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**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.

At one point during this interview, I forgot I was doing a podcast, instead I was caught up in all that Greg was sharing and simply there for the conversation which ranges from the interesting ways that plants caught Greg's attention as a young boy, to the beauty and nourishment of oaks, to the challenges the lands of Indiana face, to the perils of raw garlic. We cover a lot.

For those of you who don't know Greg Monzel, he's a student of nature with a gift for nourishing deep connections between people and plants. He first experienced the medicinal power of plants as a teenager when he successfully treated his chronic strep throat with raw pineapple. He has been a practicing herbal educator, medicine maker and grower since 2008. Greg and his wife, Colleen, co-founded Persimmon Herb School in 2015 to hold plant-centered space and build a healing community. You can visit Greg at [persimmonherbschool.com](http://persimmonherbschool.com).

Welcome to the podcast, Greg.

**Greg Monzel:**

Thank you, Rosalee. It's great to be here.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I'm pleased to have you. I'm so excited about the herb that you've chosen, but obviously, the place we need to start is this whole "pineapple strep throat" thing. I would love to hear that story.

**Greg Monzel:**

Sure. I just told the story this morning so it's fresh for me. I was a middle schooler, probably 12 or 13 years old. In the summertime one year, I started getting strep throat. My mom who's a nurse—she wouldn't take me to the doctor for anything, but if I needed a prescription she would know that and she'd take me in. So we'd go in, I get antibiotics, take that for the full treatment period, and then my strep throat went away, of course, but then within a week or so it was coming back. I would go back to the doctor, get the antibiotics, take that again, it would go away. A week later, it's coming back again. I don't know why but I probably took five or six rounds of antibiotics that one summer. It just seemed to me intuitively this did not make sense. This is not how medicine is supposed to work and I don't want to keep doing this.

So I had that in mind and I was at my grandparent's house. My grandpa had a copy of Gary Null's, *The Complete Encyclopedia of Natural Healing* or something like that. I just looked at it and thinking maybe there's something in here about strep throat and I found this entry for pineapple. Of course, the bromelain, the enzyme that's in it, is proteolytic so it breaks down protein, so you can process the pineapple, keeping the core end where the core is the more concentrated part in bromelain. Eat little bits of it and let it run down your throat and it will help to break down the protein, the bacteria, and of course, kill the bacteria in your throat. I gave it a try next time I started feeling my throat itchy and scratchy like I'm getting infected, I got on my bike and pedaled down the grocery store and picked up a pineapple out of the produce department. I came home and prepared it, and I ate it. My strep throat went away and it didn't come back this time.

It was a really magical moment for me to connect how I can take some responsibility for my health and how powerful healing foods can really be. I don't think I had really thought of them as having healing capacity before. Of course, I had nothing to lose. This is a—it's a food. It's pineapple. I love pineapple, so of course, I'm going to give it a try.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I love that story for so many reasons. I love how young you were and that these things just came together like, "There's a book. I'm going to look at it." I love that you just got on your bike and

went to the supermarket because that's how I grew up very much as well. I don't know that a lot of kids grow up that way these days. I love that and that sense of empowerment on so many levels, and then of course that you got better. I also had strep throat repeatedly as a kid, and so-

**Greg Monzel:**

Did you?

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I did, yes. I'm a little bit jealous because I did not come up with the pineapple solution. It was all antibiotics for me, which I've often wondered about that after effect of—for taking antibiotics so often at that young age. Thanks for sharing that story. I often start out with hearing what caught you on your path and what's led you here, so I'm guessing that's part of it, but I'd love to hear more about your plant path.

**Greg Monzel:**

That's a big part of it in terms of shaping my view of healing plants. I started researching more about nutrition and plants at that point, functional medicine stuff a little bit. As I was graduating high school and moving in the next part of my life, I didn't really know what I wanted to do yet, not a lot of direction. I was really into survivalism in the wilderness, so I took a trip out to the Pacific Northwest when I was 19. It's my first solo wilderness adventure. I picked up a copy of Michael Moore's book. I think it's *Medicinal Plants of the Pacific West* or something like that. Maybe it's *Pacific Mountain West*—one of Michael Moore's books—and read it on the night I was heading into the woods. I read at my hotel, last stop before the wilderness. There was an entry in there about *Usnea lichen* and how it can be beneficial for respiratory infections. I thought I've had respiratory infections. Those can get pretty nasty. I might need that.

When I got to the woods where I was at, it was kind of rainforesty and lots of lichen growing in the trees. I was able to tease it apart and find a little thread in there, verify it was *Usnea lichen* based on his descriptions. I collected a little bit and put it in my backpack, and just forgot about it and took my little wilderness adventure, and then ended up going home. When I got home, my dad who I was living with at the time, had a really bad respiratory infection. He's like, "I'm really glad to see you, but I'm going to have you take me to the doctor tomorrow because I feel terrible." I said, "Oh!" It was like a light bulb went off in my head and I thought, "I have this plant I gathered when I was on my trip. Do you want to try that and see if it helps?" "Could it hurt?" "Probably not." I brewed him up a tea with it, gave it to him and Pops drank it. The next

morning he said, basically, in so many words, “I feel so much better. Just make me more tea. I’m not going to go to the doctor.”

