

VOICES OF THE EARTH

**A journey into the
healing power of plants**

*by children, young people and
adults involved with
Global Generation*

GLOBAL GENERATION & Complicité

This odyssey of nature connection is the first stage of an ongoing collaboration between Global Generation and Theatre de Complicité.

About Global Generation

We are a London-based environmental education charity that is dedicated to what happens when people of all ages come together in the natural world. It is an approach we call 'I, We and the Planet'. Through our work with people of all ages, we have experienced time and again the healing power of nature; healing relationships within and between people and between all of us and the earth. The Voices of the Earth journey with Complicité highlights that, rather than any of us owning the earth, we all belong to the earth. We feel this understanding is good ground in which to grow a generative presence on the earth.

About Complicité

As a result of their widely celebrated production 'The Encounter', international touring company Complicité became committed to highlighting the significance of Indigenous knowledge, including plant based wisdom, and to developing cultural work that supports the future health of the planet. The Complicité approach is enhancing Global Generation's storytelling and participatory practice. For Complicité, collaborating with Global Generation is an important part of their transition towards combining their outstanding reputation as a touring theatre company, with a new, locally-engaged community focus.

Contents:

●	About this Anthology	4	
●	About the Voices of the Earth Fellows	8	
●	Map	18	
1	Oak	The Story Garden Oak Circle	21
2	Sugarcane	The Story Garden Polytunnel	35
3	Marigold	The Story Garden Willow Dome	49
4	Thyme	The Francis Crick Herb Garden	61
5	Daisy	Purchase Street Open Space	75
6	Ash	The Hardy Tree in St Pancras Churchyard	85
7	Yarrow	Regents Canal Towpath, King's Cross Estate	95
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●	Other Plants that Claimed Us	103	
●	Audio - Sound Design and Voice Credits	113	
●	Illustration and Photo Credits	114	

About this Anthology

Imagine you are sitting in a circle of 50 small Oaks, grown from the acorns of 7000 Oaks planted by Joseph Beuys, hundreds of miles away in Kassel, Germany^[1]. This is where our journey began. The Oaks arrived in Global Generation's Story Garden a year ago, carrying with them a message of social and environmental change. They wrapped around us and silently spoke to us, encouraging us to go slow. They brought to us an age old call; reminding us to create space for open mindedness, a space beyond barriers and prejudice. In their brittle branches they carried warnings about the fallout of holding knowledge and power in fixed and oppressive ways. Through oak, marigold, sugarcane, thyme, daisy, ash and yarrow along with many more wild and not so wild plants, we found a different kind of time, beyond this time. We began to listen through our own lived experience to the Voices of the Earth.

We hope this anthology will give you a taste of the first nine months of our journey into the healing power of plants, which the Global Generation team carried out with children and their parents, young people, older people and Theatre de Complicité. From the outset we had the idea that we would like to publish some kind of little book about the plant stories that came to us through this project. We didn't really know what kind of stories or indeed how they might come to us; would they be mythological tales or medicinal remedies and recipes? Would they be political and environmental or deeply felt and personal? They are all of those things and more. The following pages are co-written windows into moments, understandings, feelings and ways of being that stuck to us and our participants and that took us all to new places in our neighbourhood, in our histories and in our experience.

In the days of large gatherings we had imagined that we would, with the help of Complicité, create an outdoor processional performance, but very soon it became clear that was not going to happen. It also became obvious that our role was to help people come outdoors, away from their computers and screens, into the wide green spaces beneath the trees and the tiny mysterious places in the cracks upon the pavements, where the dandelion, the nettle and the fireweed are finding their way through. There are different ways you can access the materials that have been produced. Firstly if you are reading this, we encourage you to make sure you have somewhere nice to sit, so you can take the time to read a full chapter in one go and to listen to the accompanying audio piece, which you can

access through the QR codes in each chapter.

Each plant is also linked to a particular location in and around the King's Cross Story Garden so we also invite you to download the audiomap from our website or collect one from one of the Global Generation gardens, then come outdoors and visit the places the plants have claimed. For each of the plants in this anthology there are so many more stories that could be told, stories that would take lifetimes to unfold. In that sense we have barely begun and we would love to know what you hear in the voices of the earth.

Finally a little disclaimer. We have included some information on the traditional remedies of certain plants. This is not intended to be the ultimate guide but rather to inspire you and offer a springboard into your own research into the healing properties of the plants. Not all plants are safe for everyone so research well.

A story of many hands

Thank you to the Earth herself for whispering in my ear and making it known that there were more stories she had to tell. Stories that would come through encounters with the children and young people who made their way to Global Generation and found themselves captivated by the healing capacity of the plant world along with the broken, often overlooked histories carried by many plants. Our young participants helped my colleagues and I tell stories and they in turn rewarded us ten-fold by telling us their own stories; words spoken and words written in silence under the boughs of an oak tree, beside a dying ash or in the heart of a woven willow dome, shrouded in climbing beans and surrounded by mullein, meadowsweet and flaming marigolds.

Thank you to Gareth Maer for helping with the huge task of preparing the National Lottery Heritage Fund application and to Polly Gifford of Complicité for writing an Arts Council grant on our behalf. Without these grants (gratefully received) this body of work would not have happened. Thanks also to the King's Cross Knowledge Quarter for their financial support. A number of Knowledge Quarter members smoothed our path. Thanks to Jane Knowles, Henry Oakley and Katie Birkwood of the Royal College of Physicians and to Alex Lock and Emma Morgan of the British

Library, for the initial meetings that helped us articulate a plan for what we felt might happen on the project journey. I am glad we managed to deliver some of the proposed sessions before lock-down happened and the world went online. Thanks to Jane and Henry for sharing the treasures within the wonderful Royal College of Physicians medicinal garden and to Alex for giving our fellows the opportunity to see some of the rare, centuries-old botanical manuscripts in the British Library's collection. Encouraging our young participants, armed with thyme, to get a taste for guerilla gardening, whilst 'enhancing' the street side herb garden at the Francis Crick Institute, was made possible thanks to Hannah Camm. Thanks also to Bloomberg who are the parent sponsor for the Oaks in the Story Garden, which have provided a mythical heart for much of this work.

I want to acknowledge the impact of Covid-19 on the project. We couldn't run things as we had envisaged. In this changing and often confusing period, when the air cleared and the birds flocked back into London, the natural world was more appreciated than ever and this highlighted the relevance of this work. A time which meant the doors of the institutions were closed and we needed to rely on the resources of our immediate community. Due to the pandemic we could no longer work with primary schools as planned and instead we invited small groups of children along with their parents into the garden, some of whom had been indoors for eight weeks or more. In this way we received stories and plant remedies that had been handed down through families in Wales, England, Bosnia, Morocco, Eritrea, Somalia, Italy, Bangladesh, Jamaica, Granada, Sierra Leone and Poland. Not all of these stories made their way into this anthology but will travel with us and be expressed in other ways. Thanks to the 'doing doctoring differently' spirit of Dr Jane Myat of the Caversham GP practice, with whom I led lockdown story walks, through some of the green spaces of Camden. Several of Jane's patients who joined us on these walks went on to become an important part of the Voices of the Earth project; Pamela Strong and nearly all of the Lewis family, Tania, Fatma, Eben and Indea.

Thanks to the Global Generation project team; Silvia Pedretti, Charlotte Gordon, Rod Sugden and Malaika Bain Peachy who brought our participants together, told stories, and delivered a whole range of hands on and hands off plant encounter activities. In doing so, they supported

children and young people to be still and to closely look and listen, to garden, to take photos, to paint, to write, to stand up tall and speak, and overall to shine. Plant knowledge and appreciation all round was developed thanks to sessions with Global Generation's Head of Gardens Sue Amos and Rasheeqa Ahmed of Hedge Herbs. Layout and design is thanks to Martina Mina.

Special thanks to the Complicité Team; to Natalie Raam for terrific organisational skills and insightful ideas when the world turned upside down, Naomi Frederick, who led physical theatre workshops in the middle of the parks, singing circles in the Story Garden Oaks and Roundhouse and who injected a positive and nurturing energy into each of the twists and turns of this ever changing project. Special thanks to Naomi's children Molly and Jimmy who brought magic and drama to our stories with their wonderful violin and trumpet skills. Sarah Ainslie took raw and real photos, which appear in the following pages alongside the images produced by Silvia Pedretti and some of the Voices of the Earth Fellows (see image credits). Particular thanks to Daniel Balfour who took our work to a whole new level through his sensitive sound wizardry.

