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Rosalee de la Forêt:

Hello and welcome to the Herbs with Rosalee podcast, a show exploring how herbs heal as medicine, as food, and through nature connection. I'm your host Rosalee de la Forêt. I created this YouTube channel to share trusted herbal wisdom so that you can get the best results when relying on herbs for your health. I love offering up practical knowledge to help you dive deeper into the world of medicinal plants and seasonal living.

Each episode of the Herbs with Rosalee podcast is shared on YouTube as well as your favorite podcast app. Transcripts and recipes for each episode can be found at herbswithrosaleepodcast.com or through the link in the video description. Also in video description, you'll find other helpful resources. For example, to get my best herbal tips, as well as fun bonuses, be sure to sign up for my weekly herbal newsletter.

Okay. Grab your cup of tea and let's dive in.

Bee balm is such a fun and powerful plant, and I'm excited that Abby Artemisia is the first one to share this plant on the Herbs with Rosalee podcast.

Abby has an obvious love of bee balm and I love that she shared information, not only from her personal experiences, but also from traditional acknowledged sources. She also shares about her calling to help people find good relationships with plants and their greater communities. For those of you who don't know Abby, she's a botanist, herbalist, and professional forager. She was raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she spent her free time climbing trees and creek wandering. This is where her love of nature began. Her love of plants had a diverse foundation, from apprenticeships on organic farms on the West Coast and in the Midwest to a bachelor's degree in botany from Miami University and an apprenticeship in herbalism with herbalist Leslita Williams, along with owning and operating her own tea business.

After visiting Pisgah National Forest, she fell in love with the biodiversity of the Southeast. Abby then founded the Wander School, the Wild Artemisia Nature Discovery, Empowerment, and Reconnection School. Through the school Abby offers the Wildcrafted Herb School program, customizable workshops, and botanical property surveys. The Wander School became a non-profit in 2020 to provide botanical education, herbs, and herbal medicine to under-served communities and to practice acknowledgement and reciprocity for traditional ecological knowledge.

Abby is also the author of the Herbal Handbook for Homesteaders and The Wild Forage Life Cookbook. She's also the host of the podcast Wander, Forage, and Wildcraft.

Welcome to the show, Abby. It's such a pleasure to have you on.

Abby Artemisia:

Thank you so much. I'm so honored to be here.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's kind of fun. I'm a podcast host interviewing a podcast host.

Abby Artemisia:

Yes, it's really cool. As we were saying beforehand, it's a little weird to be on the other side of the mic so I'm excited.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Nice. Well, I am so excited to talk about your chosen herb, but before they get there, I want to hear about what brought you on this fabulous plant path.

Abby Artemisia:

Oh yes. It's such a cool story. I love hearing people's paths and mine has so many different facets that weave into it. I always tell people because I don't know if this happens to you, but people are always like, "How the heck did you get into that?" I always tell people I was lucky enough to be an outdoor kid. I was raised in the era when it was normal to run around outside and I did that and I was blessed enough to have trees and woods and a creek to run around in behind my house and all those things. I just explored outside and that's how I first got interested in all these nature-y things and probably not plants as much as just nature in general, and went to outdoor camps and had this really cool thing in school called outdoor education, which I don't think they do anymore, but that's where I hung out all the time.

Then when I was an older teenager, I started working in health food stores. I grew up actually in the Midwest in Cincinnati, Ohio and spent most of my life there. There's actually a lot of green space there. Then I wanted to get away from there and so then I went out West to, I think, sort of near you, I was out in Oregon. I was in Southwestern, Oregon in a tiny little town of 1000 people next to a tiny town of 1000 people. I was working on a farm and so I started learning about growing plants and there were a few herbs there. Then I was so lucky to meet some neighbors who were and are Native folks and still live in the same place and they're what I call my family now. I go back and visit them when I can. They taught me about the... more of the medicine of herbs, the physical medicine and the emotional and spiritual medicine.

