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Rosalee de la Forêt:

Wow!

Linda Shanahan:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

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

Most of us know pleurisy root, if we know it at all, as a lung herb. But in this episode, herbalist and farmer Linda Shanahan opens up a much bigger conversation about what it means to bring a piece of land back to life, and the plants that make that possible. Linda runs Bluestem Botanicals in Pennsylvania, an herb farm she and husband built from scratch on what was once a dead zone: a sod farm where nothing grew, nothing sang, and nothing visited. But what came back first and what has stayed is a story worth hearing. By the end of this episode, you'll see pleurisy root and the milkweed family it belongs to in a completely different light: not just as medicine but as a bridge between the plants we grow and the living world that depends on them. If you enjoy this episode, please give a thumbs up so more plant lovers can find us, and be sure to stay tuned until the very end for your herbal tidbit.

Linda, it's a delight to have you here. Thank you so much for being on the show.

Linda Shanahan:

I'm honored to be invited. Thank you.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Of course! I'm excited to hear your plant path, how the plants have called you here. I saw that you got started with Howie and Stephen, so I'm excited to hear about that, just a few years ago. Excited to hear about that, that's more my neck of the woods. You're joining us all the way from the East Coast, but I will let you take it away and share your plant story.

Linda Shanahan:

Yeah, so how I got started was really kind of a crooked path, I guess you could say. I was living in Philadelphia. I went to college there and kind of found myself a little bit depressed living in the city. It was during the crack epidemic in the early to mid '90s that I went to college there. It was just a hard place to live at the time, and I decided I wanted to move west after college. I moved to a little town in Southern Oregon after applying for the AmeriCorps program, which is like a year-long "domestic peace corps," is how I describe it. It's a very low commitment, but great experience program that I don't even know if it exists anymore. I think it was defunded. It was started by the Clinton administration and I was one of the early participants in that program in 1995 into '96. I worked in a town called Yreka, California, which is right at the Oregon border, and I lived there for a few years. While I was living there, I was working initially with foster kids who were—my background was in social work, so I worked with kids in foster care whose parents were primarily addicted to methamphetamine and heroin. That was a lot of the problem there after coming from a crack epidemic-infested community on the East Coast. It was very familiar territory for me in that way, but what I increasingly felt was just that everyone around me, even in this amazingly beautiful place which—I initially thought the city life was part of the reason why people were so sick spiritually. But really, people were sick spiritually in this beautiful mountain town as well. Obviously, economics has a lot to do with it, but culturally, we just are so disconnected from our environment. I just kept feeling this.

Eventually, I kind of floated around for a while, explored different things. I left human services for a while and I worked in a bakery. I worked in restaurants, and I eventually found myself finding the most comfort and the most peace going into the woods, and also wanting to just learn about the plants that were around me because they were so different from where I grew up. I grew up in this lush Northeastern—Mid-Atlantic, really, temperate jungle, really. I mean it's so lush here in the summer, and going there, it was high desert/oak savanna, and so dry in the summer. I wanted to learn about the madrone trees that had these beautiful peely bark. I wanted to understand how these plants survived in this environment. Ultimately, I took a basket weaving class, and in the basket weaving class, we harvested plants to use in our baskets. It was so amazing to have that experience that I knew I wanted to do something working with plants.

So, I started to look around for resources, and one of the resources that I had at my disposal was—my boyfriend at the time had a computer. It was a time when we really didn't have computers. We're still in the '90s here and not everybody had a computer in their home. I was able to do an online search, which was something I also didn't have a lot of experience in yet. I sent in—I found that there was an herb school in Eugene, Oregon. I was only three hours south, so I sent an email to Howie who was the teacher there, main teacher, and I said "I want to learn." That was the title of my email, but I had no idea what I was even really going to learn about. I just knew I wanted to learn about plants. He wrote back. This was 1998. He wrote back and said, "We do interviews in the fall for the following year," so I drove up to Eugene in September, did the interview, and stayed in Eugene until April, we started class. It was—I just knew I was in the right place once I had started, so—so that's how I got started and then it was just one foot in front of the other for the rest of my life up until now.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, that's so interesting. I always feel like I have like a reso—resonance with the plant stories. I feel like there's bits and pieces where I'm like, "Oh, yeah. It was just like mine." I had a similar thing where I had that realization of the sickness of today really comes from that disconnection.

