

Ashley Elenbaas:

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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. In this episode, I'm joined by Ashley Elenbaas to spend some time with one of my very favorite garden plants—that's bee balm, *Monarda fistulosa*. By the end, you'll understand why this hot, spicy herb turns out to be one of the finest remedies for drawing heat out of the body, whether that's a fever, a fresh burn, or the big feelings that build up when a house is full of people. You'll also hear how the same plant which you may already keep in your kitchen as wild oregano can steady frazzled nerves, and why the herbs we spend the most time with stop feeling like remedies and start feeling like old friends who show up right when we need them. If you enjoy this episode, please give it a thumbs up so more plant lovers can find us and be sure to stay tuned to the very end for your herbal tidbit.

Ashley, thanks so much for being here. I'm really looking forward to chatting with you today.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Thank you, Rosalee, me too. Thanks for having me.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Absolutely! I've been listening to your podcast. I love how much energetic focus you have there, so I'm sure—I also love energetics—we're going to have lots to chat about, and you chose one of my very favorite herbs, which just happens to be in bloom for me right now, *Monarda*, bee balm. I went out to the garden and got a little bouquet, so we can have bee balm with us as we're chatting.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Nice.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

But before we dive into *Monarda*, I would love to hear about your story. What brought you here? How did the plants call you on this path?

Ashley Elenbaas:

Well, I think it started when I was a kid. I was one of those kids that was always outside and I loved to talk to the trees, which now isn't so weird for me but it was definitely like a weird thing. I was definitely one of those kids that, yeah, I just—I think I was into things that were a little bit more fringe. My aunt went to France and brought me back some tarot cards when I was 11. I was like, "Oh, wow!" I had a really cool aunt who exposed me to tarot, to the beginnings of herbalism, to music like Ani DiFranco. I think she—all of those things started to build my awareness of this larger cosmos.

And then specifically, when I went away to school in North Carolina in Asheville, I was surrounded by kind of, you know, urban-ish mountain hippies, which were like my people. I met Corinna Wood and started learning more about herbs. I think kind of it all came together pretty organically, and then when I was studying environmental restoration in—at UNC Asheville, and I was studying chemistry and environmental biology, I realized that I really—I wanted to go into the health sciences, and so then herbalism became a very natural next step. After I got my AA in Environmental Restoration, I went on to get my BA and then my MA in herbalism, and clinical herbalism later on. So that was kind of my—my path into it.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, I love that. There's something there too about how like in my mind herbalism is like environmental science in many ways. The two are just—you cannot—I mean people do try to unlink them obviously, but I think that's the real beauty and depth and joy of herbalism for me is understanding how intertwined they are, and how at its highest output we're really

recognizing both the environment around us, the living world around us, the plants, the healers—all of it together. That's beautiful that that was your—your path in.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Yeah, and I was also practicing yoga a lot in my undergrad years, and just kind of understanding energetics—in my body starting to learn, “Oh, I’ve got these energy centers and the mirror of my body exists out there in the outer world.” When I started studying herbalism and I started learning specifically energetics, it was like, oh, yeah, of course. The plants have—they have energy bodies just like I have one, and so that link started getting stronger as I studied more and more about the plants.

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.

Ashley Elenbaas:

How about you? What was your link into the herbal world?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

My link was like a pers—there were so many layers. I can see it on different—like you said, you talked to trees. I, definitely, when I was younger, I had that where—I remember the first time someone showed me that a plant was edible out in the so-called “wild,” and it blew my mind and that stayed as this amazing fact for me. It was Brigham Young tea. I was in Utah and I was told this could be a tea and I thought, “That is the coolest thing I’ve ever heard.” I think back on that now and I’m just like, “That was a sign,” but yeah, I had to get really sick though.

I was diagnosed with a terminal autoimmune disease. It was really the plants that brought me back in after medicine—Western medicine was like, “Yeah, too bad. We got nothing for you.” It was plants and everything within herbalism that brought me to the other side of that. It was also—I love hearing you have these different layers because that’s how it was for me. First, it was like plants heal and then—but it was also very much, for me, it was coming to feel that connection with the living world around me because at first, it really was like, “Oh, if you put cayenne on your knee, it feels better.” That’s where it started, but then it just kept growing and growing to this wider, more in-depth, beautiful connections with the world around us.

