellness.”

But this is far more than just a book of recipes and remedies. Kami embraces all that’s real and honest, traditional and practical, about the green world, and she generously, with spice and vigor, offers her warm insights for all of us to savor. It’s sweetly delicious, like the elderberry syrup, Rose Delight Honey, and Benedictine liqueur, (recipes she shares along with the stories that accompany them). One can feel the grandmothers with her, guiding her, whispering their ancient wisdom and infusing it into the very teachings that Kami shares so warmly with us. Perhaps that is one of the reasons I love this book so much; it offers a sweet antidote to the sometimes stale modernism of so many herb books written today. In Kami’s *The Herbal Kitchen* I am reminded of all that I love most about this ancient tradition of healing, how it’s been passed down through the ages, from grandmother to granddaughter, grandfather to grandson; how it embraces simplicity and humbleness, while being grand and noble at the same time. And how it offers us the best kind of medicine, the kind that feeds the heart as well as the body, reaching deeply into the sacred places of our souls to heal us from the inside out.

“I keep a watchful eye for what the earth has to offer, paying my respects by nourishing my body and soul with the harvest.”
(from *The Herbal Kitchen*)

Read deeply; this is a book that will nourish heart and soul, body and spirit with the rich harvest of the green world. And yes, another book to add to my shelves of green literature. This one, however, goes on the top shelf, where I house most of my favorite tomes and the ones I use most often.

Rosemary Gladstar, herbalist and author
From her mountain home in Vermont

Introduction



Do you enjoy eating garlic bread? Does oregano always find its way into your spaghetti sauce? Do you garnish potato salad with paprika? Then you are participating in the ancient tradition of using herbs to enhance the health benefits and digestibility of your food.

Herbs in the kitchen not only augment the flavor of what we eat, they support our overall health and wellness on a daily basis. Whether you are a seasoned cook or just cutting your teeth in the kitchen, these pages assist you in nurturing and healing yourself and your loved ones.

Did you know that stuffing your turkey with sage helps keep away the colds that begin circulating around Thanksgiving? Or that adding ginger to a fish meal kills pathogens found specifically in fish? And when you sprinkle fennel into your meat marinades, it helps you digest the fat in the meat more easily. These pages discuss many herbs and spices that you already have in your kitchen. My hope is that you will be inspired to think of your spice rack as more than a source of flavor. It is also a medicine chest, full of healing remedies that can help you keep your family well.

I am so grateful that you have picked up this book. Who do you know who is entrusted with preparing food for their family or tending to the wellness of those around them? Please get a copy for them also. *The Herbal Kitchen* is about using herbs to prevent illness and elevate the nutritional value of whatever is prepared in your kitchen. This essential information can help you use herbs in your foods to more efficiently address the seasonal and specific health needs of the people for whom you prepare meals.

There is an extraordinary pharmacy waiting for you right in your own kitchen. With just a handful of herbs, you can begin to fortify the nutrient and therapeutic density of your meals. Adding valuable vitamins, minerals, and digestive aids to your food takes little effort.

Let's become more intimate with the spice cabinet. Using medicinal herbs doesn't have to be foreign and difficult or take years of college to understand. We can begin with what we have on hand and already have a relationship with. Most of the herbs in this book are common household items; you don't even have to buy anything. You just get to realize the full array of benefits of what currently sits in your cupboards. Let's take cinnamon for example; most everyone has cinnamon and has used it to liven up their oatmeal or pumpkin pie mix. Cinnamon is a highly medicinal herb with hundreds of health and kitchen medicine applications. It is a first-rate cold and flu prevention agent and remedy, and it offers relief from menstrual cramps, allergy symptoms, coughs, and much more. The same thing holds true for all the common spices: oregano, garlic, sage, cloves, and pepper all contain healing attributes that inspire good food and good health.

Food is one of our most powerful medicines. We create millions of cells every few seconds. What we eat is what we use to build those cells. Most of the kitchen herbs promote nutrient digestion and assimilation, helping to increase the quality of the cells that make up our tissue and organs. Many culinary herbs activate the circulatory system, contributing to more efficient dispersal of beneficial nutrients. Culinary herbs are also a surprisingly effective source for helping to calm the body while eating, so you can relax and enjoy the amazing process of digesting life into life. When you understand the comprehensive digestive support that the spice rack offers, you realize the value of using herbs to practice preventive health care while you eat.

