

Catskill Apprenticeship

An Educational Herbal Weekend Retreat Series

With Nathaniel Whitmore, Herbalist, Shiatsu-shi

The Catskill Herbal Apprenticeship consists of once-a-month weekends (May - October) in Big Indian, NY that will cover the medicinal uses of herbs in the traditions of Chinese medicine and Native American medicine with a focus on local wild herbs. Alongside botany walks and medicine making opportunities, classes will focus on local herbs as they were used by Lenape and other Native tribes and how local herbs are used in Chinese herbal medicine. Clinical assessment is an additional focus, which includes abdomen, tongue, and pulse diagnosis in the style of the Far East. The Catskill Apprenticeship weekends are May 25th - 27th, June 22nd - 24th, July 20th - 22nd, August 24th - 26th, September 14th - 16th, and October 19th - 21st. If you are not already on my e-mail list and want to be notified of Apprenticeship developments and other events, let me know by e-mail: Nathaniel Whitmore wathakes@gmail.com

The apprenticeship focuses on traditional uses of the *materia medica* with classes on Native American ethnobotany and traditional Chinese medicine. Familiarity with the herbs will further be developed during identification and harvesting walks, as well as through opportunities to make herbal preparations with a variety of fresh local herbs. *Materia medica* is a primary focus of the apprenticeship, as herbs are the focus of herbalism and the weekends in the Catskills provide the ideal atmosphere to deepen awareness of herbs and expand familiarity towards improvement in clinical abilities. Because continued education of the seemingly infinite *materia medica* is a necessity for the herbalist, the classes are intended to be opportunities to learn about local herbs in new light, particularly common local herbs, invasive weeds, and unique medicinals that are little-known to modern American herbalists. *Materia medica* classes include **Doctrine of Signatures, Leni Lenape / Delaware Ethnobotany, Iroquois Ethnobotany, Cherokee Ethnobotany, Dine / Navajo Ethnobotany, Moxa & Meridians, Toxic Medicinals, Classic Chinese Formulae, Local Chinese Herbs, Native Medicinal Herbs, Invasive Medicinal Herbs, Common Local Herbs, Antimicrobial Herbs, and Tonic Herbs.**

Clinical assessment skills and knowhow are also major areas of study in the Catskill Apprenticeship. Because diagnostic skills like pulse assessment, tongue assessment, and hara (abdominal) assessment take time and experience, the apprenticeship offers classes to study the material with hands-on practice. Diagnosis classes include herbal indications and with them woven with *materia medica* studies, a truly holistic approach to herbal medicine is being offered.

Additionally, chi kung and tai chi chuan classes are offered in the mornings in order to expose students of herbalism to a more complete understanding of the range of Chinese medicine.

The meridians of Chinese medicine are also a focus of the apprenticeship, being introduced during the tai chi classes and with a few classes on the specific subject of meridians and pressure points. These four studies, *materia medica*, diagnosis, meridians, and chi kung offer a comprehensive study of Chinese herbal medicine for the clinical herbalist or clinical herbalist to be.

Because of our location in the Catskills, the apprenticeship focuses on Native American herbalism. While “ethnobotany” can have an association with history, these classes are offered in the spirit of “living herbalism” and with the understanding that Native people have had a mastery of herbal medicine and that Native American herbalism is very much alive today with much to offer. Since ancient times herbal medicine has revolved around humankind’s relationship with the environment and the plants growing there. More than ever in known history it can be said that people have grown away from the natural environment and the local plants. The Catskill Herbal Apprenticeship is an opportunity for herbalists to connect more deeply with the green beings around us to understand how medicinal herbs can help us heal. We turn to Native American herbal knowledge, wisdom, and lore to better understand the medicinal herbs of these native lands, including the little that has been recorded (see Recommended Reading List).

The Catskill Apprenticeship covers between 67 and 83 herbs (if taken in full) as the *materia medica* study and core of the program. Classes covering *materia medica* specifically can be found (in green letters) in the outline below. Class descriptions follow the outline. Then a summary of the *materia medica* covered in each class and class hours follows. The selection of herbs is based on those native to and otherwise wild in our area that have relationship to herbs used in the quite solid system of Chinese herbal medicine.

