

Rachelle Robinett:

Oh, kava, my old buddy. I love this plant. The way that it's prepared and consumed traditionally and has been for thousands of years does not lead to issues with liver toxicity. This is a conversation that's so much bigger than kava. It's about how to responsibly use herbs.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Welcome to the Herbs with Rosalee Podcast, a show exploring how herbs heal as medicine, as food, and through connecting with the living world around you.

In this episode, I'm joined by Rachelle Robinett, clinical herbalist and author of the book, *Naturally*, to talk about kava, one of my favorite plants to reach for, and one of the most misunderstood. Kava has this wonderful way of loosening tension in the body and quieting a nervous, jittery mind, all without any kind of mental cloudiness. We also meet the harder questions on in this episode. You'll learn where kava's reputation for liver concerns really come from, why the idea of kava as a rare, off-limits plant doesn't really hold up, and how a single conversation about coffee reshape the way I think about which plants we're allowed to love. Rachelle also shares a recipe for a kava old-fashioned mocktail that makes for a beautiful evening ritual.

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.

Welcome to the show, Rachelle. This has been a long time coming. I'm really looking forward to it.

Rachelle Robinett:

I am so happy to be here. Thank you.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah, well, we're going to talk about one of my favorite herbs to turn to for so many reasons, but before we get to kava, I want to hear about you. I'd love to hear about your story, how the plants have called you on this path, and just the ways that you're showing up in this plant world.

Rachelle Robinett:

Yeah, definitely. So, my relationship with plants is definitely lifelong. I grew up on a farm in the Pacific Northwest in Washington state, and both of my parents worked in medicine. My mom was and still is a functional health practitioner. My dad was an anesthesiologist, but he also came from a family of ranchers and cowboys, and people very close to the land. I was raised with a lot of exposure to nature. We were outside all of the time. We were working until the sun went down, playing in the forest and the rivers, and riding horses, and tending to an enormous garden.

Then I also had the insights from my parents, and those two sort of different worlds. My dad would take us to the hospital with him. We would see surgeries. He would talk about the body and teach us things. He would give kids—myself and my brothers stitches on the dining room table if we knocked our head on a rock or something like that. And then, my mom, of course, introduced us to nutrition and supplements from a very young age, and tea and essential oils, and allowed me to explore every fancy I had, many of which were very witchy. I was wanting to do spells in the backyard and wanting my crystals and my pendulum and my tarot cards, and all these things, so there was a lot of early life experience.

For me, I never—I didn't originally intend to go into healthcare or health or wellness or herbalism as a career, but I was very interested for as long as I can remember, from the time I was very, very young in something a little bit more spiritual, a little bit more—a little bit more esoteric, if you will. I was interested in finding truth or God or essence or whatever it was that was this sort of vital force that animated and connected everything. When I was young, I thought, "The adults know what this is. They have it figured out. I just have to read the right

book or study with the right person and I'll—and I'll—and I'll encounter this because certainly, somebody knows.” Well, it turns out no one really knows what this is, but that drove me into studying, from the time I was very young – studying the world's religions, but also studying all of—all of sort of mysticism and spirituality. In doing that, I got a lot of exposure as well to healing systems, like systems of medicine and healing traditions. It's so interwoven in so many cases that you see the use of plants in rituals. You see the interconnectedness between medicine and spirituality, and of course, the body and nature – all of these things.

