

HERBS FOR WELLBEING



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INTRODUCTION

As the winter of 2020 began to draw near, members of Dwellbeing Shieldfield decided to take some proactive steps to support our physical and mental health. With the Covid-19 pandemic showing no signs of relenting, it felt more important than ever to find ways to stay strong and healthy and to look out for the wellbeing of others around us during such tough times.

We began working with Medical Herbalist, Jill Schnabel to learn about how to use herbs to support our immunity and wellbeing through the winter months. This booklet shares all that we have learnt during three online sessions along with written and illustrated contributions from members about their own experience of using herbs for wellbeing.

This is part of our ongoing work to build community knowledge about the issues that affect our lives. We hope this booklet inspires you to learn more about the many benefits of plants to community wellbeing, and to rethink the relationship between humans, plants and the rest of nature.

BACKGROUND TO HERBALISM

For centuries herbs have been highly prized for their medicinal and culinary properties. Much of the knowledge we have about herbs today has roots in ancient civilisations from all over the world. With the development of contemporary medicine, much of this traditional knowledge has been sidelined. But the benefits of plant-based remedies continue to be proven in medical science, showing that our health and wellbeing is intricately tied up with the wellbeing of plants and the rest of nature.

Using herbs safely

Please pay attention to the guidance in this booklet about the safe use of herbs. The majority of remedies listed here are food herbs with a long history of culinary use. Taken in moderate doses, they are as safe as foods. The remedies in this booklet can be used alongside conventional medicine, but this is not a substitute for medical treatment and diagnosis. If you are interested in using herbs for serious medical conditions you should consult a qualified medical herbalist. The National Institute for Medical Herbalists will help you to find a qualified herbalist in your local area: www.nimh.org.uk

TIPS FOR PICKING HERBS

Never pick anything unless you are confident that you know what it is, otherwise ask for advice before picking. Make sure that you are certain that the plants have not been affected by pollution and have not been sprayed with chemicals. This can make picking wild herbs difficult in an urban setting. For this reason Dwellbeing Shieldfield is working with Shieldfield Art Works (SAW) to grow herbs for the community at SAW and other locations around the neighbourhood.

Using herbs is all about nurturing a healthy relationship between people and plants. It is vital that we pick herbs sustainably. As a rule, only pick 30 per cent of what is available and only if it is abundant. Never pick a herb if there are only a few of the plants around and never pick a whole plant because this deprives the natural world of important sources of food and habitat. It is important that we learn to share our planet with the rest of nature.



Dandelion by Afnaan

GETTING STARTED

Herbalism is not all about lotions and potions. Indeed the food that we eat plays a huge part in our health and wellbeing. The best plants are the ones that taste good and make us feel good, and this booklet is full of examples for you to try.

If you are new to herbs we encourage you to stay open-minded. Some of these ideas might sound a bit strange and the new tastes can take some getting used to. But as you will see there are many different ways you can experience the benefits of herbs and we hope that there is something in here for everyone.



Sage by Maria

HERBS TO FIGHT INFECTION

In the winter it is especially important that we keep up our immunity to help to prevent infections

Garden Sage is good for sore gums, mouth ulcers or a sore throat. It can be drunk as tea or the tea can be used as a mouthwash or gargle. Avoid high doses (more than 1-2 cups a day) in pregnancy or if breast-feeding.

Here's what one Dwellbeing member said after trying: *"Sage has come to my rescue. I had a really sore throat and mouth ulcers and so I tried gargling with it. Honestly, it has been brilliant! I'm addicted to the sage gargling, it has really helped me. I couldn't speak. I am really impressed. I wish I had known about it years ago."*

There are many other uses for sage. Sage has historically been associated with having a good memory and living a long and healthy life. Scientific studies looking at the use of sage in the treatment for people living with Alzhiemers and Dementia, show that it can help to reduce the symptoms. Sage is also used as cold tea to calm hot flushes associated with menopause.

Garden Thyme is strengthening for the chest or lungs and can help with coughs, sore throats and bronchitis. Like sage, thyme can be used in cooking and it can also be used as a tea or gargle. In Shieldfield, thyme can be found in one of the raised planters on Napier Street. It has been planted by a local resident.

