

Rosalee de la Forêt:

My first question to you is why did hawthorn come up for you as your plant?

Betzy Bancroft:

Because it's been so very useful to me. I find hawthorn to be really healing to the heart on all the levels. It's this delicious, nourishing food that you can make all kinds of really wonderful preparations from.

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. If you've ever thought of hawthorn as simply a gentle heart tonic, this conversation might completely change how you see it because what if working with hawthorn isn't just about supporting your cardiovascular system, but also about influencing how your body expresses health at the deepest level?

In this episode, I'm joined by herbalist Betzy Bancroft who shares something that stopped me in my tracks: hawthorn's ability to support the heart all the way down to gene expression, therefore helping your body turn on what it needs when it needs it. She also shares her favorite ways to work with hawthorn from berries to leaves, including her delicious hawthorn cordial recipe, and she also shares why this is a plant that benefits from consistent daily use.

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

Betzy, I'm so thrilled to have you on the show. Thank you so much for joining us.

Betzy Bancroft:

Oh, I am thrilled to be here! Thank you for inviting me. This is a great—a great opportunity.

Rosalee de la Forêt:



Oh, well, I am just really looking forward to connecting with you. You were actually one of the first herbalists I ever heard about because John Gallagher introduced me to you way back in the day, and so you have long been on my radar. We haven't had a chance to connect a lot in person, so this is my time to get you. It feels like such an honor to connect with someone who I've been hearing about for literally decades now.

Betzy Bancroft:

Oh and I'm delighted too. Your book is one of my favorites. It's one of the maybe-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, wow!

Betzy Bancroft:

Alchemy of Herbs is one of maybe six herbals I recommended in my book, so it's way up there.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, my gosh! The thought of Betzy Bancroft loving my book is like—I don't even know if I can do the rest of the interview now. Thank you. Thank you. I have a lot of love for your new book too, which we're going to get into, but what I would love to start with is how the plants found you in the first place.

Betzy Bancroft:

Oh, yeah. That's a good question. I grew up in an area of New Jersey—I say "Roseland" which I really like saying "I'm from Roseland," but it was rapidly suburbanizing in those days in the 1960s. I was out in the woods all the time. I was outside – woods, fields, etc., all the time, which I feel really blessed, but as I said, it was also rapidly suburbanizing in those days. What used to be a dead end road is no longer a dead end road. I kind of gravitated to being outside and hanging out with plants, and so forth. I started to get—by the time I was a teenager, I started getting interested in nutrition and then I took off from there.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

And I'd love to hear more—how did that take off? Because it's one thing to go—nutrition is so widely accepted, I think. Herbalism, especially back in the day was not, so how did you make that-

Betzy Bancroft:

Well, that's—true there that I didn't know you could grow up to be an herbalist. I had no idea you could grow up to be an herbalist, so—so I didn't take as much science in college as I wish I had and so forth. But then after college, I happened to find David Winston at a workshop with some Indigenous folks. He twisted my arm to—to join his herb studies class. I was like, “Oh, really? Herb class? That's a thing?” I was honestly interested in herbs at that point. When I was a kid, I found a patch of peppermint in the yard and started adding that into my water. I was dabbling a little, I guess with plants, but—but again, the concept of actually being an herbalist and studying herbs was that—that was not part of my awareness at all.

So when I met David and he said, “I have an herb studies class.” “Oh, wow! That does sound interesting.” He really did twist my arm and like, “You can—you can barter it.” So, I also started working at Herbalist & Alchemist about that time. I ended up in the class to be in.

At that time, which was the late '80s, he still lived in his mother's attic in New Brunswick, so we went for herb walks all the time. First of all, his books were starting to crowd out the space in his apartment. It was also really stuffy up there, especially in the summer, so we get out and go over to Rutgers or go to a number of other places. We even went as far as Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve in Pennsylvania, which is a real treasure of a place. If any listeners are anywhere near New Hope, Pennsylvania, go to Bowman's Hill. Then lo and behold, I'm in herb school! And like I said, working at Herbalist & Alchemist and then I just stayed. I stuck around.

Also, the class that I was in also kind of stuck around. We were out for herb walks so much that we didn't finish the curriculum in two years, and also, again, books outgrowing his apartment. He—he needed to move and he wasn't sure where he was going. Our class, which was only ten people or so, we all said, “Why don't we just keep coming to class?” I didn't



really actually finish the curriculum. I was in herb school for about three years instead of two, and then I took a couple of his graduate level courses as well, and then working for Herbalist & Alchemist, had the good fortune to go to herb conferences to work in the vendor department selling tinctures, which is how probably a lot of people remember me is—is for selling tinctures at herb conferences and then selling United Plant Savers memberships because when I—so in 20—2003, I moved to Vermont, which is one of the most smart things I’ve ever done. I got a job working for United Plant Savers as the office manager, so-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I just have to interrupt. You didn’t just move to Vermont. You moved next door to Rosemary Gladstar, right?

