



Medicine Stories Podcast

Episode 79 with Amber Magnolia Hill

Sunshine Medicine: The Healing Magic of St. John's-wort

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[Interview Begins]

(Intro Music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)

[00:00:07]

Amber: Hi friends, welcome to the [Medicine Stories](#) podcast where we are remembering what it is to be human upon the earth. I am Amber Magnolia Hill. This is Episode 79, a rare solo episode. Today I'm talking about St. John's-wort.

So the most downloaded episode yet of this podcast is number 67, [Harvesting Light: the Alchemy of Sun and Human](#), my interview with Nadine Artemis. The practically infinite and certainly multidimensional healing power of the sun, which was, of course, apparent to our ancestors in every waking moment is one of the best kept secrets in our backward, modern culture.

The most amazing thing to me about St. John's-wort is that it, in the words of a Chinese medicine doctor friend of mine, "acts as an extension of sunlight." So I'm gonna say that again: St. John's-wort acts as an extension of sunlight. When you hear about the million and one health benefits of this plant and wonder how it's all possible, just think about what the sun does for us and for all life on Earth.

Hypericum perforatum blooms around the Summer Solstice when the solar influence is strongest upon the earth, the full force of the Sun ripening the hypericin within; the main medicinal constituents of the plant and what turns the medicines made from it red. If you crush some of the small yellow flowers or leaves between your fingers at this time of year, it'll leave a deep burgundy stain behind — this is hypericin.

The plant has evolved over millennia to capture the ultimate expression of sunlight on our planet and turn it into hypericin, which in turn has profound effects on our human bodies. From deep nerve healing, relaxation, and pain relief when applied externally, to its antidepressant, antiviral, and liver-supportive properties when taken internally, St. John's-wort has always occupied an exalted place in the medicine cabinet of the ancestral humans who were lucky enough to live where it grew, and is one of the most used and loved herbal medicines in the world today.

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Amber: If I could only choose one remedy to have on hand, there's no question I would choose St. John's-wort oil. I literally use it every day. The warmth and relaxation that seeps into my nerves and muscles the moment it touches my skin, helps drop me into a parasympathetic state, which in turn, boosts my immunity, helps me sleep, and reminds me to slow down and fully inhabit my body, among other things. These are the foundations of health and well-being, and we cannot be in a state of healing unless we're in a parasympathetic state.

If I were to cover everything there is to cover about St. John's-wort in this podcast, this would be like a 100-hour episode minimum. So please bear in mind that I am merely scratching the surface here. I'm so grateful to former guest Rosalee de la Forêt — see Episode 65, [Wild Remedies: Tending Relationships with the Land Around Us](#) — for gifting listeners of this podcast who supported on Patreon at the two-dollar-a-month level, a beautiful PDF booklet of the chapter on St. John's-wort from her book [Wild Remedies: How to Forage Healing Foods and Craft your Own Herbal Medicine](#), written with her co-author, Emily Han.

So you can access and download this lovely ebook at patreon.com/medicinstories. It covers plant energetics, medicinal properties, many of which we'll also talk about here that she expands on more, how to identify, harvest, and use St. John's-wort, gardening tips, and special considerations for safety — that includes a list of pharmaceutical drugs that may be affected by the internal use of St. John's-wort. So that's pretty important for you to know about, and I'm not going to cover it here because you can find it there or elsewhere online if you don't want to be a patron. There's also recipes for oil, salve, and tea made with St. John's-wort.

With so much information and thousands of years in folk herbalism, I am focusing here only on what I have experienced to be true or heard from customers or other herbalists, many of whom will be quoted here. I'm going to give some basic background info on the plant before diving into its physical, then emotional, spiritual, and the magical properties, and then a word about wildcrafting. And we're gonna end with a ten-minute interview that I did with my teacher, Kami McBride, who's been a guest on the show three times already, as we were sitting on a stoop in downtown Nevada City a couple weeks ago, when she was here visiting.

[0:05:18]

Amber: Okay, so when we talk about St. John's-wort, its medicinal use, what's most often in commerce, we're talking about *Hypericum perforatum*. I'll talk about the etymology of both the scientific and the common names coming up, but for now, know that *H. perforatum* is just one species of about 400 in the genus *Hypericum*. You might be familiar with the ornamental species. Maybe there's more than one, but there's like that one (*Amber laughs*) that was planted everywhere.

It's on the side of the highway here where I live. It's big and low-growing, whereas the perforatum is spindly, skinny, and tall, but people often mistake the two.

And I know I had the experience many years ago of a friend saying, "You've got to come out to my property. I have all the St. John's-wort you can harvest," and I was like, "Yeah!" so stoked. It's like a 45 minute drive out in the country. I get there, I'm pulling up to the driveway, and I'm seeing the low-growing ornamental everywhere. And I'm like, "No! Is this what she called me out here for?" And sure enough, she thought that was the medicinal St. John's-wort. So that's just one of the other species.

And you can tell that there's medicine in a Hypericum species if it has the red, burgundy, purplish color left on your fingers when you crush it between them. So even if you're not sure it's the perforatum, if it's got the hypericin in it left on your skin, like, there's some medicine in there.

Records, mentioning its medicinal use go back at least 2,400 years to Ancient Greece, where it's mentioned by numerous writers, and pagan Europe has handed down a plethora of writings as well. Hypericum perforatum is native to the whole of the British Isles and most of mainland Europe, Western Asia, and North Africa. It was introduced to North America with European colonization and grows here most prolifically from the Pacific Northwest to NorCal and in central Nevada, but it's cultivated in the prairie states and elsewhere. In his book, *The New Healing Herbs*, Michael Castleman writes, "Early colonists introduced St. John's-wort to North America, but they found Native Americans using the native forms of the herb in much the same way Europeans used the Old World plant."

