

Erica Macrum:

So, I have started to try and spend more time with the plants that are around me. Balsam fir is one that grew—it's right outside my door, so I spend a lot of time with it. Topically, it's amazing for wound-healing, antiseptic, antibacterial, just like many of the other conifers. These resins are there to protect the tree from insects and disease, and so it's doing that for our body. It's supporting our body in creating this layer of protection so that our wounds can heal.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Welcome to the Herbs with Rosalee Podcast, a show exploring how herbs heal as medicine, as food, and through connecting with the living world around you.

Well, most of us know balsam fir as the scent of winter holidays, but for herbalist Erica Macrum, it's the tree growing wild in her backyard, weeding its way into her garden, and offering some of the most accessible medicine in the boreal forest.

In this episode, Erica shares how she works with balsam fir's resins, needles and bark for everything from wound care to lung support, and why so much of what she knows came not from books, but from years of quiet observation with the tree itself. By the end, you may find yourself looking at that nearest conifer a little differently.

If you enjoy this episode, please give it a thumbs up so more plant lovers can find us, and be sure to stay tuned until the very end for your herbal tidbit.

Erica, I'm thrilled to have you here. Thank you so much.

Erica Macrum:

Thanks for having me, Rosalee.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Absolute pleasure! Well, I am very excited to hear about your plant path. This is always one of my favorite parts of the show because it's so interesting to hear how the plants have called you, to see similarities and differences amongst us herbalists. There's always kind of like a thread that runs through it all that I feel like we can all relate to. I'll let you begin: what called you on this path?

Erica Macrum:

This is my favorite part to listen to too, when I listen to your podcast. The plant path started for me quite young. I didn't know that a person could be an herbalist. That wasn't the title I had in mind, but I spent a lot of my youth kind of alone—the latchkey generation. We lived further out in the country where the suburbs kind of took over the country. We had this beautiful wetland preserve near our house and I would just go out there and sit with the different plants. My curiosity was piquing all the time like, “What are these plants? Who are they?” and without—as a child, your imagination and your mind is so vivid.

And so, I got to know burdock, which later I knew its name. I got to know some of the asters. Some of the plants, I still, to this day, I'm like, “I don't know. I was so young. I can't quite remember who they all were,” but they—there was just kind of this safety and resonance that they gave, this sense of peace where it was like I had a sense of belonging when I was with the plants, which felt really good.

I just spent so much time with them and then we moved closer into the city. I grew up near Chicago, now I live in Northern Wisconsin, but going from kind of this open, natural area to then into this concrete jungle, I just sought plants all the time. I often would—after school, I would take my little backpack and I would put field guides, especially the trees. There were tons of trees in the town I was in. I just got to learn all of the trees that were around me. I also—Evanston was the town and it's right on Lake Superior. Along the lake and along the El tracks are a lot of wild spaces, and then all these little 1x1 block forest preserves. I would just wander through after I got to know the trees. I got to know a lot of the plants.

When you're learning from a book, it's so different than that first experience I had where you're just with the plants. It didn't feel—there wasn't this intimacy, but kind of just, “Ooh, okay, you've got these veins here and that there”—but I didn't—I've never been a botanist, so I don't know plants in that way. But one time, I was in this forest preserve, and this older fellow was coming through and he was harvesting grape leaves. I was like, “What are you doing?” He explained to me, “I come in here and we make dolmas and we eat these,” and that—my little kid brain was just blown like, “Oh, my God! You can eat this stuff?” There's so much more than just greens growing, plants growing around us. My friends—they give these gifts.

So, just slowly learning more and more, and at the same time, I had a very deep—I don't know what the word for it would be but it's like a passion, really, to—to reconnect with the earth with this idea of, “Wow, as humans on this planet, we are creating so much destruction.” You know, as a teenager you kind of get into this angry-like—waah, everyone is ruining everything. That wasn't my—I didn't want to be in that, but I really just wanted to find solutions, so I started getting really into traditional skills or primitive skills. There's lots of different earth skills. Did-

