

# Herbarum

## **Actaea racemosa**

### **Black Cohosh**

In the 1870s the standard treatment for severe menstrual cramps was surgery to remove the ovaries. Forty percent of all patients died, and women, skeptical of male doctors, began concocting herbal remedies. In her Massachusetts home in 1873, Lydia Pinkham combined wild roots and herbs – Black Cohosh, a main ingredient – to help women control their reproductive health. Black Cohosh promotes menstruation, soothes menstrual pain and eases menopause. The Haudenosaunee and Cherokee, having long known the benefits of this buttercup species, likely introduced it to European colonists. An Algonquian term, *cohosh* means “rough” for the herb’s dark, knotted rhizome. These underground stems contain compounds (triterpene glycosides and fukinolic acid) with estrogen-like effects. A few drops under the tongue relax uterine muscles and induce abortion.

Nicknamed Bugbane, Bugwort, Black Baneberry, Black Snakeroot and Rheumatism Weed, this herb is also lethal. Its analgesic salicylates cause everything from vomiting and tinnitus to hyperthermia and organ failure. Wild harvested, Black Cohosh is so popular it is considered “at-risk” across the United States and endangered in Illinois and Massachusetts. Though an age-old remedy for dangerous ailments and treatments, now the endangered plant itself needs protection.

## **Anethum graveolens**

### **Dill**

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### **Foeniculum vulgare**

#### **Fennel**

Hippocrates made a mouthwash of Dill. Both Charlemagne and New World Puritans utilized Dill to calm noisy stomachs. As he despised burps and hiccoughs, Charlemagne required Dill oil be served to all his dinner guests. Devout Americans fed their children “meetinghouse

seeds” to calm stomach growls and suppress appetites during six-hour religious services.

In addition to being a wonderful host plant for butterflies, Dill and Fennel have been used for antibacterial, antifungal, anti-diabetic and anti-inflammatory properties for millennia. Dill was listed as a painkiller component in the Ebers papyrus from 1,500 BCE while Fennel was discovered among personal chattel salvaged from the Egyptian Pharaoh’s tombs.

Dill and Fennel belong to the same family, Apiaceae, which they share with Queen Anne’s Lace. Both produce feathery leaves – Dill’s slightly wider, umbels of yellow flowers – Fennel’s more golden, and small flat seeds. Fennel’s are grooved.

Ancient Egyptians also used Dill to ward off witches, a custom passed down to the Europeans. In the Middle Ages a witch who found herself in the presence of Dill was taken by an overwhelming compulsion to count Dill leaves, counting and recounting continuously until the first light of dawn, when the witch had to disappear. In Denmark, on Walpurgis Night and on St. John’s Day, cattle were fed with dill and garlic to protect against witchcraft and to guarantee a large yield of milk. Dill water has been used by women for centuries to increase milkflow and calm colicky babies. Uterine contractions, miscarriage or premature labor can be induced by the use of Dill.

With an estrogenic effect Fennel seeds promote menstruation, ease dysmenorrhea, alleviate symptoms of menopause and peri-menopause and increase libido. Its essential oils can be used both as an emmenagogue and a galactagogue. Made into a salve or crème, Fennel is effective against Hirsutism in women. As Fennel protects mucous membranes it can reduce vaginal symptoms due to menopausal changes to the vaginal lining. Containing powerful compounds called monoterpenes, Dill seems to prevent carcinogenesis at both the initial stage and the progression stage.

## **Artemisia vulgaris**

### **Mugwort**

In 21st-century America, drinking Mugwort tea to terminate a pregnancy is grounds for jail time. Seven states have outlawed

self-managed abortion, and 40 laws nationwide could criminalize it. In 2004, a South Carolinian migrant mother of three was sentenced to jail for taking an abortifacient. Even an herbal abortion using Mugwort — one of an estimated 525 abortifacient plants worldwide — could be a punishable crime. But the herb grows along roadsides and wastelands. Considered invasive, it spreads via rhizomes.

