Urhp
Unified Register of Herbal Practitioners

eHerbalist



Items in this edition Include:

- The Inflamed Mind: Turning Down the Volume on Neuroinflammation with Phytotherapy by Lloyd Gee
- Herbal Reality: A Free Resource for Herbal Medicine Practitioners by Sebastian Pole
- When the Body Overheats: Supporting the Nervous System Through Summer by Nicola Sabin
- A Herbalist in Crete by Judy Evans
- Meet the Members Q&A: Lucy Jones
- URHP Summer Gathering & AGM + Save the Date for URHP 30th Anniversary in 2027

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Please send your contributions for the next issue to: registrar@urhp.com

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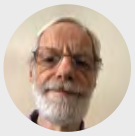

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Letter from the Editorial Team

Dear Members,

What began as our Summer Solstice edition has gently slipped into autumn! Although a little later than planned, this issue of the URHP eHerbalist brings together a wonderful mix of herbal knowledge, professional insights, and news from our growing community. We look back on our wonderful Summer Gathering in Cirencester, with its inspiring speakers, shared learning, and warm friendships, and look forward to celebrating **URHP's 30th anniversary from the 25th to the 27th of June 2027. Save the Date!**

This issue welcomes three new Council Members and explores a fascinating range of subjects, including inflammation and cortisol and mental well-being. We also discover the wild herbs of Crete, follow the changing seasons through a herbalist's eyes, and introduce Herbal Reality's valuable resources for practitioners. Our thanks to all our contributors and to everyone who helps keep our herbal community informed, connected and thriving. We would love to hear more of your experiences, discoveries, and ideas for future editions and for our new website to be launched soon.

As the seasons turn, we hope you find something here to inform your practice, spark your curiosity or simply bring a little pleasure.

Warm herbal wishes,

Rachel, Dilys, Wendy & Alistair

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URHP 2026 AGM | Highlights

The Council Meeting and AGM reflected on a year of greater stability and renewed focus, with healthy finances and a commitment to strengthening membership support, communications and professional development.

Priorities for 2026–27 include rebuilding student membership, improving links with training providers, developing mentoring opportunities, reviewing insurance options, and monitoring regulatory developments. Council will also consider additional administrative support, student involvement and Chair succession planning. The refreshed URHP website will simplify renewals and payments, improve access to resources and encourage more member contributions.

Preparations are underway for our 30th anniversary gathering 25th to 27th June 2027, with volunteers warmly welcomed. Above all, our aim is to build a more connected, visible, and supportive herbal practitioner community. Full AGM minutes will be available in the Members' Area of the URHP website.

New Council Members

We warmly welcome Diane Waby, Lucy Jones and Ghislaine Headland-Vanni, elected to Council at the AGM. We look forward to their contributions to URHP.



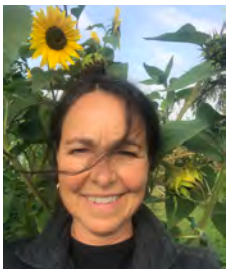
Lucy Jones studied Tibetan Medicine before western herbal medicine and combines the two disciplines in her South Somerset practice. When she's not seeing patients, she's growing, gathering, and processing her own medicines, teaching her apprentices or writing. She's the author of two books.

Read more about Lucy in our Meet the Members feature on page 26 of this



Ghislaine Headland-Vanni: My herbal and natural health journey began at 14, when I eagerly read, learned, and shared homemade remedies with family and friends. A move to Lincolnshire in my early 50s finally allowed me to formalise this lifelong interest through the BSc at Lincoln College.

In my practice, I combine herbal medicine with 26 years of clinical hypnotherapy experience. For the past ten years, I've also been part of the three-herbalist team at Fenland Natural Health, delivering workshops, talks, wild medicine walks, and monthly meetings to support and inspire people in my local area.



Diane Waby is a medical herbalist with a degree in Clinical Herbalism from Lincoln, graduating in 2025, Diane runs her own practice near Nottingham. She has a particular interest in self-sufficiency through growing herbs and producing her own tinctures, teas, and other herbal preparations.

As a member of the URHP Council, she hopes to build connections with fellow practitioners and contribute to advancing the profession, promoting high standards of practice, and raising awareness of the URHP to encourage wider membership.



CELEBRATING PLANTS & PEOPLE

URHP SUMMER GATHERING 2026

19–21 JUNE, RAU, CIRENCESTER

Three days of herbal learning, conversation, and connection in the Cotswolds

The Royal Agricultural University (RAU) in Cirencester welcomed the URHP community for a summer weekend devoted to herbal practice and the people who sustain it. Alongside talks spanning practical clinical challenges and traditional herbal knowledge, the programme made space for a herb walk, shared conversations, an AGM and a celebration of the summer solstice.

MOMENTS FROM CIRENCESTER: A WEEKEND IN PICTURES

From professional exchange to midsummer celebration: Learning across traditions, sessions covered supplements in herbal practice, taking a new patient's case, Welsh herbal folklore, and propolis and three-dimensional medicine.





Opening and Welcome
URHP Chair Rachel Boon led the proceedings



Exploring three-dimensional medicine
James Fearnley examined therapeutic potential of propolis



Stories, knowledge, and tradition
Salena Walker explored herbalism in Wales through a fascinating mix of myth, folklore, and practice



Taking knowledge into practice
Lucy Jones explored taking a new patient's case



Taking knowledge into practice
Neil Williams considered supplements in herbal practice



Preserving herbal heritage
Vicki explored the work of the Herbal History Research Network

PLANTS AT THE HEART OF THE GATHERING

Barbara Wilkinson's Herb Walk brought the programme outdoors in the beautiful landscape of the RAU









Plants on our Herb Walk

Can you identify them all?













Community and Connection: The conversations in between

















The Inflamed Mind: Turning Down the Volume on Neuroinflammation with Phytotherapy by Lloyd Gee

The traditional landscape of mental health and cognitive care is undergoing a substantial paradigm shift. For decades, clinical practice was dominated by the simplistic "chemical imbalance" model. However, a recent day seminar hosted by the College of Practitioners of Phytotherapy offered an inspiring alternative. Bringing together five pioneering researchers and clinicians, the event outlined how contemporary psychopharmacology is moving away from monoamine deficiency toward a dynamic, multi-targeted framework centred on neuroinflammation (NI), synaptic plasticity, and Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor (BDNF).

For professional herbalists, the seminar's central proposition was that the CNS functions as an integrated neuroimmune network and that treatment may therefore need to address systemic as well as neurological factors. The speakers presented plant medicines as promising multi-target interventions that have the potential to succeed where single-molecule pharmaceuticals have failed.

