

Musing from the maker :: July 2019

“Offering sanctuary is a revolutionary act; it expresses love, when others offer scorn or hate. It recognizes humanity, when others deny and seek to debase it. Sanctuary says ‘we’ rather than ‘I’. It is belonging—the building block of community.”

- Diane Kalen-Sukra

Although we may automatically say we feel safe in our homes, can we call it our sanctuary? Is it a place we can let down our barriers and roll on our backs to expose our vulnerabilities? Is it a place to heal and learn to love again?

I think that when we look at it that way we start to ask ourselves more questions than we care to answer. Creating a sanctuary is more than just walls and a roof. It's having spaces that intrigue and inspire, nurture and protect.

How do we get to that space then? I'm so excited to have Jessi Bloom, ecological landscape designer and author, delve into these questions with me. I highly recommend checking out her work further. Because creating your own sanctuary can also help to inspire community, and we need that more now than ever.

In other news, Woodspell Apothecary is finally reopening its shop on July 29! Moving forward, I've decided to keep the shop open for just one week a month to allow me the most time to make meaningful medicine. Also, I live a ways out of town, and consolidating shipping will be so much easier for me. I truly hope this works out for everyone. Feel free to contact me with any questions.

As we reach the peak of high summer, the temperatures here in Michigan are reaching the triple digits and mercury retrograde has hit full force. I had been feeling a bit unbound myself during this high planetary energy phase. Unbound as well as emotional and insecure and a little fearful to be honest. Everything seemed to be coming to a head, until I was sitting in a coffee shop writing this exact column.

Then I looked up and a tiny kitten was pulling herself across the main road on her two front baby paws. I ran out, leaving my laptop and purse and snatched the little nugget up. I could tell her back legs were probably badly injured so I rushed her to my vet.

Although it could've been much worse, just one of her back legs had been broken. But by then I had no choice. This little familiar was coming home with me. I already had two torties at home, and this third little munchkin who decided to try and cross the road at the exact moment that I was working at the coffee shop made it seem that fate had knocked at my door. Suddenly my manic emotions disappeared, and this one pound of love has found a sanctuary of her own. Little Rosalina, Rosie for short, is the newest addition to the Woodspell family.



Notice the tiny little splint on her back leg! We're getting her all healed up.

Environmental (good) news

All of the land in the world suitable for reforestation could capture two-thirds of human-made carbon emissions.

The Crowther Lab of ETH Zurich has published a journal that shows this would be the most effective and accessible option to combat the climate crisis. The study does not include cities or agricultural lands in its results.

There is currently 1.6 billion hectares of land in the world that would suit reforestation, essentially an area the size of the US. The key is to plant these forests in the most optimal locations. The study has cited Russia, the US, Canada, Australia, Brazil, and China as prime locations.

Of course care needs to be taken when taking on a reforestation project. Existing natural ecosystems must be taken into account to determine which trees would best suit the area and not disrupt the fragile web of life already there.

Although this is a huge undertaking, many scientists are suggesting that we focus on "restoration hotspots"; places that are the most cost and space effective areas. These are mostly found in our disappearing rainforests, though anywhere there is an opportunity should be considered.

Take a look at the Crowther Lab [website](#) to find out how many trees could grow in your region and how much carbon they could store. They also are conducting reforestation projects around the globe that you participate in or support.

Climate Action

Plant Smart

These are delicate times that require strategic action. When taking part in a personal, community, or global effort to reforest land, there are a few things to keep in mind.

First, research has shown that diverse forests can hold more carbon than single species plantations. This is because of the diversity of height in the canopy to let in more light. This also increases its ability to attract more animals that act as pollinators to the forest, thereby increasing reproduction and helping forests to grow more quickly.

The age of the forest also matters. More mature forests can store more carbon than younger forests. It takes at least twenty years for a forest to mature.