Camping is available, as are nearby accommodations. Some meals will be provided, made from local ingredients in a health-promoting way. Campfire cooking and tending is encouraged, both for the practical necessity of keeping the fire going and providing food, and for the opportunity to learn of yang energy and commune with the ancient traditions that centered around fire (What better way to learn of the the symbol of water and fire as yin and yang than to see the natural rivers and circle around the fire?). Additional help will be requested on occasion, but mostly it is just expected to observe common courtesy in the sharing of a retreat space.

Medicine making sessions will include a guided workshop, such as tincture making or the crafting of some other form of herbal preparation, for those desiring instruction or just simply wanting to enjoy the group experience of making herbal medicine. The time is also set aside to give participants the chance to make whatever they wish from herbs they harvest or from our shared harvest (we will bring herbs from farms and previous wildcrafting. You can also choose to take or skip classes instead of or for medicine making.

Catskill Apprenticeship course outline : _____ class titles in **bold**, *materia medica* classes in **green**.

Friday night: 5/25: _____ 6/22: _____ 7/20: _____ 8/24: _____ 9/14: _____ 10/19: _____

4:00 **Herb Walk (1.5H)**

6:00 - 8:00 potluck dinner

8:00 Ethnobotany (1.5H)

Doctrine of Signatures

Lenape Ethnobotany

Iroquois Ethnobotany

Cherokee Ethnobotany

Dine Ethnobotany

Importance of

Ethnobotany

Saturday:

5/26: _____ 6/23: _____ 7/21: _____ 8/25: _____ 9/15: _____ 10/20: _____

6:00 tai chi (1H)

Opening/Standing Meridians Basic Moves Chi Kung Do-In Healing Sounds

7:00 breakfast

9:00 **Herb Walk (2H)**

11:00 **Medicine Making (1.5H)**

12:30 lunch

2:00 **Medicine Making / Beginners Chinese Medicine: (2H)**

Yin/Yang Theory (Theory of Fire and Water)

5 Flavors of Chinese Medicine

Organs & Body Systems

Pulse & Tongue Assessment

Doctrine of Signatures

Intake & Assessment

4:00 **Medicine Making / Advanced Chinese Medicine: (2H)**

Pulse, Tongue, & Hara

Moxa & Meridians

Toxic Medicinals

Classic Chinese Formulae

Local Chinese Herbs

Pulse Assessment

6:00 dinner

9:00 Native Herbal Lore at the Camp Fire (1.5H)

Sunday: 5/27: _____ 6/24: _____ 7/22: _____ 8/26: _____ 9/16: _____ 10/21: _____

6:00 tai chi (1H)

Basic Moves Chi Kung Karate Meridians & Tsubo Chi Kung Do-In

8:00 Herb Walk (2H)

10:00 brunch

12:30 Local *materia medica* (2H)

Local Native Herbs

Invasive Herbs

Common Herbs

Local Chinese Medicine Herbs

Antimicrobial Herbs

Tonic Herbs

Materia Medica (including Ethnobotany, Local Materia Medica, and Plant Walks) = 73.5 Hours

+ Beginner's classes (5 Flavors & Doctrine of Signatures) = 77.5 Hours

+ Advanced classes (Moxa & Meridians, Toxic Medicinals and Local Chinese Herbs) = 83.5

Hours

Meridian Classes morning tai chi chuan classes = 24 hours

Recommended Reading / Reference List:

Planetary Herbology by Michael Tierra

The Energetics of Western Herbs by Peter Holmes

Western Herbs According to Traditional Chinese Medicine by Tomas Garran

Chinese Herbal Medicine: Materia Medica by Dan Bensky

Chinese Medical Herbology and Pharmacology by Chen and Chen

Native American Medicinal Plants by Daniel E. Moerman

Folk Medicine of the Delaware and Related Algonkian Tribes by Gladys Tantaquidgeon

Iroquois Medical Botany by James W. Herrick

Plants of the Cherokee by William H. Banks

Catskill Herbal Apprenticeship

Class Descriptions

Friday Night 8:00 Ethnobotany

5/25: **Doctrine of Signatures**

An introduction to one of the oldest and most widespread theories in traditional herbalism. This ethnobotany class will focus on Native American application of the Doctrine and examples of our local plants.

6/22: **Lenape Ethnobotany**

The Esopus were the local (Big Indian, NY) band of the Lenni Lenape, or Delaware, tribe. Although much was lost of the Lenape's knowledge of the area and mastery of local herbalism, tribal members from Oklahoma and other places have passed down some lore that. Since it pertains to Native people of the area using native plants, this material should be studied by any serious student of herbalism. We start our ethnobotany focus with herbs used by the Lenape.

