

Our Walk With Grief-Support for the Journey(herbs and more)

The allies discussed here are not intended to disrupt or bypass the grieving process. Some are to give us the strength to continue on while experiencing our grief, give us the footing to bravely encounter our feelings, or to ease tension to allow for a needed night of rest, others are to provide nourishment and help the body to mitigate the stress response that comes with grief.

Flowers, Aroma:

Even the **flowers** given or bought for a funeral go beyond just the sentiment, the symbol of the flower and its beauty. The scent of flowers hold nurturing aspects for us, reminding us that our sorrow and joy, our living and dying are intertwined, reminding us of the beauty in the world in times of darkness.

The Hypothalamus and Pituitary are stimulated by smells, triggering the release of neurochemicals and hormones that regulate body systems, like the nervous, immune, endocrine systems. This can be helpful for stress, blood pressure, tension and much more. As an herbalist, I use very few essential oils because it takes hundreds of plants to make a very small bottle. End of life care is one time I find EO's useful. The smell in a diffuser or on an anointed body can have a beneficial effect on grieving caretakers and community members, as well as mitigate smells that sometimes occur during vigils lasting many days.

General Essential Oils used in times of Grief: Rose, Lavender, Cedarwood, Linden Blossom, Melissa(Lemon Balm), Rosemary, Chamomile, Sandalwood, Frankincense, Myrrh, Cinnamon, all citrus and citrus flower(tangerine, Mandarin, neroli, lemon, grapefruit etc.), Spikenard, Jasmine, Cypress, Bergamot

Sleep Aid/Calming: Spikenard, Chamomile, Lavender, Sandalwood

Uplifting: Rosemary, Citrus, Cedar

Shock/Denial: Sandalwood, Melissa, Frankincense

Guilt/Anger: Lavender, Roman, Chamomile, Jasmine

Depression: Mandarin, Lavender, Clary Sage

Acceptance: Mandarin, Spikenard, Cedar

Lungs/Phlegm/Grief: Eucalyptus, Rosemary, Peppermint, Sandalwood, Tea Tree

Ways to use Essential Oils: Open the bottle and smell, Add to spray bottle with water(5-20 drops to 1 cup water), Add a few drops to lotion, Use a diffuser.

Aromatic Herbs: The volatile oils in aromatic herbs give them a strong scent or aroma, as well as a dispersive quality. When making tea with these herbs it is important to cover the cup or jar that they are brewed in so that the volatile oils remain in the tea instead of evaporating out. Many aromatic herbs have carminative properties, meaning the volatile oils dispel gas in the stomach and aid digestion. The volatile oils also work to break up and disperse stuck mucus in the lungs. These plants can be dispersive in shifting stuck moods and overwhelming feelings, with effect upon the nervous system. Here are some examples of Aromatic herbs: **Rose, Lavender, Mint, Lemon Balm, Catnip, Fennel, Anise, Rosemary, Holy Basil, Juniper, Bee Balm, Fennel, Ginger, Chamomile, Sage, Anise Hyssop and Thyme.....**

Adaptogens: Adaptogenic herbs are used throughout various herbal medicine systems. Ayurvedic medicine calls them rasayanic herbs, meaning rejuvenation. Traditional Chinese Medicine calls them qi tonics or superior herbs. They bring balance to various body systems, normalizing functions and increasing resistance to a wide range of stressors. Western herbalism defines adaptogens as regulating to the HPA axis and sympathoadrenal systems, re-regulating disharmonies in the neuroendocrine and immune systems. Some examples are: **Eleuthero, Ginseng, Astragalus, Licorice, Reishi, Schisandra, Ashwaganda, Goji Berry, Rhodiola and Holy Basil.....**

The stress response from grief leaves stress hormones in the system circulating and causing further damage to the body. Overexposure to cortisol, adrenaline and other stress hormones can lead to:

- * Anxiety
- Depression
- Digestive problems
- Headaches
- Heart disease
- Sleep problems
- Weight gain
- Memory and concentration impairment
- Impaired Immune System Responses
- Greater Risks of Major Health Issues-Cancer, Heart Attacks, Auto-Immune

Liver Herbs help the liver to process the excess stress hormones circulating in the body - **Burdock, Yellowdock, Dandelion, Chicory, Gentian, St. Johns Wort, Mugwort and many more.....**

Lung Herbs: Many aromatic herbs are beneficial to lung conditions breaking up stuck mucus. The dispersive quality shifts emotion and mood. Examples:

Elecampane, Wild Cherry, Thyme, New England Aster. In Traditional Chinese Medicine emotions are affiliated with the body/organs. Grief is considered to be held in the lungs. Helping to keep the lungs healthy aids in the process of grief and keeping illness away. Other herbs supporting lungs: **Mullein, Violet, Borage, Plantain**