I think that that was pretty much the end of my dad going to the doctor and he has pretty much treated me as his source of natural health ever since. That experience inspired me to realize I want to do this more. I want to deepen my learning and I want to help people with natural medicine. That sparked my learning more about it.

Some of my big teachers that have been really important for me have been Song who I studied with at the Northeast School of Botanical Medicine. He taught me how to identify plants, make medicine and do a lot of really amazing things. He’s a very influential teacher for me. I studied with Jim McDonald also in his intensive program. I learned a lot about energetics and a lot of great things with Jim. Margi Flint is wonderful and other folks. I’m constantly trying to learn new things and deepen my skill set. In fact, just this morning signed up to finish my Bachelor’s degree finally in biology in field botany.

### **Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Wow! Wow! Tell me a little bit about persimmon too.

### **Greg Monzel:**

Our business is Persimmon Herb School. It’s a partnership between me and my wife/partner, Colleen, who is a yoga teacher, meditation instructor and herbalist as well. We bought our place with the goal of having this homebased education center, garden and homestead together where we could help share our passion for plants and connecting with nature with other people. We are home to a mature growth of persimmon trees, so we named it for the dominant plants that occur here. We also harvest those persimmons and sold those to local shops as persimmon pulp in the fall. Last year I think we did 75lbs of persimmon pulp and about 30lbs of pawpaw as well.

### **Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Wow. Wow, thanks for sharing that! I’m often struck by how similar stories are. I also got into herbalism through survival stuff. I went to school—that’s like my first schooling out of college is I went to different survival schools. My dad was also game for trying all sorts of things, so here’s to cool dads, or at least being open to that. Thanks for sharing about that.

I would love to dive into oaks and acorns. This is the first time they’re showing up on the show. Something—speaking of which—oaks and acorns are something I work with a lot more when I

was in—going through survival schools. Now, where I live there's not really any significant oak population but it's a plant that I miss and I'm excited to hear what you have to share.

**Greg Monzel:**

That's a shame. Where are you that you don't have any oaks?

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I'm in the Methow Valley of Washington state which is a couple hours south of the Canadian border. It's more eastern Washington. When I was in western Washington, there were oaks and people planted them as ornamentals too, so I would go harvesting in neighborhoods and Seattle, that sort of thing. There's one oak tree that I know of here.

**Greg Monzel:**

Okay, so you have harvested acorns though and you've...

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Yes, oh, yes.

**Greg Monzel:**

Really? That's exciting.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

They make—we'll talk about your recipe in a bit. I just think they make such a lovely flour that's just so absolutely delicious. But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Let's hear I guess why were you inspired to choose oak for the podcast?

**Greg Monzel:**

Oak has been a plant for me that feels so motherly, grandmotherly even. The oak tree supports so much life in nature. It is full of epithetic goodness of their lichens and the whole canopy of things going on. When we look at what insect species around what plants in the environment, the oak tree will support twice the diversity of the next highest tree in our environment. At least, here in the eastern deciduous forest.

That is just something for me, connection-wise, that is just special about oak in particular. It's—I think I was called to get to know it. It was one of my meditation trees when I was also a younger guy. I started meditating early. I started meditating at age 8. There was this tree that I

would go to up behind my dad's place and it was my special tree to sit under. It just had the right buttress roots to support my little behind sitting there for a long time in meditation on this little hillside. I think that's the first I really connected with this tree. I thought of it as my "giving" tree.

In fact, one day, I went out there and it had been logged out of the forest. It had been a few years since I have been there. I literally sat there and cried for that tree and I never thought I would have that kind of connection or feeling to the plant.

I was early on in my medicine making workshops that I started to teach, which I have been doing for about 15 years now—but I was doing a lot in the foraging workshops in the herbal medicine vein. We were making teas and salves and cool stuff like that, and then I met some other foragers who were like, "How are you going to eat out here? You can't just eat tea and be okay as a survivalist." They challenged me a little bit to think about how I was foraging or at least, teaching about it, so I went to one of their workshops about harvesting acorns because acorns are one of those rare sources of carbohydrate and starch that you can find out in nature in a really dense, easy to gather, easy to collect way. Of course, acorns you can't just pick them up off the ground and eat them most of the time. They do take some work to process to make them edible, but I feel like that's just true for everything.

If you think about the offset for agriculture and what it takes to grow, let's say, corn, there's the tilling, the cultivation after planting, sorting it and protecting it from all the different things that want to eat corn to get a crop finally in the end. You have to dry it just right or it might mold. Acorns do most of that for you because the tree is just growing and doing its thing, but you have a little more process you got to do on the backend to make it edible. I think it works out to be a similar amount as somebody who also grow—I also do grow my own corn and try do some small grain production. It works out almost the same I feel like.

