

NICOLA SWANSON

Interview: Executive Director of The American Herbalists Guild **Mimi Hernandez**



Mimi Hernandez

What drew you to becoming a herbalist? Perhaps was there an event, person or health complication?
I consider myself blessed to have been gifted with a calling toward herbalism from a young age. I always knew as a little girl that I would grow up and be a healer. My Colombian Mami would make us herbal tea when we got sick and my Mexican Abuela would tend neighborhood children with herbal remedies. But perhaps it was my love of all things science that intrigued me toward chemistry, biology, anatomy and physiology, and all of those topics gave me an inquisitiveness about life, the body, and the world around me. When I partner those insights with the sense of enchantment I experienced when in nature, and the excitement of botanizing, the emerging passion for plants, it all sort of came together. Like I wanted to be a doctor but I also wanted to keep my hands dirty. I wanted to study real world healing

and this is when Herbalism opened up to me and I have been obsessed ever since that path revealed itself to me early in life.

Who is your favourite herbal ally? Why are you so drawn to this plant?
Every time I get asked that question reveals a different plant! I think in the big picture of life, rue (*Ruta graveolens*) has been a powerful ally in the most magical sense. It is inherent in my lineage, as it is so respected in Latin American folk herbalism. In an esoteric sense, it has helped me through life's milestones, clarifying my vision when I need that insight. I also am a very sensitive human being, and experiencing the protective qualities of rue energy, has given me safe vibes to walk in confidence outside of my comfort zone.

What do you see as the biggest threat to our healing profession in years to come?
The biggest threat I personally see is losing touch with traditional ecological knowledge of the generations before us. Like plants, our field thrives from diversity. I fear a homogenisation of our herbal practices that standardises usage of herbs into limited categories that check narrow boxes. I fear a polarisation of our herbal traditions into a scope of practice devoid of magic and mystery. Appointing plants strictly through a preapproved lens loses the nuances of what plants have to offer. The language of herbal energetics is essential in maintaining our intimacy with plants and assisting in their potential to fulfil human health and spiritual needs. I believe we can hold herbalism to a high standard of ethics and education while maintaining respect for herbal traditions.

What is a favourite recipe you love that incorporates medicinal herbs

that you are happy to share? Preferably one with ingredients we can access in NZ
It's funny you ask. I actually am preparing a "Cream of Weeds" soup today! Where I live in the southeast US springtime is teasing and I am picking chickweed (*Stellaria media*), dead nettles (*Lamium purpureum*), and little wild onion greens (*Allium canadensis*) from the lawn. I saw lots of purslane (and I saw watercress at the grocery) in New Zealand and that would make a wonderful Cream of Weeds soup.

It's really simple: Pick some edible green weeds. Give them a good rinse and chop them up. In a large pot melt that wonderful NZ butter over medium heat and add the chopped weeds. Cook for a few minutes: add the potato cubes, salt, and pepper, and add stock to cover the weeds and potatoes. Bring to a simmer over medium-low heat for about 20 minutes or until the potatoes are tender. Remove from heat. With a handheld mixer or in a blender reduce to a smooth green puree. Blend in the heavy cream. Put the weed puree back into the pot. Lower the heat and warm up the soup, do not boil it (the cream is delicate). Taste and season accordingly. Serve with a floral garnish. I never measure ingredients but here is an example:

- 3 bunches (handfuls) of fresh weeds
- 3 small potatoes, peeled and cut into small pieces
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3-4 cups vegetable or chicken broth (or shiitake mushroom/astragalus stock if you really want a healthy boost)
- 1/2 cup heavy cream (or more/less as you desire)
- salt and pepper to taste

Please share a magical moment that you have experienced in the plant realm.
I think the most magical is when I was pregnant with Evan (now 19 years old) and because of a prior miscarriage, I was so scared of losing the baby. I had thought of taking an herbal formula to prevent miscarriage, but I hesitated because



Standardised Liquid Extract Range FOR SUPERIOR CLINICAL RESULTS

PhytoMed's standardised liquid extract range provides efficacious and validated minimum levels of active herbal constituents, for high potency per dose. This is supported by clinical research for superior clinical results and client care.

All PhytoMed herbal products are manufactured in New Zealand from sustainably and ethically grown and harvested herbs. With rigorous testing and quality assurance, we provide a premium quality, practitioner-only herbal range.

