



REGENERATIVE FORAGING AND ETHICAL SOURCING

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A STORY

Though a very silent man he was so mild and calm that Ged soon lost his awe of him, and in a day or two more he was bold enough to ask his master, "When will my apprenticeship begin, Sir?"

"It has begun," said Ogion.

There was a silence, as if Ged was keeping back something he had to say. Then he said it, "But I haven't learned anything yet!"

"Because you haven't found out what I'm teaching," replied the mage, going on at his steady, long-legged pace along their road, which was the high pass between Ovark and Wiss. He was a dark man, like most Gontishmen, dark copper-brown; grey-haired, lean and sought as a hound, tireless. He spoke seldom, ate little, slept less. His eyes and ears were very keen, and often there was a listening look on his face.

Ged did not answer him. It is not always easy to answer a mage.

"You want to work with spell," Ogion said presently, striding along. "You've drawn too much water from that well. Wait. Manhood is patience. Mastery is nine times patience. What is that herb by the path?"

"Strawflower."

"And that?"

"I don't know."

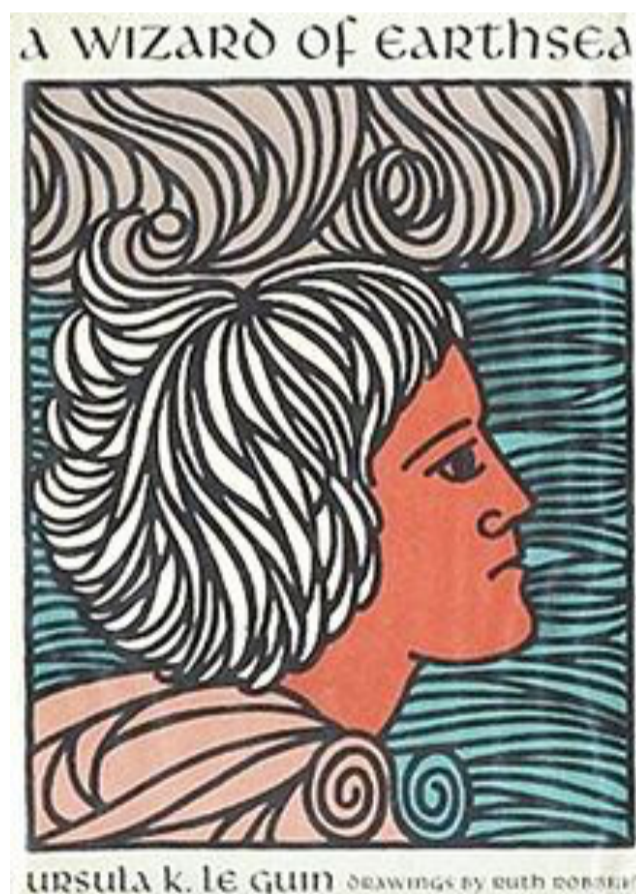
"Fourfoil they call it." Ogion had halted, the copper-shod foot of his staff near the little weed, so Ged looked closely at the plant, and plucked a dry seedpod from it, and finally asked, since Ogion said nothing more, "What is its use, Master?"

"None I know of."

Ged kept the seedpod a while as they went on, then tossed it away.

"When you know the fourfold in all its seasons root and leaf and flower, by sight and scent and seed, then you may learn its true name, knowing its being: which is more than its use. What, after all, is the use of you? or of myself? Is Gont Mountain useful, or the Open Sea?" Ogion went on a half mile or so, and said at last, "To hear, one must be silent."

