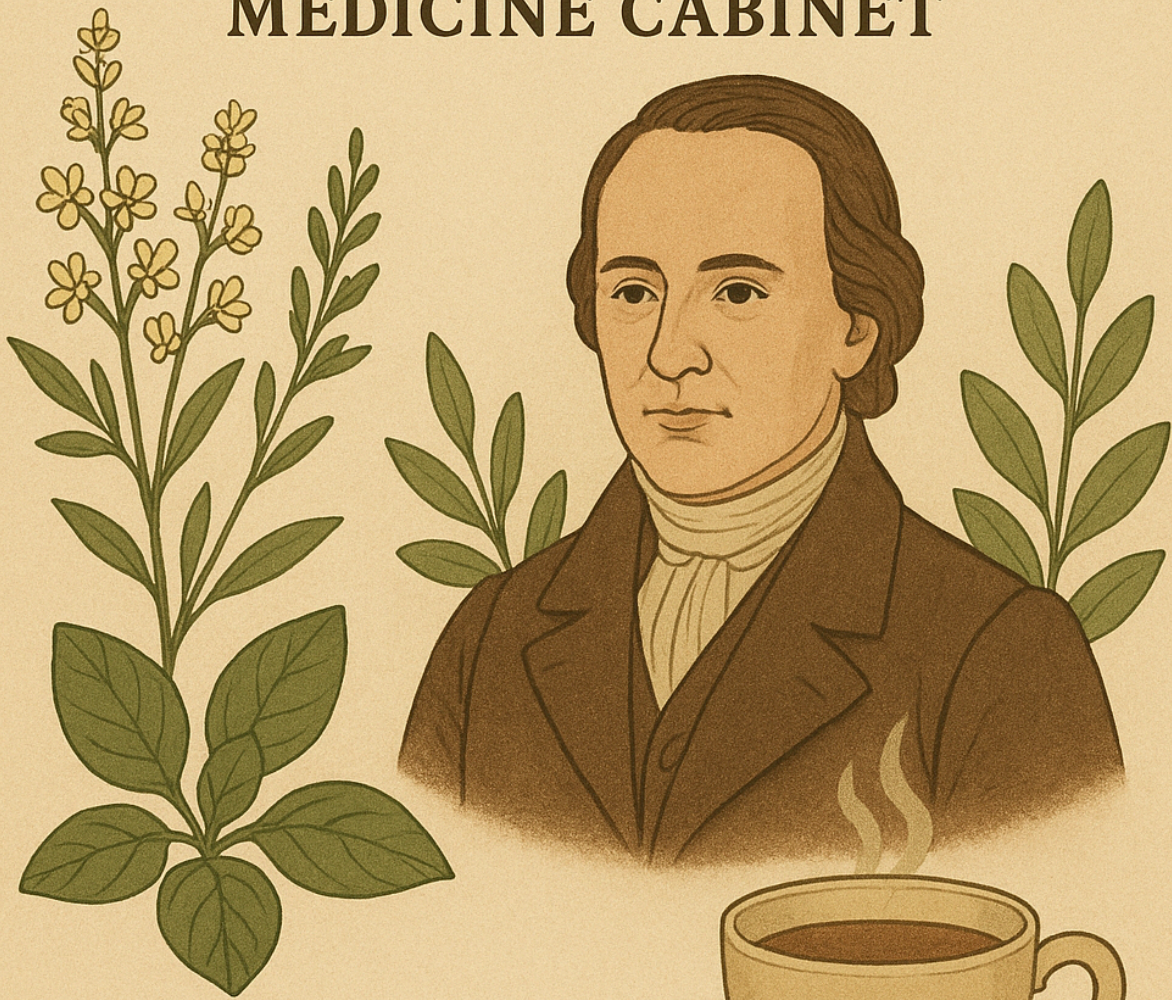


THOMSONIAN HERBALISM

A RETURN TO NATURE'S
MEDICINE CABINET



BY SISTER
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Thomsonian Herbalism

A Return to Nature's Medicine Cabinet

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The Order of Franciscan Clareans
2025

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Introduction: The Fire Within

When I first learned about **Thomsonian Herbalism**, it was like discovering a spark I didn't know I'd been missing—a warming ember from another time, yet one that lit up everything I was already passionate about: simple living, radical care, herbal wisdom, and the sacred dignity of the poor.

Samuel Thomson wasn't a doctor. He was a self-taught herbalist and New England farmer in the early 1800s who believed that healing belonged to everyone—not just to the privileged or professionally trained. He watched as his neighbors suffered under bloodletting, calomel (mercury poisoning), and dangerous medical treatments. And so he turned to the Earth and to God.