Mugwort, sometimes an umbrella term for similar *Artemisia* species, is native to Europe, Asia and North Africa. The pointed, sage-scented leaves contain eucalyptol, which targets umbilical cells and causes the uterine lining to shed. Ancient Greek, Anglo-Saxon and Indian medicine have used it for reproductive health. For over 10,000 years, the Chumash have used California Mugwort, what they call molush, to promote menstruation and regulate hormonal flux in menopause. Mugwort is considered safer than traditional hormone replacement therapy.

This bitter herb is popular in cooking (especially Mugwort soup), though it contains thujone, a lethal psychoactive convulsant. Inhaling what Russians call zabytko, meaning “forgetfulness,” induces lucid dreaming. Placing the stalks under a pillow while sleeping intoxicates the mind and memory. The herb also heals the body. In Chinese medicine, moxibustion — mugwort heat therapy — treats colds, inflammation and spasms. Still burned as incense in pagan rituals, mugwort was invoked in the 10th-century Anglo-Saxon Nine Herbs Charm: “Remember, Mugwort, what you revealed, / what you established at the mighty proclamation.” Spreading head to toe and body to mind, Mugwort’s powers are rhizomatic, too.

## **Atropa belladonna**

### **Deadly Nightshade**

In 14th-century Ireland, Dame Alice Kyteler and her servant Petronilla de Meath used Belladonna to grease “a staffe, upon which [they] ambled and galloped through thick and thin.” The poison made them “fly.” Alice was Ireland’s first person to be condemned as a witch, and Petronilla was the first to be executed as one. The bishop accused them of heresy, a frequent charge after England’s

invasion (with papal approval) to spread Christianity.

Three centuries later in Italy, six hundred women used a Belladonna-based potion, Aqua Tofana, to kill their husbands and escape Christianity’s cruel institution of marriage. They were perhaps inspired by the ancient Roman “matron poisoners,” the 366 noblewomen who besieged the city with Belladonna by poisoning their own domineering kin, the all-male ruling class.

Common names include Devil’s Berries, Death Cherries, Beautiful Death, Devil’s Herb, Great Morel, Dwayberry and Dwale. A member of the Nightshade family from Europe, North Africa and Western Asia, Belladonna can intoxicate and kill but also heal. Once used as an anesthetic, its alkaloids are still medicinal: Belladonna supplements line store shelves to treat fevers, dry eyes, earaches, inflammation and anxiety. The Bell-shaped flowers and Black Berries were useful in warfare, too. In the American Civil War, medical wagons and hospitals treated various ailments with the Deadly Nightshade. Three centuries before Dame Alice, Macbeth of Scotland (1005-1057) dispatched his foes with it. He gave Belladonna-tainted liquor to the invading Danish army, killing the enemy in their sleep.

## **Convallaria majalis**

### **Lily of the Valley**

Lily of the Valley can manipulate human sperm cells. Known for centuries as an aphrodisiac, *Convallaria majalis* contains bourgeonal, an ingredient used in perfumery. Studying in-vitro tests, the Forschungszentrum Jülich with Bonn based researchers found bourgeonal can mimic progesterone and serve as a chemo-attractant — causing human sperm to swim twice as fast. The olfactory receptor OR1D2 is found in our nose and in sperm. Both bourgeonal and progesterone can activate sperm’s OR1D2 receptors opening calcium ion channels and increasing their speed.

In early 20th century France, Lily of the Valley was traditionally sold on May Day. The day was thus christened: *La Fête du Muguet*. In 1906 perfumer Guerlain, perhaps harkening to the flowers’ popularity, created the beloved fragrance Muguet. This first perfume

in the lineage of the modern white floral was rivaled only by Muguet des Bois created by Henri Robert for Coty in 1936. The wildly adored Lily of the Valley remained part of the good girl's olfactory repertoire until 1956 when the master Edmond Roudnitska created Diorissimo for Dior. Reconsidering traditional femininity with a new erotic disposition, Dior's virginal Muguet added a touch of civet in the background, creating a sophisticated sweet girl aroma that was also a little bit dirty. Dior himself was insanely superstitious, sewing sprigs of Muguet into the hems of his early dresses for luck. His early fragrances were all constructed around this flower.