Linda Shanahan:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

And that's where I wanted to work too—just like how do we—how do we reform that connection again? And my first apprenticeship and plant teacher was also a basket maker, and so I spent my early days making baskets too, and I loved it! The going out and har—it was traditional basket making. You go and harvest and learn about the plants, learn how to work with them, and everything. So, yeah, that's lovely.

Linda Shanahan:

I love the tactile experience—the experiential practice that it offers – both herbalism and basketry.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

How long did you stay in Oregon after then?

Linda Shanahan:

I was in there—I was in Oregon a total of eight years. I was there three in Southern Oregon, and then five in Eugene. And then I met my husband there and brought—he's from Michigan—and then we found ourselves having to travel back and forth for every wedding and funeral and I just couldn't live with myself flying. Even once or twice a year was too much for me, so I wanted to be closer, and I wanted to be closer to my family. I missed my family, so we moved back and we went back and forth between Michigan and Pennsylvania for about a half a second, and then in Pennsylvania won out on that one.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

And how did you decide to take the plunge into having your own farm and business and?

Linda Shanahan:

So, that was really the result of missing Oregon. We moved back from—we moved from Eugene, which for those of you in your—in this audience that know Eugene, it has a giant farmers' market. It's amazing. There's just such a great food community there. There's a great herbal community there, so I left my herbal friends. We left all of our favorite farmers that we'd go to every week and get our veggies from. We had a really intense network of friendships there—I mean, I have a godson in Portland now that I go back. I went to his bar mitzvah. I flew back for that. We have really tight relationships in that area, and when we moved back to the East Coast, I felt like I had gone back in time, not just missing the relationships that I had with people, but also the cultural experience that we had living in the Pacific Northwest that wasn't in existence here. The environmental ethics that I felt people just got and understood without having to say it. I could go to a corner grocery store and I could bring my own containers. Everything was in bulk, and I didn't have to walk out with a plastic. Whereas here, even the coop wasn't that way. You had to buy everything in plastic. Little things like that just drove us nuts. It was difficult. I was a bike commuter. I didn't have a car, so trying to navigate this city or the East Coast on bike was a little more challenging. There's not bike lanes set up for everyone like there is in other places that are more recently built.

The main thing was really this kind of create the world that you want to live in. We really felt like we didn't live in a place we wanted to be, and we were going to have to make it be a place we wanted to live in. And so, we—it was really my husband's idea to start a farm, with zero farming experience. We had a garden, but that's not farming experience. I was also going to nursing school so I had decided to study nursing as a way to kind of bring some of my herbal knowledge to people more effectively—which I'll talk about later if we get into it—but it wasn't super effective. I couldn't bridge them very well.

But so—I kind of joined in with my husband. We initially grew vegetables, herbs and flowers, and then we cut back after a few years to just herbs, and so we really specialized in our production. It was my interest to focus on herbs and it took over the production of the farm.

About 95% of it is herb production, about 40% of it goes toward mocktail/cocktail ingredients, and the rest goes to our therapeutic type extracts.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Are those mocktail/cocktail ingredients, those are things that you make and sell then?

Linda Shanahan:

We grow and manufacture at our farm.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Wow. As well as the therapeutics as well. Wow!

Linda Shanahan:

And we—we lease our land. We built all of the infrastructure, created all of the—we built all the buildings, dug all the trenches, ran all the electric lines – all of that from scratch on this leased land which is also a little bit crazy, but we’ve been there now 19 years, so it’s—we are pretty established there.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Wow. I cannot—I cannot even imagine the amount of learning that went into, like you said, you had a garden but not farming experience, and you just took one foot in front of the other, I assume, and learned along the way.

Linda Shanahan:

Yeah, we pretty quickly—one of the things that I think helped us was we pretty quickly were able to connect with other farmers in the area. The organic farming community, just like the herbal community, it’s a pretty tight network. It’s pretty small once you get into it, and so we started going to herbal farm—or to farming—organic farming conferences, meeting with the other area organic farmers in our region. They were so amazing. That first year, I had another

farmer who was like, “Oh, your peas didn’t do so well. Here’s a flat.” I mean they would just give us stuff and just help us in so many ways. It was really an uplifting experience in that way.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It’s lovely that you found a community there after having to leave a community that you love so much.

Linda Shanahan:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

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

Well, you’re here to talk about in part, pleurisy, butterfly weed, which is one of my very favorite of the *Asclepias*. I’m curious why you chose this plant for us today.