Adding ginger to increase the digestibility of chicken, pacifying the mucus-forming effects of yogurt with cardamom, whipping up a fennel tea when someone complains of a stomachache—this is the creative, health-giving art of having fun with herbs in the kitchen. Who knows how long that stomachache would have persisted or who else would have contracted it were it not quelled with an herbal remedy? The small act of adding healing herbs and spices to our food is one of many things we do to nurture and care for ourselves and those around us.

Writing this book has been an alchemical distillation of more than twenty years of my personal hobby and professional occupation. Years and years of classes in herbal medicine and herbal cooking are concentrated into the chapters before you. It has been an exhilarating adventure having the opportunity of placing my botanical kitchen curriculum into your hands. I sincerely hope that you are inspired to use the accumulated experience in this book to enhance your health, save money, make your food taste better, nurture your relationship with the earth and the people around you, and to have fun.

DISCLAIMER

This book is intended to be used as an educational tool. The suggestions described in this book are not a substitute for appropriate counseling, diagnosis, and treatment from a qualified medical professional. If you are taking medications, consult your health care practitioner before taking herbs. This book is about culinary uses of herbs and spices. If you want to take these plants in larger doses to achieve more therapeutic effects, please consult your health care practitioner.

If you are taking medications, consult your physician before taking herbs. Many herbs are contraindicated or inadvisable in chronic and acute diseases. If you have a health challenge, consult with your health care practitioner before using herbs. It is best to be cautious when using herbs and spices while pregnant. Carminative and antispasmodic herbs that are commonly found in foods can stimulate the uterus and are not recommended for use during pregnancy. Please consult with your midwife and health care practitioner before using herbs and spices during pregnancy. Never taste an herb if you are not sure what it is. Only use herbs that have been accurately identified.



CHAPTER 1

Kitchen Medicine and Culinary Culture

Many people use herbs and spices in their cooking, often because these food combinations are what they grew up with, because a recipe calls for herbs and spices, or because it is just in the ether that you can't make spaghetti sauce without oregano. Awareness of the health benefits is not in the forefront of why we use spices. Often people serve food combinations without realizing the medicinal value of what they are cooking with. Whether we appreciate it or not, the use of herbs to support optimum digestion is embedded in garnishes, sauces, dressings, and condiments. It is common to serve chicken with curry sauce, garlic with eggs, and mint jelly with lamb. You will find cinnamon applesauce with pork chops, dill pickles with lunchmeat sandwiches, juniper berries with cabbage, and ginger with fish. Mustard seed would sit in my mom's cupboard all year. She didn't often use mustard seed, but she always pulled it out for the special occasion of preparing corned beef and cabbage on St. Patrick's Day. She is of Irish heritage, and that is the dish that her mother and grandmother had prepared in celebration of the holiday. It is a good thing she used the mustard seed, otherwise that corned beef would sit like a wet log in the stomach.

Herbs and spices are a gift from nature. We are nature, and plants have an affinity with our bodies. They are our allies, not only enlivening the taste of our food but also working in hundreds of ways to keep our bodies healthy. When I add thyme to spaghetti sauce, I think about how it is helping to keep my family from catching a cold or getting a stomach bug from something in the food.

We all have to eat, and we need whole, seasonal foods to be healthy. We need herbs and spices not only for flavor, but also to help us digest and

assimilate what we eat. If you look through old cookbooks, you'll see that each food is paired with specific spices. Sage goes with turkey, pepper spices cheese sauces, fennel accompanies sausage, celery seed garnishes root vegetables, mustard and horseradish are served with beef, and the list goes on. As we have come to rely on packaged foods preserved with salt, sugar, and chemicals, we use fewer herbs and spices to flavor and preserve our food. This book is about reclaiming the art of using herbs in our daily food routines and developing a deeper understanding of the relationship between what we eat and our wellness.

