

**Elise Higley:**

I feel it's like a staple as far as nourishing and fortifying the body. For me, that's I'd go to. I'm feeling I need to stay strong and I got—I have stuff to do, it's always nettle. Probably as a farmer, that's probably one of my go-tos.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

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

Each episode of the Herbs with Rosalee Podcast is shared on YouTube, as well as your favorite podcast app. Transcripts and recipes for each episode can be found at [herbswithrosaleepodcast.com](http://herbswithrosaleepodcast.com) or through the link in the video description. Also, in the video description you'll find other helpful resources. For example, to get my best herbal tips as well as fun bonuses, be sure to sign up for my weekly herbal newsletter. Okay, grab your cup of tea and let's dive in.

I've been hearing about Oshala Farm from my students for a while now, and so last year, I decided to place an order, check them out, and I was so impressed with their herbs. I immediately knew I had to have Elise on the show.

Herb farmers are amazing, seriously amazing. It's so much hard work. It involves a lot of juggling of many details. Hearing about this from Elise just gave me even more respect for this important work.

For those of you who don't already know Elise Higley, she is a folk herbalist, wife, mother, grandmother and farmer. With her background in Western Herbalism at the California School of Herbal Studies, and her husband, Jeff's background in organic farming, they blended their dreams and created a full-fledged herb farm in 2013. Together, they own and operate Oshala Farm in Applegate Valley, Oregon with 80+ medicinal herbs in cultivation.

Her teachers and mentors are many, including Cascade Anderson Geller, Rosemary Gladstar, Karen Aguiar, Terri Jensen, Lily Mazzarella, Autumn Summers, David Hoffman, Shana Lipner-Grover, Jon Carlson and of course, the plants themselves. In her downtime, 9:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m., she helps with the Breitenbush Herbal Conference, TerraVita Herbal Symposium and works on agricultural advocacy with Our Family Farms. She also hosts their annual herb camp on June 30th through July 2nd this year at Oshala Farm.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Thank you so much for joining us today.

**Elise Higley:**

Thank you. It's a pleasure.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I'm so thrilled to get to meet you and talk with you, not only because I'm a huge fan of farmers, but because I've been hearing about you so much from word of mouth and I've been loving the herbs that I've been getting from the farm. It's very exciting to have you here and talk about one of my very favorite plants, but before we get to that, I would love to hear a little bit about your journey on this plant path.

**Elise Higley:**

Thanks for having me and that really means a lot because just knowing that people are excited to get our herbs and that you're thrilled to get them—they're our little babies and then we send them off into the wide world. You hope they're loved and respected when they arrive to you. Thank you for mentioning that.

My journey with plants--it was funny when we talked about being an herbalist and how you got that, I was like, "Oh, gosh. That's a word that's pretty loaded, a lot of responsibility. Am I really an herbalist? I guess I am." I started—My roots are at California School of Herbal Studies, where I studied. I think it's been close to 20 years almost now. When I was in the classes there, I obviously was just so excited and thrilled about learning to have a relationship with plants and how they work with the human body, and having so much respect for them and how they work. I started toying with making products. I have been making things for my friends and family ever since then. I was buying herbs in different places. I wasn't really aware or tuned in to how and where they were grown, which kind of is ironic because my husband, Jeff's background is in vegetable farming, so he's farming vegetables. I should've been more aware of that, but I somehow was just enamored with the product making. I wasn't paying as much attention as I should've or I felt like I should now.

When we moved to Oregon in 2010-ish—11, I stopped my full-time job as a school administrator and started making products, and came up with a tea line, an herbal tea line and wanted to use herbs that were really from a region. I was paying attention to really where herbs grew in Southern Oregon and was starting to source them in different places, and was realizing that I wasn't really sourcing them from who was growing them. They were from distributors, which surprised me when I realized how few herbs are actually grown in the US. I guess almost 90% of

what's consumed in the US is imported, even basil and nettle and things that we know grow here, but these are not.

As we were talking to these different distributors, when they said, "Hey, if you're going to be growing that, let us know. We'd love to have a sample and see if maybe we can buy from you." That's how our herbal farming world blossomed. It was from this tea line, of going to other places like Herb Pharm and Pacific Botanicals and seeing plants grown in crop production, which I had not really experienced. It was only in vegetables. It was very eye-opening.

My experience at herb school was seeing plants being grown at a garden scale in companion with other plant-loving companions. I've never had experienced growing medicinal herbs at a production scale in row crops, which I didn't really even realize was possible until we went to visit some of these other farms that were doing that, like Pacific Botanicals and Herb Pharm. That was just a whole new experience. With Jeff's background in vegetable farming kind of melded that experience of farming in rows and production and with medicinal herbs. The world game and challenge has been like how do you grow and produce herbs at a scale, but also keep that quality in reverence for the plants. When people who are herbalists and receive their herbs, they know when they see the quality and the difference. They are just like, "This is what I would've grown at home myself." It's been an amazing experience trying to figure it all out. Every year we're learning and growing, just trying to make it all work. It's been quite a journey.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Congratulations on ten years.