Rosehips are very high in Vitamin C which is brilliant at fighting infections. They can be squashed and boiled with sugar to make a syrup. Make sure you sieve the syrup thoroughly to remove the fine hairs. The hairs are traditionally used to make itching powder so you would not want to swallow them! Rosehip is widely available as a herbal tea.

Wild Yarrow has lots of common names which indicates that it is popular, well used, and a good reliable medicine. You might know it as Carpenter's Weed, Soldier's Woundwort, Bloodwort, Fever Herb, Field Hop, or Nosebleed. Wild yarrow can make you sweat and breaks a fever which helps the body to deal with infection. Applied to external wounds it will help the blood to clot and stop the bleeding. In Shieldfield, wild yarrow grows with other wild flowers along the pathway on City Stadium.

HOW TO MAKE HERBAL TEA

You can use both dried or fresh herbs to make a herb tea. Fresh leaves can be dried in the summer for use in the winter and will keep for up to a year. (See our preserving booklet for more information.)

Use a heaped teaspoon of fresh herbs or a level teaspoon of dried herbs. Add the herbs to a cup of boiling water. Allow to stand for 10 minutes to infuse. Strain the tea and drink warm or cold.



Peppermint by Maria

Flu tea

If you're feeling the beginnings of a cold or flu, try this traditional folk remedy to help reduce the symptoms. Make it as a herbal tea and drink as required, up to every hour for a day or two. Mix these three herbs in equal quantities and follow the recipe for herbal tea above.

- **Yarrow** reduces fever
- **Elderflower** helps to dry a runny nose
- **Peppermint** clears the sinuses

Did you know?

In Shieldfield, there is an elder tree growing at the back of Martin Luther Kirche. In folk law, the Elder tree is known as 'Elder Mother' - she is the mother of all medicines! The flowers work wonders for a runny nose and the berries are a great anti-viral. There is also a long tradition to use the elderberries in a cordial to make an effective winter flu remedy.



Elderflower by Maria

KNOW YOUR ONIONS!



Onion syrup ingredients (Photo: Jill)

Onion has antibiotic properties which means it helps to prevent infections. Onion also contains lots of vitamins and minerals to help strengthen your immunity.

Onion Syrup

If you have a cough or a sore throat try this simple homemade remedy. This has been used as a natural medicine for centuries and is much cheaper than any cough medicine you will find in the shops. You will need:

- 1 onion
- 1 small jar with a lid
- Sugar

Slice the onion thinly. Add a layer of sugar to the jar. Add a layer of onion. Repeat the layers until the onion is used up or the jar is full. Leave in the fridge overnight. Strain off the syrup (you can use the onions for cooking later). Keep the syrup in the fridge and use within one week. Take one teaspoonful taken as needed. If you can't have sugar, use instructions for flu tea on page 8.

TIPS FROM OUR COMMUNITY

There are many herbal traditions from all around the world. Dwellbeing members have shared some remedies from their home countries.

Kaltouma, from Sudan, recommends a homemade refreshing drink that is good for digestion. Cut and squeeze a whole lemon and put it into a large container. Mix with honey, fresh ginger and mint, add water or some ice and blend together. Ginger is good for digestion and this drink is suitable for the whole family.

A traditional Sudanese coffee includes fresh ginger, cinnamon, cardamom and cloves which can help to soothe a cough and cold. The spices have antioxidant and anti-inflammation properties and can help to lower blood pressure.

Kaltouma also recommends mixing garlic with olive oil and coconut oil to make a conditioning oil that is very moisturising for your hair.

Tigist, from Ethiopia, is growing rue in her garden which is widely used as a medicine in her home country. Tigist uses the fresh leaves to make a traditional green tea to prevent colds and soothe a sore throat or cough. She recommends adding a teaspoon of rue leaves to a cup with boiling water and leaving it to stand for 3-5 minutes. Tigist also uses the rue seeds for cooking. She mixes the seeds with basil and pepper to make a delicious sauce.

Do you know what rue is?