We have a local species here. I'm not remembering the species name right now, but I have done the test of crushing in between my fingers, and it has the hypericin in it. And I know that other local herbalists have made medicine out of that one. So yeah, the other species can carry similar properties. Any St. John's-wort product you see in commerce is going to be the perforatum, unless stated otherwise, but I've never seen that.

[0:08:07]

Amber: So let's get into the physical healing properties. There's both external and internal uses. This is one of those plants that has, like, really profound and diverse uses, properties, used both ways. It's just a whole medicine chest in itself. So I'm going to talk about the external use and the oil first.

But while I'm thinking about it, let me mention that though depression comes to mind first for most people with the internal use of St. John's-wort, I have been surprised over the years to have dozens of customers, who have bought our St. John's-wort oil, tell me that using it helped their depression, even lifted them out of their depression. So though people are talking about tinctures or teas for depression, apparently, it's also very helpful when used externally as an oil which, actually, when we think about it as an extension of sunshine, and when you hear more about what I'm going to say about the emotional and spiritual properties ahead, it totally makes sense.

So St. John's-wort oil is pure sunshine in a bottle. I have talked at length about how profoundly whole plant, infused herbal oils have affected my life, including on past episodes of this podcast, namely Episode 23, *The Profound Medicine of Herbal Body Oils*, Episode 53, with my teacher, Kami McBride, *Healing Herbal Oils: How to Make and Use Them*, and in Episode 55 with Lola Pickett, *Highly*

Sensitive People are the Psychedelic Plants of the Human Real. So though I will just be focusing on St. John's-wort here, please know that there are countless medicinal herbs that can be infused into oil to make a variety of incredibly healing medicines. And later, I'll share information about how you can learn to make your own.

As my teacher Kami said in Episode 53, "Humans have always taken some kind of herb and some kind of fat and combined the two to make medicine." Our ancestors didn't have fancy extraction equipment to squeeze the oils out of vegetables, like we do now, and so they use animal fats which is a beautiful, traditional technique that many folks still prefer today.

St. John's-wort oil was the first herbal medicine I ever made to share beyond just my family. Though I'd been making it for personal use since 2007, I decided to make a few extra gallons back in 2012 and list them in my then-Etsy-shop, Violet Folklore, along with the vintage clothing I was peddling. To my delight they sold like hotcakes, and that started me on the path that I'm still walking today from sustainably and respectfully wildcrafting — again, more on that coming up — a few gallons back then, to getting 80 gallons out of our garden this year. All hail my gardening genius husband, Owen. I owe so much that is good and healing and soft and sweet-smelling in my life to the reverential creation of this ruby rich oil.

We have just restocked the shop after months of being sold out. Since this medicine is best made fresh, and there's only a short window of time in which to harvest it fresh, the amount we can make each year is limited. As with all of our medicines, we only harvest at peak potency, and we tend our patches, both wild and cultivated, in a way that ensures their future thriving.

We don't over harvest, and we don't buy our ingredients online. This is small batch, seasonal medicine making. We aren't in this for the infinite growth of our business, but to connect people with the medicine of the land in the hope that y'all will cultivate your own relationships with the plants around you, and tap into your own ancestral medicine-making memory.

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Amber: With that said, I'm going to make this easy on myself and read the St. John's-wort oil description from our website because it pretty much nails it:

St. John's Wort is a beloved healing herb with a deep solar affinity; it is in its full [florescent](#) expression when our local star radiates its strongest light.

And this use of the word "florescent" is not like the fluorescent lights. But it means the flower, the radiant flowering.

These sunbeams activate the healing power of the plant, which then penetrates deeply into the musculature and nervous system, bringing immediate warmth and relaxation to your whole being.

St. John's-wort oil is known to deeply relax sore and stressed muscles and help alleviate muscular pain. It quickly penetrates and nourishes the nerves to support the body in recovering from short or

long-term nerve damage and pain, such as sciatica, neuralgia, etc. It has an immediate warming effect. It supports the body and recovering from stress and sensory overstimulation.

So back to that podcast Episode 55 with Lola Pickett on highly sensitive people. It has been traditionally used to support the healing of wounds, bruises, burns, blisters, cuts, eczema, growing pains, inflamed skin, muscle pain, nerve pain, neck tension, spasms, back pain, insomnia, anxiety, stress, et cetera. I mean, like et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. I could go on and on. And it's indispensable for menstrual pain, pregnancy, postpartum, babies, children, elders, empaths, and again, highly sensitive people— really, anyone with a nervous system, anyone with muscles, anyone with stress, anyone with a body.

And it's so simple. It's two ingredients or three, if you're really making it to the full extent that you can to make it awesome. The fat, in our case, we use organic olive oil and St. John's-wort. Those are the two ingredients. It's that simple: fat and an herb, St. John's-wort, olive oil, or whichever carrier oil you prefer. And then we also add high potency alcohol to make it shelf-stable and to bring out even more of the medicine from it. This was a technique I learned from Kami, and we'll talk more about that coming up.

[0:14:36]

Amber: Here I'm going to talk about photosensitivity and sun protection because it's just so interesting, the super complex relationship that St. John's-wort has with the sun.

