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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!

Today, I am super excited to bring you this conversation with Colleen Codekas about a super popular springtime plant. For those of you who don't know Colleen, she's passionate about healthy living through natural food and herbal medicine. She lives with her family of three in Vermont, where living close to nature is easy and a way of life. In her off-time, she likes to go foraging for wild edible and medicinal plants and mushrooms, cook delicious food, make mead, grow a ridiculous amount of edible and medicinal plants, and make herbal medicine.

She is the author of the traditionally published book, *Healing Herbal Infusions*, and four eBooks: *Wildcrafting Weeds*, *Healing Kitchen Herbs*, *Simple Mead Making*, and *The Backyard Forest Garden*. She has also created an online foraging course, *gather + root*.

Welcome to the podcast, Colleen.

### **Colleen Codekas:**

Hi, thank you, Rosalee. Thanks for having me.

### **Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Oh, it's such a pleasure. I feel like we've known each other online for so long and it's really fun to have this face-to-face visit, and I'm excited to talk about the plant you've chosen. But before we do that, I want to hear how the herb world called you in.

## Colleen Codekas:

Well, let me see. It really started with a love of hiking when I was a teenager and into my early 20s. So, I loved going hiking and just being out in the natural world. When I was that young, I didn't really do any plant identification or whatever. I just liked being out in it. Then when I went to college, I was an environmental studies and biology major. So I really started learning about botany and plant identification and identifying trees. I really gravitated towards those type of courses. So, I learned a lot about plant, just identification. I wasn't as much into the foraging and herbal medicine part yet, but I just really loved learning a lot about plants.

Then when I was in college, towards the end of my college years, I got a chance to go to Ecuador, which was really cool. I was there for about four weeks or so, and just learning about plants and the tropical plants was so cool. That was like 20 years ago now. So I can't really remember specific plants that we learned, but we learned about a lot of different plants, and it just really solidified me wanting to continue that with my life.

Then I got a job in my late 20s working in Yosemite National Park and was there for almost 10 years, actually. During that time, that's really when I started identifying plants that were edible and medicinal. I really started leaning towards that. I heard rumors about elderberry growing in the park and people making wine with it. We're in the middle of the woods, so wine was a hot commodity, right? So, learning about elderberry wine, but I had never found it yet, so I wasn't sure what it looked like or anything like that, but I knew it existed out there. Eventually, I was able to find some blue elderberry growing in Yosemite, and around and outside of the park and inside of the park, and I was able to identify it. Then, of course, I learned about the medicinal benefits that went along with elderberry. So that was really cool. Then people would start coming to me, "Well, where are the elderberry trees? Where are the elderberry trees?" It was actually pretty easy to find them because they were almost everywhere. That was fun.

Then I started working up in the high country of Yosemite at Tuolumne Meadows. It's really high elevation and the elderberry doesn't grow quite that high up. It's more lower down. But I learned about yarrow. There was yarrow growing everywhere, and it wouldn't flower up there. Through the whole summer season, it wouldn't grow flowers. It would just be the frilly little leaves. But a friend of mine who I worked with knew about the benefits of it and was telling me how it was good for blood clotting and all these things. I was like, "Wow, that is so cool. How cool is that?" So I would really say probably yarrow was the plant that really got me into it. I mean, elderberry was an interest too, but I just thought... It was such a small little plant up at 9,000 feet, that this very unassuming little plant could do so much.

Then from there, I eventually started my blog and I just was pretty much self-taught at that point. I just started reading and learning; getting books, Rosemary Gladstar of course, and lots, any books that I could get. Then I just sort of learned by doing, creating herbal medicine; in the very early years of my blog, creating things for the blog and learning as I go, learning how to make skin care products and herbal salves and creams and all that sort of thing. It just kind of took off from that point. Eventually I took a couple online courses and stuff like that. Then I wrote a book, and here I am.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Another thing that we share a love for is beautiful photography. Is that something that you also just picked up along the way, self-taught?

**Colleen Codekas:**

Yes. Yes. Yeah. If you were to look back at my first blog posts, the photography wasn't as beautiful, but yeah, thank you. I love photography and that has definitely been another passion of mine as the years of blogging have gone on. I just, I love plants and photographing plants and photographing the things that I make with the plants, whether it's foraged foods or herbalism-based stuff. It's just, it's really fun for me. I enjoy it. It's something that I really love doing. So, yeah.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Oh, it shines through. Following you on Instagram, as well as your blogs, but your Instagram page is just so beautiful. It's just-

**Colleen Codekas:**

Oh, thank you.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

-eye-candy for the herbalist. So-

**Colleen Codekas:**

Yeah. Thank you so much.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

And I love that you said it didn't start off well, or didn't start off as pretty, because it's the same way. Like, my early photos now, I just cringe. But I just completely learned by doing. I was not something...

