

A decorative border of various botanical illustrations in shades of green and yellow, including leaves, flowers, and ferns, framing the central text.

The Green Witch

Your Complete Guide to

THE NATURAL MAGIC OF
HERBS, FLOWERS,
ESSENTIAL OILS,
AND MORE

ARIN MURPHY-HISCOCK

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Contents

Introduction

Part 1: Discovering the Green Witch

Chapter 1: What Is Green Witchcraft?

The Path of the Green Witch
A Brief History of Green Witchcraft
Learning to Identify with the Earth
The Magic of Being a Green Witch

Chapter 2: Embrace Your Own Power

Focus on Your Energy Centers
Tools of Use
Make Your Home a Sacred Space
Make a Sacred Outdoor Space
Be in Tune with the Earth

Chapter 3: Attune Yourself to Nature

Get to Know Your Corner of the Universe
Experience the Environmental Energy Around You
Grounding Yourself
Work with the Four Natural Elements
Discover and Develop Your Senses

Chapter 4: Manifest the Power of the Seasons

Seasonal Cycles and Energy
Celebrating the Solstices and Equinoxes
Meditations for Every Season
Performing Seasonal Rituals

Part 2: Walking the Green Path

Chapter 5: Live Closely with the Earth

The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars
Working with Green Energy
The Magic of Trees
Tap Into the Energies of Flowers
Potent Herbs and Greens
Using Stones: The Bones of the Earth

Chapter 6: Keep a Green Witch Garden

The Power in a Garden
Designing Your Garden
Tips on Planting
Caring for Your Garden Naturally
Fill Your Home with Houseplants

Chapter 7: Create and Craft Green Witch Magic

Preparing Herbs
Extracting the Energies of Herbs
Blessing Your Creations
Making Herbal Incense
Create Spell Bags
Craft a Dream Pillow
Garden Spell Bags
Make a Broom
Craft Balms or Perfumes
Build Garden Stepping Stones

Chapter 8: Become a Natural Healer

The Steps of Healing
Brewing Healing Teas
Energy-Empowering Essential Oils
Regenerating Baths and Bath Salts
Make Restorative Elixirs

Chapter 9: Green Witch Kitchen Recipes

Tap Into the Energies of Fruits

Integrate the Power of Flowers
Craft Vinegars for Potency
Add Sweetness with Infused Sugars
Boost Health with Vegetables
Incorporate the Goodness of Grains

Acknowledgments

About the Author

Appendix: The Magical Associations of Natural Items

Bibliography

Index

Dedication

For Saya and Sydney, who may be among the next generation of green witches.

Introduction

Whatever your reasons for seeking balance you'll find that harmonizing yourself with the energy of nature can help you break free from the stressors in your life and focus on the here and now. And there is no better way to explore the bounty of nature than by following the path of the green witch.

The way of the green witch is the path of the naturalist, the herbalist, and the healer. It is a free-form, flexible, and personalized practice for anyone who wants to explore the gifts of nature and use them to find balance and harmony in life. With *The Green Witch* you'll find the information you need to develop and nurture the spiritual practice of green witchcraft—from advice on walking the green path in the modern world to information on essential herbs, plants, trees, stones, and more. You will find recipes, exercises, ritual suggestions, and directions for making potions and herbal blends for purposes both mundane and magical.

From issues such as the history of the practice to creating your own individual traditions, *The Green Witch* is a positive and practical guide for the modern green witch trying to connect with nature in today's society. What is so relevant and unique about green witchcraft is that it is a highly specialized and solo practice. Not everyone will be drawn to the same things and practice in the same way. It's about finding a workable balance in *your* own life within *your* own setting.

The green witch works closely with nature and its gifts. She uses natural elements to improve the well-being of the physical body, the spirit, and the environment, and works to establish a personal connection with the natural world. It may seem like a challenge to harmonize with nature in today's technological and industrial world. Fortunately, you don't need to remove or reverse modern influences. What you need to do is discover how to connect your modern life to that earlier knowledge that is waiting for you to find it again. The trick is to recognize the presence of green energy in the world today and to see how it still operates.