Then I ended up moving back to Ohio and I had my daughter and I feel like that was when I really hardcore committed to living a natural lifestyle with herbs. As I say, my daughter became my guinea pig. I tried things out on her and then I wanted to do work that I could do and be able to stay home with her. I tried a lot of things and the thing that stuck was actually a tea company. I was making my own tea blends and selling them at the farmer's market. I met my amazing teacher, Leslie Williams and we both lived in Cincinnati at that time. As she tells the story, I begged her to teach me until she finally gave in. She started teaching classes in her

living room and she was already, I would say, an elder herbalist at that point. But unfortunately she moved away about six months later, but we've done distance education ever since. I'm so grateful for her vast array of knowledge and willingness to teach.

Then over many years, I got into many car accidents, and as the story is of many herbalists, used my own healing journey to learn about herbs. As KP said in your interview, the whole journey we all know of the wounded healer. I did that. I learned a lot about herbs, about surgery, and also a big part of my recovery was walking out in the woods a little bit further each day with my Peterson's Field Guide because that was all I knew and just teaching myself the plants because there was nobody else around who was teaching them.

Then serendipitously, I'd already been to four colleges and hadn't found the program I wanted, but it turned out somebody, a parent of a child in my daughter's class, went to Miami University, which strangely enough is in Ohio, and it's named after the Miami Indian tribe. They had a botany program and I didn't even really know what that was at the time, but I decided to go and my first class was with my professor who would become my mentor. It was field botany and I fell in love. I was like, "This is it. This is where I'm supposed to be." But I quickly learned that botany was a great foundation for learning the plants, but it didn't really teach anything about what to do with the plants once you knew what they were.

I actually ended up assistant teaching that course for the next three semesters and teaching the students who were mesmerized what you do with those plants. I also did a project there with the Shawnee and learned a fair amount from them about the plants that grow locally. I did a fellowship at the Lloyd library, which I feel like is this hidden gem that is in Cincinnati, Ohio, the largest botanical medicine library in the hemisphere. If y'all don't know about it, go to Cincinnati. Then I eventually ended up moving to North Carolina and that was about eight years ago and just happened to actually, you would love this, at a fire cider Imbolc party ...

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Nice.

Abby Artemisia:

Met my friend Tyson, who is an amazing Cherokee person. We became really good friends and I started spending time in Cherokee, North Carolina, with the Cherokee people and met a woman, Amy Walker, who ended up adopting me as my granny. I've been learning from the Cherokee since then. Yeah, I think that's the majority of the long, winding road.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, that was lovely. That filled in some holes for me that I didn't know.

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's kind of interesting that life kept bringing you back to Ohio too. That's just kind of fascinating to me.

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah, yeah. Interestingly, my daughter's about to go to college in Ohio.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Wow. I like that botany was such a big part for you too. I also had to start in botany and I'm so grateful to have that, as a background...

Abby Artemisia:

Mm-hmm.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Learning the plants, because it's something I rely on even though hardcore botany is not really my calling. I'm just not that specific of a person, so that's not my thing.

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah. We'll talk about it in a little while, but it was a hard thing for me because I went to all these different colleges and couldn't find a program I liked. I knew I wanted to study plants, but I couldn't find the program and I went to Oregon State University for a little while and was in forestry and it was totally split down the middle between people wanting to study natural resources and people wanting to be loggers. Neither of those things were what I wanted to do. I'm so grateful I found the path that I did.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah. Well, I was literally jumping up and down for joy when I saw that you were choosing bee balm. So excited because this is such a fun plant. That's just the way I think of it. It's just super fun, also powerful, but I'll let you ... How about you tell us why you chose bee balm instead of just my excitement in you choosing bee balm.

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah. I think it's super fun too. When you just look at the shape and the color of the flower, when we talk about the red bee balm, I was looking through several resources before this interview, seeing what other people said and Jim Duke, who I had the huge honor of meeting and teaching at his place in the year before he passed, he says in one of his books, talks about them being fireworks. It's kind of hilarious because he's like, "Yeah, on July 4th, instead of going to see the fireworks, I just decided to pull my chair out to my garden because I had three different varieties of bee balm in red, white, and blue."

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Nice.

Abby Artemisia:

They are kind of like fireworks. I chose it because, one, I think it's so incredibly versatile. I love plants that are medicinal herbs and food as well. This one is definitely that and it just has such a wide array of benefits. It's really important to me and it's also super important to some of the tribes that I work with. I thought that was a really great thing as well. Do you want me to just jump right in?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah. Jump in. Let's go for it.

