Urban Farm’s Medicinal Plant Garden

Randall’s Island Park Alliance
What do we grow on the Urban Farm?

Most of the crops grown on the Urban Farm are fruits and vegetables that we can eat (like tomatoes, cucumbers, garlic, and collard greens).

But in one area of the farm, we have plants that people don’t recognize as quickly like rue, valerian, motherwort, and yarrow. We call this area, our “Medicinal Garden.”

What are Medicinal Plants?

Medicinal plants are those used for healing! Plant medicine came long before tylenol or advil. What were you to do, living just a few hundred years ago, having suffered an injury in the field or forest, home or on the road, with no ambulance to call, and no drugstore to visit? All around the world, people have gathered knowledge and stories about plants having the capacity to heal. On the following slides, you’ll learn about the medicinal plants we grow on the Urban Farm.
Disclaimer: The following medical treatments mentioned in this document are references to historical, folk, and traditional medicinal practices. Not all treatments are substantiated by modern scientific evidence.
Original Map (Plants have naturally migrated)

Pigment Garden

- Hibiscus
- Anise Hyssop

Medicinal Garden

- Black Cohosh
- Goldenseal
- Horsetail
- Angelica
- Feverfew
- Elecampane
- Saffron Crocus
- Mullein
- Bonaset
- St. John’s Wort
- Baptisia
- Chamomile
- Yarrow
- Pyranthemum
- Motherwort
- Valerian
- Calendula
- Daylilies
- Catmint
- Lemon Balm
- Rue
Rue (Ruta graveolens, family rutaceae)

Native to: The Balkan Peninsula

Uses: Fragrance, flavoring, medicine. A component of the Ethiopian spice mix Berbere. Toxic in large quantities. Medicinally, used to treat stomach issues, heart and circulation problems, headaches, arthritis, menstrual pain and issues, and more. Also used as an abortifacient. Antibacterial, antifungal.

Fun Fact: Rue symbolizes regret in literature like Hamlet, Paradise Lost, and Gulliver's Travels

RIPA tip: Be careful as exposure to rue can sometimes cause phytophotodermatitis (sun poisoning). Also, the rue at the farm is a good place to find caterpillars feeding!
Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*, family *caprifoliaceae*)

**Native to:** Europe and Asia

**Uses:** Medicine. Valerian root extract is used to promote sleep, a remedy for insomnia, and for pain relief.

**Fun Fact:** aka All-heal

**RIPA Tip:** Careful, Valerian is listed as invasive in many jurisdictions, banned in CT.
Angelica (Angelica archangelica, family apiaceae)

Native to: Temperate & subarctic North America (mostly seen in China)


Fun Fact: It is called ‘archangelica’ because it was believed that the Archangel Michael was told how to use it as medicine.

RIPA tip: Biennial. Self-seeding.
Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*, family Lamiaceae)

**Native to:** Southeastern Europe, Central Asia

**Uses:** Attracts native bees, traditionally used to treat heart conditions, to regulate menstrual periods, reduce inflammation, alleviate anxiety, help with sleep problems, and reduce blood pressure. Antioxidant, antimicrobial.

**Fun Fact:** In Ayurveda it is believed that Motherwort is a protective herb which brings peace to the home; make tea from motherwort and use it to launder your family’s socks and underwear.

**RIPA Tip:** Cut back after flowering.
**Lemon balm** (*Melissa officinalis*, family Lamiaceae)

**Native to:** South-central Europe, Mediterranean, Iran, Central Asia

**Uses:** Attracts honeybees, fragrance, flavoring, medicine. Used in toothpastes, perfumes, tea, candy, food like lemon balm pesto. Medicinally, used to treat GI tract, nervous system, and liver; used as a sleep aid, digestive aid, stress/anxiety reducer; antimicrobial.

**Fun Fact:** grown in Thomas Jefferson's garden.

**RIPA Tip:** The square stem indicates it's a member of the mint family. Use to make tea and infused water.
Catmint (*Nepeta*, family *lamiaceae*)

**Native to:** Europe, Asia, Africa

**Uses:** Repels pests, provides food & nectar to pollinators, fragrance, flavoring, medicine. Treats stomach issues, relieves stress, insomnia, and arthritis, suppresses coughs.

