

MEDICINAL PLANTS



SOURCE: [Embracing one](#) by Susan Cohen Thompson

INTEGRATION OF HUMAN- PLANT RELATIONSHIPS

Anna Betz, MCPP, Dip.SW

SUMMARY: We live in an interconnected world, but we make decisions primarily motivated by what benefits us individually. Gaia theory, as explained by Anna in this article, is the foundation of a global community of living systems, including humans and plants. In this article, Anna offers ways to facilitate reflective thinking and concrete action towards a more sustainable and respectful relationship with plants, medicinal and comestible. Community supported agriculture and community gardens are both discussed as the outcome of the integration of the human-plant relationship.

NEW APPROACHES TO SELF, COMMUNITY AND PLANET

[Gaia theory](#) (1) is the principle that the biosphere of Earth is a single complex living system, influenced by all living beings within. This understanding of the interconnectedness of all living systems within the

terrain of Gaia has profound implications for human health, agriculture, climate change and many other scientific disciplines.

As members of the human kingdom, we need to ask ourselves, how integral is our behavior in terms of agriculture, stewardship of land and changing global temperatures in participating in the totality of the global ecosystem?

Our life is interdependent on other kingdoms of earth—especially plants—for food, air, water, fuel, clothing, and shelter, but their lives are not interdependent on us. With respect to plants and humans, who is the lesser and who is the greater? Who should be more mindful of keeping a balance?

QUESTIONS WORTH ENQUIRING INTO AS A COMMUNITY OF HEALERS:

1. As prescribers, producers and users of plant-based medicines, conscious of the interconnectedness of life in its many forms, what are the implications for the way we live and how we practice endobiogenic medicine?
2. As a community, how could we support each other in refining our receptivity to the spectrum of people-plant interactions?
3. Are there some practices worth replicating that could enable us to notice what catches our attention that needs to be ‘exercised’?
4. What are possible situations and conditions we can co-create as a community for the emergence of a more ecological life practice?
5. How can we become more aware of the contributions that plants make to human life—the meanings they add, the needs they meet, the values they create, their nuances and extraordinary adaptations?

ACTIONS WORTH TAKING FOR A MORE INTEGRAL RELATIONSHIP WITH PLANTS

As we inquire into these kinds of questions, we can become more conscious of our daily habits and choose to change them. Some suggestions to start with:

1. Purchasing plant extracts including tinctures from people who work with growers who are exemplary stewards of the land.

2. Supporting companies that use plastic-free, biodegradable and compostable pots instead of glass bottles or plastic ones for supplements. [Cytoplan](#) is an example of how a supplement company supports customers, both ethically and sustainably by going plastic-free. [This article](#) describes why glass bottles are not good for the environment either.
3. Supporting and participating in [Community supported Agriculture](#) (2) (CSA). CSA is a partnership between farmers and consumers in which the responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared.
 - a. CSA helps to address increasing concerns about the lack of transparency, sustainability and resilience of our food system. It is one of the most radical ways that we can re-take control and ownership of our food system.
 - b. *The most significant difference between a CSA and a veg box scheme is the way in which customers share some of the risks and rewards with the growers, meaning sometimes they receive a smaller share of the harvest and sometimes a larger one dependant on any crop failures or successes of that year.*
 - c. *A non-profit organization in Greece named The Southern Lights (<http://thesouthernlights.org>) has created a regenerative farming program (<http://regenerativefarminggreece.org>). The organization is currently in the process of converting 6 farms throughout Greece into regenerative operations.*
4. Actively supporting biodynamic farming
5. Supporting ethical foraging *and creating Community herb gardens* in local communities to provide education and increase resilience and diversity as well as providing continued supply of herbs.