Linda Shanahan:

Couple of reasons. When we started the farm, one of the things that I kept thinking about was partly drawing from my training with Howie and Stephen, which for those of you that have studied with them, one of the things that they imprint upon you is really the importance of the ecosystem, not just the herbs. You’re thinking about relationships between plants that grow together. You’re looking at—you’re going out into an area where there was a clear cut five years, ten years after, or a fire five years, ten years after. You’re looking at communities of plants together and how they respond to human interaction, as well as natural interactions.

One of the things that I felt pretty intensely when we started farming was how impactful farming was, for one, on the land, and how not knowing how to do it well was potentially more problematic. And then also, we were leasing what was a sod farm. It was a dead zone. There was literally no life. There was no sound, no birds, no insects, no nothing because it was chemically managed very intensively. The owners of the land wanted to switch it to an organic production and through our networks we were able to connect with them and lease this land, but it had a lot of healing it needed to do. So, that kind of became my mission initially when we started farming, was focus on building—I built a wildlife corridor, basically, by planting hundreds of trees and shrubs, and growing out a whole bunch of herbaceous plants, and creating a buffer all around the farm of native plants. I incorporated a lot of medicinals into that purposefully, but a lot of the medicinals are also the same pollinator plants that I'll talk about later with regard to the monarch garden. I really wanted to bring life to the site.

I met with a landscape architect who is a restoration architect, David Hughes, who's in this area. He said, "You know, you really want to have water also." We were having problems with flooding in our fields, so I thought that's great. I want to be able to harness the water somehow because we needed to get it out of our vegetables. So, we dug out kind of like a permacultural installation, I guess you could compare it to. Basically, we dug out ephemeral pooling areas, and then we built berms. We created, basically, wetlands, at the edges of all of our fields, mixed with warm-season grass meadow. I worked with the NRCS, the Natural Resources Conservation Service. They have a program called Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project, which WHIP is for short. They don't—they have a similar program now that I don't know how well it's funded, but there is—there was a program at the time that provided a small fee for each tree or shrub you planted. So I was able to get some support, which gave me so much more confidence doing it, and so I basically spent my entire nursing salary, and all the free time I had on this project for a full two years getting it established. We—I did a total of three acres of plantings, one of which is a warm-season grass meadow. In that planting, pleurisy root or *Asclepias tuberosa* was a star. Part of the reason that plant stuck

with me from the beginning was it was one of the first wild plants to come back once the sod farmer stopped spraying. It popped up through the grass, through the sod, so it was already there.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Just waiting.

Linda Shanahan:

Just waiting to come up.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's lovely. I love the color. I love the *Asclepias* flower, in general. I just find it so beautiful, and then I love butterflies, and so-

Linda Shanahan:

Yeah!

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It's also a lovely plant to have around for that as well.

Linda Shanahan:

I was going to say I also grew it for medicine. I propagated it out, planted it out into my field, and then waited three years or so for the roots to develop, harvested the roots. While harvesting the roots, I was struck by the smell. I don't know if you've experienced harvesting it, but I have worked in critical care nursing for almost two decades. I worked in hospice care for part of that time and I worked with a lot of people with COPD in their homes and in a hospital setting. And so, I am very familiar with what long-term chronic exposure to contaminants of some—or particulate matter and irritants like smoke to the lungs due to someone and how miserable that experience can be. When I was digging up the pleurisy root

that first time I ever harvested it, all I could smell was dirty ashtrays. It was telling me—it was telling me who it was for.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Wow!

Linda Shanahan:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's fascinating. I'm really excited to hear about your medicinal experiences with the plant. It's not one that I've worked with much. It doesn't really grow as much here so.

Linda Shanahan:

I have only made a small amount of extract with those plants that I harvested. I've reserved it just for very specific situations when someone has pleuritic rubs or when they are post-pneumonia but can't quite get out what's stuck in their chest.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

What are pleuritic rubs? Is that basically what you're saying or...