This vestal plant is also called Our Lady's Tears or Mary's Tears. It is a symbol of humility in religious painting and a sign of Christ's second coming. The plant with the tiny droplet bells and red berries sprang either from the tears wept by the Virgin Mary during the crucifixion of Jesus or from Eve's tears after her expulsion from the Garden of Eden.

Defying its virginal and ladylike image this member of the asparagus family, only masquerading as a lily, is deadly. Just a bite causes headaches, hot flashes, hallucinations, irritability, and red blotches on cold clammy skin. Even the water from a bouquet contains deadly traces of the glycoside convallatoxin. Containing at least 38 cardiac glycosides, steroids specifically affecting the heart, death by Lily of the Valley might look like a heart attack.

## Cytisus scoparius

### Scotch Broom

*This golden plant rooted firmly amid rock, yet upholding what is ready to fall, shall be my cognizance. I will maintain it on the field, in the tourney and in the court of justice.* Saying this, Geoffrey the 5th count of Anjou thrust a gold-blossomed bush into his helmet so that his troops might see it and follow him into battle. With this gesture the humble *Planta genista* was adopted as a heraldic badge and a royal name. In 1154 his son became King Henry II of England, founding the Plantagenet lineage that reigned over three hundred years.

From Old English *bróm* and Old High German *bramo*, the use of this plant for sweeping gave rise to *broom*. *Cytisus scoparius* has

long, slender, erect and tough branches growing in close fascicles ideal for broom-making. Local names, Basam, Bisom, Bizzom, Breeam, Browme, Brum and Green Broom reference this habit. Revered by the Druids, Broom was then ascribed magical powers during the Middle Ages. Though potentially deadly, an intoxicating infusion was ingested to increase psychic powers. Hewn from the thicker stems, broomsticks were ridden by witches during their hallucinogenic travels. Ritual wands were used in purification and protection spells while rods and scepters were carried high as symbols of authority. An infusion of Broom sprinkled throughout the house, exorcised poltergeists.

Women use Scotch Broom for labor induction, heavy menstrual periods, bleeding after childbirth and as an abortifacient. As the plant reproduces quickly and grows rapidly, it has been a traditional symbol of fertility. Though listed by some sources as native to Switzerland, many countries consider it a highly invasive, ecologically destructive, colonizing weed.

## Datura stramonium

### Jimson Weed

*Datura* felled three armies. The trumpet-shaped flowers turned Odysseus's men into pigs, and centuries later subdued the starving Roman army with mass hallucinations. During Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 in colonial Virginia, the weed bewitched hungry British soldiers sent to suppress the uprising. Jamestown colonists spread the word about the psychedelic stupor. One soldier "would blow up a Feather in the Air" and another "dart Straws at it with much Fury," so naming it Jimson Weed for Jamestown.

Invasive, it is found along roadsides and in fields, and its nicknames, too, are widespread: Devil's Snare, Thorn Apple, Apple of Peru, Stramonium, Hell's Bells, Locoweed, Devil's Trumpet, Moonflower, Stinkweed, Prickly Burr, Devil's Cucumber.... The leaves' pungent odor serves as a warning while the flowers' sweet aroma entices. The plant (especially its seeds in their prickly pods) causes alkaloid intoxication with deadly symptoms: "hot as a hare, red as a beet, dry as a bone, blind as a bat, mad as a hatter."

Its genus *Datura* is Latin for “send to die,” which proved too true in colonial Massachusetts. Amidst the colony’s political instability, Jimson Weed intoxicated pubescent girls, who howled like dogs and encountered apparitions. The Salem teenagers catalyzed such a threat to Puritan decency that, despite knowing the weed’s role in Algonquian puberty rituals, male authorities hanged fourteen women.