We also can’t—we cannot—you mentioned some of my favorite things like France and Ani DiFranco. I’m—sometimes people know that I’m a Tori Amos fan because I mention it from time to time, meaning all the time, but I actually am quite a huge Ani DiFranco fan, her Patreon member and check in with her often. That was also part of my awakening as well. She was such a powerful force and continues to be.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Totally, and I think the activism piece that all of these things have in common—activism on the environmental stage, activism for our own health, being able to advocate for ourselves. I also had a similar health journey that the plants were a big part of as well, but the sort of all of these ways of advocating, I feel like the herbal world and the herbal community holds all of that. It’s like if we look at herbalists, we have so much in common because of our histories, and also where we’re—where we’re all headed, what we see in the future as a community.

I was just—I just recorded an episode for my podcast. I was like, “Imagine we’re on a boat together,” and I feel like that’s—when I speak with you and other herbalists, it’s like we all have these similar stories that we carry with us. We’re all trying to educate people about plants because it’s the way of the future. I think so many of us see there’s no way forward if we don’t bring the plants with us.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's such a beautiful way to say that, Ashley. I ask a lot of herbalists, "What got you on this path?" and I don't think there's been one person—everybody has these different details and different stories and different meanderings, but every time I'm like, "Me too! Samesies!" There's always something there that's very similar, which I am not much of an esoteric person, but one thing I've started asking people is, "How did the plants call you?" I ask that because that is basically what people say to me all the time like, "I was doing this and then I got pulled into it," and it's the plants. They're like "Oh, here we are!" in one way or another. Whether it's just recognition of them or being called in a passionate way or a health crisis or something, it's like the plants kind of stand up and say, "Here we are."

Ashley Elenbaas:

Absolutely, yeah. And then they say—it's like, "Here we are," and then it's like, "Now, go tell everyone else."

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's so true because the people who get bit—bit by the plant bug, it's like then there's this exuberant enthusiasm like, "Okay. I know so let's make sure everybody knows."

Ashley Elenbaas:

Absolutely.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Very common thread, absolutely.

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.

Thanks for sharing a bit about your story. We'll talk more later about your offerings. I'd love to hear more about your podcast, your classes, etc. I'd also love to dive into this beauty, *Monarda fistulosa*, or whatever *Monardas* you want to talk about, and what made you choose bee balm for your plant today.

Ashley Elenbaas:

I actually went out and picked some as well before I came up so we can—we can see where we are in the growing season. I'm a little later than you because mine are kind of on their way out. They're—a lot of them are going to seed, but there are still some that are—that are open. But, yeah, I think there were a few things that—reasons why I wanted to talk about *Monarda*. When I started studying herbs with Matthew Wood, this was one of the plants he talked about all the time. I remember being like—I'd never heard of it because when I went to school in Maryland at—it was then Tai Sophia. Now, it's something "Notre Dame." It's gone through several iterations of different names, but when I was there it was Tai Sophia. We never learned about this plant. It wasn't covered in our materia medica, and so when I started studying with Matthew Wood who is from Minnesota in the Midwest, and he was just like, "It does all these things." I was like, "I want to know about this plant."

I'm—I was from Minnesota. I was born in Minneapolis. My family left when I was five, so when he was talking about it being a Midwest herb, I was just like—my interest was—was piqued so I started growing it in my garden in Maryland, and it was so happy. I was like, "Oh, gosh, it's beautiful and abundant." All the bees and the butterflies—it attracted so much life to our garden. I started learning more and more about it, and its signatures and its uses.

I started using it in my clinical practice and seeing it help people on pretty profound levels, and then it was interesting because in 2020 when COVID hit, my husband and I, we had two—our daughters were I think four and two at the time. We were looking at where do we want to live because the DC Metro area, we're like, "You know this isn't—this is just too much." I was like I think I want to go home. I think I want to go back to Minnesota, so we visited our family back in Minnesota and the bee balm was in bloom. I was like—I don't know. There was something about bee balm and also the blue vervain that are really prolific in the Midwest that kind of called me home. And so I moved back in August of 2020 to Minnesota and I've just had an obsession with this plant ever since. I think it really was one of the reasons that drew me to move back here six years ago. I'm happy to talk about [crosstalk]

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Before you do, I have to ask, Ashley, how did your family feel? They're like—you came back to Minnesota and you're like, "It wasn't for you though, it was for bee balm." How did that go over? Just wondering, family dynamics. Please tell.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Totally. My—my mom still lives in Maryland. My dad lives here in Minnesota, so he moved back. My grandmother who's 95 still lives here, 15 minutes down the road—aunts, uncles, cousins, grand cousins. Minnesota is definitely the family hub. That was—it's funny because it's never one thing, is it?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

No, you said it was one thing. You said it was bee balm. It's on record.

Ashley Elenbaas:

It was the bee balm. The bee balm was definitely the plant pull, but I also felt my people, my ancestral pull was also drawing me back to the—my homeland, to Minnesota. My husband grew up in Minnesota too, even though we met when he was in New York City. There's a lot—

there were a lot of pieces that were coming together at the right time. I think the plant was the—it was kind of the final pull, like-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Okay. Good save, for your family.