So you might come across some scare tactics online about photosensitivity when taking St. John's-wort internally. This definitely happens to livestock when they come across huge patches of St. John's-wort and eat a lot of it. They can then become, get to the point where their skin burns in the sun. It's not so fascinating, like the medicine inside their bodies interacting with the sun through their skin and burning them. It's considered a noxious weed in much of the states because of this, but I have never heard of this happening to a person. I think, perhaps, if it does happen, it's very rare and probably in people who are already super sensitive to the sun — I would guess very fair-skinned people.

Other folks, such as me, use St. John's-wort oil — that's the internal use, when it can burn livestock— use the oil as a sunscreen, basically. So you don't want to use this, like, as your only sun protection if you're going to be right in the sun all day, but if you're only going to be in there for a little bit, you're going to be in and out of the water or the shade. I've been doing it for years, and I have never gotten a sunburn when I use St. John's-wort as my sunscreen.

And there have been, there's a study that Rosalee talks about in the ebook that you can find on Patreon that shows that it does indeed have sun protective properties, and it's also commonly used to heal sun-damaged skin. I've even heard about people with pre-cancerous cells on their body, applying St. John's-wort oil to that area every day, and by the time they go back to the doctor, it's gone.

Amazing, right (*Amber laughs*)? So, so fascinating how, like what a flexible and dynamic herb it is and how that's related to its relationship with the sun, and how the sun interacts with us and our skin. So

that's just a little bit about the external use. I mean, it's a little bit, but it's a lot, right? It's unbelievable how healing and helpful this plant is.

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We're going to hit on the three main internal uses that I am familiar with, and again, in Rosalie's ebook, the chapter from her book, *Wild Remedies*, goes over these in a more extended way.

So anti-depressant, the one everyone thinks about, the one everyone knows about, and again, this what I see here is St. John's-wort acting as an extension of sunshine, is bringing like the light back into the body. Again, quoting Michael Castleman in *The New Healing Herbs*, which is not one of those really well-known or often referenced herb books, but I love it because he gives pretty thorough overviews of the plants he talks about, and then he just lists studies. It's very scientifically-based book. So it kind of counters, like, all my folk herbalism books, which I love, too.

In the 1980s, German researchers discovered that hypericin interferes with the activity of a compound in the body known as "monoamine oxidase" or MAO. MAO inhibitors are an important class of anti-depressant drugs.

In 1996, German researchers published a meta-analysis in the prestigious British Medical Journal, which included 23 trials involving 1757 adults with mild to moderate depression. 22% of people who took placebos experienced a significant mood elevation, but among those using St. John's-wort, 55% reported similar results.

Since then, many more studies have shown that St. John's-wort is an effective anti-depressant.

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Amber: It's also a potent anti-viral. In the same book, he writes, "Hypericin is active against a broad range of viral infections, including influenza, herpes, polio, hepatitis C, and HIV. It also helps combat several types of bacteria." So beyond anti-viral, its antimicrobial.

Three years ago, I got shingles in the trigeminal nerve in my head. This is kind of coming out of the ear area. It was insane. It took me a week and a half to realize what was happening. I'm already prone to headaches, and I just thought I'm just having the worst headache of my life. I had just had dental work done down right in that part of my jaw, lower right jaw, back back of the teeth. And I think that probably, you know, awoken the sleeping varicella zoster virus in my body that had been there since I had chickenpox as a kid.

I'd also come back from a trip in which I had flown with my baby on four flights and hadn't slept for five nights basically, and so I was super low immunity, super low energy, no vitality, and that, combined with the dental work, I think just woke this virus up in my body because that's how it works with shingles.

So I didn't want to take you know, a pharmaceutical antiviral, and by then, it was too late anyway. They straight up told me that when I finally went into the ER to get a diagnosis. And I took St. John's-wort tincture and lemon balm tincture and high dose vitamin C, and it turned around within

24 hours doing that. I was mostly concentrating on the St. John's-wort. So that's my story of how potent of an antiviral hypericum can be. It was amazing. I was so grateful to finally be out of the overwhelming pain in my head while trying to mother a baby.

You can also use it for cold sores, you know, anything in the herpes family; there's so many uses. So again, I'm just sort of skimming the surface here. Please dive deeper into all of this if you have any of these issues.

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Amber: The liver supportive aspect is also really compelling. In his book, *The Herbal Lore of Wise Women and Wortcunners: The Healing Power of Medicinal Plants*, German herbalist, Wolf D. Storl, writes that "St. John's-wort increases the liver's production of enzymes which speed the clearance of impurities. St. John's-wort does indeed detoxify and drive whatever is unnatural out of the body." That's a big claim, but a cursory internet search or looking more into the books or Rosalee's ebook will fill in the scientific details here for you, like which enzymatic pathways are cleared by use of St. John's-wort taken internally.

So that's huge, too. That's, like, huge, that's helpful with hormonal imbalance issues, digestive issues, all sorts of stuff. You know, the liver is called the liver, because it's really the seat of our health. Obviously, you could say that about any part of the body because it's all interconnected, but the importance of the liver, the foundational health-giving aspect of it, can't be overstated. So whenever an herb is going to help the liver function better, that's something to pay attention to.

