

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I'm curious. Why did you choose Japanese knotweed?

Emily French:

Well, first of all, I love that plant, which I know is controversial, and I think that's maybe part of why I chose it. I have a little rebellious streak. I just have seen that plant do so many amazing things with clients, and personally, myself. I just think that it's important to have a counternarrative to the mainstream "We hate knotweed" narrative. But also, there are so many other medicinal gifts that knotweed offers to us that I thought maybe it would be kind of fun to chat about some of those as well, and just broaden the scope of how we're thinking about this plant even more.

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.

Japanese knotweed shows up again and again in protocols for Lyme and chronic inflammation, but what is it actually doing in the body? In this episode, I'm joined by Emily French to explore its role as a blood-moving herb, how it can support your body in calming systemic inflammation, and why focusing on a single compound like resveratrol can really miss the bigger picture of how this plant works. If you're interested in the "why" behind the herbs you use, this conversation is packed with insight.

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.

Emily, it's a pleasure to have you here. Thank you so much for joining me.

Emily French:

Thank you for having me.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah. We've already had a couple of minutes to chat before we hit "record," but I just have to bring it up. Your background is so stunning. I mean it's absolutely stunning! It almost looks fake. It is so stunning! You are in your actual apothecary. This is-

Emily French:

I am.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Beautiful!

Emily French:

I'm in my actual apothecary, yes. My sweetie is a—is a pro videographer and did some little touch-ups to make it extra special for—for today, but is a beautiful space. Thank you for noticing.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, if we didn't live—we live on opposite sides of the country, but if we didn't I would want to be like, "Hey, can I rent your space for my podcast?"

Emily French:

Yeah, totally.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's the background I should have.

Emily French:

If you find yourself in Vermont, come on over.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Alright, well sweet. I'm going—I'm going to do that for sure. It's just absolutely stunning. Anybody listening, just pop on over to YouTube and check this out because it's so beautiful. I'm really looking forward to chatting with you. We are newly met, thanks to jim mcdonald who spoke so highly of you and said I had to have you on the show. I always listen when jim recommends somebody. I'm looking forward to hearing about—well, to begin with, your story. How did you—how did the plants find you? How did you find yourself on this path?

Emily French:

I really—I wonder if you feel this way too, Rosalee. I almost really feel like I had no choice. The plants kind of chose me to do this work. Like so many of us, I feel like it's just a calling. Ever since I was little, I remember—I have very vivid memory of this little mortar and pestle I had when I was a little kid. I grew up on a beautiful apple orchard in Massachusetts. That land really just held me and my family so beautifully. I would make these little potions with whatever I could find in the yard and some crushed up Cheerios. Whatever I could find I would try to make my sister eat them. I would call them “medicine.” It was already there. She still jokes with me, “Oh, you made a living out of that.”

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's the first time I've heard Cheerios as part of an herbal formula.

Emily French:

You know they add some good bulk. I feel like it's always kind of-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's great, you're thinking about the consistency, not just the-

Emily French:

You have to make it palatable. I feel like the plants really have always just enthralled me, which I think is actually a good word for it. Really kind of—I've been in their thrall for my whole life. When I was in college, I went to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. I

remember one day walking into a one credit class on community herbalism with an herbalist named Chris Marano. Do you know Chris?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I know of Chris, yeah.

Emily French:

He's wonderful. He was just sharing the basics of herbal medicine. I remember sitting in that class and just feeling this feeling, like I was floating on the clouds. I walked out that first day and said, "Oh, my gosh, this is what I'm going to do with my life!"

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Wow!

Emily French:

That was—22, 23 years ago—and then I kept going to his class. A few months later, I approached him very shyly and said, "Do you think I could apprentice with you?" He took me on as an apprentice. At that point, he was—I was his first official apprentice, and he now has a thriving herbal school. I highly recommend checking it out for anyone who is listening. It's Clearpath Herbals. He's in Western Massachusetts. He took me on as an old school style apprentice. I didn't have any money and I worked with him for five years just in and around his apothecary, his medicine gardens, tagging along with him wherever he would go, sitting in the back corner in consultations. I feel so grateful for that old school style education because I feel like it was just a learning by osmosis. He taught me so, so, so much about what I know about plants. In 2011, I was still just thinking this is what I'm going to do with my life. I opened my own practice and I've been a practicing herbalist ever since. I feel really blessed to be able to be supported by the plants like this, to make a living at it.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

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

I just love that about that old school apprenticeship because we have to imagine that's how herbalists were taught for millennia. That's always the way it's been, but modern day has certain challenges to that model. I've actually heard of many people who are like—like the idea of having apprentices, but then there's just difficulties with that in terms of expectations. It just could be a very challenging role, and so I like to hear that this was so successful. It was not only successful, but you are so grateful for that opportunity as well.

Emily French:

So grateful, and he remains my mentor. He's like a second father to me in a way. He is—we're so close. I feel—I was just so blessed to have met him when I did and been taken under his wing.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's so wonderful. As you were learning with Chris in this kind of old school apprenticeship way—I know you do a lot of different things, but I'm just curious. As you were learning, do you remember feeling, "I'm going to make—I'm going to be a medicine maker," "I want to be a teacher," "I want to be a clinician"? Was that always kind of a whole package for you? Or—how did that come about?