Listen to the world around you. Open your heart. Rebalance. And enjoy your journey.

Note: Although the green witch and reader are referred to as “she” throughout this text, the path by no means excludes male practitioners, who are more

common every day. The pronoun “she” was chosen simply for convenience.

Part 1

Discovering the Green Witch



Chapter 1

What Is Green Witchcraft?



HISTORICALLY, A GREEN WITCH LIVED apart, using the energies of plants and trees around her to heal others. Those who needed her services traveled to see her. These days, a green witch is more likely to be living in the middle of a city or in the suburbs. She could work in any of a variety of fields, such as business, medicine, or teaching, or might be a full-time mom.

A green witch isn't defined by where she lives or what she does to bring home a paycheck. Nor is she limited to working with plants, trees, or herbs. She is not, as people might assume, defined solely by the particular way she expresses her spirituality or by the religion she follows. A green witch is defined by her relationship to the world around her, by her ethics, and by her affinity with the natural world. In essence, she lives the life of a green witch: she lives the green path.

The path of the green witch is an intensely personal path that integrates ability, likes and dislikes, the climate of a particular geographic location, and interaction with the energy of that environment. It isn't a tradition so much as a personal adaptation of an ideal.

The Path of the Green Witch

In popular perception, the practice of green witchcraft is a nature-based expression of spirituality that focuses on the individual's interaction with his or her natural environment. Witchcraft itself is a practice that involves the use of natural energies as an aid to accomplishing a task or reaching a goal. In general, witchcraft acknowledges a god and a goddess (sometimes solely a goddess) and recognizes that magic is a natural phenomenon.

Witchcraft is frequently confused with Wicca, which is a modern, alternative, nature-based religion. While Wicca and witchcraft possess many similarities, including reverence for nature, Wicca is a specific, formal religion. There is a wide variety of forms of witchcraft, with varying degrees

of structure. For the sake of this book, the term “witchcraft” refers to the practice of working with natural energies to attain goals, without a specific religious context.

A green witch, then, is someone who lives the green path and is aware of how the energy of nature flows through her life and environment, even if that environment is not the traditional garden and forest setting popularized by fairy tales and romanticized notions.

Why do we use the phrase “living the path” instead of simply saying “practicing green witchcraft”? It’s very simple. Green witchcraft is not a practice separate from ordinary life, like ritual magic, for example; it is an all-encompassing, total-immersion experience wherein all of life is a magical experience.

Green witchcraft is not a formal tradition in the sense of Gardnerian Wicca, Dianic Wicca, Feri Tradition, or other established forms. When we use the phrase “the green witch tradition,” we do not refer to an unbroken line of initiates or an established body of lore. Instead, we are referring to the various practices from diverse places that come together to inform the modern green witch and wisewoman.

Because the path of the green witch is an individualized solo practice, any modern book on green witchcraft is simply a single author’s way of interpreting the practice. Initiation into green witchcraft is technically impossible. There exists no body of formal knowledge passed on through careful training, no established group mind to which you are connected by sacred ceremonies performed by elders. Some modern eclectic groups may base their regular practice on the ideals of green witchcraft, but it’s not the same thing.

A practitioner of green witchcraft may pass on her personal knowledge, including her personal notes and writings, to another, but that’s not an initiatory process. Reading a specific author’s ideas and views concerning the path of the green witch is a form of apprenticeship in which you learn a new way of looking at your world and discover new exercises and techniques that will help you refine and deepen your connection to the natural world around you. This process cannot be as intensely personal as traditional apprenticeship, where the apprentice worked beside the master, but it is a modern form of acquiring the knowledge and skills of one particular practitioner.