Linda Shanahan:

Yeah, like a pleu—so, pleurisy—one of the reasons why pleurisy root is called “pleurisy root” is pleurisy is a condition in which the surfactant that keeps your—the sac that your lungs sit in—it's the secretion that keeps it smooth every time you expand your lungs. They're like little balloons against another balloon. It's a smooth fluid that allows your lungs to expand and contract smoothly. When you don't have enough surfactant allowing your lungs to expand and contract smoothly, you actually—when you're listening to someone's lungs, you can actually hear the rubbing that occurs between your lungs and that lining—that pleural lining as your lungs are trying to expand and it hurts incredibly. It's one of those situations where

you really need specific treatment for that, and pleurisy root is the most specific treatment for that. It helps mobilize—it's a demulcent that seems to be specific for that region.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I'm just curious, what do they do in Western medicine for this situation?

Linda Shanahan:

We give antibiotics because it's usually infectious-related, but we don't have symptom relief like we do in herbalism. It's a very different approach. The person does suffer from the experience and when you hear pleuritic rub, then report it to the physician. The physician might be concerned that they are drying out a bit too much, maybe they'll pull back on their diuretics. They might infuse more fluids, but it doesn't mean they're going to get fluid to that tissue.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Linda, that reminds me of a quote from a good friend of mine, jim mcdonald, herbalist from Michigan. He says, "Herbalism rocks because we have demulcents. Who else has demulcents? Nobody."

Linda Shanahan:

Demulcents are amazing and that's—I love mullein for its ability to just bring fluid to the lungs out of nowhere—who knows where it's even coming from—and bring fluids to other parts of the body too: the eyes and the mouth and other places you might want moisture. Mullein is great for that. Pleurisy root is also great for that but it does have a mild toxicity. It has cardiac glycosides that are concerning if you're taking it long-term. Mullein is a little more gentle, so it's not—like I said, it's not an herb I've used much at all because of that. Only for short-term use for specific conditions. I don't-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

What would that look like for you? I'm guessing it's a tincture form?

Linda Shanahan:

Tincture.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

And then how would you dose that and what would you consider a more appropriate amount of time?

Linda Shanahan:

It's actually been years since I've used it. Probably—when I had it in a formula—I'm trying to think—my most recent use of it was with my father when he was recovering from pneumonia. He—I gave it to him as a formula and I can't remember, honestly, how much I put in there, but I want to say it was less than a mil per dose, but I'd have to look. I have done way too much since then. I don't remember.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's fair.

Linda Shanahan:

But it's something that I use very rarely. When I use herbs like that rarely, I just look them up every time I go to formulate with them. I'm also not—I'm not practicing clinically anymore. I make—I'm growing and I'm making medicine and I'm selling people medicine. I formulate for formulas. I'll occasionally formulate for someone custom, but I really don't see clients anymore because I just don't have time.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Already—my mind is already reeling of just like, wow, you built a farm while you're a nurse?

Linda Shanahan:

I tried. I tried to do a clinical herbal practice for a number of years and I saw clients. I tried to pile it on to everything else I was doing and it was really hard. It was the follow-up that was one of the most difficult things I was trying to keep being really good at. I'll see them and then reach out in a couple of weeks, then reach out four more weeks after that and make sure they're doing okay. "Oh, they need a refill? Okay, hold on. Let me stay up until 11:00 at night doing your refill." It was very, very challenging, so I realized that the best way for me to spread the herbal world with people and to help spread, really, well-being was to bring people to the farm and share with them the plants. That's really what I do now mostly.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Hey, it's Rosalee. You know, creating this podcast has been one of the most rewarding parts of my herbal work, and if you found something meaningful here, whether it's a new perspective, a favorite recipe or just a sense of calm, I want to let you know there's a good way to go even deeper. It's called the Podcast Circle. Inside, you'll get access to live classes taught by some of my favorite herbal teachers, behind-the-scenes updates, and a beautiful library of herbal resources that we've gathered over the years. But more than that, it's a space to connect with fellow plant lovers who care about the same things you do, and truly, your membership helps make this podcast possible. It's how we keep the episodes coming and the herbal goodness flowing. So, if you're ready to be part of something more, something rooted in connection, head over to HerbalPodcastCircle.com. I'd love to see you there.

And the recipe—for the recipe, you have an interesting take on this week's recipe, which I love. It's a Monarch Medicinal Mini Garden. Will you talk to us a bit about that?

Linda Shanahan:

Yes, so learning about butterfly weed, it is a milkweed, and there's many milkweeds. There are 77 species in the United States and 11 just in Pennsylvania. There's a lot of milkweeds. No matter where you live in the country, you likely have a variety of *Asclepias* that is native to where you live. One of the interesting things about *Asclepias* species is they are hosts for the monarch butterfly larvae. There are concerns that the monarch butterflies are dying, so

there's been a lot of information in the news in the last, really, decade or so about ways in which people can support the monarch butterflies.