Ashley Elenbaas:

It's time, yeah. But I'm very close with my family and I feel so grateful that we're all here together now in many ways.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, that's wonderful. I'm excited to hear all of these many ways to work with bee balm.

Ashley Elenbaas:

So maybe I'll start—I'll start with the signatures because I find that that's a fascinating way to think about the plants. The signatures are a very ancient way of looking at the symbols and the patterns in the plant. The signatures can be the color, the shape, the form, and then the habitat of where a plant grows. I think for maybe our early ancestors, it was also a kind of a memory device that if something looks like a part of the body, or if it has a similar color to other things that work similarly it helps us remember. It's not all magic. I mean it is magical in some ways, but it's also very practical because our minds—human brains work really well with patterns. The patterns that we see in these signatures, they help us to remember stories and stories of the plants. Let's start. I'm going to try to get it here in focus. There we go. The first thing I like to call attention to is the flowers and the flower shape. Can you see that, Rosalee? Is it—is it in focus?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, little—well, no—oh there we go.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Okay.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

We can also put B-roll up too of a close flower.

Ashley Elenbaas:

We could do a close up. Maybe when we are looking at the flower—I was at the Midwest Women’s Herb Conference a few years ago and I did a spotlight on this plant. I had everyone take the—a few drops of the plant into their bodies, and one woman said—and she didn’t even know what it looked like. She goes, “I feel fireworks. I feel fireworks.” I was like, “Oh, my gosh. That’s what these—the flowers look like an explosion of fireworks.” Another woman said, “I see a dragon spitting fire.” I was like, “Interesting,” because the little lips on here almost look like dragons spitting out fire.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I hope I never unsee that again. That’s so perfect.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Isn’t it beautiful?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Beautiful flowers. Yeah, so lovely.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Yeah! So then if we take those images and we look at the actions of the plants, what do we know about this plant in terms of its medicines, those two things line up perfectly because #1 is the firework. What is firework? The heat dispersing out. What is a dragon breathing fire other than heat being dispersed out? This is one of my favorite remedies for dispersing heat.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Me too, me too.

Ashley Elenbaas:

It's really good if you've got for fevers, if you're trying to disperse fever out of the body, if you're hot or angry, hot emotions even I think ring true, and you're trying to move anger or move that heat out, breathe the fire out without burning down the city, then this is a great remedy. One of the ways that I like to think about this plant and those signatures too is—herbalist Tis Mal Crow—are you familiar with Tis Mal?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

No.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Tis Mal was a Muskogee herbalist here from the Minnesota Thousand Lakes region, and he talked about this plant—the Muskogee people using it to help when there's been anger or hostility or volatility in the environment, that they would take a big pot of water. They would throw the bee balm or the *Monarda fistulosa* into it and steam out the house or steam out the dwelling space, and then it disperses the anger. It clears the bad anger—angry spirits from a household. Isn't that beautiful?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It is so beautiful.

Ashley Elenbaas:

And it works because we've got a family, and anytime you've got multiple people living in a space, there's going to be—there's going to be big emotions so I sometimes will burn it as a smudge or do it as a steam. I use it as a steam if there has been big—we call them “big feelings” in our house—just to move those big feelings out. It really—it burns really well also. It's a very clearing herb. That's one of my favorite ways to think about it, is it's an herb that clears heat. It disperses things out. I just—I'm like—the plant tells us. It kind of shows us.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Absolutely it does, yeah.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Yeah. You mentioned that you like to think about it as dispersing heat too. Could you say more?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, my gosh. You're really going to put me on the spot, Ashley. This—I think of bee balm as teaching me “diffusive.” When I was a very young herbalist, I think I had memorized the term “diffusive,” which is everything that you're talking about – the dispersing heat outward, the movement. I had a really strong cup of bee balm tea. It was very strong. I remember thinking like, “Whoa! This is super spicy.” It's hot tea so I felt that warmth. It was just so obviously warm and I felt that warmth in my mouth, in the esophagus, in my stomach, and I was like, “Whoa, this plant is so heating,” and then it's dispersive and diffusive, and so it goes (makes whooshing sound), and it spread out to my periphery. It was like—I will never forget that moment because I just remember such a big aha. It's like the light bulb went off. I was like, “That's diffusive!” It went from being a memorized term to being a felt sense of like, “Oh!” because then it was so strong and the heat pushed out so fast, then I got cold. That's what it does, right? It was like—pushed it all out, and I was like, “Oh.”

