

Helena del Pesco:

Some plants are like a little harder to be friends with. They've got like thorns and they're hiding from you or whatever, and calendula is just like, "Hey!"

Rosalee de la Forêt:

So true.

Helena del Pesco:

"Hi!" And then the calendula is just like so many things. It's anti-inflammatory, but also, just really helping to get the actual healing of the tissues going. You know herbs aren't always that miraculous in their demonstration of their powers, but that was one of those moments where I was like, "Wow! Wow!"

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Welcome to the Herbs with Rosalee Podcast, a show exploring how herbs heal as medicine, as food, and through nature connection. In this episode, I'm joined by Helena del Pesco to talk about all things calendula – from a surprising encounter with wild calendula, *Calendula arvensis*, in Spain, with its dainty yellow blooms and potent aromatics, to the everyday way this plant supports skin and tissues for healing. 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.

Welcome to the show, Helena.

Helena del Pesco:

Thank you. I'm so glad to be here.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I'm so thrilled you're here. I'm really excited to get to know you a bit and hear about your plant path, and you're sharing about one of my very favorite plants, so I'm excited about that

too. But before we dive into calendula, I would love to hear about your plant journey and just everything that's led you to being here with us today.

Helena del Pesco:

Yeah. I love this part of the podcast when I listen to other people, so I was thinking a lot about what I wanted to say. I think I love hearing the ripples, like back of one-thing-that-led-to-another. I'll try not to go too—too many ripples in, but I was thinking about how my grandparents, especially on my mom's side, who were German Holocaust survivors who came to the US in 1951, were really big influences in terms of just growing up with that story, which is really intense, which is a survival story. Part of that story was my grandfather was—this is really intense to start out with, sorry. My grandfather was in a Siberian work camp. When he—at the end of the war, when he made his way out, he was making his way back to Germany to try to find who survived from his family. He almost starved to death, and some women gave him some chicken livers, and that saved his life. That was like a very powerful—as a young person—I don't know, eight or nine maybe when I heard that story—like nourishment, like the power of food, and the power of food to heal, the power of a generous act to save someone's life. That story came up when I was thinking about this, about my herbal journey, even though we don't think of chicken liver as maybe an herb, it is definitely medicine. He, also, my grandfather, when we had blueberries, in particular, if we left behind the slightly mushy ones, he would come and eat them. Just this idea of really cherishing these gifts.

My parents decided when I was three, to move to a vegan commune just outside of Nashville called, "The Farm," and that also—it's funny berries come up. I have memories of—they called us the "kid herd." There was—over half the population was under 18, so literally, there were herds of kids that ran—ran around the woods together. We would pick berries and bring them back to the moms, and they would make us hand pies. That's also a very cherished food memory that's like pleasure medicine, for sure, just like those wild berries.

Growing up, camping was a really big part of our family. Pretty much all of our family vacations were camping trips. I—at some point, my parents gave me a plant ID book, and I was just sort of obsessed with figuring out which plants were edible, learning how to ID them. There's actually a story. I'm really lucky to have 16 hours of recordings with my grandfather that the Wisconsin Historical Society did. Relistening to them recently, there was a story I hadn't remembered hearing before—that I was hanging out with him and he made me a salad with raw mushrooms in it. I'm from the Midwest. Raw mushrooms in salad are a thing. Not great, but they're a thing. I told my grandpa at I don't know, four or five years old—I don't eat raw mushrooms. I only eat cooked mushrooms.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Whoa!

Helena del Pesco:

Apparently, he asked my mom, "What's up with that?" and she was like, "Oh, she's always wanting to put things in her mouth when we're walking around." And so, to basically protect me from putting poisonous mushroom in my mouth, my mom was like, "We only eat cooked mushrooms." I've always just had this-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's really brilliant. That's a really brilliant-

Helena del Pesco:

I know. Smart, smart. She wasn't—she didn't shame me. She wasn't like, "Mushrooms are dangerous," or scary. But, yeah, and so, I also have a really strong childhood memory of my third grade public school class in Minneapolis doing a nature hike where we dissected owl pellets. That's like a very formative memory. But also we learned about dandelions and sumac. I went home and I was like, "Mom, we have to make dandelion fritters." Of course, they battered and deep fried the dandelions, and made the sumac into kool aid; added a lot of sugar to it. I was definitely hooked.