**Elise Higley:**

Thank you.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Just in my mind, I'm trying to picture what that must have been like for you and Jeff, because that—I get that he was a farmer before, but that's still a big decision to be like, "We're going to be herb farmers now." Do you remember? Was that a moment? Was it a prolonged discussion? How did that come about?

**Elise Higley:**

We kind of always joked that the herbs took us hostage and so now, we're just like a vehicle. We have some weak links here. Let's make it work! We were, for the first couple of years, producing vegetables for Farmers Market in our community, along with growing herbs. That was the first couple of years of the farm because growing vegetables also helps you pay your mortgage and your bills.

It was a journey just to even get into our farmland, which I think is important to share. It was really hard to find clean soil to grow medicinal crops in. We are dealing with a toxic legacy in the US, and really, the world at large, so it was super important to us with growing medicinal plants to have good, clean soil. That took a few different properties just to even find the right property that didn't have DDT in it still. It's been banned for 50 years, but they're still in our soil so that is one whole process. Then we finally found the land and it was a bigger piece than we had anticipated, but we fell in love with it. It had all the great soil, great water, great community, so we landed in the space and we had to figure out how we're going to make this all work. We sold our really only good working car and bought irrigation pipe, all the things that smart farmers do when they're trying to start a farm. We did six Farmers Markets a week for the first three years, actually, to try and make ends meet just so we could make that happen.

About the 30-year in, we just decided we either need to totally focus on the herbs or we need to stop because we can't do an amazing job by vegetable farming and herb farming. That was the moment I think that we discussed. The rest of it we were already like, "How did we end up growing so many acres of herbs? What's happening?" Like I said, we always joked that the herbs had a mission and we were just part of it.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I love that. It makes so much sense now.

**Elise Higley:**

Now, we have 90 acres in herb production.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Wow!

**Elise Higley:**

We're on 290 acres, but that is not all in cultivation, and then we do a lot of crop rotation. We grow 80 different varieties of medicinals. We're doing a lot of changing around and switching fields so that we can have good soil health and good crop health. It keeps us pretty busy, that's for sure.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Oh, my gosh. That is a lot of land. That was actually going to be my next question. You said that the land was larger than you had first envisioned that I was curious. Did you grow into that? Because I've seen that happen with farmers before, but it sounds like you did.

**Elise Higley:**

Actually, the first piece of land was 113 acres and then we had neighbors that were selling next to us. It was a good chance to buy that piece of land because it was right next to us and so that's how we've expanded. As the demand was growing, especially, we found during the times of COVID and people really wanting to source domestic herbs, we also wanted to stay true to our values of farming, which is leaving a third of the land fallow and not in production, letting that land rest and regenerate so that we're not constantly trying to get the land to produce every year, but that she has time to rest. Buying more land allowed us that opportunity to be able to do that, so I'm really grateful for that, for sure.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Some of my favorite herbs that I have gotten from Oshala Farm has been aromatics – thyme and oregano. Are you growing those as perennials then?

**Elise Higley:**

Yeah, about half of our—we grow our perennials. I think part of that is just keeping those aromatics is in the drying process. We harvest and we have the herbs into the dryer within 15 to 20 minutes of harvesting, so there's not a lot of lag time in that. Just keeping it on a low enough temperature to not lose the aromatics, but a high enough temperature to also be able to pass all the tests that we need to pass to be able to sell and feel that we are putting safe herbs on the market. A game in itself.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

So many moving parts. Just recently I've been—because I subscribed to your newsletter now, I see that you have a new mill and you're offering more roots and ground roots. That's exciting.

**Elise Higley:**

It's a huge step. We've been really—it's always been a bottleneck as we have been harvesting all those roots, but then we have to send them out to get milled. They're not in our possession for months at a time. It's just been a game, and then also paying freight to send them down to a mill and then back to our farm has been challenging. Now, we'll be able to know—we are actually, currently milling ashwaganda today again. We're really excited to be able to have that opportunity. We have a great team of people that work with us--about 20 people all together the high of the season, and about 15 of us full-time year round.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Wow! How cool. I'm just so excited about the farm and seeing you grow. Getting the mill I know is so important, so that's all just really exciting. I know you have other fun things happening on

the farm later this year, but before we get to that, I would love to hear about nettle and why you decided to choose nettle for your plant today.

**Elise Higley:**

It's my totem plant, nettle, which today was a perfect example, but just that sometimes I'm a little prickly upfront and can sting you, but in the end, I'm really good for you. Very nurturing person and I really am there to support you. Nettle and I have a lot in common that way.

It is, I think, the first crop that we planted on the farm. I think we actually moved with about 250,000 starts of nettle, believe it or not, in trays. I know. I know it was crazy. It was crazy. That was always our first harvest of the season too. That'll be in May we'll start to harvest nettle. To us, it's like the beginning of the season because it's when we are cleaning out all the dryers for the first time again for the season, getting all the harvest. Everything is all around the first harvest of nettle. It's just such an abundant plant in giving. It is so supportive.

