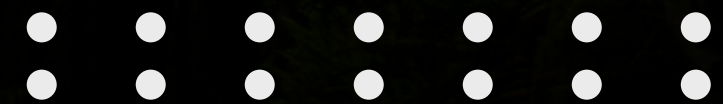
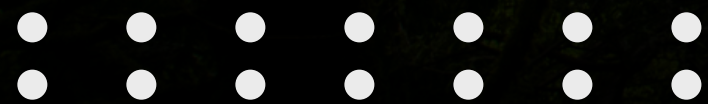
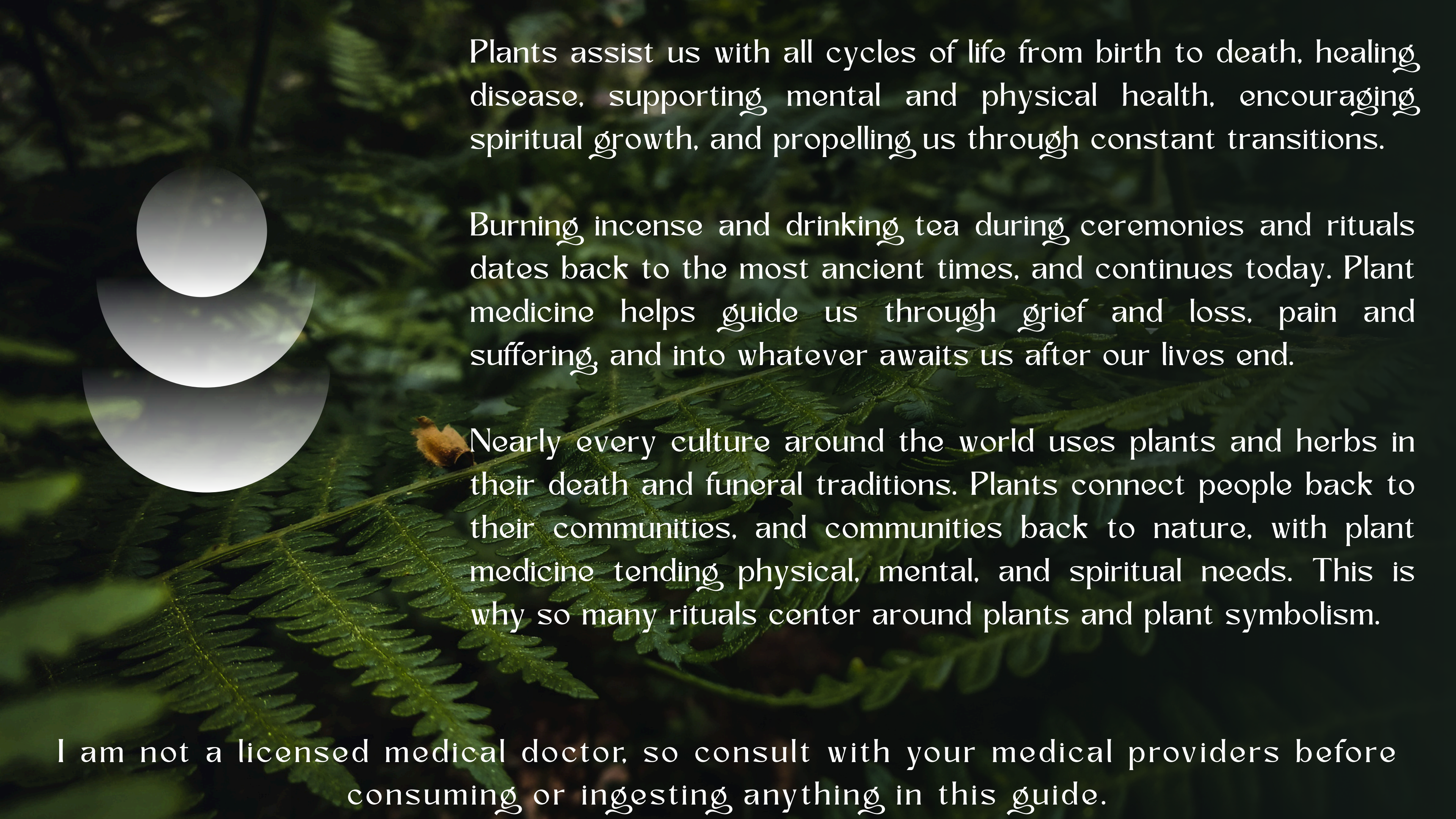