That's when I understood formulation more too because sometimes we don't—sometimes we want to heat up a little bit, but we don't necessarily want to clear out the heat, necessarily. So, what does that look like in formulation? How do we modulate that? Anyway, there was lots of learning in that one cup of tea, which I also credit that to just like why it's so wonderful to learn about the plants from books and from teachers, and every source that we possibly can. And we got to drink that tea.

Ashley Elenbaas:

We got to drink that tea.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

We have to understand that for ourselves and experience it and understand that way more than the books ever could. The experience is so important.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Absolutely is, yeah, and that reminds me of one of the times that I've used this plant. One of the other traditional uses is for burns. It's a burn remedy to pull out heat. I made this—this is like one of those herbal fails when I just—it's kind of embarrassing, but we all—we all make mistakes. I had a really bad chest cold. One of—an unreliable source told me that if you put garlic on the soles of your feet, it will clear out the phlegm. Now, I had done this with onions. I had done it with my kids, with myself, and it really did loosen the phlegm because of the sulfur, it gets absorbed into the lungs and you can cough things out. He had said garlic. I was like, "Oh, wow. I've got a really bad cold so I'm going to try this." I sliced up some garlic. I put it on my feet. I put some saran wrap over because that's what I did with the onions. I ended up getting third degree burns.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, my gosh, yeah.

Ashley Elenbaas:

On the bottoms of my feet, which was like the most painful thing, and then I had to go to my daughter's birthday party at a—an indoor pool. It was just—it was like the worst disaster. I get home, I've got these huge, pussy blisters, and I have to drain them. I'm trying to sleep that night, and then my feet hurt so bad. I was laying there in bed, and all of a sudden, it was like 2:00 A.M., and I hear bee balm being like, "Hey, hey. Me, come pick me." So, I went out and I picked some bee balm. I chewed it up to—into a spit poultice. I stuck it on my feet. I put some Band-Aids over. I was laying in bed and I could feel—kind of like you said, that dispersion—I could feel it pulling the heat out of the blister.

When I woke up in the morning, it was significantly better. It was like the blister was almost—it was still red. It still hurt, but it was significantly less irritated. I was like, ah! Traditionally, what they would do is they would take the leaves and brew a tea out of it and then use that as a cold compress. That would be the more gentle version for like a sunburn or an oil burn, but for this burn—and I just—it was 2:00 in the morning so I wasn't going to make a tea. I was just like, get on there! But it really did help, and so that—that was another way that I used it for diffusing the heat in my body. I'll never do that again. Don't do that at home. Stick with the onions.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I have my own garlic burn story. That's I think maybe—maybe a coming of passage with—with garlic, to take garlic so seriously. That's so interesting about the bee balm, and that really great showing of dispersing of heat because obviously, it is a warming, pungent, hot herb, but it's so much more than that. It's that movement that happens with it as well.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Totally, yeah. One of the other signatures that we can see in the flower—and I don't have an image of this, but if you've ever seen a nerve axon—you've got the nerve head, and then it has all these little things that stick out that are basically receptors for the nerve impulses coming in. This also looks a lot like a nerve axon. When I was at that same herb conference, I had another woman say—it was interesting because she took the first dose and didn't say anything. At the end of the two-hour talk, I had everyone take another few drops to kind of just “now that you've learned about it now see what you notice.” She came to me after the workshop and she goes, “I'm not one to speak in public, but I had to tell you that after I took the first dose—I have this dead spot on my stomach where I had a surgery and the nerves never repaired. But after I took the first drops, I started feeling tingling at this dead spot on my stomach. I thought, no, no, no. It's nothing. Well, then I took the drops at the end and it went right there again. I could feel it repairing and working on those nerves.” I was like, “What?” And then another woman heard it and she goes, “I wasn't going to say anything

either but I have—I have nerve damage in my feet and I could feel my toes tingling after taking this.” And so, yeah, one of the other uses is for nerve damage and nerve repair.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Interesting!

Ashley Elenbaas:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Because I always think, of course, of St. John’s wort in that situation. I could see this as just like, again, that dispersive movement that’s so nervous system anyway, and—and that repair factor. That’s really cool to hear that twice within a class, which is one where I feel like we should plug in-person classes with people because so much learning comes from that when you get people together to hear different experiences.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Absolutely, yeah, and those are the experiences that I remember. I can read them in books, but when you have that live, in-the-moment, someone having an aha moment. Those that—yeah, exactly. Those—those can really stick.