I feel not only is it that way for my health that plant, but it also has sustained the farm financially. Now, we have people year-round, but in the beginning years, we could really only have our farm staff in, say, in March when we start or February, into the greenhouse because we don't get paid until we harvest. Once that first—we're paying for everybody to come in... like now, we've been paying for everybody all-winter long where we're not receiving any money in until May, especially when we're doing only contracts. We didn't have a website.

It's just always such a gift, nettle, because, "Thank you. The nettles finally bringing in some sales." I love that we also provide nettle to the fresh produce departments. We work with the local Pacific Northwest distributor called, Organically Grown Company. We sell half pound bags of fresh nettles so they're in all the produce departments. I get calls from different herbalists saying, "I'm so excited to see fresh, organic nettle in the produce department. I'm making pesto now," or whatever they're doing with it. It's really fun to see.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Wow, I have never heard of that. That is so awesome! I've seen nettle at the Ballard Farmers Market in Seattle, occasionally, but I've never heard of it being in the produce department of a grocery store.

**Elise Higley:**

Request it at your produce department. Maybe they'll start to carry it.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

That's so, so wonderful.

**Elise Higley:**

The nettle seed we harvest later in the year. Nettle root has been one that we haven't harvested a lot just because when you harvest the roots, the plants are ending and I always have a hard time ending my relationship with the plants of nettle, but that is a well-loved part of the plant as well. Our nettles and the perennial stands. We have about three different areas in the farm where we grow nettle because eventually, over years, it'll start to not produce as much and so we will then harvest the root, and then plant another field of nettle someplace else on the farm.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

It's a good rhythm with nettle. I love the recipe that you shared with us, the spring greens tonic of vinegar, nettle. I can feel your love for nettle. I share that love and also that springtime, like "Okay, now it's time to make this nourishing tonic." Will you share a little bit about that recipe? People can download that at [herbswithrosaleepodcast.com](http://herbswithrosaleepodcast.com) and get the beautifully illustrated recipe card, but I just love to hear your inspiration for sharing this with us.

**Elise Higley:**

I think my excitement about this annual tradition of gathering nettle and making a spring tonic is like fire cider is as well. It's something that you can do every year and that it brings so much—not just nourishing to the body when you're consuming it, but also just making it. I feel like that's part of it. I love to gather the nettles fresh. You also can use dried if you don't have fresh available. You also can use any kind of fresh herbs that are growing around your house and that you know are clean and healthy, like miner's lettuce or different plants that are growing. There's dandelion greens that are popping up now. There's beautiful violets right now all over the farm. Those are fun things to add in to this. I just use a cork jar. I fill it halfway filled with chopped different herbs. Some I leave some bigger than others just because I like to see them floating around in there and enjoy the beauty.

I think the biggest thing is just making sure that while you're collecting your herbs that there's a good, clean source. You're not getting it from the side of the road where they spray or something. Organic apple cider vinegar. Actually, did a fun class at our herb camp last year about making your own apple cider vinegar. You can make your own or you can buy it. I always use organic and raw apple cider vinegar. Just pour it over the herbs. Chop them up finely, pour it over the herbs. You can just shake it every day.

Make sure to label it, that's one thing. I'm sure everyone talks about making products, making sure you label correctly. I've always been taught to label on the jar versus the lid, especially if you have lots of things and you're opening them. You take lots of lids off and then don't

remember which one's which. You can also experiment doing one with all mixed spring tonic herbs, and then another one just with pure nettle and see what kind of vinegar you like the best.

I usually start using it in a few days, I mean if I'm out, but in a few days, you'll start to even get some flavor. I usually do moon cycles, four to six weeks, whatever works for you. You can strain out the herbs. You can press those. Sometimes I'll even add those until (0:19:29.3) whatever, because they're already infused with the vinegar in, so it's great for having broths, just throwing in those herbs that had been macerated in the vinegar and-

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

That's a very good tip.

**Elise Higley:**

Use it for salad dressings, marinades. You can dilute it in water and take shots of it in the morning or whenever. My fun spring tonic ritual.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

How lovely. Thank you for sharing that with us. What are some other ways that you like to enjoy fresh nettle?

**Elise Higley:**

Oh, gosh. I mean—I joke about me and my family, especially, when the kids were little. They would be like, "Is nettle in this?" Of course, it is! I do nettle enchiladas. I do nettle pesto. Gosh. What else? I'm always freezing nettle too with olive oil just because then I can add it. I love nettle soup. It's so good. What else do we do? Pretty much anywhere spinach or a green could be used, I'll switch it out with nettle. I put it on pasta sauces. I put it everywhere. It's great to dry and use and to add to things as well. I think the fresh have a little bit more of the antihistamines and allergy relief which is nice for the springtime for a lot of people.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Let's talk about dried nettle because it is so much fun to have the fresh nettle as they're going to start popping up here in a bit too. I wanted to reiterate the freezing of the nettle because I'm a big fan of that. I blanch mine, freeze them in vacuum sealed bags and then we get to enjoy them all winter long, which is really important to have that local, nutrient-dense food. We eat a lot of local foods here. We're in a farming community too and we grow most of our own food. It can be really easy to have a lot of potatoes and winter squash, stored vegetables, carrots, etc. Those greens are really important, doing their... while there's snow on the ground here.