**Colleen Codekas:**

Yes.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

... just get a little bit better.

**Colleen Codekas:**

Yeah. You know, first I was taking all my photos just with my phone, and now I have a real camera. I actually just upgraded to an even better camera.

So I'm really into that too.

But the other thing I was going to say about learning about plants is where I was living previously in Southern Oregon, now we've moved to Vermont. But, in Southern Oregon, things would start growing in our yard that were like weeds, most people would think of as weeds. I was just so interested. Like, what is this plant? What is that plant? Almost every single one was something that was used either for herbalism purposes or for food or both. So, like chickweed; well, dandelion of course. I was able to identify that one pretty easily. But chickweed and cleavers. We had this huge patch of cleavers pop up in our yard one year. That's when I learned about cleavers. And wild violet, we had tons of wild violet.

I'm trying to think what else popped up. But so many different things... henbit, so many different things popped up. It was just another way for me to learn about plants. Sometimes it was like, chickweed was one I had heard about for quite a few years, but the place I'd been living before, it didn't really grow very commonly or whatever. And then this plant popped up at our new house and I'm like, "What is this plant?" Then finally I saw the flower. I'm like, "Hey, I think that's chickweed. Wow!"

### Rosalee de la Forêt:

So they were popping up, piquing your curiosity. It seems like that's a great segue into the plant you've chosen for today. I'm so excited to talk about purple dead nettle because this plant is the most popular plant for one month out of the year. I swear everybody is talking about purple dead nettle, and the thing is, there's not a lot of information about it. So I think part of it is people are interested, and then people are also craving to hear from somebody who has experience with the plant. So, I'm so glad you chose it, and I'm excited to hear what you have to say about purple dead nettle.

### Colleen Codekas:

Yeah, yeah, for sure. Purple dead nettle was another one of those ones that just sort of popped up in my backyard. The first year, there was just a few of them and then every year there was more until I had this huge patch of it. I think that's just kind of how that plant grows. It's a mint family plant. So those tend to sort of take over. But, yeah, it was so cool to learn about it and what it was. I was able to identify it fairly quickly. For those who don't know, it has a little purple top, it's kind of low growing. It has a square stem. It's a mint family plant. It's a little bit fuzzy. It's called purple dead nettle because it has no sting, whereas stinging nettle has a sting. But it's actually not in the same family as stinging nettle at all.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Oh, it's such an unfortunate, common name--one that I think collectively we should maybe try to change just because it just has a weird connotation, purple dead nettle. But like you said, it's not in the same plant family. Once you know basic plant ID, they really don't look alike.

**Colleen Codekas:**

No.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

So it's such a beautiful plant that I feel like, I don't know... It's just that relationship to that particular common name is not heartfelt really for me. So, yeah, it'd be nice. It's fun to call it *Lamium purpureum* because that's also letting us know about being in the mint family and the color of it, *purpureum*, but doesn't quite roll off the tongue in a common name sort of way. So...

**Colleen Codekas:**

Right.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

We should have a contest. Let's rename this. Let's all commit to using this new common name.

**Colleen Codekas:**

Yeah. Yeah. I remember thinking when I first identified it like, "Hmm, well, it doesn't have a sting. Why are they calling it dead?" I guess that's where they get the dead nettle part. But why the nettle part? I don't quite understand it. I saw a few things online that said, "Well, because the leaves look similar." I'm like, "But I mean, they do, I guess. But not really that much." They're much smaller. Purple dead nettle leaves are much smaller and they're fuzzy. So maybe that's why. But whenever I post about it on my Instagram or wherever, people a lot of times think, "Oh, well, it's a nettle. It must sting." There was one picture that I have of me holding up a whole bunch of purple dead nettle. And they're like, "You're holding it with your hands?" And I'm like, "Well, yeah, it doesn't have a sting though."

Yeah. It's a really cool plant though. Some people despise it just like other plants that are viewed as weeds because it, like I said, it can take over. I just let it do its thing when it grows in my yard and just kind of let it take over. Like you said, it doesn't last for very long. It's sort of, at least where I was in Southern Oregon, it would come up around the same time as chickweed and wild violet. Actually, the chickweed and wild violet might have been a tiny bit ahead of, and then not long after that purple dead nettle would pop up and it would seem to just grow very, very quickly. Then it would be there for a few weeks, and then it would go to seed and get kind of crusty-ish, I guess is the right word, but it would get kind of pokey and then die off. That would be the end of purple dead nettle. But people always get excited when I post about it.



### Rosalee de la Forêt:

I rarely see purple dead nettle without a bee or several bees buzzing around the plant.

### Colleen Codekas:

Yeah. The thing is the bees tend to love it. Love it a lot. I've seen bees a little bit on the chickweed flowers, and of course you'll see them on dandelions, but they swarm to the purple dead nettle for sure, which is pretty cool. It's definitely a good early spring plant for the bees, just like dandelions are. So, if you have a purple dead nettle in your yard and you don't want it there, it's good to leave some.

### Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yeah. Yeah. So you had purple dead nettle peek up and then more and more, and then I'm sure it grabbed your attention. And then you started making things with this plant?

### Colleen Codekas:

Yeah. Yeah. After I realized that it was edible and medicinal and I'm always like woo-hoo when I find a plant that's like that. I just started researching on what I could do with it. The thing about purple dead nettle is that it doesn't taste super great. It kind of has a musty flavor. Some people like it. Some people don't as much. It's just kind of grassy. Musty is the word that I hear people use a lot. So, if you're going to use it in making a pesto or something like that, I usually recommend people to mix it with other herbs. It's really good mixed with chickweed and dandelion leaf. That way you sort of get the benefits of all of them, but you don't have the sort of weirdish flavor of purple dead nettle. It's also kind of hairy, like I mentioned, so just having a lot of it is just not... doesn't have the best taste in your mouth. So you can use it as an herb, like little bits here and there like you would just use a chopped herb.

But, of course, it has these medicinal uses. So there's ways that you can use it medicinally. Some people make a tea out of it. Again, it doesn't taste super great, so you can put honey in it or whatever. Also, I should mention that it's really good for allergies, purple dead nettle. Same as stinging nettle. So it sort of has the same benefits in that manner. People tend to use it for allergies, and it's also a good anti-inflammatory and antibacterial. I've actually never made it into an infused oil and salve, but I know that it is really beneficial for that. But yeah, there's lots of great ways to use it.

### Rosalee de la Forêt:

Is there something that every year you're sure to make with purple dead nettle?

### Colleen Codekas:

Typically, I'll include it in a wild greens pesto. So that's why I mentioned that recipe. I've seen recipes that call for all purple dead nettle, but I don't think that would be something that most people would like. I really like the bitterness of dandelion leaf. So, I think that complements it



well. If you happen to have chickweed around, you can add that too. I think those three together work really well. That's the main thing that I do with purple dead nettle. I also like to infuse it into honey, and that's sort of a new thing that I did last spring, and I'll do it again this spring. The benefit of that is the honey kind of gets rid of the taste that people don't like so much, and so you can enjoy the benefits of purple dead nettle with the honey, which kind of tempers that flavor.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Mm-hmm (affirmative). With that honey, is it something that you like adding it to teas or is there particular ways you like to work with the honey? I'm imagining that maybe it could help with allergies.

**Colleen Codekas:**

Yeah.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

You mentioned allergies. Yeah.

**Colleen Codekas:**

Yeah. Yes. It can definitely help with allergies, especially if you use local honey, because it's known that if you use a honey that's really, really hyper local to your environment that may help with allergies as well. So then you've kind of got a double dose there.

Yeah, you can use it in with your tea or you can just take a spoonful of it every day. Some people like to do that, just have their purple dead nettle honey or whatever type of honey they're making. Yeah, those would be the two main options or you could just drizzle it on your oatmeal or on your ice cream or whatever you want to use it for. But honey is just delicious. When you use the fresh plant material too, and that's another thing about purple dead nettle and a lot of plants. I mean, you could use purple dead nettle dried, but I think it's more beneficial to use it when fresh. If you've ever dried a mint family plant, a lot of times they lose their scent a little bit and lose their... I'm trying to think of one that I've done. Peppermint will still be really strong-smelling, but some of the other mint family plants, they seem to lose some of their essence or whatever.

I feel like with the honey, it's really easy to just throw a whole bunch of purple dead nettle in a jar, top it with honey until it's covered and just let it infuse for a few weeks. Super simple, really easy, and pretty tasty.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Those are my favorite kind of recipes.

Thank you so much for sharing that recipe with us. For the listeners, if you'd like to download your free recipe card, then you can visit the show notes at [herbswithrosaleepodcast.com](http://herbswithrosaleepodcast.com) and you'll get a recipe card for purple dead nettle infused honey.

Well, I'm wondering if you could talk briefly about lookalikes because I feel like that often comes up when people are thinking about purple dead nettle and some of the lookalikes that are out there.

**Colleen Codekas:**

Yeah, sure. Well, we already talked about stinging nettle, which really doesn't look like purple dead nettle even though they have the same name. The main lookalike would be henbit, which is very, very closely related to purple dead nettle, and to be honest, they could be used in the same way. It has a square stem. It's about the same height. It has the little purple flowers. The purple dead nettle, the top is triangular-shaped and that whole top is sort of pinkish or purple-ish in color. Henbit, the leaves go around the stem and it does have little pink flowers, and the pink flowers look almost identical to the flowers that actually come out of purple dead nettle. Both of those look very similar to other mint family flowers as well. They're just really tiny and they have this sort of distinct look to them. But the leaf structure is different and they don't have the fuzzy hairs. But sometimes people call purple dead nettle henbit dead nettle, which is really confusing.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

That's been confusing.