[0:22:03]

Amber: Okay, spiritual and emotional healing properties of St. John's-wort, the following words were written by herbalist and teacher Sajah Popham in his piece entitled, *Feeding Your Inner Sun with St. John's-wort*. I don't think I've said yet that every podcast, book, everything I name here, is going to be in the show notes. This is a long show notes episode because I'm, like, referencing so much. So if you want to go deeper into any of the resources I name, just check out the show notes which, if you don't know, wherever you're listening to this, there's show notes right there like just scroll down and you'll find them. So you can find that whole essay there if you'd like. Sajah has also been a guest on this podcast both in Episode 17, *True Holistic Healing: Bridging Plant & Human Consciousness* and in Episode 62, *Called to the Plant Path: Herbal Myths, Healing Forward, and Human Ecology*.

Sajah writes:

St. John's-wort initiates us into the sphere of influence of the sun, which represents the core of who we are; our gravitational center. The sun is all about coming into direct contact with our essential self, being strong in that, and learning to shine our truth out into the world in a way that is of service and benefit to the whole.

This remedy would help those who have lost touch with that essential part of the self, where darkness has crept into their psyche, and they have lost their confidence, their path, their purpose. They feel alone, isolated, and disconnected from life. A certain heaviness weighs on them and they feel down.

St. John's-wort functions to help to strengthen the inner sun to bring the light back into someone's life. It feeds that inner light, fans and brightens the flame of consciousness, and where that light shines, the darkness dissipates.

Rather than focusing on what's wrong, what's not working, and what is holding one back, this remedy teaches our minds to find the positive in every situation, to take our challenges and struggles and transform them into our teachings, our strength, and our power. In this way it is "above the apparition" (the meaning of the Greek word hypericon)

— Again, more on that coming up.

and helps us to face our inner demons and conquer them.

I see the healing process of St. John's Wort in a way that starts at the core of who we are, it finds the light of our consciousness and starts to feed it, to strengthen it. As that light brightens within the self, it begins to push the subconscious fears and traumas up and out so we can face them and deal with them.

Progressively over time, our inner light — which is simply our truth, purpose, and power — shines out from within and re-establishes the structural integrity of the astral body, healing any punctures to our etheric field so that we are no longer leaking our vital force out, nor are we susceptible to the malefic influences of others. We are not protected from the outside in, but rather from the inside out- we are filled with the truth of who we are so that there isn't any more room for other people's projections to enter.

Eventually this inner Sun radiates out into the world. We have faced our demons, overcome our traumas, healed our wounds, and transformed them into our teachings, strength, and personal power. We now have the will to act in accordance with our truth and to live our lives from the heart, to walk our true path and live out our life purpose.

As this light shines out into the world, we become servants to that light, doing everything in our power to have a positive impact and influence upon the world, which at times can feel filled with greed, envy, war, and fear.

In this way, St. John's Wort is a most important herbal remedy for herbalists, healers, and people striving to create positive change on this planet, for it assists us all in breaking through our own limiting thoughts and beliefs, so we can get down to making this world a better place by anchoring ourselves in the light as reflected through the Sun, and the little yellow flowers of St. John's Wort.

I don't know about you, but I could certainly use that remedy for myself. We all could. We all could. What am I talking about? I do know about you. I know about all of us on the planet at this time needing to step up, step into our power, fill the world up with our own inner light. So you could use St. John's-wort as a flower essence to do this, a spagyric remedy, which I have recently been using for St. John's-wort, tincture, tea — I love the tea. It has such a lovely taste. I'm gonna dry some of our St. John's-wort this year to use for tea, and of course, using the oil will help with that, too. I love, as

you'll hear Kami and I talk about in her interview that I'm going to end this episode with, St. John's-wort oil just grounds me in my body. So in that way, it's fulfilling that purpose as well.

[0:27:13]

Amber: Okay, magical uses. Numerous herbal texts that I consulted mentioned St. John's-worts connection to magical beans, to witches and fairies, and other such folk. Much of this has to do with it blooming around the Summer Solstice which is, of course, one of those magical times of the year. The Druids, the Celts, Saxons, and the Romans all used St. John's-wort in ritual around this time.

And I think this association with magic also has a lot to do with the reddish purple residue left on the skin when the plant is crushed against it, which the human mind can't help but associate with blood; one of the most ritually powerful substances there is. As herbalist Henriette Crest writes, "A red color from yellow flowers? If that's not magic, I don't know what is."

We can't talk about the magic and ritual use and naming of St. John's-wort without taking a look at how Christianity has co-opted ancient pagan beliefs. So St. John's Day is a Christian holiday celebrated on June 24. It's a day that honors either Jesus' buddy, John the Baptist, or the 14th century martyr, Saint John, depending on what source you read. And just like Christmas, the colonizing Christians took an important holy day — Winter Solstice in the case of Christmas, Summer Solstice in the case of St. John's day — and imposed their own holiday on it.

Paracelsus, the Swiss Alchemist and philosopher born in 1493, called the red secretions of St. John's-wort, "Johannes-blut," linking the plant to St. John and giving rise to the English and German common names of St. John's-wort. So, "John's blood" basically is the translation there. "Wort" is simply the Old English word for plant, "healing plant." W-O-R-T, for the record, mugwort and motherwort being two other examples of this, so it's St. John's plant. The etymology of *Hypericum*, because it is very interesting, is noted above when I was reading Sajah words.

Maude Grieve in *A Modern Herbal II*, which was published in 1931, another book I love because it was published before so many of the herbal books we read now, where, you know, there's sort of this remote renaissance in the 70s people started writing books again, and then you kind of get to this point where people are just repeating what other people said, but Maude was writing in the 20s, right, in the early 30s. So she's really drawing on, like, older sources and folk wisdom that has been forgotten in a lot of modern writings. There's a part one and part two to *A Modern Herbal*.

