

soil in the wild has fewer nutrients leached out than the farmed soils in which plants are harvested year after year.

The three Columbiners instructors bring their students back to the same plots year after year, Brounstein explains, and then requires that those students develop their own plots and not return to the ones the school uses. This lets the wildcrafters see the effects of their harvest over time. It's about the relationship with the place, Yeager says.

Brounstein cautions against "herb lust" — when someone gets excited and picks more than they can use. Soon a patch is depleted, but the wildcrafter can't even begin to process what was gathered and the plant goes to waste, as well as having a reduced presence in the wild.

Some plots have been killed by overpicking, Brounstein says. And he recommends that, when harvesting from a stand, pickers adhere to a 1-in-10 ratio leaving enough plants behind to continue reproducing in the wild and for the wildlife. He rarely harvests more than one percent of a stand, he says.

Brounstein recommends beginners harvest plants like blackberries and dandelions — the same invasives Níc an Fhleisdeir suggests — because they are not easily damaged or eliminated. Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) is another example of a hard-to-kill yet useful plant.

Looking at Brounstein's checklist for wildcrafting, I wonder if "herb lust" is related to his directive to have a "proper emotional state" when wildcrafting. It's not hippie-dippie, he assures me.

Just as a rock climber should be in the right state of mind before a climb, a wildcrafter can do harm, or do themselves harm, by not being in the right state of mind. You might misidentify a plant, not find what you are looking for, or get so excited when you do find what you were looking for that you don't step back and realize there's a better stand nearby, or you might not pay attention to what you are doing, fall and get hurt.

Oregon grape is a plant the Brounstein uses often in his teaching. Its spiny leaves and purple berries are native,

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abundant and useful. "Howie has done a lot to popularize it," Brae says.

And Brounstein cheerfully admits there might be as much as six hours of lecture on the plant, from how to identify it, to how to harvest it, protect its ecosystem, process it and use it.

Oregon grape root has antimicrobial qualities, he explains. And the plant that has properties that can replace those of plants that have been overharvested. Both goldenseal and Oregon grape's rhizome (underground stem) contains bright-yellow berberine, which recent studies have shown to enhance the effects of antibiotics used against drug-resistant MRSA.

Brounstein extolls Oregon grape root's uses: a salve for infections, a medicine for internal infections, a bitter (a digestive stimulant), a liver stimulant, and helpful for colds and flus.



There are many schools of thought when it comes to wildcrafting and herbalism — some try to emulate Native American plant uses, while others like Níc an Fhleisdeir focus on European plants and invasives, and yet others, like Brounstein and the Columbiners School, build on years of plant studies. There are also those who believe the plants can "tell" them their uses. But despite the vari-

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