The Paradigm Shift: From Serotonin to Neuroplasticity

Kerry Bone argued that the traditional serotonin-deficiency hypothesis of depression is dead, citing reviews that found no consistent evidence that depression is caused by low serotonin activity or concentration. He presented a neuroplasticity framework in which antidepressants such as SSRIs restore connectivity between brain regions and increase the brain's capacity to adapt, helping to explain their delayed clinical effects.

Chronic low-grade inflammation may interfere with neuroplasticity in some people. Peripheral inflammatory drivers, including gut dysbiosis, diet and stress, can influence neuroimmune signalling, while impaired gut and blood–brain barriers may amplify these effects. The resulting processes can include microglial activation, mitochondrial dysfunction, HPA-axis disruption and altered BDNF signalling.

A major consequence of chronic neuroinflammation is the suppression of **BDNF (Brain-Derived Neurotrophic Factor)**, a crucial protein responsible for neuronal survival, maintenance, and synaptic plasticity. Peripheral blood levels of BDNF are significantly lower in depressed patients and negatively correlate with symptom severity.

Bone identified curcumin, bupleurum, ginkgo, St John's wort and rosemary as key herbs that boost BDNF. He also highlighted a wider group of therapeutic agents for downregulating neuroinflammation, supporting neuroprotection, improving microcirculation and mitochondrial function, and addressing depressive symptoms:

- **Curcumin and Boswellia:** Powerhouses for lowering neuroinflammation. Meta-analyses show curcumin significantly improves both depressive and anxiety symptoms. Boswellia uniquely protects the blood-brain barrier, reduces cerebral oedema, and lowers brain atrophy.

- **Ginkgo biloba:** A true multi-tasker that satisfies every therapeutic box—it is neuroprotective, anti-inflammatory, boosts microcirculation, elevates BDNF, and supports mitochondrial function.

- **Bupleurum and St John's Wort:** Extensively documented to enhance nerve growth factors, elevate BDNF, and improve clinical depression scores.

- **Saffron, Rhodiola, Rosemary and Cocoa:** Rosemary tea has been shown to nearly double peripheral BDNF levels within 10 days. Saffron acts as a potent clinical antidepressant equivalent to standard drugs for mild-to-moderate cases, while Rhodiola significantly improves clinical depression scores.

Bone introduced a multi-herbal protocol combining curcumin as CurQfen®, Boswellia, Bupleurum and Gotu Kola. In an eight-week randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled trial involving adults with depression who continued their existing antidepressant therapy, scores improved by day 28, but the benefits took time to develop fully, with significantly better results by day 56. At day 56, the active group had achieved an approximately 40% mean reduction in MADRS depression scores, and 43.5% achieved at least a 50% reduction, compared with 4.4% of the placebo group. Anxiety and sleep scores followed the same pattern, with greater reductions at day 56 than at day 28. The formulation was safely used alongside some antidepressants, including SSRIs, during the trial.

The Therapeutic Challenge: Modulation, Not Suppression

Professor Andrew Scholey started by defining the ultimate therapeutic challenge: selective intervention. Turning inflammation off entirely is dangerous, as acute, protective immune responses are required for pathogen clearance and tissue repair. The goal of phytotherapy is to shift maladaptive chronic signalling while preserving homeostatic safety.

Scholey presented human trials demonstrating the rapid and structural benefits of Curcumin, which has been shown to improve working memory and attention within just one hour of an acute dose, and significantly enhance spatial



Boswellia serrata (frankincense)

> ***"Curcumin and Boswellia! Powerhouses for lowering neuroinflammation"***

Turning to nutritional nootropics, Scholey highlighted New Zealand Blackcurrants (the 'neuroberry' cultivar). In human multitasking feeding studies, this polyphenol-rich berry protected against sustained attention decline with a magnitude of effect comparable to 150 mg of caffeine (a double espresso). Whilst anthocyanins in berry fruits are known to enhance cognitive function and memory, more dramatic effects have been attributed to Sarmentosin, a newly discovered natural molecule in *Ribes nigrum* (blackcurrants). It has gained attention for its potential therapeutic applications, including recently as an inhibitor of monoamine oxidase (MAO), an enzyme involved in the metabolism of neurotransmitters. It triggers complete, reversible Monoamine Oxidase-B (MAO-B) inhibition within 10 minutes, safely elevating circulating dopamine, serotonin, and noradrenaline for over eight hours.

Rethinking Essential Fats: Alternatives to Fish Omega-3

No discussion on neuroinflammation is complete without essential fatty acids. Professor Philip Calder (Speaker 3) detailed how the long-chain omega-3s, EPA and DHA, embed into cell membranes to displace pro-inflammatory arachidonic acid. This structural shift blocks NFκB, the body's master inflammatory switch, and is associated with a lower risk of incident Alzheimer's disease.

However, Calder noted a sustainability crisis: 80% of the world's fish stocks are fully or over-exploited, making marine fish oils ecologically unviable. The clean alternative is algal oil, which delivers identical EPA and DHA bioavailability and successfully doubles immune cell omega-3 status in human trials.

For herbalists seeking pure plant precursors, Calder pointed to Ahiflower oil (*Buglossoides arvensis*). Unlike standard flaxseed (ALA), which faces a strict enzymatic bottleneck in the human body, Ahiflower is exceptionally rich in Stearidonic Acid (SDA). Bypassing this bottleneck, SDA is 5 times more efficient at converting to EPA in humans, cleanly elevating anti-inflammatory Interleukin-10 (IL-10) production. However, plant-derived oils do not convert to DHA, so adding in algal oils is recommended.

Clearing the Fog: Practical Applications in Brain Fog and Long-COVID

Marion Mackonochie described brain fog as a cluster of cognitive symptoms reported in conditions including Long COVID, ME/CFS and perimenopause. Her presentation cited brain fog as the second most common Long-COVID symptom, attention impairment in 83% of people with ME/CFS, and brain fog in 68.3% of surveyed perimenopausal women. Proposed mechanisms included neuroinflammation, altered microglial states, impaired synaptic integrity, blood–brain barrier dysfunction, oxidative stress, mitochondrial dysfunction, neurotransmitter changes and dysbiosis; the relevance and strength of evidence vary by condition.

Mackonochie's clinical strategy involves a four-pronged herbal formulation: anti-inflammatories, Nrf2 promoters, neurogenesis enhancers, and stimulating nootropics. She talked about herbs like *Bacopa monnieri*, *Ginkgo biloba* and *Withania somnifera* as ones she often uses in her prescriptions.