Long story short, I was—I am still on that quest, but that drove me to a lot of study that eventually led me back to herbalism. I had met it many, many times. Of course, when I was doing rituals in the yard or when I was doing my spells or making my potions. I had been practicing herbalism in many, many different ways, but I didn't really know it by that name until much later again. When I reencountered it later, at that point, I had already left the farm, moved to New York City to work in fashion, the total opposite, had already left fashion, and was practicing as a health coach. I didn't really know what to call myself at the time. I called myself a “health coach,” and I reencountered herbalism and it was like a light bulb. I realized this is it! This is—this is the—not only is this the truth, but this is the thing. This is the system. This is the framework that connects everything. It is so holistic. I know a lot of people think of herbalism as just plants as medicine, but it is so much more than that, so much more than that. I realized it encompassed everything that I was doing, of course, but everything that we need and want to live the best lives we can naturally. From then on, it was just like, “This is it. This is herbalism.” I tripled down on my studies, got my certification, and spent over ten years working professionally as an herbalist in New York City after that doing many, many things. I'll stop there for now.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's great. I want to dive into that a little bit deeper because it's something I feel really passionate about. I often think that it sounds like a cliché thing, like herbalism can change the world, and that's not necessarily just because cayenne will help an arthritic knee. There's such a deep connection, which I think you're alluding to. You said herbalism helps us see how

to live this life a better way. I'm wondering if you would—just putting you on the spot—if there's a practical example or just what does that mean for someone who might be approaching it from a—that's how I approached it when I first started, just like "Herbs help with healing. Okay, how do—how do I use the herbs for this problem?" That's how it all began for me and I think how it begins with a lot of people, but I love to pull back the veil and be like, "Oh, there's also this." I'm just wondering if you have an example of what that might be.

Rachelle Robinett:

Yeah, yeah, I love that. I think the first example that comes to mind for me is—there are two things I could say about it, but one example that I have is one that I write about in my book as well. It's a client that I had who, of course, came to me wanting to lose some weight and deal with some indigestion. We ended up working together for years and years after that through pregnancies, through hormonal shifts, through so many, so many changes in her life. What began as "I want to lose 10 pounds and deal with some heartburn" eventually became this session—I mean her life transformed – her body, her health, her mind, her relationships totally transformed. There was this day that she came to me and she said, "Okay, I know this might sound crazy, but can herbalism help me start playing the piano again? It's something that I love so much and I've lost it as I've been raising my kids and work—busy working on these things, but can it do that too?" I was like, "You know what? Yes, it can! Yes, it can." We talked about it.

I think the way that it can is the way that it—gosh, and now all these other examples of clients are coming to mind, people whose lives transformed in ways that seem unrelated to herbalism itself—but what happens is once we start practicing herbalism, even just a little bit, it's teaching us how to be more self-aware. It's teaching us how to self-reflect and start from a place within and make these gradual changes that are—changes in our lifestyle. When we start changing our lifestyle one tiny habit, one choice at a time, there is no limit to where our lives can go once we start realizing: 1. What we need and want in order to be well, and 2. That we have the ability to create that change in our lives. You start to see the change on a health basis first maybe, and then realize, "Oh, okay. Maybe this is going to be able to affect my

relationships as well. Maybe it's going to be able to affect my career. Maybe it's going to be able to affect my hobbies," or these kinds of things. I just see people just run with it, like that example, into places that seem totally unconnected to—to herbalism.

And then of course, there's just a perspective change that happens really quickly I think for people when they're—it's like—it's like that light bulb moment. It's like you realize—you just see. All of a sudden you see the world that we're surrounded by in a different way and realize that these are—these are medicines, yes. These are—this is a language. This is a language that our bodies know that we evolved speaking. We evolved being in communication with the natural world. We are part of it. It's all connected, and it's just that—that is like the "lifting of the veil." You walk out—even in New York I would walk out of my apartment. There was the day that all of a sudden I realized that that one big weed that was growing in the sidewalk right in front of my house was mugwort. "Oh, hi! I know you." It's incredible as—as you know.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thanks for expanding on that. That is the awe-inspiring nature of herbalism and how it is—often begins with that first little step, and then we go deeper and deeper and deeper. I love that you brought up the interconnectedness too because I think that is one of the most profound things that herbalism can help those of us who have lost that sense of interconnection with the living world. It's a really beautiful roadway into reestablishing that.

Rachelle Robinett:

Yeah, yeah.

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 text 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 would love to transition now to your chosen plant, which is kava. The first question I just naturally have for folks on the show is why did you choose this plant? Why did kava want to show up today?

