



Community-Based Herbalism

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Definition of Community-Based Herbalism – An herbalist dedicated to helping maintain the health of their self-defined community through the use of herbs and other tools of the trade.

Community based herbalism is a traditional way of practicing as an herbalist. The term herbalist is presented here as a broad one, where the herbal practitioner is a generalist, involved in many aspects of herbalism. This may include gathering and growing plants, preparing them as medicines, and devising specific formulas for individual clients and community members. The herbalist is an integral part of their community available for their neighbors and extended family and often their pets and animals.

The definition for community is also an inclusive one; being any group of people you offer your knowledge, skills, and attention. This may be a rural, suburban or urban setting; church groups, neighbors, intentional community or any other self-defined group of people whom you consider your 'community'.

Attributes of a Community-Based Herbalist

- 1) Availability
- 2) Accessibility
- 3) Skills
- 4) Education
- 5) Networking

Money Matters-There are a few forms of exchange and barter a community herbalist can employ

- 1) Cash or local-based currency
- 2) Direct barter. Your client gives you something of approximate value for the work you gave them. This can include material goods or services.
- 3) Indirect barter or community exchange. Here you offer services freely and when you have need for help or an item, it is given to you in the knowledge of 'what goes around comes around'.

Other Money Ideas- It is a good idea to initially offer your services as an herbalist for free, though you may want to charge for your medicines.

The reasons for this include:

- ✿ As a novice, you need people to help you learn your skills, hence your first year or so in practice you may want to make yourself freely available
- ✿ The humble factor
- ✿ It allows people of many socioeconomic strata to get to know you
- ✿ It helps keep your responsibility in perspective as you learn your craft
- ✿ It opens the doors for other opportunities of exchange and networking

Letting People know you exist

Offer community service, such as:

- ☞ Free workshops and plant walks at community events
- ☞ Help or initiate an 'alternative' first aid station at craft and music festivals as well as other community events
- ☞ Work through a local health food store
- ☞ Work with children, teens and the elderly
- ☞ Offer free consultations
- ☞ Join local groups supporting health care choices
- ☞ Write articles for local newspapers
- ☞ Develop a relationship with other local practitioners
- ☞ Develop a rapport with people who make herbal suggestions and sales, such as those working in health food stores and co-ops. Be available to answer their herb-related questions
- ☞ Offer phone times when people can call you up and ask herb and health related questions
- ☞ Radio talk shows – offer a program or arrange to be interviewed as a guest speaker
- ☞ Have a booth at your local farmers market

Advertise

- ☞ Post flyers in local co-ops, herb and health food stores
- ☞ Hang up a creative sign
- ☞ Advertise in alternative newspapers and magazines
- ☞ Direct contact – let people know what you know
- ☞ Have an interesting, informative business card and/or brochure
- ☞ Try to interject the occasional herb-related comment in your daily conversations with people you may not know well
- ☞ Sell products locally and make sure your name, address, and phone number are clearly readable so that people can contact you if they have any questions about your products
- ☞ After receiving permission, spend time near the herb section of natural food or herb stores offering assistance to anyone with an herb question or having an obviously puzzled time finding something
- ☞ Host a website with pertinent and interesting information

Developing a Practice

- ☞ Start small
- ☞ Be affordable
- ☞ Initially work with family, friends and pets
- ☞ Be honest about your skill level
- ☞ Suggest herbal medicines that you have on hand or are easily procurable
- ☞ Be willing to expand your knowledge base by doing research and networking
- ☞ Have an excellent reference library
- ☞ Find practitioners who are willing to help you with specific cases
- ☞ Practice confidentiality skills

Other Considerations:

- 1) Punctuality
- 2) Personal appearances
- 3) Body language
- 4) Listening skills
- 5) Good counseling abilities
- 6) Develop good diagnostic skills

Being an herbal resource for you community

- 1) Work with local pharmacists, since increasingly more people are asking them questions about herbs and herbal products
- 2) Network with other practitioners who may also come into contact with herb-related questions such as Nurses, Midwives, Acupuncturists, Chiropractors, Doctors, Massage therapists, and other health-care workers
- 3) Volunteer time or work with health food stores who are swamped with herb questions daily

Basic aspects of practicing as a Community Herbalist

- 1) **Trust and Confidentiality-** People often need to reveal touchy subjects in their discussions of their health concerns. Confidentiality is a major issue in helping them to develop a trust in you. As a community herbalist you may often share friends and acquaintances with your clients and hence it is important that you hold these confidences private. You may want to begin your consultations by letting a client know that you can be trusted in this way.
- 2) **Service-** One of the true modes of health care is one of service. Not only is service welcomed by those in need, but it is also a way to help appease the herbalist's mind when questions linger. Service encompasses many of the ways that herbalists may be helpful. It is being of service to your clients, the plants, the earthly community, and importantly, to yourself. Being of service does not necessarily mean being available 24 hours a day, since it is important to nourish yourself as well. Service may mean going out of your way when possible, and participating in ways that bring your community to greater health.

Service, as well as being a community-based herbalist, is a calling. This often means following your instincts as well as knowledge. This is a way of life and one that can help transform the global community in many more ways than just providing herbal medicine.

Key Ideas

- ♦ Community
- ♦ Competency
- ♦ Cooperation
- ♦ Ethics
- ♦ Integration
- ♦ Integrity
- ♦ Intention
- ♦ Legalities
- ♦ Mentorship
- ♦ Reliability
- ♦ Responsibility
- ♦ Service