<https://www.chinesemedicineliving.com/philosophy/the-emotions/grief-the-lungs/>

Nutritive Herbs/ Nourishing Infusions: There are many herbs that are high in nutritive content. An infusion is a water based extraction of plant medicine. Usually done with boiling water, sometimes cold depending on the plants constituents. An infusion has a steeping time of about 4-8 hours. This allows for a greater extraction of nutrients, which can prove to be beneficial in times when grief eliminates the appetite, when drinking infusions or tea is easier than eating. Infusions of nutritive herbs provide vitamins and minerals needed for basic bodily processes and brain function, mental health. Vitamin C(found in rosehips, hibiscus) is vital to the stress response, supports the adrenals and adrenal hormone production. Minerals in nutritive herbs(oatstraw, nettle) provide nourishment to the nervous system. Some herbs for infusions are: **Nettle, Oatstraw, Milky Oats, Alfalfa, Raspberry, Linden, Horsetail, Red Clover, Rose Hips, Hibiscus, Chickweed, Burdock Root, Hawthorne Berries, Violet leaf, Plantain Leaf, Marshmallow Root.** Nervines and Adaptogens can be added in Using dried herb-4Tbsp, 1/2 to 1 ounce by weight, or 1 big handful- to a quart jar- add boiling water to fill the jar-put on lid and let sit overnight or 4-8 hours. Strain and drink. A quart a day.

Nervines: A plant remedy that has a beneficial effect upon the nervous system in some way. Here are some examples of herbs with nervine affect: **Skullcap, Lemon Balm, Mint, Catnip, Passionflower, Motherwort, Rose, Wood Betony, Holy Basil, California Poppy, Linden, Hops, Valerian, Milky Oats, St, John's wort, Rosemary, Kava, Blue Vervain**

Nervines for Sleep: Passionflower, Hops, Valerian, Milky Oats, California Poppy, Jamaican Dogwood, Chamomile, Catnip

Stimulating, uplifting and soothing Nervines: Rosemary, Mint, Motherwort, Rose, Lemon Balm, Milky Oats

Heart Tonics: These are herbs often used to help with physical conditions of the cardio-vascular system. They have shown to be effective allies for the heart on an emotional level. **Hawthorne, Linden, Rose, Motherwort, Reishi.....**

Flower Essences work on an emotional level. Their subtle medicine is helpful when our emotions keep us from health, happiness/being who we want to be, providing a gentle nudge of awareness, with support to help us remove our blockages to wellness.

Elm-for overwhelm

Bleeding Heart- Strengthening Heart Forces

Borage- Deep Grief, Courage, Past Stress/Grief Resurfacing

Pink Yarrow- personal boundaries, finding containment, centering, rebalancing

Forget me Not- helping to know on a soul level that death and departure are not the end of a spiritual relationship

Star of Bethlehem- inconsolable grief, shock, torment, to soothe and calm

Onion- Balancing the tears, will aid with crying if you need to cry and help to stop if crying is bringing overwhelm.

Wild Oat- Where to go from here? What's next? For the person feeling clueless, left behind, without purpose, needing and seeking direction. Regenerating Neural Pathways to the New Self.

Periwinkle-Despair, confusion, ease constriction, heart-opening through life's changes

Rose- loving support through life's transitions, being held while opening to grief

Violet- helping the body and heart to come to terms with grief/loss. Strength in the darkness.

Homeopathics:

Ignatia amara- recommended for shock, anxiety, insomnia, depression, headaches, twitching and spasms that are all associated with grief. Also helpful for a person who is forming a wall around heart to suppress emotion.

Rescue Remedy: Shock, Crises and Emergencies(Rock Rose, Clematis, Star of Bethlehem, Cherry Plum, Impatiens)

Caring for the Body: Cleansing Herbal Waters, Burning, Anointing, Herbs to add to **washing water**(care of the body)- **Rose, Lavender, Yarrow, Mugwort, Angelica, Wood Betony, Elecampane, St. John's wort, Oregon Grape Root, Barberry Root, Sage, Sweet Fern, Monarda** and much more. Is there a plant that you really love and have a relationship with that you would want to be washed with? You can make a tea out of them and add to the washing water. The tea that I add to the washing water has as aromatics, antiseptics, disinfectants and plants for power and personal strength. You can also add flower petals and essential oils.

Anointing of the body- often done with essential oils added to carrier oils. Threefold Benefits- 1)Honoring, an act of caring, a final gift. 2)Ceremonial blessing connecting to divine source for the journey ahead 3)Cleansing the body, removing smell and absolving fear of germs. The fourth bonus benefit is to the caretakers, by way of aromatic qualities.