## **Daucus carota**

### **Queen Anne’s Lace**

For centuries, women have passed on contraceptive knowledge of Queen Anne’s Lace. They still do, especially in regions like Appalachia where reproductive rights are under attack. In North Carolina, a woman kept a mason jar of its seeds to take after intercourse, which worked for ten years until she only once forgot and got pregnant. Queen Anne’s Lace is a progesterone inhibitor, working like the birth control pill and morning-after pill. Swallowing one spoonful of seeds causes a “slippery” uterus, so a fertilized egg can’t implant. Hippocrates wrote the earliest account of it as birth control nearly 2,500 years ago.

The tiny, white flowers gather like a parasol. Together with the leaves, they resemble relatives in the parsley family: wild parsnip, parsley and deadly hemlock, many of which are poisonous. A tiny red dot at the bloom’s center helps distinguish it and gives rise to its name. Native to Europe and Asia, the plant is linked to Queen Anne of England (1655-1714), who, legend has it, pricked her finger while sewing the finest lace. Others say Saint Anne, patron saint of lace makers, inspired the name.

European colonists brought the edible wild carrot with them to America, perhaps for women to control their fertility. The wind carried its seeds, overtaking grasslands and prairies as a ubiquitous weed, though knowledge of its contraceptive properties is not as widespread. Now, with the reinstated Title X restrictions of 2019, keeping contraceptive plant knowledge alive is not simply oral history; it is revolt.

## **Eupatorium cannabinum**

### **Hemp Agrimony**

Before the Christian Church fueled the infamous witch hunts subjugating and assimilating all local myth and custom into one dominant mythology, Europe was awash in a multitude of goddesses where midwives and wise-women (witches) were the local health practitioners and keepers of the knowledge concerning plants’ powers. Birth was a ritual centered around the childbed. As labor approached the midwife prepared a bed of fragrant herbs to ensure a good birth and a plentiful flow of milk. The earthly smells were to pull the laboring mother under to her earth goddess. Known later as Our Lady’s Bedstraw or Mary’s Bed or The Virgin’s Bedstraw the childbed was originally dedicated to Frau Holle (Germanic), Freya (Norse), Huldra (Scandinavian) or another local Mother Earth goddess in hopes of her support and protection during birth. Plants were present that could stop heavy bleeding (Tansy) or encourage milk production (Dill). Sweet smells brought good fairies and elves to protect the baby. Under the guise of protection from bad witches, spirits and demons, many plants contained aromatic oils and coumarins that had a calming effect on mother and child as well as an antibacterial (Thyme, Oregano), disinfectant or antimicrobial effect (Dill, Fennel). Present among these herbs was the emmenagogue and abortifacient Hemp Agrimony also known as Holy Rope. Used as a wound herb on Medieval battlefields to staunch bleeding, this same property slowed heavy menstrual bleeding and could be helpful during birth. The bed provided a sense of security and piece of mind.

Throughout Europe a number of herbs have been associated with Our Lady’s Bedstraw including but not limited to: Oregano, Tansy, St. John’s Wort, Thyme, Ivy, Wild Baby’s Breath, Enchanter’s Nightshade, Chamomile, Sweetgrass, Purple Betony, Labweed, Hemp Agrimony, Dill, and Fennel.

In an attempt to obliterate all pagan customs in 742CE at the Synod of Liftinae, St. Boniface put the Christian curse on all heathen practices forbidding the use of the Freya’s Bedstraw. The newly sanctified Christians justified their old custom by claiming the

bedstraw was made of the same herbs used in Jesus' Bethlehem manger, hence Our Lady's Bedstraw or Mary's Bed.

On the darker side medical science did not increase women's chances of survival in childbirth until the 20th century. Some argue it may have actually increased the dangers. Puerperal fever, an infection that killed many women in the 19th century is probably the classic example of iatrogenic disease – disease caused by medical treatment.

## Gossypium hirsutum

### Cotton

Mary Gaffney, an enslaved Texan woman born in 1846, chewed cotton root to keep from bearing children. "Maser was going to raise him a lot more slaves, but still I cheated Maser, I never did have any slaves to grow and Maser he wondered what was the matter." Freed at twenty, she and her husband went on to have five children. After the US withdrew from the international slave trade in 1808, slavery continued through enforced reproduction. Black women and girls, familiar with the *Gossypium* species in Africa, used cotton root to prevent pregnancy. On one Tennessee plantation, black women gave birth to only two infants over a twenty-five-year span.