### **Rosalee de la Forêt:**

That is such a great analogy. I also grow corn so I get that and it's—I've never really thought of it like that. One thing you're making that I'm being reminded about is when I was in college, I got really into the simplicity movement. I would just read all these books. This is way pre-herbalists. I remember reading about acorn flour and I just thought it was cool. I hadn't done anything with it. I just thought it was cool.

I was staying with my grandfather, my Papa Jack in Texas one summer, and we found an oak tree and there was all these acorns. I told him just repeating what I had read. I was like, “You can gather these and then you can soak them,” and I went through all the process of what you’d do from what I read. My Papa, who I loved dearly, just looked at me and said, “Why would you do that? You can get flour for \$.99 a pound at the store.” I didn’t really have a response for that because I just—in my heart I knew that it was so cool that we could do it ourselves. Obviously, when we do that, when we buy it from the store, we’re also erasing all of the work that went into that, so...

**Greg Monzel:**

Erasing the work and also I think we’re disconnected. It’s a disembodied way to get our food and it feels empty. We don’t feel connected to those same biscuits that you make from wheat flour or from the \$.99 a pound bag of wheat compared to those dense acorn muffins that you can make where you know what tree you were under when you gathered those. You can smell the argan. You can see the squirrels scurrying around. You just feel connected to your land and to the place that you’re in. Nutritionally too, you just can’t compare acorn flour to wheat flour. It’s way more nutritionally dense and fatty and rich. When I eat things cooked with acorn, I feel like I’ve eaten something meaty, something substantial and heavy in a way that I don’t get that from a typical pastry crust or something.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

That’s so true. I love the image of the squirrels and that connection to place and the empowerment that brings us with that connection.

**Greg Monzel:**

There’s an ancestral aspect to it too because pretty much anywhere you are in the Northern Hemisphere, your people ate acorns at some point in their history not that far long ago.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Would you explain a little bit what goes into processing acorns to make them edible?

**Greg Monzel:**

Sure. You’ve got your—here’s my—here’s a red oak acorn. Collect your acorns. You’re going to go find a nice tree. I try to find one during a mast season when they’re really producing a lot of nuts and there’s just abundant acorns on the ground. I gather them and sort as I gather. I discard anything that has a hole where there might be a weevil in there, or if it’s obviously

discolored, then it might have some mold or something, I'd leave that behind. I throw pretty much good ones in my basket. I bring them home and they're still wet and damp at that stage, so you got to dry them out. I spread them out usually on a screen or out maybe on a blanket on my deck would be a pretty good spot to dry them out too for awhile. It's okay to put the acorns in the sun to dry which we wouldn't normally do with a lot of herbs, but as a food thing, they're okay done like that. The shell protects them from direct insulation.

After they're dry, they can be stored like that and that's how they are stored best. When they're ready to process then you crack the nuts, take out the nut meat inside and you have to rehydrate those. You soak those overnight and then once they're rehydrated, you can grind them up. I use a Vitamix blender. They're great. We have two now. I feel really blessed about that. Blend them up and make a slurry. It'll be basically like an acorn milkshake at that stage. You're going to add extra water. At that stage, I put them into a colander. I've got a big two-gallon metal colander. I line that with muslin cloth and then that goes on top of a couple of sticks over a bucket, so it can all just drain into this five-gallon food grade bucket. I put the acorn into the cloth on the top and I start running water over it and that leaches out the tannins from the acorn. You get a little bit of starch come out too, which is why you have the bucket there. The bucket catches the starch which falls out of solution and collects on the bottom. You can reserve that and reclaim that back later. It takes about 40 gallons of water or so per gallon of acorn to leach out the tannins enough to where it tastes bland and starchy instead of astringent and bitter. That's the stage which it's ready to go. You can either use it fresh as like a acorn grits like that. You can culture that with lacto-ferment style and make a acorn yogurt sort of thing that's really tasty, or you can take it and take the meal and dry it out completely, grind it up again to make acorn flour.

This is my batch from last fall. You can see it's like a—this is from white oak acorns, *Quercus alba*. You get a white-ish colored flour from it, but when I do the red oak acorns, I get a red colored flour from it. I think—I don't know this for sure, I'm unable to verify this—but I think that's where the red oak, white oak designation comes from. It's from the color of the acorn meal that you got. Because it's a lot more predictable than looking at the trees and saying, "Oh, yeah. That's a—these characteristics are red oak." It seems more reliable than the lobing on the leaves or the bark color or other aspects.



**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

That's interesting. I've only worked with the white oak before. I was always taught that the white oak tends to be a lot less astringent. I don't know if that water requirement changes between the white and the red.