As an herbalist, I talk to many people about health. The conversation eventually leads to questions about what to do for a sick child, friend, or family member or how to prevent them from becoming ill. Since food is one of our primary medicines, I always begin with exploring what a family eats that either invites or deters illness. What I have noticed is that today fewer women cook, and especially many younger women possess less comprehensive cooking skills than women their age fifteen years ago. It is surprising how many women begin our sessions by saying "I don't cook." The pervasiveness of convenience meals has contributed to a way of life that continually erodes our food and body knowledge base.

As more and more of our meals come neatly wrapped in neon-colored packages, the meat and vegetables are watered down with cheap oils, and the spices are replaced by chemicals. The imposter spice additives deceive our taste buds into craving fraudulent foods that are an assault to our physical strength and intelligence. Food becomes a burden to our body instead of a source of vitality. We lose our sense of taste for what nourishes a strong body. We disassociate with where our food comes from or what it takes to prepare it. I have heard children say that their food comes from a vault under the grocery store.

One of the many advantages of increasing your herb quotient in meal preparations is the vitamin and mineral content of herbs and spices. The spice cabinet and garden are abundant in mineral-rich herbs. Chemical farming practices have depleted the soil of nutrients that would normally transfer into

our vegetables. The breadth of flavor in a vegetable is an indicator of its mineral content. Mineral-rich vegetables have a full, sweet taste. Vegetables devoid of minerals taste like nothing; I refer to them as cardboard vegetables. Many chronic diseases develop from nutrient deficiency. With the widespread consumption of prepackaged and conventionally farmed foods, we are experiencing the phenomenon of being overfed yet undernourished. Eat fresh, whole, organic, and locally grown food and add herbs to as many meals as possible.

I spend a significant amount of time with students and clients exploring strategies for how, when, and what to eat. This basic knowledge of nourishing ourselves is absent from so many people's lives. If you weren't raised with the appreciation of homemade, well-spiced, whole foods, it can be an overwhelming task to learn from scratch.

The recipes in this book are simple and for everyone, both seasoned healthy eaters and those who are looking to make a change for the better in their dietary habits. You can begin by choosing one or two herbs or spices to work with and make as many things as you can with them. You can also choose one medium to work with; obsessions with herb-infused oils have been known to happen. Make as many varieties of herbed oils as you can stand and then just let them have their way in your kitchen.

The herbal crafting that is abundant in my food preparation is an embodied art of asking, "How do I better understand the food and medicine that the earth provides? How do I better know and care for my body?" This book is a piece of the lifelong inquiry of exploring these questions and how the answers manifest in my home and kitchen environment. The culture of our kitchen environment is the space we create to nurture and care for ourselves and our family.

The food culture that I grew up with held a vein of richness that is still with me. My dad's garden never failed to produce an overflow of fresh zucchini/courgette and squash. We lived in a town that was known for its rich history of fruit production. There were always trees to pick from, and the farm stands were brimming with each seasonal bounty. We purchased fruit by the box and

made pies, cobbler, ice cream, and jam. My grandfather was a fisherman, and my father was an ocean diver. We always had a freezer full of fish and abalone, and many times throughout the year we had fresh seafood feasts, feeding loads of people the most delicious fruits of the sea.

My grandparents kept an annual tradition of harvesting wild mushrooms after the first spring and fall rains. I can still smell the mounds of garlic, onions, and mushrooms cooking in the enormous cast-iron frying pan on their stove. I remember them talking in amazement about how many helpings I could eat. I loved our family mushroom feasts. This celebration was a high point in our culinary culture, and everything about it is vivid in my mind as if it were yesterday. I can hear the sound of the knives on the wooden chopping board. I see the smiles on my grandparents' faces and hear the conversation and laughter of family and friends that came out of the woodwork for our holy day of mushroom gluttony. I was so awake and present for this vivacious celebration that centered on the pleasure and excitement of a single wild food.

When I was about fifteen years old, this tradition stopped. Development and overgrazing laid waste to the mushroom patches, and there just weren't as many mushrooms anymore. Even during the final years of my grandfather's life, he was still searching for mushroom patches to reappear. In the months before he died, we found a small patch of mushrooms together. We brought them home, and I watched him carefully, almost ceremoniously clean them so as not to waste a single piece. I remember sitting at his table, just he and I, humbly savoring our mushroom side dish. They were as delectable as ever, but what an impoverished relic of the fungal feasts of days gone by.