In one case study, Mackonochie treated a PhD student with post-COVID headaches, fatigue and brain fog using a fluid extract blend of *Bacopa*, *Withania*, *Glycyrrhiza*, *Centella* and *Schisandra* at 5 ml three times daily, alongside lifestyle and dietary advice. He reported gradual improvement in physical capacity, concentration, fatigue and headaches over several months.



By January, after later changing to a lower-dose commercial Bacopa combination for financial reasons, he said that he had “just remembered what normal feels like”.

Tuning Down the Volume in Neurodevelopment: A Paediatrician's Perspective

In an emotionally resonant presentation, **Dr Ben Marlow** (Speaker 5), a Consultant Paediatrician and Director for the Synapse Centre for Neurodevelopment, shared his journey into an interest in phytotherapy. As a father to a son with profound, non-speaking autism, Dr Marlow noticed his child intuitively foraging for and eating lavender and sage in the garden to meet his sensory needs. This sparked a professional quest—partnering with medical herbalist Dr Chris Etheridge—to uncover how plant medicine can reset early developmental neuroinflammation.



Marlow presented maternal immune activation, trained immunity, mTOR hyperactivation, impaired autophagy and altered microglial pruning as interrelated mechanisms associated with profound autism. He described how these pathways may contribute to neuronal overgrowth, neuroinflammation, elevated neuronal excitability and deficits in synaptic pruning. The resulting hyperconnectivity leads to brain overgrowth, sensory overload, and developmental regression.

At the centre of this distress is the Cell Danger Response (CDR). Stressed cells continually leak extracellular ATP (eATP), a universal danger signal that locks the brain's premier inflammatory gatekeeper, the P2X7 receptor, into an unyielding "on" switch. This forces the continuous assembly of the NLRP3 inflammasome and the hyper-secretion of neurotoxic cytokines.

The therapeutic aim is to turn down the biochemical volume of this cell-danger loop. Marlow and Etheridge are investigating phytochemicals with P2X7-inhibitory activity. Baicalin from Baikal skullcap, resveratrol in Japanese knotweed, and apigenin (found in celery, parsley and chamomile) stand out as the strongest candidates for direct ASD-model testing on the combined strength of their P2X7 pharmacology and reported blood–brain barrier access.

Conclusion

The seminar highlighted the bidirectional relationships among the gut, immune system, blood–brain barrier and brain. For herbalists, these pathways offer clinically relevant targets for multi-component interventions that can address neuroinflammation, antioxidant protection, neuroprotection, mitochondrial function, microcirculation and BDNF. Phytotherapy is well placed to act as a complex systemic modulator and help turn down the volume of the inflamed mind.

About Lloyd Gee

Lloyd Gee is **Vice-Chair of URHP,** is on the Council of EHTPA and practices in North London and near Cheltenham.



Welcome New URHP Members!

Since our last newsletter was published in December 2025, we have welcomed the following new Members to the URHP Register:

New Full Qualified Members

Tamsin Djaba
Finlay Mahoney
Jane Placca
Diane Waby (Upgrade from Student Membership)
Catherine Wheelock

New Student Members

Janet O'Donnell
Megan Powell
Debbie Richards
Helen Saville

Category	No. of Members on the Register
Full Qualified Members	56
Student Members	8
Friend Members	11
Honorary Members	2
Total Members	**77**

Congratulations and welcome to all our new Members!



A Herbalist in Crete by Judy Evans

Having just returned from an amazing 10-day holiday in Crete, I thought I would share my experiences particularly from a herbalist point of view.

The land is so natural and rugged with deep gorges and mountains everywhere. It is almost impossible to travel anywhere worth seeing without having to drive through this on narrow, quite scary roads, or so it seemed. The scenes were spectacular with greenery covering most of the land and, as you can imagine, teeming with wonderful herbs growing everywhere.

Olive Power



I was eager to know which herbs are the most popular and grown in abundance and especially what they are used for. Of course, there is the olive leaf herbal extract distinctive of Crete by its powerful antioxidant benefits due to the high levels of oleuropein, a compound known for its many health benefits. This is due to the Mediterranean climate and constant warm gentle breezes. The olive trees are crucial for the island's main economy and can be seen growing everywhere as far as the eye can see. Some of these are hundreds of years old and revered as such. It was a joy to see them still flourishing. They produce delicious black olives and olive oil later in the year. Being half Italian, I was brought up on olives and always knew the health benefits, especially for the skin. I was told this from a very young age and have eaten a few nearly every day.



© Judy Evans

Dittany of Crete

The most popular herb, as I was told by locals, is one called dittany, or *Origanum oictamnus* from the Lamiaceae or mint family, which can be seen growing on the sides of mountains and the deep gorges. I would have loved to have gotten closer to touch and smell them whilst in their natural habitat, but it would take some quite brave people to venture anywhere near them.

Dittany has multiple health benefits and mostly taken in a brewed tea form and tasting slightly of the aromatic herbs mint and oregano. Locals were eager to tell me how good it is and all the different uses it had from digestive issues to women's health and regulating hormones, the latter of which I am very much involved with. The tea is usually mixed with the exquisite Cretan honey freshly



Dittany of Crete (Peter A. Mansfeld, Wikipedia)

produced all over the island. You can see the colourfully painted bee hives perched on the hills in the villages almost everywhere. The hotel where we were staying gifted us a jar of it as we were leaving which I am very much looking forward to tasting.

Dittany at Hogwarts

A little piece of herbal trivia that often raises a smile is that many people today know dittany not from the mountains of Crete or traditional herbal medicine, but from the Harry Potter films! In the wizarding world, dittany is portrayed as a magical healing herb capable of mending wounds and aiding recovery. While real-life dittany may not perform quite such spectacular feats, herbalists have valued it for centuries for its healing and restorative properties. I think it's amusing that this humble Mediterranean herb has probably become more famous through Hogwarts than through its long and distinguished history in traditional medicine. Perhaps the filmmakers knew what herbalists have always known – some plants really do seem a little magical.

Agave americana

Another plant I found interesting was the agave (*Agave americana*) also known as century plant, which was growing wild all along the rough terrain near the beaches. It looked very similar to aloe vera, and I wondered if it had the same benefits.



© Judy Evans

It certainly felt very different, being more fibrous with sharp pointy spines at the ends and sides of the leaves and not easy to bend, unlike aloe vera.

Although it is well known for producing the agave nectar used as a natural sweetener, it does have some health benefits similar to the aloe vera plant. However, it has to be processed and prepared in a certain way due to the raw sap having the potential to be highly irritating to the gut and skin. This is also unlike aloe vera gel which is mostly fine to use straight from the plant when applied topically. To use aloe vera internally also needs a little preparation although not as much as agave.