Abby Artemisia:

Because there's so much to say.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

There is. Yeah.

Abby Artemisia:

It's native to much of the US. Interestingly, what I found was much of the central and Eastern US, but also the West Coast. Hmm. It's also perennial and there I feel like is a lot of confusion about the species because the species I'm talking about, the Latin name is *Monarda didyma* and that is the red-flowered species. Some people call the light kind of lavender colored flowered species *Monarda fistulosa*, they'll call that bee balm. I call that one wild bergamot but I have found in most of my research that they're generally interchangeable as far as herbal benefits and food. I feel like the taste is slightly different, but a lot of the same property is both really high in thymol, which I think is crazy cool that it actually has more thymol than thyme. Thymol is this very strong antimicrobial and to me, that's what you're tasting when you taste bee balm. When I say antimicrobial, it's antibacterial, antiviral, and antifungal. It's also called Oswego tea because it's important to the Oswego tribe. It is sometimes called wild oregano because it's delicious. I feel like it's more delicious than oregano. It's also I think a little bit stronger.

I learned from Linda Black Elk who I do some work with that, and I don't know if I'm saying this correctly, because I've only seen it written and I was trying to get in touch with her before this, but we didn't have time, that the Lakota word for it is *waštémna*. I just talked to one of my Cherokee friends today and I'm just now learning the Cherokee syllabary, which is the Cherokee language, so I'm probably not going to say this correctly. It's a very hard language to learn, but it is *walelu unitsagisdi*.

I so love learning the Cherokee names for plants because each name has its own meaning. The beginning of that, walelu, means hummingbird.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Mm.

Abby Artemisia:

The rest of it, unitsagisdi, means they eat it. What my friend was telling me is for the Cherokee, it's all about right relationship. It's about the relationship that the plant has with the animal world. Oftentimes when you see bee balm, I read some differing things about it. In several places, I read that it was pollinated by bees but then I also read that the tubes of the flower are, the flower petal, are too deep for the bee to get its proboscis into, so that it is pollinated by other things which can get into those longer tubes like hummingbirds, and amazingly one of my favorite insects, the hummingbird hawk moth.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Mm. Yeah.

Abby Artemisia:

I was actually at the botanical gardens in Asheville a week or two ago, just watching this, so amazed as the hummingbird hawk moths just circle around and get in there. If you've never seen one, you should totally look it up because they're one of the craziest things I've ever seen. They look like a hummingbird, but they have a tail that looks kind of like a lobster or like a crawdad and their wings flap really quickly, so they're this magical creature and they pollinate this really magical flower.

They're great for pollinators, they're in the mint family and like other mint, I feel like they're great in the garden for, one, pollination and also maybe keeping away some of the pests that might eat the garden and yeah. They also have the benefits of the mints. What we call carminatives in herbalism, great for the digestive system. The Cherokee, some of the Cherokee research I found, says that... some really interesting benefits: A diaphoretic for fevers, helps you sweat out a fever and super interestingly, a sedative. I don't ever think of bee balm that way, because when I first got into studying herbalism, I was into Ayurveda and so I really think of energetics a lot. To me bee balm is really hot and spicy. For something that's hot and spicy, I don't usually think of it as a sedative. I tried it last night and I made a tea of just bee balm and first I was drinking it and I was like, "Whoa, that's so strong."

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Spicy.

Abby Artemisia:

"I've never drank a bee balm all by itself." It was really strong first of all, but it did, I noticed I slept really well and it really seemed to calm me down. Yeah, that's pretty amazing.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I thought I'd mention, one time I had a very strong solo bee balm tea and this was many years ago and kind of the beginning of my energetic herbal studies, and I drank the tea and I felt that heat, it just goes down the esophagus, hit my belly, radiated out, and I was like, "Oh, that's diffusive." You could read about diffusive all you want but to me, I was just like, "Oh." That was the first time I really got it because that heat really did just come out, then it's so spicy it cooled me down. Because that heat radiated out, opened my capillaries, and I was like, "Oh," the stuff I've been reading about that can sound somewhat esoteric sometimes, it was just such a great felt sense of that. I'm very grateful to bee balm for that experience.