His system wasn't flashy. It was based on **common sense**, **accessible plants**, and **natural processes**. It was a form of *folk resistance*—a medical populism that stood against oppressive institutions long before the term “health justice” ever existed. And it worked. Communities began to heal themselves. Mothers became herbalists. Farmers became healers. And the sick began to trust their own bodies again.

Why This Book, and Why Now?

We are living in a time of **medical burnout**, rising costs, widespread mistrust, and over-reliance on pharmaceutical fixes. We're also seeing a beautiful reawakening—people returning to the land, learning their herbs, and caring for themselves and their communities in deeply rooted ways.

But more than that, we're in a time when **herbal justice** is urgently needed. Disabled people, neurodivergent people, queer and trans people, poor people, people living in tents and tiny homes and rural trailers—we are often treated as afterthoughts or burdens in mainstream health systems. But Thomsonian herbalism, like the gospel, says otherwise. It says healing is *ours*. It belongs to the broken, the barefoot, the bold.

As a Franciscan Clarean nun, I see in Thomson's work the same spirit that animated Francis and Clare: the call to return to **creation**, to **simplicity**, to the **sacred fire of love** that lives in every living thing—including herbs, including our aching bodies, and yes, even in resistance itself.

A Word to the Reader

This book is for you. Whether you're brand new to herbalism or a seasoned community herbalist looking to deepen your roots, I pray these pages will feel like coming home.

You don't need to be a scientist or a saint. You just need a little courage, a warm cup of tea, and a willingness to believe that **healing can be simple, sacred, and shared**.

May this book rekindle your inner fire, reconnect you to the wisdom of the Earth, and empower you to care—for yourself, your loved ones, and this hurting world—with holy hands and humble herbs.



In warmth and solidarity,
Sister Abigail Hester, CNC
Order of Franciscan Clareans

Chapter One

Herbalism for the People

Before Samuel Thomson ever called himself an herbalist, he was a barefoot boy in the woods of New Hampshire, learning from the land itself. He watched how plants grew, how they changed with the seasons, how certain leaves could soothe burns and certain roots could calm a restless stomach. He didn't learn from medical books—he learned from *Creation*.

And yet, the world around him was full of suffering. Doctors in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were trained in a brutal system of care: **bloodletting, mercury poisoning, forced vomiting, and toxic purgatives** were standard practice. Medical care was expensive, dangerous, and inaccessible for most people, especially the poor.

But Thomson had a radically different idea:

“Every man his own doctor.”

This wasn't just a slogan. It was a **revolution**. And it terrified the medical elite.

Medicine as Resistance

Thomson's system took power away from the professional class and returned it to the kitchen, the garden, and the gathering circle. His vision was grounded in **empowerment**, not dependency. He believed that ordinary people could—and should—heal themselves and their communities.

He created a simple, accessible method using only a handful of herbs, sweat baths, and supportive nourishment. He didn't need laboratories, surgical tools, or pharmaceutical companies. He needed **lobelia, cayenne, steam, and faith in the body's design**.

In a society where most people couldn't afford a physician, Thomson offered a healing path that **honored the poor** and **trusted creation**. It was earthy, homegrown, and deeply spiritual.

Sacred Ground

As a Franciscan Clarean, I see in Thomson's story a reflection of the earliest followers of Christ. Just as Jesus laid hands on the sick and walked among the outcast, **Thomson's herbal practice walked with the poor and lifted up the broken**.

Francis and Clare taught us that healing is a sacred act—done not from a place of control, but from *compassion*. And they remind us that healing doesn't always come from institutions; often it comes from **fields and forests, from prayer and presence, from the tender leaves of plants growing wild.**

The Herbalist Next Door

Thomsonian Herbalism is not about elitism, fancy credentials, or rare exotic tinctures. It's about **simplicity. Access. Trust.** It's about **bringing herbal medicine back into the hands of ordinary people**, just as God placed herbs in our backyards, fields, and window boxes.

And today—amid skyrocketing medical costs, environmental collapse, and a culture addicted to synthetic fixes—his message feels more urgent than ever:

Healing is not a commodity. Healing is a birthright.

Reflection Questions

- What does “every person their own healer” mean to you?
 - Have you ever experienced a moment when a simple herbal remedy brought comfort or healing?
 - How can you begin to reclaim your relationship with nature and its healing gifts?
-

Chapter Two

The Four Pillars of Thomsonian Practice

Samuel Thomson believed healing was simple—so simple that he structured his entire system around **four core ideas**, accessible to anyone regardless of background, education, or income. These weren't just medical theories. They were **lived truths**, grounded in experience, observation, and deep trust in the body and the Earth.

