



Shamanic Herbs and Highs

by Miheal O Riagain



In every country, Shamans are linked with the use of naturally occurring psychotropic herbs. If turning on were all that mattered, any dope-freak could call themselves a Shaman. Those who would explore the inner worlds through psychotropic herbs should do so only after prolonged magical preparation. They should also grow and prepare their own herbs of every kind; and know the proper days and times on which to plant and to cull them to achieve the maximum magical effect. In this article, Miheal O Riagain shares some of his experience as a grower and user of magical herbs in New Zealand.

Much has been written on the folklore and mystique of the wonderful little plants known to humankind as herbs.

An ancient Art

Herbs have been known to the human race since the dawn of time and have been used to heal, to maim and to kill; and they have always been used for magic. The adepts of wortcunning who were burnt in the days of the Inquisition took with them many of the ancient magical secrets of the uses of herbs, but luckily, there are still a few people around who have inherited this knowledge to continue the Art. I call the lore and use of herbs an Art, as it most certainly is. It is an Art in which it takes many years to become skilled.

This article has been written with the aim of bringing to light how anyone with the necessary desire, determination and love can quite easily grow and maintain a flourishing garden of Nature's True Magic.

From where do I get herbs to grow?

There is more to this question than meets the eye. One might think that it is easy to get the desired herbs here in N. Z., but one quickly finds out that this not so.

There are several reputable herb nurseries in Auckland and undoubtedly others

in other main cities, but there are some points which need to be taken into consideration;

Lead pollution

Most of these shops are situated on or near main roads. If the organic way of gardening appeals to you, as it does to most growers of herbs for magical purposes, it should be remembered that plants grown and sold on main roads will contain lead from car exhausts.

It has been shown that lead pollution remains in plants for at least a generation and that ingesting or smoking leaves or seeds from such plants would mean admitting lead into your body.

Also, those spiritual beings who dwell in herbs do not appreciate the noise and other unwelcome side-effects of the internal combustion engine.

Stale seeds

Most herbs can only be bought as seeds. This can often mean stale seeds and hassles trying to germinate them. There is nothing worse than finding out at the end of the season that none of your seeds have come up. In my opinion, it is best to obtain herbs from those small country nurseries which normally grow them organically. You can

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also get many herbs in the wild, either taking cuttings of existing plants or lifting whole plants from paddocks or other areas which you know have not been sprayed with weed-killer and the like.

There is a nursery in the Waikato from which I have obtained most of my herbs: Karama Wines & Herbs. It is a brilliant little shop with reasonable prices. All their plants and herbs are organically grown. The herbal knowledge and advice of its owner has been most valuable to me. It is located just out of Hamilton.

Herb Gardens

Selecting which herbs to grow in your garden depends on what particular purposes you have in mind. What kind of herb garden to grow is up to you. There need be no limits on your own creativity.

General purpose magical gardens, consisting of many different kinds of herbs are a good option, especially for those who have a variety of uses for herbs.

Here are examples of different kinds of special herb gardens you could form.

- **A Love Garden**

This would consist of herbs of Venus, including Vervain, Yarrow, Basil, Lovage, Southernwood, Lemon Verbena, Marjoram, Oregano, Peppermint, Catnip, Savory, etc.

- **A Moon Garden**

Moon gardens consist of herbs corresponding to the lunar aspects of the Goddess. It could include any of the herbs of Artemis: Jasmine, Juniper, Mugwort, Southernwood, Wormwood, Lunaria and even Willow, which is a tree of the Moon.

A Garden of Shamanic Herbs

The roots, herbs and barks listed below have been and are used by both native tribal shamans, pagans and magicians and

shamankas, as well as by would-be psychotropic psychonauts.

In the case of psychotropic herbs, even those that are legal, it is necessary to do more than just set out a list of names.

Commonly they are either used by smoking or, for those who do not like that idea and prefer to use their stomachs, by drinking an infusion.

Obviously, it is prudent not to exceed safe dosages and also to be cautious in the consumption of some of them.

Some of the botanicals are available in N.Z., as noted below, but, if I do not know some of them by personal experience, I have had advice and information given to me by a truly Celtic shaman whom I met in England a while back.

CALAMUS

Eating the dried root gives a stimulating and hallucinogenic effect depending on the dose. Dried root 2" long and of pencil thickness gives stimulus; over a foot long, Calamus root is a mild hallucinogen.

CATNIP

In a tea, relaxing or, in a cigarette, a mildish hallucinogen and intoxicant.

DAMIANA

Boiled in a tea, one ounce to each pint for 5 minutes, acts as an aphrodisiac similar to a marijuana 'stone'. Do not use for more than a maximum of 3 weeks at a time, with a break of at least two weeks in between.

GALANGAL

Mild hallucinogen when eaten or drunk in a cold tea. It tastes pretty revolting though, even worse when eaten raw! It pays to have a strong tasting drink around.

KAVA KAVA

Used in the islands as an euphoric and extreme relaxant. It takes a bit of getting used to but essentially, with a big enough dose, you trip without the flashbacks.

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Macerate the Kava Kava root stock about 1 oz per pint and drink with Kahlua or Irish Cream. It doesn't impair mental awareness.