Plant Allies in Deathcare & Funeral Rites

By Michelle Sanders
& Home Funeral Alliance





Plants assist us with all cycles of life from birth to death, healing disease, supporting mental and physical health, encouraging spiritual growth, and propelling us through constant transitions.

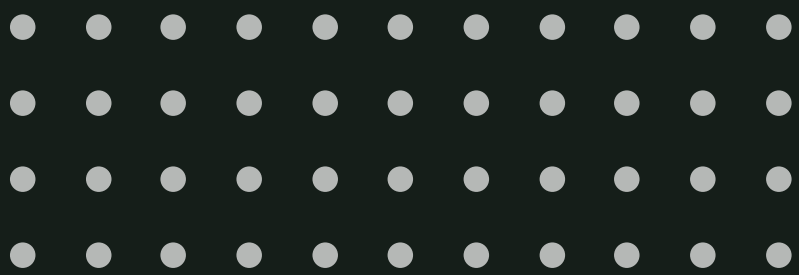
Burning incense and drinking tea during ceremonies and rituals dates back to the most ancient times, and continues today. Plant medicine helps guide us through grief and loss, pain and suffering, and into whatever awaits us after our lives end.

Nearly every culture around the world uses plants and herbs in their death and funeral traditions. Plants connect people back to their communities, and communities back to nature, with plant medicine tending physical, mental, and spiritual needs. This is why so many rituals center around plants and plant symbolism.

I am not a licensed medical doctor, so consult with your medical providers before consuming or ingesting anything in this guide.

Herbs for the Dying & The Process of Death

These plants are helpful allies when a person is actively dying, fearing death, or when their loved ones are suffering anxiety and anticipatory grief.



Herbs for the Dying & the Process of Death



BLUE VERVAIN

- mild nervine and sedative
- soothes witnesses of active dying
- bitter shudder response
- ensures that the soul does not linger



BASIL

- fosters love and protection
- brings dignity and courage
- antiseptic and expectorant



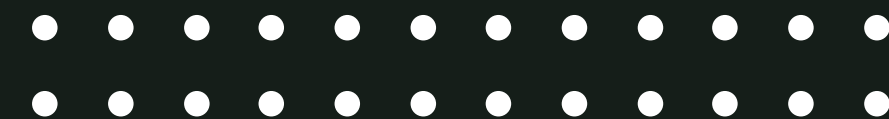
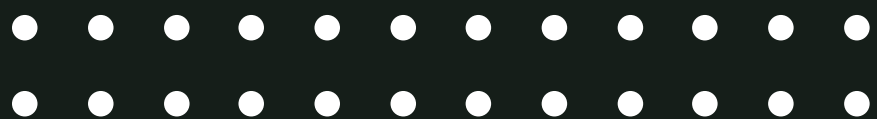
PARSLEY

- strengthens the spirit and mind of the dying and their loved ones



LEMON BALM

- uplifts
- soothes the spirits of the bereaved
- soothes anticipatory grief



Herbs for the Dying & the Process of Death



MUGWORT

- brings insight and closure
- guides lucid and astral dreaming
- protects sleep, travel, divination
- guards against sickness and evil



WORMWOOD

- banishes negative spirits
- cleanses parasites
- contains thujone which can be toxic