So the more I learned about plants, the more I learned about ethnobotany and just really connecting in. That was really the start of my plant path, was that—and the healing as well. There was—I got into massage, and that, like I said, I didn't know you could be an herbalist. It's like when I was graduating high school, here's all these people being like, “Oh, I'm going to go to this college and that college.” I was like, “College—no. I think I'm going to go to massage school. Or is there some sort of—can I just run into the woods? Can I just take a basket and be like a Baba Yaga at 17? I don't think so. You have to earn that over the years.” That was a lot of my drive. Massage therapy, and eventually, shiatsu was kind of my gateway—my gateway drug to herbalism.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Hey, there. Just a quick note: if you'd like to hear from me in a more personal way, I'd love to have you in my free text community. I send a couple of texts every week, things like behind-the-scenes updates, herbal thoughts that I'm chewing on, and little sparks of joy I don't always share anywhere else. To join, just text the word ROOT to 1-509-383-8398, and if you ever want to break up, no hard feelings. Just text STOP to the same number and you'll be opted-out immediately. My goal is to make it so juicy and so fun that you look forward to getting my texts each week. Okay, now back to the show.

So, I knew already that we had some things in common, which we haven't yet gotten to. It just is always so funny to me just how many—how much I see myself in the guests. I also got into herbalism through ethnobotany. It was also through this activist mindset, but wanting to be filled with joy and love, and just that connection back to the earth. I also went to a lot of earth skills schools and spent a lot of time doing that. Then it was the ethnobotany that pulled me in, and then the healing, but I was also a massage therapist, so yeah, a lot—a very similar pathway there. And then, I don't know all the schools you may have gone to but you went to East West, as did I.

Erica Macrum:

I did.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

East West School of Herbology.

Erica Macrum:

Yes.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

And your bio mentioned Susan Kramer, which is not a voice—not a name that you hear of outside of a lot of East West, but what an incredible herbalist, was somebody I spent a long

time in classrooms with as well. I wonder if you just want to bring that in, of just where you studied and how that has influenced you as well.

Erica Macrum:

Oh, definitely. Some of my first studying actually happened in Central Utah. I went to—it's called the Boulder Outdoor Survival School.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

You know I'm from Utah, so I just have to laugh.

Erica Macrum:

No, I didn't know you were from Utah, that's hilarious.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

My family's from Escalante, actually.

Erica Macrum:

Escalante is like a part of my heart. I love that place. I went back later and lived in Loa for a really short amount of time. I don't know if you know—up on the flats. There's a really cute, little hot springs in Monroe, Utah, near Richfield that I-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I was actually born there. Anyway. This is starting to get weird!

Erica Macrum:

I started there and that's where a lot of my—my deep earth skills really came in and I loved it. And then I went to the Center for Natural Wellness School of Massage Therapy in Albany, New York. I chose that school because they did both East and West and I was just curious at that point. I had never really done much with that except that when I was young, I had some bladder issues, and so I—my mom would send me for acupuncture. I guess I should add that I

grew up with homeopathy and my grandma was a very—a very modern—I think she’s a crunchy lady, but she wasn’t. She was like a very modern urban woman, but she definitely opened the doors for, “We should take vitamins.” We got excited about going to health food store and drinking—getting our personal soy milks or whatever. Not something that was typical in the ‘80s.

Anyways, I went to East West School—to Center for Natural Wellness in Albany. One of my colleagues there was doing the East West School, or she had done it, and so when I started learning about Chinese medicine and I mentioned I love plants and I really want to learn more, she’s like, “Did you know you could be an herbalist?” I was like, “I have no idea,” so she lent me all the books. I went through most of it, and at that time, it felt like a foreign language, a lot of the Five Elements, and the Yin Yang theory and all of that. I’m really glad that I had that base because then in the school I was in, we then did Chinese medicine classes and it started making more sense, and we—and then I got into shiatsu. Shiatsu is what I did for about 20 years, and so just holding space for people and feeling and seeing them in this context of—of the elements of the earth really changed—it just changed my view on healing and body. But I still knew I wanted to get into herbalism, but I had—I was pregnant like three weeks into—and maybe not even three—I figured it out three weeks into massage school. I was probably pregnant before I started. I didn’t want to take on something new while raising children. Once my son was old enough—I have two kids. Once he was old enough, I was on a walk with a friend and she’s like, “You’ve talked about this East West School forever. Why don’t you just do it?” So, I did finally join in and I loved every moment of it. Michael and Lesley Tierra are wonderful teachers—very encouraging and supportive. My Chinese medicine background made a huge difference in being able to learn in an easier way in that school because it can be really complicated if you’re—and go very quickly—if it’s not something you understand. And then I worked really closely with Susan Kramer who is a brilliant herbalist, still practicing, still connect with her.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Remind me where she’s located. She’s like in the Southeast, I think.

