



# Lesson 2

## Plant Connection & Harvesting Ethics



### Plant Connections and Medicine Path Alignment

Since the beginning of time, humanity has found its way in the world by learning how to draw on the creative forces in nature. It is in the natural world that we have found our greatest teachers. Through our relationship with plants, animals, bacteria and fungi, we have learned how to survive and find our place in the circle of life. Although many of us feel disconnected from nature in the modern world, this fundamental wisdom resides deep in our bones and is a part of us no matter how we have been raised. When we take the time to align and connect with the natural world around us, there is a feeling of wealth and reciprocity that goes far deeper than money can ever take us.



As our world becomes more and more entrenched in a mechanically manifested artificial existence, many of us are finding it harder to find a sense of belonging and connection. Many of us feel disempowered and disconnected from our food and medicine. For these reasons and more, there is currently a large movement of people turning back to the land, back to the plants, and back to the wisdom of nature to guide us in reclaiming a life of deeper fulfillment.

One of the best ways to deepen our connection to the land we inhabit is to build a sustainable small-scale wild foraging practice. As we forage even a small amount of our food and medicine, our relationship with ourselves and the world around us begins to change. We can't help but notice the cycles of the seasons and the interspecies conversations happening all around us. Often our appreciation and abundance factor increase, we tread lighter and start to become more conscious stewards of the land and communities we inhabit. In essence, there is a major empowerment and alignment upgrade on levels that come from the creation of a connected and sustainable practice of wild foraging.



*Getting up close and personal with the forest floor.*

For these reasons and many others, the exploration and development of an interdependent relationship with the plant communities is one of the most important things we can do.

Plants are the supportive backbone behind the life energy found on our planet. Without their photosynthetic qualities, the abundance and diversity of life on Earth would be impossible. Even the deposits of oil that have made humanity's industrialization possible are the direct result of the sun's energy, accumulated by



plants in the Carboniferous age over 200 million years ago. So it is with humility, humbleness, and reverence that we should approach the world of plants if we are asking them to come home with us as medicine. It can be easy to take plants for granted. They can seem overly familiar at times, as they have always been around us in abundance. They don't really move all that much, and their forms of communication are subtle enough that they often go overlooked. Due to these factors and others, it is common for people to see plants as an extractive resource, rather than a collaborative relationship.

When it comes to building a healthy wild foraging practice, we are best to reset and unlearn this type of socially normalized narrative. Look instead to the teachings and viewpoints held by the many intact ancestral traditions around the world. These traditions often view plants as having personality or spirit archetypes, and recognize plants as part of a larger community of interdependence.

Plants are the great alchemists of our world, they produce an abundance of unique and powerful chemistry that cannot be truly replicated by our synthetic means. Their subtleties, nuances, and entourage effects will always hold a resonance far more in alignment than our technological advancements can ever mirror.



## How do we approach plant communities?

It is tempting to let our analytical mind sit in the driver's seat when we engage with most activities. Retraining ourselves to step out of this pattern is an important part of building a deeper connection with the plants we forage. Remember to approach



plants with an inquisitive mind, rather than with dominance and results based focus. Plants are living breathing beings, they produce the chemistry we hope to work with as a way to protect themselves and support their own needs and the needs of the community they thrive in. They are not magic bullets here to serve our health needs.

When we approach the world in an extractive way, we are ultimately reinforcing scarcity that generates a cascade of imbalance around us, which eventually returns to us with a negative effect. We have seen this approach fail humanity time and time again, just have a look around at the consumer-driven motives that have bred much inequality, suffering, and scarcity in our world.

## Asking for Permission To Harvest

Sometimes you will see an abundance of wild medicinals on a piece of land that is not being utilized, or a tree in someone's yard that is full of medicine they likely don't even know about. Even when these plants seem to be calling to come home with you, it is important to ask for permission. This can be a tough rule to follow, as everywhere we look there are fences and boundaries discouraging access to land use. At times it can feel like everything is off limits for wild foraging. At the same time, when we muster up the courage to knock on a few doors and ask if we can harvest someone's weeds for medicine, often people are happy to allow us to do so. Sometimes they will say no, but other times they are even excited and curious about how we will use them.

Over the years, I have "foraged" many relationships with landowners that have allowed me to harvest plants or mushrooms, and in a few cases, even manage their fruit trees. Building these relationships can often increase the value in the plants that we are collecting, in addition to creating a foundation for a healthier and more cohesive community.



*Nettles (Urtica dioica) is a wonderful springtime harvest.*



This is not to say that I have not also found myself wandering into someone's open field to harvest elderflowers, or reaching over a fence for a few extra hawthorn berries. But I recognize in doing this, that it is as I call it, a "crime against wisdom". Deep down I know that despite my rationalization that these medicines are going to waste, there is a boundary that I have chosen to ignore when doing this.

So it really becomes a moral issue, and over the years, I have found it is much healthier to ask for permission, than to beg for forgiveness.

When it comes to public parks and government-protected land, there are often rules established that discourage people from foraging. It is best to check to gain clarity on the specific bylaws related to foraging in your area. Backroad maps are an essential resource for accessing and exploring forest service roads in your area. In British Columbia, we have approximately 719,000 kilometres of roads that allow motorized vehicle use.

Of those, 92% are unpaved, and most give us access to deep pockets of wilderness that are accessible for foraging our wild foods and medicines.

All in all, it is not always easy to find good access to healthy stands of wild plants. It seems like it should be simpler, but the need for privacy, and the claim of ownership have evolved in ways that make wild foraging far less acceptable -and accessible- than it was in time of the past.

As you journey down the forager's path, remember to be respectful of not only the land and plants you are tending but also the relationships required to come full circle in a sustainable and regenerative way.