Since that time, I’ve had other people. I host garden gatherings here in Minnesota, and this is a plant we spend a lot of time with. I’ve heard since that people talk about help—it helping with nerve damage and numbness in their fingers and toes as well. It’s a nice remedy. I think we had kind of forgotten about it being used for that nerve repair as well. I also think about it—and not just nerve repair for literal nerve damage, but for nervous exhaustion too and depletion. As a mother of young kids, I’m always kind of teetering that line of trying to keep myself from going into nervous system overload that I will often sprinkle a little bit of this into my nettles or my overnight infusions just to kind keep my nervous system strong, so that I don’t go into that exhaustion state.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I have some questions about how you're working with it if you don't mind me breaking in with that because what I'm hearing, in the class you did a couple of drops, and now you said "sprinkling in." Do you tend to work with this as more of a lower dose botanical?

Ashley Elenbaas:

I do. I do, yeah. It's strong. As you noticed in that tea, it doesn't take a lot for you to feel this herb. I know one of its other names is "wild oregano." I use this in cooking as well. I think you don't need a lot of it to get that opening effect or that—that spreading effect. I kind of—next to where I keep all my herbs and spices for cooking, I keep bee balm, dried bee balm, in a little jar and I'll use it when I cook my vegetables, when I cook my meats just like I would use oregano. Again, I'm just thinking of it as something I can sprinkle in more regularly to prevent in some ways stagnation, depletion, nervous system overwhelm, like a tonic in some way, like a little flash of heat, because we know that when we get a little flash of heat, it increases circulation, and when we increase circulation, we bring blood—we bring white blood cells and red blood cells to areas to heal things up. I think about those little blasts throughout the day as being a way that we can keep our system strong.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love that and I love that your bee balm is just like it's part of your spice cabinet. I feel like it's part of my tea cabinet and I should move some over.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Yeah, I mean it works really well. I use it—I just made a Greek salad dressing last night, and I—instead of—they say use Greek oregano. I've got North American oregano. Anytime I see oregano in recipes now, I'll just use my bee balm.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Nice.

Ashley Elenbaas:

I can feel that kinship growing because I think we have to—if we want to build a relationship with the plants—I think one of the reasons it spoke to me at 2:00 in the morning is because I have a long-standing relationship with it. For me, with herbs, once I’ve made a friendship with them, they’ll pop in my head here and there, or they’ll pop into—they’ll pop into my mind and I rely on that now as an herbalist when I’m working with clients or with students. The herbs I know really well are usually the ones that come and say, “Oh yeah, I would work well here,” and then I trust that. I trust that when they come in like that.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love that description, Ashley, because it’s like, “They just pop in my mind, as friends do.” Friends pop into your head [crosstalk]

Ashley Elenbaas:

“I need to call so and so.” It’s like I’ll add this one in to this friend, exactly.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I’m curious if you’ve worked with bee balm as an infused oil.

Ashley Elenbaas:

I have not.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I don’t know that I have either, but as you’ve been talking, I’m just like that’s been a wondering in my mind of like, “I wonder what that would be like.” I could see—it’s so strong. I could see diluting it with other things. I could just see it as this warming, invigorating, dispersive.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Absolutely. One of its main volatile oils is thymol, which is the same one we find in mountain mint and in thyme and in oregano. It's very strong. You just stick it on your tongue and you can taste that thymol. It's a little analgesic. I think in an infused oil, gosh, wouldn't that be nice for Raynaud's? Right? Bringing in heat.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's funny. When you were talking about nerve repair, that's definitely what I was thinking of, is Raynaud's. I have a friend with Raynaud's, so as friends do, they popped into my head.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Totally, exactly. I might try that this winter because I have a huge amount drying right now—is putting that into an infused oil for those sorts of things.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Alright, let's try it, Ashley, and then let's report back together.

Another way I know you like to work with bee balm is as an infused honey, and you've shared that recipe with us. Wondering if you'll walk that—walk through that recipe. Tell us why you love it, tell us how you make it.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Sure. Honey in itself is a medicine. If you can find local honey from a local apiary, it is antibacterial, antifungal. It has tons of enzymes and immune-boosting properties. If you can—if you can—it's like a medicine within a medicine. Then when you take bee balm, what I do is I just take the fresh plant. I'll just show you. I just strip the leaves off. I'm sure you—maybe you know this, the word “garble,” isn't that a great word?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, I love that word.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Garbling is just stripping the leaves off the stem. I'll just do that and then I'll rip it up, and then—I'm not like one of those—I don't know—SMR people, but I do love the sound of ripping herbs.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It sounds nice.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Doesn't it sound nice?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Can we say that as herbalists? Like we love the sound of ripping herbs? I don't know.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Maybe we should say "preparing them." I don't like the—the vibe of hurting them, but we'll prepare them and open them up because we have to get the cell walls broken so the oils can go into whatever we're doing. This is one that I made earlier in July. This one is almost empty as you can see, but I-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Just like a testament within itself, right?