Tigist shared a rue plant with Ken from Hong Kong. In Cantonese traditions, rue is added to a sweet green bean soup, for the benefit of cooling the body.



Tigist's rue plant (Photo: Ken)

Warning: There are oils in rue that might cause a blistering reaction if it comes into contact with your skin. The oil can sensitise the skin to sunlight and cause blisters so remember to be careful if you handle it, especially if you have sensitive skin. Rue can be toxic in large doses. Never use rue when pregnant or breastfeeding.

Candy, also from Hong Kong, forages one of the common weeds called plantain weed. The weed is found growing in August/September in the local park and she will wash and dry the leaves for use throughout the year. Candy will boil the leaves in a big pot of hot water for 15-20 minutes, and then drink with some honey or brown sugar. She believes it is a good way to detox the body which has benefits for the lower body systems such as the kidneys and bladder.

Plantain has a long history of use all over the world. In Southern China, the herb is used to make a popular folk medicine for urinary tract infections. European plantain also has a long history of medicinal use and there are records of it being used for urinary conditions.



Plantain by Julia

GARLIC

“A companion plant to humanity”



Garlic by Maria

On the Winter Solstice 2020, Dwellbeing members planted culinary garlic cloves in locations around Shieldfield. Each clove will grow into a whole bulb which will be ready to harvest on the Summer Solstice in June 2021. The garlic will be shared in the community so that more people can benefit from its medicinal qualities.

Garlic has long been regarded as a restorative, strengthening medicine which was given to keep people healthy. It is from the same family of plants as onion - this includes garlic, leeks, chives, shallots and spring onions, and all of these are good for you. If you are sensitive to garlic or find garlic too strong, you could try chives instead to get some similar benefits.

The only type of garlic that grows naturally in the UK is wild garlic, known as Ramsons, which can be seen everywhere in Jesmond Dene from April-July. It is a mild form of garlic and you can eat the leaves, the flowers or the flower buds (the tiny bulbs are also edible but it is illegal to pick a whole plant without permission).



Winter Solstice garlic planting

Garlic Use in Ancient History

Going back as far as 5000 years, garlic was a valued food and medicine. Preserved garlic has been found in the tombs and burial chambers of the pyramids and garlic is written about in documents around 3000 years old, from India, China and Central Asia. The things it was used for then have now been shown in medical research to work. Garlic has historically been used to kill worms or parasites in the gut; to help fight chest infections or lung problems; or to help heart and circulation problems. There are records of giving garlic rations to labourers, soldiers or sailors, who did hard physical work because it was believed to keep them strong and healthy.

Medicinal qualities of garlic

Garlic has amazing medicinal qualities.

As an **antibiotic** it kills bacteria to prevent infection. As an **anti-viral** it helps with colds and flu. It is also **anti-fungal** which means it can kill fungi such as ringworm, thrush or other candida infections on the skin.

Garlic is **great for the heart and blood**. It helps to thin the blood and keep blood pressure low. Garlic lowers cholesterol and can balance blood sugar so it can help with diabetes. Garlic helps keep the blood vessel walls elastic and helps the blood to flow.

Garlic is **good for your gut**. It helps balance your gut flora (the good micro bugs in your gut), and helps to kill off parasites, worms or bad bugs.

Modern research suggests that garlic has **anti-cancer** properties. It is also an **antioxidant** which helps to reduce aging in the body and keeps the body young and vital. As an antioxidant, garlic can help detoxify heavy metals such as lead, aluminium and mercury, which can accumulate in the body due to exposure in your environment. New research shows that garlic is **anti-inflammatory** and can help to alleviate pain making it good for conditions like arthritis.

How to get the best from garlic

Clearly garlic is a good preventative medicine for all sorts of things! It is good to eat it every day, if it suits you. To make the most of its health benefits, garlic is best eaten raw. You can use raw garlic in a salad dressing, pesto or garlic butter or you can add it to soups, stews or sauces at the end of the cooking process.

Garlic is not toxic and is very low risk. You could eat as much as you want but, as with all herbs, use garlic in a way that suits your body.