In terms of herbalism, I grew up with—both of my mom’s sisters, my aunts, were acupuncturists, so needles, of course, and herbs, but the herbs that they worked with were mostly compounded, like capsules or pellets, and little balls. I never really connected that medicine to the plants that I had a connection with as like a person who liked to be out in the woods. Even I think like when you get the bag of the chopped up roots and barks in Chinese medicine that isn’t compounded, and you boil it, and you pour off that decoction, like I had done that, but I still didn’t know those plants out in the wild.

I think it was really when I moved to Baltimore and worked for a fermentation company, and some of my co-workers were really into herbalism and were taking classes. A couple of them—one at MUIH, which used to be Tai Sophia, in Maryland; and a couple of them at—it was Centro Ashé at the time, is now Wild Ginger, Molly Meehan’s school. I know she’s been on the podcast too. I did that program in Southern Maryland, and that was—I remember just thinking, “This is the best gift I have ever given myself.” I just felt so—it was just another level of getting to be in relationship with plants, and other people who cared about plants in the way that I did. Molly did an amazing job of—I think it was every other weekend for six months. She would often teach the Saturday class and then she’d have someone else teach the Sunday class. She brought people from all over the Mid-atlantic. It was very diverse perspectives, diverse student cohort, and so that was—that was amazing.

Then, I opened a restaurant, which is a whole other story. I kind of had to put my active herbalism studies on the backburner. Molly’s first year program I did was very folk method, so I was able to make a lot of medicine for myself and for friends and family, and then work what I learned into the restaurant that I opened, as well. We did a lot of fermentation. We made kombucha and herbal infusions. It was there in the restaurant, but running a restaurant is all-consuming. I think I consoled myself by thinking I’ll do this restaurant thing for ten, 15, maybe 20 years, and then I will be in my full witch phase. I will—that will be my final act, just like getting back into the herbalism.

The restaurant was going well, and then the pandemic happened, so we opened the restaurant in May of 2019. I was already pretty burned out, and then when the shutdowns came, it was just like okay. I reached down inside and found another pocket of reserves that probably shouldn't be tapped, but I tapped it. Did that for two more years and then just really was like super burned out. I was like, "Oh! I guess—I guess I get to go back to dedicating myself to herbalism a little sooner than I expected."

I had heard Guido Masé give a talk, I think on the Mountain Rose podcast, and I was totally enamored with his weaving of folklore and tradition, and also the science. I was like, "Can I learn from this person?" and that's how I found the Vermont Center for Integrative Herbalism, which he helped found. He doesn't teach there anymore, but Betzy Bancroft and Larken Bunce who founded it with him are still there. That pretty much brings us up to today, where I am still doing a lot with food more in fermentation, like teaching fermentation, but fully into the clinical herbalism role.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

And you specialize in gut health and nervous system health, and the gut-brain axis between them?

Helena del Pesco:

I find that herbalism is just so, so vast. Camille Freeman, actually, I've done some mentoring with her and she really recommends choosing a focus early on, which is hard, I think because we all want to be like, "I want to help anyone who needs help. Why would I limit myself?" But when you get into really helping people with complex health issues, it's a lot of research. There's no way I can remember—or anyone really can remember everything we learn in clinical herbal school. It's such a huge info dump—so much information. Every client we end up having to go back to our notes and check our sources, do a lot of matchmaking of the particular person and the herbs, so I really heeded that advice of starting out with a specialty so that I can just get really—feel really, really confident, and that gut health zone has been really great.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It really ties in well with your fermentation love, and-

Helena del Pesco:

Exactly.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

One of my first teachers, Michael Tierra, he also said you need to choose something when you start out. I was like, “Ah, it’s just so limiting. I don’t want to be limited. I also don’t know if I want to work with fibromyalgia or eczema or whatever for the rest of my life.” He says, “Oh, no, no.” He says, “Just do it for six months and see how it goes.” I was like, “Ohh.” It was very freeing to just take a specialty for a while and see how it goes.

Helena del Pesco:

It’s funny. I feel like as we get older, as I’ve gotten older, I feel more of that room to breathe. Somehow when I was in my twenties, it felt like every choice I made was going to be forever, and so I would avoid narrowing. Now, I realize that freedom in it of just like, “Yeah, I’ll be really focused on this for a while, and then it can change.”

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It can change, yeah, yeah. Good perspective. Well, you have chosen one of my very favorite herbs; one that I’m spending a lot of time with these days because calendula is still blooming in the garden, so it’s still harvesting, still drying. Plus, it’s such a lovely plant to be with, so I’m excited to dive into calendula wherever you would like to start.

