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Wise Woman

Weed

Wise Woman  
HERBAL

HERBAL FOR THE CHILDBEARING YEAR

FOR THE **CHILDBEARING YEAR**

"This Wise Woman Herbal is an excellent, comprehensive, and usable guide for everyone involved in women's health care. The detailed instructions provide a wealth of information for sensible herbal use. I recommend it highly to all women and health practitioners looking for reliable natural alternatives to conservative medical therapy."

Lawrence M. Perl, MD  
Obstetrician/Gynecologist

"Open your heart to a love affair. Thanks to this Wise Woman Herbal, my life and medicine chest are filled with trusted plant remedies which eased my pregnancy, rallied my energy as a new mother, and relieved my daughter's diaper rash and colic. Casey and I drink Anise seed tea in the moonlight; we pick bright blue Borage flowers to eat in our mush; and we honor the great Pine in our yard. Yes, it's a love affair, and Susun Weed is cupid."

Diane Rhoades, mother

"This remarkable book shows us how herbs can support the natural functions of pregnancy and childbirth in such a way that we are empowered to take responsibility for our own wellbeing. It is filled with valuable insights as well as highly useable information, and it should be in the hands of every health practitioner caring for pregnant women, and most certainly in the hands of the women themselves."

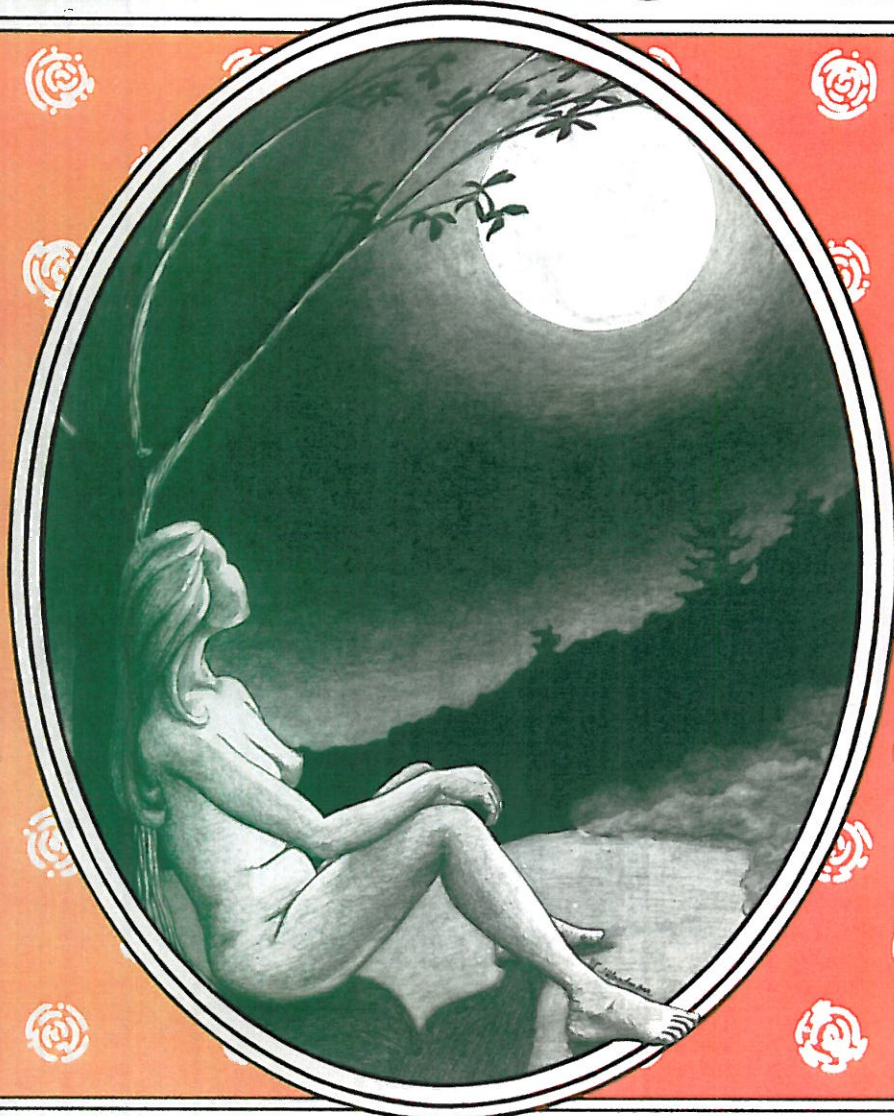
Anne Frye, Director: Midwifery Studies,  
Informed Homebirth