**Fun Fact:** aka catnip; ingesting makes cats euphoric!

**RIPA Tip:** Cut back to the ground in late winter/early spring, and after flowering in late summer for a second round of flowering.
Mountain Mint (*Pycnanthemum*, family lamiaceae)

**Native to:** North America (eastern US)

**Uses:** Flavoring, fragrance, insect repellant, medicine. Used to treat menstrual pain/issues, cold, coughs, fevers, stomachaches, toothaches, mouth sores. Antiseptic, diaphoretic, analgesic.

**Fun Fact:** Several native American tribes claim that the fresh crushed flowers, when stuffed up the nose of a person near death, will revive them.

**RIPA tip:** mint-family plants can be propagated from cuttings.
Anise Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*, family lamiaceae)

**Native to:** North America

**Uses:** Feeds pollinators, flavoring, fragrance, medicine. Treats coughs, fevers, wounds, and diarrhea.

**Fun Fact:** It spreads like crazy!

**RIPA tip:** It tastes like black licorice (its where the flavor is derived from) so a lot of kids like it. Try combining it with stevia for a sweet treat.
Yarrow (Achillea millefolium, family asteraceae)

Native to: Temperate areas of North America, Europe, and Asia.


Fun Fact: Some Pick-Up-Sticks are made of yarrow. Also, was used to flavor beer before hops.

RIPA tip: A great companion plant! Careful: it’s toxic to dogs and cats.
Roman Chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*, family asteraceae)

**Native to:** Europe

**Uses:** Flavoring, medicine. Treats gastrointestinal problems and skin irritation. Aids sleep.

**Fun Fact:** Chamomile means ‘Earth Apple’ in Greek, and is named for its apple like scent.

**RIPA tip:** Harvest and dry the flowers for tea. Cut back after flowering for a second round, and cut back in late winter/early spring.
Feverfew (Tanacetum parthenium, family asteraceae)

Native to: Eurasia


Fun Fact: aka ‘medieval aspirin’

RIPA Tip: Both centaurea (cornflower) and Feverfew go by the common name “bachelor's button,” but don't get confused - they are distinct plants. Feverfew and chamomile are often visually confused, but the feverfew flower receptacle is flat while that of chamomile is conical, and chamomile has a distinct apple-like odor.
Saffron Crocus (*Crocus sativus*, family iridaceae)

**Native to:** Persia, Crete, & Central Asia

**Uses:** Seasoning, fragrance, dye, medicine. Treats gastrointestinal ailments and depression, high in antioxidants, aphrodisiac. Used in European, North African, and Asian cuisine, in foods like paella, curries, soups, teas, baked goods, cheeses.

**Fun Fact:** Saffron is the most expensive spice in the world

**RIPA Tip:** Harvest the stigmas of the flowers in late fall
Mullein (Verbascum thapsus, family scrophulariaceae)

Native to: Europe, northern Africa, Asia

Uses: Dye (yellow & green), medicine. Treats skin sores, irritations, and infections, athletes foot, hemorrhoids, sunburn, earaches, colds, and respiratory infections. Also used to make torches, candle wicks, and shoe linings.

Fun Fact: ‘Mullein’ derives from the french word for ‘soft’ and some alternate common names that reference the leaf’s softness are ‘poor man’s blanket’ and ‘cowboy toilet paper’

RIPA tip: Biennial, not perennial.
Elecampane (*Inula helenium*, family asteraceae)

**Native to:** Eurasia

**Uses:** Fragrance, flavoring, medicine. The root is used to treat asthma, bronchitis, coughs, nausea, intestinal worms. Anti-inflammatory.

**Fun Facts:** Has been used to make absinthe. Sacred to the ancient Celts, associated with the elves and fairies.
Comfrey/Boneset (*Symphytum officinale*, family boraginaceae)

**Native to:** Europe

**Uses:** attracts bumblebees, compost, medicine. Roots were used to treat osteoarthritis, joint pain, bruises, and bone breaks/sprains, but use of topical treatment has since shown to cause liver toxicity.