Emily French:

I think it was all of the above. I think that was influenced by Chris too, telling me that at that point, at least, which was really early days of online classes and all the—so much of herbalism

that has blossomed in the last 20 years that to be a successful herbalist, you have to wear a lot of hats. So, you wear the clinician hat. You wear the educator hat. You wear the medicine maker hat, and whatever else it might be. Maybe you pick up a side job too. I always—I think I just stepped into it feeling like it was important for me to have a many-armed practice. I really love that, actually. It helps me to not burn out.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, the variation is fun too. As herbalists, we often need all the skills. We don't have—a lot of us don't have a dispensatory down the road that does the medicine making or whatever the case may be.

Emily French:

Yes, so true.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you for sharing that about your background. I'm very excited about the plant that you have to share with us today. I'm curious, why did you choose Japanese knotweed?

Emily French:

Well, for many reasons. First of all, I love that plant, which I know is controversial. I think that's maybe part of why I chose it. I have a little rebellious streak that I just have seen that plant do so many amazing things with clients and personally, myself. I just think that it's important to have a counternarrative to the mainstream, "We hate knotweed" narrative. I actually was just perusing your website in the last week and came across Timothy Lee Scott's interview that he did with you on knotweed, which was so great. Everyone should go back and listen if they haven't yet. It was—I liked hearing his kind of "countercultural" knotweed talk as well. His book has been influential for me, for sure.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Cool.

Emily French:

I think—I think even among those of us who can understand and appreciate the medicinal values of knotweed, that plant still gets pigeonholed as a “Lyme herb.” Many of us who work with that plant when we’re working with clients who have Lyme disease, which for good reason—I mean that’s a fabulous Lyme plant, but also, there are so many other medicinal gifts that knotweed offers to us that I thought maybe it would be kind of fun to chat about some of those as well and just broaden the scope of how we’re thinking about this plant even more.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, cool. I’m excited for that. Japanese knotweed does not grow near me.

Emily French:

Probably just as well.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It’s not a plant that I have a lot of personal experience with. Even in my mind if somebody today was like, “Tell me everything you know,” I’ll be like, “It’s high in antioxidant status and people work with it for Lyme,” so-

Emily French:

Yes.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Let’s expand my mind as well. Where would you like to dive in?

Emily French:

Some of the reasons why we work with that plant so much for Lyme have to do with a lot of the anti-inflammatory compounds in knotweed. Traditionally, in the Chinese and Japanese

materia medica, knotweed was used for hundreds and hundreds, thousands probably of years, as an arthritic support plant. Because it's so powerful—such a powerful anti-inflammatory for joint pain, swollen, inflamed joints. We can—we can expound that from just working with people with Lyme who have joint issues, to anyone who's dealing with arthritis, in particular, osteoarthritis.

As one of our frontline—I put it in a joint support formula that I make that—it's one of my frontline plants for joint inflammation, in general. That's partly because of its anti-inflammatory constituents, and partly because it also is an analgesic, which is a non-drowsy pain reliever for people who might not know that term. Also, a central nervous system relaxant, even to the point of slight sedative, although you wouldn't necessarily choose knotweed if you're looking for sleep help. But if you were looking for sleep help when you are also in pain, you might, actually. It might be in your Top 5. I think that combination of calmative and pain-relieving and anti-inflammatory is such a beautiful thing for an herb to have. It makes me think of Baikal skullcap—Chinese skullcap is kind of similar in that way because so often when we're in pain, we're irritable. We need that. We feel yucky. We want that calming presence at the same time, and so to have that in one place is really, really wonderful.

Then if we take that analgesic and anti-inflammatory profile and we add to it some of the blood-moving properties that knotweed has—it's breaking up stagnation in the system. We also see that it comes in really handy for menstrual pain, for menstrual cramping, for any kind of issues with the menses that have to do with stagnation like amenorrhea, which is when the—the bleeding is not coming, or dysmenorrhea when it's starting, stopping, or irregular. Anything having to do with that deep pelvic circulation being stagnant, knotweed is actually an herb I turn to often for that, as well, which I don't think many people are thinking when they're thinking about their frontline menstrual pain and cramping relief.

Also, topically, knotweed is incredibly helpful for burns, even all the way up to third degree burns because there's—there are—there's the anti-inflammatory constituents. There are

constituents in knotweed that help to regenerate skin cells, and also, that help to rebuild or create new blood vessels in an area that's been badly burned. It's also an antiseptic. You can make a strong tea—and this will be the aerial parts. For most, everything else we're using the roots of the plant, but this will be the aerial parts of the plant. You make a strong decoction, and then you can use that as a wash on burns. It speeds healing time much like aloe would, but without the—without the mucilage that at the early stages, if the burn is very bad, might be trapping heat in the body.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It makes me wonder about using it as a poultice too because often times those green tops are so cooling for burns.

Emily French:

Yes, and if you peel the outer layer of the—the aerial part off, like the skin of the plant off, inside is a—is a gooeyness that's really great as a poultice.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, interesting.

Emily French:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I'm wondering too since you mentioned it for amenorrhea or pelvic stagnation, do you think this plant is having an effect on the liver at all just because often times those things are associated?

Emily French:

Yeah, it absolutely is. It's a great alternative plant. It's a cholagogue, so it's increasing bile flow from the gallbladder. It's supporting liver detox—detoxification, in general, as well as

supporting the kidneys in detoxing and the lymphatic system and the lungs, and the large intestine and colon. It's really a good all-around alternative, moving blood, cleaning blood. It's interesting actually, Rosalee, because I feel like what knotweed is doing in our body is very similar to what it's doing on the surface of the earth where it's a bioremediator. It's kind of moving and pulling toxins that have gotten stuck in the system and helping them to be metabolized and moved along and out, so that the body or the land can thrive. So we're kind of bioremediating on every level with this plant.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Whether we're talking about our personal terrain or the terrain of the ecology where it's located.