"The major focus of my work is to teach ordinary people that they can heal and maintain health themselves by using common plants (weeds), compassionate intuition, and simple ritual. This is the healing tradition of Wise Women, the oldest healing tradition on earth. Taking nothing for granted or gospel, I began to study herbal medicine twenty years ago. This book, the first of a series, flows out of my accumulated experiences using and teaching about herbal medicines."

Susun Weed

Wise Woman

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by Susun S. Weed

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Susun S. Weed



**Ash Tree Publishing**  
Woodstock, New York

All information in this *Wise Woman Herbal* is based on the experiences and research of the author and other professional healers. This information is shared with the understanding that you accept complete responsibility for your own health and well-being. You have a unique body and the action of each herbal medicine is unique and health care is full of variables. The results of any treatment suggested herein cannot always be anticipated and never guaranteed. The author and publisher are not responsible for any adverse effects or consequences resulting from the use of any remedies, procedures, or preparations included in this *Wise Woman Herbal*. Consult your inner guidance, knowledgeable friends, and trained healers in addition to the words written here.

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May the six directions empower this medicine work.  
May it be pleasing to my grandmothers, the ancient ones.  
And may it be of benefit to all beings.

*So mote it be.*

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## Acknowledgements

I think it's obvious; a book is made by a group of people, not one individual. I asked the people who joined me in creating and producing this book to help me fill it with love, joy, and cooperation. And they did. I especially want to thank:

- Clove, for editing and proofing all the versions, and counseling and supporting me through the entire process.
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- And all the Wise Women midwives, who must remain nameless to protect themselves, for nurturing me, and for insisting that this book be born.

Green blessings to all!

## Foreword

Women are carriers of life. We hold the fruit of our loving beneath our hearts. For too long we have lost touch with the fullness of this mystery due to modern, technological culture.

*Wise Woman Herbal* is another ally in reclaiming our lost gnosis as healers for ourselves and one another. It demonstrates beyond doubt that now is the time to be fully who we are throughout the childbearing year—guardians and nurturers of new life.

Susun S. Weed has created a magnificent testimony that the wise woman within is irrepressible. SHE will arise in all her glory if we but open our souls to our natural world. True to the essence of the herbs themselves, the material is presented mythically, botanically and lovingly. Susun not only introduces the novice to plant allies but further refines the already practicing herbalist's relationship with healing the fertility cycle.

It is challenging to choose one particular part as outstanding, as I found it all to be consistently excellent. Even after many years teaching herbal workshops to perinatal professional and natural parents, and mothering five children myself, I found much new and helpful material. It is kindred to my work—just like the book I would like to write.

In the many years since I wrote *Hygieia: A Woman's Herbal*, I have re-visioned my personal relationship with herbs to exclude their usage for abortions. I cannot endorse emmenagogic prescription in cases of pregnancy no matter how new the embryo. As a healer I strive to be harmless. With this clarification I heartily endorse Susun's wonderful book, for within its pages is distilled much worthwhile wisdom for mothers and mothers-to-be. This book is sweet word-medicine.

*Wise Woman Herbal* is a book I would give my best friend—and her daughter contemplating pregnancy. I will certainly share it

with my sister-midwives. It speaks to the deepest needs of women wishing their childbearing year (and years) to be the best that it can.

Blessed Be Gentle Mother!