**Colleen Codekas:**

Because they are two different plants, but both of them are edible. Both of them are medicinal. So even if you confuse them, it's really no big deal.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Well, thanks for mentioning that. Did you have anything else to share about purple dead nettle?

**Colleen Codekas:**

Well, one thing I can say is I do have a whole blog post on my webpage about purple dead nettle. I have photos that show the difference between dead nettle and henbit. So, if you really want to get a good photo representation of those, you can check out on my blog, Grow, Forage, Cook, Ferment, the posts that I have all about purple dead nettle

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

And it is another example of your stunning photography on that-

**Colleen Codekas:**

Oh, thank you.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

-particular blog post as well. Well, Colleen, I'd like to hear about what projects you have going on right now.

**Colleen Codekas:**

The main thing is my online foraging course. It's called gather + root and it's open all the time for enrollment, but it's obviously very popular during the springtime when everybody's starting to think about foraging and all that. I talk about edible plants. I talk about medicinal plants. So, I kind of cover both spaces there, but it's all about foraging. It has like 50 to 60, I don't know the exact number, but somewhere between 50 and 60 plants I cover. I do videos for each one and show how to identify them and use them and harvest them and all those sorts of things.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Wonderful.

**Colleen Codekas:**

Yeah.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

If you'd like more information on purple dead nettle, visit the video description for a link for an exclusive handout filled with lots of tips and insights.

For my last question that I have for you, is one that I'm asking everybody in season three, and I love this question because it's no matter whether we've been herbalists for 30 days or 30 years, there's always something new out there in the herb world. So, I'm curious, what's new for you these days?

**Colleen Codekas:**

Well, what's new for me is us moving to Vermont, as I mentioned. I had been a West Coast person my whole life. That's where I learned how to identify plants. I learned all the plants on the West Coast for foraging and the herbalism plants. So, I'm all really knowledgeable on the West Coast. But there's some differences. What's really exciting to me now is to see all the things that are growing out here. When we moved, it was in the middle of summertime, and there was all these plants, some of which I recognized, of course, but some of which I didn't and others which I was really excited to find.

**Colleen Codekas:**

As we were traveling through upstate New York to get to Vermont, I saw these flowers just growing all along the side of the road. At one point, I asked my husband, I was like, "We need to stop. I need to see if that flower is what I think it is." And I was right. It was valerian, wild valerian growing everywhere, which I had grown in my garden in the past, but never really had found in the wild in Oregon. So, I was so excited, and teaching my son, who was four, that this is wild valerian. It's really exciting to me to find these plants that, okay, I know about and I've heard about, and I've used and I've maybe even grown, but haven't found them out in the wild. So, yeah, valerian was one.

Then the Eastern version of mugwort. Of course on the West Coast, we have the West Coast version, but to see the Eastern version was really exciting. Staghorn sumac grows everywhere here, and of course, black elderberry too. We have blue elderberry on the West Coast and there might be some places where you can find black elderberry. Have you ever found black elderberry? Yeah. It doesn't-

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Not growing wild. But people will plant them.

**Colleen Codekas:**

Yeah. We actually had one growing in our yard that we planted. But yeah, I had never seen one in the wild. As we were traveling up the East Coast, we saw a black elderberry just growing on the side of the road. So that was very exciting.

Anyways, I'm excited for the upcoming spring and summer to see what else I'm going to discover that maybe I haven't discovered enough of. Jewelweed was another one. Jewelweed.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

I'll bet. Yeah. Yeah. I had that same experience in that I learned all of the plants on the West Coast and then I moved across the mountains and that time was so special, that just every day just felt so exciting and vibrant. I never went anywhere without my field guides. It's those beginning crushes and the intensity and-

**Colleen Codekas:**

Right. Right. Even just the trees and stuff. There's different trees and some of them are similar, but just learning what's here, what's new and all that. It is very exciting.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Yeah. Well, thank you so much, Colleen, for being on the show and for sharing about purple dead nettle with us. It's been such a pleasure, and I'm so happy that you've been here.



**Colleen Codekas:**

Yeah. Thank you so much. Thank you so much for having me.

**Rosalee de la Forêt:**

Thanks for watching. Don't forget to click the link in the video description to get free access to Colleen's recipe for purple dead nettle infused honey. You'll also get access to the complete show notes, including the transcript. If you enjoyed this interview, then before you go, be sure to click the subscribe button so that you'll be the first to get my new videos, including interviews like this. I'd also love to hear your comments about this interview and this lovely springtime plant.

I deeply believe that this world needs more herbalists, gardeners and plant-centered folks like you. I'm so glad that you're here and a part of this herbal community. Have a beautiful day.