



FREE ROOTWORK LESSON

What they call weeds,
we call
MEDICINE

THE ROOT DOCTOR'S FIELD GUIDE

16 Medicine Plants

Safety First

Reading a Leaf

Teas, Washes & Poultices

Rootwork Uses

Field Journal

HOODOO UNIVERSITY

Roots & Remedies School of Herbalism





WELCOME, SCHOLAR

THE ROADSIDE IS A PHARMACY

Every Remedy Has a Root. Every Root Has a Story.



Look at where most medicine plants grow: roadsides, vacant lots, field edges, ditches, and the cracks in the sidewalk. Field guides call these places "waste areas." Our ancestors called them the medicine cabinet.

The root doctors of the South did not separate healing the body from tending the spirit. The same plant could be a tea for a cough and an ingredient in a work for protection. Their knowledge was a living blend of African traditions, Indigenous plant wisdom, and what was learned by hand in Southern soil.

This free lesson introduces 16 common plants you can likely find near you, how they were traditionally used for the body, and how many of them show up in rootwork.

HOW TO USE THIS LESSON

Read it once through. Then take it outside. Try to find and correctly identify three plants this week before you ever think about using one.

BY THE END, YOU'LL BE ABLE TO

♥ Follow the root doctor's safety laws

♥ Name the deadly lookalikes

♥ Describe a plant like an herbalist

♥ Know 16 plants by name and use

♥ Tell a tea from a decoction

♥ Turn a remedy into a spiritual wash



BEFORE YOU PICK A SINGLE LEAF

THE ROOT DOCTOR'S LAWS



1

Know it 100%, or leave it be.

Never "test" an unknown plant by tasting it. Identify it with more than one trusted source, or with a teacher standing beside you.

2

Mind where it grows.

Skip plants near busy roads, sprayed lawns, railroad tracks, and polluted water. The plant holds what the ground holds.

3

Ask, take a little, leave the rest.

Get permission on any land that isn't yours. Never take the whole stand. Many practitioners leave an offering, like a coin or a word of thanks.

4

Respect your own body.

Pregnancy, nursing, allergies, children, and prescription medicines all change what's safe. Check with a healthcare provider first.

DEADLY & DANGEROUS LOOKALIKES

Poison Hemlock *Conium maculatum*
Purple-blotched, hairless stems and lacy, parsley-like leaves. Every part can kill. It is easily mistaken for wild carrot and angelica.

Giant Hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum*
Huge white umbrella-shaped flower heads. Its sap plus sunlight can cause severe burns.

Wild Parsnip *Pastinaca sativa*
Flat clusters of tiny yellow flowers. Like hogweed, its sap can blister skin in the sun.

Poison Ivy & Poison Oak *Toxicodendron spp.*
"Leaves of three, let it be." The oil spreads to clothes and tools.



TALK LIKE AN HERBALIST

HOW TO READ A LEAF

Look closely. The plant is always telling you who it is.



LEAF SHAPES

Elliptical

Longer than wide, tapering evenly at both ends.

See it in: birch

Heart-Shaped

Two rounded lobes at the base, pointed tip.

See it in: violet, burdock

Rounded

Nearly circular, often with a short point.

See it in: plantain

Oval

Egg-shaped, widest just below the middle.

See it in: chickweed

Lobed

Deep rounded or pointed cuts along the edges.

See it in: oak, dandelion

Lance-Shaped

Long and narrow, like the head of a spear.

See it in: willow, mint

LEAF TYPES & ARRANGEMENTS

Compound

One leaf made of many small leaflets on a single stalk.

See it in: black walnut, sumac

Alternate

One leaf per joint, zigzagging up the stem.

See it in: oak, birch

Opposite

Two leaves facing each other at each joint.

See it in: mints, catnip

Whorled

Three or more leaves circling the stem at one point.

See it in: cleavers, juniper

Basal Rosette

Leaves spreading flat in a circle at ground level.

See it in: dandelion, mullein

Square Stem

Roll it between your fingers. Four corners often means the mint family.

See it in: peppermint, catnip



CHAPTER ONE

The Healing Hand

CUTS · SCRAPES · ITCHES · STINGS

Common Plantain

Plantago major

FIND IT Lawns, sidewalk cracks, and paths, with broad ribbed leaves in a low rosette.

BODY Chewed or crushed leaves were laid on stings, bites, and small cuts.

ROOTWORK Called "snakeweed" in Southern folk practice for its use against snakebite and poison.

Yarrow

Achillea millefolium

FIND IT Fields and roadsides, with feathery fern-like leaves and flat white flower clusters.

BODY Leaves were pressed onto small wounds to slow bleeding, and the tea was used for colds and fevers.

ROOTWORK Courage and protection, and also used in love work.

⚠ Avoid in pregnancy or if you react to ragweed.

Jewelweed

Impatiens capensis

FIND IT Wet shady spots, with orange spotted horn-shaped flowers and juicy stems.

BODY Crushed stems were rubbed on skin after poison ivy or nettle contact. It often grows right beside them.

Witch Hazel

Hamamelis virginiana

FIND IT Eastern woods, a shrub that blooms yellow in fall after its leaves drop.

BODY A bark and leaf wash was used to tighten skin, calm itching, and help stop minor bleeding.

⚠ External use only.

A STORY WORTH KNOWING

Around 1750, an enslaved man named Caesar was granted his freedom by the South Carolina General Assembly in exchange for his remedy for poison and rattlesnake bite. Its published ingredients included roots of plantain and horehound.



CHAPTER TWO

The Warm Cup

COUGHS · COLDS · CHEST CONGESTION

Common Mullein

Verbascum thapsus

FIND IT Dry disturbed ground. Soft, fuzzy gray-green leaves in year one, then a tall spike of yellow flowers.