Rachelle Robinett:

Oh, kava, my old buddy. I love this plant. I—I just, you know, look. For everyone, of course, there's—I don't know if there's always a favorite, but there are favorites. Kava is a—it is a—it's a special ally for me. I was actually introduced to kava when I was quite young. I had a lot of anxiety when I was a little kid and a young adult, and an older adult. I remember—and also, when I was younger, it was also the time in the US, at least—not only in the US, but in the US because that's where I'm from—that kava was having some moments of popularity. It was pretty widely used at that point. I was introduced to it by my mom, of course. My mom actually worked with some really, really pioneering people in the functional health world who are still pioneers today. She had access to a lot of really high-quality supplements and herbs and things. I don't remember the form. I'm trying to think of the form that I might have had it in then. Probably as a tea? Probably as a tea. And then later on in life, I rediscovered it.

I would say that I re-befriended kava when I became sober. I became sober around age 28 or 29. I don't know exactly when that was, but young enough for people to question why I was choosing not to drink alcohol. They thought I was sick or pregnant or really confused, like why would you do that at such a young age? Of course now, it's very common and very popular to be drinking less or no alcohol as a—as a 20-something. I loved kava as an alternative to alcohol, as something that I could have in my happy hour routine or in my evening routine to wind down. It also—I was prone to headaches for a lot of my life and I found that kava was really effective for releasing the tension and easing some of the pain of my headaches. I also love it for travel. I almost always have a tincture or lozenges with me on the airplane because, again, I love that physical sensation of relaxation without getting any of

the mental cloudiness. I like to use it for sleep. I really—I really—and that most of the herbs that I use for—I don't really use a lot of herbs for the state-changing effects, but if I do, they're always the nervines or the sedatives because I naturally have a lot of energy, so I really like to have some—some little collection of plants that are going to help me relax and calm down, and these kind of things. That's my constitution. I'm never using herbs for energy or focus, or these things.

I feel like kava is—it's becoming a bit more popular again with the non-alcoholic beverage industry and the expansion of that, but I still feel like it's pretty widely underused based on the demands that exist in modern society and how well it is equipped to meet them. So many other herbs are as well, but this one just happens to be my favorite. I love the—I love the tingly mouthfeel. I love that I can feel it. I love that I can use it one day, and then not for another ten days if I don't want to. I find it really convenient and effective and potent. It's been—I used to use it as well before big speaking engagements. Anything that was making me feel a little too—too energized, too jittery, like nervous or nervy. It was wonderful because I could feel more calm, but have, again, no cognitive disruption.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

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 think that's a beautiful collection of gifts of kava. I want to turn to some of the controversy around kava because I've had this plant featured on the podcast before. A dear friend of mine, Beth, who also turned to kava with sobriety as well, so it's interesting to hear that story again. After that episode, I had some comments. One person mentioned—said that this is a rare native plant and it shouldn't be promoted. Other people talk about its sacredness and it shouldn't be promoted. People talked about overuse of kava. I feel like a lot of those are—just to put my own two cents in before I give you the mic again—I feel like some of that is very misinformed, and so this time around, I just want to meet all of that head on. There's obviously nuance in here as well, but I'd just like to—let's address the controversy that comes up with kava. We should probably talk about the liver toxicity issue at some point too.

Rachelle Robinett:

Totally. Actually, that was going to be the first place that I went because that is the most common question that I get, and that I see also come up. It's just like, okay, is this herb even safe to use? From my—from my understanding, and I write about this in the book as well, the way that kava is prepared and consumed traditionally, actually increases the—first of all, we—we know that the way that it's prepared and consumed traditionally and has been for thousands of years, does not lead to issues with liver toxicity. Unsurprisingly, when industry comes in and is using incorrect parts of the plant, or is processing it in ways that are different from the traditional preparations, then the final kava product, final result of that processing is different and that sometimes means it's more potent. Sometimes it's a bad product, in many cases of incorrect parts of the plant being used or the—the production with—or the—I want to say processing with different kinds of solvents as opposed to water.