If you are allergic or sensitive to garlic then you might not want to eat it a lot, or you could cook it really well. If you are on blood thinners like Warfarin, do not eat too much because it might thin your blood a bit more than needed. If you are having an operation, it is recommended to stop eating garlic 2-3 days before the operation so the blood can coagulate properly (just like doctors would advise, if you were taking Warfarin).

In the old publications from China and India, garlic is said to make the body hot. If you are experiencing menopausal hot flushes, you might want to stop eating it for a while. Also, chemotherapy patients sometimes feel hot and might want to avoid garlic.

HERBS AND OUR EMOTIONS

Herbs are a great way to help lift our spirits and calm our nerves. Our emotions are complex. This is why it is best to use herbs as part of a wider strategy for wellbeing. There are many things we can do to help us feel better.

These are some of the things that Dwellbeing members do:

- Listening to sounds of the sea
- Having a good bedtime routine
- Creativity, drawing, cooking
- Spending time outdoors
- Going to the allotment
- Doing housework
- Staying active
- Having contact with friends, family or neighbours
- Eating lots of fruit and vegetables.

It's about finding what works for you. We suggest that you try herbs alongside 2-3 other strategies to support your wellbeing. If you experience severe anxiety or depression then you should seek medical advice.

LIFTING OUR SPIRITS!

Herbs to improve low mood

If you are feeling sluggish, low or sad you need herbs that help invigorate the mind and body.

St John's Wort is a native British plant which grows in the wild. It has been clinically shown to be as good as medication for low mood. It also helps symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder (S.A.D.) in the winter months. If you are on other medication please consult your doctor because it could interfere. St John's Wort can be taken as capsules or as a tea.

Rosemary is invigorating. It stimulates the blood and mental activity. It can be used to help lift the spirits. It can help mental clarity if your memory is poor or if you are experiencing 'brain fog'. Rosemary can be used in cooking, in a stew or chopped up in mashed potato. It makes a strong tea so you might want to add honey. Rosemary can be grown in a garden. In Shieldfield you can find some growing for the community outside Shieldfield Art Works. (Please only pick when the plant is in abundance and only from the front garden!)

Thyme, as well as being good for your chest and lungs (see page 6), is also strengthening and uplifting. It can help you feel more focused and help with decision-making. Thyme leaves can be used as a tea or in cooking.

Dandelion grows in the wild and is known as a liver tonic. The liver is associated with low mood and throughout history liver imbalance was linked to melancholy. Dandelions will be coming in the spring and in Shieldfield they grow everywhere! Eat the young leaves because the older ones are tough and too bitter. Other bitter leafy greens have similar effects, such as rocket.

Remember not to pick where animals have been or chemical sprays might have been used. Be careful where you pick and wash the leaves really well before use.



Dandelion by Zouhal

CALMING OUR NERVES

Herbs to help fear & anxiety

If you are feeling jittery and on edge, you need herbs that will calm the nervous system down.

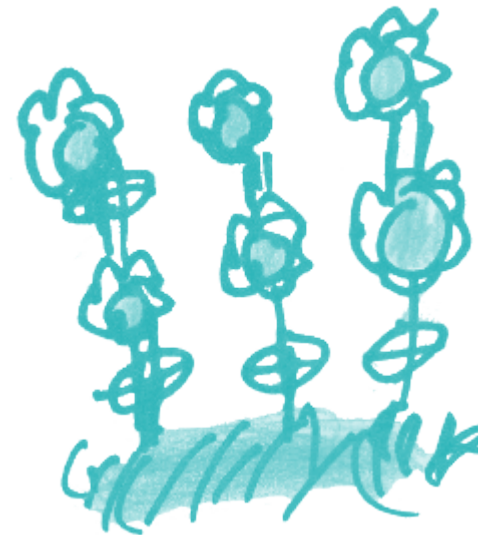
Lavender is very calming and relaxing. You can use the flowers to make tea or for cooking and baking. The dried flowers keep their scent and can be used to make lavender bags to keep under your pillow to help you sleep. Lavender can be grown in gardens and the bees love it. (Check out our previous booklet, 'Pickling, Preserving and Infusing - Tips from our community' for instructions to make a lavender herb oil by Dwellbeing member, Kaltouma.) There is a healthy lavender bush growing outside Shieldfield House and in the planters between the three tower blocks.