With Love,  
Jeannine Parvati Baker,  
Utah 1985

P.S. Here's a terrific miscarriage preventative formula used by the Utah midwives with great success. I gave it to one pregnant woman with a chronic "incompetent" cervix who had lost 5 babies and delivered all her others early. She began miscarriage once again, faithfully took this formula, and carried full term! A miracle, everyone called it. The formula is one ounce Wild Yam, one ounce Squaw Vine, one ounce False Unicorn root, one half ounce Cramp Bark. Simmer for 20 minutes in one quart water. Take one wine-glassful every four hours until symptoms of miscarriage cease. They will!

## Introduction

The childbearing year is a thirteen month year: the two months before conception, the nine months of pregnancy, and the two months following the birth. The childbearing year is a time of change and an opportunity to grow, filled with rapid physical adjustments and fierce emotions. The childbearing year touches every season. This book is about herbs for the childbearing year.

For more than a million years Wise Women have used herbs—gathered, eaten, tended, loved herbs—and taught their daughters the wisdom of herbs in the childbearing year.

In Europe, five hundred years ago, men tortured and burned the Wise Women who healed with herbs, the midwives, the ones who celebrated the cyclical ways. Calling them witches, they burned them in millions and broke the flow of mother to daughter transmission. In the Americas, their sons down the way killed the medicine women and curanderas, the Wise Women of the New World. Then they denied the existence of Wise Women in history.

Without our connections to each other and the earth, without our mothers' wisdom, we forgot our power. When we were told that we had no souls, and no minds, and no sisters, we believed it was true. When they told us that childbearing was too dangerous and difficult for women, midwives, and herbs, we believed it was true.

But the Wise Women live in our dreams, our visions, our deepest memories. We hear their whispers and we listen.

Wise Woman healing works in cycles and seasons, with the turning of the planets, and the pulsation of life. Wise Women gather each herb at its time and use it to nourish and build the sixty million cells we each create every second. They understand the attunement built into our cells after thousands of generations nourished on wild foods, the special kinship our bodies have with the vital elements condensed in herbs.

Wise Women herbalists see the whole herb, the physical forces and the subtle forces, and respect this wholeness. Wise Women make use of the color, form, spirit, and substance of a plant, using it

as a whole, not dividing it into parts and seeing power only in the “active” principle. Wise Women know that we are each whole and unique, in an individual, everchanging, symbiotic relationship with herbs.

Wise Woman healing is grounded, earthed, rooted. The Wise Woman accepts herself and her changes, her moods and her bleedings. She tends to birthing and dying without alienation from herself or the ones she helps. She is open to the life song surrounding her, she hears the secrets of the herbs. Fairies appear to her; devas bless her. All that she needs for health and well being grows within the fall of her foot. She prepares the nourishment, she concocts the medicines. She is filled with creativity. Her life, her children, her art, her healing are shaped by her understanding of color, tone, harmony, and balance. She is wise in the ways of heart, body, and spirit.

This book speaks to the Wise Woman in you—the pregnant woman—and to the Wise Woman in your mate, lover, midwife, doctor, childbirth educator, and friends. It is based on the belief that you are capable of observing your own body, heart, and mind, responding to the messages you receive during the childbearing year, and caring for yourself in a context of loving support and assistance.

The information I share with you here represents the careful experiments and experiences of many herbalists and ordinary people. It is not a compedium of herbal remedies gathered from other books with the hope that these herbs will work, but a record of herbal practices which have been tested in many situations and with a wide variety of people. I see this work as a link in remembering ourselves as Wise Women, joining with the Wise Women in China and other areas where herbal medicine has an unbroken tradition, joining with the Wise Women in plants, joining with the Wise Woman mothering earth.

Do you remember? Is that a picture of your grandmother in her garden? We are all Wise Women.