**Greg Monzel:**

A little bit, but it's like an exponential curve. It doesn't seem like that much more water to the red oaks but the red oak acorns are better preserved and they have a longer collection time through the season. Your white oak acorns are going to germinate in the fall and that makes them more likely to spoil and become otherwise contaminated. I gather them right away, process them right away. I dry the red oak acorn for storage for longer term use.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Nice and your setup sounds really slick. That's a really great way to do that because sometimes I think that acorn processing can feel a little bit overwhelming. It's complicated, but the way you described it and that setup just sounds very easy.

**Greg Monzel:**

I think the most complicated part is the leaching, especially if you're trying to do that in jars, which is how I was taught. It does take a long time to get there. It's hard to really get it finished. I think using it more of a percolation type method instead of a maceration method really helps, but there's different ways to improvise that. There's a local person around here who they just crack the nuts more coarsely, and then they throw a loose bag of those in the tank of the toilet...kind of give them a little refresher, a little clean. Each time you flush the toilet, you're passively washing out the acorn tannins and so you're not using any extra water. I live in Indiana and we have abundant water resources. It's a blessing but I know that's not true everywhere, and so if you're in a place that's dryer, you can definitely find some creative ways using rainwater. I've leached them out on a stream before for more primitive kind of setting. Different ways to do it... (inaudible)

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I've done the stream method as well so that's a nice way.

**Greg Monzel:**

They get kind of peaty in there, right? They take on a little more of a boggy kind of quality.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Maybe depending on spring, which should be different—different *terroir* wherever you are. You shared a recipe with us for Colleen’s acorn cookies, inspired by your wife I assume?

**Greg Monzel:**

Yes, for sure. Colleen.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

It’s crackers, not cookies. Crackers.

**Greg Monzel:**

Crackers. She really has started going nutty with the sourdough. You may know somebody in your life who in the pandemic, is like this and everything is sourdough now. We just had sourdough cinnamon rolls which were amazing. She’s just cranking out the stuff. I love acorn bread and acorn soups and different things, but my whole family doesn’t love them so we’ve been working with trying to find some other ways that acorns are more palatable, especially for the single digit people—age people in my family.

The crackers are great. Everybody loves a good cracker, a salty party snack. Usually, we’re thinking, “This is kind of a treat. I need to be cautious about how much I eat here,” but when you’re eating a homemade, cultured sourdough cracker that’s half acorn flour and it’s got amaranth seeds and sunflower seeds and all kinds of other goodies tucked in there, it doesn’t feel like you have to worry about that. It just feels like this is good nutrition. I like it.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Thank you so much for sharing that recipe with us. For me, it’s just before lunch so I’m hungry now. I’m also really intrigued by this acorn yogurt too. That is also very interesting, so the possibilities out there.

**Greg Monzel:**

For sure, for sure. You connect with your environment. In a place like I am in where it’s mostly field crop here and most of our forests and wetlands have been drained and cut for growing corn and soya beans, this is a way to—I think to help brings some value back to the forest and conservation that it doesn’t involve logging and other extractive processes. We can—I think once people start to connect with the plants in their landscape then it does help create more of that impetus for conservation, which I think we need.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

This is tangential, but isn't Indiana where Gene Stratton-Porter was from? Are you aware of Gene Stratton -

**Greg Monzel:**

Yes.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

The book, *A Girl of the Limberlost*, was my favorite book when I was 12. I have read that book maybe 30 times in my life. As you were talking about the deforestation there, it made me think of her writings.

**Greg Monzel:**

Indiana used to be home to probably the largest wetland complex in North America at one time, south of Lake Michigan. It was the Grand Kankakee Marsh and the part of... Limberlost Swamp was part of it. It was all drained for agriculture and then it turned out to flood a lot, and so the crops didn't do great. There's a lot of sandy soil so the nutrients leached out and they didn't do so great. It's really just so sad to see it. I go up there and explore some of those remnants and you can still find lotus plants and other cool wetland stuff up there. Just imagine the millions of acres there would've been and how lost it is to unproductive practices. It just seems like such a folly that our ancestors had such hubris to just trample the landscape the way that they have, that's really, that's really—it's really sad what's happening in our country.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

It's really sad. Are there efforts to replant or reforest?

**Greg Monzel:**

There are parts of—there are protected and there are more active wetland conservation things going on, but it's such a political battle here. We just had a wetlands bill last year that was passed that basically made it totally cool to just drain and eliminate private wetlands on any property. They're no longer protected by the State of Indiana. If they're not connected to a federal body of water then they're fair game for development. As long as you put a retention pond, that's all the same to us as far as Indiana is concerned. That's really unfortunate policy. To think about how Indiana has lost 98%-99% of its wetlands and it was once dominated by wetlands, which are such a good carbon sink, too, with climate change issues. It is a real issue

that we need to tackle with a little more urgency. The State of Indiana is not known for being a progressive state environmentally or otherwise, so we take a long time to turn the ship around here. I keep my fingers crossed that we'll keep making better choices.