Let's walk through each of these four pillars, honoring their wisdom and imagining how they still speak to us today—especially for those living at the edges, in tents, shelters, mobile homes, and modest kitchens where healing must be simple, practical, and sacred.

Pillar One: *The Body Heals Itself*

Thomson taught that the body, when free of obstruction and given the right conditions, **will heal itself**. He rejected the idea that disease was a foreign enemy to be “attacked.” Instead, he saw illness as a natural process—an expression of the body’s **attempt to restore balance**.

From a Franciscan Clarean perspective, this is deeply affirming. It means that **our bodies are not broken, shameful, or untrustworthy**. They are sacred, wise, and full of the Spirit’s movement—even when suffering. Healing begins not with domination, but with **cooperation**.

🕊️ *“The same God who clothed the lilies and feeds the sparrows also gave your body the wisdom to heal. Trust it.”*

🌶️ **Pillar Two: Herbs Are Food and Medicine**

Thomson didn’t use rare or complicated formulas. He used **whole, warming herbs** you could grow in a garden or find in a kitchen: cayenne, lobelia, peppermint, ginger, bayberry. These herbs weren’t distant or mystical—they were **local, familiar, and deeply effective**.

In this system, herbs were treated like friends and allies. They weren’t used to suppress symptoms but to **stimulate the body’s natural healing processes**. Herbs were infused into daily life—as tea, as nourishment, as warmth, as prayer.

🌿 *“If you can make soup, you can make medicine.”*

🏠 **Pillar Three: Every Home a Healing Center**

Perhaps the most revolutionary aspect of Thomsonian herbalism was its **radical decentralization**. He believed every family should be able to care for themselves. He trained mothers, farmers, and working-class folks—not as a business, but as a movement.

Every home, he taught, could become a **healing space**. Not sterile, not professionalized—but **loving, warm, earthy**, and capable. He gave the power back to the people—and they never forgot it.

For today’s communities—especially queer, disabled, trans, and houseless people who are often excluded or harmed by the medical system—this principle is not just empowering. It’s **liberating**.

🏡 *“Let the poor teach the rich how to heal with their hands and herbs.”*

🔥 **Pillar Four: The Importance of Heat**

This might be the most misunderstood part of Thomson's work: **his obsession with heat**. He believed cold was the root of most disease—cold food, cold air, cold emotions. Healing, he argued, required restoring **inner fire**: circulation, digestion, energy, warmth.

This wasn't just physical—it was **spiritual**. Heat was life, love, movement, passion. Cold was stagnation, fear, and death. Through cayenne, ginger, steam baths, and warming broths, he sought to **ignite the sacred fire within**.

From a Franciscan Clarean lens, we see this as a metaphor for **reviving hope, awakening justice, and stirring compassion**. Healing isn't about numbing. It's about **awakening**.

🔥 *"To heal is to burn brightly again."*

✨ Bringing the Pillars to Life

These four pillars are not just historical curiosities. They are **invitations**. They call us to reclaim herbalism not just as a method, but as a **way of life**—one rooted in trust, warmth, simplicity, and community care.

🌱 Reflection Questions

- Which of these four pillars speaks most deeply to your current healing journey?
 - What would it look like to make your home (or tent, or trailer, or room) a healing space?
 - How can you rekindle your inner warmth—physically, emotionally, spiritually?
-

🌿 Chapter Three

The Materia Medica of Thomsonian Herbalism

In the heart of every herbal tradition lies a **materia medica**—a collection of the plants that make up the foundation of healing. For Samuel Thomson, this list wasn't long or exotic. It was **simple, accessible, and powerful**.

Thomson chose plants that were warming, stimulating, and reliable—plants that helped eliminate waste, rekindle the inner fire, and **restore the body's natural flow**. These herbs weren't abstract tools. They were **friends, teachers, and co-laborers** in the work of wellness.

What follows is a practical, sacred, and justice-rooted guide to some of Thomson's most essential herbs. Each entry includes traditional uses, preparation methods, and spiritual reflections.

Cayenne Pepper (*Capsicum annuum*)

“The universal stimulant.”

Actions: Circulatory stimulant, digestive aid, anti-inflammatory, catalyst for other herbs.

Uses:

- Improves blood flow to all parts of the body
- Eases cold hands and feet
- Aids digestion and absorption of nutrients
- Speeds healing by increasing circulation
- Enhances the effects of other herbs

Preparation: Tincture, capsule, or a small pinch in warm water or tea. Start with ¼ teaspoon or less.

Spiritual Note: Cayenne ignites the sacred fire. In both body and soul, it **awakens what has gone numb**.