The Complicité way of working illuminated many of the things we hold dear in Global Generation: deep listening, adaptation, co-creation, and celebration. Qualities which the natural world shares in abundance. It has been an honour and a delight to see these qualities expressed by our young Voices of the Earth Fellows, who have in many ways been the life-blood of this project, each bringing their own unique skills and interests into the mix. The contributions of the fellows; Tsion Dawana, Maedah Pourhamdany, Lucy Sheikh, Cassie Adoptante, Afifa Abdirahman, Jocelyn Vick Maeer, Aesha Rahman, Ellie Osgerby, Eben Lewis and Dontae Jacobs are the heart of this anthology and the associated audio pieces.

Dr Jane Riddiford
Voices of the Earth
Artistic Director
October 2020

[i] Ackroyd, H. and Harvey, D. (2007). *Beuys' Acorns*. Available at <https://www.ackroydandharvey.com/beuys-acorns/> [Accessed 19 October 2020].

Meet The Voices of the Earth Fellows:

Cassie Adoptante



I decided to take part in this project because I have always had an interest in the environment, different cultures and the ways we all connect through nature. I always looked for ways of being more sustainable, whether that meant becoming vegetarian and cutting down my animal produce consumption as much as possible, buying reusable products, signing petitions and protesting. However, I came to realise that in many ways, I could continue saving the

environment by being more aware of plants, their properties and ways to stop buying produce in shops that I could grow in my own garden. This links to different cultures; for example, I learnt about Yarrow's healing properties from someone from Kosovo, who explained how she has used the leaves to stop cuts from bleeding. I also learned about the ways different cultures use certain plants as teas to relieve pain, rather than modern medicine. I like this approach.

I believe this project is so important for the world. While taking part, I have been fortunate enough to meet people of different genders, religions and ages, and hearing about their relationship to plants has given me a wider understanding of their culture. It made me feel that I am not alone in truly appreciating nature, as it often feels like this gets disregarded in a society where everything is bought and discarded without a second thought about where it may end up.

The other reason this project has been important to me is because nature is proven to help relieve depression. Just by being outside, feeling the sun and touching the plants, my brain will have released the serotonin that helps me psychologically. Overall, being involved in Voices of the Earth has helped me in more ways than I expected. I met a lot of amazing people and I found their experiences with plants fascinating. Whilst Sugarcane and Yarrow stood out the most to me, just knowing about certain herbs and how they have medicinal properties made me go around telling my friends

and family about them all – they too were captivated. I did further research which I found really inspiring. I looked into how indigenous people use plants, what plants mean to them, and I realised that, just like the history of sugarcane and slavery, other plants also have unfortunate back stories - in this case, stories that relate to the experiences and treatment of Indigenous peoples.

Tsion Dawana



I first joined Voices of The Earth because it included the study of medicinal plants and I want to pursue a career in medicine. However, once I joined, I quickly learnt that the project is not just about plants but also community. This project gave me the opportunity to connect with nature and appreciate what nature gives us; things that can not be replaced; things that connect history and myths of the past to the present's harmony and the future's hope.

Everything we did was outside my comfort zone, which helped me to gain confidence in doing things that were sometimes challenging, sometimes uncomfortable and in the end good, like speaking to a group of people. I believe if there are more projects like this one that reach out to the wider society, young and old, more people would be appreciative of the little things around them. I am truly honoured to be a part of this project and our community.

Eben Lewis



My experience with the Voices of the Earth project may be different than others, because I wasn't visiting the Story Garden for years like the others my age. I had only been introduced to the garden, Jane and the project during lockdown.

From there I was taken on to the Voices of the Earth project, seeing it as an opportunity to expand myself in a musical way, to gain insights into the life of a sound engineer and begin to create a professional portfolio from a young age as well as make some profit from it.

What started as a conversation planning details of the project sparked an opportunity to carefully and precisely express my culture, my history and whatever shadows may loom around them. To continue shedding light on black history and connect it to something that will make people think, appreciate and remember that Black Lives Do Matter. And that we deserve better for what we have already endured.

Lucy Sheikh



Taking part in this project has driven me to not only learn about plants and the history behind each plant, I have also been able to share my knowledge with others around me. I have contributed in speaking, presenting and learning in many workshops and sessions. I have developed these new skills, and have stepped outside of what I usually am comfortable with, whether it is performing and speaking in front of a crowd or challenging myself to adapt to different work environments.

Through this project I have also noticed that many people seem to take for granted and neglect the fact that plants are so important for our environment and wellbeing. Plants have been around a lot longer than humans, and therefore are wise and sacred. They sustain life on earth, so we as humans have a job to protect them. Learning about the seven medicinal plants helped me to reflect on this, and how easily we can use them in our day to day lives to eat, sleep, soothe, cure and more, all in a natural way which costs nothing.

The Greek mythologies and other stories played a big part in teaching us about some of the medicinal plants, creating beautiful imagery along our journey. The imagery of the history and stories behind some plants was very impactful, especially when talking about how different people were enslaved to harvest crops. For example, I learnt that sugarcane was a significant part of the slave trade and the way Africans were used on plantations. Therefore it is important to appreciate and remember where some of our household products originated from, such as brown sugar.

Overall, being involved with this project has made me think about how more people should get involved in things like this, as it would educate and engage them in learning about plants and using their voices to teach other people about how we can make the world a better place.

Jocelyn Vick Maeer



I first came on the Voices of the Earth journey because I was curious to learn more about medicinal plants, especially about our human and historical relationships with them. I was curious about herbal medicine and the so-called “witches” of old England, about plants from distant places, and the ways our lives have been entwined with them around the world. The light and the dark, the stories of how plants travelled and were transported, and why. Which stories

are told, which are hidden, and how we can rediscover and retell some of these buried stories.

The focus on learning and telling these stories is one thing that made this project feel unique to me. Maybe part of this comes down to the historical moment, with racial justice high on the agenda, and with the necessary refocusing of many environmental groups towards climate and environmental justice. It also felt very meaningful that everybody actively wanted to speak and listen to different and possibly uncomfortable truths. It reminded me of the value of places like the Story Garden and projects like this, which gather and focus people and communities, making space and spaces (like the new roundhouse, the Oak circle or the yurt) where these kinds of discussions can happen.

This project turned out to be about much more than herbalism. It was about myths and stories, what people have known from living close to the plants of their place. It was about our personal responses to plants, how we can learn to open ourselves to listening to the language they speak. It was about sharing these feelings and experiences of the natural world. And because all the plans changed with the spread of coronavirus and then lockdown, we also ended up connecting in new ways, over Zoom, and were somehow able to digitally reach out and support each other. I remember the feeling of relaxation that came over me when Charlotte led meditations over this strange medium, the feeling of peace that remained

afterwards. The project was about experimentation, working outside our comfort zones, and the unexpected outcomes this can bring. Starting each day during the summer week by singing in a circle bonded us. Telling stories by dancing with bamboo took us outside ourselves. Writing freefall and then speaking these on-the-spot musings into a sound recorder in front of the whole group - that was scary but so rewarding. Everybody shined at some point during the project and that was so great to see. It has been a special experience so far and I want to thank everybody - the Fellows and facilitators - for all that we've done together.

Ellie Osgerby



I have really loved being a part of this project. The two main things that being involved with this project have given me are a sense of community and respect. To me Global Generation is all about community and connection, opening up spaces of nurture and inclusivity which has helped me feel more connected with my local area. I have known that plants are alive, but working with Global Generation has made me feel that they really are. I talk to my house plants now. Getting to know this on a deeper level has given me new-found respect and care for plants. I can be in awe of a tiny bit of yarrow, as much as I am of an ancient oak tree.

Afifa Abdirahman



My reasons for becoming a Voices of the Earth Fellow cannot be simply condensed into one simple idea. My motivation stemmed from many different reasons. One of the reasons was its connection to nature; in my everyday experiences, as a student living in central London, I am detached from nature and the beauty of it. I never got a chance to truly embody nature and implement its beauty in my life. Through being a fellow I was able to become one with nature,

to understand what it has done for our society and become one with it. Throughout my everyday experiences in an urban society, surrounded by the bustling culture of London, I never truly have time to reflect on how nature plays a huge role in our society through aspects such as medicine.