She writes, "There are many ancient superstitions regarding this herb. Its name, *Hypericum*, is derived from the Greek and means 'over an apparition,' a reference to the belief that the herb was so obnoxious to evil spirits that a whiff of it would cause them to fly."

I've also seen that "over an apparition" translated as "above an icon." So hyper is "above," right — hyperactive, hyperthermia, when you're too hot. And then "icum" hypericum, being translated there as an icon or an apparition. So it's a powerful magical plant used ritualistically to protect oneself and one's household from malevolent influences.

[0:31:03]

Amber: Quoting Wolf D. Storl the story again, this is from his other one of his many books, another of his books *The Untold History of Healing, Plant Lore, and Medicinal Magic: From the Stone Age to Present* writes:

When the yellow flowers that blossom proficently at midsummer are crushed between the fingers, red blood (hypericin) swelled out.

For the Germanic heathens, it was the blood of Baldur, the mortally wounded Sun God. For the Celts, it was the blood of Belenus or Bel. Christians dedicated it to John the Baptist, whose blood was transferred into the plant when he was beheaded during the time of the Solstice. So it happens that the devil cannot stand the herb, but is forced to flee. "Fuga Daemonum," or double flee, is one of its names.

Even Paracelsus writes that 'St. John's-wort has the power to drive away imagined illnesses: fantasmata.' The Dominicans shared this belief. They ordered it burned as incense while questioning witches during the Inquisition, so that Satan could not whisper any answers to them as they were being interrogated and tortured.

A medieval poem reads:

*St. John's-wort doth charm all witches away
If gathered at midnight on the saint's holy day.
Any devils and witches have no power to harm
Those that gathered the plant for a charm.*

[0:32:28]

Amber: When I studied with herbalist Kathy Keville, she taught us that on St. John's day, the ancient, pagan Europeans would hang a cross of St. John's-wort over their door for protection.

So if all this talk of like evil and Satan doesn't resonate, you know, keep in mind, again, that this is just Christianity, building practices and philosophies on top of ancient pagan beliefs, and pagan — this is one of my favorite things I learned in college when I actually took Latin, but I also took a class on word roots — comes from the Latin word "pagandos" which just means "the people," just means the people. So ancient peoples' beliefs (*Amber laughs*).

People have always sought divine protection, you know, like, if you boil down the things we tend to pray for when we are, when we come in supplication to commune with that which is greater than us, protection is one of the main categories of things that people have always asked for. So St. John's-wort has this long history of being considered a reliable aid in protecting oneself. And I love what Sajah shared earlier about how it doesn't so much create like a shield of protection as it strengthens our inner light to the point that we can't be penetrated and harmed.

One last word about the etymology: so the species name “perforatum,” refers to if you hold the plant up, you know, you can just pick off the top couple inches, you'll see tiny little holes in the leaf. They're so beautiful. And so those perforations are where it gets its species name.

[0:34:21]

Okay, I want to talk a bit about wildcrafting now. So I cannot say everything there is to say about wildcrafting in this episode. I have talked about this numerous times on Instagram, on past episodes, especially the one with Rosalee. I think I said that was 65, Wild Remedies. We talked at length about wildcrafting ethics, and we end with the question: what if everyone wildcrafted? So if you want to learn more about that, think more about that, I highly recommend that, and don't come after me asking me, “Why didn't you say this? Why don't you say that?” I'm not gonna say everything. I can't. I never could. It's not even possible.

Okay, so I've been wildcrafting St. John's-wort since 2007, always super reverentially, sustainably. When I got together with my husband, Owen, in 2013, I started taking him out. And he is just so good at knowing what a community of plants needs. And so we would tend these patches over and over again. We would just drive up into the Sierra, especially the High Sierra, we're here in the foothills, but the High Sierra is very close, and just drive, drive down roads, drive down roads, get out of the car, start hiking up hills, and find these patches, and then return to them, over and over again. And they thrived under our care; they got bigger and more abundant, year after year after year.

But a few years ago, we realized that even though we are respectful stewards, not everyone is, and we don't want to continue burdening these wild plant populations. So Owen who, again, is an incredible gardener and just such an intuitive sense of what plants need, started growing a lot of the medicinal plants that we use in our herbal medicines, which by the way, I realized I did not tell you where you can find our St. John's-wort oil earlier: [mythicmedicine.love](https://www.mythicmedicine.com) is our website. So we're growing our own elderberries, now the mugwort, yarrow, California poppy, so much more, I can't name at all. But Owen has been working for years on cultivating St. John's-wort.

And finally, this year, like I said earlier, we got 80 gallons of St. John's-wort oil out of our garden, which is incredible. It's just this, like, big garden space full of these joyful, yellow flowers. It's been such a gift. And so we did not have to wildcraft at all this year, which was killer timing, because one, huge drought in California this year, terrifyingly low amount of water out there. And so there's not a lot of St. John's-wort out there.

I'm hearing from herbalist friends here that they're going to their usual places, and it's just not there. And secondly, I have heard too many stories this year of people — and maybe it's because they're not finding the amount that they're used to or were hoping for — decimating whole plant stands.

I have heard of a company here who is taking every St. John's-wort plant that they find to make their medicine because it's not native. So they think it's okay to wipe it out because it's not native. So this is an important distinction to make here: just because a species is not native to an area does not mean that it's invasive, does not mean that it needs to be taken out. And that is certainly the case with St. John's-wort.