Excerpt from **A Wizard of Earthsea**, by Ursula LeGuin



REGENERATIVE FORAGING

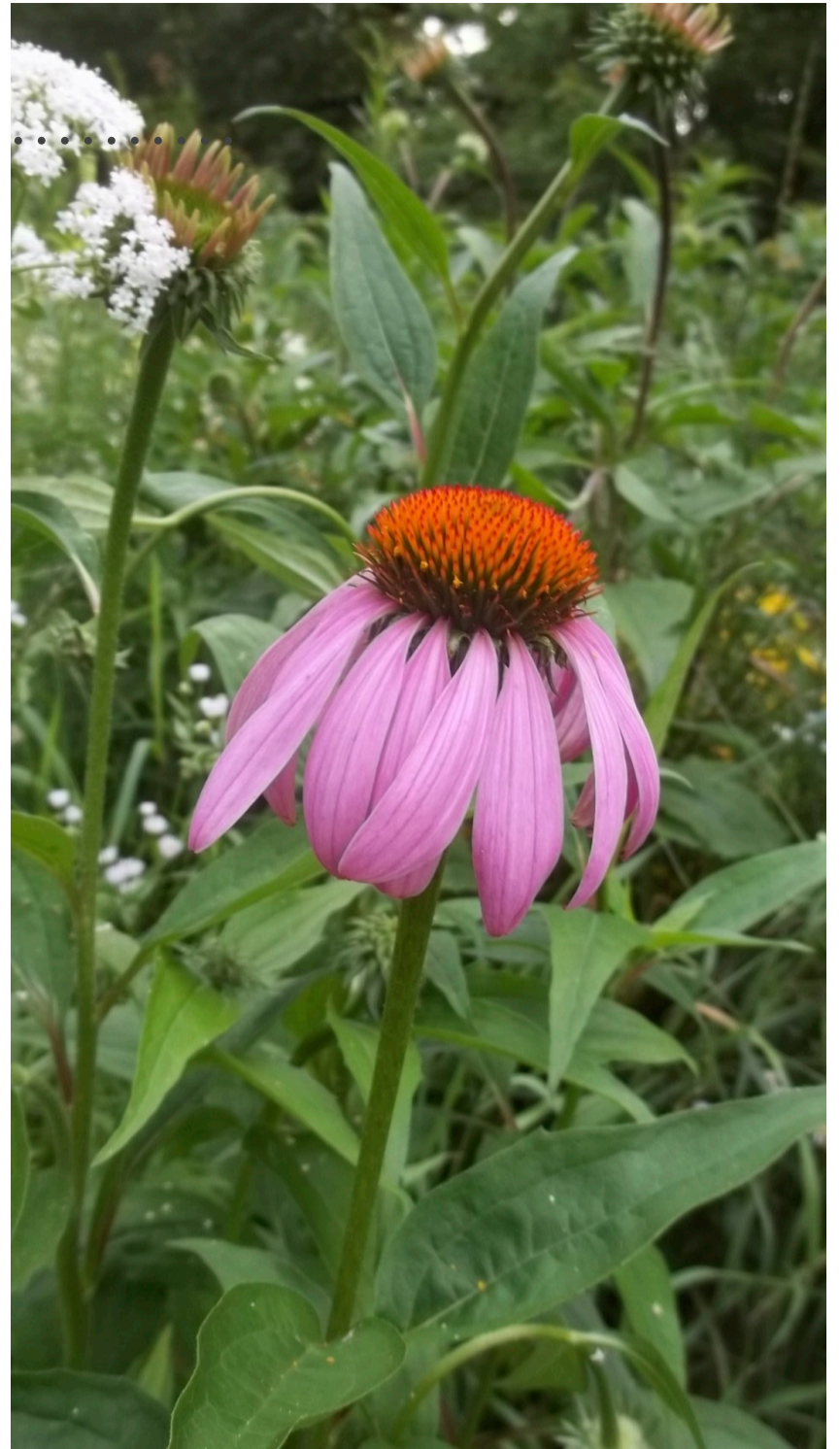
As Ogion says above, the best way to get to know a plant is spending time with it. Watch it grow through the seasons, learn how each year's unique weather patterns effect the taste and smell and other actions of the plant. In my experience, the best way is to choose the plant that calls to you or fascinates you. Find it, or get some seeds. Read about it, drink tea from it (if safe), make a variety of extracts (if safe), take a bath in it (if safe), or if it's a toxic plant try a flower essence. If you don't know much about the herb, do some research. If you don't know much about herbalism, consider reading my ebook, *Responsible Herbalism*.

Correct identification of the plant is vital, especially if there is a toxic or poisonous plant that looks similar enough that there would be a risk. One of my friends once gestured at the plants and trees on the roadside saying, "I don't know how you tell them apart, to me it's all green." I like to have **three** sources of identification: a field guide with photos, a field guide with annotated drawings with arrows pointing at important features, and most importantly, an introduction from a trusted botanist, herbalist, or other plant lover. You notice I'm not including plant ID apps... they are not always reliable.

Plant names are often informative. The scientific name, usually two words presented in italics with the first name capitalized, such as the plant *Daucus carota*. Sometimes the scientific name gives you a clue to the plant. The first word, *Daucus*, descends from the Latin word for parsnip, carrot, and other related plants. *Carota*, looks and sounds like the word carrot. Common names, wild carrot, bird's nest, and Queen Anne's lace, all refer to physical features of the plant.