A lot of what you're saying reminds me of yellow dock, which I know they're very different but same family. I'm much more familiar with yellow dock, but still a lot of that different versions of it I can tell. Just a lot of big picture, very similar.

Emily French:

Yeah, I love that. Yeah, so true. I think that where yellow dock is so rich in iron and in helping us to absorb iron from other substances that we're ingesting, knotweed is very, very high in Vitamin C. It's one of the highest known plant sources of Vitamin C. It has a different kind of vitamin-mineral profile, but each one is offering a lot of nourishment, actually, to our system in addition to everything else that it's doing.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Interesting. That makes me think of—I wonder what that would be in Dui Yao or dual combination because Vitamin C being so important to iron absorption as well. [crosstalk]

Emily French:

We could make something, totally, yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I'm wondering—we could keep going in whatever direction you want, but one thing that I'm wondering is, you've talked about a lot about the roots, and then also about the aerial parts. I wonder if you could a breakdown of, "Here's what we're looking for in aerial parts," because I'm curious. For example, is the Vitamin C in the roots?

Emily French:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It is? Perfect.

Emily French:

Good question. Yes, it is. It's in both, actually, but generally, we're working with the roots for all the different medicinal uses except for the burn care, and using the young shoots as early season edible, which taste—which is—maybe I'm jumping the gun, but the recipe that I wanted to share with you all was the strawberry rhubarb knotweed galette, which we could talk about more. Rhubarb has a really specific—or really similar flavor to knotweed, so we can think about using them as an edible wild plant in that way too. But in general, it's the roots. It's the roots we use for Lyme disease too. I would love to just touch on that a little, in addition to everything else.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Please do. Oh, please do.

Emily French:

I work with a lot of clients who have chronic Lyme and co-infections—many hundreds of clients. It's become kind of an inadvertent specialty of mine. I actually remember when I was—when I was apprenticing with Chris Marano, and Lyme was showing up more and more. I remember turning to him and saying, "Chris, I want to—I want to know what this feels like

from the inside out.” He just gave me this look like, “Be careful what you wish for, girl friend.” And then I—I got Lyme, shortly thereafter. Who knows if there’s a correlation, but maybe. I got extremely sick and I worked with the herbs exclusively to heal and bring myself back to a place of balance, and that was my apprenticeship, really, with knotweed for the first time among other plants.

I’ve really seen firsthand, and then also in many clients how incredibly potent this plant is for dealing with tick-borne illness. I think that this is actually a really big deal on many levels that we don’t necessarily always consider. For example, if you were to look at a range map of where knotweed is spreading and becoming invasive, and a range map of where Lyme is spreading and becoming endemic across this continent, you’ll see that they overlap almost to a tee except for a few areas like the desert southwest where it’s hard for the knotweed to really thrive. There’s—there’s knotweed where the Lyme is. If you were to go into a lab and try and come up with the—the perfect constituent profile for dealing with a Lyme infection, what you would come out with would look a lot like Japanese knotweed root. The medicine is right there with the illness.

I just think that this is such a beautiful microcosm of the macrocosm of our world—of the natural world, which is that what is—what it is that we are struggling with or the thing that is pulling us down is so often coupled with the thing that will bring us to a place of vitality and balance. I don’t want to say “back to a place of vitality and balance.” If you got a lot—if you have chronic Lyme, you’re not going back to the life that you had before most often. You’re moving forward with the help of these plants into a new chapter of life that is more sustainable for your body, for your heart, for your spirit long-term because you shift and you become so much more aware of what your body actually needs to thrive.

I actually think that—we could say that the Lyme itself is a teacher, and some people—it depends where you are in the journey whether that resonates or not, or maybe it never does, but for sure, the knotweed I think is a really powerful and potent teacher for us about turning back to those places that we’ve become afraid of—the velds, the edges between the

cultivated land and the wild land, which is where the ticks are hanging out too—turning back to those places for the thing that’s going to help us become well again after getting sick. We have the scientific constituent profile that’s so right on, and then we also have this bigger picture, kind of meta look at a world that’s really much more cooperative and interconnected than we might think.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That’s beautiful, Emily.

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.

I’ll just be honest. One thing that makes me a little weary about Japanese knotweed is that—not that—you have not done this, but in some circles I feel like Japanese knotweed is offered up as, “Here’s this very serious disease, just take some Japanese knotweed.”

Emily French:

Yes, right, totally, absolutely.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

And that is very concerning to me, so I want to make sure we don’t give that impression here and I would love just to talk a little bit more about that.

Emily French:

Yeah, that's such a good point. That's absolutely true. Lyme disease is a very serious illness. It can have really lasting repercussions for people. I think that when we're approaching Lyme, it's really good to have as multifaceted of an approach as we possibly can. I think the herbs are a really solid foundational part of that. I'm an herbalist, I'm biased, but I've seen this happen for people where the herbs can—can very solidly support healing, but they work best in conjunction with other things including antibiotics. I think that Lyme is a—is an appropriate use of antibiotics which are very overused, as we all know, but if you tolerate them well and you are dealing with Lyme infection, antibiotics are—can be a really good ally. What we know about knotweed, for example, is that—is that they can increase the efficacy of doxycycline by up to 40% when taken in conjunction with that antibiotic. Doxycycline being an antibiotic that doctors prescribe often for Lyme disease.