KOLANUT

Strong tasting sexual stimulant; the high lasts about 3 hours. Take about 1/4 oz powdered in black coffee. Restrict to about 3 weeks maximum use at a time as the effects after this period are akin to chronic coffee drinking, plus the DTs.

NUTMEG

Strong hallucinogen when grated and smoked, or drunk in a milkshake. It is very strange and powerful in effect and can be harmful or fatal if even two are taken. My flatmates smoked it . . . out of desperation. I've heard that it is like smoking soap!

PASSIONFLOWER

A sedative with a high (almost opiate in effect). Smoke with Damiana or scullcap for an enhanced journey. However, it should not be combined with any other drug within 10 hours of use.

SCULLCAP

Said to give a marijuana-like high if smoked. It can be steeped in very hot water, 1 oz per pint, and it clears inhibitions and relaxes. Do not use Scullcap if you are on medication. It didn't do much for me personally, though.

VALERIAN ROOT

Steep the covered root in cool water for 1/2 hour to keep the essential oils intact as they evaporate quickly. 1 teaspoon of the root is roughly the equivalent of a valium or two.

WILD LETTUCE / LETTUCE OPIUM

A well-known plant useful in dream-work because of its hypnotic effect. Taken by smoking the dried leaves, or collecting the milky juice by soaking it in water overnight. Excess water is then removed by the

gentle application of a heat lamp or fan. As its alternative name suggests, it is chemically similar to opium.

YEW TREE

Apart from being one of the sacred trees of the Celts, the Yew has been used for thousands of years as a shamanic aid. All parts of the Yew are poisonous, but by smoking a few of the dried berries in a herb mixture you will have a truly Celtic experience. I was told by my pagan acquaintance, Dave, that even sleeping under a Yew during summer induces visions. This is caused by the leaves releasing the hallucinogenic oils into the air under the boughs. No wonder Christians considered it bad luck to sleep under a Yew Tree.

- This is but a small selection of legal psychotropic substances which can be used to induce altered states of consciousness to reach into and explore the inner mind and dream states.

Restricted plants

Information on the following herbs is included, because they grow wild in N.Z. and could accidentally lead the user into unpleasant governmental realities.

PSYLOCYBE CYANCENS and PSYLOCYBE SEMILANCEATA

These are mentioned because they are psychotropic fungi which occur naturally in New Zealand. Known as Goldtops and Liberty Caps colloquially they are a natural LSD. However, there are the same legal restrictions on them as on LSD in New Zealand, though not in all other countries.

WORMWOOD

Smoking Wormwood causes a mild narcotic effect similar to codeine. It is a narcotic-analgesic which is preferably drunk in a liquor composed of 1 oz fresh herb to a pint of brandy soaked for 6 weeks in a warm place. It is to be shaken every few days and

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then strained. It is harmful in large and frequent amounts and thus should be taken as a liqueur, and not as a wine.

[Editor's note: An active constituent of Wormwood is absinthine [codeine sulfate]. Codeine and its derivatives are Class C controlled drugs. Another constituent is thujone, legally a poison throughout the world. Any liquor containing more than 10 ppm thujone is illegal. Vermouth [from German Vermut = wormwood] contains less than 10 ppm of thujone. Absinthe contained 60 ppm. Pernod tastes the same as absinthe, but has no wormwood in it. There are trace elements of thujone in sage. Wormwood is popularly reputed to be one of 11 secret herbs and spices used in Kentucky Fried Chicken.]

Timing, tools and magical intentions.

Timing, as in other forms of magic, is of considerable importance as the cosmic currents affect the occult potency of the herbs. Of course, if the Moon is not in the right phase or Mars is not in the right constellation, that doesn't mean that workings will not be entirely effective, but planting, weeding or picking at a good time will certainly enhance the herbs effects. The Moon, of course, is the main influencing factor and to follow the ways of old, it would be best to obtain an astrological calendar or keep track of the phases. Gretchen Lawlor's Moon Calendar always includes valuable information on gardening by the moon.

Tools

Compared with other magical arts, wortcunning requires a minimum of working tools.

- A mortar and pestle for grinding leaves and seeds is invaluable, preferably a stone or ceramic one. Otherwise it will get stained by the oils from the crushed plant.
- A ceramic pot for brewing infusions. Avoid metal pots at all costs, as this can poison the brew.
- A small sewing kit for making poppets.

- And, of course, candles and the herbs themselves, for your shamanic herbal rites.

Herbs can be used with the following: intentions (an it harm none): Exorcism; Fidelity; Healing; Health; Hex-breaking; Love; Luck; Lust; Money; Protection; Wishes. For the names and spells of herbs, I would advise you to consult *Cunningham's Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs* [Llewellyn, 1985] and *Magical Herbs*, also published by Llewellyn. Both of these books are by Scott Cunningham. They are concise and are extremely useful references.

Magical courtesies

Talk to your herbs, love them and they will love you. Always thank the plant when taking anything from it and place a gift (a small coin or a libation of mead) in the ground near the plant. Herbs are living creatures. They can sense your vibrations.

- Good luck and may the Ways of the Worts illuminate your path.



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