Cotton is medicinal. Its roots, leaves and seeds treat pain, urinary problems and menstrual disorders, whereas its oil is a male contraceptive in Chinese medicine. Gossypol, the toxic principle of the seeds, decreases sperm production and induces abortion. Enslaved men in the South may have also used the root for birth control.

Though cotton was a crop of oppression, African Americans transformed it into resistance. In the late 19th century, black cotton farmers and sharecroppers formed the Colored Farmers' Alliance (CFA) to dismantle railroads, merchants, brokers and banks that charged exorbitant fees and interest rates. Disenfranchised by segregation, the CFA organized strikes and trainings to promote economic self-sufficiency and wrest control of "king cotton."

## Helleborus niger

### Christmas Rose

Historian Kathryn Utz Tremp determined 30,000 to 60,000 Europeans were burned at the stake for witchcraft between the 15th and 18th centuries. This includes 6,000 in Switzerland, 300 of whom were executed in Fribourg. 75-85% of the victims were female. As noted in the 1973 screed *Witches, Midwives and Nurses*, Witch-hunts were a systematic male attack on women. Witch-healers and midwives had been the unlicensed doctors of western history, often the only health practitioners for folk who had no doctors or hospitals but were bitterly afflicted with poverty and disease. Women healers were people's doctors whose medicine was the consequence of subcultural knowledge passed down from generation to generation. Born in feudalism and gaining in virulence into the "age of reason," the essence of the witch-craze was a ruling class campaign of terror directed against the female peasant population. Witches represented a political, religious and sexual threat to both the Protestant and Catholic churches. The Medieval Church supported by kings, princes and secular authorities controlled medical education and practice. The hunts constituted a "professional" repudiation of the skills and rights of the "nonprofessional" to minister to the poor. Then, as today, control of medicine determined who would live and who would die.

Hellebores thrive in dying light and cold frozen soil. They bloom in the shadows of December or January. This killer plant featured as a prominent ingredient in Old-World Witches' flying ointments. Best absorbed through mucous membranes, an unction of herbs in rendered fat was rubbed under the arms and in other hairy places often abetted by a broomstick. Disrupting heartbeats and causing hallucinations — this member of the Buttercup family gave women the license to fly high.

Assimilation by pious Christian lore neutralized folk traditions: A small girl in the presence of the Christ child began to weep, as she had no gift for the babe. From her tears the Christmas Rose grew. *Helleborus niger* was transformed into a symbol of innocence. Considered holy, it was now rumored to ward off evil spirits.

Before its holy conversion this flower had been commonly prescribed by Hippocrates to treat insanity and mania. While ancient herbalists used it to heal ailments such as worms, the primary usage was more sinister — poison. Ancient Greeks weaponized *heleîn borá*, which means literally, “injuring food“. In 585 BCE the water supply of the besieged city Kirrha was poisoned using *heleîn borá*. Once consumed, unlucky victims eventually died of cardiac arrest after vomiting, tongue and throat swelling, and a slowed heart rate.

## Nerium oleander

### Oleander

For more than a century the story went that one slice of Chloe's Oleander cake killed the Myrtles Plantation mistress and her two daughters. Enslaved cooks, wet nurses and nannies were in close proximity to owners' families, which fueled fears of poisoning. This hysteria led to laws stipulating the death penalty for any slaves administering medicine or educating another on poisonous plant knowledge. Passing on herbal wisdom became rebellion.

A single Oleander leaf can kill a child. The ornamental shrub contains glycosides that cause everything from cardiac abnormalities to visions and seizures. Standard toxicology screenings rarely detect Oleander poisoning, making it the perfect weapon. The seeds and leaves have other uses: inducing menstruation and abortion.