Helena del Pesco:

Yeah, sure. It’s funny. I was kind of doubting myself. I’m like, I know other people have talked about it on the podcast. It is kind of common, but I do really like—obviously, repetition is not a bad thing because, again, there’s so much information. Hearing about things again just deepens it. I also am a big proponent of, “Let’s celebrate the common plants.”

Let's not just fetishize the rare plants." I also got to build a new relationship with calendula last year because I spent some time in Spain, just north of Barcelona, on this property that had a bunch of wild calendula; so *Calendula arvensis* versus the *officinalis*. I totally fell in love with it. It's just so— these dainty, little yellow flowers, and then rather than going up, it kind of crawls; sort of sprawls out a bit. Dainty flowers, but really powerful aromatics, lots of resin. I was there in—I guess it was the fall. When I was leaving in December, there were plants going to seed, so I tucked some seeds in the pockets, and made it through customs with them. I figured there—it's like I don't think there's a risk of this becoming an invasive plant.

So, I have—I know lots of people are not seeing video, but just hearing audio. They're so tiny and so amazing, and so I'll try to describe them too. They're just the coolest seeds. They are—lots of different shapes. Some are really round and some are more like a kind of comma-shaped. They have little hairy spikes on them, almost like a little mohawk. In preparing for this interview, I was reading more about why—what are the theories about why it has such wild—because so many flowers just have a little demure, black, round thing, or a fluffy umbrella-like shape. I don't know any other plant that has this kind of seed. Apparently, it's like—is it heteromorphism? I think is the term for a seed that has variations in shape versus one in the same plant? Part of it, like the rounder ones—I don't know if you can see this, but this one is round like a little—if you had a pill bug, like a roly-poly with a spiky mohawk on its back.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's exactly what it looks like.

Helena del Pesco:

And apparently, that spike—so, the spikeys help it grab on to fur and animals to travel. The round helps it kind of roll downhill, roll further away from the parent plant so it can propagate itself. The more comma-shaped ones, as they moisten, they kind of straighten out, and that can help them dig into the soil. It's got a super fun seed. Both the *officinalis* and the *arvensis* have that same fun, kind of alien egg. It reminds me of something from another planet.

I was able to grow it in my garden this spring-summer in Maryland, and harvest some. I didn't have a big harvest, but I started to make some oil with it. That's how I've used it a lot—is topically, infused in oil. Although I have been really loving it just like in a tea for—like the recipe that I gave you all, this Tissue Tonic Infusion, is—I had to go back and remind myself because I've done different variations, I think, of this. I believe it's calendula, plantain, sage, and marshmallow. Is that the one that I gave you?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yes, it is.

Helena del Pesco:

I originally made this for my sinuses. This is something that Betzy Bancroft introduced us to in one of our medicine making classes, was rather than just doing a straight saline neti pot, to actually do an herbal infusion in a neti pot. At first, I was like, “Oh, no! Is that—can we actually do that? Is that”—not really meaning to doubt her because, obviously, she knows what she's talking about, but something in me—there was a taboo, I think, for me, about putting tea up my nose. It's like, “Don't put anything up there!” She emphasized that you want to really strain it well, put it through a coffee filter; not just muslin but a coffee filter, so there's no particulates that are going to irritate the sensitive tissues up there. Wow! It was—it really helped so much with—I just had like really inflamed sinuses; hot, inflamed tissue. I think maybe even I had done a more intense neti pot wash first with oregano, which was a mistake. Don't. I would not recommend oregano.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah.

Helena del Pesco:

It's too hot too, but I was trying to flush out. I didn't want to have to use antibiotics. I was worried it was going into a sinus infection land, so then I made this to soothe the irritation I

had caused. Now I would—in the future, I would do thyme instead of oregano. Now, I know oregano is too spicy for the sinuses. This just really instantly soothed that hot, irritated feeling.

The calendula is just so good for actually healing the tissue. The marshmallow is very soothing, cooling. The sage, you have these aromatics to break things up, and kind of dilate, open up the airways. The plantain is so nice in that it's both moistening and astringing, because sometimes when we have those swollen tissues that are kind of boggy, and we want to actually tighten them up with a little astringing. And then the calendula is just like so many things. It's anti-inflammatory, but also just really helping to get the actual healing of the tissues going.