- Taking re-usable bags when we go shopping, etc.
- Shifting our mindset and behaviours from acting as consumers to becoming co-producers of what we need for a good life

Scientists and educators have described this contemporary condition as “plant blindness”—an anthropocentric and animal-centric cultural attitude that recognizes the large above the small, the moving above that which stands still, or the singular animal above the biologically complex and

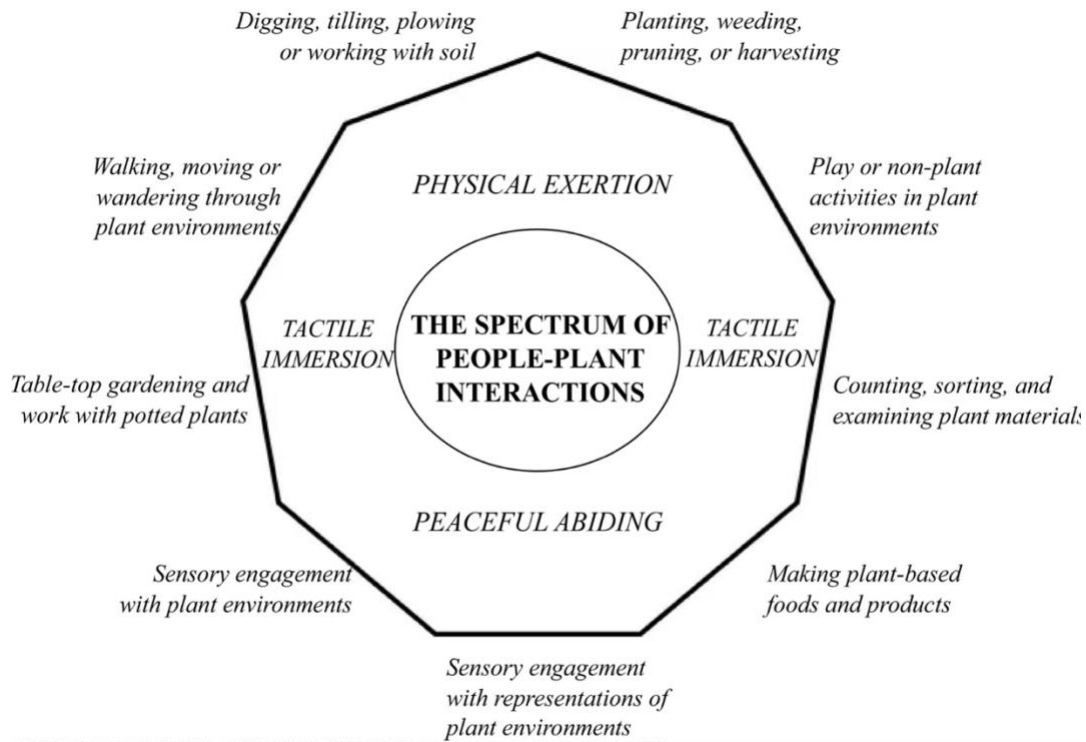


Fig. 1: Maps the spectrum of people-plant interactions, which can include various degrees of peaceful abiding, tactile immersion, and physical exertion (4)

To function in society, we can easily become guilty of filtering out information that seems to be unimportant to the personal or professional task at hand. In many cases these “unimportant” things may be plants. Although terms like “ecosystem services” and “sustainability” have begun to widen the reach of plants and brought them into economics and policy, it is also the case that self-identification with plants or everyday consciousness about plant ecologies is not yet widespread. This is especially the case in highly urbanized and industrial societies, where the intrinsic value of living plant ecologies has historically been ignored, or plants are seen as something to conquer, domesticate, and channel for economic profits (e.g., Brennan, [2000](#); Leiss, [1994](#); Merchant, [1980](#)) (4).

diverse landscape (Allen, [2003](#); Blackhall-Miles, [2015](#); Sanders, [2019](#); Wandersee & Schussler, [1999](#)) (4). People-plant interactions, may not always seem particularly productive for “commercial value” or relevant in “the clamour of our own practical interests”, but they can ultimately lead to profound shifts in personal or collective consciousness.