Types of trees to sequester the most carbon:

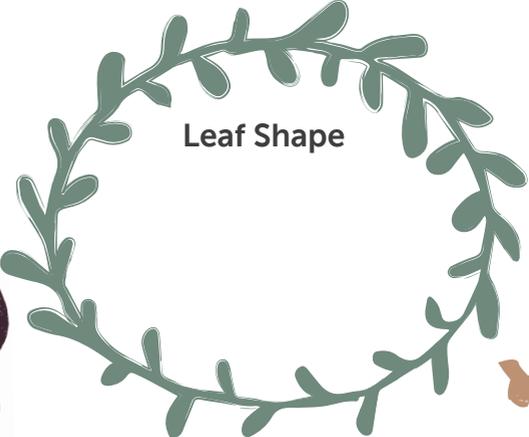
1. Horse Chestnut
2. Black Walnut
3. American Sweetgum
4. Pines (Ponderosa, Red & White)
5. London Plane
6. Oak (Scarlet, Red & Virginia)

Plant Ally of the Month



Plant Name:

Scientific Name:



Leaf Shape



Intuition

Sit quietly with the plant. Take in all of your senses. Describe what you see, smell, feel, and hear.

Go deeper. Sing a song or make an offering to the plant. Sit awhile longer now. Share any messages or feelings you experience with the plant.

Research

Medicinal uses

Preparations (tea, tincture, salve, etc.)

Dosage

Energetics (warm, cool, dry, neutral, etc.)

Creating sacred spaces with functional form

Jessi Bloom is an ecological designer, consultant, author, speaker, and owner of N.W. Bloom. She makes functional gardens beautiful and has been featured in some of the biggest publications including the NY Times, Better Homes & Gardens, and Martha Stewart Living. Find her at www.nwbloom.com.

Can you tell us a bit about your background and how you got into doing what you do?

I have always loved plants, animals and the earth - spent a lot of time as a child in nature and naturally was curious to learn more as I got old enough to direct my own education - going to college for environmental horticulture, wetland science, permaculture, arboriculture and then eventually herbalism and psychology when I became an author as I wanted to learn about why people don't generally value plants and the environment in our culture.

I've been in the horticultural industry for over 20 years. I started my own ecological design/build business because there was no one doing it at the time and I refused to do work that required pesticides or other unethical ways of being in this world.

Do you have a philosophy when it comes to land stewardship and ecological design?

Yes - I believe we need to work with the ecosystems we find ourselves in, rather than fight against them. This means honoring the natural cycles, honoring all of the other beings in the space - if all we do is domesticate the land and make it "ours" to do as we please, we can often miss the opportunities to make it

Where do you look for inspiration when starting a new project?

The land. Every landscape and environment wants to be wild. The question is, how can we get the steward of that land to fully appreciate it and take care of it and honor it to fit their own personal capacity? Often the human will define what they want - and the inspiration could come from their experiences or belief systems, or even pinterest or houzz boards online which have collections of photos that they like.

Do you have any personal rituals that you come back to on a regular basis?

Many - as simple as daily check in meditations to medicine making on certain days. I also have several around the moon cycles, with water, fire and creating intentions. In [Creating Sanctuary](#) I list out several that work for me personally that are easy for anyone to incorporate.

What are a few of your favorite go-to plants that you like to incorporate into your designs?

That's a tough question - kind of like asking who is my favorite child.. they are all great but need to be paired with the correct environment and steward. I like to start with native plants as a foundation or backbone to my palette. This ensures honoring the natural ecology of the site - considering soil type, sun and water availability of course. Then I consider winter use/interest, for us in the PNW seems like forever. From the perspective of introducing new medicines to people, I like to see what they could use and try to incorporate plants suitable for being their personal allies.

Where do you find sanctuary?

I try to find it everywhere I am. It has taken years of practice on an energetic level to create that for myself, especially considering my journey with PTSD. I find the ecological allies, I nurture my own nervous system and have a number of grounding practices to make my experience in the world feel comfortable. Though, there is nothing like being at home where I have created a personal sanctuary - I tend to be an introvert and homebody especially after busy work seasons and being "on" all the time.

What is the NW Bloom Farm and what are your future plans for it?

This endeavor has been evolving over the past 2 years and will serve to help give access to food and medicine - as a nursery, upick and event space. There are many intentions we hold there and one is to focus on people care and trauma healing. We have a long way to go before the complete vision is realized but we are off to a good start. (Find out more about NW Bloom Farm [here](#)).

What gives you hope?

Children.



NW Bloom uses permaculture, ecological design, and sustainable construction to integrate people and land.

Bitters 101

Bitters are the femme fatale of the herbal world. An air of mystery and elusiveness surrounds their edgy aura. They show up wearing many different masks, easing their way around a cocktail bar and medicine cabinet alike. People are drawn in by their seduction with an edge. Yet their identity remains low key; spoken in whispers at speakeasies and conjured up in many a wise woman's apothecary.