Burning Plants/Resins- used throughout cultures for cleansing the air, clearing and protection. Can clear the air and help with odor. Also proven to protect against germs. Study: <http://www.greenmedinfo.com/blog/killer-germs-obiterated-medicinal-smoke-smudging-study-reveals> Plants I like to burn: **Sweet Fern, Yellow Sweet Clover, Garden Sage, Angelica Root, Lavender, Meadowsweet**

Contraindications

It is good to consult your local herbalist, physician, health practitioner when using herbs medicinally, especially if you have complex health situations and if you are on pharmaceuticals. Many herbs can be used safely with meds by spacing them out 2 hours apart, as herbs run through the bloodstream in that time. But some herbs and meds specifically react in non-helpful ways. An herbalist can help you find the best way to take the herbs that will be of benefit to you, whether through tincture, glycerite, herbal vinegars, oxymels, teas, infusions, external oils and salves or simply as the food that nourishes us.

Other Support

Nourishment- Food and Water, Stay hydrated! Nourishing Infusions when appetite is sparse.

Family, Friends, or a simple silent presence/witness- to physically be with us and check in regularly. Sometimes a hug is the best medicine.

Exercise/Movement getting up and doing something different helps us to create new experiences/feel something different- Relieves Stress, moves the blood and keeps us healthy

Sleep- Sleep is often disrupted by grief, shock, trauma. Make time for rest.

Getting outside in Nature and Sunlight- There is a holding that happens, a balancing/ integrating, feeling a part of it all. Tending to plants.

Ritual, Rhythm, Ceremony- Ways of honoring our dead and our grief. Be it lighting a candle each day to reflect upon memories of beloveds, acknowledge pain or find gratitude for experiences. Daily writing, walks in nature, Praying, meditating, fire ceremony.

Counseling Services- Having someone to talk to who can offer methods to encounter and live with our grief, emotions.

Medical Support- Having a doctor or practitioner to check in with if the stress of grief is causing physical, mental, emotional harm that needs to be addressed.

Music- Singing, whether you think you have a good singing voice or not. Sing along with meaningful to you music, make sounds, hum. Laughter is good medicine as well.

Scaling down a busy schedule in order to take care of your self. Taking people up on their offers of help.

Some of my Beloveds:

Hawthorne is an herb that is used physically for ailments of the heart. It has a normalizing effect on blood pressure and increases circulation to the heart, strengthening arteries. It has vitamin C and flavonoids like quercetin that have overall health benefits, mitigating inflammation. It can reduce excess fluids and congestion in the heart and help to regulate heartbeat. Emotionally it brings strength when our heart feels congested, tight and overwhelmed. It's like a big hug from a beloved, providing courage and support to be present in our walk with grief.

Holy Basil, I use as a nervine and adaptogen with an affinity for memory, brain health and depression that centers around experienced trauma. As an adaptogen it lowers corticosterone levels that indicate stress. It is joyfully aromatic reminding us of the sweetness that is in our lives even in dark times. I have learned it to be a powerful ally when we have been able to look at our grief, stress and traumatic experiences, holding and knowing them, gleaning enough awareness and truth from their messages to begin the journey of releasing what no longer serves. Holy Basil can be an ally for releasing old painful patterns from experiencing and re-experiencing trauma.

Rose brings about a strength in vulnerability allowing us to let go and feel, in times when we are holding too tightly in our hearts, denying grief. I think of the opening of the flower's petals, and opening to our grief. When taking or recommending Rose it is good to ensure that you or your beloved has support for riding the waves of grief.

Burdock is like a rock providing nourishment, stability and solid ground in tumultuous times. It is rooted. Have you tried digging up a big burdock root! It runs deep. Matt Wood says it provides courage in the face of fear of the unknown. It "brings up old memories and new answers and gives us faith to move ahead on our path." As an oily root burdock regulates sebaceous glands and provides needed nourishing oils to the endocrine and nervous system, helping with hormone transport and coating the myelin sheath. As a prebiotic, the inulin in burdock feeds the healthy gut flora, helping to undo the damage stress wreaks on our digestive system. It also provides vitamins and minerals, which is perfect when stress and grief are affecting the appetite.

Linden is a dear friend for congested grief, folks weighed down with emotion who carry stress in the heart. Robin Rose Bennet so beautifully says: "linden helps you dance with current grief and clear out old stuck grief" This speaks to me strongly when pondering the reality of congested and undigested grief in our culture. I find that when we encounter new experiences that bring us to grief, all the old stuck stuff has a chance to come up too, for revisitation, to be felt and seen.