Betzy Bancroft:

Yes.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

When you did that? Yeah. [crosstalk]

Betzy Bancroft:

That was—that was remarkable. I actually—the first place I landed was house sitting for my mom’s neighbor. Really, my mom was one of the main reasons I moved to Vermont. So, yes, I landed at her neighbor’s place—house sitting for her neighbor, but then—but then yes! Lo and behold, a room in the house next door. It was Rebecca White’s room—house at that point. Rebecca worked in Rosemary’s office and rented out rooms to random herbalists like me at the time. So, yeah, I ended up living next door to Rosemary at Sage Mountain, which I still pinch myself about that. How lucky. That has also, really, been part of my journey because now I get to teach there too, which—and enjoy the forest there and the gardens and so forth, and the hawthorn trees. So, our plant is hawthorn. Hawthorn is like a weed at Sage Mountain. It’s like volunteering all over the meadow. I’ve been working on a little bit of a

wildlife food forest up at the uphill part of that meadow. There's a whole thicket of hawthorn coming in up there, which is really stunning.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I would love to see that. I've never been to Sage Mountain, but I'm hoping to soon.

Betzy Bancroft:

Please, please visit. You're so welcome.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, well, there you go! I guess I'll go now. I—so you've just dropped so many fabulous stories, Betzy, that I'm like—I often—that question like, “If you could time travel to any time, when would it be?” I don't know, but just when you were talking about being there in the late '80s with David Winston and doing all these plant walks and just that era and everything, I can only imagine what that must have been like for you being like, “Maybe I'm into nutrition,” and then being twisted your arm with David Winston, possibly before he was David Winston. Just having all these experiences that just sounds—what a delight, what a wonderful story and just—what a thing to live through to have been in that experience, and be in the conference times of the '90s, I think which was really special. Then moving to Sage Mountain-

Betzy Bancroft:

I was in—I was in the right place at the right time.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah! Yeah and I love how you were just all in too. That's something that I find with a lot of herbalists. It's like we get a little bit of tug and then suddenly it's like all in, and you clearly were. Before we move to hawthorn, there's probably other things to talk about too, but I really do want to talk about the Vermont Center for Integrative Herbalism because that is one of the most, in my opinion, and just like the temperature read of the herbal world, one of the most respected herbal schools out there, especially for clinical herbalists. I would love to hear

about that. How did that get started? When did that get started? What has it been like to develop such a comprehensive curriculum that reliably turns out folks who are just brilliant herbalists? I mean, it says something when you say “I went to VCIH.”

Betzy Bancroft:

Yeah, and they really are. We grow really good herbalists. Also, actually soon after I moved here—well, there was a—it was called the “Sage Mountain Free Herbal Clinic” that had grown out of Rosemary’s advanced apprenticeship program. Rebecca, who I bought my house from and Guido Masé and several other herbalists were part of that. We were just renting space from an organization called the People's Health & Wellness Clinic, which is still going in Barre, Vermont. We had a number of herbalists practicing with us. We had this little cabinet of herbs. Maybe we—maybe we had all the herbs that we wanted to put in our formula, maybe not, but there was a lot of people evolution, and so forth. We decided that really—we really needed a more sustainable framework. Also, Larken Bunce had graduated from Tai Sophia right about then as well. The three of us—primarily, the three of us—and then there were other people who were in on it at the beginning too. We—we decided to create a school because we had some experience with teaching. I had been already teaching a lot of freelance and Larken had that wonderful experience of the student clinic at Tai Sophia. Guido, of course, had been teaching and mentoring and doing various things, so we—and practicing. With the three of us, had actually really good time hanging out on Larken’s porch or on the way to and from IHS and various other conversations that we had. “Okay, like what is our dream school? What is our dream curriculum? What is”—we put a lot of love and intention, and again, experience into it. In I think 2007 we had four classes. We didn’t even have a space yet. We had four classes. We taught most of them at Guido’s straw bale lab where he used to have this little herb company.

One of the funny things is they put me up to teach a plant spirit class, and that’s so not my thing, which was kind of funny at the time. I morphed it all into learning from the tastes and the signatures. I made it a lot more grounded because I am an earth as far as constitutions go.

We put a lot of thought into the organizing the curriculum and building it. We created the Family Herbalist curriculum, and then the first year of the clinical, so two years' worth of programming. Once we had that going and we had students, we actually wrote the third year when we had students. I was writing curriculum in the morning. We learned a lot. I give our original students a lot of credit for hanging in there with us. We learned a lot. We morphed the curriculum a lot over the years based on a lot of feedback from the students, and so forth. It has—it has evolved quite a bit, but the basic structure is still intact. The way we do our student clinic except now it's over Zoom rather than in-person is fairly similar to the way we've always done it. The students really do get a rich experience. They really do. Guido doesn't teach for us anymore, but Larken is here and I'm here. We've been joined by a number of really excellent and wonderful herbalists like Kristin Henningsen, and some of our graduates like Hannah Rae Behrens and Linden de Voil and so forth. We're—we're still chugging along.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Absolutely. As I said, your reputation is very strong and I think that that speaks both to the quality of the teachers, and as well as the quality of the students. It's been—it's a fun thing always to talk about folks who've been there and just how much they love it.