Perhaps a reason for their elusiveness is that we live in a world that revolves around sweet and salty, with maybe a touch of sour thrown in. Speak the word "bitter" and you'll be met with upturned noses and scrunched up faces.

"We actually have separate taste receptors for each type of taste. The bitter taste receptors are the most complex and sensitive of the group"

The fascinating world of bitters formulas is much more complex than that. In its most basic sense, a bitters formula is an infusion of herbs containing specific bitter compounds in alcohol. They can contain hints of citrus, floral, sweet, salty, sour, or savory, but with an edge. This gives them a much more interesting dynamic than something that is only sweet or only savory. This is why they aren't solely considered medicine. Just a few drops of bitters are a key ingredient in signature cocktails such as the Manhattan and the Old Fashioned.

The storied past of bitters

The secret seduction of bitters is that our bodies actually crave this misunderstood flavor. For centuries our ancestors incorporated bitter greens into their diet. Traces of bitters have been found in pottery jars from an ancient Egyptian tomb and the Romans were known to have infused bitter herbs in their wine, marking the earliest known records of people using bitters in liquid form.

During the temperance movement of the 19th century, people were adding bitters to poorer spirits to make them taste better. These versatile formulas were even advertised as a "cure-all" during the 1800's until the government intervened.

Modern society has essentially eliminated these options and replaced them with preservative packed sweets. However, once we reintroduce this forgotten flavor, our bodies begin to respond with recognition and remembrance.

A medicine with many masks

One thing that confuses people about bitters is that they see them advertised for different things. Some are marketed as digestive stimulants and others as cocktail additives, when in fact most of these formulas can be used interchangeably. You will notice they have overlapping ingredients with different labels. They are in fact masters of disguise. Let's take a deeper look at the versatility of these sly starlets.

Digestive

Digestive bitters are marketed specifically towards those with stomach complaints. You will find strong bitters such as gentian or lobelia incorporated in these blends. It is recommended that digestive bitters are taken 15 minutes prior to eating a meal to stimulate sluggish digestion. Taking digestive bitters with a meal can help to eliminate cramping, bloating, and indigestion. These are also a great option to keep on hand in case indulgence grabs hold and you give into a few glazed donuts or that chinese buffet.

These formulas can also be specially blended to address other medical concerns. For example, if someone is dealing with anxiety, an herbalist may include bitter herbs such as skullcap, blue vervain, or passionflower which are

also strong anti-anxiety allies. This way, the person receives the bitter benefits as well as the anti-anxiety benefits all in one formula.

Cocktail

These bitters wear a bit of a more flamboyant mask, utilizing more aromatic bitters such as cinnamon, cacao, and orange peel. Bitters that are targeted towards the concoctress are meant to add another dimension to an otherwise sweet or savory cocktail. Angostura bitters, which were originally created in 1824, are the classic example of a traditional cocktail bitters formula. Cocktail bitters are meant to give depth to the drink and enhance other flavors while adding a tasty punch themselves. The kicker is that you also get the added digestive benefits of their ingredients.



Goldenrod is a late summer bitter that is known for its use in allergy relief and urinary tract infections, but is also a delightfully warming bitter herb that can be used in a blend to add a pungent salty note.

Alcohol & caffeine alternative

The final mask a bitters formula can wear is that of an alcohol or caffeine alternative. There are many reasons why someone may choose not to drink either of these beverages, but whatever the reason, bitters can spice up a mocktail or hot chocolate to make you feel like you're still a part of the party. A main reason why people drink is to socialize and it can be awkward to be the "party pooper" who is in the corner not drinking. But bitters can be a great option, even just to add to tonic water or cup of tea to join in the fun.

Another reason people drink is to relieve stress. However, you can even find bitters that incorporate stress-relieving herbs to gain the other benefit that alcohol promises. Bitter herbs such as lavender, skullcap, blue vervain, passionflower, and hops can all be used in a bitters blend to both stimulate digestion, keep you away from alcohol, and also relax the nervous system.

As a side note, although most traditional bitters do contain alcohol, they are used in such minuscule amounts that they don't cause alcohol-related side effects. If avoiding alcohol all together, you can find bitters infused in glycerin instead.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have caffeine. If you're using bitters as a substitute, you can incorporate energizing bitter herbs such as ginseng, angelica, cayenne, or nutmeg to get a good start to the day.