Violet. This shy little flower thrives in the darkness. Just as it nourishes weak and emaciated tissues, it also revitalizes us when it is our constant wish to shy away from life and living. Violet is used as a lung and breast herb, moving lymph and clearing congestion. It's doctrine of signatures sings of the long road that we must cross in our grief, the pathway from the head to the heart. The purple or white flowers relate to the crown and third eye chakra colors and it's leaf is heart shaped and green like the 4th chakra. When encountering loss of beloveds our minds may hold the information that they are no longer here, but our heart and memories hold them alive. Violet can bring a loving embrace to the despair of this juxtaposition while trying to keep our bridges alive on this pathway. The beautiful analogy of the pathway between the head and heart was shared with me by Lora Krall, who learned of it from her teacher BlackHawk Woman, also known as Pinky.

Blue Vervain, a powerful bitter nervine and antispasmodic, is helpful for trauma and the initial and continuing shock of loss. Herbalist Carol Jacobs used to speak of Blue Vervain's restorative properties and finding the plant growing in places where trauma has occurred, like flooding, fire. Blue Vervain relaxes tension. Suited for folks who hold a lot of tension and have very high expectations or standards for themselves, perhaps an expectation to get back to work and not spend time "grieving about" after the death of a loved one(perhaps not the healthiest aspiration). In such cases it can be used to relax tension in the heart, neck back and shoulders bringing movement and an easing up of such intense expectations, allowing grief. It is an intense bitter with a gripping force that gets our energy moving and helps with grounding when the shock of trauma seems unmovable or overwhelming. Shock and trauma can have a nervous and anxious energy and blue vervain's cooling sedative nervine action calm and bring down this energy, to help us find our footing in the midst of it. Relaxes nervous and musculoskeletal systems, a systemic relaxant. Allows a reconnecting to the physical body, bringing the vital force down

from the head. Good for the driven Type A folks who neglect themselves in the caretaking department. Caretaking becomes even more elusive in times of grief and trauma.

Milky Oats replenish and nourish the nervous system coating the myelin sheath, restoring function and a sense of calm. This is particularly helpful with the nervous system exhaustion that tends to occur when grieving takes hold of us. The tea is nutritive with vitamins and minerals like Calcium, Magnesium and Vitamin B which support the nervous system, strengthening, restoring nerves. It is food for the nervous system in times of exhaustion, depression, shock, trauma, fatigue anxiety and heart palpitations. A good friend in times of sleeplessness. Milky Oats also has a balancing nourishing effect upon endocrine and immune function.

Schisandra is considered a kidney ally. In TCM, kidneys are where we hold fear. Fear is a frequent visitor when dealing with death and grief. Our process with grief remakes us. We are never the same and don't entirely know who we will become on the other side, which can be fearful. The kidney regulates water in the body and in the lungs. Schisandra helps the kidney to keep the lungs clear in order to grasp vital breath. I call on schisandra when the fear of death and pain of grief is so overwhelming that the simple act of taking in a breath is difficult. Shock and trauma can cause what is called disturbed shen in TCM, Shen being our mental emotional "spirit" or capacity. When we are shaken to our core, experiencing anxiety and agitation, schisandra (and reishi) can help calm and settle shen, helping us to catch our breath. Schisandra is also an adaptogen helping to mitigate the stress response, the cascade of stress hormones in the body. Helps with porous personal boundaries, pulling life force back into the body.

Motherwort is used as a heart tonic with palpitations, arrhythmia and nervousness. Strong bitter and nervine used with overwhelm and shock, anxiety and restlessness. It can calm an anxious mind and relax a body into sleep. It relaxes tension, moving heat and fluids down for a more grounded and centered focus. It can calm a stressful nervous stomach. Helps ease a heavy heart and regulate its rhythms, reducing tension from emotional and mental stress. As a mother taking motherwort helped me in times of overwhelm, tension, grief and stress. It has always left me with the sense of being mothered in times when I felt alone with the weight of the world on my shoulders.

Reishi is an adaptogen that I highly value in times of stress and grief, knowing how the stress response can damage our immune system (and more). It is an immune tonic and a calming herb that reduces cardiac pain, arrhythmia and strengthening overall cardiovascular function. Reishi like schisandra can help to settle shen (In TCM, our mental emotional spirit) in times of shock, trauma and grief.