Betzy Bancroft:

I'm kind of a stickler about I want people to be able to find the assessments, find the patterns. I get a lot of enjoyment of seeing those tinder bundles go off and be like, "Oh, yeah! Okay."

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love how you put that. That's fabulous.

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.

Well, you have chosen one of my favorite herbs and I'm going to put it out there it's probably one of your favorite herbs, so I'm really excited that we get to love on hawthorn together today. My first question to you is why did hawthorn come up for you as your plant?

Betzy Bancroft:

I think because it's been so very useful to me. I use it a lot for heartbreak, heartache and stuff like that. That was the thing for me for a while. Fortunately, not—it's not as big a deal, but yeah, I find hawthorn to be really healing to the heart on all the levels – physical and spiritual and emotional. Really, I drink a cup of hawthorn tea if I'm stressed or grumpy or something like that. It makes me such—much nicer person. I'm just saying—just happier, grounded. It really rearranges my—my mood and orientation. And it's so beautiful, you know! At the same time, it has these enormous thorns. My students talk about hawthorn as a “thorn medicine” and a “boundary plant.” I see that—again, especially in the context of emotional heart stuff. It's really—we want to have—we want to be open and loving and generous, and all the things, but the world is a rough place. The thorns help us—I think be sweet and loving with a boundary and with some protection for our—the vulnerability that comes along with that generosity. So I think of it as thorn medicine.

Literally, I've told this story—well, one time in particular. I tried to cover hawthorn on as many herb walks as I can. Some of the places I give a lot of herb walks like Sage Mountain, but also a place called the Roots School, which is near me here. I was giving an herb walk at the Roots School and I was talking about this heart boundary and making good choices about who you're hanging out with and whatnot. This—this young woman who had tears all running down her face. It's just like hawthorn is profound that way. I also had a bunch of students—they were in my advising group. They were all talking about going out in the world adventuring. I said, “I'm going to send you all out in the world with hawthorn thorns.” I did

actually say there's a hawthorn tree right there. I said, "I want you all to go hang out with that hawthorn tree, and each of you pick a thorn and keep it with you."

Like I said, it's such a lovely—hawthorn is actually really balancing in a lot of ways. That—that vulnerability and protection and love piece—I think it's really unique. I mean, yes, roses kind of do it too, but hawthorn is—it's not so sweet as rose and I mean that in a—I don't mean that in a bad way, but roses are very, very sweet. Hawthorn is sweet but it's not overly sweet. It's got this nice, gentle sweetness with a little bit of sour. Those are—those are some of the reasons why hawthorn is my favorite.

And then I come from a family of humans with sort of a family history of heart stuff, so I also appreciate it as a tonic. Hawthorn really is an excellent tonic because it—sort of to be boring about it—it improves the structure and/or function of the organ or system. It really does, actually. We think of that balancing of the cardiovascular system as nourishment which it definitely is nourishing to those structures and tissues and so forth, but the way it works to improve the—the cardiovascular system is through modulating genes.

It's—it's—it's this delicious nourishing food that you can make all kinds of really wonderful preparations from, including ones that you want to take everyday which is the best way to use tonics – to have them in your diet really regularly. So, wanting to drink your hawthorn cordial at the end of the day or have your hawthorn jam or whatever it is. Hawthorn tea in my case.

It's supporting the cardiovascular system all the way down to the level of regulating the genes. Not making the genes do anything they don't want to do or that isn't appropriate for them to do, but helping the genes express things that we need when we need them. It really is actually quite balancing to the function of the cardiovascular system. I could get more into the details of that, but just the fact-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I'm curious about more details about that because I—this is not in my knowledge base of how hawthorn may be regulating genes at that level.

Betzy Bancroft:

Very well-known that polyphenols, in general, are antioxidants. Maybe sometimes you'll hear some more cynical scientists say like, "Yeah, but you can't absorb enough to actually be an antioxidant, so how is that even working? Is that a thing?" The way it works isn't as like a direct antioxidant. Polyphenols and flavonoids and so forth do that. In other words, they do lend electrons and quench radical molecules. I don't like to call them "free radicals" because I, free radical—but reactive oxygen species. Which species? That's plants. So, "reactive oxygen molecules" is what I like to call them. Flavonoids—they can lend the electron and quench the free radical. Actually, what they really are doing is increasing the genetic transcription of the endogenous enzymes that do that work.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Like glutathione for example.

Betzy Bancroft:

Exactly. Like glutathione, superoxide dismutase, things like that that are the endogenous molecules that—that manage and mitigate oxidative stress, which is we're always making these reactive oxygen molecules. They're part of our mitochondrial function and our other cellular functions. We can't not make them, we'd have no energy! But we want to keep the balance of oxidation and anti-oxidation in a healthy way because these reactive oxygen molecules damage us. They can—they can damage the DNA of our cells. They can promote mutagenesis. You mentioned in your—in an Instagram post that I was all about. I was like, "Yay! Rosalee is talking about hawthorn and I agree with her—all the things that she's saying." We don't want these reactive oxygen molecules damaging our cells and damaging our DNA and leading to cancer, and also leading to inflammation in our cardiovascular system, which is also a really big, big deal and a bad thing, right?