I think all in all, we are improving somewhat due to federal prodding because Indiana contributes more soil erosion to the Mississippi watershed than I think any other state, or at least, a disproportionate amount higher than other states because of all the agriculture and runoff that happens. I'm hopeful. I've seen more practices moving towards wetland buffers along riparian zones and conservation grants towards taking farmland out and that helps restore the wild edges of the rivers, which help with flood control which is an issue here and everywhere now.

I think it's moving in the right direction. It's just slow. I don't know that we'll ever be able to—there's not really a going back to what it was like here before the damage was done. So much biomass is now stored in buildings as lumber or has been burnt or eroded downstream. It's just never going to be the same forest. Indiana had 14-foot diameter sycamores and such. When settlers got here, there's no trees like that here anymore.

I think we can look forward to what does a healthy, balanced ecosystem look like. What's the best way we can get there in the context of where we're headed in climate change? We're getting pretty far off course from a standard herbal medicine podcast, I feel like.

### **Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I do find it fascinating though. Even our role as herbalists when people—take the oak tree for example. When people come to love the oak tree, rely on the oak tree for medicine—which we haven't talked about yet—or food, there's a shift that happens there. For me, I think that's one of the most important shifts we can make because in my life I've seen that when I try to tell people how they should feel about something or tell people that obvious that doesn't really work. I tried for (0:29:47.2 crosstalk) in college and I really did try standing on street corners. I really tried to tell people a lot of things and it didn't really go anywhere and I ended up getting burnt out. But watching someone grow to love the plants around them and then also rely on those plants for food and medicine, that makes such a big shift. It's no longer about telling people. It's just opening up a world that's already there to them. I think it is somewhat related and that I feel it's one of the most important work we can do as herbalists.

Why I get really passionate about herbalist as a plant or as a bioregional focused practice because although I love, say—I'm trying to think of a plant that doesn't grow here—I love cacao! That is a plant I definitely love and a plant that I turn to often. There's something different about turning to cacao versus turning to elderberries, which grow right outside my front door, and just that connection I have with those versus something that grows far away. There's a lot of—as herbalism grows, there's a lot of focus on more exotic plants that don't grow near us, as if those are the best ones – the macas and the turmeric. Again, plants, I have nothing against plants that I even like, but I think this getting to know our place and the plants around us is such an empowering part of herbalism that I don't like to see that looked over for this nutraceutical get-your-herbs-in-a-bottle approach.

**Greg Monzel:**

I started out the natural food world where it was like I have this tincture. It has a label on it. It tells me what's in there. I believe that's what it is, but I really have no idea. I've never met this plant or seen it. I have no idea where it grows, what culture it might have been to but I know it does XYZ in the body supposedly because I read this book. You know what I mean? And it just—it felt disembodied then.

I met an herbalist in that work that had studied with 7Song. I was like, "You're an herbalist? I didn't know that was a thing!" So she recommended 7Song and that was definitely a part of it. I can resonate with that going from the nutraceutical stuff and seeing how pervasive and how effective those marketing messages can be to promote these exotic super food type plants and things like that when we all can just go down to the river or the hedgerow to pick stinging nettle and probably get more out of it than these other things.

I hope that your listeners are skeptical. Imagine they're probably a little more educated on that sort of thing than a lot of folks in the natural medicine world. Definitely be skeptical of what people have to gain by selling you their products.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Well said. We've talked about oak as food, talked about oak as comfort and going to your oak tree for meditation. Wondering if you'd like to talk about oak as medicine?

**Greg Monzel:**

Sure. I use oak on a limited basis for medicine. I don't feel like I use it a lot. Main thing I'm looking for in oak is a simple astringent. It doesn't have, I feel like, to me, a lot else going on in it chemistrywise or energywise, but the tannins are strong in this one. They are easily extracted in

water, so I will—I don't have any bark with me here, but I will take twigs, just shave the bark off of them. I usually use something small. It's either come off of a tree in a windstorm or something that I can prune to help encourage the health of the tree. It's still pretty small so I can use inner bark, outer bark together and not feel like I have to take something big down and separate that. Anyway, I'll take the bark. You can dry it for storage. I'll brew it into—I'll throw a large handful into a cork jar, pour some boiling water on that. I'll let that steep and use that for maybe a wound wash for something like if one of my kid goes down on concrete and the skin gets all mashed up and is gross and there's debris in there. It can help to put that in a bath for awhile.

Oak makes a great herb for going into a wound wash bath like that. It will help tighten up the tissues, stop bleeding, help clean it up a little bit and hopefully help get out some of the crud that gets mixed into those kind of wounds. Sometimes I use it with a tooth powder blend. I used to mix up two powders and use those with some baking soda. I'll put a little oak bark in there, maybe some horsetail or other things for strengthening your teeth. There the astringent helps tighten up the gums. It helps prevent tooth decay. It helps moderate bacteria. It's not really antimicrobial antimicrobial, but it toughens up the body to make it more resistant to microbes.