Common names, such as woundwort, are less helpful. Woundwort is a name used for many plants, like yarrow, St. John's wort, and other plants used for wounds. Relying on common names can be misleading, which is why most books will tell you the scientific name along with some of the common names.

Knowledge of the plant's role in the environment is important. For example, don't forage plants that accumulates lead in places that likely contain this heavy metal, such as near old houses, old gas stations, etc. Garden soil should be tested for toxins. Sometimes plants, and especially mushrooms, can draw toxins or unpleasant chemicals from surrounding plants. Look around. Know the land.



Echinacea, once abundant in the wild, is now widely cultivated.



A red trillium, listed as at-risk with United Plant Savers.

The plant's status establishes whether it is legal or ethical to gather. Whether a plant is native or introduced, meaning whether the plant originated in the area or if it was introduced intentionally or accidentally, and whether it's considered invasive or naturalized. For example, wild carrot was introduced from Europe and has naturalized while Japanese knotweed was introduced but is invasive, because it tends to take over areas pushing native plants out.

Protected native plants are illegal to forage. Rare plants may be unethical to harvest. Check on the status of the plant using the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and United Plant Savers (UpS). The NRCS maintains a database of endangered plants searchable by individual plant, plants by state, and more. UpS maintains a list of medicinal plants that are at-risk along with a list of which plants could become at-risk.

Access the NRCS site here:

<https://plants.usda.gov/threat.html>

Access the UPS site here:

<http://unitedplantsavers.org>

ONLY TAKE WHAT YOU NEED

This is a common mistake I see inexperienced people make. They take more than they need and then the plant material gets old and goes unused.

I was taught to only take 10% of the plants I find. This requires taking time to walk the area to see how many plants are there before harvesting. If I don't find enough, I'll just have to look in another location to find what I need.

Use appropriate tools and techniques when foraging. Digging deep roots might require a shovel, but a shovel might damage shallow roots or nearby plants, so perhaps a potato fork will work better. Using the right kind and size of clippers means cleaner cuts. Knowing where to cut is also important so learn how to prune.

Find ways to develop an authentic relationship with the plants around you. Understand the history of a place, its peoples, and how they worked with plants augments your experience.



White sage flowers (Salvia apiana), a plant that is at-risk and that Native Americans don't sell because it is sacred. If you aren't Native American learn about the plants that are or were sacred to your ancestors and use them instead.

WRITE IT DOWN

Keep records. Start a foraging journal to keep track of when and where you find plants. Journaling or record keeping will help you develop a localized foraging calendar, even if it's mostly in your head. You will begin to know when plants are ready by noticing seasonal indicators, such as temperatures, other plants that are blooming or not blooming, bird migrations, astronomical or astrological timing, etc.

Once the plant you collected is processed and preserved, whether dried, tinctured or otherwise prepared, you will need to label your packages carefully. Labels should include common name, scientific name, place gathered (or purchased), date, all ingredients used, method used, plus any of the other seasonal details that you wish to remember. An unhappy moment is finding an unmarked bottle of something and you can't figure out what it is.

PRESERVATION

An equally unhappy moment is returning to your herb preparation and finding that it spoiled. Take time to learn proper methods for drying and preserving. If you live in a humid area, drying is difficult. Sometimes the plant matter feels dry, but then when the jar is opened in winter for a nice cup of tea, the puff of mold spores is a disappointment and a waste.

HONOR THE LAND

To honor ancestors (all those who came before me, including family and the ancestors of this land) I adopted a system of herbalism based on the four elements common in European and North American healing traditions. This means that when I gather native plants, I ask permission and provide an offering as taught to me by Native American friends and I use my hands or sharp stones to carefully collect the plant. When I'm gathering invasive or naturalized plants, I use a knife and consider my ancestral traditions.



Dried calendula flowers.

ETHICAL SOURCING

When buying herbs...

- Buy local or regional when possible. The plants around us are adapted to where we live.
- Check at farmers markets or find a local herbalist.
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- Choose herb companies that source from organic or ethically hand-harvested plants.
- Choose herb companies that include the country of origin, where is the herb grown? Because if it is shipped, it may be exposed to chemicals or irradiated.
- Look for sources closer to home when possible.

Be safe.