Not only does hawthorn help us express antioxidant—antioxidants—endogenous antioxidants, it also helps us express some of the signal molecules that regulate vasoconstriction and vasodilation. Hawthorn also—again, from the level of gene transcription, helping our blood vessels be flexible. You think about that for a minute. Every cell of the body needs the resources that blood brings to them, especially oxygen—obviously, especially oxygen. Especially some of the organs that we depend upon most like brains.

Right, the blood brings oxygen to all the cells, brings resource to all the cells so we have to have good blood flow. By improving the flexibility of the blood vessels, then the blood vessels can respond to the vital force, and then if we're eating food, the blood vessels in the gut can expand and absorb more food. Or we're thinking, so the blood flow to the brain can increase, by again, opening up the blood vessels or whatever the—whatever the function that needs to happen, the body can move the blood where we need it when they are—when the blood vessels are more flexible and resilient. It's this part of what makes hawthorn very good for—why it's helpful for congestive heart failure but also for improving quality of life around there, in terms of mitigating shortness of breath, helping us have better stamina, better strength, and again, resilience overall because the blood vessels can get the blood where it needs to be at any given moment when the vessels are flexible.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

You just summed up so brilliantly, the reasons why I love hawthorn because there's such a practical reason to love hawthorn in that we're talking about organ function and structure, and then there's these beautiful ways to love hawthorn in terms of protection—protecting our vulnerability, protecting our hearts from emotional heartbreak, and being an ally in that way. And then also, just this beautiful dance between our system and the hawthorn. And as you've alluded to, it's really fun to work with hawthorn because we have lovely ways to enjoy hawthorn whether it be jam or cordial—which we'll get to in a bit—or the lovely tea.

You know what's funny to me, Betzy, is that why don't more people know and love hawthorn? I mean in the general public, not just herbalists. Herbalists love to love hawthorn. We're just

like what heart medication does this? Literally, there's nothing out there that's interacting in such a way that's helping to modulate chronic inflammation, improving the fluidity and flexibility of the endothelium. There's no other medication out there. I mean, hawthorn is just this incredible, brilliant, amazing plant. I often say we—there should be no tomato ketchup on the shelves. We should just have hawthorn ketchup on the shelves because every single person could benefit from regularly having hawthorn in their life.

Betzy Bancroft:

That's so true, but it's—it's also polyphenols, in general, which is why we just really need red, purple, blue in—in our diets all the time.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, I still stand by hawthorn ketchup over tomato ketchup. I'm not backing down.

Betzy Bancroft:

That sounds really good. I want your hawthorn ketchup recipe.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I actually think ketchup is disgusting. I think it's part of—I am French and so it's just part of my Frenchness. I cannot stand or abide by ketchup, but I do make a really good hawthorn barbecue sauce. I'll send you the recipe.

Betzy Bancroft:

There's no ketchup in my refrigerator.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

There we go.

Betzy Bancroft:

There's homemade mustard in my refrigerator, but there is no ketchup in my refrigerator.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Barbeque sauce all the way.

Betzy Bancroft:

I'm with you on that, yep.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

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

Well, you've just laid down a lot about hawthorn, so now, I'm like "Where do we go from here? How do we keep going with hawthorn?"

Betzy Bancroft:

Oh, well. Let me think. I can give you a couple more take home, good things that it does for us. Like I said, it helps—it also—it makes the heart work better, and especially if someone has been stressed or has a family history or personal history. It helps—it helps with problems like angina because it improves oxygen flow to the heart. One of the reasons why pain happens is because the cells are saying, "Give me some oxygen." The cells are not happy without resource, so they'll—pain is one of the signs like, "Hey, human. I need something. You gotta fix something." Heart pain is mitigated by hawthorn.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I have a question. Have you ever heard of working with hawthorn when you go into a higher elevation? Because it makes me think of that and I'm actually headed to Denver this year, which I have historically struggled a bit with that. I've never really considered hawthorn as an ally for higher elevation—like sudden increase of high elevation.

Betzy Bancroft:

I haven't had that experience, but I would try it. I really would because, again, improving blood flow makes us more resilient to pretty much everything, I think. It's just super, super useful. And then, yeah, it helps prevent many other cardiovascular problems like prevent—because it keeps inflammation down in the blood vessels and helps the blood vessels work better. It prevents atherosclerosis. It can help lower blood pressure and it's safe with blood pressure-lowering meds. There's a wonderful researcher named Ann Walker who did a bunch of studies on that. You can look her up. I actually have used it for as an amphoteric to balance out blood pressure if it's a little low or a little high or flippy back and forth, especially when it's flippy with respect to stress, because I really think hawthorn is a good nervine too. In Chinese medicine, it's used as a carminative. I got Christopher Hedley's books on recommendation from jim mcDonald. I didn't know Christopher Hedley had books. He was one of my favorite teachers and that's his speculation—is that because the Chinese hawthorn is more sour, it does lend itself more to digestive function.