THE GREEN WITCH’S OUTLOOK

The concepts of healing, harmony, and balance are all key to the green witch’s practice and outlook on life. These concepts embody three distinct focuses:

1. The earth (your local environment, as well as the planet)
2. Humanity (in general, as well as your local community and circles of friends and acquaintances)
3. Yourself

The earth is often singled out as the green witch's main focus, which is slightly unfair. The green witch understands that the earth incorporates the planet and all living things upon it, including animals, plants, and people. In this respect, yes: the earth is a collective term for all living things. However, the green witch also knows that to lump them all together means that we sometimes forget the more individual emphasis each deserves. We can decry the general mistreatment of our planet's water supply, but local action often has more of an immediate effect on our environment than demonstrating in front of an office tower. "Clean up your own backyard" is a phrase the green witch understands well.

People are also the green witch's province. The modern green witch understands that humanity impacts the natural world, not only through how individuals treat it, but also via the energy created by their feelings and beliefs. Just as nature's energy affects us, so too does our energy affect nature, and that effect isn't always positive. Therefore, the green witch seeks to maintain harmony between humanity and nature. She also understands that people affect other people with their energy, and she strives to maintain a harmonious energetic environment in which people can feel calm and empowered to improve themselves in a positive fashion and interact with each other with ease and love.

Finally, the green witch must function in harmony with the realities of her own life. This means working out your own goals and obstacles and knowing your own self so that you can apply your energies and skills to the best of your ability. Your true self is not necessarily the self you wish you could be; it is the self you actually are. Finding this true self can be a remarkably difficult goal. We lie to ourselves on a regular basis, often so well that we are completely deaf to certain aspects of our personalities until the day we die. Working with that shadowed side of ourselves can be rewarding, however, and maintaining a harmony between our darker aspects and our positive aspects brings our personal energy into balance.

ETHICS OF THE GREEN WITCH PATH

In any path related to the expression of spirituality, the concept of ethics is important. Interestingly enough, there are no ethical or moral rules associated with the green witch path other than those that the practitioner already possesses.

Why are there no ethical rules set out in green witchcraft practice? First of all, the practice is so very personal that to create an overarching ethical system would exclude some practitioners or force them to change who they are. Green witchcraft isn't about forcing an individual to change; it's about an individual choosing to harmonize her own life with the energy of nature. Second, the green witch is so in tune with her surroundings that a set of ethical strictures is unnecessary. Knowing yourself to be a part of a greater whole makes it difficult to act against that whole. Working with the earth means that to act against it would be counterproductive, and that includes acting against a member of the earth's extended energy, such as other people, animals, plants, and so forth. It is difficult to act unethically when you understand how everyone and everything is affected by the negativity of such an action.

If you love and respect the world around you, you will not abuse it. The more empathy and sympathy you have for your surroundings, the better you will treat them. This is tied in to the basic Golden Rule found in several religions. It's ethical reciprocity: if you treat those around you with courtesy, they will extend the same to you. What you put out into the world returns to you, and that goes for thoughts, acts, and energy.

With the well-tuned awareness that the green witch strives to possess comes a knowledge of who and what will be affected by her actions and choices. With this understanding, and the sense of responsibility and guardianship for life that she also possesses, a further focus on ethics is unnecessary. Nature is your mother, your father, and your best friend. It makes no sense to harm your kin or friends intentionally. Think of the love and respect you have for the earth. Extend that regard to all the creatures that make up the natural world. Humans, animals, plants, trees—they are all part of nature. Naturally, you treat them with the same respect with which you treat the earth herself.

A Brief History of Green Witchcraft

The practices of the modern green witch have arisen from folk healers and practitioners of folk magic. The modern green witch finds her foremothers and forefathers in village herbalists, midwives, healers, wisewomen, and cunning-folk who performed particular services for their communities.

The duties of these spiritual ancestors of the green witch usually included midwifery and preparation of the dead for burial, as well as the use of various plants to heal mind and body. These people possessed knowledge of both life and death. They knew what kinds of which flora could create both states of existence. These earlier green witches, while often respected, were more often

feared or mistrusted because of the knowledge they held. They were often marginalized by their communities and lived alone or away from the social center of the community. Even today, society is often uncomfortable with those who possess knowledge not held by the common man.