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah. That is really interesting, cool. Thanks for sharing that.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah.

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah. Also, because it's got all that thymol and it's an antimicrobial, I like to not focus on just one phytochemical because one amazing thing that Jim Duke told me, such a treasure. He let me ask him, he's like, "Okay, three questions. You can ask me any three questions you want." Somehow we ended up talking about phytochemicals and he was like, "I believe there are 10,000 phytochemicals in every plant and that in 10 years from now we'll find there are 20,000 phytochemicals in every plant." Just like the studies on St John's Wort, where they just extract the hypericin and then they find out that it actually doesn't work as well for what we mostly think of it for, antidepressant kind of qualities.

I feel like I don't want to focus on just the thymol, but that is what it's really known for. For all of those antimicrobial qualities, it is great for colds and flus and fevers with that diaphoretic quality and we can put it into all kinds of preparations. Great for a tea infusion, the flowers and the leaves. I throw the stems in there too. And for a tincture as well, I tincture all the aerial parts. Of course the flowers look really pretty in a tea blend so you can give that to somebody that you love. Or steams, it's great for steams because you're inhaling all those antimicrobial properties and because the spiciness, I feel like it helps clear out your sinuses. It's an antiseptic wash.

Interestingly, the Cherokee also talk about working with it topically a fair amount. Not just as an antiseptic, but actually putting it on your head when you have a headache. I love those kinds

of things, reading that in the ethnobotanical research, because I feel like it helps us as modern herbalists think outside that box of we just have to drink tea or take tincture. That was really cool. Also, I never thought about this, but it's so simple. It's called bee balm because people have worked with it to soothe bee stings. Like, "Oh, okay."

Lots of wonderful, amazing things we can do with this plant. I also make oxymels with it or syrups, throat sprays, all kind of for the same thing, for sore throats, it's really wonderful for that whether it just be scratchy throat or some kind of infection. Then I just like Hippocrates, right? "Let thy food be thy medicine and thy medicine be thy food." I think whenever we can eat a plant, it's wonderful to be able to take it in that way. This is one that's super tasty so it's easy for us to do that. I eat it in all kinds of ways. I just substitute it for oregano and I have it in a recipe in my cookbook, *The Wild Forage Life*, and I make a wild za'atar, so the Mediterranean spice and combine it with, I add that as the wild oregano and combine it with wild sumac and nettles and a little bit of salt and it's really yummy. But that's not the recipe I gave you, is for wild oregano bee balm salt.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah. Tell us about this wild oregano bee balm salt.

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah, it's super duper easy. I think it's a great way for folks to start out who are just beginning foraging or growing it in their garden. We could talk about growing it in a minute, but it's pretty easy to grow in the garden. I like to give new foragers or new herbal cooks really easy recipes and so I make a lot of salts. I think wild condiments are awesome. I also have a wild spices course that I did. I always make my salts with fresh herbs because if you want to get all scientific about it, salt is hydrophilic so it pulls the water out of things, it's attracted to the water, the molecules in the salt. I feel like it works better if you're working with fresh herbs because it will also, as it draws out that moisture, it'll also draw out the flavor from those herbs.

I pretty simply just throw the leaves into a clean coffee grinder or an herb grinder with the salt and you can do it in batches if you're doing it in a small coffee grinder or just make a little bit at a time and that's all you have to do, just grind it, maybe pulse it a few times, and then let it sit in a jar, really important to put a plastic lid on that jar or if you don't have one, a piece of parchment paper between your jar and your lid, because the salt will eat through the metal really quickly.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Hmm.

Abby Artemisia:

You just let it sit there really as little as a week, but you never have to strain it out so you can just leave it in there forever and you're done and that's it. I put it on everything, anywhere that you would want oregano and salt. Put it on eggs, put it on popcorn. I love it on wild mushrooms that I forage, large quantities of mushrooms. It's so delicious and I have a hard time finding things not to put it on.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

So beautiful too I might imagine.

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I make a lot of herbal salts too, and I love chives with the chive flowers. I love sage when it's flowering and to put the purple sage flowers in there, but they are pretty light lavender and so I can imagine with the red bee balm that could be quite pretty.