Notably, for example, one of the things that we maintain in those water-based preparations is levels of glutathione, which support—it's an antioxidant, of course, that supports liver health. I find that to be just like such a—such a great example of how traditional use had it right and industry got it wrong. Again, from my understanding, I don't claim to be the expert on kava toxicity across the board, but it's something I've written a lot about and researched quite a bit, and obviously, take seriously because it's a plant that I like to use. The cases of liver

toxicity occur with some of those things that I mentioned – incorrect parts of the plant being used, poor production, and also, comingling of kava use and prescription medications, or kinds of pharmaceutical or things anybody that has. Of course, it's fair to say that if there's somebody who has a compromised liver already, then this is probably not the plant for them. But this plant meeting a healthy liver in the form of a high-quality product that's consumed as directed, I don't have a concern there about liver toxicity—and not mixing it with other pharmaceuticals or prescription medication. Did you want to add anything to that before we move on to some of the other points you mentioned?

Rosalee de la Forêt:

No, that was a great summation, I think, on that. It reflects my understanding as well, especially, a lot of that—my understanding is a lot of the liver toxicity issues came up, like you said, incorrect use of the plant—the plant parts, etc. I wonder—I think it's—100% agree with if there's liver toxicity, don't work with kava. You don't even know necessarily that that's a problem, it's just why risk it?

Rachelle Robinett:

Exactly, exactly.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's just like your history that it has, but we actually don't even know that, but of course, we're not going to do studies right now where we say, “Let's take these people with compromised livers and give them kava, and see what happens.” We will never know that, and so there's so many other wonderful plants to choose from, why—why risk that? You shared that beautifully. Thank you.

Let's talk about the “rare native plant.” That one's—one that it is a native plant. It's almost all farmed now. It's not something that's collected from the wild, so it is 100% cultivated plant, which I would say does not mean that we get to use the plant irresponsibly. Dandelion gets as much respect as a rare native plant in my book. I would just like to put it out there that kava is

not a rare native plant. It's actually farmed and cultivated specifically for sharing with the world, that's how that comes about.

Rachelle Robinett:

Yeah, yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Do you have anything to add to that, Rachelle?

Rachelle Robinett:

I don't—honestly, I don't think that I have too much more to add to that. I think, as you mentioned, there's—this is—this is a conversation that's so much bigger than kava. It's about how to responsibly use herbs. It's about how to responsibly use herbs from respecting the—the sacred use of particular plants and individual cultures. There's also the question of how best to harvest, how to cultivate, how to—and then production, and there on. But yeah, it's a huge conversation, especially for herbalists who, of course, we would love for much more of the world to be using herbs, but they're a finite resource. The way to build and maintain some sort of infrastructure that is respectful and responsible and high-quality, and can also facilitate the distribution as broadly as we would aspire that it be distributed is a challenge. I don't think—I don't think we—anybody has the answer to that. It's also the question of how we use the finite resources of the planet, in general, which is a long ongoing conversation as well. So, not really—I don't have anything more specific to add. I just think it's—I think it's a big ongoing balance that we're trying to achieve, some with more integrity and focus than—than others, of course.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I appreciate you bringing that bigger picture. I just had this memory come into my mind. I was driving through Northern Utah many years ago, and all of a sudden, there was fields and fields of lavender. There are essential oil companies in Utah. For a moment, I was like, "Oh, cool! Look at these fields of lavender!" It didn't take many beats for me to be like, "Oh, my

gosh.” This—surrounding the lavender is native habitat, sagebrush steppe land. It—clearly this sagebrush steppe land had been demolished, so that there was this monoculture of lavender. It was such a weird thing to be like, “Yes, lavender! That’s so—wait. Hmmm.” Now, we got these monoculture plants, maybe grown organically but disrupting native habitat, and just the conflict within that, obviously, that’s better than concrete there, but it’s still [unclear] That’s an ongoing discussion as herbalists that we need to keep having—just because it’s cultivated, doesn’t mean that that is therefore better than wildcrafted. How is it grown, how are things being tended and cultivated? How do we truly provide medicine for people in a way that enriches the earth and doesn’t just extract? Just because it’s plants doesn’t mean that that’s the case. Like you said, a very big discussion out there, one that’s not easy—easily answered with simple—simple answers, but one that we need to keep having.