Imagine how our culture could start to change once children from a young age would spent more time in nature and developed their receptivity to the language of plants and opened themselves to other ways of thinking and being in the world.

There is not necessarily one kind of interaction that is more effective than another. Different kinds of

interactions may be better suited for different settings or groups, and can be adjusted based on availability of space or resources. The spectrum of people–plant interactions includes (c.f. figure 1): sensory engagement with representations of plant environments, sensory engagement with plant environments, walking, moving, or wandering through plant environments, play or non-plant activities in plant environments, counting, sorting, and examining plant materials, table-top gardening and work with potted plants, digging, tilling or working with soil, making plant-based foods and products, garden planting, weeding, pruning, or harvesting.

For educators, gardeners, or therapists who plan horticultural activities for a specific group, the goal is often to encourage people to engage with plants in both new and familiar ways. For example, someone who is eager for physical exertion through horticultural work may have difficulty pausing to rest and note new flower blooms. Someone looking to passively escape in the garden may need reminders to engage more tactilely or physically. In some cases, a temporary escape may be exactly what is needed. When properly approached and contextualized, plants are able to meet people where they are—in terms of ability, experience and background—which means that different people will experience the spectrum of plant activities much differently. A good resource is [The Profession and Practice of Horticultural Therapy](#) (5)

- CSA's to learn from and with each other. We can do this via podcasts, videos, articles, workshops.
- Cultivate our own patch of Collective Knowledge creation which would be

Conclusions:

There is an urgency in our world for us to live in a way that respects and honours our interconnectedness with everything. Consciously or un-consciously we co-create the world we live in with every choice we make in our lives, whether personal, social, economic or political. The theory and practice of Endobiogeny provides us with [ideal tools and practices](#) to support our collaborative sense-making as an endobiogenic community.

We can strengthen our competencies by envisioning and enacting our desired reality together. **Every consultation, every encounter and every therapeutic intervention can become an opportunity for transformative learning for ourselves, each other as well as for those we serve.** Together we can explore our strengths and learn how to use them in the context of the global, positive change we want to see happen.

Next steps:

- Come together as a global Endobiogeny learning community and envision and enact generative steps towards a desired future.
- Respond to the growing public sentiment and sensitivity for interconnectedness by engaging with the public and with practitioners in neighbouring fields like

accessible to the public, we need to create a well curated and easy to navigate knowledge garden. ✱

About the Author

Anna Betz, MCPP, Dip.SW, is a medical herbalist, co-founder of Endobiogenic Society UK and member of the professional governing body for qualified Medical Herbalists in the UK. She practises [Endobiogenic medicine](#) in conjunction with [herbal medicine](#), dietary, life-style and wellness coaching, utilizing systemic family therapy and

narrative approaches. For the National Health Service of the United Kingdom, she pioneered a 'brainfood project' to optimise brain health and to prevent or slow down cognitive decline.

Lear more about Anna's scientific contributions:

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29988927/>

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/14713012211014382>

<https://enliveningedge.org/research/social-systems-need-learn-biological-systems/>

RESOURCES and REFERENCES

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- (2) Glass, plastic and the environment: <https://www.goingzerowaste.com/blog/which-is-better-for-the-environment-glass-or-plastic/>
- (3) CSA: <https://communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/what-is-a-csa/>
- (4) Community supported farming in Greece: <http://thesouthernlights.org> <http://regenerativefarminggreece.org>
- (5) Gaia Theory: <https://wholepeople.com/gaia-theory>
- (6) People–plant interactions and the ecological self:
<https://nph.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ppp3.10087#ppp310087-bib-0012>
- (7) The Profession and Practice of Horticultural Therapy
https://books.google.co.uk/books?hl=en&lr=&id=FTqDDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PP1&ots=r7D2RnucLG&sig=pKroZxBZM8tuABYdHJ2Bzg-3YkE&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false

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