STANDARDISED HERB PROCESS

1. Raw herb identification, analysis and microbial testing.
2. Manufacture: Cold percolation and maceration.
3. Actives testing: High-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) tests active phytochemical levels to required amount per mg/mL.
4. Standardised liquid extract bottled and labelled ready for use.





Rue tattoo

I really just wanted simple nettles. The herbal formula I had considered included wild yam. Pondering this, I started dreaming vividly of wild yam vines twirling loosely around me and reassuring me that they are taking care of us. This gave me the strong conviction that the plants were indeed supporting my pregnancy in an otherworldly way.

What is your favourite recipe, detoxification or cleansing treatment or herbal healing treatment that you regularly share with clients?

Polyphenol Vitality Smoothie

1 cup Green Tea
 ½ cup 100% Pomegranate juice (or dark juice such as cherry/blueberry/black currant)

- 2 cups of fresh or frozen Berries
- ½ cup organic plain yogurt or kefir
- 1 Tbsp of Linseeds
- Optional ingredients:**
- Protein powder of choice
- 1 Tbsp of organic dark Cacao Powder
- Adaptogenic powder of choice

A smoothie is a great way to start off the day and this one is packed with age defying polyphenols, and is rich in probiotics, fibre and protein. This smoothie has a low glycaemic impact and is a fabulous way to start the day on the right note. Polyphenols like the red and blue ingredients in berries are easy to find in nature and in your grocery store. Polyphenols, like those in green tea, are antioxidants that keep free radicals from damaging our blood vessels, our cellular structures, and even our DNA. Plant polyphenols help stabilize the collagen in our skin and blood vessels, keeping us elastic and young. They are food for our brains and are very supportive for our eyesight.

PHOTO: MIMI HERNANDEZ



PHOTO: FXMED

Rachel Piper (BCApSc, Dip Nat, Dip Med Herb) is an experienced Naturopath and Medical Herbalist, providing technical support to practitioners on products, protocols and functional testing available through FxMed.

RACHEL PIPER

Post-Holiday Brain Fog?

Did your holiday season include over-indulging, for example, in sugar, alcohol, caffeine, processed foods, barbecues, dairy and gluten-containing foods? Are you now experiencing low mood, low energy, sleep disturbances, digestive symptoms or a general malaise as you try to get back to a regular routine?

The brain and gastrointestinal (GI) system are intimately linked and the connection between your gut and brain goes both ways – aptly named the gut-brain axis – so a troubled intestine can send signals to the brain and vice versa.¹ This means that even without over-indulging, you may still experience GI and cognitive symptoms. This could be due to stress, anxiety or mood disturbances triggering your brain to send signals to your gut. For such functional GI disorders, it is imperative to consider the role of stress and emotion in order to soothe the distressed gut.¹

The brain relies on a steady stream of vitamins and minerals, amino acids, essential fatty acids and glucose, in addition to getting enough rest, relaxation and plenty of oxygen.²

The brain has a larger requirement for oxygen than any other organ. Poor brain oxygenation can be related to a number of factors:

- Low iron, zinc, vitamin C, copper, B12, folate and B6 or issues related

- to anaemia, blood production or blood loss
- Blood sugar disorders can impair blood oxygenation
- Blood pressure problems (both high and low) impact blood flow to the brain. If diastolic blood pressure is too low, this has been shown to be related to brain atrophy
- Cardiovascular problems such as cardiomyopathy, congestive heart failure, atherosclerosis, arteriosclerosis and aortic stenosis
- Lung problems, including emphysema, COPD, asthma, lung cancer and others, all impact brain function, as does the common problem of sleep apnoea
- Respiratory complications arising from acute COVID-19 or Long-COVID
- Lack of physical activity or sedentary lifestyle and short shallow breathing.

If you do not get enough sleep this is likely contributing to your symptoms. We all need between seven to nine hours of quality sleep per night to think clearly, with children and teenagers usually needing more. Maintaining a natural rhythm of exposure to sunlight during the day and darkness at night is one crucial foundational component of sleeping well.³



Brain Fog

PHOTO: ISTOCK



Are you getting to the root of the problem?

Allergenic testing offers a wide range of tests, help you tailor an effective and individual treatment protocol and provide ongoing technical support.

- Food and Environmental Sensitivity
- Comprehensive Nutritional Assessment
- Comprehensive Women's Health
- Sleep and Mood Test
- Comprehensive Men's Health
- Heavy Metal and Environmental Toxin Test

Become an approved Practitioner by visiting our Practitioner page at: practitioner.allergenicstesting.com or call us on 09 320 0234

Simple Non-invasive Trusted

