

THE POTIONS JOURNEY

Fiona Burns



I remembered how as a child, I was fascinated by making my own potions out of anything available including such substances as rose petals, water, tomato ketchup and mud! I have observed how many children do in fact display a seemingly inbuilt urge to 'concoct' potions and the thought occurred to me of how great it would be to channel this natural creativity so that real potions could be made that would have medicinal value as opposed to just fantasy ones with no practical use. I had been teaching adults already for a few years and had seen the benefits which people were gaining from being able to use simple herb preparations in their daily lives to promote well being.

Fiona Burns is a practicing Medical herbalist and Craniosacral Therapist who works in London and Bristol. She has been teaching adults and children about how to make and use herbal remedies for the last 5 years. She can be contacted on:
fiona@totallyhealthy.org
tel: 020 88839773

As adults, many of us have learned to give our power away when it comes to health.

Many of us have grown up with the belief that our bodies are able to put up with all kinds of abuse and then when we fall sick, that the doctor will be able to 'fix' us. This model clearly doesn't work for us anymore and this is demonstrated by the fact that people are actively perusing ways to support their health, such as the use of herbal and homeopathic remedies, more awareness regarding diet and exercise and an awareness around the importance of emotional health. I see my role as herbalist as chiefly educational and have my focus not just on treatment of disease, but also on the very important area of disease prevention.

It seemed to me that if children could be taught from an early age about herb recognition and how to use medicinal plants, that this would be a very effective way to spread this knowledge and set them on course for the rest of their lives. I had little idea at this time just how popular these classes would become, nor just how far the ripples would spread in terms of educating their friends and families about herbs.

I began by setting up a four hour workshop at Islington Ecology Centre and took my inspiration from JK Rowling in deciding to call them 'Potions classes'. As bookings came in thick and fast, it was clear that I had hit on something big. Thus my Potions journey began.

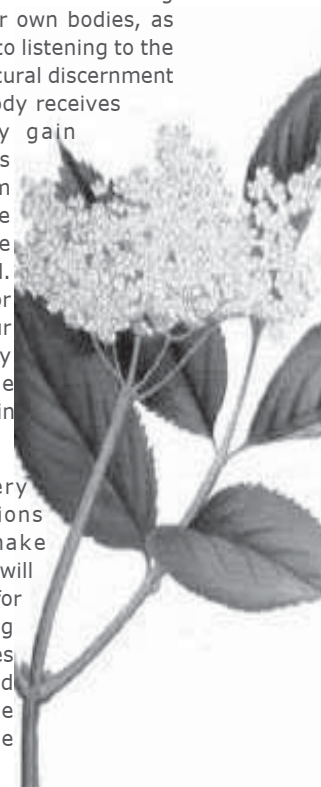
I had never taught children before and I had a lot to learn. As with most of life's important lessons, I learnt a great deal early on via my mistakes. Over the years, I have discovered what works best when teaching kids with the general rule of 'the messier the better' being one of my most important guidelines!

I have been touched and inspired by the eagerness with which children generally receive information about plants and healing. It seems that they are hungry for this knowledge, which they quickly integrate and utilize with overt enthusiasm. The format each week consists of learning about one main herb each week, which we go out and find. We collect it and make a tea out of it, as well as making something more complicated to take home, for example an ointment or cough syrup or poultices.

The tea is enthusiastically made and drunk, whilst we as a group, 'tune in' to what instant effects it may have on the body as it is taken. The natural sensitivity of the children means that with a little guidance, bodily effects are often noticed straight away as it is drunk, for example; Yarrow tea makes you feel warm, Rosemary makes you feel alert and Lemon balm relaxes the tummy.

By bringing children's attention to their physical perceptions as they ingest the herb, you can encourage the connection between mind and body that can become lost as we grow older. The result is a nurturing of the trust in their own bodies, as they become used to listening to the intelligence and natural discernment with which their body receives the herbal tea. They gain tremendous satisfaction from being able to name the effects of the herb as it is ingested. It is also possible for them to see how our ancestors originally learned about the properties of certain herbs.

Children ask very intelligent questions and quickly make connections which will be useful to them; for example learning about the properties of Calendula and then making the ointment, led one



little girl to treat her own eczema very successfully. I have been delighted to hear the fantastic effects that many of the potions which we have made in class have had on the children, their families and friends. There is much excitement as children report back how their liquorice and Thyme cough syrup healed their Grandmother's bad cough, or that they have cured their own warts, or that their Dad took the slippery elm lozenges, which helped his digestion.

The list is endless as far as feedback that I have had from them is concerned. They receive great satisfaction when they are able to create a potion which actually benefits themselves or somebody else, as well as leading them to see that they can take responsibility and be empowered around their own health matters. I take much joy in seeing how their natural connection with nature is supported by the classes. They become fascinated by plants and start to excitedly point out to their Mums and Dads with great pride, such common medicinal plants as Chickweed, Plantain, Comfrey, Elder, Dandelions and Mugwort.

Of course, it is natural when working with children to bring in the magical dimension of the plants too – after all, many of them come along after reading Harry Potter and if I didn't slip in a little mention of the fairies'

favourite: Elder, or the flying dream herb; Mugwort, I think a few of them would feel short changed! The emphasis, however, remains on the very practical use of herbs.

When working with small children, I like to introduce the concept of fairies and have been lucky enough to run Potions workshops at two fairy fairs. These are organized by the Fairyland Trust whose main aim is to support the connection that children naturally have with nature, using fairies as the theme. Check out the website www.fairylandtrust.org for details of these.

My career as an herbalist was inspired by my own recovery from cancer aged eleven. When I look back on my life prior to developing the cancer, I can see how the lack of encouragement around emotional and creative expression along with poor diet contributed to my developing the disease. Luckily for me, my parents sought an alternative way to treat me as they did not trust that the chemotherapy would be the answer. I went on the Gerson therapy, which consists of taking in large quantities of freshly pressed juices, as well as eliminating toxins from my diet, such as refined food and salt. The results for me were dramatic as I made a complete recovery.

I feel that the work that I do now with children has been very healing for me as I am able to open up avenues for the children that for me were unavailable.