The fresh nettle is fabulous, but the dried nettle is so important. I don't know. I probably have more nettle dried even though I love it fresh. You said you can add it to anything. It does have a little bit different texture though when it's dried. Do you have any tips? Or exactly what you like to add it to? Or how you like to work dried nettle?

**Elise Higley:**

I guess I just want to add one more thing on the fresh that's interesting when you're talking about the blanching, because I know in a lot of—some recipes will say to blanch it first or cook it slightly because it'll take the stinging out. From my pesto experience, I just use it fresh. What about you? Because I feel like the grinding—I have a pretty good blender, so maybe that-

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Let's talk about that because—so when I was taught about nettle, it was always you have to cook it first. For freezing purposes, the blanching helps, I think, to keep it in that fresh state or whatever. I think that's important. But then for many years, I was told you had to cook it because it was bad to eat it raw. Then actually, when my very first podcast episode was with Rosemary Gladstar herself and she recommended a nettle pesto, which did not involve cooking, I was like, "If Rosemary doesn't cook her nettle, then I'm not going to." After that, fresh nettle pesto works great. I have a nettle cake recipe that I used to blanch the nettle and then puree it, and then put it in the cake. After discussing that with Rosemary, I just pureed it. I'm always in for what's simple, so if it works for Rosemary, it works for me and it sounds like that works for you too.

**Elise Higley:**

Good. Thanks for having that conversation. I'm kind of the same thing. You see so many variations of blanched and not, but I use it fresh. I used to sell nettle pesto at the Farmers Market... 500 containers a week and I never had any problems with it.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

That's a very big testimony for that.

**Elise Higley:**

Yeah. Nobody complained. I do have people complaining about reaching into the bag of stinging nettle from the produce department not knowing that it's stinging nettle. It does say "stinging nettle" on there. Now, we have the disclaimer, "put gloves on." Sometimes people do call at the farm every once in awhile, "Can I pay you to run through the nettle field? I'm into urtication. I'm like, "No, we're not allowed to do that. I love that you're asking."

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

It could be a side business, the special patch that's just for urtication.

**Elise Higley:**

I know. Just found some—I don't even know if it's some YouTube video or something. It's a farm in England that has a fresh nettle eating contest once a year. They eat this amazing amount of nettle. I don't know if we could get away with that, but it seems fun. Dried nettle--let's talk about dried nettle.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

All right. Let's do it.

**Elise Higley:**

I do rehydrate a little bit if it's—I usually just put it in soup recipes if it's drying or I'll grind it and make a powder and I'll use it directly on something as like a sprinkle, like a gomasio or something like that. I'll add it in or mix it with a smoothie or something then I use the powder. I just use the powder and powder it up that way or I'll put it in dry and put it in a smoothie because I feel like it rehydrates enough, but mostly in soups and things that I'm using the dry, or obviously, tea because I love dried nettle tea.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I feel like the dried nettle tea, specially, strong, nourishing infusion, we're using an ounce of the herb to a quart of water and steeping that in hot water overnight, feels like somewhat of an herbalist rite of passage. It's something I teach my students. It's so interesting how many people start—there are people who drink it first, right off the bat they're like, "I love this." But there's also a lot of people who liken it to swamp water or grass clippings or other things that you wouldn't necessarily say, "Umm, that's delicious!" What's really fascinating to me is that people who grow to love it. It's just like their bodies have—you start drinking the nettle and maybe—it's not—it doesn't taste like you're drinking apple juice or whatever, but the body begins to crave it because it's just incredibly nutrient rich tea that's so lovely even though you could, you know, say it tastes like swamp water. I definitely feel that now, when I taste it, it just tastes like nettle to me. I feel like all the cells in my body sing when those first sips come in. Do you often do the strong infusion? Do you do more simple teas?

**Elise Higley:**

I go back and forth with simple and blended teas. I make herbal blends and sell them, but I am a huge proponent of my own kind of ritual. I pick an herb for the month or two and then I just, like you said, put an ounce in a jar. I put hot water over it and let it steep overnight, and then I



grab that to go for the day because I don't find, personally, that I'm really very good making the time to sit down for a cup of tea, so I have to grab-and-go, and then finally, I'll drink that quart of tea because I have it and then I see it's not—I didn't drink at all, so I have to finish it. I love using the french press. Sometimes I'll just put it in a french press at night and then I'll just press it out in the morning. A lot of times with nettle, I'll just eat the nettle. As I'm drinking the tea, I'll just leave all the bits in there, just put that cooked nettle because they're not even dehydrated all the time. I'll just stick that on my rest of my food for the day or whatever, so get to use it all.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Do you have any favorite herbs that you like to pair with nettle, like when you're making a tea blend?