Treating psoriasis with Cretan Purple Milk Thistle (*Galactites tomentosa*)

Many herbs in Crete are also common to the UK but can be a little confusing as I found out when speaking to a local called Yorgos who is the manager of the hotel that we were staying at. He was thrilled when I told him I was a herbalist as the only one to help his life-long psoriasis was a herbalist called Elisabeth. She was English and visited Crete to study many of the wild herbs years ago. She fell in love with the country and after spending much time in the wonderful mountains collecting and using the herbs, decided to stay. She set up a herbal practice and is now thriving as a well-known herbalist in the area. I wished I had more time on the island to visit her after I heard about her helping Yorgos so much.

As most of us know psoriasis is a skin disorder that causes skin cells to multiply many times faster than is normal. It shows as thick silvery patches of flaky dead skin. It is due to an auto immune condition which is very hard to treat and is known to have no cure, but it can be managed effectively with certain remedies.

I was eager to know more about the herbs Elizabeth gave Yorgos, and he was keen to tell me. Firstly, he showed me the remnants of his psoriasis mainly on his elbows and back of his forearms. You could see how extensive it was, but you would have to look closely as it was very much under control. He said the herbalist changed his life as he was in a state of long-term depression due to the severity of the condition. You could see his eyes light up when speaking about this and that he had come a long way from those dark days.

So, there I was fully attentive waiting for him to reveal the magic herb or herbs that helped his psoriasis so much. I was a bit taken aback when he explained that it was mainly milk thistle and aloe vera gel applied topically. I thought that he was going to tell me about some exotic rare herb only found in Crete. So, when I said, “Oh just milk thistle, we use a lot of that in the UK”. He replied saying no, this milk thistle is different, it is not commonly known in the UK, and it is called purple milk thistle here in Crete. I was intrigued, so did a little research to compare purple milk thistle with the more widely known type and this is what I found:

Comparison: Common Milk Thistle (*Silybum marianum*) vs. Cretan Purple Milk Thistle (*Galactites tomentosa*) Both are from the Asteraceae family.

Feature	Common Milk Thistle (*Silybum marianum*)	Cretan Purple Milk Thistle (Galactites tomentosa)
		
Main Compound	Contains Silymarin, a complex used globally for liver cell regeneration and protection.	Known for higher potency; the intense Aegean sun and rocky soil increase the concentration of active flavonoids.
Liver & Gallbladder	Standard treatment for fatty liver, alcohol detox, and protecting the liver from toxins.	Used in Cretan folk medicine as a potent bile stimulant and intensive gallbladder cleanser.
Culinary Use	Rarely eaten; mostly processed into supplements, tinctures, or seed powders.	Widely used as "Horta" (wild greens); young stalks and leaves are peeled and eaten raw or boiled in salads.
Antioxidant Level	High antioxidant capacity that helps reduce systemic inflammation.	Contains additional wild-type polyphenols developed by the plant to survive the harsh, dry Cretan climate.
Digestive Effect	Acts as a mild bitter to improve fat digestion and reduce bloating.	Stronger bitter action: traditionally used to "clean the blood" and improve metabolic rate after heavy meals.
Growing Habits	Grows globally in temperate zones; often thinner stalks and softer leaves.	More resilient and robust; features thicker stalks and sharper spines to protect its high-nutrient content.

If I ever return to Crete, I will certainly seek out Elisabeth and some of the other local herbalists if I can. There is so much more to learn, especially from cultures that have long understood the extraordinary healing powers of plants.

My visit reminded me that herbal medicine is not simply about remedies and recipes; it is about a relationship with nature that has been nurtured over generations. The wisdom of the past still has much to offer us today. As herbalists, we are merely custodians of that knowledge, passing it on and adding our own experiences along the way. The journey of learning never truly ends, and perhaps that is one of the greatest gifts that plants have to offer.

About Judy Evans

Judy has been intensively researching the subject of natural hormone therapy since 1996, particularly natural progesterone, after she cured herself of severe PMS nearly 30 years ago. This later progressed to her specialising in women's health which is mainly focussed on helping women regain hormonal balance using the more natural approaches. In 2006, she became a naturopath and medical herbalist after studying with the College of Natural Medicine and a member of the URHP, which greatly improved her knowledge of the power of herbal medicine and in particular the incredible benefits of phytoestrogens which can be a very effective alternative to the more conventional types. Judy has gained much experience helping women over the years and is often sought after for talks and interviews. She was honoured to become a patron of CANCERactive, a charity run by Chris Woollams for people suffering with cancer who would like to know more about the complementary medicine support on offer. She has written articles for the CANCERactive Icon magazine and has been active in fund raising for the charity. She also ran a women's support group for many years which was gaining momentum until the unfortunate Covid restrictions came in.

She now hosts a Facebook group for women with hormonal imbalances and has just published her eBook and audio book, which was much requested!

You can see the book titled 'EMPOWER Yourself, Balance your hormones naturally including the unique benefits of natural PROGESTERONE' which can be seen here: www.progesteronelink.com

Facebook group: Progesterone Link Support Group Balancing Hormones Naturally



Agave Americana (Marc Ryckaert, Wikipedia)



Herbal Reality: A Free Resource for Herbal Medicine Practitioners By Sebastian Pole

Why Herbal Medicine?

Given the acute pressure the National Health Service is under, the high levels of ill health across the UK and the poor access to support services, it seems as though herbal medicine could play an important part in the nation's wellbeing. Looking at supplement sales figures, the public certainly think so too!

I first came across the healing power of plants through encounters with Ayurveda in the early 1990's that inspired me to study and become a herbalist and Ayurvedic practitioner. My clinical experience showed me that the simple power of herbal medicine, as well as all it teaches about diet and lifestyle, has a place in healthcare.

But, in a pharmaceutical driven medical system, how can we help more people access self-care and herbal medicine? How to overcome the seemingly endless road-blocks in terms of regulations, costs, medical hegemony and cultural hesitancy? This thinking eventually led to me co-founding Pukka Herbs and giving people access to herbal teas but clearly the nation's health needs more than just a few cups of herbal tea

The ever-mounting positive research into the efficacy of herbal medicine has fueled a surge in confidence regarding the benefit of plant-based diets, herbal medicines and a more natural lifestyle. This has trickled into a growth in herbal supplements and the wellbeing industry that is doing a lot to open people's eyes to the potential of natural health.

Parallel to this 'retail' awakening, professional herbal medicine colleges in the UK have proliferated, including Western, Chinese and Ayurvedic herbal medicine courses. This has resulted in the numbers of qualified herbalists growing from a small base. These foundations of health, championed by natural health advocates, are now being adopted by health professionals of all types and Integrative Medicine is the zeitgeist of every evolved GP.