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah. That's a good point. I don't even put that in the recipe I don't think, but you could totally throw in the flowers if I did not put that in there and it would be beautiful.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

For sure.

Abby Artemisia:

I know there was something else I just said that I was going to mention, oh, gardening.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, so talk about gardening. I grow three different varieties of bee balm.

Abby Artemisia:

Ah, cool.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love that the Cherokee name has hummingbird in it because I always associate hummingbirds with this plant because they're always there. Tatiana, who is a watercolor illustrator, who does a lot of watercolor illustrations for me, whenever she does another bee balm, I'm always like, "Put a hummingbird on it because I just can't imagine it without."

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah. Yeah. I love that illustration she did, so please tell her thank you, so beautiful.

Yeah. Gardening, there are different varieties you can grow. You can also grow the wild bergamot, monarda fistulosa, there's lots of different species of monarda that folks can grow and lots of different cultivars. I usually see when I see it in the wild, I usually see bee balm growing in partial shade and so you can grow it in partial shade or you can grow it in full sun.

I was looking at Strictly Medicinal Seeds' website today, one, because I love Richo and he's a friend of mine and I just think everything they do is great and they have amazing growing instructions, which are really helpful.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Mm-hmm.

Abby Artemisia:

They were saying to grow the plants two feet apart from each other. I had seen one foot apart on other sites, but I think one to two feet apart is a really good idea because they usually get powdery mildew, which is a fungus. If you grow them one to two feet apart, it will help prevent powdery mildew. Interestingly, I don't know if this is true, but I also read if you counterintuitively spray them with water, it will help prevent powdery mildew. I don't know the science behind that.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I don't know about that. I don't know about that because it grew in my garden and every year it got powdery mildew, and once we switched to not having overhead watering, I haven't had that problem. I kind of thought that was the problem too, but couldn't do anything about it. Yeah. That is my experience. I'm kind of like, "Yeah, I don't know about that."

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah. Yeah. But yeah, I feel like they're pretty forgiving as far as where they will grow and what they will grow in.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Mm-hmm.

Abby Artemisia:

Partial shade to full sun, but again, I usually see them in the wild in partial shade, and the wild bergamot, the monarda fistulosa in full sun. I think they will both grow a little bit in either habitat, but yeah, I thought it was really interesting because I made, this was actually one of the first flower essences I ever made. My friend Julia Onnie-Hay who's an incredible herbalist who

was from Florida and recently moved up here, but she taught the class and she was talking about sitting with the plant and while you're making your essence or beforehand and asking it for a message and so I did that. I'm not going to tell y'all totally what the message was, but a big part of it was about community and I've been taking it leading up to this interview and because I was listening to one of your interview with Mason and he was like, "I drank tea every day for a month," and I was like, "Wow, that's commitment."

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That was.

Abby Artemisia:

I have been taking the flower essence and flower essence is, if folks have not worked with them, it's like, to me, it's so easy to think like, "Oh, they don't do anything. There's no real trace of this flower in this essence," but I feel like they can have really strong effects. But you also, it's good to be in this receiving mode where you're really ready to deal with that thing and have that intention. Some things have really come up for me in the last month around community. I thought about, I guess the doctrine of signatures of the plant. The plant always grows in community. When I see it in the wild, I never see it growing alone and then I thought about the fact that it's recommended to grow them one to two feet apart so that they don't get powdery mildew, and I was like, "Oh, so they grow in community, but they need personal space."

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love it.

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah. Good lesson. Especially during COVID times when we're all a little weird from being isolated for too long. Yeah, it's just an awesome plant and a native plant and I just love it so deeply.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Hmm. Speaking of different species, this spring I bought monarda didyma. I always say didyma but I'm sure they're both right but Monarda didyma at the nursery. I was wanting the red flower and it came up pink and already had pink. So I'll have to get it from Richo because they are the best over there and you're right. Their descriptions on how to grow something, that's very much how I learned how to garden, was Richo's-

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

And whoever else writes for him.

I have a lot of pink now. I definitely have the purple because that's what is closer, it doesn't grow necessarily in my valley, but it is more native to where I live. Then I'm also growing monarda punctata, the spotted bee balm which is so cool. It's not big and bushy the way the other ones are, but I just love having it around and it's such a cool flower.