Lime or **Linden Blossom** is very calming and can help you sleep. It makes you go woosy so be careful. These trees are commonly found in cities. Pick the blossom from the tree and dry it for use in tea.



Lemon balm by Afnaan

Lemon Balm (Melissa) is recommended for hyperactive children, to calm them down. It also relaxes gut tension - some people hold a lot of tension in their stomach. Lemon balm is another garden herb which is easy to grow and share. The leaves can be used in tea or cold drinks.



Chamomile calms the nerves and aids relaxation. The dried flowers can be mixed with other leaves like peppermint for taste.

Chamomile by Afnaan

Wild Valerian grows in damp ditches and hedgerows. Herbalists use the roots as a strong herbal sedative. Keep in mind that it can make you very sleepy. Start with small amounts and be careful about when you choose to take it.

Rose has a magical scent which works both ways. It can calm your emotional and spiritual body and can lift your spirits. In Shieldfield roses grow in the raised flower beds near Napier Street/Byron Street.



Rose and Mint by Sophia

SMELLS

Plant essential oils

Some of the plants that we have mentioned can be bought in the form of essential oils. The use of plant essential oils for wellbeing is a specialist topic that is beyond the remit of this booklet but there is lots of information out there.

Smells can have a huge effect on the mood. The smell goes to the 'primitive' or emotional part of the brain. The essential oils from plants can be used in different ways to improve your mood. To give a couple of widely available examples:

- Lavender essential oil can be calming and is commonly used to reduce anxiety and stress
- Rosemary essential oil can be used to reduce low mood and to invigorate and uplift

Essential oils are best used in low doses:

- 1 drop per teaspoon of carrier oil/cream to make a body lotion
- 4-5 drops in your bath water
- 3 drops in an oil burner/vaporiser

Never take them internally and do not use them neat on your skin.

Think about using herbs for different times of day. For example, rosemary is good to pick you up in the morning or if you're trying to concentrate and lavender is good to relax you in the evening.

Medical Herbalist Jill Schnabel has a favourite book on the subject: *Aromatherapy for Healing the Spirit: A Guide to Restoring Emotional and Mental Balance Through Essential Oils* by Gabriel Mojay. Dwellbeing has a copy of this book to share in the community. Please contact us if you would like to borrow it.



Lavender by Gemma

HERBAL NETWORKS

Like us, there are many groups around the country who are sharing knowledge about the benefits of herbs for wellbeing. Here are just a few we have come across...

Eat Weeds explores uses of wild plants as food and medicine. The site acts as a wild food foraging guide to the edible and medicinal wild plants of Britain and Ireland and what to look out for month by month.
www.eatweeds.co.uk

Grass Roots Remedies runs low cost herbal clinics and free community workshops on foraging, growing medicinal herbs, remedy making and community health in Edinburgh.
www.grassrootsremedies.co.uk

Herbalism Without Borders is a collection of groups in the UK and Ireland who promote and deliver herbal medicine to individuals and communities. They teach people to make kitchen remedies and distribute surplus to refugee communities experiencing border violence in Northern France.
www.necessity.info/herbalism-without-borders

Idle Women is an arts and social justice project that creates vibrant spaces with and for women. Through the project Mud to Medicine they are transforming a strip of canalside land in Nelson, Lancashire into the UK's first physic garden.

www.idlewomen.org

Radical Herbalism Gathering Network organise a range of workshops weaving together herbal knowledge, medicine, social justice politics and organising, including prison abolition workshops, practical medicine making sessions, migrant solidarity information exchanges and wild foraging for medicinal plants.

www.radicalherbalism.org.uk

The Mobile Apothecary brings people together to learn about medicinal plants and create herbal medicine for distribution to community members in East London facing barriers to health, food and shelter.

www.phytology.org.uk/apothecary

The Solidarity Apothecary supports people experiencing state repression and violence with herbal medicines through care packages for people on trial and prison leavers. Through the Prisoners Herbalism Collective they coordinate a course in herbalism for prisoners to encourage conversations about health justice and imprisonment via grassroots media projects.

www.solidarityapothecary.org

BACKGROUND

Dwellbeing Shieldfield supports members to play an active role in the community by sharing skills and building knowledge about the issues that affect our lives.