BODY Leaf tea was a classic remedy for coughs, sore throats, and congestion.

ROOTWORK Protection and keeping away bad dreams. Also known as a substitute for graveyard dirt.

⚠ Strain through cloth to remove the tiny hairs.

Red & White Clover

Trifolium pratense / *T. repens*

FIND IT Any lawn, with three-part leaves and round puffball flowers.

BODY Blossom and leaf tea was used for coughs, colds, and fevers.

ROOTWORK A luck charm. A four-leaf clover is carried for good fortune.

⚠ Red clover is not for pregnancy or blood thinners.

Sunflower

Helianthus spp.

FIND IT Fields and roadsides, with tall stalks and spade-shaped leaves.

BODY Tea was taken for fevers, coughs, and bronchitis.

ROOTWORK Success, happiness, and the blessing of the sun.

Horseradish

Armoracia rusticana

FIND IT Moist garden soil, with huge long-stemmed leaves and a thick white taproot.

BODY A root poultice on the chest was used to break up congestion. Grandmama's go-to.

⚠ Very strong. It can burn skin, so test a small spot first.



CHAPTER THREE

The Settled Belly

UPSET STOMACH · DIGESTION · CRAMPS

Common Dandelion

Taraxacum officinale

FIND IT Everywhere, with a basal rosette of toothy leaves and bright yellow flowers.

BODY A gentle tea for stomach upset. Root tea was used as a diuretic.

ROOTWORK Wishes and divination. Blow the seed head and send your prayer.

Chicory

Cichorium intybus

FIND IT Roadsides, with wiry stems and sky-blue flowers that close by afternoon.

BODY Leaf and root tea was used to aid digestion. The roasted root is a coffee stand-in.

ROOTWORK Removing obstacles and winning favor.

Wild Rose

Rosa spp.

FIND IT Thickets and waterways, with thorny canes, five-petaled blooms, and red hips.

BODY Rose hip tea is rich in vitamin C and was used for cramps and loose bowels.

ROOTWORK Love, sweetness, and peace in the home.

⚠ Strain well to remove the hairs inside the hips.

Peppermint

Mentha × piperita

FIND IT Damp ground, with a square stem and a scent you can't miss.

BODY A soothing tea for indigestion and nerves.

ROOTWORK Cleansing, plus washes that keep money and luck moving.

⚠ It may worsen heartburn.



CHAPTER FOUR

The Quiet Night & The Strong Wash

REST · CALM · CLEANSING WASHES

Catnip

Nepeta cataria

FIND IT Disturbed ground. A grayish mint with a square stem and soft heart-shaped leaves.

BODY A calming bedtime tea, also used for colds and headaches.

ROOTWORK Drawing love and attraction.

⚠ Not for pregnancy.

Hawthorn

Crataegus spp.

FIND IT Woods' edges, a thorny tree with white blossoms and small red "haws."

BODY Leaf, flower, or berry tea was used to calm the nerves and invite sleep.

ROOTWORK Guarding and protecting the home.

⚠ Talk to your doctor first if you take heart or blood pressure medicine.

Oak

Quercus spp.

FIND IT Woodlands, with lobed leaves and acorns.

BODY Boiled acorns or bark make an astringent wash for irritated skin.

ROOTWORK Strength and endurance. Acorns are carried for luck.

⚠ For washing, not drinking.

Black Walnut

Juglans nigra

FIND IT Moist woods, with long compound leaves and green, tennis-ball-sized husks.

BODY A strong leaf tea was used to repel insects.

ROOTWORK Cutting ties, ending what needs to end, and uncrossing.

⚠ The husks stain hands dark for days. Wear gloves.



IN GRANDMAMA'S KITCHEN

FOUR WAYS TO WORK A PLANT



Infusion

THE TEA

For leaves and flowers. Pour hot water over the herb, cover it, and steep about 10 minutes. Steeping longer makes a stronger brew, and strength changes the effect.

Decoction

THE SIMMER

For roots, bark, and berries. Chop or crush them well, then simmer gently in a covered pot for 15 to 20 minutes. Tough parts need heat and time to give up their medicine.

Poultice

THE PLASTER

Crush fresh plant into a paste, adding a little water if needed. Spread it on clean cloth or directly on the skin, and bind it in place.

Wash

THE RINSE

A strong tea, cooled and strained, poured over the skin or used on a cloth. It's for the outside of the body only.

WHERE THE ROOT DOCTOR COMES IN

In rootwork, a wash isn't only for skin. The same brew becomes a spiritual bath or floor wash when it's prayed over, with your intention, a Psalm, or words from your heart, and poured with purpose. The plant feeds the body. Prayer feeds the spirit.



TAKE IT OUTSIDE

YOUR FIELD JOURNAL



PLANTS I'VE CORRECTLY IDENTIFIED

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ Plantain | ☐ Yarrow | ☐ Jewelweed | ☐ Witch Hazel |
| ☐ Mullein | ☐ Clover | ☐ Sunflower | ☐ Horseradish |
| ☐ Dandelion | ☐ Chicory | ☐ Wild Rose | ☐ Peppermint |
| ☐ Catnip | ☐ Hawthorn | ☐ Oak | ☐ Black Walnut |

Which plant did my elders use that I never knew was medicine?

Where did I find it, and what was growing beside it?

Ready to go deeper than the roadside?

Join the Founding Scholars Cohort, Class of 2027, at the Roots & Remedies School of Herbalism.

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This lesson is for education and cultural preservation only. It is not medical advice and does not replace care from a licensed healthcare provider. Never ingest a plant you cannot identify with certainty.