Erica Macrum:

Yeah, she is in Atlanta, Georgia.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Okay. You said three other things that we have deeply in common there too, so that was just hilarious to me. So, yes, we've been on a very similar path. It's wonderful to meet you, Erica.

Erica Macrum:

Nice to meet you too, Rosalee.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I will say I didn't realize when I was getting into East West School of Herbology how focused it was going to be on Traditional Chinese Medicine. I found it very frustrating at first. I didn't really want to learn that. It's not why I went there, but then it just like—then it just like I got wave after wave, and then just seeing how brilliant it all is, once my mind could wrap around it more, I'm so grateful I went and have that strong background and the understanding, just seeing that—all those different energetic patterns, moving away from diagnostics of this-herb-is-good-for-that-situation that was very key for me. When were you there at East West?

Erica Macrum:

I didn't end up going until 2016, 17. I think it was 2017.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Okay.

Erica Macrum:

That's when I finally enrolled.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Now, it's been transferred over to Thomas Avery Garran. I think you were kind of in the later stage of getting Michael and Lesley, so it's nice. Thomas also is doing a great job with the school.

Erica Macrum:

He's doing a really great job. Yeah, it's still a beautiful school.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Hey, friends. It's Rosalee. If you've been nourished by this podcast, if it has helped you feel more connected to the plants or more grounded in your own herbal path, then I'd love to invite you to join the Herbs with Rosalee Podcast Circle. This special membership helps make the podcast possible. It supports everything we do behind the scenes, and it gives you a chance to go even deeper with the content that you love. Inside the circle, you'll get exclusive herbal resources, live classes each season with some of my favorite herbal teachers, and a private space to connect with fellow plant lovers. It's where the heart of our herbal community continues to grow. To learn more and join us, visit HerbalPodcastCircle.com. Your support means the world and it helps this podcast continue to bloom.

Thank you so much for sharing about your plant path. We'll get back into it, hear what you're doing these days, but for now, let's dive into your chosen herb, which is balsam fir. I loved hearing you talk about the—the trees that you were falling in love with in Evanston. By the way, one of my best friends is from Evanston. I've never been. I just went to Chicago for the first time a couple of weeks ago and did notice the lack of plants. That was something that stood out to me a bit. I love the idea of young Erica walking around finding plants where you can and those were trees, and now here we are talking about balsam fir. Why is it that you chose balsam fir for us today?

Erica Macrum:

It's hard to choose just one plant. I went through the cycle of—it's almost like when you have to choose your one best friend that you're going to do the special thing with? Just like all of

the *astragalus* and passionflower and red clover—all these plants were like, “How about us?” This winter I’ve been really focusing on balsam fir. One of the things that throughout my plant journey—I love Chinese medicine. I love every part of it, but I live here and these are the plants that grow around me. I have started to try and spend more time with the plants that are around me growing wild, those in my garden as well too. They’re not necessarily—because I’m in Northern Wisconsin. I’m right on the shore of Lake Superior. It’s the very beginning of the boreal forest. There’s no books about these plants. If there are, they are very minimal, like one or two sentences like, “good for headache, may be used for fever,” like, “Oh, okay.”

A lot of it has been through observation, which to me, is a really powerful tool that gets overlooked so often. A lot of people see a TikTok reel or whatever, a YouTube thing about a plant, and they’re like, “Great! Okay, this is what I got to do for it. If you have a headache, you drink white willow bark or meadowsweet and you’re going to be good.” When you actually go and you hang out with these plants—and that can be sitting with it, if you don’t live near plants, maybe that’s just like gazing at a beautifully drawn illustration of the plant and just trying to get that energy of it. What is it like? What does it feel like?

Balsam fir is one that grew—it’s right outside my door. It’s my whole backyard. It comes up as a weed in my garden. I spend a lot of time with it. It’s a very fast-growing plant. It’s like a primary plant where it’s coming back right after things get logged or cleared, which is why it’s a weed in my garden. It grows quickly and so its wood is quite soft and it burns really fast. It has this beautiful resin and it has this beautiful scent to it. So, for me, just that first part of the medicine that it offers is—is the smell. When I go into the forest and you just touch its leaves and they’re soft, unlike spruce, which are very pokey. It has these, this flat—flat needling. You just rub it and it’s just this release of the aromatics. The grounding sensation that I feel in my body, it’s like, “Oh, I’m here. I’m home. I’m centered.”