Lobelia (*Lobelia inflata*)

“The relaxer.”

Actions: Nervine, antispasmodic, expectorant, emetic (at high doses)

Uses:

- Calms muscle tension and spasms
- Relaxes tight breathing in asthma or anxiety
- Aids in emotional release and deep rest
- Used as an emetic in the original Thomsonian system for detox

Preparation: Tincture in low doses; poultice for muscle spasms; teas for nervous tension.

Caution: Lobelia is powerful and should be used in small doses unless guided by a skilled herbalist.

Spiritual Note: Lobelia teaches **surrender**. It invites us to **release control, unclench, and let go**.

Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*)

“The digestive kindler.”

Actions: Warming stimulant, anti-inflammatory, carminative, immune-boosting

Uses:

- Relieves gas, bloating, and nausea
- Warms the stomach and whole body
- Promotes sweating during fevers
- Eases menstrual cramps and muscle aches

Preparation: Tea, fresh juice, tincture, candied ginger, or decoction.

Spiritual Note: Ginger **comforts the gut and the heart**. It’s a mothering herb—steady, warm, and familiar.

Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*)

“The cooling companion.”

Actions: Carminative, mild antispasmodic, nervine, digestive, decongestant

Uses:

- Eases digestive discomfort and gas
- Opens the lungs and sinuses
- Calms the nerves and clears the mind
- Soothes tension headaches and mild fevers

Preparation: Tea, essential oil (diluted), tincture, steam inhalation

Spiritual Note: Peppermint brings **clarity and refreshment**. It reminds us to **breathe deep and carry on**.

Bayberry (*Myrica cerifera*)

“The astringent builder.”

Actions: Astringent, stimulant, antimicrobial, tonic for weak digestion

Uses:

- Helps tighten and tone loose tissues
- Used for diarrhea, sore throat, gum disease
- Supports recovery from illness or depletion
- A tonic herb to rebuild strength

Preparation: Decoction (boiled tea), tincture, or gargle.

Spiritual Note: Bayberry strengthens **what has gone slack**—in body and spirit. It **rebuilds resilience**.

Other Friends in the Apothecary

Though not exclusive to Thomson’s original list, modern practitioners inspired by his teachings often include:

- **Garlic:** A universal antimicrobial and circulatory stimulant
- **Slippery Elm:** Soothing for the gut and respiratory tract
- **Yarrow:** Fever support and wound healing
- **Elderberry & Elderflower:** Immune-boosting and fever-managing

These herbs are part of the **living tradition** of self-healing, available to anyone who wishes to learn.

Starting Your Own Apothecary

Start with **five to seven herbs**, and learn them well. Get to know their smell, taste, texture, and effects. Make tea. Observe. Journal. Notice how your body responds.

A few jars, labels, and some simple tools (like a tea strainer and mortar) are all you need to begin.

Reflection Questions

- Which herb are you most drawn to right now?

- What do you feel when you smell or taste cayenne? Ginger? Peppermint?
 - How might you create a healing ritual with just one of these plants?
-



Chapter Four

Making Herbalism Simple Again

Herbalism, at its heart, is **kitchen medicine**. It's the kind of healing your grandmother practiced when she made tea for a fever or wrapped a cloth around your chest with mustard and honey. It's not about expensive tinctures or rare roots flown from overseas. It's about **accessibility, rhythm, and relationship**.

Samuel Thomson understood this. His system wasn't built for laboratories or clinics. It was built for **ordinary people**, in **ordinary homes**, using what the earth and local markets could provide.

This chapter will walk you through the basics of **setting up a simple apothecary**, making a few key **remedies**, and beginning a **ritual practice** of herbal care—even if you're living in a tiny home, a tent, a trailer, or a shared apartment.



The Bare-Bones Apothecary

You don't need a fancy herb shelf or expensive bottles. You need **jars, labels, and commitment**. Here are the basics:

Tools:

- A few clean glass jars (for herbs and infusions)
- Labels and a marker
- A tea strainer or cheesecloth
- A small pot for boiling water
- A spoon or wooden stirrer
- Optional: dropper bottles, funnel, mortar & pestle

Starter Herbs (from Chapter 3):

- Cayenne powder
- Dried ginger or fresh root
- Peppermint leaves
- Lobelia tincture (or buy from a trusted source)
- Bayberry bark
- Garlic and onion (always on hand!)

Everyday Remedies You Can Make

Firestarter Tea (Stimulating and Circulation Boosting)

- 1/4 tsp cayenne
- 1 tsp grated ginger
- 1 tsp honey (optional)
- Juice of half a lemon

Steep ginger in boiling water for 10 minutes. Stir in cayenne, lemon, and honey. Sip slowly.