After making this for myself, I had a jar of the loose tea sitting around. A friend was visiting and we were all hanging out outside. We came inside and she had gotten bitten by—I don't know if it was mosquitoes or a fly or what, but she had this big reaction on her leg—her side of her knee and her calf. She was like, “Wow! I'm really”—it was like red and swelling. I was like, “Hmm. Let me see if this tissue tonic blend would help.” I literally just put a thin dish cloth in a bowl, put the herbs in there, poured boiling water over the herbs, let them cool, and then folded that cloth up, put it on her leg, and then Saran-wrapped her leg. I was like, “I know this might feel crazy that I'm coating you in Saran wrap, but unless you want to sit still for the next two to three hours, you will still be able to walk around, but keep these herbs on there.” She took it off a couple of hours later, and the skin was like—like nothing had ever happened. No swelling. No redness. No itchiness. You know herbs aren't always that miraculous in their demonstration of their powers, but that was one of those moments where I was like, “Wow, wow!”

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Herbs work.

Helena del Pesco:

Yeah, exactly.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

So, you'd use it for your sinuses, specifically, and this was the first time you used it externally?
Is that kind of the-

Helena del Pesco:

Well, I had used it in salves, like the oil extraction.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Okay.

Helena del Pesco:

That was one of my very first—I got really excited after learning how to make salves with Molly, and I think I made a calendula and plantain salve. It was one of my first salves that I made. I made the classic newbie herbalist mistake where I made a gallon of calendula oil—so much calendula oil! For anyone who's wondering why that's a mistake, it's just like it's expensive and it doesn't last forever. You know oil goes rancid. Sometimes starting out with a little and figuring out how much you need, how much your community needs, is better than—but it was really potent and really lovely. I had seen it. I had seen the salve help a lot with skin things, but then at VCIH, I got deeper into energetics and realizing that salves aren't always great for hot conditions, especially hot-wet, like hot-damp conditions because the oil and the wax, although they're great for hydrating and protecting skin, they trap the heat and the moisture. It took me a while to break out of just wanting to reach for salve for everything because it's so convenient. It's already extracted. It's right there. It's shelf-stable. It's a little more work to pull out the herbs and boil the water. But in certain cases like that, like a bug bite is you don't want to trap what's in there because the reason you're reacting is the bug injected something into your skin. You actually want more of a drawing action rather than a sealing action. Actually, to try to make a more convenient version, I did make—I harvested some wild clay from the Northeast River a while back. It took me years to finally get around to cleaning it because that's a whole process, but I cleaned and sterilized the clay, and then ground up calendula. This one actually has comfrey and plantain in it. This is like my “bug bite powder” now,

which is just mix a little bit of it with water and slather it on to a smaller area, and that makes it more convenient. The clay adds to that drawing-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's lovely.

Helena del Pesco:

The drawing action. I actually also made a honey because that was another revelation to me. I was like, "Wait. Honey is actually better than salves on wounds that are hot and damp, especially if there's a big surface area affected, like a burn," so I infused calendula into honey with plantain. I'm always putting plantain in skin things because it's so great. This one also has some rose petal in it, partly just because they were—the roses were there and offering themselves up. I put them in fresh. I think it was dry calendula, dry plantain, but fresh rose. The nice thing about adding something fresh in honey is that it loosens the honey up a little bit, adds some moisture which—you don't want to add too much moisture because then the honey ferments more easily, but a little bit of moisture is nice to just make it a little bit of a looser, easier-to-apply thing. That I used on—my husband had a nose procedure on his nose. He had a pretty serious wound. I think after a few days of Aquaphor, he finally let me convince him to put honey on it instead, and it had a really profound effect on that healing situation too.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's a really good tip for that.

Hey, it's Rosalee. You know, creating this podcast has been one of the most rewarding parts of my herbal work, and if you found something meaningful here, whether it's a new perspective, a favorite recipe or just a sense of calm, I want to let you know there's a good way to go even deeper. It's called the "Podcast Circle." Inside you'll get access to live classes taught by some of my favorite herbal teachers, behind-the-scenes updates, and a beautiful library of herbal resources that we've gathered over the years. But more than that, it's a space to connect with

fellow plant lovers who care about the same things you do. And truly, your membership helps make this podcast possible. It's how we keep the episodes coming and the herbal goodness flowing. So, if you're ready to be part of something more, something rooted in connection, head over to HerbalPodcastCircle.com. I'd love to see you there.

Well, I wanted to specially highlight this recipe that you've shared with us, the Tissue Tonic Infusion. You mentioned it as being great for the sinuses and also using it for the bug bite. You have the recipe for us, so folks can download that by going to the show notes, getting the link there, or you can go to herbswithrosaleepodcast.com and find it there. Like you mentioned, there's the calendula and the plantain, which is such a fabulous duo; marshmallow and sage—really fantastic recipe. I don't know if you have anything else to say, but I just wanted to make sure folks know that they have access to that recipe card.