When we're making the acorn—the acorn mash, we take the water that we've collected, the tannin water. We take that and put it in the bathroom, put it on our hair and shower. We'll put that in the bath. We try to use at least a little bit of it when it's nice and strong towards the beginning of the process, so it doesn't all just get poured out in the garden.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Nice.

**Greg Monzel:**

Acorn tannins are hepatotoxic. If you consume them internally, they can basically tan your gut from the inside and lead to limited nutritional absorption. They're also just hepatotoxic. There are different tannins in different plants, so tannins are not all the same thing. The ones in oak are not great for internal use. I don't usually use it internally for medicine. I would normally turn to a different astringent type plant for that depending on what I'm looking at. I use oak externally or the mouth. That's about it. What about you? Do you have other uses you like to use oak for?

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

It definitely is the wound. That's the big way that we used it is was for wounds. In the primitive skills earth living schooling I did that was a go-to. I was taught to use it internally so that was—it's interesting about the hepatotoxicity. I'm wondering if there's a dosage or a duration on that because it was historically used famously. I have not turned to it a lot internally though because it's so intense and I just haven't had that. It's just so intense that it seems overblown. It is a great thing to taste if you're wondering what astringency is. You could also get that from a green banana or something. You don't have to do oak, but it is so that astringence. So mainly the wound wash is also what I've used it for.

**Greg Monzel:**

Nice. It is very astringent. The same reason I don't use it internally a lot because I could get something gentler like a plantain or even a yarrow for some astringent. Of course, there's other stuff going on there. It's not so simple but it feels better internal environment fit.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

For me, the blackberry root is more of what I would go to for the astringent.

**Greg Monzel:**

There you go. Rose family stuff like some rose bud. I do occasionally just like to pick up an acorn and eat it off the ground. I think that it's just good. They're just a tonic. I think human bodies are pretty adapted to some plant-based chemistry stressors from time to time and I think that that's good for us to engage those things. I like to just munch an acorn. I'm going to get some tannins in there. As far as—I'm not that worried about the toxicity that I'm just going to stay away from it internally altogether, but I wouldn't want to take it everyday. That's for sure. I think it's a lot more palatable if you get the tannins out from the acorn flour. That's for sure. That is one thing – don't underwash your acorn because if you end up with an acorn batch of flour and it's too astringent and nobody wants to eat it, what do you do with it? It's kind of lost at that point. Maybe you could feed it to your chickens or something. That's a lot of work to go through to end up having it just too astringent to eat and be comfortable with it. It's happened to me.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I'm glad you mentioned that because when you're describing that I wanted to mention tasting it along the way is very important. You want to taste it before you think you're done just to make sure.

**Greg Monzel:**

That's how I tested it.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

(Inaudible) edible.

**Greg Monzel:**

Once you start getting water that looks less and less amber color or muddy looking, start to taste it and it should taste bland and mealy, like soaked almond or something, mildly nutty.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I imagine oak must be used for tanning. Here, my husband use Doug fir bark for tanning, but that's not really known for the astringent, so imagine that oak must be used for that in some shape or form.

**Greg Monzel:**

I'm sure there are some traditions with that. I'm not familiar with them in particular, but the name "tannins" comes from hide tanning, because it makes the leather more waterproof and preserves it. I've done a little bit of tanning, not with oak. Locally here, the eastern hemlock trees were cut down for their tannins. I don't know. You probably have some kind of hemlock out there.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Where I live it's not super common either.

**Greg Monzel:**

Okay, got you.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

We have a lot of—a lot of soft woods here and not a lot of tannins. My husband, he used to do all of our wood with a bow saw. He'd cut down the trees. He did forestry management, so he'd cut down the trees, not big ones. He'd use the bow saw and then he'd cut it up for our use in the fire with the bow saw. I would brag about this to jim mcdonald. He's our mutual friend and jim would often point out that we don't have hard woods here. (0:40:37.2 crosstalk) not a hard wood.



**Greg Monzel:**

It's fair. I wouldn't want to tackle a persimmon tree with a bow saw. That's for sure.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

It's a hard wood, the persimmon.

**Greg Monzel:**

Persimmon is the only plant in North America in the ebony family. It's like mahogany-- extremely dense. The hard wood—the heartwood is purple in color and it was used for the woods in golf clubs.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Interesting.

**Greg Monzel:**

It's really hard stuff.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Is there anything else that you'd like to share about oak before we move on?

**Greg Monzel:**

Oak has some interesting galls in it that are sometimes [inaudible] as sources of tannins and things. You can use the caps to make cool whistles. Have you ever done that, have you ever [crosstalk]?

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

No. Acorn cap?