I use hawthorn a lot as the primary herb in a formula. I am a triangle formulator. Hawthorn is the nourishing herb, and then I'll put motherwort with it for rhythm problems or maybe yarrow with it for circulatory stuff. It's—it often shows up as a key tonic in formulas that I make. I think it's really nice for mood stuff too, especially mood stuff related to the emotions and the heart and grief and heartbreak and all that kind of stuff.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Are there herbs you'd like to combine it with specifically for the emotions and heartbreak?

Betzy Bancroft:



Rose. It's a little redundant, I think, but—but also linden and holy basil is a nice companion for emotional stuff. Honestly, I've been known to just take large doses of plain old, simple hawthorn. What's a large dose? Like drink an ounce bottle because I had one. I like to extract it in brandy which makes it taste even better too. It's easy. We will get to that with the cordial, but-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

[crosstalk] right now is kind of a surreal moment to me because I make my husband hawthorn tea everyday. It has hawthorn, rose, linden and tulsi in it. Those are the exact ones you just mentioned. I make—as you do, I make tinctures as alcohol extracts. I almost always use a clear spirit. With hawthorn, every time it's brandy. I wouldn't even bother with something else. That's all I would use it for. Anyway, I'm just having a—I feel like hawthorn has spoken to both of us and been like, “This is how I like it,” and we have both listened to hawthorn.

Betzy Bancroft:

Yes, we have both listened to hawthorn. That's really wonderful.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Let's talk about your cordial, actually. Let's dive into that. You've given us a beautiful recipe for a hawthorn cordial full of lovely aromatic plants. I'd love to hear you introduce this recipe and share how—how maybe you came up with it and how you like to enjoy it.

Betzy Bancroft:

Yeah. I've made lots of different versions of hawthorn cordial. I should admit that when I'm making medicine for myself or my—my loved ones, not in clinic. Clinic I measure tinctures. I want to get it consistent and accurate. When I'm just making stuff for myself or loved ones, I'm not a measurer. Hawthorn is also really nice with those aromatics, like ginger and cinnamon and spices, and so forth, which also support circulation. As I said, I just really like the flavor of hawthorn with brandy, specifically. It just comes out that nice, rich red color. It's

just lovely. I made a bunch of different versions of hawthorn cordials over the years. I usually just do it with the folk method. Hopefully, the recipe that I sent you works out in terms of the parts.

The other thing that I like about cordials is that they're really easy and they're delicious. It makes it easy to take one's medicine, especially for an adult who likes to have a drink or something like that when they get home from work or just having a little delicious alcoholic beverage is just like it fits in their life. They're—they want to take their medicine, which is, again, the key thing with tonics is that we need to take them regularly for them to work, especially something like hawthorn which is both working on a nutritional level and is—is active on—in an ongoing way. Having flavonoids in our body regularly is what keeps everything flexible and working properly. Coming up with something delicious that people want to take is a good strategy. Yes, cordials are lovely and delicious and easy to take.

I've also made—when I have access to fresh hawthorn berries, I cook them with some water and a little bit of lemon until they're soft. Hawthorn berries—we'll talk about this some more because you talked about it in your Instagram post. I'm actually very—I have a lot to say about hawthorn berries and making extracts from them. When I have fresh ones, like I said, I cook them up. I cook them in water and a little lemon until they're soft, and then I put them through a food mill. I strain out the seeds and—and the other stray bits of twig or whatever that's in there. I'm not much of a jam eater, but you could also just cook it down and make jam out of it. What I end—what I make is like a sauce. You could also put pectin in that and make actual jelly out of it, but the way it turns out when I do it is just like, yes, sauce.

Honestly, when jim mcDonald was recuperating, I made some for him. Some of the seeds—hawthorn berries have a good size seed in them. Some of the seeds jumped out of the food mill and into the batch and I think I sent him a jar or two that had seeds and probably broke his teeth. That sort of sauce-like consistency of cooked fresh hawthorn berries is also crazy delicious. I like to mix it with yogurt for a treat or for a snack or for breakfast or whatever.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Do you add any sweetener for that at all when you make that or is it just straight up hawthorn and lemon?

Betzy Bancroft:

I'd probably put a little honey or something in it, but it doesn't need a lot. I like—I prefer my savorys to my sweets. I actually like it not really sweet, but you can definitely add honey or maple or whatever you want to it until it's palatable for you.

And then I also really like hawthorn teas as well. For myself, I'll either make an infusion with hawthorn powder or I put hawthorn berries in my decoctions too. Here—here is me getting nerdy. Check these things out. Play around with hawthorn berry. They're really freaking hard. You won't really get a lot out of dried hawthorn berries unless you smash them, grind them, or otherwise increase the surface area because they're just too hard. That's why I put them in my—I put them in my decoction. I decoct it, not just a little simmer but actual decoct it. And then they get soft, and I get some extraction or like I said, I'll make an infusion with the powder which is quite lovely. I have seen—I have seen jars of hawthorn—whole hawthorn berries in vodka and it's barely pink, so I'm with you on that. You want to grind up your hawthorn berries. If you want to just make a plain infusion—you just really like infusions, use the leaves and flowers, which are also beautiful and delicious.