Rachelle Robinett:

Yeah, absolutely.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I will just be very honest. I used to be afraid of having kava on the show because we’ve gone through a time of cancel culture and a lot of anger, oftentimes, rightfully so. I just felt like that plant is too much, like it’ll—the backlash would be too much to have it on the show. I got over that, obviously. Part of what that got—part of what helped me to get over this is my friend Olatokunboh Obasi. She’s from Africa, and for her, coffee is a very sacred herb. To have coffee is a ceremony. It’s a spiritual plant. It’s a deep plant for her. I thought—and just in that moment of recognizing that, I was like, every plant is sacred. Every single plant is sacred. Coffee is one of the most consumed plants in the entire world. Nobody is saying you cannot talk or discuss coffee or have coffee because it’s such a sacred plant. We could bring more sacredness in regards to coffee, don’t get me wrong. [unclear] I just wanted to bring up that too because sometimes, there is a kind of feeling about kava, like we shouldn’t be working with it because it’s a sacred plant. I don’t know if you have any thoughts on that, Rachelle.

Rachelle Robinett:

Yeah, yeah. There are—there are others obviously, so many others. I have nothing to add. I was—I was thinking about the—I was thinking about the—the beauty of having sacred relationships with plants, and the way that they are treated as kin or with reverence, and how much that can vary from culture to culture, meaning some are so well-versed in that kind of relationship and others, like modern Western culture are so disconnected that even just—even just beginning to work with herbs, beginning to ingest them or relate to them feels foreign and scary, and what a—what a distance that is from treating them with reverence or as kin or as sacred. A lot of—a lot of territory between those two relationships.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's so true. It is interesting even people who are starting to feel that spark of herbalism and wanting to turn to plants can have that intimidation and fear, not sure, uncertainty, just being afraid of what they—the plants might do, which made me think of just how important it is for those of us who might be a little bit further on the path to be continually representing how our relationship with plants is and how that evolved. It kind of is a guiding light. I appreciate my friend, Olatokunboh. She did that for me with coffee. She didn't tell me, "You should treat this with more respect. You shouldn't do this." She did not come at it with that language. She just beautifully brought me into her relationship to see what that looked like. It was just awe-inspiring and beautiful for me, in a way that I didn't feel should-ed or shamed or anything, but opened the door to more beautiful connections for me with all plants, not just coffee too.

Rachelle Robinett:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I hope I can keep doing that for people and showing because, again, as I said, I got started because of this-for-that herbalism. I had aches and pain, illnesses, and I wanted to work with

herbs instead of pharmaceuticals, and that's how I got into it, but wanting to keep holding that higher light of the connection and everything with the plants.

Rachelle Robinett:

Yeah, I love that. I love the—the example of teaching by showing and inviting others into a way of working with plants or a way of relating to them. You remind me of a conversation I was having yesterday. Somebody was asking me how to support someone who is interested in beginning to work with herbalism, and yet unsure about how reliant they should be on education, teachers, books, material, versus how much they should go based on intuition and just kind of explore the world, which I think that's a common question I received over the years, especially when we're—or I am encouraging people to be so self-reflective as a starting point.

What I—what I had answered was that I think there's a balance between—of course, we need some guidance to begin. We need the book or we need the teacher. We need the relative or we need the neighbor to show us how to start, and then we have the opportunity to go and explore on our own and learn more. After we learn more, we can return to our guides to learn more about what we learned more about, and go back and forth from there. Like I said, I like the—for me, that example that you just shared is a little bit of a hybrid of the two. It's showing a personal—and it's also cultural but showing—showing a way of relating and working with the natural world that is so alive and not necessarily following a recipe in a book. It feels a little bit in between kind of those two—those two—what do I want to say—“methods” of approaching the world. So, anyway-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I'm so glad you shared that Rachelle because that's beautiful, and a beautiful guide too. It's not one or the other, but how we get to weave those together. Speaking of recipes, I would love to talk about your Kava Old-Fashioned Mocktail. I love that it's a mocktail for obvious reasons. The ingredients here just look so fresh and delicious. Will you walk us through this recipe?