**Elise Higley:**

An all-time favorite is nettle tulsi, of course. So lovely together. I think that does help people who have an aversion to the nettle flavor. I'm like you. I really love the nettle flavor and taste, but tulsi can win anybody over.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

That's true.

**Elise Higley:**

I don't know that many people who don't like tulsi. It's a favorite. We have a blend – it's nettle, tulsi, half and half, and then a bit of borage just for the energetics of courage, be good to yourself. Got that borage in there to give some courage because sometimes it takes courage to be good to yourself. Also, adds a little salinity to the blend because it can be a diuretic, so just keeping it in.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Lovely. I don't know, Elise, if we talked why someone would want to undergo nettle stings. Why would anyone want to try this plant in the first place?

**Elise Higley:**

The nettle stings? Why would anyone-

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Because some people might be like, "Stinging nettle? Why would you want to eat that?" Or drink it? Or have anything to do with it?

**Elise Higley:**

I think we talked about all the nutritive, high in iron, high in minerals, all of those parts of the plant are just so nourishing. I feel like it's a staple as far as nourishing and fortifying the body. For me, that's I'd go to. I'm feeling I need to stay strong. I have stuff to do, it's always nettle. Probably as a farmer, that's probably one of my go-tos. Of course, we touched upon the antihistamines of the plant. It does have a lot of allergy support, which I think that draws—I think probably most people know it from that, the stinging with the urtication we talked about, was people will do a flogging of the fresh plant. It creates welts. That's the stinging part, so anybody who has an experience stinging nettle fresh and being stung, it has this welting effect on your body that keeps lingering for hours. It does give—if you have all this stimulation. Especially, people with arthritis, that's a tradition. I guess it's European. I don't think it's very popular in America, but do you know who has a background on that part?

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I learned of it as a European tradition. Interestingly, they've done studies on this. It just cracks me up every time I think of it. Can you imagine, "We're looking for people who are willing to be flogged with nettle." It's part of a study, but it turned out well. I've seen two studies, one on thumb osteoarthritis pain and one on knee pain. Old European tradition. So many reasons to love nettle leaves. You mentioned the seeds briefly. Would you want to say a few words about the seeds? Is that something Oshala Farm sells? These nettle seeds?

**Elise Higley:**

We do sell nettle seeds. It's interesting, like you said, you study one thing and then you turn another way, and then you learn something else. I think the more you learn about anything, especially with herbalism—the joke about herbalism is as many herbalists are in a room, that's how many opinions you have on something. I was taught don't harvest nettle in its seed state because of the alkaloids, but then also we harvest nettle seed and that's for another customer. I really never experienced nettle seed consuming that. I was excited when we had an interest for that and we started to harvest that plant for the seed. You're researching what people are using for different things and a lot of it was kidney support. I was very—can really energize people, especially if fresh, so I thought I want to try it because I never tried it before.

We're eating the seeds out there as we're harvesting. That stuff, I mean, it is strong! It is really, really strong. I remember at the end of the day, hadn't eaten anything, full of energy, wired. I was like, "What's wrong with me?" It was like I had a pot of coffee or something and I don't really drink coffee. Oh, my gosh! It was the fresh nettle. Of course, I had to try it again because I wanted to make sure that's what it was. I think it's advice for people who are maybe adrenally

having issues or stressed to not be that great. I don't know. I'd love to hear your thoughts on nettle seed too and what your take is.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Those are—that's pretty much what I know. For one, the kidney support. Just recently, I had David Winston on the podcast sharing about nettle seeds, specifically. He told a great story about how nettle spoke to him about the kidney support and then that bolstering of energy as well. You mentioned gomasio before. I've had put nettle seed in my gomasio blends. One question I get a lot with nettle seed is – What does it look like when you're harvesting nettle seed? Because there can be some confusion there in terms of—anyway, I'll let you take it from there.

**Elise Higley:**

When we're harvesting nettle seed, it's in the calyx. It's got this covering on it and it's before it goes to the stage where it actually could germinate. It's like a chartreuse green. I wish I had a picture to show you because it's so beautiful, but we might have one on our website somewhere. It is interesting too because you're having to go to the plants and hand strip and harvest all the nettle seed when it's in its right stage. It's not like you're stripping all the—and the seeds come in these clusters, almost cones. You're kind of hand stripping the seeds off of it while you're saving them because they're super tiny and small, little seeds. We're cleaning them, winnowing that off of the rest of the flower. It's this green, chartreuse color is when it's really at its peak potency for medicinal purposes.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Wonderful. Thank you for that. I'm sure we can—we would've put a photo up by now, I'm sure, for those people watching. We'll find one.