Again, we are looking at kind of merging different modalities to treat a really serious illness, but knowing that when we work with the plants alongside antibiotics if people choose to do them, and also other things like—like craniosacral work and lymphatic massage, and whatever else it might be—nutritional changes—we have a much better capacity for healing than if we are to silo – “I’m only doing this. I’m only doing that.”

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you for that. I appreciate that. I feel like every herbalist who works with Lyme who I deeply respect, they all say the same thing like, “Do your antibiotics and your herbs,” which is generally not something that we want to leave up to fingers-crossed situation.

Emily French:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

What is it—you talked about if we could come up with a perfect chemical constituent profile for working with Lyme, Japanese knotweed would be it. I'm kind of curious. What is that? What in the Japanese knotweed is so great for working with someone who is working with Lyme?

Emily French:

I don't even think we know all the answers to that yet, but we know that Japanese knotweed-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

We never do.

Emily French:

No—is really high in resveratrol and trans-resveratrol, which are two things that are particularly helpful as anti-inflammatories and as antioxidants. It also has some very specific—actually, a broad spectrum antimicrobial action against both viruses, like influenza and herpes and the common cold, and bacterial infections like staph infections and Lyme, and some of the co-infections too. We have an antimicrobial effect that's quite potent in this plant, and then we also have constituents in Japanese knotweed that are what we call, “cytokine cascade inhibitors,” which is a very technical sounding term that I basically like to break down if I'm talking with clients to a simpler way of understanding it that you can think that the—the *Borrelia* bacteria, the spirochete bacteria that cause Lyme disease rely on the breakdown of collagen tissue to eat. They initiate the breakdown of collagen tissue in the body, which is one of our most abundant compounds. It's 70% of our hair, skin, nails, etc. They initiate the breakdown of collagen by initiating these inflammatory cascades. They're almost tricking the body's own—own immune system into creating enough inflammation that collagen begins to break down. What plants that are cytokine cascade inhibitors do which is so sophisticated and so incredible, is that they inhibit that—it's like the Lyme is ringing the doorbell asking for food and the message doesn't go through, so they're inhibiting this cascade of events that happens in the system that leads to the breakdown of collagen. Not only when we ingest knotweed for its antimicrobial effects—sorry. Not only when we ingest

knotweed for Lyme we get the antimicrobial effects, we also get—we're working even further upstream where the Lyme begins to not have a food source—an ongoing food source because as soon as the knotweed is in the system, those cytokine cascades begin to be inhibited, which is just—it's really sophisticated compounds that are—that are creating this effect.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's interesting. As you're describing that, it made me think of almost like the *Borrelia* are acting like meat tenderizers, like they're putting out meat tenderizers to our cells so they can eat better [crosstalk]

Emily French:

I never thought about it like that before. It's an accurate and gross description.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

You made me think of it.

Emily French:

Totally, yeah. Totally, yes.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

As plants often do, working on multiple levels-

Emily French:

Multiple levels.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Not just thinking an antimicrobial; not just thinking antioxidant status, but really looking at this whole picture.

Emily French:

And as so often with the medicine plants when we work with the whole plant extract, we seem to have much better results than if we isolate certain constituents because there's a synergy that happens with the whole plant medicine.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Cool! That's two questions I had in my mind, actually. One, what would you say to somebody who's like, "I love Japanese knotweed. I take resveratrol extract"?

Emily French:

My understanding is that resveratrol extract is not as potent as the entire plant extract.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

There we go.

Emily French:

For—perhaps if you're only looking for resveratrol properties, like the strong antioxidant and the anti-inflammatory, but if you're working with tick-borne illness and you want knotweed as part of your protocol, the whole plant extract is—is more potent.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Great, and then you say whole plant extract. Are you often working with the tincture or are you working decoction? How are you working with this?

Emily French:

My apothecary is fairly tincture-focused but that's because—well, that's just the way that I've gone with it, but I think that decoctions and powdered herb also can be extremely, extremely useful for people. I like tinctures personally because I can—as much as we can with plant medicine, I can really understand and standardize my dosing and I can give them to people in a form that is fairly convenient for them to use, and to take with them as they're moving about their daily life. I really also enjoy the process of formulating tincture blends and of

creating formulas that are addressing things on multiple levels. That's really enjoyable for me, so I do tend towards tinctures, but teas, decoctions and powders are also fabulous. I think a lot of it comes down to personal preference and also what feels best in your body.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Absolutely. Do you make your own Japanese knotweed tinctures? And then my follow-up question is, do you harvest that root yourself?

Emily French:

I do.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Wow, that's a strong flex right there.

Emily French:

Yes, I do and it's quite a—it's quite an endeavor. The knotweed root is extremely tenacious and strong. I think—I was just remembering—I was reflecting earlier that I remember hearing that knotweed is able to travel under a four lane highway and pop back up on the other side. We know that knotweed can bust through concrete. It's such a strong, potent plant, so much life force. I think that's part of what it's offering us. It's just this intense tenacity to stay alive. It means that the roots are strong enough to do that kind of thing, which means that they are pretty hard to harvest.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

If I remember correctly, I think Timothy Lee Scott was talking about using a tractor because he was doing it in very big quantities. Do you have any tips for someone who is looking at this seemingly innocent patch of Japanese knotweed thinking, "Maybe I'll harvest a bit of those roots?"