**Greg Monzel:**

You take a little cap and position your thumbs over it, and blow across it and make a little whistle. It's kind of fun.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I haven't done that. I have used them to make little fairy creatures, little...

**Greg Monzel:**

Oh, yeah. I feel like oaks are very natural fairy trees and the landscape here, their profile is very stately. They have this big, blocky trunks and branches and you can really see them stand out in the forest. They take up a lot of canopy space.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I just think oaks are so gorgeous, very romantic. Especially the older they get, they're just so beautiful.

**Greg Monzel:**

Such a giver.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I really love that you brought up that it—the oak trees are such interdependent, reciprocity, showing us all the different pollinators and all the different life it supports. I'm glad that you presence that as well.

**Greg Monzel:**

I mean, I think that's really, to me, the most important medicine from oak is that that just giving nourishing quality because—not only it does that for the little bugs and things, but around here it's deer, turkey, squirrel and humans. Everybody eats them and benefits from it. It's not a lot of plants are out there making toxins that are trying to kill you and it's not that. It just needs to sit out under a tree long enough that the tannins were inside of it, then you can pick it up and eat it.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Lovely. I would love to hear what herbal projects you have going on at your school these days?

**Greg Monzel:**

Great! We have a lot going on. We run seasonal intensive programs and this year we decided to try doing our medicine making intensive with a virtual format, which has been super fun. We did some virtual programming starting with the pandemic, but this is our first time doing a medicine making classes that way. The joy in it I think is that I can be here in my herb room and do my stuff here and demonstrate it for the people in the workshops and then they can be at home in their kitchens doing it too. It's the first time I ever had that capacity where everybody could do it along with me that even in my constructional kitchens, there's never enough

equipment for everybody. You have to have little groups or something. This has been kind of special to be able to do that. I sent out a materials list and equipment list and they'll be looking at their stuff together to be able to make it along with me. Of course, some people who are busy or have kids at home, they just tune in and watch the demonstration and ask questions.

Those are also interpreted with ASL sign language interpreters. We have a partnership with Oxford Interpreting & Consulting, who has also a community garden nearby, with us. They offer interpreting. You may not have somebody on the podcast who's deaf or hard of hearing, but maybe they know somebody who is and would be interested in that kind of programming. There's not a lot of enrichment opportunities, at least in my area for folks like that. Anyway, it's been a lot of fun to have diverse people coming from all over the place, from Michigan. We had somebody from New Mexico last week. So you could tune in from wherever you're at.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

That's wonderful. I second that--the gratifying to be able to do it live with people. This move towards the virtual classroom, a lot of stuff has moved to pre-recorded and DIY. Having that connection, I think as herbalists, it's just so important. It's inspiring. It's fun. That's really wonderful.

**Greg Monzel:**

For sure. I think people learn better to be able to do that too. At least, I do.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

And where can people go to find out more about these intensives?

**Greg Monzel:**

There on our website, [persimmonherbschool.com](http://persimmonherbschool.com). We also have an Instagram page, a TikTok. You can find those also Persimmon Herb School. We put a lot of stuff on there. If you want, we have some acorn content on there. We may share some videos with you. I don't know if those would be attached to this or not, but they are definitely on Instagram and TikTok. We do—we are building a greenhouse that we're finishing right now. It's super exciting. We're hoping to do more native plant production with that, especially important botanical plants in our area and make that—for me, I started out in service of people. Through working with the plants, I see that they need a lot of help and there's not a lot of people out here helping the plants, so I've become more and more passionate towards that in the herbal work. It feels very nourishing and restorative to do that kind of work. We're putting a little more towards conservation here at

Persimmon Herb School as well. We hope to be able to connect with you guys and talk with you more soon.

### **Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Wonderful. I'll put quick links to all of your social and your websites, as well as the recipe for the acorn crackers at [herbswithrosaleepodcast.com](http://herbswithrosaleepodcast.com). The show notes there will have it all. Before I let you go, Greg, I want to ask you a question I'm asking everybody in Season 8 and that is – What has been your most important herbal mistake?

### **Greg Monzel:**

Oh, boy. Just one thing I love about teaching because I get to be really transparent and honest with my students about the mistakes that I've made because there are. They happen. I think probably the most important for me has been—I think it was maybe the year after I studied with 7Song. I had a toenail—an ingrown toenail that went sideways on me. It started to get infected and I thought here's a great chance for me to employ my new found herbal education. I can be a great patient for myself. I thought okay, but what do I have on hand that's really great at killing infections?

I, basically, just went straight—straight with allopathic mindset. I thought I've got some *Thuja* tincture on hand. I got this goldenseal powder. I can make some kind of paste. I got fresh garlic. I'll take some of that. I'll mash up this fresh garlic and mix it with these other things and just stick that all right there right in my wound. I made this really nasty looking paste yellow with the goldenseal and everything, crammed it and packed it in that toenail. I wrapped it all up with duct tape like a field bandage kind of thing you could call, nice and cozy inside.