Our 'weekly check-ins' began at the start of the first Covid-19 lockdown in Spring 2020 and have continued, as a way to support each other through this difficult period. The check-ins provide space to talk about wellbeing, to build friendships and for skill-sharing and education.



Sharon and Val planting garlic (Photo: Julia)

Covid-19 has shed light on the fragility of the UK's food supply chains, so in response Dwellbeing and SAW organised a collective growing effort in the neighbourhood. Shieldfield Grows enabled people to grow vegetables, fruit and herbs in their homes, on balconies, gardens and allotments.

These growing projects are part of our long-term work around Shieling, which includes creating and sustaining community spaces and public realm improvements. Through Shieling we are reclaiming land for food growing in our community as well as building community knowledge and engagement around the issues of food security, sustainable and participatory forms of building, land, planning and urban development.



Ahmad and Aameena's courgettes (Photo: Ken)

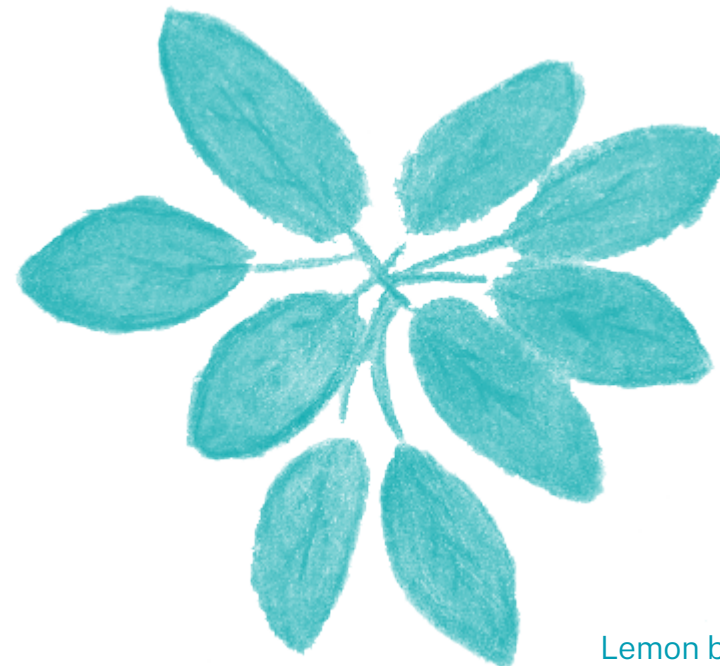
Growing our own produce is a huge part of community autonomy and resilience especially in times of economic downturn and hardship. We want to be part of a movement which empowers our communities to have good quality, nutritious food for our bodies, minds and souls.

If you would like to find out more about our weekly check-ins, food growing projects or the wider Shieling programme please get in touch with us. Our contact details are on the back page.

THANK YOU

We are hugely grateful to Jill Schnabel for sharing her knowledge with us. Jill is a qualified Medical Herbalist with 15 years of experience. Jill specialises in Western herbal medicine traditions and prescribes plant-based remedies that can be used safely in conjunction with mainstream medicine.

We are also grateful to Dwellbeing members for their contributions: Afnaan, Alison, Candy, Gemma, Hannah, Helen, Julia, Kaltouma, Ken, Maria, Sharon, Tigist, Val and Zouhal.



Lemon balm by Zouhal

Dwellbeing Shieldfield is a welcoming, artistic and inclusive community benefit society and cooperative of Shieldfield residents and community members of all ages and backgrounds. Through our projects, research and events we share life together, support our neighbours and celebrate and empower our rich and diverse community. Our aim is for community members to play an active role in shaping life in Shieldfield. We share our knowledge about the issues and challenges that affect our neighbourhood and work collectively to find alternative models for organising, learning and solidarity. Through these actions we aim to move Shieldfield (and other neighbourhoods like it) towards self-reliance, resilience and interdependence.

Get in touch to find out more:

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