The science behind the magic of bitters

Taste is one of our most powerful senses. It can change our mind and

mood on a dime. We actually have separate taste receptors for each type of taste. The bitter taste receptors are the most complex and sensitive of the group as they rely on more than 30 genes to help determine their shape, whereas the others only use three or four. Once stimulated, they elicit an aversion response as most poisonous plants taste rather bitter. This acts as a warning signal for our body and in turn causes us to consume less to quickly get the juices flowing through the digestive system. Bitters essentially manipulate this response to help the digestive system break down food and detoxify itself.

The liver is also kicked into gear by these amazing herbs. Once stimulated, it increases its secretion and production of bile, thereby eliminating more waste from the bloodstream. This process helps with a whole slew of problems caused by liver waste backup such as acne, allergies, pain, fatigue, chronic headaches, and skin inflammation.

How to use bitters in a cocktail or mocktail

So what is the best way to incorporate bitters into a signature drink? This is more of an art than a science and suggests a lot of play and experimentation. A great starting point is to think of a liquor, juice, other mixer, or syrup that you want to base your drink around. Then think of what other ingredients you can add to create depth and balance and choose a bitters formula that will add a missing flavor such as salty, savory, sweet, spicy, etc. Try adding bitters to wine, mead, tea, sparkling water with citrus and fresh herbs, or create your own concoction.

Other fun additives to mix with bitters in cocktails or mocktails are flower essences, shrubs, hydrosols, fresh fruit, homemade syrups, infused sugars and

salts, and edible flower ice cubes. The possibilities are limitless and are sure to impress friends and family.

Traditional bitter herbs

Dandelion root

Perhaps our most abundant bitter herb, dandelion is also highly nutritious from root to leaf to flower. Besides its long list of health benefits including lowering blood pressure, reducing cholesterol, fighting inflammation, regulating blood sugar, and aiding in weight loss, dandelion is highly sought after for the prebiotic found in its root called inulin. Though best extracted in water as a tea, dandelion root can also be extracted in a low proof alcohol for a bitters blend.

Gentian

The root of this herb is hailed as one of the strongest bitters used traditionally to improve digestion. Several species of the genus *Gentiana* are used in herbal medicine today. It can help to fight inflammation, support the nervous system, boost endurance, and contribute to heart health. As a digestive aid though, we treasure its active compounds gentiopicroside and amarogentin. These bitter compounds bind to the bitter taste receptors in the mouth to get the juices flowing.

Burdock

You've certainly seen the mammoth leaves of burdock growing in abandoned fields, along roads, and maybe even in your backyard. What many see as a weed, herbalists use as a potent medicine. It can help to purify the blood, strengthen the lymphatic system, heal the skin, defend against diabetes, improve arthritis, and even fight cancer. For a bitters blend, burdock provides a soothing demulcency to soften other main bitter compounds,

though it can stand on its own as well. Its long chains of sugars and starches help to feed beneficial bacteria in the gut.

Citrus

Plant person or not, everyone knows the sour taste of citrus. The ability of citrus peels to curb appetite and promote weight loss due to their mildly stimulating alkaloids makes it a useful component in a bitters blend. The warming quality of the peel also helps to balance the cooler nature of most bitters as well.

Yarrow

You will find this herbal treasure in every herablist's cabinet as well as in fields across North America in early to mid summer. For centuries this herb has been used for everything from prophetic dreams and clairvoyance to treating fevers and poor circulation. The flowers and leaves are prized for their bitter lactones and tannins that help make yarrow a centerpiece in many bitter blends. Although it is fairly bitter, yarrow has an interesting taste that combines pine, cedar and sour apple.



Many of our bitters grow wild too! You can find lemon balm, bee balm, pine, and goldenrod as pictured above all across the country.

A breakdown of a few classic bitter recipes

Dark 'N Stormy



[Recipe](#)

This well-rounded cocktail includes rum, ginger beer, lime, and bitters. The spiciness of the ginger beer offsets the kick of the rum and the citrusy addition of the lime adds another level of complexity. Bitters in this cocktail help to tie all of the flavors together. Be sure to buy craft ginger beer when experimenting with this recipe!