It is also likely, however, that the spiritual ancestors of the modern green witch chose to live apart from the center of the community because it is harder to hear what nature has to communicate to you when you are surrounded by people. Being closer to the forests and fields made it easier for the cunning-folk to commune with the energies of the living world of green and to gather what they needed.

Practitioners of folk magic, those who live on the second branch of the green witch's family tree, are not necessarily separate from the first. Sometimes the healers were also spellcasters who performed folk magic particular to the region (such as Pennsylvanian pow-wow), but more often they were just grandmothers who had a talent for "fixing" things. Folk magic is composed of traditions and practices that have been handed down in a geographic or culturally specific area. It generally focuses on divination for love and marriage, agricultural success, and weather prediction.

Owen Davies, author of the fascinating *Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History*, explains that as opposed to being healers, cunning-folk originally dealt mainly with lifting bewitchments from people who believed themselves to be the victims of a curse or of some sort of spell. Witchcraft was the soil in which the careers of the cunning-folk grew; when popular belief in witchcraft ended, the roles of the cunning-folk ended as well.

SIMILAR PATHS

There are other modern paths that resemble the path of the green witch. Kitchen witches and hedge witches observe similar practices, and, indeed, sometimes people use these terms interchangeably with green witchcraft. All three paths have three basic things in common: they are based in folk magic, they do not require a spiritual element, and walkers on all three paths tend to be solitary practitioners.

Before we launch into a full examination of what constitutes the modern green witch's path, let's take a look at kitchen witchery and hedge magic and see how they are similar to and how they differ from one another.

- **Kitchen witches**, who are family oriented, focus on magic performed in the heart of the modern home: the kitchen. The kitchen witch bases her magical practice in her everyday household activities, and cooking, cleaning, baking, and so forth all become the foundation for her magical acts. Sweeping the floor free of dust and dirt may inspire a simultaneous

cleansing of negative energy, for example. A kitchen witch works intuitively rather than ritually and may or may not keep track of how she works.

- **Hedge witches**, a term used more in the UK than in the US, live close to nature, often away from urban areas. When you think of the classic wisewoman on the edge of town who was visited for love charms and healing potions, you have a pretty decent idea of what a hedge witch is. The modern hedge witch is usually a solo practitioner of a neopagan path who uses spellcraft as a basis for her work.

Modern practitioners often try to link their practice to some sort of history in order to create a sense of tradition, but that sense of tradition is not as important as the sense of self. This is particularly true of the green witch path.

It is easy to look back and acknowledge the influences of the past on modern practice, but every green witch creates her own practice. There is no initiation, no adherence to a set of rules. Living the green path is really and truly a reflection of the green witch's inner light.

THE MODERN GREEN WITCH

Despite its so-called progress, our modern society tends to look back to a simpler time, even though pioneer days were probably harder and more isolated than life today. This yearning isn't nostalgia, which is a longing for an airbrushed memory. It is a genuine subconscious draw to knowledge that has been obscured by innovation, progress, and improvement. We don't need to remove or reverse modern innovation and give up our sidewalks and television sets and computers. What we need to do is discover how to connect in our modern environment to that earlier knowledge that is waiting for us to find it again. Removing the technology and replacing it with witchcraft and agriculture-based practice is not the answer. To reverse evolution and merely substitute something older is a denial of the modern world. A green witch does not deny the world around her. She accepts it and seeks to understand how to integrate it into her spiritual practice. The green witch serves as a bridge between past and present, new and old. The trick is to recognize the presence of green energy as it exists in the world today, to learn how to see it as it still operates.

Learning to Identify with the Earth

The main identifying trait of green practice is a close identification with the earth. Although honoring the earth and being aware of the natural world is a large part of the majority of modern alternative spiritualities, the green witch

is not necessarily a member of an alternative spiritual path. The main difference between the green path and the neopagan religions is that godforms are not an essential part of a green witch's practice. While the green witch is content to look to mythology and ancient religions in order to deepen personal understanding of how earth energy has been perceived throughout the ages, she does not necessarily worship the gods and goddesses that are expressions and representations of earth patterns and energy. The planet itself is an archetype of nurturing, but further refinement of that archetype is not necessary for the green witch. That being said, a green witch often finds a mythological figure—be it a deity or a hero—who resonates with her personal beliefs and energy. She finds inspiration in this mythological figure. This does not, however, lead to worship of that figure.