Of course, significant issues face herbal medicine; notably the concerns regarding poor quality and the safety of the source materials due to a variety of factors including widespread environmental pollution, ecosystem pressures, increased demand and widespread unsustainable harvesting. In response to this, concerned parts of the industry have acted to set higher standards and initiating schemes such as FairWild ensuring sustainable collection and fair remuneration, and initiatives such as B-Corp instilling social and environmental standards alongside financial objectives. But reliable, accurate and easy-to-access information is still lacking.

Why Herbal Reality?

After years of writing for Pukka I felt stifled by the legal restrictions of what can be said about herbal efficacy and safety. Clearly regulations intended to keep the public safe are also hindering their ability to access reliable information written by herbalists. Rather fed-up with the 'herbs will cure everything' panacea to the 'one sip will kill you' polemic driven my unqualified media click bait, I felt a strong need for there to be a reliable source of information about herbal medicine that was curated by herbalists with clinical and research expertise. Importantly it needed to be free to access and also without adverts and unencumbered from the bias inherent with promoting products. The ethos is more of a donation Wikipedia model than a 'sponsored' WebMD model!

Herbal Reality is a free, expert-driven hub for learning how plants can support health. We publish clear, rigorously checked articles from a wide community of specialists—medical herbalists, phytotherapy researchers, foragers, healthcare and industry professionals, and educators. Drawing on their clinical experience and academic expertise, we commission high-quality, reliable content that explores the breadth of herbal medicine and its practical, everyday potential.

In a world where chronic and acute conditions are increasingly common, herbalism offers supportive ways to maintain well-being, complement conventional care, and bridge therapeutic gaps. If you're new to herbs, Herbal Reality aims to spark curiosity—inviting readers to discover the plants already in their kitchens, gardens, and hedgerows, and to learn how these can be used safely and sensibly for themselves and their families. For practitioners and professionals, our platform is a current, credible resource on herbal safety, integrative healthcare opportunities, and the sustainability and quality challenges facing today's botanical industry.



What we publish

Over the past five years we've built a substantial library: 250+ monographs, 100+ condition-focused articles, and 400+ features on health, herbalism, sustainability, and research. We've also developed practical resource pages, a popular health quiz, and produced four seasons of our Herbcast podcast. In that time, more than 2.5 million people have visited our site, and over 20,000 have joined our newsletter—where we share highlights from the 10+ articles we publish each month.

Monographs you can trust

Our monographs are frequently used by students, clinicians, retailers, and the herb-curious public alike. Each profile covers a plant's actions; traditional and modern uses; history; energetic qualities; key constituents; clinical research; safety; preparations and dosage; growing guidance; sustainability status; and any quality concerns to watch for. The collection spans Western herbal medicine, Ayurveda, and Traditional Chinese Medicine—think calendula to ashwagandha, liquorice to yarrow—so your team and customers can explore across traditions in one place.

Conditions, explained clearly

For those seeking herbal and holistic perspectives on specific concerns—such as asthma, high blood pressure, cough, or anxiety—our conditions section lays out the pathophysiology, risk factors, signs and symptoms, and typical approaches with herbs, diet, and lifestyle used by qualified herbalists. Organised by body system (cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive, etc.), it also brings in Ayurvedic, TCM, and Western viewpoints to help readers understand where approaches align and where they differ.

Connecting people to practitioners and education

Herbal Reality not only introduces people to plants—it also helps them connect with qualified herbal practitioners for personalised support and bespoke medicines. Our resource pages signpost to schools, events, and glossaries, and we help widen access to training by offering bursaries to students enrolled at Betonica School of Herbal Medicine and Heartwood Education.

herbal reality

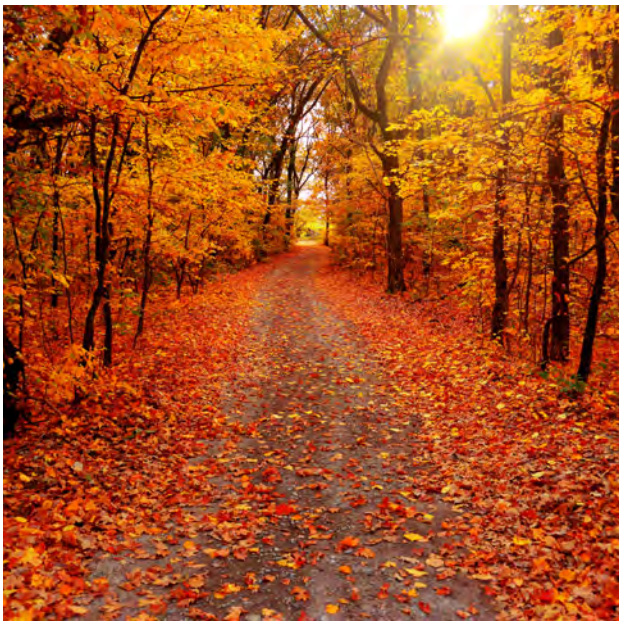
A VOICE FOR HERBAL MEDICINE

Our mission

We're guided by a simple aim: to share traditional, scientific, and practical insights into herbal medicine that deepen understanding of how plants can support health. We want to empower, engage, and evolve society's relationship with healing plants by keeping trustworthy information free and accessible. Our progress to date has been made possible thanks to the support of the Earthsong Foundation and we are also open for supporting donations.

Benefits for Students:

- Learn about herbs with access to hundreds of monographs
- Find definitions for herbal actions and energetics
- Learn about health conditions and the herbs that can support
- Read a range of articles written by experts and find references to reputable research papers
- Find courses and events taking place around the UK and beyond
- Hear from the experts with our podcast Herbcast
- Learn more about plant species sustainability and how to forage



Get involved

Subscribe to our Herbal Reality Newsletter to receive monthly highlights. Follow us on Instagram, and YouTube to keep learning and share posts with your community. Listen to Herbcast on Spotify or Apple Music. If you want to learn about herbal medicine—or help your clients do the same—Herbal Reality is here to help!

Best wishes,
Sebastian

About Sebastian Pole

Sebastian Pole is a prominent herbalist, Ayurvedic practitioner, and Chinese herbalist based in Bath, UK. He is the co-founder of the organic tea and supplement brand Pukka Herbs, which was established in 2001.

In clinical practice since 1998, Sebastian is a member of the Ayurvedic Practitioners Association and the Register of Chinese Herbal Medicine. He has a degree in Hindi and Indian Religions and spent several years living and studying Ayurveda and Yoga in India.

In 2020, he launched Herbal Reality, a free, expert-driven digital hub designed to share traditional, scientific, and practical insights into herbal medicine and plant sustainability. He also runs Earthsong Seeds, a UK medicinal seed project growing over 100 species of organically certified, open pollinated herbs and plants to encourage herb growing and self-care.

