

Lancing the herbal Nature Wisdom summer retreats in France
with Matthew Wood and Julia Graves

I had known for a long time that Matt had been dreaming of teaching advanced classes in Europe, and of having a school which teaches herbalism the way he sees it – as vibrant, alive, and energy-based. Still, when he called me to say he wanted me to co-teach and host this course at the farm I had just bought in France, I felt overwhelmed. With only six months left to make it all happen and a fallen down building, it all seemed impossible for the summer of 2010. But Matt ignored whatever I had to say, and in the sleepless full moon night of New Years Eve, I became filled with a vision of offering not just any herbal course, but to start a tradition of an herbal summer school to train planetary herbalists – herbalists who are fluent in all major planetary herbal systems (such as Western traditional herbalism, Ayurveda, Chinese Medicine, and the herbalism of the Native American Indians), and are trained to practice herbal medicine based on an energetic model. This being the invocation, we set about.

While the work of renovating the building and getting things ready was one gigantic nightmare, the course itself proved to be incredible. To my amazement, according to the invocation the participants arrived from around the world, coming from all continents including Australia. To everyone's mirth they found “O, you also know so-and-so?” and “What? You graduated from my same high school?” Others looked like twins and I thought sometimes that this was the course of herbalists finding their planetary herbal soul mate. Even with the best of intention and screening, we could not have picked a more coherent, synergistic group than this group of “accidental” sign-ups.

We picked up people in Paris at the airport and took them to Carnac, a 6000 year old 4 km long field of standing menhirs that is magic. The embodiment of “humans and nature wisdom” on earth, the students were in awe of the palpable cosmic energy in this place, and some young Americans in tears over the discovery that even as whites (that is, non-natives), we do have our very real native roots, and not just the *people of colour*.

Having been captivated by the beauty of the farm and seduced to buy it, we were grateful to know that the others loved it, too. At the farm, people exclaimed “how beautiful a place!” and “what an incredible energy!” Matt called this remote area in rural France with its rolling hills and lush forests “the most beautiful area I've taught in” and the farm “even unfinished the most beautiful building I have ever taught in”. Despite the rustic setup, everyone settled in fast and the magic of the course continued to unfold. For Matt and I it was an incredible joy to teach such an enthused group of well trained herbalists, being able to lecture at an advanced level. To my surprise, even the beginners were able to follow and learn a lot. A rather ungrounded budding herbalist and reiki practitioner from New York City told me two weeks ago that the entire class was “despite the very spiritual topics so well grounded” that it helped her become a much more grounded person in her whole life.

Changing between lectures and herb walks, plant study, clinic practice and guest speakers, the classroom time proved to be rich, fun, and profoundly educational for everyone including us teachers. One of the highlights of the course was Edwin and Jinpa's presentation on African and Caribbean herbalism and Libby Rupp's presentation on treating autism with herbs (herbsforautism.com). Jinpa went to his native Haiti to work at the Naturopathic Earth Quake Victim Relief Clinic right afterwards, and said that the course had helped advance his skills palpably also for such an emergency situation (visit the clinic's web site at haiti.citronica.com).

After the dust had settled over Peyrissaguet behind the leaving tour bus, Matt and I stood there, waving, when the realization hit us “O my god, it really happened! We really did train planetary herbalists, planet-wide!”

Matt and I had conceptualized the course as a two year event, teaching two weeks in two consecutive summers. Half way through the first course we realized that we had so much to teach, that it would have to become three years. So next summer, we will be teaching module two, which covers each of the body's organ systems. We will study the most useful herbs for each tissue state (hot, cold, dry, boggy etc.) for each organ along with their main symptoms. The highlight will be a trip to the cave of Lascaux to immerse ourselves in the 17000 year old prehistoric shamanistic paintings. To facilitate students who did not attend module one, we are offering a 2 1/2 day pre-course intensive covering pulse, face, and tongue diagnosis and other skills necessary to follow in module two. In the summer of 2012, we hope to offer module three on the entire endocrine system, as well as other points such as alchemy, cancer, lymes etc. We are hoping to run module one in the same summer, offering one and three within one year. While all modules build upon one another, they can also be taken singly. Primarily conceptualized for practicing herbalists and practice-oriented, they can also be taken by beginners who do not shy from not being able to follow at all moments.

The next Nature Wisdom Retreat in 2011 will take place from August 2 to 15 in Peyrissaguet, France, and focus on the herbal treatment of each organ system. To see the announcements, visit Matt's website at matthewwoodherbs.com and click on classes. The course is NIHM accredited.

(Swanie's comment below sums up what we heard from everyone)

by Julia Graves; photos by the course participants

Here is what participant Swanie Simon has to say:]

The Herbal Intensive course in Peyrissaguet, France, taught by Julia Graves and Matthew Wood was an incredible course in every way. Breathtaking nature with many wild herbs provided a beautiful outdoor classroom and the newly renovated farm house made for a cozy and rustical indoor classroom. The word intensive is a bit of an understatement for describing this course, we covered an astounding amount of material in the 10 days we were there. In spite of the overwhelming amount of information, it was a fascinating course from beginning to end.

Julia Graves is an exceptional teacher who shares her vast knowledge freely in a well structured and easy to comprehend manner. Her great love of nature and herbs along with her intuitive understanding of the nature and signatures of herbs make for truly inspiring lessons. Matthew Wood, who doesn't really require an introduction adds unique insights, vast clinical information and compelling anecdotes to the classes - one gets the feeling he is describing close friends as he speaks about the herbs.

The combination Graves/Wood leads to complete lessons, covering all aspects of herbs, healing, diagnosing and prescribing. It is very difficult to chose a part of the course that I would deem my favorite, as the course works so well because of all of its components. A few highlights were the doctrine of signatures, animal constitutions, pulse diagnosis, facial diagnosis, anthroposophic theory, treatment of blood and I especially liked the plant attunements. But the real highlight for me was how so many things that I had learned theoretically all came together in this course, creating a non-stop aha effect. I have never learned so much in such a short time, with

such great teachers and such a fantastic group of students in such a beautiful setting. I wouldn't miss the next courses for anything in the world.

Swanie Simon is a German-American dog trainer and naturopathic doctor for animals. She raises German shepherds and owns a successful herbal pet remedy company. Visit her website at www.barfers.de. (her photo in photo email)