Emily French:

First and foremost is safety precaution, which is that because knotweed is a bioremediator, you want to make sure that where you're harvesting from is not downstream or off the roadside from anything that is going to be having toxins coming in because it's pulling stuff up from the soil. Finding an organic farm that has knotweed on it can be wonderful. The farmer will probably be really happy if you came and took some, or as far upstream, up the watershed if you can go.

I think that it is helpful if you find a stand and then you pull out from there and you almost follow the roots out. They do become thinner as you go. If you are working with a pair of Felcos or whatever, good luck, but if you're working with a shovel and you're getting in, and then you're wanting to be able to cut up by hand, you just want to follow the roots as far out from the—from the base of the plant as you possibly can.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Is this a yearly harvest for you?

Emily French:

It is, yes. Sometimes I do run out, and when I run out I buy knotweed from Woodland Essence from Kate Gilday. Do you know them? They're on the East Coast. Just a plug for their company too—they make really good knotweed extract, but I do harvest spring and fall, usually.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's definitely some bragging rights there.

The other question I had is that you said you love formulating. I'm curious, are there plants that you often formulate with Japanese knotweed?

Emily French:

Yeah, there are although I would say, as you know, there is no one-size-fits-all for everyone. Part of the work I do is I meet one-on-one with clients, and then I custom blend formulations for them based not only on whatever health symptoms they're having, but also on their constitution—thanks, jim mcdonald, he teaches great classes on constitutional temperaments—and medications that they might be on, etc., etc. That being said, there's always some tweaking that needs to happen based on the person. I often put knotweed with other herbs that are cytokine cascade inhibitors if I'm working with someone who's dealing with Lyme, such as Baikal skullcap and cat's claw, isatis, redroot sage, cordyceps, which is a mushroom.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Interesting.

Emily French:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's always interesting to hear what plants you find play well with other plants. I think that the dual combination is just a fascinating place to start with formulation.

Emily French:

Yes, yes.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's like having cream in your tea or whatever; cream in your coffee, like you just get to know they play along well together. It's almost like an uber insight into the plant itself.

Emily French:

I love that. Yes, it's so true. For example, with knotweed that tends to be rather cooling, I'll often pair knotweed with a little bit of ginger on the top just to warm it up a bit, so that it's

not—one thing about Lyme is that it actually really prefers a cool body temperature. It can thrive more in cool body temperature. When the body temperature is warmer, the Lyme gets a little more agitated. It comes out in the bloodstream and is easier to hit with the herbs or the antibiotics or whatever it is that you're doing. One thing that is important to know about these herbs that we work with for Lyme is that many of them actually are cooling, so we want to be able to have the skill in the apothecary to warm them up in whatever way is going to work for the person. Ginger is one I turn to often, sometimes cinnamon—all in tincture form—which is a good harmonizer. Sometimes orange peel. You name it. It depends on the person, but that's part of what I love about my job, is just creating these never-before-seen-formulas for each person that comes through the door.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That is something that's so beautiful about herbalism—is that we aren't just doling out pre-prescribed pills—or pre-made pills or whatever. Speaking of the coolness in the body, one of my teachers, David Winston, he is such a big fan of sauna for someone with Lyme. He'll actually recommend taking the formula and then go—having a sauna or hot tub or something, but getting the body to 102.

Emily French:

Yes, or even if someone doesn't have access to that, just a really nice, long hot shower. Just anything you can do to get the body temperature up. Such a good point.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Fascinating aspect of that disease.

We talked about how it's a little difficult to get those roots out. It's for the stalwart among us. You've already mentioned your delicious recipe. This is a more pleasant harvest. Let's switch to these young aerial portions and talk about your galette. I have to say, “Emily French,” and then you're offering a galette, like you're speaking to the French in me. When I saw that come

in as the recipe, I was like, “That’s perfect.” Let’s talk about your strawberry rhubarb knotweed galette.

Emily French:

It is—it is relieving to know that it’s made with the young aerial shoots. You want to get them when they’re about this tall, and you can treat them-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Which for people listening is like six inches, would you say?

Emily French:

Thank you, yes. Thank you, about six inches.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Which everyone should be watching again just to see the apothecary background that Emily has blessed us with. In case you don’t make it over, about six inches.

Emily French:

Yes. You can treat them just like rhubarb. You wash them and then you’ll chop them up small like you would rhubarb. The galette idea actually came from—my family had the really wonderful, good fortune of living in France for six months a couple of years ago, while my kid’s dad was working on the rebuild of the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, wow!

Emily French:

It was so great! We were staying up in Normandy, and the galette is like a very traditional kind of home style, earthy, countryside dessert there. I had had galette before, but it wasn’t really until France that I saw the fine art of a galette, which is a very simple dessert where you’re

basically making a flat crust, and then you're putting a filling in the middle, and then you're just folding the edges over, sprinkling with a little bit of—I usually use maple sugar, whatever it is that you want, and then baking in the oven. It comes out as this gorgeous, kind of bubbling delight that you can cut into slices like a pie, but it's much less labor-intensive than a pie. We're taking the classic-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I can't even be bothered with a topping—like a top layer.

Emily French:

No. Even the bottom, honestly, trying to get it up on the sides of the pie pan. Just take a—it's just a twist on the classic strawberry rhubarb pie, but making it much simpler by turning it into a galette instead, and then adding the knotweed so you get that burst of Vitamin C first thing in the spring, and get to incorporate a wild edible into your dessert, which is both delicious and health-promoting and a great conversation-starter.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I was going to say, “and fun.”