He is a trustee for the Earthsong Foundation, and serves on the Advisory Board of the American Herbal Pharmacopoeia. He is also an Honorary Member of the URHP.

Sebastian has written several books on natural health and traditional medicine, including *Ayurvedic Medicine: The Principles of Traditional Practice* (Updated 2nd edition launched 2026), *A Pukka Life*, and *Cleanse, Nurture, Restore with Herbal Tea*.

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When the Body Overheats: Supporting the Nervous System Through Summer By Nicola Sabin

Not everyone thrives in summer. Each year, as temperatures rise, a familiar pattern begins to emerge. People who felt relatively steady through the cooler months begin to notice a subtle but persistent shift. Energy becomes less reliable. Sleep grows lighter. The body feels harder to regulate. There is rarely a single, obvious cause. But underneath it, the same process is often at play: an increased autonomic load in response to heat.

Thermoregulation is, at its core, an autonomic process. As environmental temperatures rise, the body initiates a series of adaptive responses designed to maintain internal equilibrium. Peripheral vasodilation increases, allowing heat to dissipate through the skin. Cardiac output rises to compensate for changes in blood distribution. Sweating supports evaporative cooling, drawing on both fluid and electrolyte reserves. These processes are constant, responsive, and often remarkably efficient. But they are not without cost.

For some, this increased demand passes largely unnoticed. For others, particularly where there is underlying sensitivity within the nervous system, reduced physiological reserve, or cumulative stress load, these same adaptive processes begin to feel effortful. The system is no longer regulating with ease. It is compensating. And compensation, sustained over time, is inherently fatiguing.

The autonomic nervous system does not function in isolation. Its activity is closely interwoven with endocrine signalling, particularly through the hypothalamic, pituitary, adrenal (HPA) axis. As environmental stressors increase, including sustained heat, the body draws more heavily on these pathways to maintain stability.

Cortisol plays a central role in this process. Under typical conditions, cortisol follows a diurnal rhythm: rising in the morning to support wakefulness and gradually declining throughout the day. When the system is placed under ongoing demand, this rhythm can begin to shift. Heat, while often perceived as benign, acts as a persistent physiological stressor.

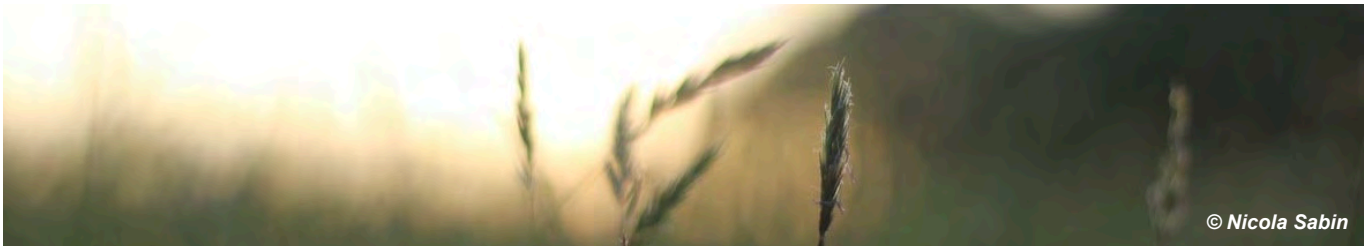
Increased cardiovascular demand, fluid loss, and the continuous effort required to maintain temperature homeostasis all contribute to a heightened allostatic load. Over time, this may present as patterns often described as “adrenal fatigue,” though more accurately understood as dysregulation within the HPA axis.

This may be experienced as:

- Inconsistent or flattened energy patterns
- Reduced resilience to stress
- Difficulty settling into restorative sleep
- A sense of being both activated and depleted

Alongside this, temperature regulation itself may become less efficient. Some individuals develop heightened sensitivity to heat, while others find that their bodies struggle to cool effectively, even in moderate conditions. These responses are not simply reactions to the environment. They reflect a system operating beyond its comfortable regulatory range.

The resulting picture is rarely dramatic, which is part of why it is so often overlooked. Instead, it presents in quieter, more diffuse ways. A fatigue that does not resolve with rest. Light-headedness, particularly in warm environments or on standing. A sense of internal “floatiness,” or difficulty feeling fully anchored in the body.



Emotional responses may shift too, with increased irritability, or a kind of fragility that feels out of proportion to circumstance. Sleep often becomes lighter, more fragmented, less restorative. There may also be a subtle reduction in capacity, physical, cognitive, or social, that can be difficult to name, but is deeply felt. These experiences are not incidental. They are the expression of a system working harder than it should to maintain equilibrium.

From an energetic perspective, summer is a season of outward movement. Expansion, circulation, expression, energy rises and disperses. In a well-regulated system, this outward movement is balanced by an underlying sense of containment. There is flow, but also coherence. Where regulation is more fragile, this balance can be lost. Heat accelerates movement. Circulation becomes more diffuse. Fluids are lost more readily.

The system opens but does not always close again with ease.

The result is a pattern of dispersal without sufficient containment.

This may be experienced as:

- Difficulty sustaining energy throughout the day
- A sense of being ungrounded or unsettled
- Increased sensitivity to noise, light, or social input
- Emotional openness without stability

In these cases, the aim is not simply to cool the system, but to support it in regaining tone, to gently restore the body’s ability to hold, regulate, and recover.

In response to heat, many instinctively reach for external cooling strategies, fans, cold environments, chilled drinks. These can offer relief, but they are not without nuance. Air movement from fans enhances evaporative cooling, yet can also contribute to surface drying, particularly where fluid balance is already compromised. Over time, this may intensify feelings of depletion rather than resolve them. Similarly, intense, or prolonged cold exposure can create a rebound effect, where the body must work harder to re-establish equilibrium once the stimulus is removed. A more supportive approach often lies in gentle, sustained cooling, working with the body rather than against it.

Hydration in this context extends beyond water alone. Sweating leads not only to fluid loss, but also to the depletion of key electrolytes, sodium, potassium, magnesium, all essential for nerve conduction, muscular function, and cardiovascular stability.

Simple plant-based preparations can support this effectively.

Water infused with cucumber and lemon offers more than refreshment. Cucumber provides trace minerals and a cooling, hydrating quality, while lemon supports digestion and introduces a gentle astringency that may help the body utilise fluids more effectively. Nettle infusions remain one of the most reliable forms of mineral replenishment. Rich in silica, magnesium, and iron, *Urtica dioica* supports both fluid balance and longer-term resilience. Hibiscus, high in organic acids and anthocyanins, contributes cooling energetics and circulatory support, though its dispersing quality is best balanced within a broader formulation.