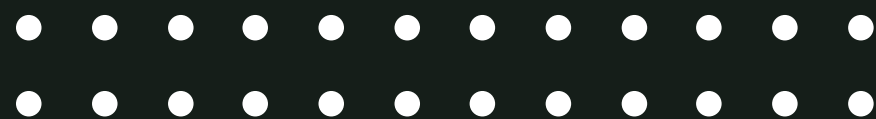
ROSE

- opens the heart
- heals grief
- protects the heart



LAVENDER

- brings peace and relaxation
- cleanses and purifies
- has anti-microbial properties



Herbs for the Dying & the Process of Death



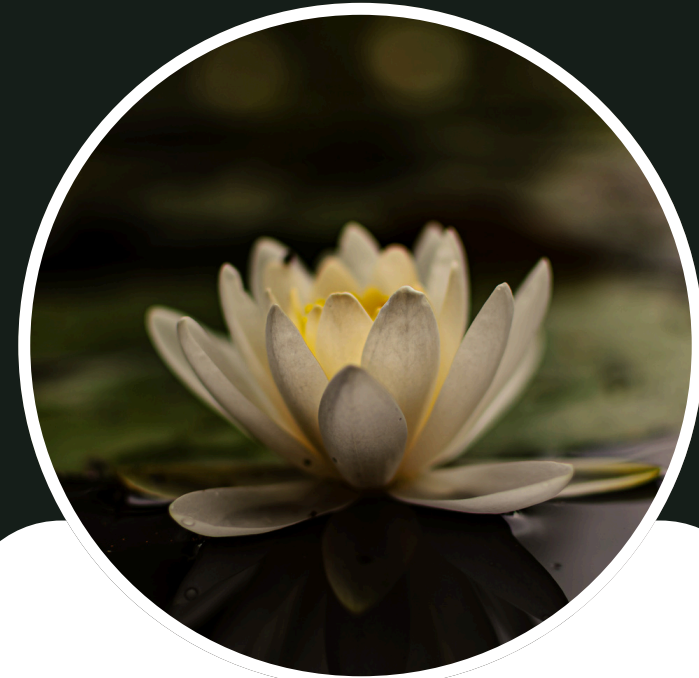
THYME

- brings courage and protection during fear or conflict
- boosts vitality, stamina, and mental fortitude



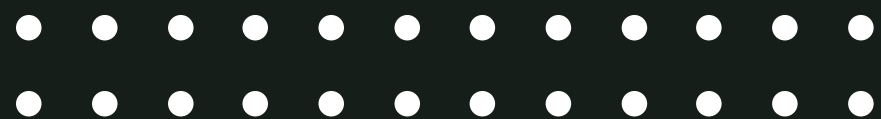
RUE

- banishes, protects, wards off harmful energy
- karmic completion
- cord cutting, breaks hexes / spiritual residue
- do not consume in high doses



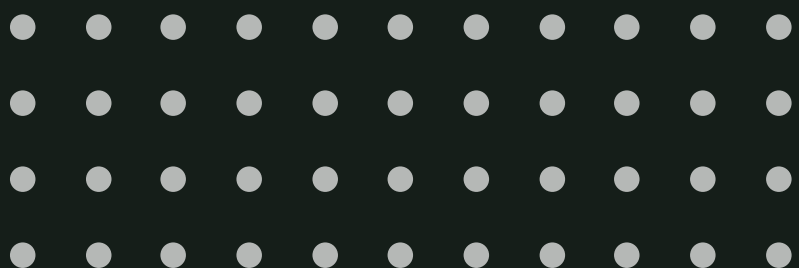
LOTUS

- fosters spiritual awakenings and reincarnation



Herbs for the Living - After Death has Occured

In addition to the herbs listed above, these are additional herbs that can provide comfort to the families and communities of the person who has died. While helpful in all aspects of death, these have a particular affinity for uplifting those in mourning or who experience complicated emotions after a death has occurred.