**Elise Higley:**

I love one of my favorite times—James from Naturespirit. I don't know if you've ever spoken with him. He's a beautiful person. He was doing a farm herb walk on the farm last year, I guess it was. We were talking about the nettle plant. He was talking about it and I was just admiring it. The nettle on our field never—you don't always get to see it. It's so high because we're harvesting the aerial tops and then we let it go to seed and then we're cutting it down again, but this particular plant was probably 8 feet to 9 feet tall. It was off to the side of the field where all of us like to hang out with this plant. We were talking and the pollen was poofing off the plant and he was talking about using in smoke blends. I remember thinking, "Is that plant smoking? What is it doing?" He said it's just a certain time with the temperature and everything. The way it was just like poofing little pollen and it was spreading around. It was so fun because

it was like the plant was interacting with our conversation and everyone was looking at it like, “Is this really happening?” Our eyes were looking back and forth at each other. It was really fun.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

That is fun. I’ve never seen that one. What a moment to have.

**Elise Higley:**

I know. Right where we were standing there next to the plant talking about it, so I think it liked it.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Obviously. I have a question about the farm. I’m wondering, do you do preorders at all? Or is it all like you go to the site and order what’s available at the moment?

**Elise Higley:**

In the winter time up until early spring, we take preorders for herbs that we don’t have in stock, and that’s just basically emailing us and letting us know. It’s usually for anything over—I think 3lbs is our minimum for preorders just because it takes us time to go back and forth and talk with you, and then we let you know that it’s in stock before we put it on the website. If it’s anything less than that, you can just get on a waitlist on the website. We’ll let you know right away when it’s available.

The preorders are especially for manufacturers or people that are relying on herbs for production. We want to make sure that we continue being a steady supply for them. It also helps us plan our whole crop plan because, as you can imagine, this whole mad formulation of trying to figure out how much to plant of every plant and making sure we have enough, and then figuring out what the yield would be, plus the dried down ratio for each plant is different, and that we have enough to last us til the next season. Soon as you have a customer who comes in and buys all of it, and then you’re out for the whole season. It’s a whole guessing game, so if you get your preorder in, then we know that we can supply that for you and make sure we plant enough for your needs. That’s how that works.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

My best friends are farmers, so I feel like I know a little bit about the farming world, but what you just explained to me, I felt like wow! Okay, there’s a lot going on here in terms of everything that needs to be thought of.

**Elise Higley:**

And then the plant families, because sometimes we grow on contract for medicine making companies and/or body care product companies. They want you to grow a certain amount of a certain plant, but maybe we already have a lot of that plant family like the *Asteraceae* family already in the field and we don't want to plant too much of one plant family or another so that we can make sure that we have good health in our plants. It's like the human race. We want diversity. That's the strength, right? It's having diversity. Plants are obviously the same way for the health of the whole farm and for the planet. Diversity solves a lot of problems.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

It's really wonderful to hear all that you're doing with the size of the farm that you have because I am more familiar with smaller farms. It's just really impressive all that goes into it, all the different—like you're saying, the fallow fields, the diversity. All of it. I'd love to hear what you have going on for herbal offerings for folks.

**Elise Higley:**

The thing I'm probably most excited about is what we are talking about – the importance of having a closer relationship to the farm and the way the plants are grown out in the field. I know a lot of people don't have the honor of being able to be with live plants, especially so many of them at once. We do have the herb camp once a year where we open up the farm to people camping. They don't have to camp. We do have camping bell tents that we put up for people that are coming from out of the area that can't bring a tent. It's a chance to get to—and then we invite teachers from really, the Pacific Northwest, and then a few from the rest of the United States come in. We get a chance to really work with plant medicine right out on the farm. It's a little bit something different that we can offer I feel like.

That's one of the things I loved about the California School of Herbal Studies is that there was a garden. We got to go in and garden. I feel like in the herbal world, sometimes we don't get to be with the plants enough and so it's really great to be able to give a whole weekend for people to experience plants in the fields, make medicine, fresh plant tinctures and all of that out there. Just even sitting out in the field with a whole field of *Echinacea* or half an acre of tulsi you're sitting with. You know what I mean? It's just really—it's wonderful to get to go around and see actually how many plants you do know out there, and having a connection with them.

You get to geek out with a bunch of other plant lovers, play music and have fun herbal mocktails and fun stuff when we do marketplace. Just creating community because I think

there are a lot of really good, fun people out there, all these herbalists, so it's good to get together once a year and get a chance to—and also for us to get a chance to really enjoy and take back the beauty and rejoice in all the hard work because I feel like, as a farm, you know with farmer friends, we work really hard and a lot. A lot of times I feel like we don't sit back enough and just really enjoy the space because we're always working making sure things are getting done. It's a weekend for us to relax and hang out and be with other herb lovers. That's my highlight of the year--the herb camp.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Oh, I love that. You said it's a weekend. About how many people come?

**Elise Higley:**

It's usually about 150 people.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Oh, wow! That's lovely. It sounds almost like an herb conference, but maybe a little bit more a flow to it, maybe? Is there certain classes that you show up to at a certain time?