Helena del Pesco:

Yeah, I mean, also, the most obvious use for it which we haven't talked about yet, is just drinking it as a tea. That's something—I do get people asking me often, “How do you choose between a tea and a tincture? Why would you use a tea instead of a tincture?” There's a lot of different reasons. It can get very nuanced, but I think generally speaking, when we're dealing with tissue—and backing up a little bit, when we think about the human body, sometimes people talk about thinking of it as a donut. We have all the skin on the outside that we're used to thinking of as skin in terms of skincare products and protecting your skin from the sun, but then there's the donut hole. There's the whole internal hollow tube that runs through us that's the same—it's also the epithelial cells. It also is a barrier, protects us from pathogens and things, and also absorbs nutrients. When we are dealing with health issues that are like—even starting at the mouth, whether it's like a mouth ulcer or dry mouth or gum irritation, to a sore throat, to gastritis, like inflammation of stomach lining, to small intestine, large intestine, we probably want to be using tea, as a general statement, because we want to be washing the tissues in those herbal constituents.

Whereas, tinctures often are better suited for an acute thing like helping fall asleep or helping with a stress flare-up. This is all like generalizing, but—so, I think it’s so easy to conflate herbalism with pharmaceuticals, like, “I’m just switching. Instead of a pill, I’m using a plant,” but there are a lot of big, important differences, like pharmaceuticals are very concentrated. It’s kind of like swallowing something—I think of it as almost like “detonating” in your system or something. That’s not scientifically accurate, but that’s kind of what it feels like. Herbs are doing more. Subtle work doesn’t mean less powerful, so I like to think of it as like that bathing—like bathing the tissues. It’s not just drinking the tea once a day. It’s making a quart of that tea, making it pretty strong, and then sipping it throughout the day, ideally, rather than chugging it. Hopefully, it tastes good enough that you don’t feel like you’re just plugging your nose and getting it over with. That it’s kind of your friend next to you throughout the day, and yes, whatever you’re doing. Calendula is really great in that respect.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It’s lovely. I love that. Just bathing—you really want to bathe all those digestive tissues. Lovely.

Helena del Pesco:

I had a very—another really “wow” moment with a client who was actually a nine-year old who had been on antibiotics for a respiratory infection, and then got gastritis after the antibiotics. Her mom came to me after she’d been suffering for a couple of months and just was on a PPI, antacid medication, and it just wasn’t helping. She was really uncomfortable and it was affecting her mood. It’s like being uncomfortable all the time, yeah, it’s going to make you grumpy. I tried to set her expectations realistically. I’m like, “This has been going on for a long time. It might take a while to see some change.” We did a tea with a similar blend. I think there was some licorice in there; some more anti-inflammatory stuff. I was like, “Make it into a lemonade, add as much honey and lemon as she wants to make it yummy.” She actually took it to school with her in a thermos, which is really adorable. Four days later, she was like, “I feel great!”

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Wow.

Helena del Pesco:

Again, it doesn't always work that way. I had to tell myself, "Not always going to be this easy. Don't—" but yeah, that's where just, you know—the antacids are okay. They're reducing the amount of acid in the stomach, but if the tissues are irritated already, those herbs are going to help calm down that cycle of inflammation that's not serving us anymore. Inflammation is part of our immune system response, but when it goes on too long or it's misfiring, then it can be causing harm rather than helping us.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

You really don't want to see anybody, but even someone that young on PPIs. That's not an ideal situation. Those are only approved for short-term use and are too often used long-term.

Helena del Pesco:

I have a friend right now who is on PPIs. The doctors are like, "Just keep taking them," and I'm like, "Hopefully, I can help you figure out how to safely, maybe make a different decision," but that is a tricky territory for us as herbalists. We're not doctors. We aren't allowed to tell people what to do about their medications, but we can give them information to make decisions or to ask their doctors more questions because doctors have this authority about them and a lot of people don't feel empowered to question their doctors. I think that's actually a lesser known, but really important role of herbalists – is to help clients advocate with their other healthcare providers for more information. It's your body. You know your body better than the doctor does. They know a lot of things you don't know, but they don't know your body as well as you do.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's beautifully said. Was there anything else you'd like to share about calendula?