One of the reasons—one of the biggest reasons why the monarchs seem to be dying is—well, there's three, really—but one of the biggest is the use of pesticides and insecticides—herbicides and insecticides in the environment in agricultural systems. One is when farms spray herbicides and kill all the plants all the way to the edge of their field. They no longer have an herbaceous barrier that isn't what they're purposefully growing, so now, a lot of farms you'll see it's road-to-road soybeans or it's road-to-road corn. Whereas, we used to have—before we used glyphosate-containing products, we typically had a border around fields where there would be wild plants like swamp milkweed or butterfly weed or various other kinds of *Asclepias* that monarchs could go to, and they had these little corridors that they could follow on and nest in. Over the last couple of decades of using these chemicals, we've lost the actual plants and then—or habitat, but then we've also had insecticides penetrating the plants themselves.

Neonicotinoid insecticides are one of the most popular at this point, and they're systemic. These are chemicals that are used to prevent insects from eating your corn and eating the soybeans, and eating the canola seeds. The different crops that are grown are sprayed with this kind of insecticide and others, but the most popular one, this one, is systemic and it's taken up by the plants. The plants then have this chemical in every cell, so then the insects are eating even the adjacent plants like the butterfly milkweed, and dying as a result. These particular insecticides are blamed now for the loss of bees, both native ground bees like bumblebees, as well as honeybees.

But also, humans. There's more studies being done on humans. Initially, these insecticides were thought to be basically benign with mammalian exposure because it would not cross the blood-brain barrier, but actually, the secondary metabolites of these chemicals are worse, and they do cross the blood-brain barrier. So, we are affected. Our nervous systems are affected. We're still learning about this. Our microbiomes are affected. There's lots of

reasons why we need to be concerned about this, but just learning about these plants connects you to learning about the monarchs, connects you to learning about the insecticides. This is one of the reasons why I love herbalism, is because it allows you to see things much more clearly and connect dots that maybe you otherwise might not connect.

The monarch garden, to get back to that, is a way to provide a tiny, little oasis for the butterflies to find. It's not just the butterflies, it's other pollinator species as well, but your goal is to provide shelter. Ideally, if you have a tree nearby, you'll have some place for them to rest that is not in the full sun, but then in the sun you have a couple of milkweed species or *Asclepias* species—those provide food for the larvae once they're laid. And then around the milkweed, other pollinator plants that are native to your region are going to provide food for the adult monarchs. You kind of need all of it so you're providing food for the adults, food for the babies, shelter for the adults, and then also, a little bit of water would be even more ideal. Then you would be creating paradise. If you had a little water bath for birds, the monarchs would use that as well, and then—or some stones at the base where you have, maybe water that collects, like a mud pond. That's another thing that I've read is suggested having a place where they can stand out of the water and warm themselves, but also then go back into the water and cool themselves. There are all kinds of theories about ways you can make this most ideal for the monarchs, but basically, plants and plants.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love all these different levels of the story, the trees, the plants because that makes so much sense. I can say I feel like most of the time I just hear they say “Plant milkweed for the monarchs.” And this is like, “Oh no, let's create a whole habitat, a whole ecosystem.”

Linda Shanahan:

That's right.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Like you said, herbalists—we love systems thinking. We love the whole ecology, so that makes a lot of sense. It reminds me too, Linda. I was in Michigan. We were on a highway and it was like the highway, one direction is going one way, one direction is going the other way. There was a green strip in between and they had planted milkweed, and so there's milkweed everywhere. I was like, oh, that's cool that there's all this milkweed! Obviously, they did it for the monarchs. The person I was with was like, "Yeah, except that's not really a great habitat to put milkweed in because all the butterflies are crossing the road. When it's butterfly migration, you just see butterflies everywhere on the road." I was like, whoa! That's a big miss. That was not good, so I appreciate this approach. It makes a lot of sense of we're not just throwing milkweed in the middle of a highway. We're creating a whole ecosystem thinking about where do they like to rest? How do they drink? How do we create a system for them.