Emily French:

Totally.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I appreciate your recipe and that you have lots of great substitution ideas too, recommending gluten-free flour or wheat flour as you want, different suggestions on sugars. Thanks for making that so easy for folks to dive into. As always, when you make this lovely galette, we want to hear about it. You can put it in YouTube comments or hit “Reply” to emails and let us know because it's always fun—YouTube comments are always great though because then people get to chat about their experiences and share about the loveliness. Thank you for sharing that.

Emily French:

I love to read those, yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

You can download your copy of this by either going to herbswithrosaleepodcast.com and looking for the episode, or you can look at the show notes, we'll put a link to it there. Our botanical illustrator, Tatiana, she does a beautiful job with these. It's wonderful, co-created project between Emily and Tatiana. We have another graphic designer creating recipe cards. We are very proud of these, so please check that out and let us know how it goes.

Emily French:

Wonderful.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Emily, you shared a lot about Japanese knotweed, the roots, these lovely aerial portions, the galettes, working with Japanese knotweed for pain, for people who have Lyme. You mentioned even—I want to say that you mentioned that even for colds and flu. Is that something I picked up on?

Emily French:

Yeah, those antiviral action against influenza and adenoviruses.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Then blood stagnation. You've mentioned a lot. Is there anything else you'd like to throw in there before we move on?

Emily French:

I think that only other thing that is worth mentioning is that for similar reasons to why knotweed is really helpful for burns, it's also really helpful for skin infections, things like boils

or abscesses, also insect bites, animal bites. Obviously, you want to have proper hygiene and make sure that everything is getting cleaned out. Once you're moving on to the healing part of that process, knotweed is an underlooked but really helpful ally to have if you live in a place where you can find the aerial parts of knotweed, and can make a decoction and use as a wash or a poultice.

Similarly, because of the blood-moving qualities, knotweed can be really helpful for sprains and strains and bruises. It's almost—it's not the same. No one can compare to arnica, but it has—there are some similarities between arnica and yarrow, the way that yarrow is breaking up coagulated blood in the system and knotweed. You can also think about an external application of knotweed to support bruise healing and to help with sprains and strains.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

You started saying—I asked you why did you choose Japanese knotweed, and one of the reasons you gave is that you wanted to help break it out of this pigeonhole that it gets often put into being resveratrol or being for Lyme. You've really done that. There are so many—you could see—for anyone who lives near Japanese knotweed, this is a real ally that you could work with in so many different ways. I'm really walking away with that kind of appreciation now. I love plants that you can just keep going deeper and deeper with and rely on for so many different things – from sprains and strains and internal blood stagnation, serious disease, and the galette.

Emily French:

Yeah, and we're not going to run out either. I think that's an interesting thing to speak to briefly too. Knotweed is taking over a lot of habitat and that—that's very real and very true, and also, is an incredible medicinal ally. I think as humans, we have the capacity to hold more than one truth in our system at the same time, and to—and to see the nuance of a situation or a plant or whatever, without—without making things so black and white, without necessarily vilifying. There's so much—there's so much lack of understanding about knotweed. You know, people who are upset about—about native habitat loss, it makes a lot of sense and

that's incredibly valid—and there's so much else going on. There's so much more than meets the eye.

I always joke about this and I don't know if this is true or not, but I always kind of feel like if we were working with the roots of this plant as much as we could be, as much as maybe we ought to be based on this incredibly broad materia medica that's being offered, and Lyme even in particular, maybe there would be just enough. I don't know. I think that that's oversimplified, but certainly, there could be a much more reciprocal relationship happening between humans and this plant than there currently is.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I realize this would not reduce the population so much, but even as you said that I'm thinking about how many people reach for Neosporin. If you just think about all the Walgreens out there, all the pharmacies that are lined with Neosporin, what if we were working with Japanese knotweed instead?

Emily French:

What if we were?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That would be beautiful. As you were saying so beautifully that we can hold two truths about a plant—I like that higher vision of people—I'm reminded, I had totally forgotten about this, Emily, but when I published the last episode with Japanese knotweed with Timothy Lee Scott, there was this person on Instagram. I think they build their Instagram followers by throwing shade, that kind of thing? They brought up—they did this—they highlighted this episode. They chopped up all the stuff to make what Timothy and I were saying kind of inflammatory. As if we were saying, "Plant this plant everywhere," which we didn't say. And they were saying—they were juxtaposing Japanese knotweed to cattail and being like, "Why are these people espousing how great Japanese knotweed is when it's horrible and it's ruining our habitats instead of talking about cattails?" It was just so funny because it was not

even what the conversation was. It was like this invented, fabricated thing. All the comments were so terrible, just mean. I've never experienced anything like that. Luckily, the herbal world is just so kind and gracious. It can hold two truths, which I think is fair. It is interesting though with this plant. Like you were saying, there's a controversy around it. It is fascinating how much people love to hate this plant or other plants. As you said, we do need to be concerned about native habitat loss and think about things, but we can think about things critically. "Cleverly" I guess is the word I wanted—cleverly.

Emily French:

We can become active participants in the management of our ecosystems and our homelands without vilification.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, yeah. That's so true. What an amazing plant! It's just...

Emily French:

Yeah. Aren't they all?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

They are, yeah. I often think of the haters-gonna-hate kind of thing when it comes to these plants because it's just—obviously, some people are just like that's how they want to navigate the world. It's just what their neural pathways are doing for them at this moment, but then these plants just keep showing up – our Japanese knotweeds, our dandelions – all of these plants that are so-

Emily French:

Mullein.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Mullein, yeah. They just keep showing up and they keep working so hard in their beautiful ways, fitting into these often disturbed ecologies, as these band-aids that are providing solutions to messes we've made.