Being a fellow taught me ideas of community and collectivism. Through the project I got to work with others and understand their passions for community. In my everyday life I rarely come across people from a variety of ages, but Global Generation has allowed me to connect with different individuals from different ages and interests. The Voices of the Earth work is important as it enforces community values and unity.

Aesha Raham



I originally joined the program because it appealed to me to try something new and help out with the community. I was not used to signing up to a lot of things, however this project interested me as it involved nature. Being part of this generation, I am not used to embracing the greenery around me. I have learnt to be a lot more resourceful and to appreciate that I have natural resources around me. If more people were to learn about the healing nature of plants then I

think that as a community we would be less willing to take part in as much deforestation and removal of plants as we are at this moment. We would understand how healing plants are and not take them for granted. Younger children would be more encouraged to be involved with nature if they were influenced by the elders of this world. To me, although plants are a big part of my life, I didn't think about this as much until I joined Global Generation and understood more about their values. For example, to expand people's understanding of how nature is so beneficial and why we need to preserve and look after plants and take care of this Earth. Plants are also included in my religion, Islam, as the idea that a small creature, such as a bird, eating from the plants or trees that we grow could give us rewards. We also have natural remedies that we use to benefit our bodies. Global Generation to me represents togetherness in aiding the Earth, teaching people that there is a world outside of social media and that there is always so much more to learn everyday.

Maedeh Pourhamdany



I remember that my first introduction to the Voices of the Earth project was learning about the Voyager Golden Record, a tangible ‘voice’ of our Earth, and I was immediately captivated by the endless possibilities of what our project could entail. I was astonished at just how little I and my contemporaries know about nutritious and healing wild plants compared to people in the past and still in some parts of the world where they are depended on.

As the project progressed I noticed the daisies, marigold and yarrow I walked past everyday, which previously had been no more than flowers and weeds to me. Gradually they became presences that I would look for everywhere I went.

I have learned that the relationship between us and nature is reciprocal; we must learn to listen to the cries of nature for they, as with the great Ash, have the ability to tell us how to heal them.

I started realising that getting to know a plant is, in essence, not much different from making a new friend; the better I got to know a plant and its qualities I could feel a personal bond being created between us. In hindsight, I think one reason why the fellows and I could develop such strong affinities with plants was because it was during and after the lockdown period.

While observing the yarrow I became envious of its freedom yet very much in adoration of its stoicism against nature’s elements, inspired by its connected relationships amidst the chaos in the world.

Dontae Jacobs



The Voices of the Earth project has given me an opportunity to connect with green spaces in my local area as I believe I take them for granted as I live so close. Learning about the plants that reside in those green spaces also allowed me to delve deeper into my interest in Norse mythology and do research on what the Rune Casters and sorcerers did to give them their abilities. I found out that the Ash trees as well as the Oak and the Yew were very important to them when creating objects with runes on and when creating tonics for spells. It was also amazing fun getting to perform in the churchyard, it made me feel a bond with the space that I will never forget.

Samirah Ahmed (Generator Assistant)



My name is Samirah and I have been at Global Generation for a long time. I am a Senior Generator now. This summer my little sister and I took part of Voices of the Earth as a Fellow and I have helped the team during the project, taking pictures and supporting the younger participants. It was great to see all the work and the planning behind the scenes. I loved the performances we prepared with Naomi at Complicité, using bamboo to make movements.

I loved the project because people of the present can help people of the past by carrying messages and making stories alive.

Map

Visit the Places that shaped the Voices of the Earth.

- 1 Oak**
Quercus robur
Story Garden Oak Circle

Sacred to the Druids, Oaks grew on this island when it was still attached to mainland Europe. They are now threatened by oak processionary moth.

- 2 Sugarcane**
Saccharum officinarum
Story Garden Polytunnel

Whilst a carnival delight, let us not forget the atrocities of the sugarcane plantations, whose owners enslaved and impacted the lives of hundreds of thousands of people.

- 3 Marigold**
Calendula officinalis
Story Garden Polytunnel

Orange and Bright, Marigold heals our skin and makes us right.

- 4 Thyme**
Thymus vulgaris
The Francis Crick Herb Garden

Thyme is an antiseptic with an etymology from the Greek Thumos meaning sacrifice, courage, anger and vital breath. Thyme is linked to the spirit of the Italian Mondine woman.

- 5 Daisy**
Bellis perennis
Purchase Street Open Space

In myth and legend daisy is a reminder of the value of time spent in the underworld.

- 6 Ash**
Fraxinus excelsior
Hardy Tree in St Pancras Churchyard

Lofty and tall, ash is the bridge between the earth and the sky and a symbol of the connection between all things. Ash is currently threatened by Chalara or ash dieback.

- 7 Yarrow**
Achillea millefolium
Canal Towpath

A plant of a thousand leaves, used in the healing of wounds by Achilles and other Greek heroes.



VOICES OF THE EARTH



1 OAK

My hand upon the oak.

How do you explain that feeling, that rising emotion which comes as your hand rests against an ancient oak? What is it we feel? Perhaps we do not always appreciate the significance of the value of that touch from one species to another species, from one individual to another individual. How do you explain that sensation which each human being knows when we as one living creature touch upon the life-force of another being of another species?

We know it most keenly as children. We know it best in the stroke of a hand upon a beloved cat or the pat of a favoured dog. Yet we also know it when we see the robin singing daily on the bird table beside the kitchen window. And it is there too in the touch of my hand upon the oak tree. -

from 'The Oak Papers' by James Canton

The Old and Young Oaks

By Jocelyn Vick Maeer, with a contribution from Pamela Strong

Quercus robur

Family: Fagaceae

We were lucky with the weather. It was one of the hot days that were rare this July, and nature was at its high point, giving us gifts of berries and flowers, colours, fragrance and warmth. We had gathered on Hampstead Heath, the best place to be on a day like this, with an excuse to stay for hours. Our group was made up of Voices of the Earth Fellows, families and people involved with the Caversham Medical Centre in Kentish Town - a GPs practice that recognises the healing power of nature.



As we walked across the Heath, from the grassy edge at Highgate Road towards the woods, we picked out the yarrow from the wild carrot and were dazzled by the brilliant purple of the rosebay willowherb. Bright yellow flowers popped out from the grass, and the trees' leaves complimented the blue sky in a way I can't articulate and find it hard to look away from. Why is that combination so beautiful?

We entered the woods in silence, enjoying the cool shade and the dappled sunlight that painted the ground. As we walked, I relished in the ability, new to me this year, to distinguish and name some of the trees and plants we walked past, and picked ripened blackberries at every chance.

When I look back now, I realise that Hampstead Heath frames so many of my teenage memories. One year, just after I began attending school by Gospel Oak, my mum gave me the gift of a season ticket for the swimming pool I could see from my classroom windows, and I swam there nearly everyday. When we were allowed out for lunch, we went to the Heath, and hung out there after dark too. It was like going to school in the countryside. On one snowy day, I even took a plastic spade sledge with me to ride down Parliament Hill. It was a welcome contrast from my home in urban King's Cross where, although there are a good number of small parks and squares, there is nowhere really wild; wild like the Heath.

After walking a while, we paused to listen and respond to a story Rod told, about a stream transforming itself to mist so it could cross a desert. We walked and paused again, this time sitting in a circle beneath an old oak tree. Jane introduced this new place and this oak tree, and invited us to write from the perspective of the oaks, imagining what an old oak might say to the young oaks. Here is what Pamela, one of the Caversham patients, wrote; compared to my two and a half decades Pamela has eight decades of lived experience from which to share.

My children - so recently acorns from my branches - you are now so widespread. To you who have taken root, be courageous and true to your roots and prosper - you maintain the land. Some of you will give your life to serve as boats and shelters and be of use to others. Do not grieve we all have a purpose.

We who have survived to stand sturdy in the land have grown to great heights and will act as a heritage and guard our survival forever. You may not have a choice where you will grow or what will be your path - but remain true to the beauty and strength of your nature.

- Pamela Strong



I wrote about how city oaks, like the ones in the Story Garden, are isolated from the oaks of the forest; an isolation I too experience when I am in King's Cross. Despite their isolation, the city oaks have a significant role to play.

You have an important role to play at this moment in history. Humans are starting to recognise again our importance for their own survival. We have an opportunity to bring to them a message, an old message that has been taken away and forgotten. It is a message which they can intuit from deep within their being. Everything connects.