Helena del Pesco:

I think it's such a fun one to grow. Definitely, in terms of accessibility, if you have a pot with some dirt in it or a little piece of land and you can grow some calendula, it's such a sweet friend to have around. It does like a lot of sun. It's—I think I've done both direct sowing outdoors and starting it inside, both have worked well for me. I was going to say too, just thinking about that—that shifting of the relationship with plants too; that part of herbalism which can be hard to get to when we work with clients who are just like, “I'm uncomfortable and I want you to help me not be uncomfortable anymore,” which, yes, that's very important. I also like—this is an opportunity for me to talk about that side of things which has been a shift for me too as much as I like—have always had so much respect for nature, and I'm deeply passionate feeling about protecting it and not harming the environment; it still was kind of, for me, this sense of, “What are plants good for? What can you get out of them?” Being in an herbalist community where a lot of people are trying to bring in—bring us back to this place of they are—we are co-habiting on this planet with plants. You wouldn't—I like the analogy of we just moved in. We have new neighbors and if I like—every time I saw my neighbor, I just walked by and ignored them. I never bothered to have a conversation with them or get to know them, and then one day, I'm baking and I need sugar, and I just march up to their door and I'm like, “Give me some sugar!” We wouldn't do that, right? We understand that being in relationship means kind of building slowly, trusting, communication, getting to know each other. There's this idea of asking the plants for permission before picking, I love that and it's hard because often times, I'm like, “Oh, my gosh! I'm super busy. I need to go out in the garden and quickly harvest this calendula before it goes to seed,” papapapapa—but it's so much richer and it's part of the medicine for me and for anyone who decides they want to work with herbs more directly to have a conversation, just stop and notice and be like—calendula is so—some plants are a little harder to be friends with. They've got thorns and they're hiding from you or whatever. Calendula is just like, “Hey!”

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's so true.

Helena del Pesco:

“Hi! Come on in.” It’s such a friendly, welcoming plant, and so generous, like you pick the flowers and more come the next day. It just gives and gives and gives. I think that’s also a really beautiful part of its medicine.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It is. I get that question a lot or I hear people say, “Oh, my calendula just started blooming, but I’m not going to pick it because I want—I’m going to wait for more.” It’s like, “Oh, no, no, no.” Go ask permission. Go spread the love, but the more you harvest, the thicker, more robust that plant will grow, and the more flowers there will be.

Helena del Pesco:

It’s surprising how quickly it will go to seed too. I think it can be tricky to—sometimes it looks like it’s still just in flower, but the seeds are starting to form underneath the petals. I try to even pick it—I want—I want petals, but maybe when it’s still little closed or—because, I mean, unless you want to collect seeds, which is also fun, the seeds aren’t necessarily where the medicine is, so we want that fresh, sticky calyx and petals. I know some people who put the leaves in salads too. It’s a strong flavor, but the tender little leaves can be nice. It’s so funny that it’s called “marigold.” I was looking up some research about it, and even a scientific paper was—it was about the seeds, and was like, blah blah blah, “marigold.” So, “pot marigold” is what people sometimes will call the *officinalis*, but even the *arvensis* is “field marigold.” I’m so curious why. They’re both in the Asteraceae family, but calendula has its own genus, and then there’s the *Tagetes*, which I think I heard I heard you and a guest talking about a different—a marigold plant recently. I was like I’ve always said it “tag-it-is” in my head.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That was with Lauren.

Helena del Pesco:

Now, I'm like shifting, "Oh, *tagetes*."

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I can tell you which one it is if you want to know the proper one.

Helena del Pesco:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's the one you say with the most confidence.

Helena del Pesco:

Nice. I'm always open to changing the way I pronounce things, but it's funny how when it's been a long time, it's like it just sounds strange to me. I love that you guys were talking about the Mexican marigold or the Spanish tarragon, I think it's sometimes called. It's so amazing. I guess that's just a good—it's a good thing for people to—if they're at a plant store and they see marigold, then it's not the same thing.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I could be wrong on this, but I do feel like it's more European to say the pot marigold. I could be wrong on that, but that's just kind of my felt sense.

Helena del Pesco:

That's cool to know that there is—there are some ways we can work with marigold for medicine and magic. It doesn't have that resinous. The resins aren't there. It's probably like just very different chemistry. Also, I think that's another in terms of buying plants or buying seed; maybe even because it is a very popular ornamental plant, you want to look for that, the *officinalis* or the *arvensis* if you can find it, because often times when we breed plants for

bigger, showier, more flowers, we inadvertently breed out some of the medicinal constituents. I think that's potentially the case with calendula.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

They have started to breed all these different colors of calendula; various colors within the same flower kind of calendula, really pretty stuff. I had friends grow that and they offered to harvest some for me. I went to check it out and it's just not resinous. It didn't have the same smell. It wasn't as resinous, so I got my original seeds from Richo Cech at Strictly Medicinal, and they're just so lovely because he's growing this specially resinous orange variety, which I love. I also really love the *Calendula arvensis*. It's nice that you brought that up as well.