**Elise Higley:**

The morning workshop and an afternoon workshop, and then there's different activities. We start on Friday. We do the whole farm tour. We go in the dryers. We do have a farm growing track for people, because we do have people that are there that are other farmers that just want to learn or herbalists who want to grow their own herbs. We try and help out on that end and get people more connected.

We also have a lot of our buyers come and audit us that weekend, which is an interesting fun thing, but it's their chance to get to do a farm visit and check off that they've actually seen what's going on at the farm once a year, and know that we're doing what we say we're going to do. They also get to have a really great fun weekend, so that's fun too. We do a special kind of audit walk with some of our buyers that need to do that. We do have—obviously, for buying herbs from us. You should feel comfortable going to any farm that you buy herbs with and know that they're doing what they say they're going to do.

Also, we're a full production farm so it's nice to get some kind of notice but you should be able to go and check out where your herbs are being grown and feel like you don't have to—it shouldn't be a closed door.



**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

And then there should be music and mocktails too, sounds like.

**Elise Higley:**

Yeah, because why not if we're all there together?

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

What are the dates for the camp this year?

**Elise Higley:**

For 2023, it is June 30th through July 2nd. It's up on our website, which is oshalafarm.com.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Can you describe where you're at? Because some people might be—I'm sure right now—wondering, "I want to go to that. Where do I go?"

**Elise Higley:**

We're in Southern Oregon. We're in between Ashland, Oregon and Grants Pass. Our address is Grants Pass but we're really in the Applegate, which has no—we don't have a zip code, so we take Grants Pass'. Medford Airport is where you find—we actually get people from all over the states, which is so fun. It's really great to see people from all over.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I can see why. It's just really fun, informative experience to spend time with the plants, spend time with plant people, making plant medicine, the ability to see all of those plants growing too is just really special. At that time of year too, I know it's just after the summer solstice is. I know in my garden it's peak time with so many plants going on.

**Elise Higley:**

I always joke that unfortunately, whenever it's looking its best for harvesting, I'm always like, "Don't harvest it! It looks amazing!" I can't say anything because they were harvesting. Isn't that the point? We harvest at the peak potency. It looks amazing. We're harvesting it now. I was like, "Just enjoy it for a few hours."

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I completely understand that because I have a very hard time getting stuff from my garden and I end up—I grow over a hundred medicinal plants but I don't harvest all of them because I just can't, and so I'll end up ordering them from wonderful places like Oshala Farm so that I can—and some things like *Astragalus*, which I know that you have. I couldn't grow enough *Astragalus* for just me and my husband. There's two people but we go through so much *Astragalus*. That would be rows and rows of *Astragalus* for us. I can't do that in my little garden, so it's nice to be able to know I can get them from places where I really trust and then enjoy my plants in the garden.

**Elise Higley:**

There's the healing of that too--having that connection. I think that is wonderful. We have some garden spaces too where we plant—you're at the end of the row and you're planting out a plant and you have 50 extra something skullcap. It's like, "I know a place where it could go." We have some spots like that, which is pretty fun.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Thank you so much for sharing about nettle and sharing about the farm and sharing about plant camp. Before you go, I'd love to ask you the question I'm asking everybody in Season 8, and that question is – What has been your most important herbal mistake?

**Elise Higley:**

The most important herbal mistake that we probably made on the farm was when we grow to the scale we do, there's not a lot of books or guidelines on—sometimes it'll say, "could make people photosensitive. Be careful, but it doesn't happen to many people. It could be slight allergies" or something like that. We had a harvest of rue and it was a lot. It was 600 row feet. We told everybody, "Wash your hands after because it could make people photosensitive." We're harvesting calendula afterwards. Nobody seem to have any problems. The next day we got a phone call from somebody and they said, "Do you want the good news or the bad news?" I was like, "What's going on?" He's like, "I can't come in to work today, that's the bad. The good news is that my profuse vomiting has nothing to do with this blistering rash on my stomach. I was like, "What?" "I called the poison control and this is what they said." I was like, "What is happening?" We ended up calling some other botanists and herb scientists and ask what could be happening. They're like, "The rue. Make sure at least you have comfrey so you can just keep slapping the comfrey on there. It's going to last a while and you're going to think it's not going to ever go away, but after a few months, it'll be fine." I was like, "A few months?" I always joke

that maybe that's how they came up with the term, "You rue the day" because I believe that's what happened. I don't know. So that is probably our biggest mistake we've made.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

It was just one person that reacted badly.

**Elise Higley:**

No, not badly, but about four people had a reaction and blistering rash.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

So, is the morale of the story you use gloves when harvesting rue?

**Elise Higley:**

Yes, and just make sure when you're taking those—I mean, we saw people that harvested—we haven't had any problems since that time, but it's just that it exudes this milky liquid. Nowadays, with COVID, people have been more avid about washing hands. I think in those days, people were just like, "I washed it a little bit and it was fine."

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

It's really you have to get rid of all that that's on you.