So, spending time with the resin first, starting with my kids making little sticks when they were younger and running around things and popping the blisters. To me, playing around

with it and seeing how well does this infuse in oil? How does it like to infuse in oil? Does it go into alcohol? What does it taste like? What if I just eat it straight? The taste—the resin is a little different than the leaves. The resin is—there's a—a slight pungency to it. It's a little sweet and a little bitter. It's kind of those three tastes where when I brew a tea from the needles and some of the thin twigs that are part of that, there is a little more sour flavor in it too.

The resin, topically, is what I used it mostly for first. Topically, it's—it's amazing for wound healing, antiseptic, antibacterial. Just like many of the other conifers, these resins are there to protect the tree from insects and disease, and so it's doing that for our body. It's supporting our body in creating this layer of protection so that our wounds can heal. And internally—taking the resin internally—which I don't do that as often, as just a tea, it really—it feels to me like there's this phlegm-resolving quality to it. It really has an affinity for the throat, the lungs, which, of course, can affect digestion too. Just this idea of this opening—there's a lot of aromatic to it, so there's that—that effervescent opening that's happening, as well as the transformation. Did you want to say something?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

No, no, no, go ahead. I'm just like sitting back and listening to all of this, taking it all in.

Erica Macrum:

And so, then-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I guess I would have a question for the phlegm-resolving. How do you like to work with it in that way? You mentioned topical for wounds, which makes sense. Maybe we could even get into that a bit too. I'm just wondering in terms of particulars how you are working with the plant.

Erica Macrum:

I haven't used it a ton with people yet. It's mostly been like—because I'm still kind of in my getting-to-know-it. It's like an intimate relationship. You're like, "Okay, I'm going to try this on myself. Anything that goes wrong will go wrong with me. I don't want to hurt anyone else." When I just take the resin either—because I will just go out in the forest. I literally will pop a blister and just lick it off my finger, and just feel that resolve in my body. I've been playing around with doing an alcohol extraction because the—the resins, for anyone that doesn't know, they're hydrophobic so they're not going to make a good tea. They're—they're going to extract into alcohol or oils. I have not tried ingesting it as an oil. That might be something to play around with. But the alcohol, it's—it's interesting. The alcohol though it makes it feel like it takes it more down to the digestive rather than staging in the lungs.

What I have found is when I am using more for my lungs I want to make a tea. Even though I just said it's a little hydrophobic, I will take the branches and I will peel them, and then I will boil it, which is a really common thing with that. Where we live there's the Anishinaabe people are here, and so it's very common for them. Even if it's an aromatic plant, they still boil it. They're like, "Don't try this little, slight steeping thing. You just—you boil the snot out of that." So, boiling it for a little while and trying to—I always keep a lid on it so those aromatics will stay in there. As soon as I pull the lid off, you just—it's like that's its own medicine right there, getting the steam. Drinking that tea, you really just feel the lungs opening up and you feel that phlegm shifting.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love that as a steam as well because like you said, it's like a bonus part of the medicine there. That's interesting to hear about the shaving off the twigs and working with that medicine as well.

Erica Macrum:

There is still a part of me that feels like I don't want to necessarily pop all these blisters or create cuts, and just drain the resin out when there are branches that are available. In my

garden, there's always baby trees that I sadly don't want there, and so I harvest those and I'll do the same thing – just take the whole tree and strip the—the bark off.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Wow.

Erica Macrum:

They're little.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

For people who are listening, that was like about a foot, maybe.

Erica Macrum:

Yeah, like a foot, foot and a half, something like that.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It really is—it really is a weed in your garden.

Erica Macrum:

Yes, it really is.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

And then topically, are you working more with the resin in that case? Making it into salves, and-

Erica Macrum:

Yes, I'm working with the resin. In that case, I've been playing around a little bit too with also doing the bark. In that because there's just so much—there's so much resin in the bark when I strip them, but I found that just collecting the resin is the best topically. I love it. I make a body butter with it. I do a lip balm with it, and it's—on your lips it's like magic.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah. I have never had the pleasure of working directly with balsam fir, but I have worked with the essential oil, and it is such an intoxicating scent. I also love it in body butters and lip balms as well.