Use for: Cold extremities, sluggish digestion, early signs of illness.

Calm the Storm Tea (Digestive and Nervous Support)

- 1 tsp peppermint
- 1/2 tsp ginger
- Optional: a few drops of lobelia tincture

Steep in hot water for 10 minutes. Drink after meals or during emotional stress.

Use for: Gas, bloating, stress, minor headaches, anxiety.

Herbal Steam Inhalation

- A handful of peppermint or thyme
- Bowl of hot water
- Towel

Pour boiling water over herbs in a bowl. Drape a towel over your head and inhale deeply.

Use for: Congestion, sinus pressure, clearing the mind.

Herbal Foot Soak (For Cold, Grief, and Fatigue)

- 1 tbsp ginger powder or crushed ginger root
- 1 tsp cayenne (optional)
- A few peppermint leaves or essential oil

Add to a basin of hot water and soak your feet for 15–20 minutes.


Use for: Grounding, warming, and emotional reset.

Herbalism as Ritual

In the Franciscan Clarean Way, healing is never just physical. It's **spiritual, communal, and intimate**. So let your herbal practices be sacred. Light a candle. Say a blessing. Name your intention. Thank the plant.

Example Ritual:

As you stir your tea, whisper:

 *"For the healing of my body, the soothing of my heart, and the love of the Earth from which all medicine comes."*

Herbalism for Tiny and Temporary Homes

Living in a tent, a vehicle, or a shared space? You can still build a healing rhythm:

- Use **portable tins or bags** for herbs
- Boil water with a camp stove or hot plate
- Hang dried herbs from a string or clothesline
- Carry teas in a thermos or mason jar
- Pray or bless your herbs each morning as a ritual

You don't need a clinic. You need courage, creativity, and cayenne.

Reflection Questions

- What part of your daily routine could become a healing ritual?
 - How can you use herbalism to honor your body where it is—without shame or urgency?
 - What's one new remedy you'd like to try this week?
-

Chapter Five

Sacred Herbal Justice

Herbalism is more than making teas and tinctures. It's more than knowing the properties of ginger or the effects of cayenne. At its deepest level, **herbalism is a spiritual and political act of resistance**. When we reclaim our right to heal ourselves, we challenge the powers that profit from our pain.

Thomsonian Herbalism, from its very beginnings, was a justice movement. Samuel Thomson wasn't just healing bodies—he was **empowering the poor, disrupting the elite**, and **decentralizing medicine** in a society where only the rich could access care.

In today's world—where disabled people, queer and trans folks, people of color, and the unhoused are systemically excluded from healing spaces—**herbalism becomes a sacred tool for survival and liberation**.



Medical Injustice Then and Now

In Thomson's day, licensed physicians used toxic treatments like mercury and calomel. The poor were either **excluded or experimented on**. Thomson's response? Teach the poor to heal themselves. Teach mothers, farmers, midwives. *Give the tools back to the people.*

Today, we still face medical injustice:

- Black patients are less likely to be given pain medication
- Trans people are regularly misgendered, mistreated, or denied care
- Disabled people are devalued in triage systems
- Many communities cannot afford health insurance or prescriptions
- Houseless people are criminalized for meeting basic hygiene needs

Herbalism, when rooted in **solidarity and simplicity**, is one way we say: *No more. We care for each other.*



Healing as Mutual Aid

In the Franciscan Clarean tradition, we see herbalism not as charity, but as **mutual aid**. As justice. As a form of **holy defiance**. When the system fails, we do not abandon each other—we **create alternatives**, grounded in love and Earth's abundance.

Examples of Herbal Mutual Aid:

- Sharing herbal teas at encampments and protests
- Teaching others to use cayenne for circulation or garlic for infections
- Making small herbal kits for houseless friends
- Leading free classes on warming herbs and cold care


- Blessing herbal remedies with prayer, tenderness, and respect

This is not “alternative medicine.” It is **ancestral memory**, **sacred practice**, and **grassroots revolution**.

Jesus the Healer, Not the Gatekeeper

In the Gospels, Jesus never charged for healing. He never required paperwork. He healed in the streets, among the forgotten, outside the temple walls.

When we gather in kitchens and street corners to share healing herbs, we follow in his footsteps.