My mother went to work when I was in grade school. Prepackaged meals and processed snacks shared equal space at the table with food from the garden and the wild. Chocolate Pop-Tarts and Cap'n Crunch for breakfast, bologna on Wonder bread for lunch, and hot dog TV dinners for which my brother and I would beg. I can still picture the snack cupboard that we raided after school; it was full of Space Food Sticks, Cheez-Its, Fruit Loops, Ho Hos, and Ding Dongs.

Even though the junk food was plentiful, I was lucky to have had so much local fruit and wild foods to supplement the packaged meals. I grew up surrounded by seasonal food harvest traditions, which at specific times of the year shaped some of the culture of our household. My grandfather was a master ice cream maker and would concoct a batch to honor the onset of each seasonal fruit. It was most definitely the best ice cream on the planet. In the summer, there was always a cobbler or special jam from the peaches and apricots. Something had to be done with all the summer squash, and late summer meant filling the freezer with zucchini/courgette bread. Fall brought walnuts, which we gathered by the bucketful and candied for Christmas presents. Each food had a spice that went with it: nutmeg with peaches, orange zest with the zucchini/courgette breads, allspice with apricots, and cinnamon with apples. The turning of the seasons was clearly marked with flavors and aromas specific to each time of year.

What we create from the earth's harvest helps shape who we are and what we love. It sets the scope of our taste buds, priming our palate for which foods we crave and find comfort in. It provides our basic nourishment for a strong body and vibrant mind. For me, it also provided something that I can't really name. What was I fed as I sat in front of giant bags of walnuts, cracking and eating them with my grandparents? More than food was given to me at the table where we dined on fish that my dad taught me how to clean and cook. The need to harvest, create, and give away was embedded in my being. The ritual of picking blackberries in August is etched in my cells. I get a little cranky if the summer is coming to an end and I haven't made my annual pilgrimage to gorge at the blackberry patch and make blackberry pies. Each season holds a craving to honor what has ripened. Harvesting the abundance and sharing it brings me such joy.

When we don't grow up with seasonal food rituals, then it can be a challenge to know what to eat when. It is easy to fall into the trap of eating all foods all year around just because they are available in the grocery store. The strawberry festival is in April; what are the health and environmental

implications of having access to a plateful of strawberries in December? Tomato tasting day is in August; do I really need fresh tomatoes on my sandwich in February? The perpetual deluge of advertisements tranquilizes any concern we may have about the chemicals and pollution involved in providing all fruits and vegetables during all seasons. We slip into eating what the media tells us to, not knowing what healthful, seasonal food really feels like in our body.

My grandparents still hunted and fished for wild foods. I got a taste of what it meant to harvest and eat wild, seasonal foods; but these were marginal events, and most of our food came from the store. How do those of us who grew up in households with a microwave and canned food make the change?

Wherever you live, there is or was a river of wild or cultivated local food and herb harvest for you to dive into. Get into the kitchen with your family and reclaim your food culture. When the apples are ripe, make apple cinnamon pie. When it is almond season, make herb-salted almonds. If you live in the heart of a city, befriend someone with a fruit tree or a planter box full of so much sage that one family can't possibly use it all, frequent local farmers' markets, or grow your own herbs in a window box or community garden. You will be inspired by the wonder of nature and how its gifts manifest in your kitchen as a way of life. It won't be long before the recipes on these pages evolve into the expression of your personal spice preferences and neighborhood gardens.

To this day, I love to find the trees that no one has harvested, glean the fruit that litters the ground, and transform this abundance of free food into jams and dried fruit for the lunch box. Summer's magnificence fills my shelf with a dozen herbal vinegars, and wild bay leaves gathered in autumn unfold their flavor into soups all year long. These small rituals guide our lives. I keep a watchful eye for what the earth has to offer, paying my respects by nourishing my body and soul with the harvest.

The knowledge of how to enjoy the earth's generosity to fortify ourselves and our loved ones is the inheritance of being human. If this tradition was lost

in your family, you are in luck, because the harvest is still on. The earth hasn't stopped giving; we have just forgotten how to receive. Start by finding one local food or growing one herb in your backyard or window, see what you can make with it, and go from there. Interview some of the old-timers where you live. What local foods and herbs do they have stories about?