Abby Artemisia:

It really is. It's so gorgeous with the yellow and the purple. The first time I saw it, I was just in shock, I couldn't move. It was like, "What is that?" It doesn't grow wild here. I think my friend said it grows where she is in Charleston, but the first time I saw it was in Maryland on a beach, I was like, "What?"

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Wow.

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah and it's so aromatic. I just took some and put it on the dashboard of my car and just smell it the whole way home. Yeah, I was thinking about these names of plants, especially talking to my Cherokee friend this morning and about right relationship and the names of the plants. I was looking at my materia medica for this plant, which I made years ago, and it literally said, I have a little place I made a form in my materia medica, and in that template it says, "Translation of the Latin." I wrote in there, "Monarda, named after some dead white dude."

I think about that more and more because I'm creating this botany course and trying to think about why it's important that we know botany and it's often because it tells us about the plant. It tells us ... Which interestingly, this is Monarda didyma and so the didyma part is two flower and I'm trying to figure out, I've just been thinking about that all day. What does that mean? Because there's usually one plant, one flower on each plant, so what is it about?

Then my Cherokee friend was actually like, "Yeah, Didymus I think is a name out of the Bible."

Whoa. It's really interesting to think about where can those things help us? Where are they not helpful? Can we rename things? I love using mnemonic devices, just whatever helps me remember about the plant. Yeah. Thinking about those things.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Hmm. Yeah. Those are all good thoughts.

Abby Artemisia:

Mm-hmm.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Well, Abby, thank you so much for sharing so much in-depth information about bee balm. If people didn't already have their notebooks out in the beginning, I'm sure they grabbed them pretty quickly because that was just a major amount of information on so many different levels too. I love the names, I love working with it. I love the practicality, and also your love for bee balm really shines through.

Abby Artemisia:

Thank you.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I'd love to hear what projects you're working on these days in the herbal world.

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah. Thank you for asking, so much all the time. I had one of those middle of the night epiphanies several months ago and I was actually about to start this herbal herb school course that I'm offering called Wildcrafted Herb School. I was like, "Oh my gosh, my mission is decolonizing herbalism." I think to my partner, he is kind of like, "Duh, you didn't know that? It's like everything you do and talk about all the time," but it just really clarified for me what I feel like I'm here for and what I have been really getting excited about the past couple years, especially since I have become interested in learning about Cherokee and other tribal herbalism.

There's this great article I can send you called, I think it's called "Water-Womb-Land Cosmologic" by this amazing herbalist, Patricia Gonzalez, who is a native herbalist and I think varying backgrounds, but one tribe in the Southwest and then also Mexico. She's also a professor in Arizona and it's a really wonderful article that they just made open source thankfully and actually my friend read it when I took my class out to Cherokee a year or two ago. She talks about acknowledgement and reciprocity for traditional ecological knowledge. It's something that's been on my mind a lot and to the point where I'm going to ... It was really cool. I actually had met her and didn't realize it at first. She was the keynote speaker at the American Herbalist Guild Conference in Oregon in 2017. I ended up driving her to the airport and we were chatting and she was like, "Contact me anytime." I'm going to interview her for my podcast, but I've just been thinking about that ever since and teaching about it.

Whenever I, which I should have said this at the very beginning, whenever I teach, I like to give a land acknowledgement. Right now I'm on the traditional homeland of the Cherokee and the Catawba and potentially other tribes as well. I just encourage people to think about the fact that if we're living in the United States, we are most likely on stolen land and that's where we're harvesting our herbs from and growing our herbs. Where does our knowledge come from as herbalist? I think, well, this is more of question number four so maybe I won't tell it yet but, but yeah, it's become a lot of the work I do. In 2020, my business, The Wander School became a



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nonprofit because it was the beginning of the pandemic and I started seeing people like Linda Black Elk posting things like, "Hey, our Lakota elders really need herbs, but they don't want to leave their houses because they don't want to get exposed and so we're creating these bins that we're hand delivering to them. We need herbs for that." Then all these herbalists, lots of amateurs, just beginning herbalists were like, "Hey, we really want to contribute and help out, but we don't know how to get herbs to where they need to go."