You oaks in the city centre will have the hardest time of this, you will not be able to connect to the web beneath the soil which we know and nourish through our roots. But you share the air between you and you can cultivate spirit and space for humans to connect to themselves and to all else that is.

- Jocelyn.

Sitting in the circle, surrounded by grasses and insects, trees and birds, stones and soil, the vast difference in experience between these old Oaks and the young ones at the Story Garden, standing in pots in a very different circle, came into sharp focus.

One of the mothers who joined the VoE journey with her children wrote this about her experience of sitting amongst the Oaks in the Story Garden..

My family and I have enjoyed being part of the Voices of the Earth. Sitting in the Oak Circle in the Story Garden taught us how much we need to be in touch with nature, how amazing plants are and how our connection with our environment transcends the purely physical. We also realised how disconnected we have become from these realities to the detriment of social, biological and spiritual wellbeing. The project highlighted what we are capable of when different communities come together.

- Ayaan



The 50 young Oaks in the Story Garden are members of an artwork called the *Beuys' Acorns*^[i]. They were germinated, amongst several hundred others, from acorns collected in Kassel, Germany, where Joseph Beuys grew 7000 Oaks as an artwork and political statement about the need for cities to become “forest-like”. Due to the spread of processionary oak moth in London boroughs, there are now limitations on where oaks of any description can travel. Due to the quarantine the *Beuys' Acorns*, which are part of a travelling exhibit, needed to stay in London and found sanctuary in the Story Garden.

The Celtic people of the land now known as the British Isles had a meaningful relationship with Oak. Listen [here](#) to find out more.



Healing our planet

Processionary oak moths are *tiny* in comparison to a magnificent oak, but they pose a significant threat to the survival of these trees in north-western Europe - and, more recently, in the UK^[ii]. The caterpillars of *Thaumetopoea processionea* are small and grey, covered in long hairs, and will normally be seen in collectives^[iii]. They march, like protestors up Whitehall or Oxford Street, or like Roman armies along ancient European roads, up the trunks of oak trees to munch on tasty green leaves. The grey spines that cover their bodies contain toxins, and if you get too close they'll cause itching and irritation to your skin, eyes and respiratory system. What's worse is the damage to trees: by eating the leaves, the caterpillars take away the oak's way of making energy in a process called “defoliation”, which leaves them weakened and vulnerable to other pests and diseases, as well as extreme environmental conditions like drought^[iv].

These caterpillars have not always posed a threat to oaks in the UK and north-western areas of Europe, because they only arrived in these regions recently. In England, the first oak processionary caterpillars were discovered in 2006, on oak trees in the car park of a new housing development in Richmond, London. Later the same year, the caterpillars were also found on trees in Ealing - again, these oaks had been recently planted^[v]. Both groups arrived with the trees, which were grown in Italy and imported from the Netherlands, places that are both home to this species of moth. In Italy, oak processionary moth is “indigenous”, whereas in the Netherlands and the UK it is an “invasive”, “non-native” species.

Biologists use many words to describe where species live and travel to, many of which are similarly used to talk about people in often harmful ways. Food grower Claire Ratinon wrote about this use of language in a recent blog^[vi], questioning the need to refer to species as “native” or “non-native” in the first place. She asks: “why is locating a species' origin as ‘other than here’ relevant when what is of concern is the way that it grows or behaves?” What becomes ignored when we fixate on where something or someone “belongs”?

Looking around an ornamental garden, a farm or even the Story Garden, I notice how many of the plants in these places are non-native, living and

growing peacefully. For starters, we could point to tomatoes, potatoes, apples and corn. Another food grower, Leah Penniman, speaks^[vii] of her ancestors, whose response to seeing neighbours taken from their land to be enslaved in other lands was to braid seeds into their hair. That way, wherever they ended up, they knew they could grow food. Some histories, it seems, become erased when we don't recognise a species as introduced. The stories of many of their journeys are forgotten.

In the same way, many problematic "non-native" species arrived as a result of colonial relations. Himalayan balsam was one of many, many plants brought to Britain by Victorian plant hunters, in this case from regions of India, Nepal and Pakistan in the foothills of the Himalayas. Impressed by the bright pink flowers and exploding seed pods, these world plant gatherers paid little thought to the long-term impacts of importing and growing it in a different place. Today, Himalayan balsam spreads along the banks of railways and rivers, and proliferates in wastelands and woodlands. It has achieved the status of a "weed" as it is able to spread seed widely, outcompeting neighbouring plants in ways that can be detrimental to particular ecosystems^[viii]. Like many other problematic weed species that arrived as botanical curiosities, the context and stories of their collection go largely unacknowledged as the conversation circulates around methods and costs of eradication^[ix].

What I understood from Ratinon's piece and the questions she poses is that, while it is useful to know where a new species originated, how it arrived, and where it is positioned within a specific ecology, classifying living beings as of this land or of another has as much to do with our need to categorise and control the natural world. In similar ways, these words are used to classify and control the movement of people, to speak about who belongs in a place, who is entitled to the rights and freedoms it can provide. These words whisper of nationalism, borders, racism and resistance to migration, the politics of today's Britain, like much of today's world. I don't think it is a linguistic coincidence that these terms and rhetorics exist in both politics and ecology; they are symptomatic of a wider discourse that I feel needs to change.

Understanding and acknowledging the similarities this ecological language has with xenophobic and anti-immigration rhetoric does not mean ignoring

the nuances of how species can behave, especially in places where they have few natural predators or competitors. As Sophie Yeo notes^[x], "not all non-native species are invasive or harmful, while some native species can be invasive or harmful". Adapting the language we use to speak about ecology, just as we are learning to do in our everyday lives (especially, I might add, we white folks), is a starting point. For example, "introduced" is a word we can use to replace "non-native"^[xi].

There is another lesson I feel we could learn from the story of oak processionary moth, which is an antidote to the rhetoric of insularity and purity that comes with notions of nativeness. Despite their prickly exterior and toxic spines, oak processionary does have some natural predators, including several species of bats, birds and insects - according to Dutch researchers investigating natural approaches to controlling oak processionary moth in the Netherlands^{[xii],[xiii]}.

By growing with diversity and with ecosystems in mind, a slower process of healing might be possible^[xiv]. City ecosystems grown slowly and thoughtfully, with a variety of trees, plants and habitats, could create friendly places for a variety of life (including natural predators) and obstruct the pathways of oak processionary. So far, more rapid and forceful approaches have been taken, like spraying woodlands with bacterial agents that arguably do as much damage to other insect species (as well as the birds which rely on them for food)^[xv]. A slower approach requires us to give up control, and instead to trust in natural systems and ecologies.

As I write this, I am sitting in a glade of Oak. Looking around, I see that the oaks are not alone, but are joined by pine, elm, ash, other trees I can't identify, as well as all the smaller plants that grow in the earth between the stones. A dragonfly passes by, butterflies flit through the air and flies buzz around me, landing from time to time. There is power in this diversity, in the balance that it brings. The earth speaks of continuity and resilience. Joseph Beuys said that our cities must become "forest-like". I understand this as the need to grow more than just trees; diversity, resilience and justice are some of the qualities that come to mind.

Identify

To me, oak leaves look like the shape you might draw if your picture dictionary card said “cloud”, or “sheep” before you draw the legs and head.



The bark covering the trunk and branches has a rough texture and brown-grey colour and becomes fissured and hollowed with age, providing homes for mosses, lichens, insects and birds. These trees don't grow especially tall but their branches spread widely, reaching out to others around them. In spring, flowers bearing pollen grow as slender catkins, while spherical, pale brown flowers hold the carpel (or “female” structures). In summer, the acorns, which look like a small nut sitting inside a knobby cup, develop, turning from green to brown in the autumn, before they fall to the ground.

Did you know?^[xvii]

- Oaks often live up to 800 years or more. The oldest known oak, the Jarupa Oak in California is said to be 13,000 years old.
- Oak was found on this island whilst it was still attached by land bridges to mainland Europe by which animals and people made their way.
- Oak provided early canoes and shelters and heat and even sustenance from ground acorns used as flour during the Stoneage.
- Oak trees and groves were sacred to the Druids.

Activity

Where can we find oak around us? Sometimes it's used for floorboards, for furniture, or in the structures of old churches and ships... How can we remember the living tree when we find things made from oak?