Herbs for the Living - After Death has Occured



PINE

- survivor's guilt
- resilience, endurance, longevity
- renewal
- protection, and grounding



PEACH

- shock of bad news or receiving news of death



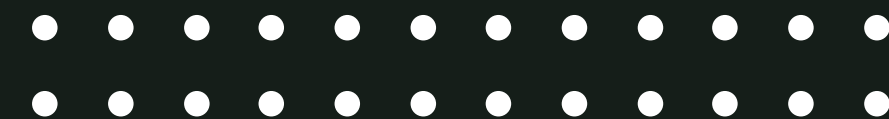
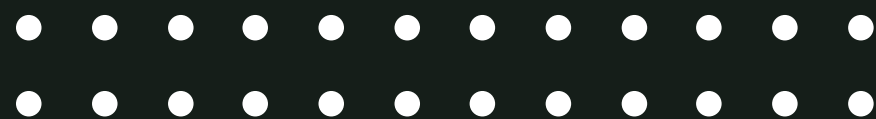
CYPRESS

- mourning
- protects spirits
- contacting ancestors
- helps process death transition and endings.



HOLLY

- helps process hatred, anger, or complicated feelings after loss
- resurrection and renewal
- do NOT eat berries!



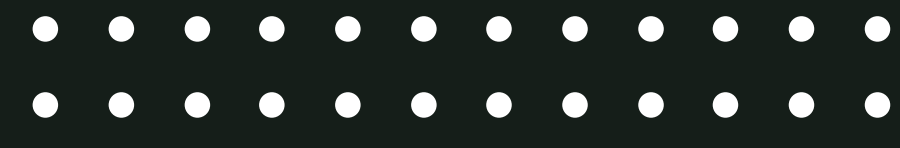
In addition to holly, agrimony, chamomile, and burdock are all celebrated remedies for soothing anger and mixed emotions.



BEE BALM MONARDA

- banishes corpse sickness
- eases conflict, brings joy and harmony
- facilitates social bonding and heart-centered communication

For more herbs for acceptance, solace, comfort, and letting go, refer to the “Herbs for Tending Grief” section.



Herbs for Body Care Rituals

These herbs serve as allies when it comes to body care and cleansing spaces before, during, and after death.

Herbs listed in this section are intended to be used as a bath tea, wash, spray, or incense unless noted otherwise.



Herbs for Body Care Rituals



THYME

- used for purification in ritual
- facilitates communion with the dead



SAGE

- blesses the body and spirit
- cleanses the air
- has anti-bacterial properties



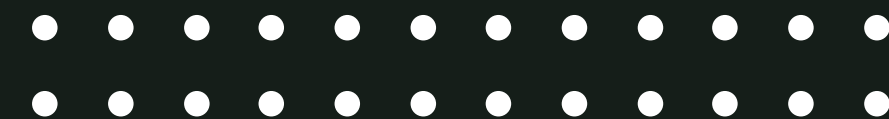
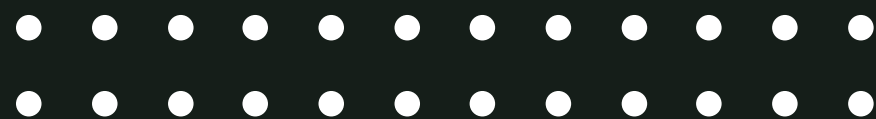
MYRRH

- cleanses and protects
- traditionally used with tansy for embalming



PENNYROYAL

- guides spiritual rebirth
- protects boundaries
- banishes harmful energy
- do NOT consume or use internally



Diffusers



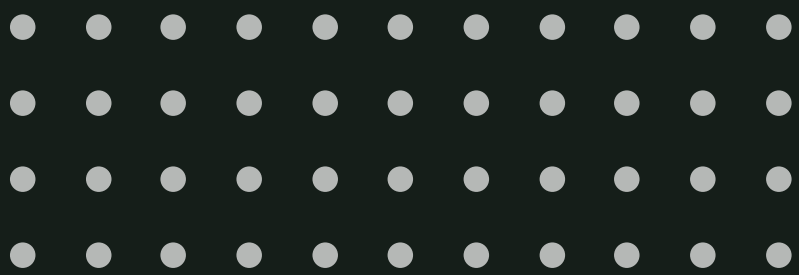
A combination of sage, cypress, frankincense, and myrrh oils in a diffuser can be helpful for cleansing the air and preventing spread of illness during bodycare, when you are handling bodily fluids, have many people sharing a small space, and especially if illness is or has been present.