## Using This Book

- Start by looking through the whole book quickly one time. Childbearing is not neatly divided into chapters. Remedies are discussed when the problem arises, but may be best used before the problem occurs. For example: remedies for breech presentation are much more effective if used well before the onset of labor, when the presentation becomes a problem.
- Pay particular attention to Chapter Six, Herbal Pharmacy. Best results and safety are dependent on your ability to use the correct amount of herb and the correct preparation. Don't assume you already know how to make the herbal medicines mentioned, even if you've been working with herbs for years. For example: I suggest infusions throughout this book, using one ounce of dried herb in two to four cups of water and steeping for up to eight hours; an infusion is not a cup of tea.
- Then look up your particular area of interest or problem. Try a mild remedy first. Wise Woman healing proceeds in this order (when life is not threatened): 1) Do nothing; the body heals itself. 2) Use a homeopathic remedy or flower essence; the vibration of a plant is harmless but healing. 3) Use herbs and foods, especially wild greens, to nourish and tone the body or a particular organ; billions of your cells are replaced each minute. 4) Cautiously take cleansing or potentially toxic herbs; side effects are more likely when alkaloid-rich plants are consumed. 5) Use concentrated, refined, or synthesized herbal medicines; these are commonly known as drugs. 6) Intervene with surgery; healing is complicated and likelihood of infection is increased when surgery is used. **It is my experience that herbal medicines do not interfere with, nullify, or potentize chemical medicines unless they are taken at the same time.** It is, for instance, safe to use Blue Cohosh or labor tincture to augment contractions, and follow this, after 20-30 minutes, with Pitocin, if necessary.



- Use herbs preventatively. Preventative medicine is one of the foundations of the Wise Woman tradition. Remedies for some postpartum problems, used during labor, prevent the problem. Remedies for newborn jaundice, taken during pregnancy, prevent the occurrence of jaundice. And so on.
- To ensure safety, check the index for the Latin name of the plant remedy you intend to use. Identify all plants, even if you buy them in a store or by mail, with their Latin names. The Latin binomial is specific to one plant; common names vary and overlap. For example: Boneset may refer to *Symphytum officinale* or to *Eupatorium perfoliatum*.
- Use the index to help you find more information on an herb you are using. Wise Woman teaching is based on cycles, so instead of centralizing all the information on each plant, I have cycled it throughout the book. If we took a walk together, we'd encounter the same plant several times, learning something new and different and restating previous information each time. That's how this book works, too.
- Look up *italicized words* in the glossary.
- Make use of the references and resources at the end of each chapter.
- ★ My favorite remedies, or herbs which are used successfully by a majority of midwives and mothers, are starred.
- Add your own marginal notes. I've written in some comments and lots of common herb names to start you off. Make note of remedies you use and the results you experience, etc.
- Trust your sense of what's right for you. Use this book in conjunction with your own inner Wise Woman. Seek second and third opinions. You are unique. Respect your body, your intuitions, and your feelings.
- Enjoy!

## Using Herbs Safely

As the accessibility of herbal medicines has grown over the past twenty years (after an enforced decline spanning many decades), questions of safety have also grown. Scare stories abound of carcinogens found in herbs, poisonous plants mistakenly sold as curative ones, and allergic reactions to supposedly safe herbs. When you begin to use herbs as part of your health program, you may wonder how to use them safely. To avoid complexity, risk, and unneeded worry:

- Begin by using gentle nourishing and tonic herbs; avoid plants that may be toxic.
- Use one herb at a time.
- Learn about one wild plant at a time from an experienced guide.
- Seek out the miracle medicines on your own doorstep.
- Remember that crude herbs (as opposed to the refined extracts known as drugs) rarely cause fatal allergic reactions or severely disabling side effects.
- Realize that reports of herbs having cancer-causing properties are misleading. They are usually based on studies done with purified extracts rather than whole plants. Alfalfa, Comfrey, Coltsfoot, and Sassafras each have a component that may be carcinogenic or mutagenic. When the "active" components are extracted and "purified," they may injure or mutate cells. But there are no reported cases of cancer from the thousands of people who have used these herbs for well-being and health care through the centuries, for these "active" components are only a tiny fraction of the plant material, and the large amount of "passive" components buffers and neutralizes them.
- Build up a foundation of trust in the healing effectiveness of plants by using remedies for minor problems and first aid before you try to deal with serious health problems.
- Increase your herbal knowledge through direct experience, experimentation, and reading.