Ashley Elenbaas:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I made this, it didn't last. I went through it.

Ashley Elenbaas:

It lasts. It's really easy. What I'm going to do, I'm just going to put these fresh herbs into this honey. I'm going to pour—it's that easy. I'm just going to take whatever honey I have and pour it over it. I like to use a toothpick and I just stir it up. It can stay on the counter for a month—maybe a month and a half. If you want to keep it longer than that, maybe three to four months, you want to refrigerate it just in case. The nice thing about honey is honey is—it's a preservative in its own. You've got all these volatile oils from the bee balm that are also antifungal, antimicrobial, antibacterial, so they're also going to help preserve. This was a honey I made a few weeks ago. This one is with the bee balm—the red.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Lovely. It's gorgeous.

Ashley Elenbaas:

I know. My—my camera doesn't like to focus, but this is the *Monarda didyma*, which is the red flower. They're very similar. However, the red is a little bit less—it's a little bit more mild with its heat, I find. It makes a little bit of a sweeter, less spicy honey. Depending on what you like and what you have available, you can use them both ways. What I'll do, like last night, my daughter came down, she was like, "I have a headache. My head—my head hurts." I was asking her what it felt like. She's like, "It just feels like really tight." I was like, "Ah, bee balm honey." I took a scoop of—of the bee balm. I gave it to her, and then she was like, "What is this thing?" and she was like—I was like, "Oh, I'm sorry. That's a flower." Not every—some people like to strain it. In our family we just take the whole thing, but you kind of push the herbs to the side and strain it. That's an easier way to do it without losing too much of the honey.

You can use it for just about anything that you would use bee balm for—for anytime you want to disperse heat, for fevers, for colds, for flus. Another medicine or another way to use it that I didn't talk about is as a antifungal for candida. Have you ever done it—used it for candida or yeast infections?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I don't know that I have in particular, but I do—I think of bee balm specifically for that. It's such a strong antifungal. You can use it. One of the signatures on the plant is the little—it looks like little powder mold on the leaves, these little—little white spots. Those spots—the leaf mold or the powder—they call it “powder mildew,” which I think is kind of mean. It doesn't actually hurt the plant if the plant is healthy. They actually live symbiotically and it actually makes the plant produce more volatile oils. If you have a little bit of that powdery, white mildew, you'll notice that the actual medicine is a little stronger in that plant.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Interesting.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Isn't it interesting? I often tend to harvest them, but if the plant is sick, the mildew will overpower and kill it, and then you'll—you can tell because the leaves are more yellow and shriveled. It just doesn't look quite right, so those I just leave. When they have just that little bit, I'll harvest it. When I was—I've closed down my clinical practice because I'm focused on teaching, but when I did see clients, I used it for probably, at least, ten cases of candida as both a tea, a tincture, and as a vaginal steam, and it worked every time. That—that's another way that I found that it works as a medicine. It works really well for that as an antifungal, an anti-yeast.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you for sharing that. That's interesting. I have always been told to avoid the powdery mildew on the leaves. Where I live, it's very arid and dry, so we don't typically see that happen very often. That's always been my approach, has been to avoid it anyway, so that's an interesting thing. I know, in general, plants, they create those secondary metabolites in response to their environment. With our herbs, if we coddle them too much, they—if we give them tons of water and they don't want tons of water, whatever, we will dilute their medicinal properties comparatively.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Exactly, yeah. Of course, if the plant looks sick, it's not—you know it's not a good one to harvest. In Tis Mal Crow's book, medicines of the *Muskogee Way*, he talks—he has like a whole chapter on—he calls it “sweet leaf,” is the Indigenous name for bee balm. Sweet leaf because it restores sweetness to the spirit. He talks about that powdery mildew as being one of its signatures, and one of its signs that it can help with these things. That was really good for me to see because I also thought, “Oh, it's sick. Something's wrong with it,” but not necessarily.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's fascinating.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you so much for sharing so much about bee balm. Thanks for sharing the bee balm honey recipe. For listeners, you can download your copy of a beautifully illustrated recipe card, either look for the link in the show notes, or you can go to herbswithrosaleepodcast.com and check it out there.

Before we move on, Ashley, is there anything else you'd like to share about bee balm? I definitely don't want to cut you short. This has been so fascinating.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Gosh, I feel like I could—I could talk all day about this plant, but maybe there's one last thing, which is that this herb can be used for sleep as well.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Whoa! Alright. Mind blown. Let's hear about it.