Helena del Pesco:

I might have gotten some of my first seeds from him as well. I wonder if I still have them floating around. I have had mixed results planting them even in the same spot. One year, they were just like so abundant, and then another year they didn't take. Maybe it was just a slightly different weather pattern. There's not enough sun at the moment that they needed a lot of sun. This year I started them indoors. My camera is shaking because my cat just jumped on the table.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

We welcome cats on the show. I'll give you another opportunity. Is there anything you've missed that you wanted to share about calendula?

Helena del Pesco:

Let's see. I do have some little notes here, but I think we covered a lot of things.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Lovely. It has been wonderful. I've been loving hearing about calendula topically, the pairing calendula with plantain a lot, then, of course, I always love the direct connection that we can have with these plants and building that relationship. Thank you for sharing that as well.

Helena del Pesco:

Of course.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I'd love to hear what kind of projects you have going on, anything you would like to share that's going on in Helena's world?

Helena del Pesco:

Well, this is Piquín.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

We have a cat visitor.

Helena del Pesco:

I just moved back to Northern California. I'm working at a really cool shop called "Preserved" that teaches fermentation classes. I've been teaching there, but I'm also now managing the workshops. I just started teaching a gluten-free sourdough class, which I'm really excited about because there's not a lot of good gluten-free sourdough bread out there. I had kind of given up, and then I was in Barcelona and had this amazing bread, and befriended the baker. He let me come work with him a bit, and so it's been really exciting to not just be able to make that bread and eat it, but share it with other people. Then, just starting to expand my capacity to work with clients which is really exciting, both—right now, mostly virtually, over Zoom, which is kind of how I've been trained to do it at VCIH. I do now have some space in my new home that, eventually, I would like to set up to see people in person just because there's a whole other dynamic to that; to getting to work with pulses and just be in shared space with people. Maybe even have them try something during a session to see how it resonates for them, just kind of expanding the client work [crosstalk]

Rosalee de la Forêt:

And again, you're focusing—oh, thank you—helenadelpesco.com?

Helena del Pesco:

Helenadelpesco.com is my very simple website that has three things you can do on it, which is sign up for a newsletter, do a free 15-minute inquiry call or jump in and fill out an Intake form.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I went to your website and I love that it was simple and very clear, so well done on that. Again, I just want to repeat that you're really focusing on digestive health and nervous system health, and the gut-brain axis, which I think is really fabulous. I always love to send folks to see an actual practitioner. There is this kind of feeling in the herbal world of DIY, which if you have a bug bite, DIY is pretty cool. You got a scratchy sore throat from a cold, DIY is really cool, but once you start getting into more complex things, it's just so wonderful to work with someone who has the experience to really guide you through it. Like you said, it's often not like, "You just use this one herb." "What's this herb good for?" "Oh, it's good for digestion." It doesn't really work like that. Often times, it's like we do one layer, and then another layer emerges. So, things are evolving. It's not like here's-a-quick-slap-of-something, instead it's an evolving process and healing process.

Helena del Pesco:

Exactly. There's just so many factors that could contribute to herbs like not working for someone, whether it's like where they're getting the herbs from or how much they're taking, or what else is going on with their constitution, or even you have to be careful about herb-drug interactions for people who are on medications. That's part of our training—is the safety piece of being able—knowing how to look up medications and make sure that we're not giving people herbs that are going to mess with their medications. I agree, it's like herbalism is, by design, medicine of the people. Grow your own calendula and make your own calendula tea, and that's amazing, but if you're finding that you have complex things going on and you don't want to—it could be expensive to do the trial-and-error route, like buy something that doesn't work, try something else. Oh, wow. As soon as I am paying attention to something else, he's very, very affectionate.

It's like having someone who's dedicated themselves to really serious study can really help get you to a good match faster. That's kind of how I think of it: we're like herbal match—herbal matchmakers.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Herbal matchmakers, absolutely. Before you go, Helena, I have one last question for you, and that is, what herbs would you include in your herbal first aid kit?