Somehow we end up talking about hawthorn berries more than we do the leaves and flowers, I think. The leaves and flowers are also beautiful and delicious. They—they end up being a little more astringent, especially in an infusion. In tincture, I like to mix them together, get a little of everything in there. I like that anyway. Like dandelion leaf and root together in a tincture or hawthorn leaf and flower and berry altogether in a tincture. It makes a really good medicine. Hawthorn is good no matter how you prepare it.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's an excellent quote, actually.

Betzy Bancroft:

One more hawthorn recipe—I’m a mead brewer. Hawthorn mead is also one of the best, so delicious, wonderful magic stuff. I was on a date—actually, I still have this date. I met him in an herb garden. I gave him some hawthorn mead and he said, “I feel my heart opening.” I’m like, “That’s what you want on a good date.” Hawthorn mead is also really delicious. For anyone who is wondering, a hawthorn—mead is honey wine. It’s a fermented, alcoholic, delicious thing.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I would love to share a glass of hawthorn mead with you one day, Betzy. It sounds delicious. This hawthorn cordial I know is delicious. I make something very similar. I love the maple syrup addition. For anybody who wants to make their own delicious hawthorn cordial, you can use this recipe from Betzy and you can go to the show notes or go to herbswithrosaleepodcast.com and get your beautifully illustrated copy of it. I love the—it’s pleasure medicine. It’s functional, structural heart medicine while also being a wonderful emotional support medicine while also being beautiful, while also being delicious. As herbalists, we really have it made. The plants make it so easy sometimes.

Betzy Bancroft:

Hawthorn does it all for us. It’s really—and it’s delicious! It’s a beautiful tree! Oh, it’s so beautiful.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, filled with so much folklore. I just—I feel like I could just be a hawthorn herbalist and just focus on hawthorn the rest of my life and still never know all of the gifts and secrets of this beautiful tree. Was there anything else you’d like to share about hawthorn? I don’t want to stop you from sharing anything.

Betzy Bancroft:

Yeah, I have also been known to carry around a hawthorn thorn as—as like a talisman. I believe that talismans are part of herbalists’ scope of practice. I had been known to recommend a talisman or two to clients, always other herbalists who are open to the idea. I think—I think just the thorns themselves are a wonderful talisman for us to keep on our person as a—as a protective. I mean—but here again. There’s a bundle of herbs on the dashboard of my car. This is where my witchy self comes out. That’s one of the cool things I think about hawthorn is it works on all levels. It’s useful to us in so many different ways that it really invites us to get to know it well and work with it in all these different types of remedies and capacities.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love this idea of carrying around a thorn too. It makes me think of Robin Wall Kimmerer. She often asks, “How do we remember to remember?” The talismans are a way of doing that. How do we remember to have an open heart that we also protect when needed? We carry around a talisman as a remembrance of that, so it’s beautiful.

Betzy Bancroft:

Cool! Lovely.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you for sharing so much about hawthorn. It’s been delightful. I feel like I love hawthorn even more now, so job well done on that.

I’d love to hear what’s going on in your world. I’m actually very excited to talk about your new book, soon to be published, *Herbal Pharmacy*. This is a phenomenal book, I mean just the amount of information about medicine making in here. It’s the science and magic of preparing and administering plant medicine. I would love to hear what you have to share about this book—what it’s been like to write the book, what was your inspiration to take on this topic.

Betzy Bancroft:

The subtitle kind of says it all, like what it's about. I've been teaching medicine making since I graduated from herb school. Literally, David said, "Here, you teach it," as soon as I graduated. He also used to pass me other gigs if he didn't feel like doing it—a local herb walk or something. I've been teaching medicine making for all these years. No offense to anybody else who has written books on herbal medicine making, but none of them have as much information as I wanted, especially about solubility of various herbal constituents. I also have a lot of—a lot of safety information in *Herbal Pharmacy* partly because as a mentor in the student clinic and just as a clinical herbalist and just person in the world, either people are afraid of herbs or they're afraid that they haven't done it right or they're anxious about all kinds of, "Oh, no. What if—oh, no." I'm really—I really wanted to write a book that would reassure everybody and give them the level of detail and carefulness that—that will make it possible for them to make remedies confidently. Yes, there is lots of safety stuff in there. Also, just yeah—something practical and easy to follow. There's a—I hope, again, as a teacher, I'm reaching people with different learning styles. There's photos. There's step-by-step—thank you—of course in the real book, those will be in color because that's a galley. Those pictures—actually, I had them—I had them zoom in on those pictures a little bit too. Anyway, pictures for visual learners, step-by-steps for people whose minds go really fast, and then paragraphs of all the ridiculous detail of explaining everything.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

And it's very approachable though. It's just very, very practical, to the point, a fun read. It's explanatory. It's making things easy to grasp without feeling you have to be a mad scientist.