Emily French:

Yes, I know the generosity is incredible.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you. That's the word I was looking for.

Emily French:

And the multifaceted—yeah, totally.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you for bringing up that in the conversation. It does give a sense or feel to Japanese knotweed, taking this conversation way beyond the resveratrol.

Emily French:

Yes. You were like, "Oh, gosh. Are we going to go there again?"

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Absolutely.

Emily French:

Just a little.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

We have to give it some props.

Emily French:

It's good.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thanks again for sharing your love of Japanese knotweed. It definitely comes through. It makes me wish that I had this plant growing near me. I could still work with it, but there is something about working with the plants that I grow and stuff that resonates. If I was living in an ecology that had Japanese knotweed and it was this time of year, which is—we're recording this in March. It's not going to come out until later—but I would just be running to that patch to make this galette.

Emily French:

Yes, highly recommend.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I would be going to Woodland Essence to get the tincture because I'm not going to harvest that. I would love to hear what you have going on in your herbal world, Emily.

Emily French:

My herbal world is—it's a mix, like we were talking about, of one-on-one consultations. I'm always happy to work with people. I work a lot online, so I see people from all over the world. Classes—I have my spring classes coming up that I'm excited about. I teach a three-year apprenticeship, which—I struggle a little bit with that word. I'm still looking for the right word, Rosalee, because the apprenticeship experience that I had was so—so immersive that the classes I teach which you come in for a weekend or were online or whatever, it's a different thing. Apprenticeship is a word that people understand what I'm talking about when I—when I use that. I teach a first and second and third year. This is our second year program, so people who've had some foundation in herbal medicine are welcome to join for the second year, which I always—I love. I love teaching those year-long classes.

Really, what I'm personally excited about most, I think, in my work right now, is the intersection of herbal medicine and somatic practices. It's something that I've been just kind of fascinated by and studying for about five years now, wanting to go ever deeper and deeper, this kind of marriage; this intersection between ingesting the plants and then working with our body's own innate intelligence. Not even necessarily intellectually, just the body's intelligence and the plants supporting that and how things can shift so deeply and so radically when we merge these two kind of modalities. There's—I have courses that I'm dreaming and scheming when I'm lying awake at night, and that I'm having coffee shop dates with myself and beginning to write down, but nothing has solidified yet. That's really, personally, where I feel like my work is moving. It really is lighting me up these days.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love that. I often say I don't know who I'm going to be when I grow up as an herbalist because I've had so many different pathways. I never thought I'd be a podcast host when I first started. Here we are. I think what's so cool about the plants is that they keep showing us new ways of being so that we're engaged and inspired, and we keep learning and growing on our path too.

Emily French:

I think being an herbalist is just the best job in the world. I think if you start feeling like you're getting to a place of burnout, you just turn 45° and there's a whole other—a whole other expanse of possibility that opens up working with the plants. They're just profound, good work.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Just seeing you light up with the somatic talk, I'm wondering—could you just describe what that is for someone who might not know what somatic therapy is? There are so many different ways of approaching somatic therapies. I would like to learn more.

Emily French:

The way that I'm thinking about it in the work that I'm thinking up is that our body holds all the stories of the experiences that have happened to us in the life that we've lived. Many of those are really exquisite and some of them are more challenging. A teacher of mine who's named Kimberly Ann Johnson, who's a somatic bodyworker and educator extraordinaire, she talks about it like a record that has a few scratches in it. When you get to the scratch, the record skips. That happens to us in moments where we feel triggered or where we're caught off guard by our response to something that has nothing actually really to do with the present moment necessarily, but has to do with these stories that are lodged in our tissues that are impacting the way that we're moving through the world.

Often times, we don't logically, intellectually know what those things are, but our body has this memory and there sometimes our movements or practices that we can do that actually kind of unlock that, which is good to do when you feel ready for that kind of work. That can allow the nervous system to kind of complete the response that it wasn't able to have in the moment, whether that was fight or flight or a freeze response. There is something that's held in the system, in the fascia, in the whole being that is allowed to complete, and then the—it's like the scratch in the record gets smoothed over. It's a super simplified version of it, but I think that that whole framework of somatic body-centered, body wisdom work that works through physical movement to heal these skips when combined with the deep support that the herbs can have. For example, nervines building our capacity to dance with stress, building our nervous system's resilience and capacity to deal with the stressors that are coming our way. That combination feels really potent to me because so much of what we hold in our body comes about from moments in our lives where our nervous system wasn't able to make sense of what was happening in that moment, and stored it for later. So if we can expand that capacity of nervous system buffer and function and resilience then we begin to be able to move in a much more uninhibited, unhindered way. I'm just into it. I just think it's really cool.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's such a beautiful explanation. I love the record analogy.

Emily French:

I do too.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That really is the key to so much healing, is figuring those things out for ourselves. We talk about doing the work. This is often the work that needs to happen, that nervous system resilience. For folks who are, “I’m really digging this. I want to learn more,” where can they find you? What’s the best ways?