Cocktail Tip

Whether a mixed drink is **shaken** or **stirred** makes a difference. Citrus drinks (daquiri, margarita, piña colada) require aeration and texture to allow the citrus to bind to the other elements and are therefore shaken. Boozy drinks (Manhattan, martini, gimlets) are stirred to give the drink a silky perfectly diluted taste that provides clarity and simplicity

Cardamom Rose Gin & Tonic



[Recipe](#)

An aromatic take on this classic cocktail flaunts homemade rose syrup, gin, lemon juice, grapefruit, bitters, and lemon lime sparkling water. The tart bitterness of the grapefruit balances out the sweetness of the rose syrup. Here, bitters can be used to accent the citrus, sweet, or tart tastes.

Spiced Apple Old Fashioned



[Recipe](#)

The thought of sipping on this twist of the classic old fashioned warms the belly. Calling on cinnamon bitters to add a bit of spice, apple syrup and bourbon are thrown into the mix as well for balance. Add a squeeze of lemon juice and an apple chip and you're cozy as can be.

Maple Meyer Lemon Whiskey Sour



[Recipe](#)

This modern whiskey sour is a delight to the taste buds. Bitter meyer lemons are mixed in with the sweetness of maple syrup, a pinch of salt, classic bitters, and even powdered egg whites. If you've never heard of using egg whites in cocktails, be assured they add a thick silky texture to the mix. What about the health risk you ask? Both the citrus and the alcohol included in drinks with egg whites act as sterilizers. Also always be sure to get eggs from a reputable source.

To best get a feel for how bitters may affect your drink, start with just bitters and soda water. Then try adding different elements separately such as lemon, an acid, or simple syrups, sugars, to see how each are enhanced by the bitters.

Elderflower Smash



[Recipe](#)

An essential summertime cocktail, this elderflower smash has beautiful aromatic notes from the mint, accented by your choice of bitters, gin, lemon and St. Germain Elderflower Liqueur. If you're more of a forager, you can make your own elderflower liqueur by infusing fresh elderflowers in vodka with your choice of citrus and sugar. Store for a month and strain.

Sumac summer punch

Recipe by Miss Wondersmith. Find her website at www.thewondersmith.com or on IG @misswondersmith

Enjoy this high summer punch with cooling herbs and natural sources of electrolytes. This is a great recipe to make in batches and take on the go for your next hike, camping trip, forage, or day on the town. This ruby red pleaser is also sure to wow your guests at your next get together. Try adding your own flair by experimenting with some of the cocktail ideas in the previous article.



Ingredients

- 1/4 c. dried nettle
- 1/3 c. dried hibiscus flowers
- 1/4 c. wild rose petals, dried (or 1/2 c. fresh)
- 1/4 c. wild mallow, dried (or 1/2 c. fresh)
- 1 (3") section fresh ginger, thinly sliced
- 1/3 c. dried sumac, or one ripe seedhead broken up into small chunks
- 2 c. boiling water
- juice from 1 lemon
- 2 c. coconut water
- 1/4 tsp. Himalayan sea salt
- pinch baking soda
- 1/8- 1/4 c. honey, to taste

Directions

1. Put the dried nettle, hibiscus, ginger, rose petals, and mallow leaves into a heat-proof container and pour the boiling water over the top. Let steep until cooled to being warm but not hot, then pour the whole mixture over the sumac. (Sumac will become bitter if steeped in hot water, but the rest require hot water to extract all of their goodness.)
2. Let the mixture sit for half an hour to an hour, then strain through a very sieve to remove plant material, then strain again through a coffee filter to remove any small sumac hairs.
3. Add the rest of the ingredients and mix well to dissolve.
4. Serve chilled over ice. Will last up to 4 days in the fridge.

Spotlight on Sumac

Staghorn sumac's red "berry" clusters (actually drupes) are full of a tangy flavor and lots of Vitamin C. The Native Americans would make a tart refreshing beverage out of it (similar to lemonade), as well as use it as a treatment for coughs and sore throats. (Staghorn Sumac is not at all similar to Poison Sumac, by the way. Poison Sumac grows in wet, swampy areas and has white berries and as the part we want are the red berries, you'll easily be able to tell the difference.) Sumacs are ready to harvest when they are red and pass the taste test: Pinch the cluster with your fingers. It should be slightly sticky. Then lick your fingers and you will taste the tartness, indicating it is ready for harvest. Sumac is also just slightly astringent, helping your body to tighten around the moisture it does have, to hold it in and preserve it.