I try to grow as many of my own herbs and spices as the weather will permit. Herbal gardening has sculpted my life in so many ways. From the garden, I learn how to work in harmony with the seasons and seasonal transitions, the moon, and daily weather. It teaches me about life, death, decay, and regeneration, and it is the master teacher of change, the one thing that is certain in life. Working with the abundance of herbs and spices that come from the garden has deepened my ability to really feel gratitude. I am always so thankful and happy when the fertility of the garden allows me to give away a portion of the fortune to everyone who walks through my door.

Learning to garden, cook, and craft with herbs has been a very empowering process. The garden makes me work to find nonchemical solutions for weeds and pests. It is deeply fulfilling to use herbs and foods that help reduce reliance on chemicals, pesticides, and prescription and over-the-counter medications. Growing my own herbs and spices is my day-to-day way of increasing my health and well-being and living more harmoniously with and in right relationship to what is around me. As I write this book, I am forty-seven years old. I am just now beginning to feel that I have some assemblage of what it means to live in awareness of the natural systems that nurture and support my life. Each season, each year, nature's manifestation in my kitchen teaches me more.

The joyful journey of cooking with herbs is more than creating delicious and nutritious food; it is my pathway toward awareness of how to live in integrity on this earth. What does it mean to use whole foods and whole herbs as a lifestyle practice dedicated to healing? From the garden to the kitchen, we nurture life. We amass the health and wealth that benefits us for now and what is to come. The level of health we cultivate before we have babies is passed on to our children. What we eat and how well we digest contribute to the wellness

and vitality of future generations. When you don't pollute your food and soil, then the actual place where the food is grown and used is in a more whole state. When you eat whole foods and herbs, you are accumulating health within your own body that is pledged to the unborn.

During the past century, our love affair with chemicals has shaped much of our lives. The food we eat, the medicine we take and the beverages we drink are processed and made with thousands of man-made chemicals. Our use of chemicals has come with many advantages and advancements, but our extended exposure to them has affected us in ways that we can't even begin to comprehend. The use of chemicals in our food production is not going to disappear, but let's just slow down a little. Let's use less, ban the chemicals that we already know are carcinogenic, look for nonchemical solutions, and err on the side of caution instead of limitless experimentation. Stop adding them to new products as if they have a right to be in every corner of our existence. We introduce new chemicals at the drop of a hat with very little understanding of their long-term effects on human and environmental health.

By indulging in chemicals this way, we have disrespected ourselves and the plants. The damage done by chemical fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, and genetically engineered seeds is reflective of the loss of integrity in our relationship with the plants. We poison the plants and denature them to the point where we have not only shattered our covenant with the plant world but also our promise of the right to health for our children. We have polluted the air, soil, and water and all life that is sustained by these elements. The chemical methods of food production are degenerative in nature, wreaking havoc on our health and vitality. The rampant chemical waste poisons our body, our children's bodies, and the environment of those not yet conceived. I could get depressed if I dwell on the problem for too long, so I have learned to remain steadfast and focused on solutions: simple solutions that are attainable within our home and daily lives. The commitment to a lifestyle of using sustainable foods, healing herbs, and seasonal harvests is a choice that has broad-reaching implications in every aspect of our lives.

In recent years, there has been an explosion of awareness about the importance of local, organic, and sustainable food. Buying food from people we know and reducing our carbon footprint by shipping food a minimal distance to arrive at our dinner tables have become central issues. Sustainable care of home ailments is the next step in this groundswell of demand for organic food and a healthful lifestyle. Once the vegetable garden is established, it is just as easy to grow medicine as it is to grow food. Food and medicine cultivation are intricately related and grow side by side. There are a variety of medicinal herbs that attract beneficial insects to the garden. Many herbs pair well with vegetables and are cultivated as companion plants for successful organic vegetable gardening. Learning to use the herbs for health and wellness is an elemental component in the movement toward sustainability and reducing our dependence on chemicals and processed substances.