Materia medica: Sycamore, Sassafras, Oak, Black Haw, Elm, Sweet Fern (plus some listed elsewhere)

7/20: **Iroquois Ethnobotany**

The Iroquois 6 Nations were centralized in New York state. They utilized many native herbs and also maintained an interesting medical system that was partially recorded in [Iroquois Medical Botany](#). This class looks at some of the beliefs and herbs of Iroquois medicine.

Materia medica: Bracken Fern, Larch, Bloodroot, Witch Hazel (plus some listed elsewhere)

8/24: **Cherokee Ethnobotany**

The Cherokee remain one of best-known Eastern tribes. Having relations with the Lenape and an herbal medicine that uses many herbs we know locally, in addition to some influential herbalists of today (such as David Winston and Jody Noe who come from the Cherokee herbal tradition) and several books on Cherokee medicine. This class will look at some herbs and beliefs of the tradition.

Materia medica: Maidenhair Fern, Wood Fern, Spicebush, Smilax (plus some listed elsewhere)

9/14: **Dine Ethnobotany**

The Dine, or Navajo, tribe is one of the biggest and maintains a strong herbal tradition. Even today herbs are sold in markets (alongside the famous Navajo jewelry) and many Native people rely on herbal medicines. Although many herbs of the southwest are not found locally, this study of Dine herbalism will give a glimpse of western ethnobotany, including herbs known to commerce as well as some unique to southwest Native tradition.

Materia medica: Sagebush, Bitter Herb, Creosote Bush, Red Root, Juniper (plus some listed elsewhere)

10/19: **Importance of Ethnobotany**

While ethnobotany largely remains in the realms of history and anthropology, the study of medicinal plants by Native people still has much to teach the modern world. This ethnobotany class will wrap up the series with continued discussion of the herbs already mentioned as well as inspiring the herbalist of today to maintain connection with Native traditions and to learn from them towards a greater understanding and practice of herbal medicine.

Saturday:

6:00 Tai Chi Chuan Basics:

5/26: Opening Posture / Standing Meditation

The opening posture of Tai Chi Chuan is often considered the most important “move” or posture of the form and is the foundation of chi kung postures. Naturally, this class also covers fundamentals of posture which are applied to everyday life as well as diagnostics.

6/23: Meridians

Essential to daily health exercise is a basic understanding of chi meridians, which can be enhance tai chi chuan practice as well as yoga, meditation, and other do-in practices. This class will cover some simple meridian stretches as well as self-shiatsu and other do-in methods.

7/21: Basic Moves

Tai Chi Chuan practice is based on “forms”, or move sequences. Learning the forms starts with learning basic moves. We will explore some of the main tai chi moves and settle on a few to practice.

8/25: Chi Kung

This class will expand on the tai chi opening posture to explore some other standing postures and exercises of chi cultivation.

9/15: Do-In

Do-in (tao yin) is a daily method to move chi and promote health by meridian stretches, meridian tapping, self-shiatsu, hara breathing, and other simple practices that can be done at home upon rising and/or at other convenient times to promote health and diminish illness.

10/20: Healing Sounds

Healing sounds, especially used according to 5 element theory, are combined with meditation and chi kung to promote health and to heal organs and organ systems.

2:00 [Medicine Making](#) / [Beginners Chinese Medicine](#):

5/26: Yin/Yang Theory (Theory of Fire and Water)

This class introduces yin/yang theory, particularly how it is applied in Chinese medicine. This is foundational material that students of herbal medicine will constantly consider and refine. We will look at general associations of yin and yang and the body, the alchemical metaphor of fire and water and how this relates to chi and the body, and basic yin/yang characteristics of herbs.

6/23: 5 Flavors of Chinese Medicine

The five flavors are at the heart of the classification of herbs in Chinese herbalism, the understanding of their properties, and the formulation of medicinals. Learn about the flavors of herbs - what they mean and when they are indicated.

7/21: Organs & Body Systems

This class will explore the organs and body systems as understood in Chinese medicine. Still uncertain about what the “spleen” does according to Chinese medicine, or what the “liver” is in Chinese medicine beyond what you know from modern physiology? This class introduces all the basics of organs and body systems in Chinese herbalism.