Rosalee writes in *Wild Remedies*, and this, of course, is in the ebook on Patreon, that “numerous insects, including honeybees and bumblebees, collect the pollen,” and that “both moth and butterfly caterpillars eat the foliage and seed capsules.” So this plant definitely has a place in the ecosystem and does not deserve to be, absolutely should not be wiped out just because it's not native. Okay?

If you'd like to see a very cute short video of my husband and youngest daughter in our big ass St. John's-wort garden, I will post the link down in the show notes to a little Instagram post that shows the garden. I don't know if we got any photos of it this year, which is crazy. Maybe we did, but anyway, I'm going to link to that video.

[0:38:49]

Amber: Okay, it's almost time to play my 10-minute clip of the interview I did with Kami. Again, she's been on the podcast three times. She taught me everything I know. She taught me how to make high potency, shelf-stable, healing herbal body oils for which I am forever grateful. I really love how she talks about how St. John's-wort oil “takes a layer off.” And that's a really sweet way to put it.

Kami is about to launch her incredible online course, *Handcrafted Healing Herbal Oils*, where you can learn from her exactly what I learned from her back in 2007, which is how to make these really high quality oils. It is not enough to go randomly pick some plants, throw them in a jar, pour some oil over it, and then strain them out a week later. I mean that, actually, that is enough. I will say that is enough. You will get healing properties out of that medicine, but if you want to really maximize the healing there's more to it than that, such as the extra step of adding alcohol, which Kami is the only person I know of who's teaching that method. And that has made the difference between our oils which sell every year and the other oils that I'm seeing in commerce.

Not only does adding the alcohol increase the potency and pull out more of the medicinal constituents from the plants you're using but it makes your oils more shelf-stable. These are all working with some sort of future expiration date. They're not like tinctures that are in alcohol, which is already super preservative. Oils go bad, fats go bad, right? So the longer you can make them last the better.

Kami's course is incredible. I'll have a link below. I also have a video out of behind-the-scenes look at her course. So it's like I logged in with my user name and info, and then I'm showing you absolutely everything you get: all the modules, all the different oils you make, all the questions that are answered, all the incredible bonuses, all the recipes, everything. So if it calls to you, if you're interested, of course, I'll link to that behind the scenes video I made below.

If you are listening to this episode, within the first, like, week or two of its release, then Kami has some free video workshops available during this time, and I will link to those as well below. The first one is all about making lavender oil. But really it's about making fresh plant oil versus dry plant oil. So even if you don't have fresh lavender around you can, you know, use any sort of fresh plant to make it.

Two of the bonuses included in *Handcrafted Healing Herbal Oils* that are relevant to this episode are one an audio piece called “All you need to know to grow St. John's-wort,” and this was really helpful

for Owen when he was figuring out how to grow St. John's-wort. This thing we've been wildcrafting forever, how do we actually grow it? It's a process. So that audio has been indispensable.

And, of course, because of these overharvesting issues that we're facing — I'm sure it's not just here. I'm sure it's everywhere as herbalism gets more and more popular, and people aren't fully educated on how to sustainably wildcraft — I would love to see more people growing their own St. John's-wort. There is a demand for it y'all. There is a demand for St. John's-wort out there and for products made with St. John's-wort, especially oil.

So, as I say in that behind-the-scenes video, if you are growing your own St. John's-wort or sustainably wildcrafting, and you use Kami's techniques to make St. John's-wort oil, please get in touch with me, and I will add you to a list of makers to refer people to when we inevitably sell out of our St. John's-wort oil.

[0:42:54]

The second bonus resource in Kami's course is a little downloadable page on St. John's-wort sources. So this is a place online where you can buy fresh plant, flowering tops. So of course this is only going to be during the time of year when it's in bloom. And I would suspect that these sell out pretty quickly. But there are a couple companies out there who go out and harvest it fresh, and then will overnight you a bag, if you really want to make your own fresh plant St. John's-wort oil. And then she also lists companies that sell St. John's-wort seeds and starts if you want to plant your own, which again, please do.

Okay, gosh, did I say everything? I feel like I don't want to stop talking about St. John's-wort. It's so profound, and I'm so grateful for it.

And as I always say: herbal medicine is so simple. You take the plant, you take whatever medium you're extracting it in, you mix them, you strain it, you have your medicine. All of our ancestors did this, it is in your bones. And at the same time, it's infinitely complex, and there's always more to learn, and there's so many ways that you can make medicine stronger, more potent, and more long lasting than just the basics.

So thank you so much to Kami McBride for being my herb teacher. I'm so grateful. You can check out her course and perhaps her free offerings down in the show notes. All the books, all the podcasts, my behind the scenes video, our St. John's-wort oil if you'd like to order some, it will sell out by probably next spring sometime is how it always happens. And just please learn to make your own, and then teach people how to make their own. The more people who know how to make herbal body oils, better place this world will be.

Okay, so now we're going to jump into this interview with me and Kami. Kami and I realized that we hadn't seen each other since my apprenticeship with her ended in 2008, 13 years ago! She was visiting here, we sat on a stoop in downtown Nevada City, and just talked about St. John's-wort for 10 minutes.

So, let's check Kami out and please go immerse yourself in or imbibe some St. John's-wort medicine.

(Transitional music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)

[Interview with Kami]

[0:45:31]

Amber: Okay, Kami. I'm curious what your introduction to the plant, St. John's-wort, was and also your introduction to the oil?

Kami: Okay, well, you know, when I started studying, I just went crazy. I joined the massage school, herb school, and yoga school all at the same time *(Kami laughs)*.