St. John's Wort helps to clear build up of unprocessed emotion as a nerve tonic and trophorestorative. Historically thought of as an "herb for depression", combined with Lemon Balm it makes a good remedy for Seasonal Affective Disorder when the light is lacking. Though there are mixed reviews on its ability as a MAO inhibitor, it is said to allow chemical messengers such as dopamine, serotonin etc. to remain in the brain as well as have an affinity for specific receptor sites. Matthew Wood says St. John's Wort has an affinity for the solar plexus and the nerves of digestion. This is how I feel this plant's medicine within me. When my heart is heavy with stress, sadness, grief, confusion or even overwhelm from being in social situations, I feel

density in my chest and abdomen, sometimes head too. I take St. John's Wort tincture and it helps to clear this density. I feel it helps with my own boundaries and sensory processing, moving energy down through the legs to ground. When I have read of the magical uses of St. John's Wort there is always mention of hanging the plant in doorways to keep evil spirits away. This resonates with keeping good physical boundaries, tending to my own energy, choosing carefully what to take in from the outside world as it all will need to be processed. A friend whose child died in a tragic accident was sharing her experiences of grief with me. She mentioned that one of the toughest tasks for her was to have to go to the grocery store and see and talk to people. It was a lot to "digest" in her state of grief, difficult to maintain boundaries with senses and nervous system already overloaded. She returned home in a state of exhaustion as she physically and emotionally processed the experience. St. John's Wort (as well as some others) comes to mind as an ally in this situation.

Lemon Balm calms the nerves and lifts the spirits. Such a bright and sunny plant, it brings joy! It can calm nervous digestion, when our stress and grief affects our stomach. Lemon balm makes a great general sedative, affecting relaxation, helping with sleep and is gentle enough for children. It has an effect upon nervousness anxiety and the heart, regulating palpitations, lowering blood pressure and normalizing irregular heart beat.

Mimosa's medicine brings joy and happiness. If you have ever looked upon a tree in bloom with its cheery bright pink, white and yellow flowers you will know joy's visual expression. I find it lovely to look upon and would often gravitate to the tree in my yard, sitting below it(or in it) in times of stress and grief. When grieving is overwhelming try mimosa for mood and spirit upliftment. I first began using this plant for help with sleep. Tincture of flower and bark 20 minutes before bed has been really helpful for me and some others as well, to fall into the dreamtime with greater ease.

Handout prepared by Tracy Mangold: EyeofRootHerbals@gmail.com

Resources

Carol Jacobs

Raul Zavaleta-Homeopathics,

Julie Schroeder- Flower essences, Essential oils,

Lora Krall

Sean Donahue

Matthew Wood [The Earthwise Herbals](#)

[The Energetics of Western Herbs](#), Peter Holmes

[Adaptogens](#)-David Winston

Robin Rose Bennet- [The Gift of Healing Herbs](#)

Francis Weller- [The Wild Edge of Sorrow](#)

Resources for Home Funeral, Green Burial, Grief and more

List of certified funeral homes and cemeteries in the states. <https://greenburialcouncil.org/find-a-provider/>

Threshold Care Circle- Integrating after-death care into family and community life
<http://www.thresholdcarecircle.org> Resources from our website:

Conservation Cemetery - www.naturallegacies.org

Crossings: Caring for our own at death - www.crossings.net

Final Passages - www.finalpassages.org

Green Burials - www.forestofmemories.org; www.cemetarygroup.org

Hospice Foundation of America - www.hospicefoundation.org

Natural Burial Cooperative - www.naturalburial.ca

The Funeral Consumers Alliance - www.funerals.org

Thresholds: Home and family directed funerals - www.thresholds.us

Merilynne Rush of Ann Arbor Michigan- <http://afterdeathhomecare.com>

Minnesota Threshold Network- Linda Berg, Many resources, national articles, information. classes. <https://mnthresholdnetwork.wordpress.com/resources/>

The Privilege of a Good Death- If death positive advocates seek to create circumstances in which more people can access good deaths, we must seek to dismantle the systems that devalue minority lives and deaths.

<http://deadmaidens.com/2016/11/27/the-privilege-of-a-good-death/>

The Order of the Good Death is a group of funeral industry professionals, academics, and artists exploring ways to prepare a death phobic culture for their inevitable mortality. <http://www.orderofthegooddeath.com>

National Home Funeral Alliance- NHFA <https://www.homefuneralalliance.org>

Final Rights: Reclaiming the American Way of Death, Joshua Slocum, Lisa Carlson

The Green Burial Guidebook: Everything You Need to Plan an Affordable, Environmentally Friendly Burial Elizabeth Fournier

Die Wise: A Manifesto for Sanity and Soul, Stephen Jenkinson

The Wild Edge of Sorrow, Francis Weller

It's OK to Die, Monica Williams Murphy MD, Kristian Murphy, Stories from the ER