8/25: Pulse & Tongue Assessment

Pulse assessment is the quintessential form of touch diagnosis in Chinese medicine. Tongue assessment is a primary form of visual diagnosis in Chinese medicine. Together they represent the main focus of two of the “four pillars of diagnosis”. Alongside symptoms, pulse and tongue qualities are primary in clinical assessment and selection of herbs and formulae.

9/15: Doctrine of Signatures

The Doctrine of Signatures is a universal theory, used by essentially all traditions of herbal medicine. Though often represented as historical, the Doctrine of Signatures is very alive and relevant today. Learn about the signatures of herbs and how to connect more deeply with the plants through their signatures.

10/20: Intake & Assessment

This class will wrap up the previous material on diagnosis and cover some basics about health intake and clinical health assessment. This “putting-it-all-together” class will help beginner herbalists to take comprehensive assessments for herbal consultations.

4:00 [Medicine Making](#) / Advanced Chinese Medicine:

5/26: Pulse, Tongue, & Hara

This class will review some of the fundamentals of pulse, tongue, and hara assessment and will present some more advanced material. Beyond the basics, this class will include hands-on practice and plenty of time for questions.

6/23: Moxa & Meridians

Learn more about the various species of Mugwort and their use in moxibustion (Mugwort-burning treatment). Alongside acupuncture, moxibustion is one of the most important practices in Chinese medicine, though relatively little-known today for several reasons. This class will cover some basic moxibustion techniques, including hands-on practice. Meridians and acupoints will also be covered.

7/21: Toxic Medicinals

Explore the scary subject of toxic medicinals. This class will cover some common herbs with (perhaps unknown) mild toxicity, following the spectrum to the most poisonous herbs known.

Materia medica: Aconite, Coltsfoot, Peach Pit, Rhubarb, Hellebore, Iris, Elder, Poke, and more

8/25: Classic Chinese Formulae

This class will present a number of traditional Chinese formulae that are well-known today or otherwise relevant, such as representing herbs in the Catskill Apprenticeship *materia medica*.

9/15: Local Chinese Herbs

This advanced class will cover some details regarding the use of local herbs used in Chinese medicine and will introduce (if introduction is needed) a number of wild plants of our area that should be better understood by herbalists of the area.

Materia medica: Mugwort, Japanese Pagoda, Wild Ginger, Willow, Amaranth, Peach, Clematis, Violet

10/20: Pulse Assessment

As the quintessential diagnostic method of Chinese medicine, American herbalists of all levels need additional study time. This class will answer questions and include hands-on practice.

Sunday:

6:00 Tai Chi Chuan

5/27: Basic Moves

Tai Chi Chuan practice is based on “forms”, or move sequences. Learning the forms starts with learning basic moves. We will explore some of the main tai chi moves and settle on a few to practice.

6/24: Chi Kung

This class will expand on the tai chi opening posture to explore some other standing postures and exercises of chi cultivation.

7/22: Karate

Karate (originally “Chinese hand” before being changed to “empty hand”) originates from the kung fu and chi kung of China, and was developed in Okinawa and then Japan. Practiced since ancient times for health promotion, many of weak and sickly constitution proved the benefits of karate with long, disease-free lives. Learn some of the basic moves and postures, along with warm-up and stretching techniques.

8/26: Meridians & Tsubo

This class will cover some of the basic moves, stretches, and postures of the other morning tai chi sessions, with a focus on the meridians and acupoints, or tsubo, that are benefited. All the major meridians will be covered along with a selection of the most relevant tsubo.

9/16: Chi Kung

This class will expand on the tai chi opening posture and previously introduced chi kung exercises to further encourage herbalists to cultivate their own chi toward becoming better practitioners.

10/21:Do-In

Do-in (tao yin) is a daily method to move chi and promote health by meridian stretches, meridian tapping, self-shiatsu, hara breathing, and other simple practices that can be done at home upon rising and/or at other convenient times to promote health and diminish illness.

12:30 Local Materia Medica

5/27: **Local Native Herbs**

This class will cover some of the most important native herbs of our area. Native uses will be covered as well as the energetics of Chinese herb classification. Closely related Chinese herbs will be compared.

Materia medica: Sassafras, Calamus, Partridge Berry, Oak, Boneset, Jack-In-The-Pulpit

6/24: **Invasive Herbs**

Many invasive plants are very medicinal and it is every herbalist's duty, in initiating balance in people and on earth, and in the name of holistic health, to better understand the invasive herbs.