It was also Black Lives Matter was just starting then, the protests were just starting, and there were people on the front lines of those protests who needed herbs. People wanted to donate, but they didn't know how to get them there. So I was like, "Okay, this is something I can do and I have connections with these tribes and I know how to get things to people and I just have a stupid big apothecary." These medicines are just sitting there because when I have this bad habit where it's like hoarding and when I see medicine, I can't walk past it so I harvest it.

We do a lot of work in Cherokee and my granny there, Amy Walker, she actually had an apothecary donated to her by her friend who passed, who was a good friend of hers and of the tribe, and it was just sitting in her storage shed. We moved that all to my friend's house in the Cherokee, on the reservation. I take groups there and volunteers and students, and we work in the apothecary and people donate herbs and money, and that's always a thing, so folks want to donate, let me know. We make medicine, we process medicine because they harvest a lot of their medicine. Luckily because some of the Cherokee never left that land they still have a fair amount of traditional knowledge. We go there, we harvest, we process, we bring things, and we package things to be distributed to lots of folks for free in the tribe. We're doing that. I send things to Linda Black Elk and other Lakota folks and work with the Gullah, so the descendants of the first freed colony of the descendants of enslaved people in South Carolina, and potential to work with the Shawnee that I used to work with when I was in college. We are about to send some packages to Uvalde. It's really exciting and I love that work, it's super fulfilling. That's happening and that's a big part of the decolonizing herbalism work and ...

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Talk about that term real quick, Abby, because I feel like that term, I feel like people who use it know it, but people who haven't heard it, it could be even kind of prickly for some people.

Abby Artemisia:

Exactly. Yeah. I think that's a really good point and I'm actually in the process of writing a blog about it, because I don't think that it's well known or well understood and because I've had some difficult experiences taking folks who have never engaged with indigenous people out to the reservation. I wanted to create something with tips of how to engage and how to practice what at first I was calling reciprocity and now I'm calling reparations.

This is going to answer your last question, but yeah, I think that in herbalism, a lot of what we as herbalists don't think about is where the knowledge that we have comes from. A lot of it comes from indigenous people and the descendants of enslaved people and it was stolen and

acknowledgement is really important. There's a fine line between acknowledgement and appropriation, I feel like. It's always important to acknowledge where we got the knowledge that we have. But unfortunately, a lot of us don't know where it came from. Most of my teachers didn't know and didn't tell me where it came from, because they didn't know.

What can we do especially if you're teaching and making money from it? What can we do to give back? I think it goes beyond reciprocity to reparations really. When I was talking to my Cherokee friend this morning, he was like, "That's also part of being in right relationship." We, as people, should be in right relationship with the plants and the land. That, to me, means how can we give back? Decolonizing herbalism to me means acknowledging where the knowledge we have comes from if we know and giving back if we're making money from it, and if we're making medicine, giving some away, doing things like popup clinics, which I'm hoping to start in Cherokee, and land back, for sure. If you have a lot of land or even a little bit of land, how can you give that back to tribal folks? If you don't know how to do that, you want to find out, you can email me and I'm happy to talk to you about it. And/or how can you grow herbs on that land that can be donated?

Those are just a few things and also too, to learn your own heritage and what are the herbs of your people? How can you work with those herbs? Because they're still in your DNA. Also how can you work with invasive plants because those are not threatened and you can harvest them wildly and it doesn't threaten any native plants.

I actually got into a little Instagram squabble with someone about white sage because they made this reel about white sage and it was very beautiful of them smudging their house. I was like, "Hey, you have a very large following. Could you maybe tell your followers like, 'Hey, white sage is actually somewhat endangered because it's been way over harvested and there's not enough for the folks who that is their tradition and they work with it in ritual. There's not enough for them. There's a lot of other herbs we can burn. What are those herbs from our own heritage? It might be Yarrow. It might be mugwort and artemisia. It might be pine and things like that. There's lots and lots of options. We can grow all kinds of sages in our garden that we can burn and lavender and lots of other things."