Whereas alternative religions promote the idea that humanity is a steward or custodian of the planet, the green witch understands that she is the manifestation of the earth itself, not merely a caretaker. That close sense of identification allows her to work in partnership with the earth's energies.

Someone who honors the earth and considers the natural world her primary teacher is sometimes labeled a nature-worshipper or called a pagan. In modern use, however, the terms are not generally pejorative. They describe people who honor the divine in nature. In New Age spiritual practice, the word "pagan" is being reclaimed by those whose spirits resonate to the heartbeat of the earth itself. So is a green witch a pagan? Many are, but not all. The path of the green witch is not by definition a religious one. It is a spiritual path, yes, but spirituality does not necessarily equate to religion. A green witch can participate in any religion and honor the divine in her own way provided that she still honors nature as sacred and blessed. The green witch sees the divine in all of nature, and each green witch interprets that divinity a little bit differently.

CELEBRATING LIFE

Green witchcraft is an ongoing celebration of life. It is a dialogue with nature, a practice that enriches both the green witch and the earth itself. The exchange of energy produces manifold benefits that may be stated in simple terms: through this dialogue, we heal the earth and the earth heals us. We seek harmony through our actions. We look to balance energies that are askew.

Like other earth-honoring paths, the roots of green witchcraft can be found in the agricultural calendar, seasonal shifts, weather patterns, and folk magic performed for health or fertility. Much of the modern neopagan practice comes from basic green witchcraft practice. Note that the word "roots" is key here: when something is rooted, it springs from a source, but it is still strong and anchored. To deny roots is to deny both foundation and strength. We may

see only the trunk and the branches of a tree, but the root system ranges deep and wide.

As green witchcraft is not a formal path, practitioners are free to adapt what they learn to what they need. This doesn't mean merely modifying practices created by someone else; it means adapting yourself to what needs to be done. It means being flexible and responsive to your needs and the needs of the earth.

It's important to note that green witchcraft is not Wicca. Wicca is a formal, structured religion that sets out certain tenets and moral guidelines and whose followers celebrate certain rituals in certain ways. Green witchcraft is a nonstructured, flexible practice that has no set holidays and no compulsory rituals. The green witch is adaptable. She creates her own path according to her individual strengths and talents and the energies and supplies native to her geographical locale.

If you live in Massachusetts, for example, and then move to New Mexico, your practice will shift as you adapt to your new environment, the new flora and fauna around you, and the new energies of the landscape. You yourself will adapt as well. As you settle into a new relationship with the earth as it manifests in New Mexico, you will discover yourself evolving to reflect it in a different fashion than you reflected the environment of Massachusetts.

The Magic of Being a Green Witch

Using the word “witch” invariably brings us to the word “magic.” This is a word that can cause confusion. Magic is not illusion, nor is it the artificial manipulation of unnatural forces. In fact, magic is perfectly natural: it is the use of natural energy with conscious intent and awareness to help attain a better understanding of the world around you and to harmonize yourself with the world's energies.

Most green witches find the use of the word “magic” to be irrelevant. Magic implies something out of the ordinary. But to a green witch the mundane is magical. When she senses, responds to, and gently nudges the flows of natural energy around her, nothing could be more natural. She's performing natural magic. Nature itself is magical. The everyday is sacred to the green witch.

Marian Green, the author of *Wild Witchcraft* and follower of a path sympathetic to the green witch philosophy that embraces natural magic and hedge craft, states that, “Magic is the art of learning to recognize these elements of change: the natural patterns of flow and ebb, the times of progress, of standing still and of retreating . . . Magic teaches us to determine which way the tides of Nature are flowing, to see on which level they run and