Thieves, aka Four Thieves, is a commercial blend of rosemary, clove, eucalyptus, cinnamon, and lemon essential oils that is primarily used in a diffuser.



Herbs for Funerals & Dispositions

These plants and herbs are often used during funeral and disposition ceremonies like burials, cremations, funeral altars, and funeral processions.



Herbs for Funerals & Dispositions



BIRCH

- symbolizes rebirth, and reincarnation
- leaves are used for writing messages to the dead



ROSEMARY

- symbolizes remembrance and loyalty
- purification
- protect the dead



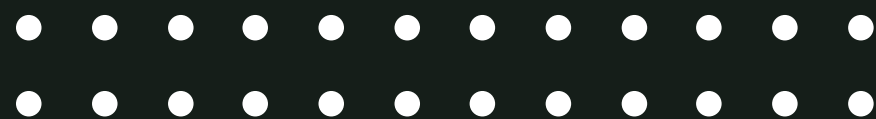
ROWAN

- used as liminal protectors, for travel between worlds
- breaks enchantments
- brings peace
- tree itself is symbolic
- take caution if consuming (process berries first)



HOLLY

- protects boundaries and spirits
- used as decoration for funeral altar
- do NOT consume berries



Herbs for Funerals & Dispositions



FRANKINCENSE

- used for communing with the dead, purification, and spiritual transformation



PARLSEY

- purifies and protects
- guides transitions between realms
- renews and grounds after rituals



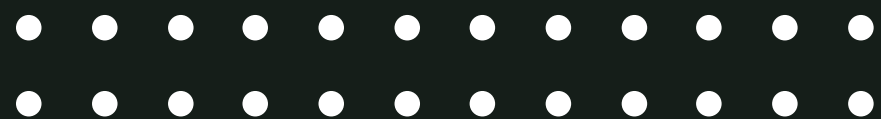
GARLIC

- protects against evil
- used in lore about prevent the dead from rising



YEW

- symbolizes immortality and remembrance
- protects and guides endings



Herbs for Funerals & Dispositions

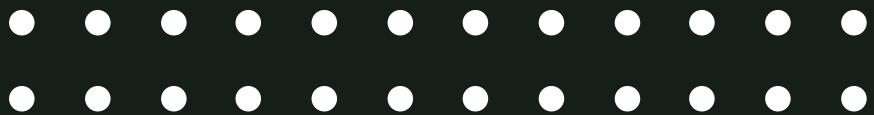
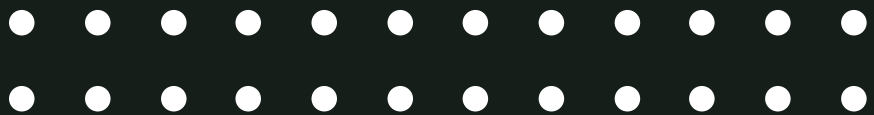


MINT

- symbolizes prosperity
- brings mental & emotional clarity
- brings joy to the mourning

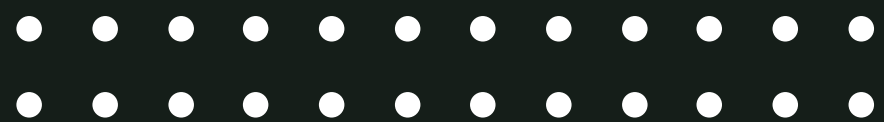
- prosperity
- mental & emotional clarity
- joy for the mourning

- spiritual rebirth
- protects boundaries
- banishes harmful energy
- do NOT consume or use internally



Plants for Tending Grief

These herbs and other plants can help
calm the nerves, soothe acute distress,
and alleviate sleeplessness.