She got mad at me and blocked me. Then I asked Linda Black Elk to write her and then she got mad at her and blocked her. I just think it's a shame. We're public figures. I feel like we have a responsibility to use our voice, to do what is appropriate and honor traditional people, and amplify the voices of BIPOC people, so I think that's another way to decolonize herbalism. I'm just starting to see this happen so every conference I go to and teach at, I try to talk to the organizers about how can you include BIPOC teachers? If that means me not teaching fine, I'm okay with that, but it needs to be done. How can we use our voice to amplify the voices of others? How can we give back and how can we reroute money too? That's another way to practice decolonization. It's weird for me because I have this book called the Herbal Handbook for Homesteaders and I was actually asked by the publisher to, oh thank you. Look at that, yay.

I was asked by the publisher to write that book actually and so the title was not my choice. And then some years ago I found out that homesteading is this very controversial word, which can



sometimes be considered racist because of the Homesteading Act, which gave land, chunks of land, to people almost completely all white people. It is their descendants today who still own large chunks of land and it's been passed down generation through generation and BIPOC folks did not benefit from that. Yeah. How can we give back?

I think it is a very tricky subject. It's very triggering for a lot of people. One thing I say is, "Please don't ever ask BIPOC people to explain this to you. This is the work that white folks need to do for themselves and so do your research." One of my favorite authors right now is Resmaa Menakem and the work that he does. He wrote *My Grandmother's Hands* and this fabulous book I just got called *The Quaking of America* and it talks about somatic abolitionism and how racism is in our DNA because of intergenerational trauma. We need to work with our own racism before we can work with anybody else's racism, and this is such a tricky thing for me because when I bring folks out to the reservation, I feel responsible for them. Sometimes it's really hard for me when people act out of ignorance to know how to interact with that so I have to stop and right now the best thing I can do is do my own work with my own trauma before I try and address other people's trauma.

But I guess I just want to say to folks the most important things are to take the step, to start the work, to start thinking about it, and do your best to do no harm. The most important thing I think that I say to people which will be in this blog article that I'm writing about decolonizing herbalism is when you're interacting with indigenous people, the best thing you can do is listen. Don't ask why, because usually oftentimes, why they do things is because that is their tradition. They don't know why necessarily, it's just the way things are done there. It's not our place to ask why, it's our place to listen and to learn because oftentimes if you listen long enough and well enough, you'll hear the answer. It's an amazing honor to be able to learn from indigenous people. Yeah. Listen and be grateful.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Well, thank you for sharing all of that and yeah, my takeaways are the listening, which is, I think so incredibly important, whoever is involved, whether it's humans or plants or the whole ecology, listening is so important. I really, thinking about being in a right or good relationship with all that came before us, all that is now, and really thinking how can we continue to be stewards and tending this world around us and building community as well. Thank you so much for sharing all of that and answering as you did the last question, which is a reminder for folks who don't know. I ask the same question on every season, each season, and for season five it's in what ways do you think herbalism is misunderstood by the general public? I appreciate your answer to that too, Abby.

Abby Artemisia:

Oh, you're so welcome. I appreciate that question. It's a great question. I think the other point that I would add to that, just looking through my notes, is talk about indigenous people and indigenous knowledge in the present tense. I think it's a really easy mistake to make, but indigenous people are still here and they're still doing these things. They're still working with

these plants and still have this knowledge and they're still here. Some people actually don't know that there are still a fair amount. Unfortunately a much, much, much lower amount than there used to be, but there are still indigenous people here. Please use the current tense when talking about indigenous folks.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah. Thank you for that as well.

Abby Artemisia:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Well, thanks so much for being on the show, Abby, for sharing about bee balm and community and relationship and your work with indigenous tribes. It's really important to hear all that you had to say, so thank you so much for being here and for sharing all of that.

Abby Artemisia:

Aw. You're so welcome. It's been such a pleasure. Thank you, Rosalee, for doing all the good work that you do to get the knowledge of herbs out into the world. It's really necessary.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Hmm. Thank you.

Thanks for watching. Don't forget to click the link in the video description to get free access to Abby's wild oregano salt recipe card. Also available are the complete show notes, including the transcript. You can find Abby at thewanderschool.com. If you enjoyed this interview, then before you go be sure to click on the subscribe button so you'll be the first to get my new videos, including interviews like this. I'd also love to hear your comments about this interview and this lovely spice. I deeply believe that this world needs more herbalists and plant-centered folks. I'm so glad you are here as part of this herbal community. Have a beautiful day.