

Christian Academy of Natural Health

HERBAL WILDCRAFTING

1. Introduction

As a Christian Medical Herbalist, you should always be on the lookout for familiar herbs that are abundantly available in your area. Part of your responsibility as a Medical Herbalist is to be able to find and identify wild herbs that are safe to use as food or medicine (especially if you are planning to wildcraft some of your own herbs).

And even though you may be planning to buy or grow your own herbs, being able to find and identify medicinal herbs in the wild is a tremendous blessing and will help you to grow in your professional knowledge as a Christian Herbalist.

God has provided us with natural food and medicine that will bless our life - if we don't eat or use the wrong plant. You must therefore learn as much as possible beforehand about the flora of the region where you live or where you will be serving.

Note: You will find illustrations of the plants described in this course in Appendices A and B. Please do not skip the appendices of this course as they contain very valuable information.

A Biblical Example of Dangerous Wildcrafting

Wildcrafting is the art and science of finding plants in their natural ("wild") habitat to use as food or medicine. Christian herbalists should learn how to recognize and use the local medicinal herbs that are native to their own area - but plants that are not 100% recognized and understood should never be used. The Holy Bible gives us a very clear example of the dangers of poor wildcrafting skills:

"And Elisha returned to Gilgal, and there was a famine in the land. Now the sons of the prophets were sitting before him; and he said to his servant, 'Put on the large pot, and boil stew for the sons of the prophets.' So one went out into the field to gather herbs, and found a wild vine, and gathered from it a lapful of wild gourds, and came and sliced them into the pot of stew, though they did not know what they were. Then they served it to the men to eat. Now it happened, as they were eating the stew, that they cried out and said, 'Man of God, there is death in the pot!' And they could not eat it." (2Ki 4:38-40 NKJV)

"Bad Dates"

In the movie Indiana Jones, there is a memorable scene where Indy's friend snatches away a date just before Indy places it in his mouth. The camera quickly pans down to a dead monkey with a date in its hand. Indy's friend looks up at Indy and says, "bad dates".

While the dates in the Indiana Jones movie were intentionally poisoned, we know that there are some herbs that are naturally poisonous to consume. In 2 Kings 4:38-40, Elisha's servant goes out to wildcraft some herbs to add to a meal. The servant finds some wild gourds and adds them to a stew - even though he "did not know what they were". As a result of the actions of this untrained servant, many people were put in danger and fed "bad dates" (good thing that Elisha was there to save the day).

The Untrained Servant

Medicinal and edible herbs were extensively wildcrafted by the people of Elisha's time and culture. The fields were daily wildcrafted for mallow, asparagus, and other wild plants. The "wild vine" found by Elisha's servant was probably the colocynth, a type of round cucumber, which, in its leaves, tendrils, and fruit, bears a strong resemblance to a wild vine. The "gourds", or fruit, are of the color

and size of an orange and very bitter to the taste, causing severe colic that sometimes would lead to death.

Elisha's servant did not know what he was doing. The servant was assigned to wildcraft edible herbs for the meal but instead he gathered something that he did not recognize or understand. As Christian herbalists, we must be very careful to only use medicinal herbs that we recognize and understand - especially if we decide to wildcraft local herbs.

Wildcrafting is dangerous without the proper skill, knowledge, and experience. In addition, wildcrafting can cause a depletion or extinction of certain herbs if we are not careful to be good stewards of God's blessings. Christian herbalists should only wildcraft local herbs that are well recognized, known, abundant, safe, and not on any botanical "near extinction" list.

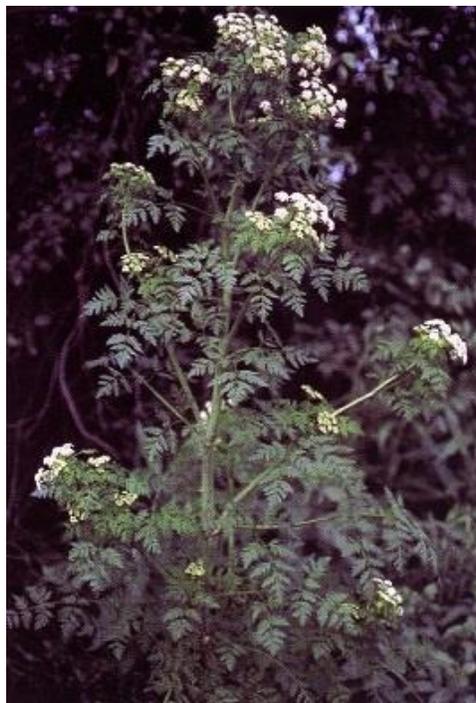
This story in God's word reminds us how dangerous it can be when we attempt to help people without the proper training and knowledge. As a Christian herbalist, do not be an untrained servant of God. Christian herbalists should always continue to study, research, and self-evaluate as they continue to grow their healing ministries.

The Best Option

Properly and safely wildcrafting your own local medicinal herbs is a very fun and rewarding experience. But the best option, if it is available, is to grow your own herbs and make your own medicinal preparations - from scratch. Growing your own medicinal herbs will provide you with a more unique and deeper insight into the herbs that you use in your own personal materia medica.

By growing your own herbs, you will learn how to recognize each herb in the different stages of growth and you will learn to appreciate the delicate balance between the herb and the medicine. But much more importantly, you will appreciate and better understand the tender mercies of God in each precious healing herb of His creation.

Nevertheless, all Christian herbalists must learn the basics of herbal identification and be able to recognize and safely use every single herb in their materia medica.



Poison Hemlock

Plants are valuable sources of food and medicine because they are widely available, easily procured, and, in the proper combinations, can meet all your nutritional needs and most of your minor to moderate health care needs.

WARNING

The critical factor in using plants for food or medicine is to avoid accidental poisoning. Use only those plants you can positively identify and you know are safe to use.

You must absolutely identify wild plants before using them as food or medicine. Poison hemlock has killed people who mistook it for its relatives, wild carrots and wild parsnips.

As you learn the plant life of the region in which you live or work, it is important to be able to recognize both cultivated and wild edible and medicinal plants.

Note: One of the best ways to learn the useable plants and herbs of your area is to pretend that you are in a survival/wilderness situation. Each time you take a walk, pay attention to the "weeds" and plants around your neighborhood - and ask yourself if you would be able to safely recognize and use the plants and herbs that you find if your life (and the life of your family) depended on it.

This concludes this course lesson sample.