Try this out. Find something around you made from oak. Sit with it, and meditate on its past, the time when it was living. Who might it have met? Who might it have provided shelter for? Maybe take some paper and write about the life and afterlife of this oak tree, from its beginnings as a tiny acorn to its death and transformation.

Locate

The Oak Circle in the Story Garden is one place to find young oak trees. Another place might be Hampstead Heath, where many oaks live, young and old. The Bandstand Oak is one notable tree, amongst many, many others.



Healing our bodies

“Plants are our oldest teachers”, writes Robin Wall Kimmerer in *Braiding Sweetgrass: Scientific Knowledge, Indigenous Wisdom and the Teachings of Plants*^[xvii], because they are the beings who have lived on our planet the longest. Although we don’t speak the same language, we can learn to interpret their movements and habits, in the same way we might interpret dance or physical theatre. On one of our Voices of the Earth days, we worked with Complicité to convey the sense of different plants, like ivy and dandelion, through the movement of our bodies. When we slow down, open up and learn to listen, what could Oak teach us?



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2

SUGARCANE



Sugarcane

By Malaika Bain Peachey

Saccharum officinarum

Family: *Poaceae*

Walking through London with three long sugarcane stalks, I unknowingly embarked on a trip across this plant's historical and geographical DNA. As I wound and wove through the city, I mirrored the way its fibrous roots shoot laterally. On my journey from Peckham to the Story Garden in Kings Cross, via the Paper Garden (Global Generation's South London base in Canada Water) I was transported across latitudes and longitudes by each story waiting to be told at the sight of the Sugarcane I held. I knew we are all connected through sugar to a certain degree, around 80% of table sugar consumed all over the world comes from sugarcane (sugar beets account for the rest)^[i]. Its origin, however, I was not yet fully aware of.

Sugarcane's use can be traced back to New Guinea almost 10,000 years ago^[ii]. Looking into this part of the world and the relationship of its indigenous peoples with sugarcane, I found a rare story, one that holds a plant responsible for the origin of humanity. In the Solomon Islands, a chain of islands southeast of Papua New Guinea, there lives a diverse population of indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, the majority of whom are Melanesian, Polynesian, and Micronesian^[iii]. One story born from Melanesian folklore attributes the origin of the human race to sugarcane. The legend says that "two knots began to sprout on a stalk of sugarcane, and when the cane below each sprout burst, from one issued a man and from the other a woman, these becoming the parents of mankind."^[iv]

The early Pacific island voyagers carried sugarcane across the Pacific, reaching mainland Asia around 1000 B.C.^[v]. By 500 A.D., in the Gupta Empire - which at that time would encompass modern day Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Afghanistan - canes were transformed into and "used as a medicine for headaches, stomach flutters, and impotence"^[vi]. As sugarcane travelled, so did the knowledge and appreciation of its medicinal properties.

On my way to the Paper Garden, I felt like a voyager navigating troubled waters as I slowly ducked and weaved through train barriers, trying not to poke passersby with the canes jutting over my shoulders. As I approached the gate, I saw the security guard light up at the sight of these bamboo-like giants. He couldn't believe it. "Where did you get that?" he blurted. I explained and he told me that fields of sugarcane grow like wildfire in his mother country of Pakistan, about the many stories that arise from the flora of his region.

To answer his question for you, the reader, I bought the sugarcane from a fruit & veg vendor in Peckham who hails from Afghanistan. I have known him for some time, so we chatted for a bit and he decided to throw in some ginger and turmeric on the house. Here before me was a friend whose people, centuries ago, experimented with different irrigation practises to make sugarcane viable in a temperate climate. Delving further into the relationship between sugar and his region, I continued on the cane's journey. By 600 A.D., the art of sugar refinement had spread to Persia, where rulers entertained guests with sweets^[vii]. When Arab armies conquered the region, they carried away the knowledge and love of sugar. The Arabic people perfected refinement and turned it into an industry^[viii]. With ongoing innovations to increase efficiency, refining progressed to churn out the pure sugar granules that we recognise today. This changed everything. The introduction of sugarcane and its refinement, especially to "The New World" brought about the "Age of Sugar"^[ix].

On the same strip of local businesses where the vendor and I stood, I recall a young entrepreneur with Caribbean roots and a radiant smile, who started a business selling freshly-pressed cane juice. She encouraged adding ginger and lime to this replenishing drink to give it an extra boost and a delicious twist. I bought a few bottles to take with me!



Thinking of her stall and my own Caribbean heritage, there is the ever present tug on my spirit. It's the same tug I feel as I think about Belly Mujinga, George Floyd, Marsha P. Johnson, Breonna Taylor, Grenfell, I unfortunately could go on and on. It is the stain of hatred and racism that no whitewashing in history books can remove. It is the atrocities that our ancestors endured over racial hierarchy and a hostile environment reinforced by slavery. I urge you to read and support resources that explore what was not thoroughly covered in school (e.g. [The Black Curriculum](#) initiative).

After colonial forces arrived in the Americas, the four centuries that followed saw over 12 million Africans enslaved and indigenous peoples killed and virtually wiped out by European diseases. The lush land was swiftly cleared for the cultivation of lucrative crops to be shipped out to meet the demand back in Europe.



For the enslaved people on sugar plantations, life was unending torture and brutality every day for centuries. “The heat of the fields, the flash of the scythes, the smoke of the boiling rooms, the crush of the mills”^[xi]. Eben, sound engineer and Fellow to this project, proposed sugarcane be part of the Voices of the Earth journey, which I am really grateful for.

Nevis and Barbados were the original British sugar islands, both colonised in the 1620s. The islands were rapidly cleared of vegetation to make room for sugar mills, plantation houses, and quarters for enslaved Africans brought there to work. In the early 1700s, a chain of events led to the collapse of Nevis’ sugar industry following a French attack on the island and the resulting starvation of enslaved Nevisians. In Barbados, the fields and freshwater resources were depleted within a century^[xii]. Hence, by 1720, Jamaica had become England’s new sugar island^[xiii].



It is by beautiful serendipity that the day the Fellows gathered together in a circle ready to explore sugarcane and its dark past, it was in fact an important and eerily relevant day. Dontae, our storyteller, greeted us all with “Happy Jamaican Emancipation Day” that morning.

The heavy weight of history pushes in the crook of my neck and atop my shoulders. There are so many voices I’ve heard and have yet to hear encircling this plant I carried. Some were the voices of people who were long gone. I was heartened by the opportunity to hear the voices of the young people, as some of them were to meet sugarcane for the first time.

I finally made my way to King’s Cross, after zig zagging across London. Desperate for caffeine on my way into the Story Garden, I headed to a coffee shop, sugarcane still in tow, and ordered an espresso. It dawned on me that the plant I held in my hand had been the key to popularizing the bitter plant whose extraction through hot, pressurised water I was about to order from the gentle silver-haired man at the till. He smiled widely, and



he leaned forward to take in the full extent of these knobbly poles I was carrying. He reminisced on his childhood back in Chile. He used to look forward to the end of the school day getting pieces of sugarcane as an after school treat, chewing and sucking the sweet nectar from the cane. He handed me the coffee, we thanked each other, and I finally headed into the garden.

The way I and a lot of these storytellers have been taught to eat raw sugarcane is quite an exciting task; one that I knew had to be shared in the Story Garden. The hard outer layers, or rind, need to be cut...well rather, hacked... off and the juicy internal fibres are chewed and sucked for the cane’s sweet nectar until you are left with a pulpy, stringy mess which you discard (in the compost of course!)



Pictured here are the Generators having a look and taste of some sugarcane after the Fellows chopped plenty for an experiment in its propagation (still in progress).

Shortly after setting up for an afternoon of tasting and talking about sugarcane, one of the growers from the community growing beds came over and cut a cane swiftly, like he's done it countless times before, and handed myself and a volunteer some slices. He informed me that, back in Bangladesh, vendors press the cane into a wonderful juice and it is full of vitamins as well as being good for the belly. This swift dance and ritual-like manner of the Story Garden grower cutting the cane transports me to mainland south Asia again, where we find it at the centre of celebrations marking the end of the winter solstice, an important time of year on the Hindu calendar. This is known as Makar Sankranti in parts of Central and Western India, Pongal in Tamil Nadu and Lohri in Punjab^[xiv]. In Hinduism, this harvest festival is a time for enlightenment, peace, prosperity and happiness which is closely followed by the change in season. The occasion calls for sweets made of til (sesame), gur (jaggery, a more unrefined sugarcane product sometimes made from palm tree sap), and raw sugarcane^[xv]. In Ayurvedic medicine, a 3,000 year old Indian holistic healing system, the roots and stems of sugarcane and jaggery are prepared to treat a variety of ailments.