And so I went to herb school with Rosemary Gladstar, and she said, "If you can't eat it, don't put it on your skin." And then I went to massage class, and they were like putting toxic chemicals all over their skin. And so I, right away, was like, "I'm using herbs. I'm just gonna, like change this whole scenario in massage school, and make herbal oils," and I did.

And all the other massage students and massage teachers and massage clients were just like, "Wow, what are you doing? You got to teach us." And so right away, I started teaching oil. I was just drafted, you know, and I didn't even really totally know what I was doing. So that's, the oils was just because I listened to Rosemary. I was like, "I gotta find another way, besides all this stuff that we're using in massage class."

But the plant itself is very interesting, when I very first came interested in herbs, I was just looking for any teacher anywhere. It was like, who's teaching? Where are they? And you had to go live in another state, or you had to travel. And so I came up to the foothills of the Sierras and Robin Martin, she's an elder, and I used to work in her garden and work for her and just do stuff for her and camp out in her yard.

And she took me harvesting for St. John's-wort oil the first time. And she took me out into her yard, and I remember, "Oh, what's it good for? What's it good for? What is it? Was it good for that?" She was like, "Oh, well just what I want you to do is while we're harvesting, I just want you to notice what comes to mind." I was like, "Wait, what is it good for?" She's like, "No, when you harvesting the plants, you're just with the plant, and you're just seeing, noticing what you think about, notice how you feel." And so that was really the very first plant I ever harvested was St. John's work with her up in the foothills.

And I'm so grateful that she just let me hang out in her yard, you know, and work in her vegetable garden and do her dishes, and I was just watching every move she made in the kitchen. I was like, "Oh, you can use garlic like that?" I mean, I was just so hungry, you know. There were very few teachers, and I was just wherever I could get it.

And so, St. John's-wort was my very first plant that I harvested, like formal training, you know. Well, if you want to call that formal. But when I finally said, "I am going to learn about herbs."

[0:48:17]

Amber: Do you remember what you did feel when you were harvesting at that first time or impressions from your first?

Kami: I remember, I can feel it right now, just being in that field there's a tall yellow plant, feeling just like (Kami laughs), I was just in, you know, one of those movies la-la-la, like, running in the field, just like kind of bliss? This bliss, in being in this field of sunshine and beauty and yeah, I felt like a sense of bliss.

Amber: Yeah, it's such a joyful plant. How can you not feel that when you're working with it? And what about the oil? Like, I mean, I remember the first time I put the oil on my body, and it was just a revelation, how the immediate warmth and relaxation and then how much, how different my state was the next few hours. And to me, it's still the oil I go to. I have so many herbal oils. I will pick St John's-wort 75% of the time.

Kami: Yeah, it is. I have a bottle in my car. I have a salve next to my desk. I have it everywhere. I don't know how people live without it. And even my son now carries it with him now. Like he goes backpacking, he takes his St. John's-wort salve, 17 years old. *(both laugh)*

And so it was just, you know, right away, just putting it on your body and just knowing, just feeling it soak into your body and just feeling the relaxation and the nerves. You know, for me, it just takes a layer off. Just takes a layer off, and it's not like, "Oh, it solves everything," but taking a layer off, you know?

Reducing our stress isn't just to be like, "Oh, I live a stress free life." Stress is about how many points of contact during the day can you have where you can just take that layer off, take that breath, take that breath, oh, I'm going to take that breath. Again, you just pull it down, just keep pulling it down, all day long. And even just the smell of St. John's-wort oil, when I smell that smell, I have a response to it now, just like I take a deep breath, and I let go of like one little layer, you know.

Amber: And it's all herbal body oils are helpful for stress and the nervous system. But St. John's-wort, especially has this affinity with the nerves, but it's just, there's just no substitute; there's nothing more superior when it comes to a topical treatment for stress reduction, pain reduction, inflammation reduction.

Kami: Spasms, muscle spasms, leg cramps, muscle cramps, growing pains, menstrual pain, sciatica, bruise, you know, bruised, crush injuries. Sorry to say, but I have somebody that just sent me. She just she took a video, actually, she was so amazed. Her horse stepped on her ankle. And she just, it was late in the day she couldn't get to the emergency or whatever. And so she used comfrey and St. John's-wort. And she said the next day the pain was gone, the inflammation was gone. She was still injured, but she didn't need to go, you know, like it just blew her away, you know?

So, I mean, if you can help somebody like that, how simple is that? How beautiful is that, to have this gift. So you know, it's really a cultural transformer for us to have this simple thing to offer to people and carry that around, and just know that we have that, that gift, right?

Amber: So simple, two ingredients: the plant, itself, the carrier oil. And I feel like it has blessed me so much to be a person who makes this and makes it available to people and has blessed me so much to have learned this from you. And I'm so grateful that you are teaching people, and it's been amazing. We've talked about before their response to your online course about making herbal oils and how deeply foundationally it changes people's lives.

[0:52:42]

Kami: Yeah, it is foundational. The oils are one of the most amazing gateways to herbal medicine, because the thing about herbal medicine is you have to use it, it has to become embodied. You can study for three, four, or five years, take your foundational course, read everything, on and on and on, but it's about getting it into your body.

Herbal medicine is about embodying the wisdom of the plants, and the only way to do that is to use the herbs every day. And so tea is good, you know, but the oils, you and your entire family can use them every day. And so it's such an incredible gateway for embodiment.