**Fun Fact:** The latin name means ´the knitting together of bones´

**RIPA tip:** Comfrey leaves make a very nutritious starter for the compost pile, or compost tea, or as mulch.
Horsetail Rush (*Equisetum hyemale*, family *equisetaceae*)

**Native to:** temperate to arctic north america and eurasia

**Uses:** as sandpaper, as scouring material to clean pots, makes reeds for instruments, medicine. Used to treat venereal disease. Diuretic.

**Fun Facts:** A ´living fossil´ from paleozoic times. Aka ´puzzle grass´ because of the way you can take it apart at the nodes.

**RIPA Tip:** Vascular plant, so reproduces by spores not seeds.
Goldenseal (*Hydraxis canadensis*, family ranunculaceae)

**Native to:** Eastern North America

**Uses:** Dye (yellow), medicine. Eye wash, bitter tonic, diuretic. Treats digestive issues. Astringent. Insect repellant. Used by Cherokee to treat cancer.

**Fun Fact:** conservation status: vulnerable (threatened)
Black Cohosh (*Actaea racemosa*, family ranunculaceae)

**Native to:** eastern North America

**Uses:** medicine. The roots & rhizomes treat gynecological problems, menopause, PMS, pain from childbirth, inducing labor, acne, osteoporosis.
Daylily (*Hemerocallis fulva*, family asphodelaceae)

**Native to:** East Asia

**Uses:** Edible flowers, fresh or dry, used in Chinese cuisine (gum jum). The leaves and young shoots can be cooked and eaten like asparagus. Medicine; treats fever, constipation, pneumonia, jaundice. Diuretic, laxative, antimicrobial, blood purifier.

**Fun Fact:** Large quantities of the leaves are said to be hallucinogenic

**RIPA tip:** Cut back the dead foliage in the late fall/winter.
Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*, family asteraceae)

**Native to:** Southern Europe

**Uses:** Flavoring, dye, medicine. Edible flowers eaten raw or in stew, provide color to cheese and butter, tea. Flowers make yellow, orange, or brown dye. Treats abdominal cramps and constipation. Anti-inflammatory oil extract treats wounds, acne, irritated skin. Poultice from leaves heals skin. Astringent. Antiviral.

**Fun Fact:** Although these go by the common name ‘marigold’ or ‘pot marigold’, they are not to be confused with marigolds of the genus Tagetes. The common name ‘marigold’ refers to the Virgin Mary, as these flowers were used in early Catholic ceremony.

**RIPA tip:** This is a food plant for cabbage moths. Deadhead regularly for even bloom production, until you want them to go to seed in the fall.
St. John´s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*, family hypericaceae)

**Native to:** Temperate Europe and Asia

**Uses:** Medicine. The oily extract is used to treat wounds. Antibiotic, antidepressant. Treats alcoholism. Interferes with many medications, including contraceptives, so don’t mix.

**Fun Fact:** St John's Wort is named so because it blooms around St John's Feast Day (June 24th) and was traditionally harvested and hung on doors of homes and barns to ward off evil spirits, harm, and sickness.
Blue false indigo (*Baptisia australis*, family fabaceae)

**Native to:** North America

**Uses:** dye (indigo), medicine. The Cherokee used tea from the root as a purgative or to treat nausea or toothaches. The osage used it as an eyewash.

**Fun Fact:** The seed pods were often used as rattles for children.

**RIPA Tip:** Don’t mistake the young shoots for asparagus, they are poisonous!
Hibiscus (*Hibiscus syriacus*, family malvaceae)

**Native to:** China

**Uses:** Attracts pollinators. Beverage (tea). Food (the flowers are eaten dried, candied as garnish, vegetally, or as a souring ingredient in many foods). Medicine. Lowers blood pressure. Treats anemia, hair loss, acne, fever, constipation, colds, and hot flashes (in Ayurveda tradition).

**Fun Fact:** The hibiscus flower is an example of a complete flower/perfect flower.

**RIPA Tip:** Cut back to the ground in late winter/early spring.

*This is a hibiscus species known as Rose of Sharon. The caribbean Sorrel drink is made from another species, roselle (hibiscus sabdariffa).*