Topical applications offer an additional layer of support, particularly where heat sensitivity is pronounced. Peppermint (*Mentha x piperita*) is especially effective. Its primary constituent, menthol, activates cold-sensitive receptors in the skin, creating a cooling sensation without significantly altering core body temperature. This can provide rapid relief and improve overall comfort during periods of acute heat.

A diluted peppermint spray or hydrosol applied to the neck or pulse points can also interrupt the stress response momentarily, offering a subtle shift in nervous system tone. As with all volatile oils, moderation is important, particularly in individuals with heightened sensitivity. Many of the herbs used in this context exert their effects through well-recognised phytochemical pathways.

Melissa officinalis contains rosmarinic acid and volatile oils such as citral, contributing to its calming, gently uplifting effects. Its influence on GABA metabolism supports its role in reducing nervous system overstimulation.

Scutellaria lateriflora (skullcap) offers more direct support in states of tension and restlessness. Rich in flavonoids including baicalin, it has a particular affinity for nervous system agitation that feels both physical and mental.

Avena sativa provides deep nourishment through its mineral and nutritive profile, supporting the gradual restoration of nervous system resilience. *Crataegus* spp. supports cardiovascular function through flavonoids and procyanidins, enhancing circulatory efficiency during periods of increased demand. Together, these plants offer support that is regulatory rather than suppressive, helping the system to find balance without forcing it.



Regular, gentle intake of herbal preparations can provide meaningful support throughout the warmer months. Cold or room temperature infusions are often best tolerated and can be incorporated easily into daily rhythms.

Cooling Nervous System Infusion

Lemon balm, oatstraw, rose: Infuse for several hours or overnight. This blend supports calm regulation while gently replenishing.

Mineral-Rich Summer Iced Tea

Nettle, hibiscus, mint: A refreshing preparation that supports hydration while providing mineral content.

Evening Settling Blend

Chamomile, lime flower, rose: Taken in the evening, this supports the transition toward rest and helps the nervous system settle.

There is a quiet expectation that summer should feel expansive. That energy should rise to meet the season. But the body does not always follow expectation. For some, summer is a time of increased demand rather than ease. A season that calls for more care, more awareness, and a different rhythm altogether. Supporting the nervous system through this time is not about forcing the body to match the season. It is about listening more closely to what is being asked. And responding, not with urgency, but with steadiness.

About Nicola Sabin

Nicola Sabin is a medical herbalist in training, holding a Master Herbalist Diploma and continuing her studies with CommonWealth Herbs. Her work explores the intersection of physiology, plant medicine, and lived experience, with a particular focus on nervous system regulation and complex, chronic patterns of dysregulation.

She has contributed to a number of herbal and natural health publications. Through her platform, *Nature with Nicola*, she shares reflections on seasonal living, plant energetics, and the evolving relationship between body and healing.

Website: www.naturewithnicola.com
Instagram: @naturewithnicola
Substack: https://substack.com/@naturewithnicola





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Meet the Members: Q&A with Lucy Jones

This month, URHP Chair Rachel Boon interviews Lucy Jones, herbalist and author

Q: Where do you live and where do you practice?

A: I live in Castle Cary, and I practice from a lovely old school building in a neighbouring village called Queen Camel which is on the river Cam. Funnily enough there is a healing sulphurous spring nearby, called the Black Well, and as its self-appointed guardian (!) I've cleaned it all up and restored it.

Q: How long have you been a herbalist?

A: I've been a Western Herbalist since 2006 and I trained with the IRCH (International Register of Consultant Herbalists) which is actually the oldest herbal school in the UK. It was the perfect course for me as it was so holistic, and it fitted really well with my esoteric leanings! Prior to that I studied Tibetan Medicine at Samye Ling Tibetan Centre for four years and I finished that course in 1998. My spiritual teacher was Akong Rinpoché, who has since passed, and he tasked me with combining Tibetan Medicine with western herbal medicine. My first degree was in Agriculture and Forestry and my previous career was as an environmental consultant, which I loved. One of my most rewarding jobs was to help bring the Samye Ling retreat centre to fruition, on Holy Isle off the coast of Arran, by helping them with their environmental assessment. The founder of this retreat centre was Lama Yeshe Rinpoché who was the brother of my spiritual teacher, Akong Rinpoché.

Q: What are your favourite things to make?

A: I love making tinctures! I especially love opening my tincture cupboard and seeing them all as they are all so beautiful to look at! I can't say which is my favourite herb, as I am generally in love with whichever herb I am working with at the time. I am quite promiscuous in my herbal loves! Recently rose and yarrow have been my favourites as I've been tincturing them.

Q: Do you have a special area of clinical interest?

A: No! I love the fact that I don't have an area of clinical specialism.

Over the years I've realised we all have our strengths and areas we are drawn to, and I feel I am really drawn to people who have not had great results with the allopathic healthcare model, people who feel let down by the system and people who feel lost and bewildered by their symptoms and more! My angle, due to the Tibetan medicine, is very much mind, body and spirit-centric and I feel that that approach can really help people understand why they got into that position.

My patient caseload ratio is about 90:10 (female:male) and I feel women often find their way to us through their gynae issues. I like working with fertility patients as it is so rewarding watching their chart changing for the better in terms of basal body temperature, mucus, observation of symptoms and more!



© Lucy Jones

Q: What types of herbs do you like to use with your patients and personally?

A: I dispense everything myself, usually within the consultation. As I grow and gather the majority of my herbs, for those reasons I prefer tinctures as prescribing a lot of teas is incredibly heavy on herbal supplies and I just find tinctures so quick and easy to do. If a patient does require a tea, I get them to outsource their own, as I'm trying to cut down my work load, as gathering and drying herbs is so labour intensive. I give the patient their herbal tea formula and send them off to Tree Harvest to procure the small bags of the herbs to make up their own tea which also helps keep the cost down for the patient. It was killing me to try and do it all, and by outsourcing the teas, it makes the patient realise the real cost of the herbs. Ultimately, we have to be wise about how we manage our time. In terms of what I personally take daily, I have two capsules of a spirulina, nettle, dandelion leaf, ashwagandha and yellow dock combination and I feel better for it. I also like a double-extracted mushroom blend (made by myself) and maybe some adaptogens, especially when I was training for my second black belt in martial arts.

Q: What are your hobbies/how do you relax?