The current explosion of interest in sustainability practices is inspiring. There are vegetable gardens popping up in front yards everywhere. The surge of demand for local food and the profusion of organic vegetables that people are growing are nothing short of thrilling. We can feed ourselves good food and have a great time doing it. The cornucopia of herbs and vegetables are so prolific that we can't possibly use everything that the garden gives, so we share them with those around us. In the process, we talk to our neighbors more often, share recipes, celebrate the abundance with harvest festivals, and voila! Our culture begins to change shape. The conversations center on food, health, and the pleasure of our palate. Our bodies are stronger and our communities are more connected.

The garden and kitchen hold a central place of importance in the economy of your home and your family's health. How much does it cost when we get sick? How do you quantify the loss of basic herbal home care and cooking skills? How is the lack of home nourishment and wellness care reflected in wages, the gross national product, and the general well-being that is expressed as joy and passion for life? I have not been able to come up with a formula that can measure the personal, family, and community savings of a society that

experiences increased vitality and greater health, but I know that it is significant. Just watch the financial and emotional ruin that happens when illness plagues a family member.

As the seasons go around and we notice which herbs grow well and promote health, we are assembling a base of body/earth knowledge that is empirical in nature. What is the best way to grow an herb? What are the most efficient harvesting methods, and what is the most effective way to preserve and dispense the spice cabinet? Direct perception guides us; we know what works through observation and experience. This is the knowledge that is accumulated over time and is passed on from generation to generation.

Many family home medicine lineages in the Western world were lost in the last several generations. We were mesmerized by the novelty and scientifically proven “superiority” of synthetic food and modern medicine. We cast our grandmothers’ teas and herbal powders to the wind. I have often wondered how it must feel to a grandmother when her clan dismisses her ancient wisdom as an old wives’ tale. This loss of ancestral food and medicine literacy is nothing short of tragic. I can’t count the number of students that have come to class talking about their grandmothers’ soups and herbal recipes that no one paid attention to and are now lost. Generations of observation of what herbs to use when and how to best prepare foods for optimal health traded for television advertisement medicine.

The current spice rack is a remnant of the wisdom of how to bring the earth’s harvest into our homes to feed and keep our families well. It is the accumulation of thousands of years of experience all powdered and packaged into convenient little jars. Take a closer look at your spice rack. The herbs come from all over the world, having touched many hands; they carry the lineage of our ancestors’ wisdom that using plants in our food helps keep us well.

What is the value of garnishing your meals with herbs that rid foods of pathogens and aid everyone at the table in digesting their food with ease? Who knows how many bellyaches, headaches, and colds are averted with the skill of the spice-wielding cook? “Eat, drink, and be merry” is a well-known saying,

but it's hard to be merry unless what you eat is well spiced so you can digest it efficiently.

Our digestive process utilizes a significant amount of physical energy. When we eat packaged, chemical-laden foods, grouchiness sets in because our energy is siphoned into a discontented digestive system. When you are bogged down by foods that are difficult to assimilate, you don't participate as much in the pleasures that life has to offer. If you are going to devour a heavy meal, by all means look at the cornucopia of carminative digestive aids listed in this book. Don't go it alone; use herbs to help you digest your food! The spice cabinet is bursting with carminatives. It really is that simple. When you are supported in digesting your foods, you feel better, have more energy, and may even experience moments of exuberance and merriment after dinner.

The Herbal Kitchen is about the personal and communal joy of putting nature in your cupboard. It is about reclaiming the indispensable skill of using herbs to prevent sickness and take care of home ailments. Nurturing the life around us with the medicine from the kitchen revives our relationship with the plants and empowers our ability to understand our food, our body, and our relationship to sustaining healthy life.

For me, this information is much easier to embody when I share it with another person. Many of my students get together once a season and mix their oils, set up tinctures, and make seasonal foods and herbal remedies. Please don't put the recipes in this book on your to-do list as one more thing adding to the compression of overstimulation and activity. They should be a fun and relaxing opportunity to connect with those around you. What about a monthly herbal crafting get-together with even one other person who is interested in health?

Not everyone needs to be the cook, but all of us need someone in our life who is focused on what happens in the kitchen. I envision a culture where there is more meal sharing between families so that our food preparation can become more sustainable. Three families on one block can do meal trades, or group cooking days can produce meals for the week.