Plants for Tending Grief



VALERIAN

- fosters deep sleep
- quickly calms anxiety
- guides astral travel and releasing the unconscious
- very acrid



LEMON BALM

- calms and uplifts
- soothes after death and loss



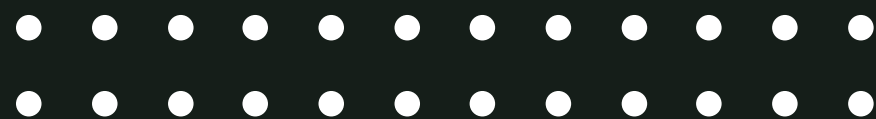
PASSIONFLOWER

- calms anxiety
- softens emotions



CHAMOMILE

- brings peace
- good luck
- soothes anger



Plants for Tending Grief



BLACK WALNUT

- facilitates change, protection, and strength during transition
- breaks attachments
- guides deep shadow work
- discourages parasites



MARJORAM

- brings domestic harmony, joy, warmth
- eases grief
- fosters peace and clarity



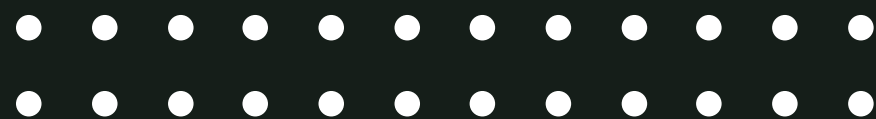
HAWTHORN

- protects the heart and emotional boundaries
- helps with integrating love, loss, and grief



LINDEN

- brings love, peace, harmony, and emotional healing

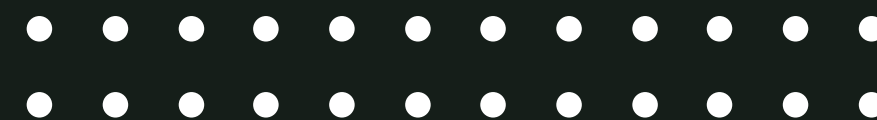


HEART HOLDER TEA

This delicious tea combines
the heart-strengthening,
grief-soothing, comforting
properties of Rose,
Hawthorn, Linden,
Motherwort, Nettles, &
Ceylon Cinnamon



Heart Holder
Tea is helpful for
the heart,
healing a
broken heart,
uplifting a heavy
heart, restoring
gratitude, and
opening up to
love and
support.



Plants for Tending Grief



FRANKINCENSE

- uplifts
- guides spiritual transitions



CITRUS

- plant, not an herb
- common in diffusers, effective, versatile
- uplifts and lightens mood



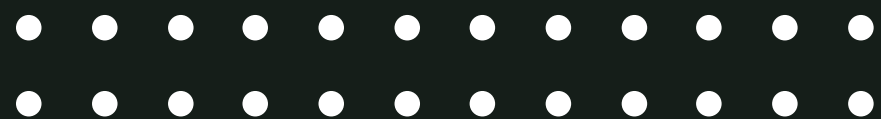
MYRRH

- brings healing
- purification, and protection



WORMWOOD

- facilitates transformational healing for the mourning



Plants for Tending Grief



JUNIPER

- symbolizes eternity and hope for rebirth and new lives.



OAK

- symbolizes honour, wisdom, nobility, strength, resistance, prowess, and protection



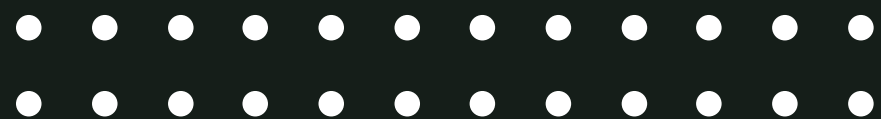
WILLOW

- guides intuition, grief work, clearing emotion, and dream magic
- eases soul in death*
- branches used to make baskets for ancestral offerings



COMFREY

- guides grounding and processing grief and trauma
- facilitates recovery from loss
- do NOT ingest comfrey



Herbs for Veneration & Memorials



These herbs are commonly used in remembrance and veneration rituals that occur on significant days, holidays, and during various feasts and festivals.



