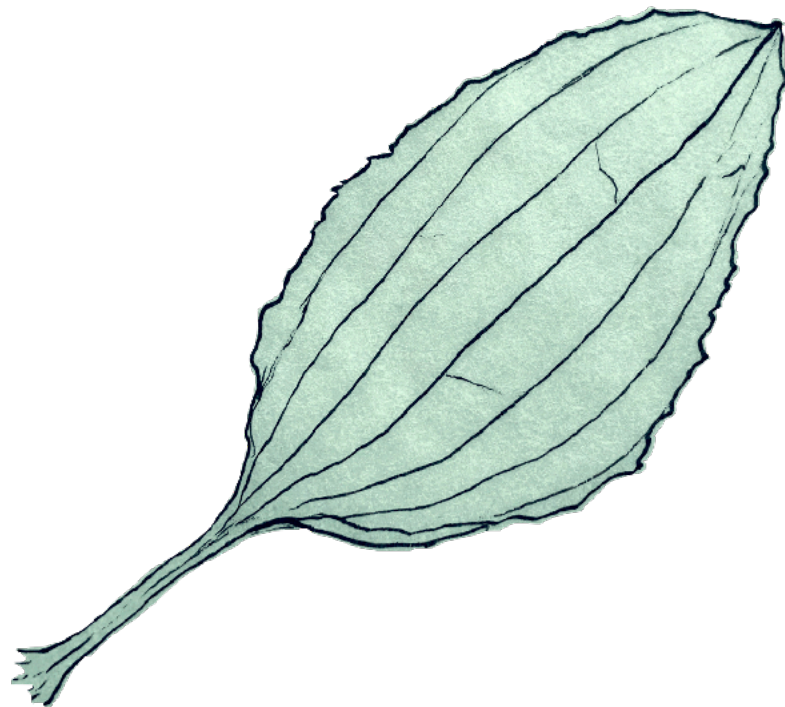


Plantain Hand Salve

Hands crusted in clay all day need special care. The weeds in your yard, local park, or even in that little strip between your apartment building and the sidewalk can help!



Whittney Klann for Greenwich
House Pottery

May 2020

Step 1: forage

If you're not familiar with these plants, do a little research to help you identify them. Leda Meredith's Northeast Foraging is a great resource for getting to know what's growing around you, as is the Plantnet app. I don't know of any look-alikes that are irritating to the skin, and we aren't ingesting them, so this is a low-risk project if you're new to foraging. Collect leaves from robust patches of the plant you are collecting. Do not disturb the roots, and leave plenty of leaves on each individual plant so that it will continue to thrive. In the city I also try to avoid areas that may be sprayed, heavily trafficked, or readily accessible to dogs.

Plantain

(Plantago major, lanceolata, etc.)

The star of this salve formula is plantain leaves. (No, it's not related to the banana shaped fruit!) There are quite a few varieties with a range of leaf shapes, but any will work for this. Plantain is often hiding in plain sight in lawns and grassy areas, as it tends to grow in areas with regular human disturbance. It is cooling to irritated skin, and helps promote healing. It can also counteract the venom from insect bites and stings, so your salve may come in handy for bug bites as well!

The rest of the herbs are optional to include, but they are widely available and tend to be plentiful, so include any that you find, and that appeal to you.



Mugwort

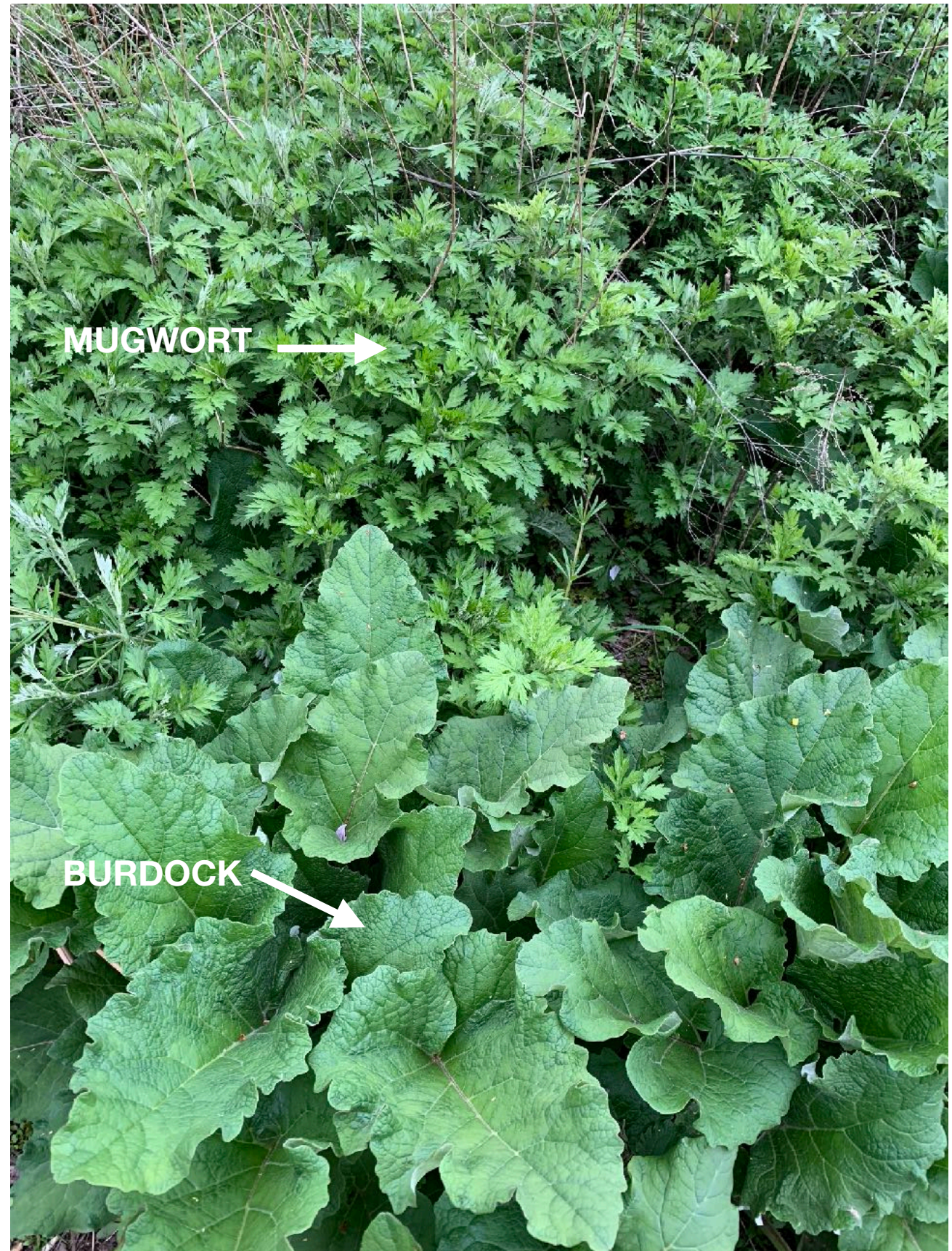
(Artemisia vulgaris)