Named Rose Laurel, Rosebay and Petite Pink for its clustering flowers, Oleander is native to the Mediterranean and southwest Asia. Its genus *Nerium* means “water,” from the Greek *neros*, chosen for its wet habitat. Thriving near the ancient Greek springs, Oleander entranced the Oracle of Delphi. After chewing its leaves or inhaling its fumes, the high priestess convulsed in a frenzy as she received revelations. With a divine conduit, poison transmogrifies into prophecy.

## Nicotiana rustica

### Tobacco

For thousands of years Native Americans have used traditional Tobacco (*rustica*) as a medium of communication with the Creator. Its smoke carries prayers. The sacred plant blesses crops, binds agreements and welcomes guests. Ceremonial smoking of Tobacco offers thanksgiving for the Creator's gift. The Haudenosaunee use Tobacco to communicate with medicinal plants. After offering prayers, they place the leaves on the healing herbs in order to share their intentions with the plants before gathering them.

After migrating from South America, the earliest pipe Tobacco found in North America dates to 1658 BCE. Part of the nightshade family, Tobacco induces hallucinations if enough is smoked or chewed. Tobacco is the name for several species, while *Tabacum* is the Tobacco industry's chief commercial crop. A hybrid species, *Tabacum* is lethal. Its industry was built by ruthless slave labor in America, and the plant's products kill eight million people each year. The deadly toxin is nicotine. One teaspoon can kill a child. For an adult, 60 mg is lethal, although the body absorbs only 1 mg from a cigarette. Now “Tobacco kills” campaigns abound.

The Chippewa are fighting the anti-Tobacco movement by growing traditional Tobacco (*rustica*). Until the Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, laws banned many Native American customs, including traditional uses of Tobacco. But the Chippewa continued Tobacco prayer rituals with a birch-bark basket of commercial cigarettes for offerings and ceremonies. The Haudenosaunee opted to roll their own cigarettes, tax-free. Each practice finds a way to keep Tobacco sacred.

## Oenothera biennis

### Evening Primrose

Another plant in the female reproductive healthcare arsenal, *Oenothera biennis* is most commonly taken for premenstrual problems, including tension, abdominal bloating and menopausal symptoms.

When it is taken with adjuvant Vitamin E it relieves breast pain (mastalgia). Containing the amino acid tryptophan and prostaglandin precursors such as the essential fatty acids, cis-linoleic acid (CLA) and gamma-linoleic acid (GLA), Evening Primrose oil is effective for stimulating cervical ripening and widely used by midwives in the United States during the last month of pregnancy to decrease the incidence of postdates pregnancy.

Evening Primrose is also called Evening Star, Sundrop, Weedy Evening Primrose, German Rampion, Hog Weed, King's Cure-all. Native to eastern and central North America, the Cherokee, Haudenosaunee, Ojibwe and Potawatomi first used this night-blooming plant as a food source. The nutty-flavored roots can be eaten raw or cooked like potatoes. The flowering stems are preferably used when still young. The flowers themselves are edible and have a sweet taste. The plant's curative, astringent and sedative properties were also highly valued by the First Nations. The Cherokee heated the plant's root and applied it to hemorrhoids, while the Haudenosaunee used it in a salve for skin problems.

Brought to Europe in the early 17th century the weedy plants quickly became a cottage garden favorite with their flashy yellow flowers that burst into bloom just as the sun set; however, it took decades for the Europeans to recognize its medicinal properties. Then, it was used for a wide array of ailments, including asthma, psoriasis, eczema, whooping cough, rheumatoid arthritis, and multiple sclerosis.

## **Origanum vulgare**

### **Oregano / Marjoram**

For centuries the classification *Origanum vulgare* has variously been identified as either Oregano or Marjoram. From North Africa to Greece and from Portugal to the North American Colonies, this plant's ability to interfere with human fertility has long been acknowledged. Dioscorides recommended Marjoram for birth control as well as an emmenagogue and abortifacient. Due to its powerful bacteria- and fungi-killing properties as well as its use

as a painkiller and anti-inflammatory, Medieval Midwives incorporated the herb into Our Lady's Bedstraw used in childbirth. (see Hemp Agrimony). The oil treats lactation-related *Candida* infections of the nipples and also kills lice.

