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Witchcraft Medicine: Healing Arts, Shamanic Practices, and Forbidden Plants

By Claudia Müller-Ebeling, Christian Rätsch, Wolf-Dieter Storl Ph.D.



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An in-depth investigation of traditional European folk medicine and the healing arts of witches

- Explores the outlawed “alternative” medicine of witches suppressed by the state and the Church and how these plants can be used today
- Reveals that female shamanic medicine can be found in cultures all over the world
- Illustrated with color and black-and-white art reproductions dating back to the 16th century

Witch medicine is wild medicine. It does more than make one healthy, it creates lust and knowledge, ecstasy and mythological insight. In *Witchcraft Medicine* the authors take the reader on a journey that examines the women who mix the potions and become the healers; the legacy of Hecate; the demonization of nature’s healing powers and sensuousness; the sorceress as shaman; and the plants associated with witches and devils. They explore important seasonal festivals and the plants associated with them, such as wolf’s claw and calendula as herbs of the solstice and alder as an herb of the time of the dead--Samhain or Halloween. They also look at the history of forbidden medicine from the Inquisition to current drug laws, with an eye toward how the sacred plants of our forebears can be used once again.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

"Witchcraft medicine is more than factual knowledge of medicinal herbs, poisonous plants, psychedelic compounds.... It is the ability to converse with the animal and plant spirits and to forge friendships." So begins this manual on traditional European folk medicine, first published in German in 1998. The work of four writers including fluid translator Lee, this volume is not the pagan whirlwind concoction of recipes and how-to instructions that it might seem at first. It is instead a highly desirable reference work for people of many stripes: cultural anthropologists, gardeners, historians, ethno-botanists, mythologists and those broadly interested in Wicca. Tracing human relations with plants (and animals to a lesser degree) back to the Stone Age, the book is deeply thorough and rests on interesting scholarship. It leaves no myth unexamined. The first six chapters delve into the evolution of the witch, usually a woman, who became familiar with the wild world that lay on the far side of the hedgerow. Chapter Seven examines images of witches, especially in art history, often counterbalanced against images of Mary. The final chapter on "Forbidden Medicine" (coca, poppy, mescaline, etc.) disappoints because its overt, unbalanced polemical tone agitating for legalization veers too much from scholarship toward politics. Copious illustrations, quotations, plant lists and profiles make this work even more interesting. The critical index (not seen by PW) should cap this 90% excellent effort.

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Review

"A well-researched and interesting read." (*Vision Magazine*, February 2004)

"Tracing human relations with plants back to the Stone Age, the book is deeply thorough and rests on interesting scholarship." (*Publishers Weekly*, October 2003)

"It is essential reading for anyone interested in the folklore and magical beliefs associated with flowers, herbs and trees." (*The Cauldron*, February 2004)

"*Witchcraft Medicine* blends history with practical applications of plant healing and shamanic practices." (*The Midwest Book Review*, June 2004)

"*Witchcraft Medicine* is a work of brilliant and passionate scholarship, fabulously illustrated, that recovers the lost knowledge of the European shamanic tradition. It is both a guide and an enthusiastic ode to the visionary edge of the botanical realm." (*Daniel Pinchbeck, author of Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contempo*)

"*Witchcraft Medicine* is a solid book and an essential research tool for anyone interested in European folk traditions, magic, alchemy, or herbalism." (*Mark Stavish, Institute for Hermetic Studies*, April 2006)

"This is a fascinating work of great importance that is incredibly well researched and documented. And brave. From the first impassioned paragraph to the last words, I was spellbound. Anyone interested in medicine, herbalism, the healing arts, and spiritual phenomena will find this book thought provoking and empowering." (*Rosemary Gladstar, president of United Plant Savers and author of Herbal Healing for Women*)

From the Back Cover
WITCHCRAFT / SHAMANISM

“*Witchcraft Medicine* is a work of brilliant and passionate scholarship, fabulously illustrated, that recovers the lost knowledge of the European shamanic tradition. It is both a guide and an enthusiastic ode to the visionary edge of the botanical realm.”

--Daniel Pinchbeck, author of *Breaking Open the Head: A Psychedelic Journey into the Heart of Contemporary Shamanism*

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--Rosemary Gladstar, president of United Plant Savers and author of *Herbal Healing for Women*

Witch medicine is wild medicine. It does more than make one healthy; it encourages knowledge and engenders ecstasy and mythological insight. In *Witchcraft Medicine* the authors take the reader on a journey that examines the women from centuries past who mixed the potions and became the healers. As humans left the “thorny brush” and settled into agrarian societies, elements of nature (including human nature) became identified as wild and destructive, and the culture of the witch was born. Through study of ancient and medieval texts and the artwork of the early Renaissance, the authors explore the demonization of nature’s healing powers and sensuousness, the legacy of Hecate, the sorceress as shaman, and the plants associated with witches. They describe important seasonal festivals and the plants used in these celebrations and rituals. They also look at the history of forbidden medicine from the Inquisition to current drug laws, with an eye toward how sacred plants of witchcraft can be used once again.

CLAUDIA MÜLLER-EBELING, PH.D., art historian and anthropologist, is the coauthor of *Shamanism and Tantra in the Himalayas* and was editor in chief of *Dao*, a magazine about the health and longevity practices of the Far East. She lives in Hamburg, Germany. CHRISTIAN RÄTSCH, PH.D., is a world-renowned anthropologist and ethnopharmacologist who specializes in the shamanic uses of plants. The author of *Marijuana Medicine* and coauthor of *Plants of the Gods*, he lives in Hamburg, Germany. WOLF-DIETER STORL, PH.D., is a cultural anthropologist and ethnobotanist who has taught at Kent State University, as well as in Vienna, Berne, and Benares. He lives in Allgäu, Germany, and is the author of *Culture and Horticulture: A Philosophy of Gardening*.

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