You've talked about the resin. You've talked about the bark. How about the needles?

Erica Macrum:

The needles—I really like a tea of the needles. When I make a tea of the needles, there is a—I don't want to say it's stimulating, but it's—I almost feel like it's mind-clearing, kind of similar to rosemary. It has a lot of that same really nice aromatic quality, and almost a similar taste. Not same, but similar in the sense of a little sour, a little pungent, a little sweet. Whenever I drink the tea, I just feel like my mind is clearing and things are opening.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Immediately, it made me think of phlegm clouding the mind just because we talked about resolving in the congestion in the chest, kind of a similar action but a higher focus.

Erica Macrum:

Yes, exactly. I would say energetically, balsam feels like more the upper part of the body, it's an upward energy.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Have you ever worked with balsam and honey before?

Erica Macrum:

I have not. That might be something to play around with. I haven't done very many honey infusions where you put it all in there—the fresh plant.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love doing that with our Douglas fir, which isn't a true fir, but it's lovely putting the needles in, for example. It's quite lovely.

Erica Macrum:

I will definitely have to give that one a try this summer and spring, yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

This is lovely, and you have another way of working with the plant as well. You've shared with us this wonderful forest herbal salt—a Spring Forest Herbal Salt. Would you walk us through that recipe please and share a little bit about it?

Erica Macrum:

First, I have to kind of giggle because I am not a recipe person. I'm one of those that in the kitchen, kind of like, "A little bit of this, a little bit of that. That looks right." The fact that I had to create this recipe mid-winter when I'm not able to actually harvest these things, I tried my best. I hope—I tried to really visualize, "How much do I put in there? What's the ratio?" So to anyone who tries this recipe out, do feel free to play around. I think that's an important-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Nice. I like the caveat. Thank you for making the effort off-season for us.

Erica Macrum:

Of course! So, in the springtime, that's when the conifers start to have some of their new growth. For some, they call them "candles," but it's just these really soft spruce tips are something that are very popular. Balsam create tips too. It is so much softer. It doesn't have the—that protective strength to it like it does as it matures. There's a suppleness, so it's easy for our bodies to digest it at that point. I'll go around. I call this "bear style harvesting" where you take a little bit of this, a little bit of that. You kind of graze around instead of taking one

tree and eating it like a corn cob. You really want to, when you're harvesting any wild plant, be sporadic.

In this blend, I did balsam tips and spruce tips because spruce also grows here. And then in the springtime, I don't know about you, Rosalee, but I get on the ground and I'm looking at all the little babies that are coming up. I'm like, "Oh." It's like *Monarda*, is one that comes up around here and is one of our local plants that I love. It's very aromatic. Some people call it "wild oregano," "wild bergamot," just some different names, "beebalm." The one that we have is *Monarda fistulosa*, which has got the purple flowers. When it's young, the spring growth, it will just be this short, little plant, and just like you would harvest oregano or basil, pinching it will then allow it to grow bigger; grow more forks to it. Like I said, I'm not a botanist so I don't have the language for this. I will usually go around and gather a bunch of those. I will gather sweetfern, which is another plant that's in this area that means a lot to me. Sweetfern is another that has just really beautiful aromatics to it if you don't mind me sharing just a touch about it.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Absolutely, please.

Erica Macrum:

Thanks. It's a—it's another plant that's really only seen in this boreal forest. It grows in sandier soils that are really well-draining, so usually on hillsides up high, things like that. It will stay year-round, but it loses a lot of its aromatics during the winter, but as soon as the spring comes and it starts to have those new growth that's happening, all of this beautiful—it's a very sweet and spicy-smelling plant. That will really arise from that. It makes a wonderful seasoning, so I'll add that into the mix too. We kind of have the conifers which when their tips have a little bit more of a sour flavor to it, like a sour citrusy. We have the monarda which is similar to an oregano, and then the sweet fern which has this sweet, spicy aromatic quality— combining these together and grinding them up with salt. The salt just is our preservative. It's what's helping to make sure we're drying that moisture out. It also