Herbs for Veneration & Memorials



BAY LAUREL

- marks high status or celebrated individuals at funerals
- given as awards



HYSSOP

- used in rituals for communing with the dead
- allegedly used to attempt necromancy



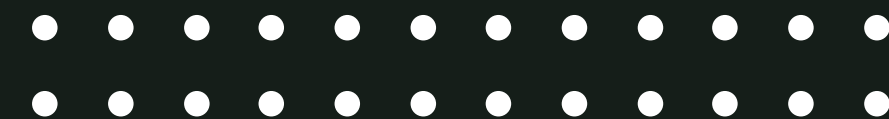
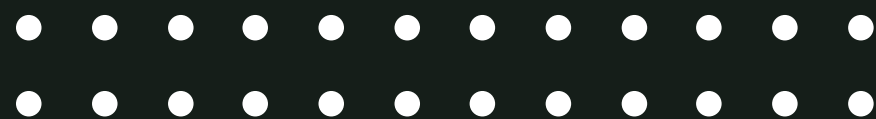
MYRRH

- used in ancestral rites
- guides sacred grief
- supports spiritual depth and devotional magic



ROSE

- symbolizes love and purification
- used in funeral wreaths and is planted in remembrance



Herbs for Veneration & Memorials



SAGE

- symbolizes wisdom
- Incense bundle for purification or tea for communicating with the Dead.



ROSEMARY

- symbolizes remembrance and fidelity
- especially popular for venerating female ancestors
- used for decoration



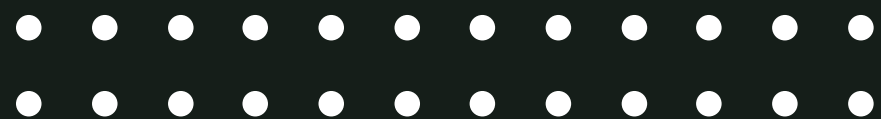
IVY

- celebrates the life of the deceased
- symbolizes love, affection, eternal life, and remembrance after death



PERIWINKLE

- herb of mortality
- used with violets to decorate funeral wreaths and tombs.
- especially used to mark the passing of a child or children.



Herbs for Veneration & Memorials



CALI. POPPY

- symbolizes wisdom
- incense bundle for purification or tea for communicating with the Dead

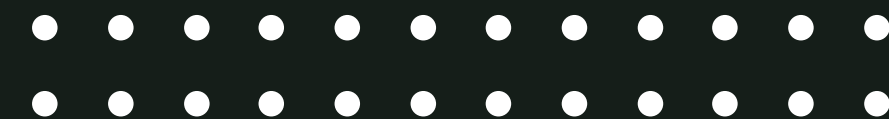
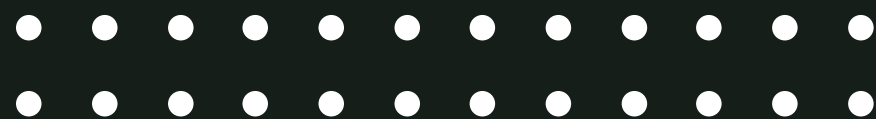
- used in funeral wreaths/on graves
- brings deep sleep, restfulness, causes drowsiness
- assists with transitions
- for short-term use
- NOT illegal like opium poppy



YARROW

- herb of mortality
- used with violets to decorate funeral wreaths and tombs
- especially to mark the passing of a child or children

- brings protection, courage, divination
- protects energetic boundaries
- brings protection and healing
- grown in mourning gardens/on graves



Native American & Indigenous Practices

- Some herbs are sacred and reserved for traditional ceremonies.
- Respect traditions of others and do not replicate.
- Some religions are closed or require invitation and initiation.
- If a ceremony, teaching, or ritual is considered closed to those outside the community, that boundary should be respected.