Linda Shanahan:

And I didn't even think about the trees until I did some more research on this, but one of the reasons why there—they think the monarchs are dying, another reason why is climate change. Obviously, there are big swings in—so they end up wintering in Mexico. One of the generations winters in Mexico. In Mexico, they had—in 2022 there was a freezing event and 80% of the monarchs overwintering died. That kind of threat is a thing, but also, when they're in the temperate rain forest regions or the Midwest, they actually can't handle it too hot either. The trees provide a buffer of temperature for them as well.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

That's lovely. I want to give a shout out to Tatiana who did the recipe card. I don't know that you've seen it yet, Linda, but it's absolutely beautiful. It's a really fun one, just this beautiful image, all these flowers for the garden. For the listeners and watchers, you can look at the show notes to get your recipe card for Building Your Own Monarch Medicinal Mini Garden or go to herbswithrosaleepodcast.com, look for this episode, you can download it there.

Thanks for sharing this. I also love the writings that you sent along with it. It's—usually we do

recipes, then there's a yield, like two to four—two to four servings or whatever for your yield. You wrote, "Greater likelihood of survival of migration across North America." It's lovely. I love the monarchs. All of these are just such lovely plants, so look for that recipe card. Thanks for sharing that with us.

Linda Shanahan:

If you're looking for plants that might be more specific to your region, the Xerces Society actually has good lists on their website, so that's a good resource also. They have it divided by what part of the country you're in.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, cool. Will you say that again? I didn't quite catch it.

Linda Shanahan:

It's—it's Xerces Society. I think I'm saying that right. It's X-E-R-C-E-S.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Alright. We'll make sure to get that in the show notes. Lovely. Was there anything else you'd like to share about pleurisy root before we move on?

Linda Shanahan:

Well, it does if you want to start it yourself, which I'm primarily a propagator—that's what I love to do. I'm in the greenhouse all the time. That's where I was before the show. You do, if you want to start your own seeds, you can put them in a little baggie with some moistened sand for 30 days before trying to germinate them. Depending on the species, it might be 60 days, but the butterfly weed I've successfully germinated after 30 days. You'll get your dry seed stored over the winter in a dry place, and then in the spring when you're ready to try to germinate it. Think ahead a month ahead of time, moisten the sand, put it in the fridge in a little baggie, and then pull it out, and then seed it. That's called "stratification." You're

mimicking the winter exposure it would have before you try to germinate it. It's actually really easy to grow, so you need to germinate.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thanks for that tip. That does make a big difference in the germination. Anything else about this beautiful butterfly weed?

Linda Shanahan:

One of the nice things about starting it from seed is it does have different colors. I know you mentioned you love the flowers. When you grow it from seed, you'll see some of them are more red, and some of them are more orange. They're just really beautiful-

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, lovely.

Linda Shanahan:

Plants.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

The kind that I grow are definitely more orange, kind of a bright orange.

Linda Shanahan:

They're beautiful. Close up—close up shots are amazing of them.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Yes, absolutely. I'd love to hear what kind of projects you have going on.

Linda Shanahan:

So, because we have been farming for so much of the time that we've lived here our lives have been crazy, trying to work and farm. I don't work actively in nursing anymore. I teach part-

time. I teach clinical nursing in the hospital and am transitioning to maybe doing a lot less. I'd like to be able to maintain some of my bridging from the nursing world with the herbal world. I'm taking a class right now in lab analysis with an emergency medicine doctor who also wishes nurses knew more about labs. That's something that I'm thinking I can bridge into my herbal classes, bring in more lab analysis understanding. I've struggled with trying to bridge my herbal knowledge with my nursing knowledge because there—I can do it in the classroom setting at the farm. I can bring in a lot of my understandings, but in the hospital setting and the healthcare setting, it was challenging to bring in any of my herbal understanding. I would teach classes for—I would teach classes in the hospital separate from my nursing world in herb drug interactions. I met with a cardiology group and taught their patients about herbs they could and couldn't use, and dosing and spices, and that kind of thing. I would meet with a dietitians group to talk to people about tea, and do things like that that are great to connect people, but I really want to dive a little deeper and support people more who don't get the support they need in the healthcare world. Also maybe don't trust it, but also want someone who they trust to help explain things better for them.

That's kind of what I'm thinking I could see myself doing as I pull back a little bit more on aggressively spending so much time in the field, is building something that's more focused on supporting people and understanding their own lab work and bridging it back to how to support yourself with the herbs. I know that sounds like a clinical practice again, but that's not necessarily. I'm still not sure how that's going to look.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I feel like with herbalism, it's—at least for me, it's following that thread of inspiration which changes from year to year, and phase to phase. There's just always something new to unravel and to explore.