Rachelle Robinett:

Definitely. Before I drank mocktails, I really liked an old-fashioned, so I was inspired to create a—create a quote unquote old fashioned for—I made this recipe for—I adapted it for my own, but I created it for *Naturally*, my book. This is—yeah, it’s a great cocktail mocktail.

You start with a slice of orange and some cherry juice. You don’t need much of the cherry juice. Of course, if you have the ability to make some of your own fresh, that’s wonderful, but I was almost always using just the juice from frozen cherries. Thaw and there’s always that extra juice in the bag, so a little bit of cherry juice. So, a slice of orange, half ounce of cherry juice, sparkling water. I love sparkling water in my mocktails or cocktails. It’s a—often, I’m just doing sparkling water and a tincture. It’s my quickest way to make a mocktail. This one, of course, has the kava tincture as well. You do one serving of the kava tincture, and a little bit of lemon. You really want a nice—you get some citrus. You get some sweet. You get some depth from the cherries. The way to make it is to muddle the orange slice and the cherries in some kind of preparation glass, and then add the cherry juice, add your kava tincture, add your sparkling water, do a little squeeze of lemon or lemon juice if you have that. Stir all of those together, and then you can garnish with an orange rind or a little bit of grated orange peel or just some additional cherries. If you want to get really fancy, you put your cherries and a little twist of orange on a toothpick or something like that, put it on top. But also, if you’re—if you’re just making it for yourself and the presentation is less important than the palatability, you don’t have to get too fancy. So, that’s it. This recipe, yeah, this recipe is for one serving. Of course, if you’re making it for others, you can double or quadruple the recipe. I love it. I love it as something that tastes great, is beautiful, is complex, and is totally herbal.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It sounds so fresh and delicious. Thank you so much for sharing, and for listeners, you can look in the show notes to download your beautiful copy of this recipe, and/or go to herbswithrosaleepodcast.com, you can find it there as well. Thank you so much for sharing this Rachelle.

Rachelle Robinett:

Of course.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Before we move on, is there anything else that you would like to share about kava?

Rachelle Robinett:

I think I—I think I gave it—gave it all my love. There's—there's so much—I write a lot more about the specific effects and the constituents, and the history, and all of this in the book. What I would say is that for me, it's—it's one of my faves to just keep in my pocket, keep in my travel bag, keep in my purse for my constitution. Of course, everybody's constitution is different so someone else's favorite could be an herb that is the total opposite. It's like some energy—I don't know. I think of what would be the opposite. *Rhodiola* maybe? I don't know.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's an interesting choice. Yeah, maybe.

Rachelle Robinett:

A ginseng? I'm not sure. But anyway, that's all I have to say about my—my old friend, kava. Thanks.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you so much for sharing about kava. Speaking of your book, let's dive into that. It's published just last year, called *Naturally*. I would love to hear more about it.

Rachelle Robinett:

Definitely. *Naturally: The Herbalist's Guide to Health and Transformation*, this book is really the culmination of—of my work and my experience in the industry and out of the industry. It goes all the way back to my childhood. My goal with *Naturally* was to write a book that

anyone could enjoy and anyone could learn from. I wanted it to be beautiful, captivating, interesting, and also informative, so it's very much not a textbook. There are a lot of references in the back that can be used more like a—as references. You can flip through this table to check specific herbs for the best dosage or format or any special notes about how to use them. There's a ton of science. I really tried to make sure that any claim I made in a book had a—had at least one. There's—most have several corresponding references, so that it's all substantiated.

The book is formatted such that each chapter focuses on a different system in the body, and the corresponding category of herbs for that system in the body. For example, one chapter is about the nervous system and nervine herbs that benefit the nervous system. In that chapter, you'll learn about the nervous system. You'll learn about nervines and all the different ways that they work and how they can be used. Every chapter includes a case study from my work with clients. You see how these herbs are used specifically in somebody's life to improve their nervous system.