Ashley Elenbaas:

It can be used in a few different ways. The Muskogee people used it in dream pillows. We often think about mugwort being used for lucid dreaming, and then you can make a pillow and use dried mugwort leaves to induce dreaming. Well, the Muskogee people used it for infants and children to help—help them fall asleep. For my girls, we did this several years ago. We sewed our own pillows and we used the dried leaves. They would—they would sleep with it. They were smaller pillows, like maybe 4”x6” but they would crush it and then take big sniffs of it, and that aroma—the aroma therapy is very calming and soothing for the nervous system. That is one final way we can use it. We can brew it as a tea to help us sleep. We can use the aroma therapy of a steam to help us sleep or use it in a pillow as an aroma therapy as well.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That’s a new one to me. Thanks for sharing that as well.

Ashley Elenbaas:

You’re welcome.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you for sharing so much about bee balm. This is like the blessing and challenge of this show, is every time I hear about a plant, I’m like I just need this plant.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Totally.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Now, I want to infuse it in oil. Now, I want all—I want it all. I hope I just definitely never forget the fire-breathing dragon because that is—I just love that so much. What fun, fun flowers.

Ashley, I'd love to hear from you—hear what you've got going on in the herbal world. I know you have a lot of wonderful offerings. I'd love to hear about your classes, your podcast, whatever you'd like to share.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Thank you. Let's see. Well, I have—I think the favorite thing that I'm doing right now are my garden gatherings. Those happen in my backyard, so it's super easy. I just get to go—go to my backyard and people come from all around. We've had people that are driving through who just stay for the weekend. The garden gatherings are two hours long. We do a little meditation with the plants. We make a plant medicine. We do art, so either plant sketching or—last month, we made a collage where we took the plants and we—we connected with the power of our solar selves and made a collage that—from the plants in the garden that helped to show what it is we want to shine forward into the rest of the summer, so that was really fun. Those happen once a month, May through September.

Then I offer online herbal apprenticeships and those are year-long online study where we meet once a month live, and then there's pre-recorded content that you can listen to. And then, I'm working on a children's book that is about to come to print. It's finished. It's just—it needs some final edits, but that will be hopefully coming out this fall, and it's called *Plants Spirits and Garden Friends*. It's a guide through the garden looking at plant spirits from the perspective of a little bee. It introduces children to these different plants and their energetics, and also their medicinal uses so that—that's kind of fun.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's really fun. Oh, my gosh.

Ashley Elenbaas:

I've been working on it for six years, so it's like—it's finally going to find its way into its physical form. I'll send you a link once that's available. I'd love to send you a free copy and-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Please.

Ashley Elenbaas:

And you can share it with whoever you'd like to.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

You have such a beautiful creative offerings like the garden gatherings. What a beautiful, amazing community gathering. When you're talking about that, I'm just thinking what would the world be if we had somebody in every community offering something like this – creative expression, time with the plants. I love that it's—I can just imagine this joyful, beauty-filled experience.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Thank you. That is—my vision is that this can happen in every town. It's not—it doesn't have to be Minnesota. I think as a community or as a—I feel like as a society, we're all kind of starting to look back towards in-person. We did the Zoom thing which is great, and I love offering my classes online, but I think a lot of us are aching for that in-person so I would love to see more and more of that popping up as well in different communities.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thanks for being an inspiration leading forward with that and for sharing with us about it as well. Your offerings just sound so lovely. It's been so lovely chatting with you. I don't want to let you go yet though. I'd love to ask you one last question, and that is, what's one remedy that you could not live without? I realize that this is a difficult, perhaps unfair question. If you have to list a couple, I will allow it.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Thank you. Thank you for that generosity. The plants that I use most often, the ones that I lean into the most are definitely going to be the bee balm that we talked about, and then I

think nettle is probably the other one I couldn't live without. Nettles I reach to again and again and again. With my herb students, it's the first herb that I introduce them to and have them take. I think of it as like the "gateway drug," like the gateway herb. I think once people have an experience of nettles, not always, but a lot of times, they're like, "Oh. Well, If this is an herb that I—now that I know this, what else is out there?" It's a really nice doorway into the plant world because it's so fortifying and green and accessible.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I'm going to be a stickler, Ashley, because the question is remedy. Nettle is a plant, so what remedy would it be. With nettles, for example, how do you like to work with nettles?

Ashley Elenbaas:

Overnight infusion.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, there we go.