Betzy Bancroft:

I'm glad—I'm really, really delighted that it comes across that way. And then also for those real geeks out there, just keep reading towards the ends of the chapters, and then you get into it again, like the solubility and more complicated stuff, answers to questions like, "Can you macerate the marc after you dump out a percolation?" No, actually. You don't want to do that, but you could percolate the marc that you press out of the tincture. I have that level of

geek in there also. So, something for everybody because I definitely wanted it to be approachable and usable and practical for—for herbalists of all levels of learning. But also, give—give those of us who’ve been making medicine some more tools to make their medicine even better. Elevate their game as they say.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Which I, it’s something I feel so strongly about because if our medicines aren’t strong, if they aren’t made with intention, then what are we doing if we’re handing out medicines that aren’t working? We’ve just already taken two steps back. This is a phenomenal book that’s going to be a must-have for every herbalist. I can already see that coming.

Betzy Bancroft:

I hope so. Yeah, it’s very practical. It has all kinds—it’s got a lot of different kinds of remedies in it too like elixirs and oxymels and powders. It takes a—bunch of different types of remedies made with powdered herbs. And then—and then I also get a lot into topical applications of herbs – poultices, compresses, etc. There’s another thing: the safety with respect to all the different orifices that we might be applying herbs to. I hope—I hope I’ve covered everything. There’s—there’s definitely—as a teacher also, when we write curriculum, which is basically, this book is the textbook for my curriculum. I put a bunch of different curriculum together to—in a book. Also, with teachers, we have to draw the line somewhere. How much can we fit? Where—where are we going to create that boundary of yes-I’m-going-to-include-this-and-not-that. There’s no flower essences because I don’t work with flower essences. They’re really kind of their own thing. There’s no—I didn’t—I didn’t get into heating alcohol. I know some people geek out on “Oh, hot alcohol is the bomb for extracting this and that.” I don’t feel safe doing that, so I didn’t go there. I did actually a bunch of experiments. I had a good time playing around with the remedies, and learning, answering questions that I still had about medicines, and so forth. It’s focused on the principles. Once you understand the principles of medicine making like surface area, how ground up is it, like we’re talking about with hawthorn berries, you really do need to chop them up or grind them or at least hit them with a hammer. Wrap them up before you hit them with the hammer. They go everywhere. I—I

tried to make it very practical and accessible and give people that—like I said, the principles like time, heat, agitation, what—what makes plant molecules leave their cell structure and enter liquids. Hopefully—hopefully with my book, you can make practically anything you ever dreamed about making.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That is absolutely true. Just as a nerdy aside, I love that it was published by Chelsea because Chelsea just publishes really cool books. There's no other publisher out there that as a whole, I think the books they publish are really awesome because a lot of publishers just publish books from all over the place, but Chelsea has just a really fantastic focus.

Betzy Bancroft:

They made it a very beautiful textbook. They're also wonderful to work with. I really—I really appreciate especially my editor for—Marcia Bradley who also edited Jill Stansbury's *Formularies*, and Kat Maier's book too. She's practically an herbalist herself. They really let me create my vision. They really—they give their authors a lot of license, like it's my book. They—they did all the things that they did, but like I said, they are really wonderful to work with and they didn't try to make it their book.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's cool. Good to hear. Thanks for sharing the book. It's available wherever books are sold by the time this publishes, so that will be exciting.

Betzy Bancroft:

It's officially—it officially launches on April 7, 2026 because I know some people will watch this later on. April 7, 2026 is when it's officially available. You can go to ChelseaGreen.com and find it or wherever your local herb store or bookstore, etc.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Fabulous! Thank you so much for sharing about that, the inspiration and just the joy of what's in the book, as well. I know you had something else to share. There's like an intermediate apprenticeship that's happening.

Betzy Bancroft:

Oh, yes! I—mostly what I do is teach. Again, that's why I wrote a book is because I teach and I needed a textbook. I teach at the Vermont Center for Integrative Herbalism. At this point, I'm mostly teaching in a clinical program and I am a mentor for the students in their—in their clinic. When we moved online—I'm not really psyched about teaching online, so I also teach in person at Sage Mountain. I live next door as we said earlier, so isn't that handy? Emily Ruff and I have been collaborating on some classes over the last few years. We've been dreaming of creating an intermediate level apprentice program. We're in the process of—it's very exciting to write curriculum for such a program. In 2027 that will begin, which is 40 years after Rosemary started doing apprenticeships at Sage. It's kind of auspicious. It will be one weekend a month over the summer, five or six weekends. It's going to be organized by function, not by body system. It's going to be organized by function. Have you ever seen that curious diagram in Simon Mills' *Out of the Earth* book with integration? That's—that diagram of the processes that bodies go through, like something comes in, things happen to it. That's the framework that we're using, so it will be based on functions like metabolism and communication and whatnot. We already have enough students that it's going to run. There's plenty of space, so if you're curious about that and you could get to Vermont once a month in the summer starting in 2027. The book and the new apprentice class are the things that I'm especially excited about these days. I'm also excited about our student clinic. We have a great bunch of interns this season that are—or this year that I'm really enjoying working with and—I like being a teacher.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's wonderful. For the apprenticeship at Sage Mountain, where can people go to learn more about that?