Linda Shanahan:

That's pretty much where I'm at—I'm unraveling.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Nice. You mentioned you're also an herbal teacher and you teach on the farm?

Linda Shanahan:

I teach classes at the farm. I basically teach farm-based herbalism. That's what I call it. It's a seven-month long program, but it's only once a month at the farm. They get to see the entire season from this all-day long experience that they have at the farm, and then we do weekly online short lectures and talks. We do it by body system throughout the season. Right now, we're on nervous system moving into digestion, and then we make our way through different systems. I use a lot of my background in healthcare to go deep on some things, but my focus with them is really connecting them with plants, helping them develop a rela—basically, fostering relationships, and so helping people build confidence and connection, and try to demystify things that people feel uncomfortable trying on their own. We make a lot of things. We are manufacturers at my farm, so I bring it into my kitchen. We make tinctures. We make glycerites. We make infused oils. We could do all the things. Each month, we harvest, we process, and we make, and then everybody goes home with things. It's a very tactile experience and people finish the program always wishing it was going to be continuing. I have a couple of students this year it's their fourth time taking.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Oh, wow.

Linda Shanahan:

Because they just love coming to the farm, so it's really fun. It's a fun—it's a fun experience for my students. It's really not too heady. It's more experiential.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love the practical and the experiential.

Linda Shanahan:

Yeah, yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Lovely. I have one last question for you before we go, and that question is, how has working with herbs changed the way you see the world?

Linda Shanahan:

I've thought about this question and I think the answer always comes back to the same thing, which is that I see connections in things that maybe I wouldn't otherwise see; that I slow down on a regular basis in order to more deeply work with plants. It is a practice that I practice almost as a spiritual exercise. I don't know that I would be as excited as I am, for example, at all the research coming out of the microbiome project if I didn't study herbalism. I don't know that I would be so appreciative of all the changes I see in our healthcare system because it is getting better. I know this doesn't sound like maybe it is, but there's so much happening in the scientific community right now that will eventually come out into the clinical world.

It is so exciting to see minds get blown in that world and—and see that a lot of this we already knew. Hello! If you guys would have listened to herbalists, you wouldn't be so surprised. I think that it has opened my mind in ways that I could not have anticipated. It changed my way of working with people. My experience in healthcare was every day impacted by my study of herbalism. The way I interact with patients, the way I taught patients, the way I viewed the treatments that they were getting, I always had in the back of my head, ways that we could do things a little less intensively, a little bit more supportively. I think it just impacts everything I do. The way I started the farm, seeing it as an organism that needed help, that comes from studying herbalism.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

I love that and I can definitely resonate with that of just that your eyes are different when you have this whole other kind of paradigm that shapes the world that we're looking at. Can I ask

you a follow up question on that? You mentioned the microbiome and you wouldn't be as excited about that if you weren't an herbalist? Can you say more about that? It's just that piqued my interest.

Linda Shanahan:

Oh, yeah. So, for those that aren't familiar, which I imagine a lot of people at this point are, but there was back in 2012 I think? A number of researchers who had access to DNA technology were able to grow out all the different kinds of beings that we have living on within us, like swabs from the mouth and the vagina, and the armpit, the cheek, behind the ears, and to look at what actually is there as opposed to an agar plate which things compete and die.

We had a very limited view of what our bodies were holding in terms of other life forms. The microbiome project grew these other life forms out and found that we had so many more—so much more diversity than we ever thought we had, and that we also had varying amounts of diversity based on where you live in the world. In the United States we have a not-as-healthy diversity going on. Since that initial study, which was just kind of the tip of the iceberg, there have been hundreds of studies that have come out from that research looking at different areas of the body, different kinds of bacteria, different kinds of fungus, different things living on or within us, and how that balance affects our day to day lives.