Ashley Elenbaas:

That's my go-to. I would have a really hard life if I could not make an overnight infusion of my plants.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, yeah, I'm with you. I'm not saying I've had it every single day, but more often than not, I've had a nettle infusion for over a year now, and it's probably maybe the longest I've gone just the consistency every single night, pretty much. Oh, my gosh, there are nights I'm tired. I'm like "I don't want to make—no, I do." And I get up and I make it, because my cells right now are just like, "Yes!" There's just something right now about the nettles I can't get enough of.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Beautiful.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

When it becomes that daily practice like you're saying, that's the remedies we can't live without. It's the daily ones.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Exactly. Cool. Thank you so much. I know I asked you some questions and put you on the spot, so thank you.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That was lovely. I like that.

Ashley Elenbaas:

For me, it's like I learned so much and there's so much I think listeners learn when there's that collaborative energy in—in the podcast space. Thank you for being open to just answer.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love the conversation now. I really do. I love the conversation. That's something Mason—Mason from HerbRally who originally pestered me over and over to have Ashley on the show. We have another podcast under our Folk Methodology production studio. We're always telling folks this is best when we're in conversation. It's so much fun, and you just brought that so I really appreciate it.

Ashley Elenbaas:

My pleasure. Maybe you can come on my podcast sometimes too. I'd love to have you-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, my gosh. I would love to.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Come on and we can showcase a plant that you're really passionate about too.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Would you tell us about your podcast real quick – say the name and where we can find you and everything.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Sure. It's Sky House Herbs Podcast, and it's on YouTube but it's also kind of everywhere else. You can Spotify, iTunes. I cover—every week I have an episode—lately I've been really diving into goddess work and the divine feminine. I have a series. I just finished looking at living a devotional life in a broken world and how we can use plant allies to help us stay connected to the divine feminine within, whether you're in a female or male body, but just that receptive, sacred embodied part of ourselves. That's what I've been really into. I recently came back from Italy where we did a pilgrimage to these sacred sites of the goddess, so a lot of my work has been focused on the goddess and the divine feminine, but I always weave plants in because I think they're part of the—they've always been part of the conversation for me. That's—that's what's on my podcast now, but I have libraries full of herb of the month videos where you can just look at one herb like we've done today, showcasing one plant and how it was used traditionally, what science and clinical data say, and then how we can bring it into our daily lives. All of that is on the podcast, Sky House Herbs.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Cool. Thank you for sharing a bit about that. We'll make sure we get all the links in the show notes. Again, thank you so much for being here. It's been just absolutely lovely to have a chat with you, talk about one of our favorite plants. It's just been fun getting to know you as well, Ashley.

Ashley Elenbaas:

You too, Rosalee. Thank you so much.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Pleasure.

Ashley Elenbaas:

Alright, take care.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

You too.

Thanks so much for listening. You can download your illustrated recipe card from today's episode. Just head over 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, we're shining our spotlight on one of the guest teachers who makes our herbal community so special, Anjali Deva. She's an Ayurvedic practitioner, educator and founder of Mādhyā Way. Anjali teaches our Introduction to Ayurveda series inside the Herbal Energetics Course where she helps students explore the foundations of Ayurveda and the three doshas in ways that are both practical and deeply approachable. Students consistently tell us that Anjali's classes help them better understand themselves, their herbs, and the connections between the two.

Her thoughtful trauma-informed approach encourages curiosity, self-awareness, and compassionate healing, which are qualities that beautifully compliment the herbal traditions we share together. Anjali brings ancient wisdom into today's classrooms, kitchens, and communities. She offers a 600-hour integrative training, as well as shorter self-paced courses. If you'd like to learn more about Anjali and her work, visit madhyaayurveda.com.

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

Ashley and I spent some time talking about bee balm as a plant worth building a relationship with, and it turns out, there's a small bee out there who has taken that idea further than any of us. Its name is *Dufourea monardae*. Sometimes it's called the "bee balm shortface bee." It's a tiny black sweat bee, which these are so cute. It's only about 7 millimeters long, and as far as anyone has recorded, it visits bee balm and almost nothing else. Its flight season is July and August, which lines up exactly when the *Monarda* comes into bloom. This whole little life is arranged around this one plant.

Part of why bee balm keeps such devoted company is the shape of the flower, those tubular blooms, those dragons breathing fire, they tuck their nectar down at the base, out of easy reach so the plant then tends to favor these long-tongued visitors like bumblebees, certain butterflies, ruby-throated hummingbirds, and the hummingbird clearwing moth, which that moth hovers and darts so much like a hummingbird that people regularly mistake it one for the other. There are a few bees who can't reach the nectar honestly, but they still want it so they just go straight for it and they bite a hole at the base of the flower and help themselves. This little, small active nectar robbery going right there in the garden. Next time you pass a stand of bee balm in bloom, just pause a moment, watch who comes to call. You might find you're in better company than you thought.

Thanks for joining me. I'll see you in the next episode.