The journey of sugarcane is both bitter and sweet, listen [here](#) to how Voices of the Earth Fellow and sound engineer, Eben, reminds us to remember these polarities in an audio piece.



More on Mythology



The image to the left is Kāma, the Hindu God of Love, with his sugarcane bow and the string formed by honeybees.^[xvi]

Many Hindu “gods and goddesses are depicted holding sugarcane, which symbolises firmness, straightforwardness with a core of sweetness within.”^[xvii]

There are references to sugarcane’s use as a magical ingredient in the Atharva-Veda (collection of hymns, incantations, and prose forming part of sacred ancient literature from India), as it

is a key in a love-charm. Translated, it ends “I have surrounded thee with a clinging sugarcane, to remove aversion, so that thou shalt not be averse to me!”^[xviii]

During the extraction of sugarcane (and sugar beets) there is a viscous, sweet by-product known as molasses aka treacle. There are three types: light molasses after the first boiling (used as a sweetener), dark molasses after the second (used in food, animal feed, and fertilizers), and blackstrap molasses after the third and final boiling (used in food, home remedies and as a vitamin/mineral supplement).^[xix]

“Blackstrap” is so named allegedly from the almost black colour after caramelizing at extreme temperatures combined with the Dutch word “stroop” meaning syrup^[xx]. Containing more antioxidants than honey, it is also rich in vitamin B6, iron, manganese, potassium, magnesium, and calcium^[xxi]. A great source of vitamins and minerals, molasses is also very high in sugar which, in excess, can be detrimental to your health.

Try

Warm Molasses Milk recipe and Mindfulness activity^[xxii]

What you will need:

- 1 teaspoon Blackstrap molasses or “Cane Sugar molasses” (a little goes a long way)
- 1 Cup milk or milk alternative of your choice (oat, almond, soy, etc.)
- Your favourite drinking spices (cinnamon, star anise, allspice, cloves)
- Honey or stevia or agave and a pinch of sea salt is optional for added flavour

In a small saucepan, combine all the ingredients, stir or whisk until well mixed, allow mixture to warm and steam but not boil.

Pouring the tea, watch the colours of the milk swirl in the cup. If you choose to stir with a spoon, feel the touch of the handle against your fingers. Let yourself hear and notice any sounds. The clink of the spoon to the edges of your cup. Notice the cup warming to the touch now it is filled with this hot liquid you created. How do your hands feel as you hold it? When you sense your mind wandering into thought, gently return your attention to sensing.

Now, bring the cup to your lips and take a sip. Be aware of your sensations and the liking or disliking of them. If there are thoughts, let them enter into and then pass through your mind without following them. Try to stay with the tasting. Notice without judgement. Perhaps reflect on the contents in the cup, the molasses and its journey into your hands. Any feelings that arise knowing the story of sugarcane, let them come and notice where they take place in your body. Any questions that arise, perhaps write them down. Otherwise breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth and savour the last few sips of sugarcane’s gift. Yum.

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3

MARIGOLD



Marigold

By Jocelyn Vick Maeer, with contributions from Charlotte Gordon, and Fatma and Indea Lewis.

Calendula officinalis

Family: Asteraceae

The first time I (Jocelyn) encountered marigolds, they were called “Calendulitas”. I was helping to sow seeds and plant seedlings in the south of Spain, where a noun adorned with the suffix “ita/o(s)” makes it a tiny version of that thing. Everything we planted was young and small, so everything was referred to in this way. A plant was a “plantita”, aubergines were “berengenitas”, lettuces was “lechugitas”, carrots were “zanahoritas”, and calendulas were “calendulitas”. These tiny seeds were planted for the colour they would bring, the warmth and the insects. I had no idea about their edible or medicinal properties yet, but I was introduced to these a year later at the Story Garden. Charlotte is an Education and community Gardener and is training in Intuitive Herbalism. As one of the facilitators of the Voices of the Earth project, she has been sharing her knowledge about various herbs, like calendula, with children, families and fellows like me. We have explored the medicinal uses of calendula by making a balm, which is useful for skin irritations and issues like insect bites and has been traditionally used for snake bites!



Charlotte's experience

I became inspired to learn about plants at a time when I was living very simply, sleeping outside and bathing in rivers, travelling and learning through farming and communal living. This opened me up to a new reality of knowing, learning through experience, learning from people who lived closed to the land, those in a reciprocal relationship with the plants around them. My passion for plants came through eating and meeting our native species, getting to know them like I would a new friend. Through having my hands in the soil, picking and eating and talking about plants I developed an eye for them. Most other foragers or plants people can attest to developing an eye for the medicinal, edible and poisonous ones. I started to recognise plants who I didn't know, they stood out amongst the others, there was an intuition that spoke loudly. I would take photos of the leaves, stem and flower, often taking part of the plant home to ID and research. Plants began to sing their songs in my heart and I began to learn from them directly, knowing their names before I had learned about them in books. They entered my dreaming world and it's been an allyship ever since.

For me, Calendula offers something dynamic and physical, it's not a plant to curl up and go to sleep next too. It invites dance and radiance and shines it's bright starlight calling forth my inner sunshine. This was one of the first plant's I encountered as a young travelling woman committed to learning the old ways of the plants. In a small holding in Wales, we picked baskets of the flower heads to make into salve for the horses muzzles. There I learnt about it's properties to support the skin's healing. This plant is celebrated by people and animals alike flowering from late Spring to Autumn. Calendula is a hardy plant; it is a strong plant. It likes being cut hard and deadheading the flowers increases the bloom, and the petals can be eaten as well as made into a balm or a salve. A true sunshine plant of the garden.

The Lewis sisters experience

We were lucky to have Fatma Lewis, her elder sister Indea and their mother Tania join our Voices of the Earth workshops. Over several sessions we gathered calendula flowers and made a skin balm with all of the petals. We sang songs and wrote stories and poems about what marigolds mean to us. This is what Fatma and Indea wrote.

*I am vibrant and healing
A beautiful fragrance
comes from my petals
I am determined to
bloom
To bring joy to so many*

Fatma

*When I wake up in the
early morning
When the sun is just
saying hello
I feel strong and
colourful as my
Fragrance starts to flow
In the wind I feel happy
When it rains I feel
excited
When the sun comes up
all the way
I blossom and overflow
My body is medicinal
And my stem is firm
All day long
I sing the marigold song*

Indea



Jocelyn's Experience

Sometimes as I walk around London it feels barren. Many pockets of green and flowers are carefully landscaped. It feels as though very little wilderness is allowed in the city. I wonder, if it were left alone, how long would it take for the wild plants to take over? I imagine buildings clothed in green, roads and pavements splitting open as the street trees seek out space beyond what they are allocated. Hints of this wilderness do exist in the cracks in pavements, forgotten verges, growing from the mortar of old walls. Somehow the seeds spread, sprouting, blooming and bringing up memories of untamed places.

This year was the first time I really paid attention to the wild plants. It happened because I started growing vegetables in a communal garden. As I was watching the ones I had planted, I also noticed the plants that turned up by themselves. They sprung up in the fertile soil at the base of my plot: poppies, dandelions, feverfew, yellow, pink and blue flowers I couldn't identify. Yarrow, broadleaf plantain, chickweed and sow thistle came too.

At some point during early spring, wildflowers reminded me of their importance in the ecology of my garden. Until they arrived, my small plot was overwhelmingly green with broad beans and potatoes, garlic and chard. There was little variation in colour, nothing that would attract pollinators and feed insects. I looked around at other people's plots to see what was growing - in a communal space there's always something new to find. It's often surprising, too, because 15 years ago this garden was a barren car park. Today, beds made from railway sleepers are home to rose bushes, hawthorn, dogwood, ferns, rosemary, bay, grasses, grapes, rhubarb, even a sizeable cherry tree.

In one corner, I found calendula. Some had bloomed a while ago and the seeds were dried out - ready to collect and spread. I sowed them in my plot, some along one side and a few in the middle where the soil was bare. They grew quickly, bigger than I had expected. They supported the other plants by breaking the wind and brought colours, cream, orange and yellow. They also made me happy.