A: I like sketching and watercolours; I like to meditate and I do spiritual practice every day to reaffirm my intention for being a herbalist. I have a little shrine in my clinic where I reaffirm my intentions daily and view my clinic as a spiritual space. I also like walking and hanging out in nature and of course gardening (but sometimes that can feel like hard work with the Mandala Garden too!). I did Martial Arts for 40 years, particularly Shorinji Kempo, which is non-competitive martial art, and in the end the travel both to Bournemouth and Southampton weekly for my classes became too much so I paused this during the pandemic.

Q: Do you have a herbal (or naturopathic) secret weapon?

A: No. I do really like people to make friends with their bodies. Whilst I use herbs to help people get more embodied, I also like to coach people to imagine their body as their best friend and you're in it for this life together.

Q: Favourite Herbal Book?

A: One of the books that really changed my life, was 'The Book of Herbal Wisdom', by Matthew Wood which I've read from cover to cover four or five times! My grandmother was a homeopath, so I loved how Matthew Wood brings in that specificity and homeopathic influence with herbal medicine-it's so fascinating! Another one I love is 'The Complete Illustrated Holistic Herbal' by David Hoffman. It gives such a great roadmap of each herb. In fact, one of my final year tutors parting comments at the end of my IRCH training was 'Never stop reading herbals!' *(Ed-Lucy has actually written two herbals herself-see links below!)*

Q: Do you have a closing message for any student herbalists out there?

A: Yes! I would advise them to learn the power of persuasion. Why? Because if you cannot persuade your patients to make the changes or take the herbs and be able to back up your reasoning and recommendations, then you are unlikely to be able to benefit them.

Q: Final question...where are you going on holiday next?

A: I have got a 7-day online Yuthok Nyingtik retreat planned from 19th October. It's a retreat focussing on the heart practice of Yuthok and Yuthok is the father of Tibetan medicine. It is just so lovely to spend time away from worldly responsibilities, so I am looking forward to that!

If you would like to learn more about Lucy and her work, visit her website: https://www.myrobalanclinic.com/meet-lucy and her Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/myrobalanclinic/

If you would like to learn with Lucy she is very active on Patreon (ideal for newly qualified students): https://www.patreon.com/u36072641

And finally, you are welcome to purchase her books from Aeon or online.

For UK and rest of the world, visit: https://health.aeonbooks.co.uk/product/self-sufficient-herbalism/93701

https://health.aeonbooks.co.uk/product/working-herbal-dispensary/95192



Agrimonia eupatoria (Wikipedia)

If you would like to be featured on Meet The Members please drop Rachel a line at info@rachelboon.co.uk so she can set up your interview!

About Lucy Jones

Lucy Jones is a qualified medical herbalist and founder of Myrobalan Clinic, a busy high street practice in Somerset, UK. She has been in practice since 2006. Prior to qualifying in western herbalism, she earned two degrees from the University of Oxford and studied Tibetan Medicine with the great master Khenpo Troru Tsenam. She grows and processes most of the herbs that she prescribes to patients and is the author of '*Self Sufficient Herbalism*' and '*A Working Herbal Dispensary: Respecting Herbs as Individuals*', both published by Aeon Books.

Website: https://www.myrobalanclinic.com/



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eHerbalist DIARY DATES 2026

Professional learning, herbal gatherings and events of interest to URHP members - suitable for CPD credits.

17 NOV 2026	**AMH - Treating Ulcerated Wounds by Nikki Darrell (ONLINE)** 19:00-20:30 UK, 50% discount to URHP Members - use code- URHPND1126 Info: theamh.uk **When Protocols Don't Work by Dominica Collis** 7 PM - 8:30 PM GMT, 50% discount to URHP Members - use code- URHPDC1126 Info: theamh.uk
20-21 NOV 2026	**NIMH Herbal Medicine Conference - Herbal Medicine and the Gut** St Martin's House, Leicester+ live online. Two days on gastrointestinal health, microbiome and clinical herbal practice. Includes 12-month on-demand access; discounted rates for NIMH members, affiliated professional bodies including URHP and students. Info: nimh.org.uk/herbal-medicine-conference
25 NOV 2026	**NCIM - Blend Your Own Herbal Teas (ONLINE)** 18:00-19:00. Free webinar on festive herbal blends and spices with Dr Vivien Rolfe. Info: ncim.org.uk/events/list
17 DEC 2026	**UKCPA - Safe Use of Herbal Medicines in Pregnancy (ONLINE)** 12:30-13:30. Evidence-based herbal safety in pregnancy. Free for UKCPA members; £35 for guests. Info: www.ukclinicalpharmacy.org

Further dates: Check the AMH, CPP, NIMH, NNM, and Herbal Reality websites for additional CPD webinars and recordings.

Looking ahead: Key URHP and other Herbal Events 2027

URHP 30TH ANNIVERSARY
25-27 June 2027 | Cirencester



More details and booking information to follow.

24 APR 2027

Lincoln College Herbal Conference

Lincoln College, Lincoln. The next conference is confirmed for Saturday 24 April 2027. Programme and booking details are still to be announced. Info: www.lincolncollege.ac.uk

10-14 MAY 2027

Junior Herbalist Leader Training (UK)

Fylde Scout Activity Centre, Lytham St Annes. Five-day professional training for qualified herbalists/naturopaths. Standard £1,295; early bird £995 if paid by 31 Dec 2026. The Herb Society newsletter also advertises a £500 bursary for an eligible applicant. Applications close 30 Apr 2027. Info: www.juniorherbalistclub.com

8-11 JUL 2027

NIMH Power of Plants Festival

Hopton Court Estate, Shropshire Hills. Talks, workshops, demonstrations, growers, suppliers, food, music and herbal community. Tickets from £65 for a day or £95 for the whole weekend; camping and other accommodation are extra. Info: www.nimh.org.uk/pop-festival-2027

THE HERB SOCIETY CENTENARY - 2027

Two face-to-face centenary events are being planned: Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh in May and Chelsea Physic Garden, London in September. Exact dates are still to be announced. Info: https://herbsociety.org.uk/



eHerbalist Submissions

Your Voice in the eHerbalist!

Share your knowledge, ideas, and experiences – and earn CPD credit!

The eHerbalist is your publication, and we'd love to hear from you!

Have an interesting case reflection, a favourite herbal recipe, a plant story, or an experience worth sharing? Perhaps you'd like to review a book, interview a fellow herbalist, or contribute something creative or amusing.

You don't need to write a long article. Short pieces, photographs, illustrations, and personal reflections are equally welcome.

Why contribute?

- Earn CPD credit for eligible articles and interviews.
- Share your knowledge and experience with fellow herbalists.
- Raise your professional profile with a short biography, photo and practice details.

Contributions are welcome throughout the year.

Send your ideas or submissions to registrar@urhp.com

Please submit original work and ensure you have permission to use any accompanying images. Contributions may be edited before publication.