Within a minute or two, it started to tingle and started to get a burning sensation. I thought it's working. It's doing it. I left it on there longer and it started to get pretty uncomfortable around 10 minutes or so. By 20 minutes in, I couldn't stand it anymore and I had to get it off. So I took the duct tape off real fast, wash everything off and it was blistery, burned. It just looked terrible. I was like, "Oh, my God. What am I going to do?" Colleen was out of town. It seems stuff always happens when she's out of town. Nobody was there to help me.

I got a hold of my friend—my dear friend, Shahab, who is a horticulturist and landscape architect guy. His dad was a physician in Iran. I've learned a lot from his father, Parvis, over the years, but this was definitely a good lesson. I called Parvis and he said sure I could come over and he'd take a look at it. He's like—he just was shaking his head. He's like, "What did you do?" He's like, "You got so many problems. You've got ingrown toenails infected. You've got eczema



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on your feet and you burned it!” I learned not to put fresh, raw garlic on the skin. You can cook it. You can infuse it in the oil and put it on something like that is okay, but don’t crush it up and put it straight on the skin. It’s going to burn you.

He really shamed me, which I kind of needed that because I was feeling really confident in my new skills. He shamed me. He made me take his sun sandals. He’s like, “Don’t wear close-toed shoes anymore. Get these Converse out of here.” He had his daughter come in and look at my—his daughter is a licensed physician here in the US. She came and looked at my foot the next day and like, “You’re going to need surgery for this.” I didn’t have medical insurance at the time so she pulled some strings and got a podiatrist she knew to give me free surgery because he owe her a favor. I had given so many vegetables and things to her family over the years that they felt like they want to take care of me. It worked out in one of those non-transactional sort of ways that I think medicine often once did and doesn’t happen like that much anymore. It tends to be very towered, siloed experience. You have to go to the authorities and you’re paying a lot of money to access their great wisdom up there, and it doesn’t feel very good sometimes.

I was really grateful for that experience. Not only did it help put me in check with my knowledge in herbal medicine and give me some experience, but it also helped me to accept the benefits of the mainstream medical system a little bit better too.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

That’s a wonderful way to look at all of that and pull some lessons and learnings from it. I’ve also made the mistake of putting fresh garlic on bare skin.

**Greg Monzel:**

Have you?

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Yeah, yeah. I’ve done that as well. Yeah. It’s one of those things you just have to do once really. I mean, you don’t have to. Anyone who’s listening, no you don’t have to. But if you were to do it unknowingly, that’s just a mistake you make one time because-

**Greg Monzel:**

Did you put it on yourself or others?

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I put it on myself, thank goodness. I was in a similar situation that I didn't have money and I had this rash show up in my armpit. It was just hot, inflamed and I didn't want to go to the doctor because I knew. I remember, even walking—talking it out with my husband, I was like, "It's going to cost." I didn't have a primary care provider. I didn't have insurance. I know it's going to cost \$90 just for the visit and then they're just going to give me steroid cream or antibiotics. I just had all this negative story about it. It was kind of same deal, just newly minted herbalist. I was like I'm just going to put garlic on there. I totally went for it too – mashed it all up and put it through a garlic press and put it on. My story ended up it still ended up working but at a cost. It was very painful so I would choose something else now.

**Greg Monzel:**

For sure, for sure. I'm glad it worked for you.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Yeah, yeah. I'm glad that is over because it really was something to remember. Greg, thank you so much for sharing your wisdom, for your most important mistake, and for all your wisdom about oaks and Indiana and land and connection. I really appreciate you taking the time to be here and to share with all of us.

**Greg Monzel:**

I feel so grateful. Thank you so much for having me on and allowing me to talk about those things and sharing this stuff with you because it brings joy to my heart and meaning. You've just made this so lovely.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Thank you, Greg.

Thanks for being here. Don't forget to head over to the show notes at [herbswithrosaleepodcast.com](http://herbswithrosaleepodcast.com) to download your beautifully illustrated recipe card and get a transcript of this 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. You can also visit Greg directly at [persimmonherbschool.com](http://persimmonherbschool.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 found you on YouTube last week and I'm so thankful I did. I did your free course and I'm listening to your podcast. You have so much great information and you present it in a way that's easy to understand so thank you again.

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:

I mentioned during the interview that I know of one oak tree near where I live. This oak tree has an interesting story. It's located in downtown Twisp, Washington, across from the post office in what used to be an open space or empty lot beside the oak tree, of course. The land where the



oak stood was put up for sale, and a local couple bought the land specifically to protect the oak tree from being felled by the less discerning developer. In a newspaper article, one of the new owners said, “We bought the property to save the tree. It’s the biggest plant we ever bought.” They then built a small two-story building on the property that was positioned and designed so the oak tree could continue growing. It’s a beautiful story about prioritizing trees.