

Grow Your Own Drugs

by James Wong

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Reviewed by Trenna Cormack

If your experience of plant medicine doesn't extend much beyond peppermint tea or echinacea, then this book is a fun and highly informative place to start. It has a beautiful, clear layout and is lavishly illustrated with hundreds of full-colour photographs.

The author seeks to repair the disconnection between our culture and the botanical world. Many of us have forgotten that, for as long as we have existed, humans have relied on plants and trees, not only for food but for much more, such as building materials, recreation and medicine. Where the latter is concerned, this book is an empowering, colourful and accessible entry point for anyone who wants to make their own remedies or is simply curious about plant-based healing.

This book concentrates on minor ailments – the author is transparent about this and also gives a few warnings and disclaimers. He covers the whole process from finding ingredients (including growing them on the windowsill or in the garden, foraging and where to find the items best sourced from shops), to identifying which ones help with which ailments, to making recipes for all manner of treatments – drinks, decoctions, scrubs, syrups, tonics, gels and more.

The book is divided into three main sections: Getting Started, Remedies, Top 100 Plants, followed by a short resources section and a useful index. As the name suggests, Getting Started provides the information a beginner needs, such as what other (minimal) kit is needed to get underway, the 'Top 10 Superstar' herbs to grow or use, how to harvest and forage for plants and how to dry them. It also explains the different delivery methods – teas, decoctions, tinctures, infused oils, salves and balms, creams and lotions, gels, honeys, syrups and lozenges, vinegars, poultices and compresses.

The next section breaks down the remedies into different areas – digestive disorders, skin problems, issues specific to women and children, aches and pains, beauty, mind and general 'under the weather'. Within each type of condition there are several recipes; for example, the aches and pains section gives recipes to help with water retention (plantain tea), varicose veins (horse chestnut gel), aching muscles (chilli plasters) and arthritis (chilli and peppermint salve). Each recipe comes with an explanation of how/why it works and how to use and store what you've made.

The third section describes the author's top 100 medicinal fruits, vegetables, trees, shrubs, roots and herbs. He describes their properties, how to use them and how to grow them or where to find them. Most can be grown in your back garden; some probably already are.

Grow Your Own Drugs is enjoyable to read and worth referring to again and again. I finished it feeling excited and inspired to have a go at making my own remedies, as well as profoundly grateful for Nature's abundance and the many properties of the plants that surround us.

Trenna Cormack is a freelance editor with an interest in the environment, society and spirit. Her book *Be The Change: Action and reflection from people transforming our world* is reviewed in issue 77.

Grow Your Own Drugs is a British television documentary series, first broadcast on BBC Two, exploring the many remedies which can be provided by plants. James Wong, an ethnobotanist, presents the series and takes the view that people should start making their own remedies in order to save money and feel healthier plus providing simple remedies to everyday ailments. Wong tries out his remedies on members of the public in order to demonstrate the beneficial effects of natural remedies, adding Grow Your Own Drugs is filled with (mostly) easy to make recipes--all from natural ingredients that are readily available. The book is also beautiful to look through, making it more likely you will feel motivated to actually try many of the recipes. The book covers beauty recipes, and recipes to make you feel better or cure what ails you. I have been waiting for this book to be available in the States, as a friend from the UK had been raving about it. After spending a few hours going through the book, I HAD to have it! The Grow Your Own Drugs Book by James Wong is of Excellent quality. The hard cover binder is very sturdy, the pages are thick, brilliantly colored and in quality and the recipes are wonderful! Cures for the most common ailments to beauty treatments.