Contemporary technology has revealed Marjoram exhibits antigonadotropic activity, inhibiting both ovulation in women and the creation of sperm in men. Antigonadotropins are used to treat hormonally-sensitive cancers, delay precocious puberty and puberty in transgender youth, and to treat estrogen-associated conditions such as abnormally heavy menstrual flow and endometriosis. High-dose antigonadotropin therapy has been referred to as *medical castration*.

## **Petroselinum crispum**

### **Parsley**

*Woman Dies After Using Parsley to Induce Miscarriage, First Death Since Argentina Senate Rejected Abortion Bill....NEWSWEEK 2018.* An Argentinian woman died after attempting to induce a miscarriage using parsley tea. In Argentina, abortion is illegal except in cases of rape, incest, or when a person's life is in danger. A bill to legalize abortion up to 14 weeks had been recently rejected. Senator Eduardo Aguilar responded: There might not be a law, but abortions will continue, and if it's without a law, the woman's life is at risk.

In May 2019 Texas legislature changed the state's abortion law. Previous state law prohibited abortions after 20 weeks, with certain exceptions, such as when the pregnancy was not viable or the fetus had "severe and irreversible" abnormalities. Senate Bill 1033 did away with those exceptions criminalizing doctors and forcing women to endure traumatic and ill-fated pregnancies. Immediately after the law changed, the Southwestern Women's Surgery Center saw an increase in patients who had tried to end their pregnancy at home. That week, a doctor found parsley in a patient's vagina. Women's bodies have been legislated by men for centuries.

In ancient times Midwives or Wise-women Witches would have guided usage of *Petroselinum crispum*. Sacred to Venus and

Aphrodite, it was used to bring on labor contractions, as an abortifacient, and to reduce a mother's milk production and help wean a child. During the Medieval Witch-hunts medicine became an institution of the church and state and women were banned from the role of Doctor. This centuries long norm held strong until deep into the 20th century.

Parsley reduces inflammations, contains histamine inhibitors and is a free radical scavenger. Volatile oil components inhibit tumor formation in animal studies, particularly in the lungs, qualifying it as a "chemoprotective" food that neutralizes carcinogens from cigarette and grill smoke. Some members of the Apiaceae family including Carrot, Celery, Fennel, Parsnip, and Parsley contain polyynes, a class of organic compounds that exhibit cytotoxic effects.

## **Ricinus communis**

**Castor Bean**

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## **Abrus precatorius**

**Rosary Pea**

In 2014, British woman Kuntal Patel laced her abusive mother's Diet Coke with abrin, a lethal toxin that she bought on the dark web with Bitcoin. Abrin, from Rosary Pea, and a similar toxin ricin, from Castor Bean, are both considered bioterrorism agents. They assassinate by toxalbumin poisoning: multiorgan failure for which there is no antidote – at least none yet revealed to the public. Both plants are native to the Eastern hemisphere: Rosary Pea from India and Asia, and Castor Bean from East Africa, India and the Mediterranean. Most Rosary Pea seeds are red and black like ladybugs and come from legume pods. The black and white ones are mistaken for Castor Bean seeds, which come from prickly pods. Both have been used for millennia in traditional medicine, from ancient Egyptian medical treatises in 1550BCE up to the present day in parts of Africa, India and China.

Before scientists isolated the toxins in Castor Bean and Rosary Pea, women knew their uterine effects. Recommended by the 4th-century Greek midwife Aspasia and used in South Africa and by the Navajo, Castor Bean oil, roots and seeds (without the deadly hull) have prevented and ended pregnancies. Women in parts of Africa and India have used Rosary Pea roots and powdered seeds as an oral contraceptive and abortifacient. But today, ordering these toxic seeds might alarm the authorities.

## **Rosa**

**Rose**

The Rose carries a deep history. A Rose fossil found in the Florissant Fossil Beds in Florissant, Colorado dates to 55 million years ago. Over 20 naturally occurring species are spread through North and South America. Garden cultivation of Roses began 5,000 years ago, in China.

