

THE MEDICINE WHEEL GARDEN

Creating Sacred Space
for Healing, Celebration,
and Tranquillity



E. BARRIE KAVASCH
AUTHOR OF AMERICAN INDIAN HEALING ARTS

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GROWING NATIVE HERBS AND WILDFLOWERS FOR HEALING, CONSERVATION, AND BEAUTY

ANATOMY OF A PAPERBACK



The American Indian medicine wheel was an ancient way of creating sacred space and calling forth the healing energies of nature. Now, drawing on a lifetime of study with native healers, herbalist and ethnobotanist E. Barrie Kavasch offers a step-by-step guide to bringing this beautiful tradition into your own life—from vibrantly colorful outdoor circle designs to miniature dish, windowsill, or home altar adaptations. Inside you'll find:

- Planting guides for every zone, from desert Southwest to northern woodlands
- A beautifully illustrated encyclopedia of 50 key healing herbs, including propagation needs, traditional and modern uses, and cautions
- Easy-to-follow herbal recipes, from teas and tonics to skin creams and soaps—plus delicious healing foods
- Ideas for herbal crafts and ceremonial objects, including smudge sticks, wind horses, prayer ties, and spirit shields
- Seasonal rituals to bless your garden and your friends, and much more

Practical, beautiful, and inspiring, *The Medicine Wheel Garden* leads us on a powerful journey to rediscovering the sacred in everyday life as we cultivate our gardens...and our souls.

"There is food for the body and food for the spirit. Barrie Kavasch offers both."
—Kenneth Little Hawk, Micmac-Mohawk storyteller and musician

"An amazing resource. Barrie Kavasch's years of experience and wisdom inform every page, and practical advice abounds. Sure to be an inspiration to anyone who loves working the soil and looks to nature to soothe the body and soul."
—Peg Streep, author of *Spiritual Gardening*

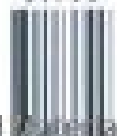
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CHAPTER NINE

**Healing Herbs from
Angelica to Yucca
Fifty Key Plants,
with Illustrations and Profiles**



The earth does not belong to us; we belong to the earth, and we have a sacred duty to protect her and return thanks for the gifts of life.

—Oren Lyons, Onondaga faith keeper

for the winter.

Companions: American ginger grows well with maidenhair fern, goldenseal, goldthread, hepatica, and Indian turnip, and underneath bayberry and elderberry shrubs.

AMERICAN GINSENG

Panax quinquefolitis

Araliaceae (ginseng family)

The name *ginseng*, of Chinese origin, means “essence of earth in the form of a man,” referring to the almost humanlike shape of this plant’s taproot. Ginseng has been a traditional Chinese tonic medicine for more than two thousand years. The genus name *Panax* comes from the Greek *pan* (all) and *akos* (ills)—when ginseng was formally named in 1753, it was considered to be a plant that cured all ills. Ginseng leaves, carried in whorls, are toothed and usually palmate, cut like the fingers on a hand—*quinquefolius* simply means “with five leaves,” the hallmark of these herbs.

The *Panax* genus has some six species of herbs with thick roots and simple stems, native to North America and East Asia. American ginseng grows about one to two feet tall and bears small clusters of up to forty whitish flowers in late spring. Bright red berries, each with two or three whitish seeds inside, cluster above the leaves in fall. Our other native species, dwarf ginseng, *Ptrifolius*, has roots that are more globelike. Both these native perennials are found in rich eastern woodlands, especially mountainous regions from Nova Scotia south to Georgia and west to Indiana, Iowa, Oklahoma, and Minnesota.

Some of the earliest botanical exports from North America were the carrotlike taproots of wild American ginseng, which were shipped to China in the early 1700s. French Jesuit missionaries working among the Iroquois Indians north of Montreal recognized the native species as similar to the highly valued Chinese ginseng.



Traditional uses: Native Americans used both native ginseng species extensively throughout their range. They stewed the whole plant and drank the water to treat colic, indigestion, rheumatism, and other skin and circulatory problems. The flowers and later seeds were chewed to treat breathing difficulties. The roots were the most important part for healing; they were chewed or otherwise used in many medicinal and tonic applications.

To treat sore eyes in a two-year-old child (ulcerated cornea): Slightly steep one small root in one cup of water. Bottle it. Wash eyes every hour with a clean rag, squeezing drops into the eye. Keep up treatment after cure for two months.

—Herb Johnson, Seneca
herbalist, Tonawanda Reserve,
1912

Lacrosse medicine. When a rival is trying to get the ball, the captain shouts “djitgaye” and that makes the other lose the ball for sure. A decoction [of dwarf ginseng roots] is rubbed on the arms and legs [before the lacrosse game.]

—Peter John, Onondaga
herbalist, Six Nations Reserve,

Modern uses: Another ginseng species highly valued in health care is the Chinese or Korean Ginseng, *P. ginseng*, noted for its warming properties. It is yang (hot) in nature and used by people who are yin (cool). The Chinese favor the American ginseng because it is a yin tonic for those who are yang in nature. Tien chi ginseng, *P. notoginseng*, which grows in southern China, is traditionally used to lower blood pressure and reduce cholesterol levels. Siberian ginseng, *Eleutherococcus senticosus*, is a close botanical cousin valuable in helping people adapt to stress. It also strengthens the immune system.

Today ginseng is a multibillion-dollar business, and the number of ginseng growers is continually increasing. The ginsengs are considered *adaptogenic*, helping to normalize body functions by enabling them to utilize other substances more efficiently, and also helping to eliminate toxic substances from the body. Ginseng is considered a whole-body tonic. It tones the organs and enhances their functions, while helping to strengthen all of the body's systems.

Cautions: Large doses of ginseng are said to raise blood pressure. This tonic should be used with caution and respect. Many people are wolfing down ginseng extracts, teas, roots, and tonics for their many benefits and energy boosts. Some care must be exercised not to overdo a good thing.

Growth needs and propagation: Ginseng has very special growth needs and profits from being pampered. Plants prefer a humus-rich, well-drained, loamy soil and partial shade. Principally a woodland crop, they thrive in dappled shade and with a winter mulch. The seeds need a good four months of cold stratification to germinate, and they require five to seven years to produce mature plants. It is best to start with young plants and cluster them in a cool, rich setting in the medicine wheel garden.

Companions: Ginseng grows beneath elderberry, bayberry hellebore, or angelica. It will also be a companion to hepatica, pennyroyal, bloodroot, strawberry, and bearberry in the garden.

AMERICAN HELLEBORE

Veratrum viride

Liliaceae (lily family)

These ancient medicinal plants take their genus name, *Veratrum*, from the Latin word for "hellebore." The species name, *viride*, means "green." A stout perennial plant of moist, rich bottomlands that can grow seven feet tall, American hellebore is also known as white hellebore, Indian poke, itchweed, and devil's tobacco.

There are about forty-five species of *Veratrum* native to North America, Europe, and Asia. All favor wet soil. Most are cultivated for specialty gardens and have important medicinal qualities. *V. californicum* is the strikingly attractive corn lily