If you are overwhelmed with all of life's tasks, just begin by setting aside one afternoon a week for embracing food culture with your family. Like everyone else, our days are busy, but Wednesday afternoons from about 3 to 5:30 p.m., we play in the kitchen. We make pesto from explosions of basil, pies from summer apricots, juice from fall apples, and nut butter from the almond harvest, and pomegranate juice flows all winter long.

Once you establish a weekly food preparation ritual, it becomes habitual, and you miss it when it doesn't happen. It becomes the time to strain out the herbal oils, stock your pantry with herbal vinegars, whip up a new batch of herbed ghee, or make a special marinade for the evening meal. When there is a profusion of lavender in the garden, we store the seasonal harvest by making vinegars, oils, cordial, and many other condiments that enrich our meals. Ripe elderberries means black fingertips and a case of cordial. It is amazing what you can do in even a few hours a week. Set a time and create a rhythm, a food culture rhythm that will feed you and your household in more ways than you can name.

Stop and think right now about a structure that can help support you into really being able to incorporate more food preparation time into your life. It doesn't have to be a lot of time; look for a rhythm and find a way to be supported in that rhythm. It is a little bit like exercising: if you have a buddy, you are more likely to stick with it. This makes sense, because it is only a recent phenomenon that solitary people cook for just themselves or others. It is really not in our cellular memory to be alone in the kitchen. We always cooked in groups. Our current template of having one person as the main nurturer in a single-family household is really a new experiment. I don't know about you, but for me, cooking alone is a task. As soon as there is another person in the kitchen, it is fun!

Involve your children in using herbs. Provide them with simple ways to incorporate herbs into their food and cooking projects. Let them be in charge of garnishing their foods with herbs. We always have several herb sprinkles on the table that my son can use at any time. In classes I pass around a platter

of little herb-filled bowls. People are usually inspired by the idea and, without much effort, put herbal condiments on their kitchen table for everyone to use. The feedback from introducing just this one little trick is amazing. People tell me how their kids are now using all kinds of herbal condiments and love sprinkling cinnamon on their oatmeal and rose hips on their rice. Children develop their taste preferences when they are young. Make it convenient for them to have opportunities to use herbs. Feed them now what you want them to eat throughout their lives. My son did not have one speck of processed sugar in his first year. At five years old, he has still never eaten boxed macaroni and cheese. He sprinkles herbs on almost all of his meals and picks his own peppermint tea when he has a bellyache.

Hopefully you will be inspired to fill your pantry to its holding capacity. Get ready to add more shelves to your kitchen storage area. Sacrifice a cabinet of dishes for more condiment space or remodel your kitchen just a little so it can house your herbal alchemy projects. What about all the bottles, jars, lids, strainers, teapots, and other paraphernalia? Build shelves above your cupboards; put standing cabinets in the garage, the spare bedroom, or a closet. Add a spice rack to the back of the kitchen door. When my husband and I went to look at the house we would live in for ten years, I said, “Oh yes, very nice, three bedrooms, two bathrooms, uh huh . . . but look at the granny flat, just behind the house! It is the perfect place for all my jars, bottles, and herbal infusions.” It was heaven, an entire building for all of the infusing, fermenting, aging, soaking, macerating, percolating, mixing, marinating, and drying that takes place with my food and herbs. We have since moved to a place that doesn’t have a second building, but the herbs now have their own bedroom, and they also dominate the garage.

Creating in your herbal kitchen is easy once you have your herbs and herbal blends organized and readily accessible to add to foods and beverages as often as possible. Keep a variety of herbal condiments next to your food preparation area as well as on your table. You can put powdered herbs in salt and pepper shakers or in tiny bowls with miniature spoons for sprinkling on your food.

I am always looking to support our meals with herbs in as many ways as possible. Make up a half dozen oils and vinegars and have them on hand to support you in the kitchen. Some days you may not have a creative flow going, or your garden isn't producing yet, or you didn't get to the market for fresh ingredients. Let the herbal oils, vinegar, ghee, and sprinkles give you a hand. Incorporate herbs into your oils, vinegars, honey, and butter, and soon your food will encompass gourmet seasonings that taste delicious and keep your family healthy.