One of the biggest areas of research that I find fascinating is the effects on the immune system that are being found from what the bacteria that live within us poop out. There are actually now, a lot of the studies are looking at what excrement the bacteria is releasing and how that excrement is being used by our bodies to then create things like neurotransmitters and using it as fuel. It's sort of like methane—like we're taking methane from these bugs and then we're repurposing it in our bodies for all kinds of different things, and that's how we evolved. If we disrupt that flora with eating foods that maybe pathogenic or disease-causing bacteria tend to like, then you're kind of pushing yourself in the direction of maybe developing a chronic disease because that bacteria is going to take over, versus having a lot

more fruits and vegetables and diversity in your diet, and supporting a more diverse flora, you may very well be setting yourself up for a healthier life. Looking at a lot of this information is helping us now understand why eating blue foods are good, or eating soluble fiber is so good. We knew it was good, but we didn't necessarily know why and now we're learning why.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

It really speaks to the deep symbiosis there too of just the give and take of us and the bacteria that's going on.

Linda Shanahan:

Absolutely. We are an ecosystem within ecosystems. We are so dependent on these ecosystems within us and we have ignored them at our peril. That's something that I think is the thing that's so exciting to me to see what's happening in healthcare because a lot of these providers that for years would throw antibiotics at people or would think of cancer as this block of tumor, are seeing now that it's a so much more complex than they ever could have imagined. And also scary for some of them that it's not—that it's more complex than they could have imagined because it's harder in some ways, but then when you have that basic understanding of what supports the microbiome, it's easy. It's eat fruits and vegetables. It's actually pretty easy.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

This is such a lovely chat because we basically have been talking about creating ecosystem. We've been talking about your farm and the monarch mini garden, creating ecosystems, creating habitats that the plants love to live in. Now, we're talking about the ecosystem of our own bodies, so it's all microcosm of microcosm there.

Linda Shanahan:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you so much for sharing that, Linda. For folks who want to find you, where's the best way to find out more about you and the farm?

Linda Shanahan:

I do have a website. It's www.bluestembotanicals.com. If you sign up for my newsletter, I do a non-salesy newsletter with information about herbs. I try to do it once a week, but it usually doesn't happen until once a month.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Alright. A little bit of honesty there, alright. Love the newsletter, it's a wonderful way to get in touch with you. Thank you.

Linda Shanahan:

Yeah.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you so much for joining us. Thanks for sharing your love of pleurisy root and of ecosystems and of the complexities out there. It's just been a pleasure to have you.

Linda Shanahan:

Thanks so much for having me. I was thinking earlier today about how you're like the Terry Gross of herbalism. I feel like I've had my opportunity to be on Terry Gross.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Whoa!

Linda Shanahan:

I'm so excited to be invited.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

Thank you very much for that. Thanks again.

Linda Shanahan:

Thanks, Rosalee.

Rosalee de la Forêt:

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

This podcast is made possible in part by our awesome students. This week's Student Spotlight is on Deborah Bobst in Colorado.

Debbie has been part of our herbal community through several programs over the years, and her recent reflections in Rooted Medicine Circle beautifully demonstrate her thoughtful approach to herbalism. She has embraced the practices of gratitude, awareness, and intentional medicine making, taking time to honor not only the plants themselves, but also the people and ecosystems that make herbal medicine possible.

Her reflections on slowing down, cultivating gratitude, and approaching each day with greater awareness remind us that herbalism is as much about how we live as it is about the remedies we make.

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

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

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

We talked a lot today about pleurisy root as a member of the milkweed family and about the monarchs that depend upon it, but I also want to leave you with something about monarchs that I find genuinely astonishing.

Monarch caterpillars don't just eat milkweed—they absorb its chemistry. The cardiac glycosides that make milkweed medicinally potent, the same compounds Linda mentioned as a reason for caution with pleurisy root, are sequestered by the caterpillar in its own body as it feeds. By the time it becomes a butterfly, it's essentially wearing the plant's chemical defenses as armor. It becomes toxic and unpalatable to predators though not through anything that the butterfly produced itself, but through this relationship with the plant.

And then there's the migration. Monarchs make an extraordinary journey each year from their overwintering forest in Mexico, all the way north, and then back again. But here's the thing: no single butterfly makes the full roundtrip. The journey north takes three or even four generations. Each butterfly lives just long enough to travel part of the way, reproduce, and then pass the journey on to its offsprings. But then something shifts, the last generation of summer, what scientists call the "super generation," doesn't reproduce right away, instead it lives for up to eight months, makes the entire journey south alone, navigates to a forest in Mexico that none of them have ever seen. How they find it remains one of nature's genuinely unsolved mysteries, and that's pretty cool.

As always, thank you so much for joining me. I'll see you in the next episode.