 *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because she has anointed me to bring good news to the poor... to bind up the brokenhearted... to proclaim release to the captives.” —Isaiah 61*

A Prayer for Herbal Justice

*Holy Creator, who placed healing in the hands of flowers and the hearts of the poor—
Anoint our work with courage.
Bless our herbs with strength.
And teach us to heal not as gatekeepers, but as kin.*

Reflection Questions

- Where have you experienced or witnessed medical injustice?
 - How can your herbal practice become part of your justice practice?
 - Who in your community might need herbal care, tenderness, or empowerment?
-

Chapter Six

A Franciscan Clarean Approach to Healing

For those of us who follow the Franciscan Clarean Way, herbalism is more than a practice—it is a **spiritual vocation**. It is prayer with our hands. It is contemplative action. It is an act of reverence for the body, the Earth, and the Divine Spirit that breathes through all living things.

Francis of Assisi called all creatures his siblings—Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Fire, Sister Water. He sang to the Earth not as a resource but as a **beloved relative**. And **Clare**, cloistered yet radiant, embodied a fierce simplicity and healing presence that could calm the most troubled hearts.

Together, Francis and Clare offer a vision of herbal healing that is rooted not only in the **soil**, but in the **soul**.

Nature as Cathedral

When we harvest peppermint or stir a ginger tea, we are not working in a laboratory—we are entering a cathedral. Each leaf is a psalm. Each root is a gospel.

Franciscan herbalism reminds us: **God is not far away. God is in the garden. God is in the mugwort and the mustard seed.**

This is why our healing is slow, seasonal, gentle. We listen to creation, rather than conquer it. We walk barefoot on the land, whisper gratitude, and bless the plants before we use them.

🕊️ *“Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Earth, who sustains and governs us.”* —Francis of Assisi

Simplicity as Spiritual Medicine

Thomsonian Herbalism aligns beautifully with the Franciscan vow of **simplicity**. Healing should not be expensive, exclusive, or elite. A few common herbs, a pot of hot water, and a quiet heart are often enough.

In our culture of overconsumption, the Franciscan Clarean herbalist resists complexity for complexity’s sake. Instead, we return to **the humble and the holy**—dandelion, ginger, peppermint, cayenne. Enough.

Prayerful Herbal Practice

Before making tea or crafting medicine, many Franciscan Clarean herbalists pause to pray:

“Holy One, bless these herbs. May they carry your warmth, wisdom, and healing to all who receive them. Amen.”

Prayer infuses our work with **presence**. It transforms herbalism into **liturgy**.

We treat our apothecary shelf as an altar. We treat our work as worship. We treat the sick with **sacramental tenderness**.

Herbalism for the Broken Body

In Franciscan spirituality, we do not fear brokenness. Francis bore the stigmata—wounds of Christ’s suffering—and Clare’s health was fragile, yet radiant.

Herbalism meets us in our **broken bodies**. It does not demand perfection. It offers presence. It says:

“You are sacred even in your pain.”

“You are worthy even in your weakness.”

“You are loved even when you cannot be cured.”

A Blessing for the Herb Gatherer

*O Herbalist of the Wild Path,
Child of Earth and Tenderness,
May your hands be steady,
Your breath be slow,
Your herbs be potent,
And your love be deep.*

*In every leaf, may you find the whisper of God.
In every brew, the fire of Christ.
In every act of care, the dance of Spirit.*

Go gently, and heal freely. Amen.

Reflection Questions

- How do you experience God in the natural world?
 - What would it mean to treat your herbal practice as a form of prayer?
 - How does simplicity shape the way you offer or receive healing?
-

Chapter Seven

Everyday Herbal Rituals

Herbalism isn't just about having remedies for emergencies. It's about creating a daily rhythm of healing. For those of us walking the Franciscan Clarean Way, these rhythms become a form of sacred routine, like the prayers of the Little Hours—ordinary, small acts that shape the soul.

Thomsonian herbalism was never meant to be separate from daily life. It was woven into the morning cup of tea, the evening foot soak, the gentle steam over the kitchen stove. It was embodied, rooted, practical, and spiritual.

Let this chapter be your invitation to build holy herbal habits—simple rituals of care, grounding, and gratitude that connect you to the Earth and to your body.



Morning Warm-Up Ritual

Begin your day with a cup of warming tea to rekindle your inner fire and set your intention.

Suggested Tea:

- 1 tsp grated ginger
- A pinch of cayenne
- A squeeze of lemon
- 1 tsp honey

Ritual: As the water boils, breathe deeply. Stir clockwise. Pray: *“As this tea warms my body, may love warm my heart, and courage rise with the steam.”*



Evening Foot Soak

The feet carry so much—physically, emotionally, spiritually. Ending your day with a warm herbal footbath is a Franciscan act of reverence.

Ingredients:

- 1 tbsp dried ginger
- 1 tsp cayenne (optional)
- A handful of dried lavender or peppermint

Instructions: Add herbs to hot water in a basin. Soak feet for 15–20 minutes. Dry with care. Massage in oil if available.