I talk about the nervous system. I have a chapter dedicated to stress and balance and adaptogens. There's one for energy, one for gut health and digestion, one for liver health and detoxification, one for sleep—so many—one for pain. That for me was the—it was really important for me to structure it that way because I find that to be the most effective way to teach herbalism to people because often if somebody doesn't have experience with herbalism, it just looks like this catalog of thousands and thousands of herbs. You're like, "Where do I begin? How am I ever going to learn all of these plants and all the things that they do? This is very overwhelming." But when you start to break it down into categories, you realize that there are much, much fewer herbs in each category, that those correspond to a body system or a need, a symptom or a cause that you might be trying to treat. And all of a sudden, instead of thousands of herbs to work with, you might have a couple dozen in—in this category, some more in this category. People, again, have found it to be really effective, really digestible, really easy to understand.

The book is—the book is full. I think the feedback I’ve received is that people are really excited about the fact that it is—okay, their words, not mine—“comprehensive.” Of course, it’s not comprehensive because no book about herbalism is comprehensive. It’s not possible, but I did my best to give—to put as much in there for somebody who is beginning from zero, or somebody who already has experience in the field and just wants to read more and learn more. It really should set somebody up for going from zero to “I feel comfortable navigating the world of herbalism on my own.”

Then the last thing I’ll say is that I—before I was an herbalist, I was a writer. I’ve been a writer since I was a little girl. It was always my dream to write books. I wrote the most beautiful book I possibly could about herbalism. I really, really, really tried to make it beautiful, and I’m happy that the reviews and feedback have mentioned that point as well. I think—I say that because, yes, it was important, but the—nature is—is profoundly beautiful. To be able to attempt to describe it—it was a—it was a gift of an opportunity, and I tried to do justice to the beauty of the plants and the magic, and the fascination, and the strangeness, and all the things that they are with my descriptions of them. Those—those sections of the book where I’m introducing each of the individual plants, they get pretty poetic because I was really trying to articulate these—these images—these plants in such a way that it would conjure the image in people’s minds. If you’re reading a book and you can’t see the plant, you can’t taste it and you can’t touch it, I wanted to try to make it as juicy and visceral for people as possible. There’s that and then there’s the science. There’s—there’s a lot in there.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I think you might have answered the question that was brewing in my head. One of the descriptions says that this book is about what it means to return to nature in a world that’s constantly pulling us away from it, so I was wondering about that. I wonder maybe that’s how this comes out, it’s through the evocative language and descriptions—or if you’d like to add anything more about that because that’s definitely a topic that’s a deep interest of mine.

Rachelle Robinett:

Yeah, yeah. That point I would say it's probably—there's different material in the book that's a little bit more to that point, and that is I would say at heart, I consider myself a philosophical herbalist. I'm much more interested in talking about how—and teaching people about how herbalism is a lifestyle. Herbalism can be transformative herbalism. It changes our perspective. Herbalism is a—is one of the ways in which we can reconnect with the natural world or return to our nature—our true nature. That is why it's called *Naturally*. There's a little in there for this endless fascination that I have with the idea of true self in our truest nature, and how we can get back to that root of self.

So, that there is—there are stories, mine and clients. There is direct advice and there are many sort of prompts in the book. I would say most of which are thinking prompts because I really like to try to help people think. The book was—the title for a long time was Thinking, Naturally, and that is still the title of my Substack. We dropped the “thinking,” but the thinking part of it is very important to me. I think that's where things begin first. So, there's a lot of material in the book to the point of how this is not just, as you said, an herb for a symptom. But this is a way of returning to our truest selves, which involves and also can be done through our relationships with nature—our relationship with nature. So—and health, I also—I equate health with—health to me is like a—is a shade or a nuance or even a medium through which we are able to express our truest self, if you will. The healthier we are, the more vital we are, the more in harmony we are, the more fully we're able to live. To me, I see that as very close to, not always synonymous with, but sometimes synonymous with being our—our truest self, if you will. It's—our health is what allows us to—to live and to feel and to grow and change and evolve, and to love, and to care, and all of the things. To me, it's really, really close to that idea of reaching our truest selves and our truest nature. So much, so much on that, but there's a lot about it in the book as well, which is why “transformation” is in the title too. It's not just *The Herbalist's Guide to Health*. It's *The Herbalist's Guide to Health and Transformation*. That was very intentional.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's beautiful. Where can people both find your book and how can they best learn more about you, stay in touch with you, etc.?