Emily French:

They can find me—you can find me at emily-french.com. That’s probably the best way. I have social media profiles, but I’m pretty lackadaisical about being on there, so my website is a really great way to find me, emily-french.com. I have a mailing list that I would really love if you wanted to join. I send out an email about once a month just with things that are inspiring me and upcoming events either that I’m hosting or colleagues that I admire are hosting, herbal tidbits and information. I would love to connect that way.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Lovely. I think the newsletter is really the best place always because it’s something you get to opt-in for, and then—as opposed to figuring out these algorithms or whatever. It’s always the best for people you love: get on their newsletter, follow them. Emily, I love how you shout out so many people. Obviously, your love for Chris and Jim and your somatics teacher, you’re really wonderful about shouting out other people. It’s a really beautiful trait. Thank you for sharing your love and whose—we’re all standing on shoulders and it’s really nice to acknowledge that.

Emily French:

Yeah. Thank you.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

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

Emily French:

I love this question. I feel like there's two answers to that. One is actually very literal in that working with herbs has—I remember the first half of my life—I'm 40—up until I was 20 and started learning about the plants with Chris, the world outside was kind of a sea of green. Along the roadsides and the forests and the meadows, it's this beautiful emerald sea of green but undifferentiated. It didn't really—I didn't know who was who, and then since working with the plants, that undifferentiated ocean has become actually populated with all of these medicinal allies who I know their stories, I know what they offer to us as their gifts. I've worked with them. I've harvested many of them. I admire all of them. Now, when I'm walking along the roadside or in the forest, it's not this—this wash of green around me, but there's all these stories and all this knowledge that I feel like I've just tapped into. It goes back so many—as long as we've been people we had this knowledge, and now I get to speak a little of that language. That's big for me.

Also, I feel like on a—on a more zoomed out level, working with the plants has changed my world view; has changed the way that I see life in general, to one that's so interconnected and so generous, and so based on cooperation. It's not a world view where we humans are at the center, but we're also not forgotten about. We're just a part of this big tapestry, this big web, and we can be in relationship with the plants and the ecosystems around us and live a really healthy and vital life when we have that proclivity and those skills. That I feel—I feel really blessed to have fallen into a relationship with the plants in a way that I have, and it's my really great honor and pleasure to open those windows with my clients and students too.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I really resonate with both of those sharings and how you see the world differently now with plants in your life. I often think herbalism can change the world and it's not just because Japanese knotweed could help someone with Lyme, but it's because of these deeper

relationships. It changes the way we see the world. You shared that in such a beautiful way. I really appreciate that.

Emily French:

Thank you. Yeah, I'm right with you. It's—I was thinking about knotweed in that way too just as we were talking about bioremediation. There was a parallel thought running in my mind about—actually, that these plant—for example, Japanese knotweed bioremediates the soil, bioremediates the ecosystem, also bioremediates our bodies like we talked about – the alternative, the detoxification support, also it's kind of bioremediating our mindset and our—and our relationship with what we think we know, and what we actually maybe don't really know yet. I feel like there's this bioremediation happening on every level when we work with plants in general, and speaking of knotweed today, maybe that one in particular.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That is so beautiful, Emily. I often just get so stoked on plants. I think all that they do—this wonderful—there's all that synopsis that you just shared about Japanese knotweed, how it's working on these different levels, different ecosystems, different terrains. We're talking about changing culture. I'm not throwing shade at Western medicine, but there's just no pharmaceutical pill that does that. It doesn't even come close. I'm not saying that that's—that pills are bad, but just the inherent deep richness of plants and all that they offer us is just so beautiful. As you were describing that too, I feel like that's what it's been like for me to be an herbalist. You kind of dive in a little bit and you're like, "That's cool!" then it's like, "Whoa, that's cool!" It just keeps getting cooler and cooler the deeper you go down.

Emily French:

It's so true and it never ends. I don't think it ever ends.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It has been absolutely lovely to hang out with you. Thank you so much for being here.

Emily French:

Me too.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thanks for sharing so much wisdom on so many different levels. It's truly been a treat.

Emily French:

Thank you. For me too. It's really nice to be with you, Rosalee. Thank you so much.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you.

Emily French:

Bye-bye.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

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

This podcast is made possible in part by our awesome students. This week's Student Spotlight is on Paulette McDonald in Ontario, Canada. Paulette is a student in the Herbal Energetics Course and she brings this deep sense of curiosity and connection to her work with herbs, really building on her experiences through her two years that she spent in our Rooted Medicine Circle course. She explored yarrow as her bitter ally and has developed a new appreciation for bitter flavors while her work with licorice in the sweet module really sparked creativity in the kitchen and beyond. Through these experiences, she has continued to deepen her relationship with the plants and trust her own observations.

If you'd like to deepen your skills as an herbalist, you can check out my foundational courses at herbswithrosalee.com.

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

In this episode, we talked about how Japanese knotweed often gets pigeonholed, especially around Lyme disease, but when you zoom out and look at the research, it's actually being studied in a much wider range of contexts. A quick search through clinical trials shows Japanese knotweed is being explored in areas like cardiovascular health, respiratory conditions, metabolic function, and even complex multisystem illnesses. It's a good reminder that this plant is interacting in the body in a variety of ways, far beyond any single use. That's often the case with herbs, of course. The more we look, the more we see just how multidimensional they really are.

Today is a bit of a two-for-one. Here's your second herbal tidbit. Japanese knotweed isn't just interacting with human systems. It's also part of a much bigger ecological web, so it flowers later in the season which means it can be a really important nectar source for bees and other pollinators at a time when many other plants have already faded. In some regions, beekeepers even get this really dark, rich honey from knotweed blooms. So, yes, this plant is often seen as an ecological problem, but it's also playing a role in feeding insects, especially right when they need it most.

Thank you so much for joining me. I'll see you in the next episode.