Native American & Indigenous Practices

- Burning herbs is an ancient and widespread ritual around the world
- Each Nation has its own traditions and relationships with plants, so no single description applies to all Indigenous cultures.
- Sweetgrass, cedar, white sage, tobacco, bearberry, rabbit tobacco, and black cohosh have each been used by various Indigenous peoples for prayer, purification, protection, and healing ceremonies.
- A Smudge ceremony is a distinct practice of Indigenous people in North America where sacred herbs are burned in prayer and ritual.

Native American & Indigenous Practices

- Appreciate these plants for their medicinal and historical benefits and use them in your own herbal ceremonies and practices rather than replicating Indigenous ceremonies.
- Do not teach or recreate ceremonies shared with you in confidence or present them outside their proper cultural context.
- Practice ethical harvesting, obtain from reputable and responsible suppliers, and/or grow your own

Ancient Herbal Deathcare Traditions

- Shanidar Cave's infamous Flower Burial includes plant species related to yarrow, hollyhock, and others, and marks one of the oldest discoveries of plants and herbs used in burial rites.
- Ancient Egyptians made extensive use of pine and cypress resins along with aromatic herbs like myrrh, frankincense, cedar, juniper, cassia, and rosemary during mummification and in tombs.
- Ancient Greeks often decorated the deceased with aromatic plants and used herbs during funeral rites such as rosemary, myrtle, cypress, and parsley. Parsley was considered especially connected to the underworld, was planted near graves, and used in funerary games.
- Ancient Romans inherited many Greek customs and funeral processions typically included burning incense, using rosemary or cypress branches, and making wreaths out of bay laurel or myrtle.

Ancient Herbal Deathcare Traditions

- Celtic and Norse people relied on mugwort, nettles, and rowan for protection, burned juniper for purification, and planted yew near graves. Norse people were known to bury herbs with ships or burn herbs during human cremation.
- Muslim cemeteries of Israel are known for showcasing sage, rosemary, iris, and cypress.
- Medieval Europeans often used rue, lavender, rosemary, hyssop, and wormwood for funerary rites. Branches or bundles of these herbs were strewn across pathways, carried by mourners, and dropped into coffins.
- If you are especially interested in ancient deathcare traditions, check out my class on our Skool channel called "The History of Modern Deathcare & the War that Changed Everything."

Creating an Herbal Deathcare Kit

- Lemon balm and thyme tea for myself/other facilitators (+Black cohosh ritual)
- Mugwort tea and blue vervain tincture for the person who is dying
- Heart Holder Tea for everyone for grounding and comfort
- Chamomile tea for kids, dogs/cats, and anyone adverse to heart holder tea
- Ritual bath tea for bathing the body and hands of guests
- Diffuser with lavender, rose, Thieves, citrus (usually orange)
- Frankincense and myrrh (and sandalwood) incense or essential oils
- Monarda and sage wands/ bundles
- Lemon balm and agrimony heart salve
- Dry bay laurel leaves, pine needles, holly leaves, fresh mint
- Anything specific that is needed or requested for a situation



Black Cohosh is used to protect the mind, body, and spirit, the sacred space of deathwork, transitioning between the worlds of the living and the dead, and contain excess nervous energy and grounding emotions.

Keeping one's emotions in check is vital for anyone guiding others through death, funeral rites, and the grieving process.

Ashwagandha and other adaptogenic herbs like tulsi, schisandra, licorice root, astragalus, and ginseng (Panax or eleuthero), as well as motherwort and milky oat tops, or mushies like chaga, reishi, cordyceps can help the nervous system stay strong and nourished.

Adaptogenic herbs and mushrooms are helpful for restoring compassion fatigue, common in caregivers and medical/funeral professionals. Adaptogens are helpful for anyone who needs psychic or emotional bolstering, strength in setting boundaries, holding their own space, standing their ground, having difficult conversations, and handling draining people or situations.



Thank You

Thank you for supporting the Home Funeral Alliance! If you have any questions or feedback about this webinar please email me at michellesanders@homefuneralalliance.org