Amber: Yes, yes, I was gonna say that it's, it has done so much to help me be a more embodied person. In this culture where we're like heads floating around, it drops me into my actual body and into presence, and then that helps me be more present. What do I, what does my body need right now? What meal should I cook next? Oh, I need some water. I need to just lay down for five minutes. *(both laugh)*

Kami: My absolute favorite way to use St. John's-wort oil is on my feet at night. And I know I've told you that before, and we've talked about that.

But even to this very day, at the end of the day, I'm just, you know, if I'm, go, go, go, or have, you know, we all have stressors, right? And then I'll be in bed, and I'll be laying there, thinking about this thing, then can't get to sleep, and it's like, oh, right. You didn't oil your feet. Right? So I get up, and I put some water on my feet, some warm water, and then I dry them off, and I oil my feet, and then I don't remember what happened *(both laugh)*.

Amber: So many nights I've gotten up in the middle of the night and just sat right there on the rug next to my bed and oiled my feet really quick because I wasn't falling asleep, and I fell asleep.

I'm out of St. John's-wort oil right now. I know, like, that never happens.

Kami: Ooohh, it becomes really valuable. *(Kami laughs)*

Amber: Oh yeah. And so I had a little bit left, and I opened it up last night, and I smelled it, and I was like... it went off. Like in the last week or two it went off. And I do not like being in this place where I don't have it, I really don't. Like I have my other oils but they're not substitutes. And you know, we've

got a lot steeping right now, so it'll be ready in a couple weeks, but it's not a fun place to be. (*Amber laughs*)

Kami: You don't know how many times over the years people have called me in, like, "Do you have any oil left?" Well, yes. It becomes, like, super valuable in April, May, June, you know, because everybody's out, right? (*Kami laughs*)

Amber: Yeah, right. So I learned now to put, at least, probably eight ounces in the fridge, you know, right when we harvest it, so that come March or April when I'm about to run out, I can just pull that out, and it will be good to go still.

Okay, thank you. Kami.

Kami: Aww, thank you. I love that you're bringing St. John's-wort to your community and your people. It's such a beautiful gift.

Amber: It's such a blessing from the earth, and I'm so grateful for it.

[Outro]

[0:55:56]

Amber: Okay, I realize that was a lot of information I just threw at you and thinking some of the logistical stuff might have gotten lost in the majestic stuff. So quick little outro here to remind you of where you can go to dive deeper into St. John's-wort.

Our oil is at [mythicmedicine.love](https://mythicmedicine.com). If you're listening to this anytime in the future, in the spring or early summer, it's possible that it's sold out. It always has in the past, but it might not this year since we were able to grow so much and make more.

My teacher Kami McBride's online course, *Handcrafted Healing Herbal Oils*, is available as a link in the show notes as well. Show notes are at our website, if you're not finding them in whatever app you're listening to this podcast. So again, [mythicmedicine.love](https://mythicmedicine.com). You'd click on **Podcast**, in this case, and find Episode 79 and check out Kami's beautiful online course that she has spent almost 40 years preparing for, really, and then the last few years running and perfecting.

If you're listening to this in the first few weeks after this episode is released, you can still access some of her free oil making workshops, and so I will also link to those in the show notes when they're available, as long as they're available. They'll be in the shownotes.

To watch my behind the scenes video of *Handcrafted Healing Herbal Oils*, also go to our website [mythicmedicine.love](https://mythicmedicine.com), it'll be at the blog there. And this is me, again, signing in under my username and showing you from the back-end everything that you get when you sign up for the course.

To download the chapter on St. John's-wort, the entire chapter from the book, *Wild Remedies*, by Rosalee de la Foret Lee and Emily Hahn, go to patreon.com/medicinstories, and you do need to be a patron at the two-dollar level to access it. And then you'll have access to a whole backlog of many, many other beautiful offerings, many of them herbal-based, including some recipes, actually, from that book on wild rose, and, I believe, chickweed. Yeah, that's there, too.

Okay, I think that's everything. Thank you for listening. Thank you, thank you, and I will talk to you next time.

(Exit music: acoustic guitar folk song "Wild Eyes" by Mariee Sioux)

[Closing]

[0:58:35]

Amber: Thank you for taking these Medicine Stories in. I hope they inspire you to keep walking the mythic path of your own unfolding self. I love sharing information and will always put any relevant links in the show notes. You can find past episodes, my blog, handmade herbal medicines, and a lot more at MythicMedicine.love. We've got reishi, lion's mane, elderberry, mugwort, yarrow, redwood, body oils, an amazing sleep medicine, heart medicine, earth essences, so much more. More than I can list there. MythicMedicine.love.

While you're there, check out my quiz "[Which Healing Herb is your Spirit Medicine?](#)" It's fun and lighthearted, but the results are really in-depth and designed to bring you into closer alignment with both the medicine you are in need of and the medicine that you already carry that you can bring to others.

If you love this show, please consider supporting my work at Patreon.com/MedicineStories. It is so worth your while. There are dozens and dozens of killer rewards there, and I've been told by many folks that it's the best Patreon out there. We've got e-books, downloadable PDFs, bonus interviews, guided meditations, giveaways, resource guides, links to online learning, and behind-the-scenes stuff and just so much more. The best of it is available at the two-dollar a month level. Thank you.

And please subscribe, in whatever app you use, just click that little subscribe button and review on iTunes. It's so helpful, and if you do that you just may be featured in a listener spotlight in the future.

The music that opens and closes the show is Mariee Sioux. It's from her beautiful song "Wild Eyes." Thank you, Mariee.

And thanks to you all. I look forward to next time!