Rachelle Robinett:

Naturally is available everywhere books are sold. You can find it online. You can find it in bookstores. It's also in libraries. There's an audio book version, which I read, so you can do the audio book version. You can do the digital downloads. That's available—I'm sure we'll have the links, it's also linked from my website. I have it linked everywhere, so if you find me on the internet, the book should be there as well.

In order for—in order to find me on the internet, rachellerobinett.com is my website. Everything is linked there. I'm pretty active on Instagram, but I would say the most interesting place to find me is on Substack. I publish quite a lot there – essays, more information about—or more material from *Naturally* and about herbalism. Just leaning into my future that is focused on writing, that's a really wonderful platform up where I'm—basically, all my new material comes out on Substack, and then we let the people on Instagram know to go look at Substack. That's the flow.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Wonderful. Thank you so much for your time. Before you go, I have one last question for you and that question is, how has working with herbs changed the way that you see the world?

Rachelle Robinett:

What a big question. Working with herbs and learning plants to me is like relearning a language. As I mentioned earlier, it's a language that we all used to speak and that our bodies still know how to speak. I really see working with herbs and working with plants as a change in worldview; that we realize that we're surrounded by life, by medicine, by allies, by friends, by kin. We see how intelligent nature is, how wise and full of insights it is for us. As I've mentioned, I'm really impressed by how much it can teach us about ourselves. It can change not only our perspective of the outside world, but of our inner landscapes. These, again, as

I've mentioned can be really transformative. We are ecosystems. Everything is connected. This can lead to just holistically better lives. I think it's—it's profound. It can start so subtly, and yet it is—it is endless in its power to, as you said earlier, change the world.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you for that, Rachelle. This is—I love these conversations about just opening the doors of the potential of plants and how far they can really take us in that transformation, which is also a favorite word of mine. Thank you so much for sharing your love of kava, for sharing about your book, *Naturally*, and for taking time with us today. It's been lovely to spend time with you.

Rachelle Robinett:

It was wonderful. Thank you for having me.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Absolutely.

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 Christine Smith in New York.

Christine is part of this year's Rooted Medicine Circle, Cooling Inflammation, and The Healing Power of Teas. She has embraced a more intentional way of working with herbs, sharing that medicine making now feels "more like I'm having a visit with a dear friend" than simply completing a task. That same care extends into her garden, where she nurtures medicinal

plants, supports pollinators, and spends quiet moments connecting with the living world around her.

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

And if you'd like to be an herbalist, you can check out my foundational courses at HerbsWithRosalee.com.

Alright, you've made it to the end of the show, which means you get a gold star and this herbal tidbit.

Every kava plant that is grown in the world today is sterile. It produces no viable seeds and cannot reproduce on its own. The only way a new kava plant comes into being is when a human being takes a cutting and roots it, so this means that for something like 3,000 years across the whole Pacific, every single kava plant has existed because a person chose to carry it, plant it, and tend it. The plant and the people who love it are really bound together completely, and one can't go without the other. Its botanical name, *Piper methysticum*, comes from the Latin for "pepper" and Greek for "intoxicating," but the deeper story here is one of reciprocity. Kava is a plant that has entrusted its entire survival to human hands, and in return, we get the benefits of its beautiful calm and connection for a millennia. When we talk about using herbs responsibly, kava is perhaps the clearest reminder that these relationships run in both directions.

As always, thanks for joining me.