Blessing:

“Thank you, feet, for carrying me. Thank you, Earth, for grounding me. Thank you, herbs, for restoring me.”

Midday Pause: Digestive and Nervous Reset

Take a break during your busiest time to calm your gut and spirit.

Suggested Tea:

- 1 tsp peppermint
- ½ tsp fennel or chamomile
- A drop of lobelia tincture (if desired)

Ritual: Sit in silence as the tea steeps. Touch the cup to your chest before sipping. Let it be a moment of reconnection.

Herbal Inhalation for Clarity

Feeling anxious, congested, or spiritually scattered? Try a simple herbal steam.

Ingredients:

- A handful of eucalyptus, thyme, or peppermint
- A bowl of hot water
- A towel

Instructions: Inhale slowly for 5–10 minutes, eyes closed. Let the herbs clear your lungs and your mind.

Prayer:

“Clear my breath, clear my thoughts, clear my path.”

The Little Hours of Herbal Care

Like a monastic prayer rhythm, you can create Herbal Hours:

- **Matins (early morning):** Warming tea, sunlight on your skin
- **Terce (mid-morning):** Stretching, peppermint breath, gratitude
- **Sext (noon):** Digestive tea, foot massage, rest

- None (mid-afternoon): Herbal steam or walk outdoors
- Vespers (evening): Foot soak, calming herbs, soft lighting
- Compline (before bed): Chamomile tea, oil rub, silent prayer

These rhythms aren't rules—they are invitations. Create your own. Let herbs mark the day, just as bells mark the hours.

Reflection Questions

- What part of your day feels most in need of ritual or care?
 - Which herbal rhythm would be easiest for you to begin tomorrow?
 - How can your daily life become a liturgy of healing?
-

Chapter Eight

Teaching, Sharing, and Passing It On

Herbal wisdom has always traveled through story, hands, and heart—not just textbooks. It has been whispered between mothers, traded among travelers, taught in garden rows and kitchen tables. Samuel Thomson knew this when he said, *“Every person their own doctor.”* But he also meant: *Every person their neighbor's teacher.*

When we share herbal knowledge, we participate in a sacred lineage. And in the Franciscan Clarean way, to teach healing is to extend love. It is to resist the hoarding of knowledge. It is to say: *No one is disposable. Everyone deserves to know how to care for themselves and their community.*

Becoming a Kitchen Teacher

You don't need credentials to be a guide. You need humility, experience, and a willingness to walk with others.

Ways to Begin Sharing Herbal Wisdom:

- Host a tea circle or “healing hour” at home or outdoors
- Share warming teas with neighbors or at encampments
- Teach children the names of herbs and how to make tea
- Leave herbal zines or remedy cards in community fridges
- Use social media to share daily herbal affirmations and recipes

- Tell your story—how herbs have helped you and your body

In herbalism, *teaching is testifying*. It's passing on the light so others can kindle their own fire.

Herbalism for Children and Caregivers

Teaching children about herbs is holy work. It connects them to the Earth, builds confidence, and nurtures their intuition.

Child-Friendly Ideas:

- Let them smell and name dried herbs
- Make tea together (ginger-honey-lemon is a great start)
- Create a “little apothecary” box with pictures and prayers
- Teach them to care for plants and say thank you to the Earth

Caregiver Tip: Herbalism can be especially helpful for disabled and neurodivergent children. Routine herbal rituals provide grounding and sensory support.

Herbalism as Community Ministry

Francis and Clare walked among the poor. They didn't offer cures—they offered presence, comfort, and dignity. In our world of inaccessible healthcare, herbal ministry can offer:

- Warming tea and foot soaks in homeless encampments
- Herbal first aid at protest camps
- Salves for cracked hands in winter
- Steams for those with limited access to clean air
- Herbal kits for disabled and housebound friends

You don't need to heal everyone. Just offer one cup of tea at a time. One listening ear. One soothing hand.

Build Local Herbal Networks

We are stronger together. Herbal justice flourishes in community.

Ways to Connect:

- Start a neighborhood or church herbal group
- Trade herbs and remedies with others
- Host free workshops at libraries, shelters, or parks
- Share extra herbs or materials with someone in need
- Encourage herbal literacy in marginalized communities

Remember, the goal is not to make herbalism trendy. The goal is to make healing a birthright again.

A Commissioning Blessing for Herbal Guides

*Beloved Herbalist of the People,
May your words be soft, your courage strong,
Your knowledge shared freely, your heart ever open.*

*May the Spirit move through your hands,
May the plants speak through your stories,
And may every tea you pour become a prayer.*

Amen. So be it. Pass it on.