- Gather a support group of people interested in “alternative” medicines and consult them when you feel unsure.
- Respect the power of plants; those strong enough to act as medicines affect the body and spirit in powerful ways.
- Respect the strength of herbs; some plants are so potent that they can only be used in minute quantities.
- Respect the unique individuality of every plant, every person, and every situation.
- Understand the varying effects and side effects of nourishing, tonic, cleansing, and potentially toxic plants.

**Nourishing herbs** are the safest of all herbs; they rarely have any side effects. Nourishing herbs may generally be taken in any quantity and for extended periods of time. They act in the body as food, providing nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, proteins, simple sugars, and starches. They improve existing conditions by strengthening the body’s defenses and resources. Nourishing herbs used in this *Wise Woman Herbal* include: Alfalfa, barley, Borage, Comfrey, Nettles, Parsley, Raspberry leaf, Red Clover, and Slippery Elm.

**Tonic herbs** act slowly in the body and have a cumulative effect; they are most beneficial when used consistently for months. Tonics rarely give rise to side effects. They generally aid the body to balance its energy and function more easily and dependably. Some tonic herbs are bitter; this taste is an indication that these herbs should be taken in small amounts. Other tonic herbs have a bland or soothing taste and can be taken safely in large amounts. Tonic herbs used in this *Wise Woman Herbal* include: Blessed Thistle, Burdock, Dandelion, Liferoot, Sarsaparilla, Skullcap, and Yellow Dock.

**Cleansing herbs** stimulate the body’s cleansing systems and disease fighting mechanisms. They are also called antibiotics, antiseptics, and antibacterials. Cleansing herbs are very strong in their effects and are more likely to have side effects. They are usually taken in small amounts for short periods of time. They may stress some parts of the body in order to help other parts, or may be too powerful in their effect for some people. Use with care. Cleansing herbs used in this *Wise Woman Herbal* include: Echinacea, Elder root, Golden Seal, Rosemary, Sage, Uva Ursi, and Yarrow.

**Potentially toxic** or “poisonous” **herbs** are the most potent medicines of all. They stimulate powerful healing and releasing actions in the body. An overdose will almost always cause side effects. Potentially toxic herbs are taken for a short period of time or in very small doses. Potentially toxic herbs used in this *Wise Woman Herbal* include: Pennyroyal, Poke, Black Cohosh, Blue

Cohosh, Cayenne, Cotton, Dong Quai, Licorice, Lobelia, Mistletoe, and Tansy. Increase your herbal knowledge and sense of security when using these potentially toxic herbs by consulting other herbal references. It is especially important to check further on the possible side effects of any of the potentially toxic herbs if you are allergic to foods or medicines.

The herbs gathered here in the *Wise Woman Herbal for the Childbearing Year* are accessible and safe. By accessible, I mean that they are easily found growing nearby you, or that you can readily buy them at health food stores, herbal apothecaries, or through the mail. By safe, I mean that they will not cause harm, now or later, if used with respect and knowledge.

The most important thing to remember is that the body heals itself, and you can assist and strengthen that healing process with wise use of herbs.

**os** - an opening; the opening to the uterus through the cervix.

**oxytocic** (adjective), **oxytocin** (noun) - an agent which stimulates contraction of uterine muscle, and release of prostaglandin hormones, thus facilitating and stimulating childbirth; may cause miscarriage, poisoning, or death, if incorrectly used.

**perineal** (adjective), **perineum** (noun) - the area between the anal and vaginal openings; also known as the "taint" because 'taint one and 'taint the other.

**pelvic disparity** - the fully matured fetus' skull is too large to pass through the mother's pelvic outlet; an extremely dangerous situation.

**purgative** - an agent which vigorously empties the bowels, and may cause intense gripping pain.

**root chakra** - the center (*chakra*) of sexual and reproductive energy in the body, correlated with the genital region.

**shock** - the failure of the circulatory system to provide sufficient blood to all parts of the body.

**suture** - to sew together the edges of a wound.

**symbiotic** - advantageous association between parts, benefitting and strengthening both.

**vasoconstrictor** - an agent which narrows or constricts the blood vessels, thus raising blood pressure.

**vasodilator** - an agent which widens or dilates the blood vessels, thus lowering blood pressure.

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