I love the scent of mugwort, and it is associated with dreamspace, so I like the idea of including it in a product that will be used in the studio. In her book *Herbal Rituals*, Judith Berger writes, "Mugwort is a wonderful ally for those who feel themselves to be too restrained; coming to know this plant inevitably causes unpredictable behavior that heals rather than hurts, coaxing our bodies and attitudes out of stagnation, helping us remember merriment of spirit."

Burdock

(Arctium lappa)

I collected a few burdock leaves for this preparation, as several herbalists have recommended it for dry itchy skin conditions such as psoriasis and eczema. The roots are edible, and would be a useful addition to an infusion such as we're making, but unless you're foraging on your own property I don't recommend harvesting the roots, as you're killing the whole plant. (Although it does grow rampantly in many areas, and many people consider it a pest due to the burrs that form in the fall)



Violet

(Viola sororia)

Violets are lush and plentiful in the Northeast in the springtime. Their leaves are soothing to dry, chafed skin. The flowers are also edible! I like to float some in my water glass.

Whole herb infused oils harness the many fat soluble components of the plant, which can be helpful to us for many purposes. They are very different from essential oils, which are aromatic compounds obtained through steam distillation. Essential oils are so concentrated that they can be too harsh to apply directly to skin, but infused oils are safe to use liberally on the skin. (Although it's never a bad idea to patch test a new product to make sure your skin doesn't have a negative reaction.)



Step 2: infuse oil

1. If the area where you found your leaves seems clean and undisturbed they don't really need to be rinsed, but otherwise wash them and lay them out on a clean kitchen towel to dry off any water clinging to the surface. Be patient, they need to be as dry as possible.



2. Chop your clean, dry leaves. This can also be done in a food processor, which can be handy if you're making a large batch.



The infusion can be done slowly, by leaving the plant material in the oil for a few weeks or months, but with fresh plant material such as we're using, there is some risk of bacterial growth. It can also infuse more quickly, with the help of heat, which is the method that follows.

3. Place the herbs in a heatproof glass container and cover with any sort of oil that is good for the skin. I am using almond oil, but jojoba or olive would also be nice.



4. Place the glass in a pot of water, boosting it up off of the bottom of the pot so there is water all around- a mason jar ring works nicely. Leave uncovered so the moisture from the leaves can evaporate, and keep over very low heat (think hot bath water) for 8+ hours. Stir occasionally, refill the water as needed.



Step 3: strain



Place a fine mesh strainer lined with cheesecloth over a bowl (preferably with a pour spout)



Strain the oil mixture, stirring gently to allow the oil to flow through. Do not strongly wring out the plant matter, as you may squeeze remaining moisture into the oil, which will shorten the shelf life of the salve.

Step 4: add beeswax

(maybe you know a beekeeper who would trade some nice wax for a piece of pottery?)

The texture of the finished salve is determined by the ratio of oil to beeswax. I like a fairly soft salve that can easily be rubbed into hands, so I chose a ratio of 7 parts oil to 1 part wax.



Don't worry if you do not have a kitchen scale, this is a very forgiving formula, so your best estimation will probably be fine. Return the infused oil to the hot water bath and incorporate the wax into the oil bit by bit. Put a small spoonful of your mixture into the refrigerator for a couple of minutes to gauge the level of firmness, adding wax until you reach your desired consistency. If you measured out your wax, go ahead and add it all at once, stirring as it melts into the oil. A few drops of vitamin E oil can also be added at this stage as a preservative.



Step 5: pour into small jars and label



et voilà!