**Elise Higley:**

Exactly. Gloves are hard because with some—if you're using—we don't really use disposable gloves on the farm, just trying to limit our plastic intake. Sometimes with planting, too, stuff can break. It's a beautiful flower and a beautiful plant, but it's a strong one and lots of lessons to be learned, for sure. Always learning... Being reminded of having reverence for the plants. Hopefully, nobody's harvesting that much rue that it will matter, but just being aware.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I grow it on my garden and this one I just admire the beauty of rue. You mentioned, Elise, that you're trying to limit the plastic on the farm. I'm so glad you mentioned that because I had wanted to mention how much I appreciated getting herbs from Oshala Farm and having them in paper bags. That was really cool. Then there's instructions on there like "Put this in a glass jar once you get it," so that was just great. That was just really wonderful to have it come in a paper bag. No plastic in there, so thanks for that.

**Elise Higley:**

Of course, I know it was a bold move at the time we were hoping. We got a little bit of flack, but mostly love from it.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Well done. Thank you and best of luck for this growing season and with plant camp. That sounds really fun.

**Elise Higley:**

It's herb camp, actually, but I like your plant camp better. I feel like maybe we should change the name.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I just pulled that from somewhere. Sorry about that. Herb camp.

**Elise Higley:**

I love it! I like that. We will be able to have you down sometime. It would be amazing.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

It would be wonderful.

**Elise Higley:**

We do farm tours every month too, just to put that out there. We do farm tours May through September, I think, is when we do farm tours.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

If I lived in the area, I would come every month because there's something new every month-

**Elise Higley:**

I have to lure you down to herb camp some year and get you down here. It'd be really fun.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

That would be wonderful. Thank you.

**Elise Higley:**

Thanks so much for your time.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Thank you for your time, Elise. It's been wonderful.

**Elise Higley:**

All right, take care.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Thanks for being here. Don't forget to head over to the show notes at [herbswithrosaleepodcast.com](http://herbswithrosaleepodcast.com) to get a transcript of the show. There you'll also be able to sign up for my weekly newsletter, which is the best way to stay in touch with me. On the show notes page, you'll also find convenient links for the many places you can find Elise. You can also visit Oshala Farm directly at [oshalafarm.com](http://oshalafarm.com). If you'd like more herbal episodes to come your way, then one of the best ways to support this podcast is by subscribing on YouTube or your favorite podcast app.

I deeply believe that this world needs more herbalists and plant-centered folks and I'm so glad that you're here as part of this herbal community.

Also, a big round of thanks to the people all over the world who make this podcast happen week to week. Nicole Paull is the Project Manager who oversees the whole operation from guest outreach, to writing show notes, to actually uploading each episode and so many other things I don't even know. She really holds this whole thing together.

Francesca is our fabulous video and audio editor. She not only makes listening more pleasant. She also adds beauty to the YouTube videos with plant images and video overlays.

Tatiana Rusakova is the botanical illustrator who creates gorgeous plant and recipe illustrations for us. I love them. I know that you do too.

Kristy edits the recipe cards and then Jenny creates them as well as the thumbnail images for YouTube.

Michele is the tech wizard behind the scenes and Karin is our Student Services Coordinator and Customer Support.

For those of you who like to read along, Jennifer is who creates the transcripts each week.

Xavier, my handsome French husband, is the cameraman and website IT guy.

It takes an herbal village to make it all happen including you. Thank you so much for your support through your comments, your reviews, your ratings. I read every review that comes in because they're like a little herbal love letter that brightens my day, like this one:

I especially enjoy the episode about the three ways of herbs that are healing. As a seasonal allergy sufferer, two thumbs up for the nettle, for the allergies episode. I use strong nettle tea this year for the first time, starting a couple of months before allergy season, and I found my symptoms far more manageable than they have been in the past.

Do you love this podcast? If you leave a review for me on Apple podcast, I may be reading your herbal love letter on the show next.

Okay, you've lasted to the very end of the show which means you get a gold star and this herbal tidbit:

First of all, herbalists love to love nettle. It's nutritious and it's medicinally powerful. To date on the podcast, I've interviewed Rosemary Gladstar and David Winston about nettles. I've also released two solo videos on nettle. If you haven't listened in already, check out all of those episodes for lots of info, plus delicious nettle recipes.

Some people will tell you that growing nettle in your garden is absolutely bananas, but I do it and I love it! Nettles are some of the first greens to show up in the springtime and I love having them nearby so I can harvest them really easily. To grow your own nettles, it's often easiest to transplant them from another existing stand of nettles. They will grow and spread easily from their roots. Because of this spreading ability, I grow my nettles in a container raised bed where they can't escape, at least through their roots. Or if you don't already know of an existing stand, you can buy nettle seeds and then start your own.

Nettle leaves like to be harvested when they're young. If you harvest them at the leaf node, they will branch and continue to grow. In this way, you can get several cuttings from the same patch. Nettle also loves to be severely cut or mowed down. They will grow back for yet another harvest

after you do that. Grow your nettles in super rich soils. I put more compost on my nettle patch every year. They also like a bit of shade and lots of moisture.  
Enjoy your fresh nettles.