Betzy Bancroft:

SageMountain.com. I'm not sure if there's info on there yet, but by the time you're reading—hearing, listening, seeing this, sagemountain.com/education is the—would be the link.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Great. How about for people who are interested in learning more about the Vermont Center for Integrative Herbalism?

Betzy Bancroft:

The website for VCIH is vtherbcenter.org. Sage is also a nonprofit, but it's got a “com” website, but VCIH is a nonprofit with an “org” website. vtherbcenter.org. Again, like educational programs, student clinic, things like that.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Wonderful. Thank you for that. We'll put those in the show notes as well.

Betzy Bancroft:

Great! Thank you so much for doing that.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, absolutely. Before you go, I do have one last question for you and that question is, how has working with herbs changed the way you see the world?

Betzy Bancroft:

That's a—that's a very interesting question. My answer to that is because I learned about herbs, I learned about elements. I'm what we call an “energetic herbalist” in the sense that I'm looking at the patterns of nature and how they show up in humans and plants and whatnot. As a European American, I'm drawn to the humoral system – the four elements of earth, air, fire and water. I see everybody as their element, especially my family members. I understand people's behavior, and especially, also interactions by their element. No wonder



the fiery person is blowing air on the—or the airy person is driving the fiery person crazy because they’re blowing air and fanning their fire. Why—why doesn’t this person just go ahead and do it? Oh, it’s because the earth is stuck. Because I’m an herbalist, I—I have this framework of elements and I see everything based on the interaction of elements.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I did not see that answer coming, not that I would have, but that is such a beautiful answer. I’m so similar. I also see the world through that as well. It’s been a major aspect of my studies whether it’s been the humoral system or five elements, I just am looking—seeing the world through that lens now always. It’s not something once you dive in that you can unsee it because it is just an observation of what is around us.

Betzy Bancroft:

Right, but it does give us really useful insights instead of “Why, why, why?” It’s like, “Oh, yeah. Fire, yeah.”

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That’s funny because I feel like I had a lot more why, why, why before I had the—some kind of elemental system in. It also helped me to be a much more forgiving person because I was more understanding of other people and where they might be coming from rather than just seeing the lens through the way I see things.

Betzy Bancroft:

I can understand that. Yes, you’ll have—you’ll have to come up and visit and have a glass of hawthorn mead and talk about elements with me.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That sounds like a dream date. Let’s do it.

Betzy Bancroft:

Let's do it.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

This has been so lovely, Betzy. Thanks so much for hanging out. Thanks for sharing so much hawthorn wisdom, and very excited for your book. Again, that's *Herbal Pharmacy*. Definitely check it out, very comprehensive. It's just been an absolute pleasure to hang out. Thank you so much.

Betzy Bancroft:

Pleasure is mine also, for sure!

Rosalee de la Forêt:

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

This podcast is made possible in part by our awesome students. This week's Student Spotlight is on Eszter Mekker in Ontario, Canada. After completing the Herbal Energetics Course, Eszter continued into Rooted Medicine Circle, and consistently infused her medicine making with joy, intention and care for her family. Her teas, glycerites, lip balms and other remedies quickly became household favorites, and she shared that the process has been such an empowering experience. For her capstone project, she created an herbarium featuring more than 60 plants collected around her home, a lasting learning resource for her children. Her herbal explorations often included her whole family; while working with astragalus, she kept a thermos ready for everyone to enjoy and joked about the panic when it started running low. She also formed a heartfelt connection with rosemary, singing to her plants and recalling the comforting scent of her grandmother's home – a beautiful reflection of how herbs can bridge memory, healing and belonging. If you'd like to be an herbalist, you can check out my foundational courses at herbswithrosalee.com.

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

For today's herbal tidbit, I want to show a fascinating recent study on hawthorn that really caught my attention. Researchers wanted to see whether taking hawthorn fruit daily could influence changes we often associate with aging, things like skin hydration and overall skin vitality. It never would have occurred to me to think about hawthorn for the skin, honestly. Probably should have but it just gets so researched for heart, heart, heart, so this was cool to see them looking at it from a different angle.

What they did is they conducted a randomized placebo-controlled trial where participants took hawthorn for six months, and then what they found was pretty compelling. Those taking hawthorn had significantly improved skin hydration compared to the control group. Researchers also saw improvements in overall skin quality, including elasticity, especially in certain groups of people. Here's where it gets interesting: the benefits were stronger in people with certain genetic patterns, suggesting that hawthorn may actually interact with how our bodies express things like aging and repair. So, while we often think of hawthorn as a heart remedy, studies like this remind us that its gifts might be much broader, supporting the bodies in ways that are both nourishing and deeply restorative over time, so much so that it shows up in our skin's health.

Alright, that's it for me. Thanks for joining me. I'll see you in the next episode.