makes it really easy, especially as a mom, to just say, “I’m going to take a pinch of this and just throw it on this venison or this fish or this bowl of rice.” Whatever it might be that we’re going to have for dinner. It’s just instantly lifted into this gourmet meal. I’m always trying to just get plants into our body in as many ways as possible. It shouldn’t just be in a cup of tea or a tincture. Let’s eat them. Let’s eat our medicine. Let’s let these plants be a part of our body so that we can just be as strong as possible and vibrant.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love that and I love salt, actually. I’m kind of—like you have the sweet people and the savory. I’m the savory-salt person any day. I can imagine putting this on popcorn, which is my absolute comfort food. It just sounds incredible. Thank you so much for sharing this recipe with us. I appreciate the caveat of “Play around with it, see what you like,” because that’s how all recipes should be. For the listener, you can look at the show notes, get a link to download your beautifully illustrated recipe card, or head over to herbswithrosaleepodcast.com, look for this episode. We’ll have it there for you as well. Thank you so much, Erica, for sharing this with us.

Erica Macrum:

Yes, definitely.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Erica, I’d love to hear what you have going on in your herbal world these days.

Erica Macrum:

Sure. Like I mentioned, sweet fern means a lot to me. A few years ago—I should back that up a little bit. Part of being an herbalist that I found really challenging was that I really wanted to make it accessible for people. We live in a really capitalistic society. It’s just what it is. We need to put gas in our car and food on our tables. As much as I don’t want to put gas in my car because it’s hurting the planet, we do, but it’s—so, this idea of being a clinical herbalist, which is what I do, I meet with people one-on-one. I just found that it was a challenge for

people to make that investment, to say like, “I really want to—I really want to—I’m going to put this for my health” because people have—they’ve got their car payments and their—the list. The whole list – the house and insurance, and all the things—the bills. Where I live—and hopefully no one in my community takes offense—it’s a pretty depressed area. It’s not very economically viable. When the median income is 50,000, which is not very much, it makes it hard for someone to say, “Oh yeah, I can invest in seeing someone one-on-one.”

Anyways, long ramble to say that I decided a few years ago to invest in my own retirement. I bought a building and I decided to start an apothecary. Behind that was really just this idea of making herbalism available for my community so that people didn’t have to meet with me and go through all things. They could walk in and say, “Hey, I need something for my indigestion. I’m not going to the bathroom.” “I can’t sleep. I have terrible anxiety,” whatever it might be, and there would be ways for me just to guide them and say, “Okay, let’s try this out. Here’s that,” and then a place to hold classes too. Through the years—through these couple of years, the online version of that has grown too, and so I now have a lot of people in the Chicago land area, in Minneapolis, Madison. I have people as far as Arizona and Texas and Pennsylvania, and so been doing more online classes for a lot of those folks. Mostly, I’m just trying to share herbalism in all the ways that I can. I daydream often about leading retreats and getting people connected back with the plants because to me that was—that’s the original part of who I am as—connecting people with the earth and really helping us to realize when you feel good and when you have this connection, you care. You want to make changes and you have the energy to make changes in yourself. That’s—that’s a lot of what I’m up to.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It’s lovely. Thank you for sharing that. For people who are wanting to learn more, maybe there in your area they want to stop by, how can they best find you?

Erica Macrum:

Sure. It's called "Sweet Fern Apothecary." I have an online store which is sweetfernapothecary.com, and then on social media, [sweetfernapothecary](https://www.facebook.com/sweetfernapothecary). If you just remember "sweet fern" and "apothecary," you'll find me.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Lovely. Make it real simple. Well, I have one last question for you, Erica, before you go, and that's, "How has working with herbs changed the way you see the world?"

Erica Macrum:

That's a really profound question. I think the biggest thing that the plants and working with herbs has really taught me is judgment with non-judgment, if that makes sense. It's the idea of we're always going to see people and witness people, and that's a form of judgment. But you don't want to judge people by putting them into boxes or deciding that what they've done in their life is not good, or putting your own projected views on how a person has come to be where they are.