Helena del Pesco:

Ohh, I think I was supposed to be prepared for this question. Let's see. I'm so tempted to just be like, "Calendula, plantain, and comfrey!" I mean, honestly. I did—in my restaurant, we had some herbs in our first aid kit, and one of them was yarrow. We had both—we had both a dry, powdered yarrow in a little vial, but we also had a fresh yarrow plant in a pot outside the front door of the restaurant. I feel like every restaurant should have that because—for anyone who doesn't know, it stops bleeding instantly. I got to really test that out early on in my herbal journey. I was in the garden pruning tomato plants and I accidentally snipped my thumb with my pruners. I was bleeding quite a bit, but I really wanted to keep staying in the garden and keep working. I didn't have yarrow, but one of my neighbors in the community garden did. So, I went and crushed up some leaf until it was juicy, and then just did this—pinched my thumb. I used my pointer finger to pinch the herb onto my thumb and kept pruning with my other hand for another half hour or hour. Then, when I was walking home, I lifted it off and the bleeding—I never put a Band-Aid on that cut. It just like—and it healed so fast, so yeah, yarrow, for sure. I also learned from someone that if you don't have yarrow around, the inner skin of the layer of onion is also a really great styptic.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, interesting.

Helena del Pesco:

That's something most people have around in their kitchens, is onion. It's just that really thin, papery layer that peels off between—between onion layers, is also good at stopping bleeding. But, yeah, yarrow, and then comfrey. I mean, it's less so in the acute first aid sense, but I have sent comfrey salve to so many friends and family who have broken a collarbone or rib or something that can't really be—I mean, even if you have a pin and you don't want to use calendula on deep, open wounds because it's so good at healing that it will close up the top of the wound, and potentially, trap-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I think you just said calendula, but you meant comfrey.

Helena del Pesco:

Comfrey, yes, sorry. So, wounds. We think of this as like a puncture wound. Wounds heal from the deepest part up, and part of what's great about that is you're pushing pathogens and things out of that wound as it heals. Comfrey is so good at helping the body build new tissue that you can seal in pathogens. I really try to stick to it with contusion type things like bruising or sprained ankles and overused tendons. It's just so great at penetrating into the deep tissues that need support.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you for that. That's a great story about the yarrow with you in the garden too. That's an herbalist story. It could be a great testimonial for yarrow: "When you severely cut yourself, but don't want to head in after gardening, try yarrow." Maybe on like a poster.

Helena del Pesco:

I was a little—I think the first time someone cut—one of my staff cut themselves in the restaurant, I was so excited. I'm like, "We have yarrow in the first aid kit!" I think they were like, "Who is this crazy person who just got really excited that I cut myself?"

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That stuff [crosstalk]

Helena del Pesco:

I want to show you this magic trick!

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's been so great hanging out with you, Helena, and Piquín as well.

Helena del Pesco:

Yes, it's Piquín.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, Piquín obviously wishes you were paying full attention to him.

Helena del Pesco:

Yes.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you much. Thank you so much for sharing so much about calendula, for this wonderful recipe, and for your herb first aid kit too. That's very enlightening, so thank you, thank you.

Helena del Pesco:

Thank you! This is such a great—this podcast has been with me on many long drives. It's just so great to be able to just browse the—the plant offerings and hear so many different perspectives, so thank you for doing this. I know it's a lot of work.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's an absolute pleasure, and having people like you on the show just makes it all the more fun, so thank you very much.

Helena del Pesco:

Thank you.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

As always, thank you 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 the link. And 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, and this week's Student Spotlight is on Kaluwa Ghalikar in North Carolina. Kaluwa completed the Herbal Energetics Course last year, and her reflections throughout the program were detailed, insightful, and full of heart. She connected deeply with each of her plant allies, especially licorice, her chosen herb for the Sweet Flavor module. In her reflections, Kaluwa shared that she even invited her son to taste licorice tea with her, explaining that licorice candy was originally made from the plant itself. She wrote in to us, "I realized I had a bit of a negative mindset on sweets and was resistant to participating, but as we moved through the lessons, I gained a new appreciation for sweet herbs, especially the adaptogens." That openness to learning and growing truly captures Kaluwa's spirit.

To honor her contributions, Mountain Rose Herbs is sending Kaluwa a \$50 gift certificate to stock up on their incredible selection of organically and sustainably-sourced herbal supplies. Thank you so much to Mountain Rose Herbs for supporting our amazing students.

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

Calendula's orange petals aren't just beautiful, they're nutritive. Their bright hue comes from beta-carotenes, which our bodies can convert into Vitamin A.

This is one reason that calendula is such a wonderful herb for skin health that literally helps feed and rebuild tissues from the inside out. So when we see that sunny glow, we're also seeing the plant's chemistry at work.

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