Reflection Questions

- Who in your life could benefit from herbal knowledge you hold?
 - How might you begin sharing in small, meaningful ways?
 - What herbal story of your own are you ready to tell?
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Appendices

A. Quick Remedy Reference Chart

Symptom / Need	Herbal Remedy	Preparation Method
Cold hands & feet	Cayenne, Ginger	Tea, foot soak

Digestive upset	Peppermint, Ginger, Fennel	Tea
Emotional tension	Lobelia, Chamomile	Tincture (low dose), tea
Fever or congestion	Peppermint, Yarrow, Elderflower	Steam, tea
Cough or lung tension	Lobelia, Thyme, Slippery Elm	Steam, tea
Sore throat	Bayberry, Sage, Honey	Gargle, tea
Menstrual cramps	Ginger, Raspberry Leaf	Tea
General immune support	Garlic, Elderberry, Cayenne	Decoction, tincture
Fatigue / low vitality	Ginger, Cayenne, Peppermint	Tea, tincture
Grief, anxiety, spiritual pain	Lavender, Lobelia (low dose), Chamomile	Tea, oil rub, prayer ritual

B. Glossary of Herbal Terms

- **Carminative:** Helps relieve gas and bloating in the digestive system.
- **Decoction:** Boiling herbs (often roots or bark) to extract medicinal properties.
- **Emetic:** Induces vomiting—used sparingly in detox.
- **Infusion:** Like making tea—pouring hot water over herbs and steeping.
- **Nervine:** Calms the nervous system.

- **Poultice:** A soft, moist mass of herbs applied to the body to reduce inflammation.
 - **Tincture:** Alcohol or glycerin extract of herbs, concentrated for internal use.
 - **Astringent:** Contracts tissues; useful for toning and reducing secretions.
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C. Recommended Resources for Further Learning

Books:

- *Herbal Medicine-Maker's Handbook* by James Green
- *Healing Wise* by Susun Weed
- *The Earthwise Herbal* by Matthew Wood
- *Backyard Medicine* by Julie Bruton-Seal and Matthew Seal
- *Medical Herbalism* by David Hoffmann
- *Plant Spirit Healing* by Pam Montgomery

Free or Low-Cost Online Resources:

- HerbMentor.com
- Herbal Academy (some free materials)
- BlackForager on Instagram and YouTube
- Free herbal zines from Radical Herbalism and Ancestral Medicine collectives

Community-Oriented Herbal Justice Resources:

- People's Medicine School
 - Wild Gather Herbal CSA
 - Queering Herbalism Blog
 - Disability Justice and Herbalism (zines and toolkits)
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D. Legal and Ethical Considerations

- **Know your limits:** You are not diagnosing, prescribing, or treating unless licensed to do so in your region. You're educating, sharing, and caring.
 - **Consent matters:** Never give herbs to someone without their informed permission.
 - **Work with, not on:** Herbalism should be collaborative, not controlling.
 - **Honor the land:** Harvest respectfully. Take only what you need. Give thanks.
 - **Respect traditional knowledge:** Give credit to Indigenous, Black, and global healers whose wisdom many herbal traditions rely upon.
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A Final Invitation

Keep it simple. Keep it sacred. Keep it shared.
You do not need to be a master herbalist to make a difference.
Start with a cup of tea. Start with one story. Start with love.



About the Author

Sister Abigail Hester, CNC, is a certified nutritional consultant, herbalist, and contemplative nun in the *Order of Franciscan Clareans*—a justice-rooted, radically inclusive new monastic community following the path of Saint Francis and Saint Clare.

A proud transgender woman, disabled mystic, and advocate for herbal justice, Sister Abigail combines her knowledge of folk medicine, spiritual care, and trauma-informed practice to serve the margins: the houseless, the neurodivergent, the queer, the brokenhearted, and all who have been cast aside by institutional systems.

She lives simply, prays deeply, writes prolifically, and offers love in the form of tea, tenderness, and truth.

Follow her blog and writings at:

<https://franciscanclareans.blogspot.com>



Closing Word

To return to the plants is to return to the Source.

To stir tea with prayer, to bless aching feet with cayenne, to press a warm mug into trembling hands—this is the gospel with roots.

Herbalism is not only ancient. It is now. It is needed. It is ours.

Let the fire within you be kindled. Let your apothecary be humble. Let your healing be an act of love and resistance.

You don't need permission. You already belong.

Now go,
brew liberation
plant justice
and pass it on.



**In the warmth of Sister Earth,
Sister Abigail Hester, CNC
Order of Franciscan Clareans
2025**