In the audio recording, we share with you a traditional Indian folk tale about the importance of marigolds. It ends with the protagonists, Juna and Sunita, returning from the underworld and travelling across the land spreading seeds. As the flowers grow, the relationship between the people and their Mother, the Earth, is healed. They begin to care for the land and live peacefully with each other. I wonder if this could be true for us today - if we bring more beauty to our immediate surroundings, will we care more for the planet?

Listen to the story [here](#).



An Invitation

It has saddened me to read about England's nature depletion - the loss of wild places, from woodlands to marshlands, as more and more space is given over to development and intensive agriculture. Although this issue feels far away, a problem of the countryside, we can also respond to nature depletion in our London habitats. How can our local places be friendly and hospitable to other species, like the insect friends who pollinate our fruit and vegetables? What effect might this have on ourselves, our relationships to each other and our Earth?

I invite you to join me in an experiment. Find a calendula plant and locate the seeds. Are they dried out? If so, gather some seeds, only a few as others might wish to do the same. Alternatively, there are places to buy calendula seeds, so you can start off this cycle yourself. Like Sunita and Juna in the audio story you will hear, you can spread these seeds. Grow them in some soil on your windowsill, in your garden, outside your front door... Anywhere with a little free space. Wait and watch - does your attitude and relationship with that space change as the flowers bloom? Do you notice any insects coming to visit them?

Identify

The name “marigold” is used for dozens of different plant species! We are all part of the same big family, but you could describe us as two sets of cousins. On one side, we have the *Tagetes* marigolds, and on the other we have the *Calendula* marigolds.

We all have flowers that look just like the sun at different times of the day: shades of orange, yellow, pink, red, mahogany and cream, and combinations of these! However, *Tagetes* marigolds have more dense and bushy flowers than the delicate *Calendula*, whose flowers are flat and bowl-shaped.

Other ways you can tell us apart are by looking at our size, petals, seeds, and by smelling us, too! *Calendula* plants tend to grow between the heights of 30-60cm, whereas *Tagetes* vary a lot more - they can range from 15cm to 1.25m in height!! The petals on *Calendula* flowers are long and straight, while those on *Tagetes* are wavy, not flat, and have a rectangular shape with rounded corners. Our seeds are different, too: *Calendula* have brown, curled, bumpy seeds, noticeably different from the straight black seeds of *Tagetes*, which have white, paintbrush-like tips^[i]. And the smell? *Calendulas* are lucky - they have a sweet, pleasant smell. *Tagetes* are more spicy, pungent, and unpleasant to some nose-owners^[ii].

It is the *Calendula*, *Calendula officinalis*, who are used for both internal and external remedies worldwide and it is the lovely *Calendula* whom we met throughout *Voices of the Earth*, celebrating them in story and song.



And what about eating us? Well, all *Calendula* plants are edible - add the petals to a salad or as a colourful garnish on a dish! But be more wary around *Tagetes*, as these might not be safe to eat. While some species may have wonderful medicinal benefits if eaten or brewed as a tea, others are toxic!

Can you guess which is which?! What other differences can you see?

Healing our Bodies

What do you feel when you see a marigold flower? What properties did the story reveal about the marigolds?

I see brightness, colour and life. A reminder of the sun, whose energy is the basis of everything. I feel qualities that heal, soothe and repair when I rub a balm made from calendula flowers onto my skin. Try this yourself, using Charlotte's recipe below.

Calendula Balm Recipe

Uses: soothing irritated skin, great for dry rough skin and bites and stings

What you'll need:

- A good patch of Calendula (Calendula Officinalis)
- Glass bowl
- Scales
- Pan of water (which the glass bowl fits comfortably inside)
- Empty jars to store the balm
- Beeswax pellets
- Olive oil
- Other oils - e.g. shea butter, almond kernel oil
- Calendula flowers (remember - these are always non-toxic!)
- Extra essential oils of your choice - e.g. lavender or tea tree

This salve lasts between 6 months - 1 year, making around 120ml is more than enough.

Method:

- Sterilise the jars you are going to use with boiling water and measure the volume of liquid they will take so you know how much oil to use. 1 jar is enough for 1 household, you may like to make more as gifts.
- Pick a large handful or bundle of Calendula flower heads making sure you pick the whole head of the flower, not just the petals (it's the Sepal, the base of the flower head that holds the oil), and correctly identifying Calendula Officinalis.
- Roughly chop up the flower heads placing them in the glass bowl.
- Pour your oil over the flowers and make a bain-marie or double boiler, by pouring boiling water into the pan and placing the glass bowl on top, making sure the boiling water doesn't touch the surface of the bowl. Heat on a low-med heat for 4-6 hours.
- Strain the oil and petals through a muslin cloth discarding the petals and keeping the oil, you could strain this a few times if needed.
- Placing the oil back in the bowl, add your beeswax.
- The ratio of beeswax to oil is 1:5 so if you use 100ml of oil you would use 20g of beeswax.
- If you want to add essential oils now is the time and add 4-5 drops each.
- Once the beeswax has melted, pour the mixture into your jars and allow it to set.
- Write a label with the date and ingredients.



Healing our Planet

In her story Fatma gives us a glimpse of what might happen if plants ruled the world.

It all started when the world was a place full of buildings and vehicles until something happened. A big white light shone down and suddenly there was a whole bunch of tulips and vegetables. It felt true to us and it was absolutely beautiful. Sunflowers covered the roads and jasmine covered the walls of the houses and smelt amazing. Fruits grew and blocked the pavements so when you walked through it was like walking through a farm. People loved it; they took raspberries, cucumbers and marigolds. I wonder, if plants could rule the world and make us feel like that then should they?

[i] Styles, S. (n.d.). 'How to Tell if a Marigold Is a Calendula', *Hunker*. Available at: <https://www.hunker.com/13426274/how-to-tell-if-a-marigold-is-a-calendula> [Accessed 28 October 2020].

[ii] Dyer, M. H. (2020). 'Marigold Vs. Calendula – Difference Between Marigolds And Calendulas', *Gardening Know How*. Available at: <https://www.gardeningknowhow.com/%20ornamental/flowers/marigold/marigold-vs-calendula.htm> [Accessed 11 October 2020].

THYME



Thyme

By Silvia Pedretti with a contribution from Samirah Ahmed

Thymus vulgaris

Family: Lamiaceae

From the Latin: thymum or thymus

From the Greek: thumos, thumon, thýmon: meaning sacrifice, courage, anger, vital breath.

“A leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars”

Walt Whitman, quoted in *The Overstory*^[1]

Movement and migration is part of the Earth’s life. In every instant of this planet, something moves, evolves, changes shape, disappears and is reborn. Nature is movement, endless cycles of things and We, as human beings, are part of this infinite change. What always stuck with me it is that, despite change, movements and new chapters, there is always something that stays, a sort of memory, or remembrance of where we come from. Where we come from stays alive and strong whatever we become or wherever we go. Our origins, our Home, our roots, those are part of us. And there are things around the world, things through the years of our life, things we see or smell or touch that, in one instant, can take you back to that place, those roots, that Home. In this chapter Silvia Pedretti, Global Generation’s Youth and Senior Project Coordinator, explains that for her that thing was an encounter with thyme.

Looking at leaves, trees, insects and stars triggers memories of my childhood, memories of Saturdays with my father, images of hair in the wind, of my sister and I running in the cornfields. But this year one particular plant was like the key of a time machine, taking me back to my roots in a surprising and unexpected way. I found out something new about my grandma and became conscious of another piece of history that shaped me and that Home I am from. Thyme was a plant that shaped this last summer, in the other Home I am part of, called London.

Thymus vulgaris, common Thyme, was planted at Francis Crick Institute during the Voices of the Earth Summer School by the young people under a hot sun.



I rubbed my fingers around its tiny leaves and my mind moved from Past to Present through the life of 3 women. My self, living in the UK, a Mondina rice field worker of Northern Italy in the last century and Samirah, a young Londoner, planting thyme and singing Mondina’s songs in the middle of London.

Yesterday shapes our present. The fights and the protests of the past have shaped today’s freedom. So I started to ask myself if a woman from the last century could have thought that her sacrifice and fight for better pay would have inspired a young Londoner in 2020, and here is what came out from that movement of thoughts through time. Those tiny leaves of thyme made me travel back and far.