Its thorns represent the pain of love. The Rose was a favorite of Aphrodite. Distraught after the death of Adonis, she ran barefoot through the woods slicing her feet on the thorns of a white Rose, forever turning Roses red. During the Roman Empire Roses were grown extensively in the Middle East. Roman dining featured wreaths of Roses for their sweet scent while Rose pudding was served to kindle love affairs. To woo Marc Antony, Cleopatra carpeted her floor with Rose petals, like we carpet the floor at modern weddings.

In 794 Charlemagne required every estate to grow the Rose. Thus, the Rose acclimated to Europe. During the fifteenth century, rival factions of the House of Plantagenet: one represented by a red Rose and the other by a white Rose went to war for the English throne. The War of the Roses eliminated the male lines of both the Lancaster and York families.

An issue of human survival, procreation has historically been a concern of the church and state. Aphrodisiacs insured both male and female potency. Brimming with aphrodisiac properties, the Rose has been an important player in human procreation. The sweet,

spicy, floral fragrance boosts the libido, evokes romance, induces relaxation and reduces symptoms of erectile dysfunction and disinterest in sexual activity. Through aromatherapy Rose oil acts to balance female hormones and stimulate hormone secretions — triggering menstruation while easing cramps, nausea, and fatigue and the pain associated with menstruation or Post-Menopausal Syndrome.

Less familiar are the medicinal properties of the Rose. Rose tea cleans the blood and strengthens the heart and nervous system. A tea made of white wine and Rose petals can cure exhaustion or relieve uterine cramps. Rosehip (the seed pods) tea is high in Vitamin C soothing coughs and colds. It also makes a fine jam.

## Rubus idaeus

### Raspberry

Often referred to as The Woman's Herb, sipping on Red Raspberry leaf tea may relieve discomforts of the menstrual cycle. The leaf contains fragarine, a plant compound that tightens muscles in the pelvic area, possibly reducing menstrual cramping caused by spasms of these muscles. It's not uncommon for expectant mothers to use Raspberry leaf tea in the last two months of pregnancy. Toned by fragarine, the uterine muscles work more efficiently during labor so it progresses at a nice, steady pace. However, Raspberry leaf should not be used to kickstart labor — it could cause intense contractions and distress the baby. As a powerful uterine stimulant, Raspberry leaf can cause miscarriage or premature labor.

Polyphenols like tannins and flavonoids in the Red Raspberry leaf act as antioxidants in your body and can help protect cells from damage. The leaves also contain small amounts of ellagic acids. Memorial Sloan Kettering cites an experiment where rats fed ellagic acid before and during exposure to carcinogens developed fewer liver tumors than rats fed a normal diet.

## Tanacetum vulgare

### Tansy

Tansy, derived from the Greek word *athanasia* meaning immortality, was one of the aromatic herbs gathered for use in the lying-in bed known as Our Lady's Bedstraw (See Hemp Agrimony). The midwife who collected the Bedstraw herbs was certainly aware of the plant's powerful potential concerning female reproduction. Tansy was used to drive out the afterbirth if not fully voided. Used to restore menstrual flow, it was also known for its ability to induce abortion. Enslaved African women of the American Antebellum South were familiar with Tansy as a menstrual pain reliever.

Highly toxic to internal parasites, Tansy tea has been prescribed for centuries to kill and expel worms. The northern Cheyenne of Montana called common Tansy "yellow medicine" as it was used to treat jaundice. In the American colonies, European-Americans wrapped corpses in Tansy to retard decay. Tansy leaves were used to ward flies, ants and fleas off uncooked meat, keeping it fresher longer. The plant's volatile oil is high in thujone, a substance found in absinthe. Known as Stinking Willie, Bitter Buttons, Parsley Fern, Golden Buttons, Agua-da-Colonia, and Cow Bitter, Tansy ingestion can cause convulsions, weakened pulse, and death.

Lune Ames, Jennifer Kabat, Marlene McCarty