Materia medica: Japanese Knotweed, Reed, Garlic Mustard, St. John's Wort, Teasel, Wild Rose, Kuzu, Tree-of-Heaven, Air Potato

7/22: **Common Herbs**

This class covers the commonly known, though sometimes overlooked, herbs. Particularly unusual uses will be presented and novel perspective to gain deeper understanding of common herbs.

Materia medica: Dandelion, Burdock, Yellow Dock, Plantain, Self-Heal, Ground Ivy, Oregano, Fennel, Privet, and more

8/26: **Local Chinese Medicine Herbs**

This class will cover some of the most important Chinese herbs that are found locally.

Materia medica: Mulberry, Peony, Ginkgo, Schisandra, Rush, Horsetail, Cattail

9/16: **Antimicrobial Herbs**

The thorough understanding of antimicrobials and how to use them is one of the most important areas of mastery for herbalists. This class will cover the herbs, as well as practical information to assist in the successful use of these important medicinals.

Materia medica: Barberry, Goldthread, Echinacea, Toothache Plant, Goldenrod, and more

10/21: **Tonic Herbs**

This class presents an overview of the various kinds of tonic herbs and covers in detail several of the most widely used.

Materia medica: American Ginseng, Reishi, Chaga, Hawthorn, Licorice, Astragalus

TOTAL : 18 Hours (per weekend) x 6 weekends = 108 Hours

Certificates to be awarded:

Catskill Herbal Apprenticeship

Catskill Herbal Apprenticeship Advanced Studies

Variations include:

Adaptations for one or more weekend (but less than 6)

Medicine Making Focus (if attending both Sat. afternoon medicine making sessions)

Academic Focus (if attending both Beginner's Chinese Medicine and Advanced Chinese Medicine on Saturday afternoons)

(class hours adjusted accordingly on certificate)

Sunday materia medica

5/27: Local Native Herbs:

Sassafras, Partridge Berry, Oak, Boneset, Jack-In-The-Pulpit (5)

6/24: Invasives:

Japanese Knotweed, Reed, Garlic Mustard, St. John's Wort, Teasel, Wild Rose,
Kuzu, Tree-of-Heaven, Air Potato (9)

7/22: Common Herbs:

Dandelion, Burdock, Yellow Dock, Plantain, Self-Heal, Ground Ivy, Oregano, Fennel, Privet (9)

8/26: Local Chinese Herbs:

Mulberry, Peony, Ginkgo, Schisandra, Rush, Horsetail, Cattail (7)

9/16: Antimicrobials:

Barberry, Goldthread, Echinacea, Toothache Plant, Goldenrod (5)

10/21: Tonics:

American Ginseng, Reishi, Chaga, Hawthorn, Licorice, Astragalus (6)

= 41 herbs covered

+ Toxic Medicinals (Advanced Chinese Medicine 7/21):

Aconite, Coltsfoot, Peach Pit, Rhubarb, Hellebore, Iris, Lily, Elder, Poke (9)

+ herbs (trees) covered during walks: Hemlock, Pine, Yellow Birch, Chaga, Poplar, Sycamore (6)

+ Local Chinese Herbs Advanced Class:

Mugwort, Japanese Pagoda Tree, Wild Ginger, Willow, Amaranth, Peach, Clematis, Violet (8)

+ Lenape Ethnobotany Class (not previously covered/counted):

Sycamore, Sassafras, Oak, Black Haw, Elm, Sweet Fern (6)

+ Iroquois Ethnobotany Class ("): Bracken Fern, Larch, Bloodroot, Witch Hazel (4)

+ Cherokee Ethnobotany Class ("): Maidenhair Fern, Wood Fern, Spicebush, Smilax, Calamus (5)

+ Navajo Ethnobotany Class ("): Sagebush, Bitter Herb, Creosote Bush, Red Root, Juniper (5)

41 + 26 = **67 herbs** covered for student course *materia medica*

41 + 43 = **84 herbs** for herbalist course *materia medica* study

COST:

\$1800.00 for full series, paid in full

\$350.00 per weekend

Full participation is encouraged, but not necessary. Alternatively, come to one or as many as you can or would like to. Attendance of beginner and advanced classes and medicine-making sessions (regarding Saturday afternoons) is by choice of the participant.

Please note:

The above curriculum is still being developed and is subject to change. While this basic outline, including the class schedule and *materia medica* focus, will mostly remain as presented, minor changes are likely to occur while we iron out the kinks. Thank you for your understanding.

Catskill Herbal Apprenticeship

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