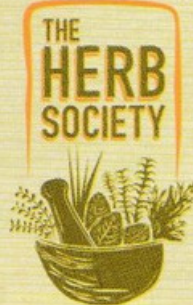


Herbs

THE JOURNAL OF THE HERB SOCIETY

43.3 Autumn 2018 - In this issue:

- Plant Dyes Part 2
 - Elizabeth Blackwell – a herbal warrior
 - Adding spice to a healthy life
 - Letting plants take the lead
 - Lifetime learning
- Plus regulars and more...



Letting plants take the lead

Fay Johnstone describes how she discovered that plants were the best teachers, showing her how to grow herbs from the heart.

After the first year of running our organic flower and herb farm in Nova Scotia, it became apparent that all the gardening books, magazines and herbal courses that I had devoured for years would only take me so far. There were much bigger teachers on the scene, gentle and generous and operating on a whole new dimension, and certainly playing by their own rules.

In 2009, my partner and I took the plunge and purchased an unkempt 35-acre-homestead in



Photo: Fay Johnstone

rural Nova Scotia with a view to doing – well we weren't entirely sure what. We had a desire for green space, fresh air and a place to grow. We ran Oliver Farm for five years producing organic fresh-cut flowers, herbs, garlic, asparagus and herbal health products.

The short spring was spent sowing as much as we could fit in to the house and our small greenhouse. This was followed by long, hot summer days that were spent tending to the plants. We were at the mercy of the seasons, maritime weather and wild beasts.

Textbook-style planting went out of the window when the full growing season really took off. In a rush to get transplants into the ground to avoid them becoming rootbound, we had to plant them in any available land that was prepared for planting. Many plants were not located in conditions ideal for their growing but at least they got in the ground. For many years the land had been rough pasture, so we weren't dealing with pretty raised beds and fertile soil. Nothing had been cultivated for years.

And let's just talk about rows for a moment. Growers and producers like to place plants in neat rows, making weeding, watering and harvesting so much easier. It turns out that plants don't really like growing in rows. If you have a garden then you will know this already. There are no straight lines in nature. Plants like to grow in the way that suits their needs, rather than ours.

It soon became apparent that the plants were leading the dance so it was up to us to tune in, connect to the land, step into the rhythm with the elements and befriend these green beings.

Spirit of nature

I first noticed that the spirit of nature had touched me when I realised I was singing. I was singing out loud in the fields, singing while planting, singing while harvesting, singing to the trees while walking the dog, singing to the sun as it set. You get the picture: I was singing my heart out to these wonderful plants every day. Each plant had a song, the salvias for example one year were full of sadness, it was sorrowful harvesting those flowers and it took forever, I would often get weepy. Snapdragons on the other

hand were always jolly and such a delight. Where did these songs come from? My heart.

We soon learnt that plants that were planted in what our minds determined as 'suitable' locations, did not thrive. Take nettles for example. We planted them in a nice shady damp spot and they simply refused to grow. So the following year, we simply asked them where they would like to be and left them to their own devices. They thrived.

We started feeling our way from the heart, rather than thinking our way using our heads. Sowing seed and transplanting the seedlings in this way we had more success, even though logically some things often did not make sense.

It was a subtle shift in attitude from one that operates from a directive and superior point of view towards an equal and creative partnership with all that was green and growing around us.

The result was a much more authentic and holistic way of being on the farm with the plants. Despite the hard grind, most of all the over-riding feeling was one of joy and bliss, getting to interact with these incredible beings every day. Plants would appear to me in dreams with messages and asking for attention (mostly watering). And I started to communicate with the plants to make flower essences and herbal tinctures, guided by their direction. My relationship with nature and the plants that grew flowed naturally since I was living and breathing plants. The same will be true for any of you who are truly immersed in your gardens and tuned into the feeling of the plants that grow there.

I no longer run the farm but I still let plants take the lead and I encourage you to do the same. The green kingdom has much to share, beyond its physical beauty and properties. I truly believe that it's time for their wisdom to come to light through willing and open hearts like yours.

Fay Johnstone's first book, *Plants that Speak Souls that Sing*, has recently been published. Further information from Fay's website (www.fayjohnstone.com). In The Herb Society June 2018 e-newsletter Fay wrote an article on how to engerise with the spirit of plants in ten easy steps.

*It turns
out that
plants
don't
really like
growing
in rows*