The plants have really just taught me that everybody is on a journey to somewhere, and on that, it's about us meeting them and holding their hand in some way and guiding them. That's what I feel like the plants are always doing with people, is just encouraging them and supporting them in all these different ways. It has really helped me to move in the world in that same way. It's like, yeah, maybe coffee is not good for somebody, and so maybe I can share that with them, but that doesn't mean that I'm going to judge them for continuing to drink that coffee. We have addictions in this world and addictions are really hard to break. We've got—there's so many—there's so many different vices that have come in for people. We have a very distracting world. We also have a very troubled and disconnected world, and a society where people have a lot of traumas, big and small, that are going to shape the way that they move and interact in the world. The more that we can hold that—I—I'm going to say "I" because I'm the one who's learning this. The more that I can just hold that space with non-judgment just like the plants would, and just say, "How can I support you? Here are the gifts I

have to offer” Now, it’s up to you to take—take the reins and go forward in the ways that you can, and that has felt really good and been very eye-opening for me over the years.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That’s such a beautiful sentiment. I didn’t see that coming from this question, so it’s always lovely when this is like a surprise. I can really resonate with that. I will say as a younger herbalist, younger activist, I definitely spent a lot of time judging or just trying—thinking I knew what was best or thinking things had to be perfect, like the coffee situation or whatever. That has definitely softened with age. Now that you say learning that from the plants, I feel like that has been a teaching from the plants. It not only makes me an easier person to be around as far as other people are concerned, but it also just feels so much better in myself too, to not have that kind of energy—that more accepting, meeting people where they’re at. I know I always appreciate that in turn, being given the grace myself to be where I’m at. That’s a really beautiful sharing. I think—I honestly feel like that’s one of the most important qualities of a clinician, is to develop that from a true heart-centered place, not just on paper. You can really feel that resonating from your heart, Erica. Thank you for sharing that.

Erica Macrum:

Thanks, Rosalee. Thanks a lot. I agree with you 100%. It’s really—it’s easy to fall into that place of—of judgment and putting things on to people—projection. The plants—the plants have been amazing teachers over the years. There are so many more lessons too, but that’s definitely the best of all of them.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That’s just so beautifully shared and your love for balsam fir comes through. I love the salty recipe. Thank you so much for taking the time to be here and to share this with us, and sharing your—you can tell you just have this very, again, heart-centered, beautiful connection to the land, your desire to share that with others all just resonates really strongly. You and I have a thousand things in common, so that was awesome.

Erica Macrum:

That's hilarious.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I think this was off camera, but we were also belly dancers. I mean [crosstalk]

Erica Macrum:

I actually used to belly dance in Moab, too.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, wow. Wow. That's fabulous. It's been absolutely lovely. Thank you so much, Erica.

Erica Macrum:

It has been great, Rosalee. I really appreciate it.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thanks so much for listening. You can download your illustrated recipe card from today's episode. Just head to herbswithrosaleepodcast.com or check out the show notes for a link. If you're not already subscribed, I'd love to have you as part of this herbal community so I can deliver even more herbal goodies your way.

This podcast is made possible in part by our awesome students. This week's Student Spotlight is on Rebecca Moreland in Pennsylvania. Rebecca is currently enrolled in the Herbal Energetics Course where she brings this joyful sense of curiosity and adventure to her learning. Through courses like Building Resilience, Healing Powers of Tea, and the Podcast Circle, she's been developing a more holistic approach learning how to support the body as a whole. Along the way, she has been experimenting with herbal preparations, engaging deeply in the community and exploring herbs like gotu kola through hands-on experience. Her reflections are detailed, thoughtful, and full of discovery showing how much can unfold when we just stay open and curious and are willing to try something new.

To honor her contributions, Mountain Rose Herbs is sending Rebecca a \$50 gift certificate to stock up on their incredible selection of organically and sustainably sourced herbal supplies. Thank you so much, Mountain Rose Herbs, for supporting our students. And if you'd like to deepen your skills as an herbalist, you can check out my foundational courses at herbswithrosalee.com.

Okay, you've made it to the end of the show, which means you get a gold star and this herbal tidbit.

Well, Erica talked about balsam fir resin as a wound healer and protector, and it turns out that protective sealing quality caught the attention of scientists and lens makers in an interesting way. Starting in the 1830s, purified balsam fir resin, known as "Canada balsam," became the adhesive of choice for cementing together the glass elements inside microscope and camera lenses. The reason for this is interesting. Its refractive index is nearly identical to that of glass, making it essentially invisible once it's dry. Light would pass through it as if the resin just wasn't there at all. It was also used to seal the cover slips on microscope slides, some of which are still intact in natural history museum collections today. It really wasn't replaced until World War II when supply shortages pushed the optics industry towards synthetic alternatives. The same resin that Erica's popping off of bark blisters and applying to wounds, helped scientists see the microscopic world more clearly for over a hundred years, so it's not bad for a boreal forest tree.

As always, thank you so much for joining me. I'll see you in the next episode.