August 1943. Lombardia, Italy.

It was evening. She took a few tiny stems of thyme to flavour her dinner: rice and beans. The same food she had had for days. Then she lay down on a bed made of straw. Her body was tired. Surrounded by other women who had worked with her in the rice field, she smelled her fingertips. Thyme had left its scent on them. She remembered when she was little and her mother made bundles of thyme to hang in the children's room and ward off nightmares.

Now she was a woman, a mother herself, a wife, but far away from home, working as a Mondina in the rice fields of Northern Italy. Working there was good for the money. After the Second World War, Italy was on its knees. Days were hard, working under the summer sun with their legs immersed in water for eight long hours, hungry mosquitos everywhere, vipers underwater, and a boss who carried a stick and made sure every Mondina worked efficiently, weeding through the fields that looked like endless mirrors.

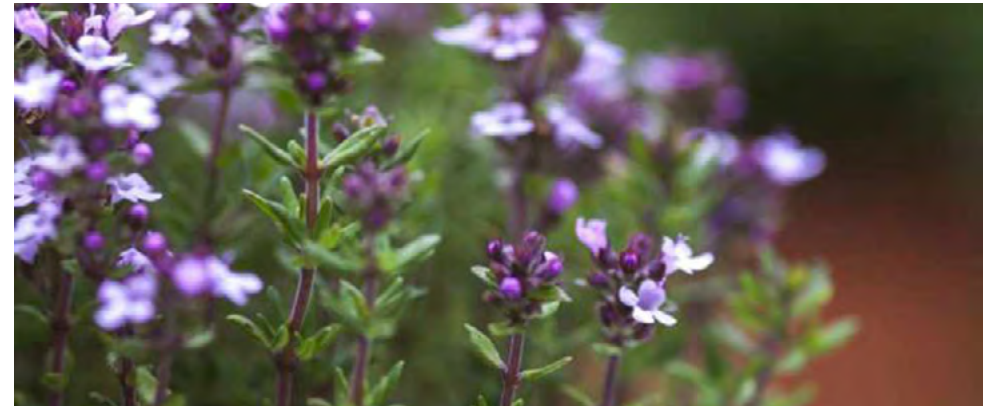


The Mondine couldn't talk to each other during the working hours but there was one thing the boss allowed them to do, simply because it made everyone work faster and feel better, and that was singing. So the Mondine could sing all day long. Singing was not just melody and tune. It represented a musical expression of feelings and hopes. A cry for justice and rightful pay. The songs were protests for better conditions. Songs were messages of love for their children and families, for a world of peace. There was one song she loved more than others. And every time she sang it, tears would trickle down her cheeks and into the water. From the inside to the outside. Water into water. Plants growing. Pain growing. Where is home?

Her legs were full of bites and little wounds. She walked outside the farm and got some stems of thyme, remembering what her mother said: 'Thyme is good for wounds and bites, piccola mia. It fights tiredness and pain. Did you know thyme leaves are called Ariadne's tears?'

'No mum, why?'

'A long, long time ago, Ariadne from Crete was abandoned by Theseus. Ariadne, who loved him very much, cried and cried. All those tears became the leaves of thyme and the smell of those leaves was so nice and strong that it attracted Dionysus, who fell in love with her and her heart was no longer empty.'



Could these tiny leaves forever carry the stories of all these women? Could thyme be more than just a cooking herb? Could a plant be a symbol of justice and freedom throughout history?

August 2020. London, UK.

*'Dear Thyme,
I am sitting here in this garden at the Francis Crick Institute where myself and other young people planted you. At first I thought you were only a pretty plant with a nice smell that I could use for cooking (my mum uses you in some of our meals). But then I learned about the healing power you have and your historical uses, and looking in depth, I see your big story: you helped children sleep better; you healed the Mondine's bodies working in the rice fields. And now that you are planted here in this garden something new can be added to your story. You tell the story of happiness, of community. Of young people smiling and making this garden look better. Of young people singing the Mondine's songs. I am feeling grateful for their fight for freedom ... the freedom I have as a young woman in London.'*

– Samirah



Samirah is a young woman who has been part of Global Generation's youth programmes for three years now. She was born and raised in London. I am Italian. I was born and raised in Northern Italy. Nature brings people together and creates a sense of community anywhere but the Voices of the Earth project awakened in me a deeper sense of belonging to history and how me being in London today is the result of someone else's fight for freedom.

The **Mondine** or **Mondariso** were female seasonal workers employed in rice fields in Northern Italy. Their job was to remove weeds that could stunt the growth of rice plants. Working conditions were extremely hard, as the job was carried out by spending the whole day bent over, often barefoot, with legs immersed in water; malaria was not uncommon, as mosquitoes were widespread. Moreover, shifts were long and women were paid significantly less than men. For these reasons, since early in the 20th century, Mondine started to organise themselves to fight for some basic rights.



Thyme is no less than the journey-work of stars for me. It is the plant my ancestors used to heal themselves. It is the plant that made Samirah smile and think about her freedom as a young woman. It is the plant that made me connect with my home town, with a piece of history I barely knew and with young Londoners who were only small children when I arrived in the UK and didn't know about the Mondine's work.



Voices of the Earth are for me Voices of humankind. This has been a project about plants but also about the stories woven into our evolution and a lot of these stories haven't been heard enough. For me, singing with the Voices of the Earth Fellows and other young people the Mondine song, "Sciur Padrun", in a city like London, did justice to the work and the life of the Mondine who haven't been forgotten.

To hear more about the journeys with thyme made by Silvia, the Mondine Women and the children involved with Global Generation click [here](#).



These are the words to the Mondine song at the end of the audio piece, sung by the Voices of the Earth Fellows on our summer school.

***Sciur padrun da li beli braghi bianchi
Fora li palanchi, fora li palanchi
Sciur padrun da li beli braghi bianchi
Fora li palanchi ch'anduma a cà***

***A scusa sciur padrun sa l'em fa tribuler
I eran li premi volti, i eran li premi volti
A scusa sciur padrun sa l'em fa tribuler
I eran li premi volti ca n saievim cuma fer***

Boss (the owner of the rice fields) with nice white trousers
show me the money, show me the money
boss with nice white trousers
show me the money
I would like to go home (to my children)

Sorry Sir
if we were trouble
these were the first times for us (doing the weeding in the rice fields)
these were the first times
sorry sir
if we were trouble
these were the first times in the rice fields
and we didn't know how to do it

Uses of Thyme

Thyme is a member of the mint family and has multiple uses. It has been known since ancient times for its great properties.

Its leaves and scent make the plant a good decoration during celebrations and was traditionally used to awaken the spirits of people, as the etymology suggests.

People in ancient Greece used thyme as an incense during religious rituals. It was well known for its therapeutic properties because it contains a type of phenol called thymol, and this is antiseptic and antibacterial. Plinio and Virgilio describe thyme as a good plant to scare off venomous animals, maybe because of its strong smell. In ancient Rome, the warriors covered their bodies with water and thyme to feel courage and strength. In the medieval period, thyme warded off bad dreams.

The medicinal benefits of thyme's essential oil have been known for thousands of years in different countries in the Mediterranean area.

Thyme is a well-known antiviral, antifungal and antibacterial herb. It is also used for its expectorant qualities making it a useful companion for coughs, colds and flu. Thyme can be used for coughing and cramps since it helps in the removal of toxins in the body. It is a good antiseptic and antibacterial for wounds and sore skin. It's generally used to stimulate our immune system. Steaming with thyme and rosemary can be a welcome relief to a stuffy nose with either an essential oil or the plant itself.^{[i],[ii]}

Identify

Thyme is a perennial evergreen shrub. The leaves are typically green, but some varieties have grey-coloured leaves. This plant is able to produce fruits as well as little flowers which are either purple or pink. A great way to tell it apart from other small plants is that thyme is entirely aromatic. Thyme is a member of the mint family; this is why it has the appearance of a woody, low growing herb. And just like mint, its leaves are the ones that contain most of the flavour and aroma. There are hundreds of varieties of thyme. The English one that we planted with young people at the Francis Crick Institute's garden has a reddish stem and leaves that are oval in shape. The leaves also have pointed ends.^[iv]



Recipe

Here is a recipe that I have adapted and made my own using thyme that grows in my garden.

Dandelion petal and lemon cookies with thyme [v]

What you will need:

- 1 tbs of dandelion petals washed
- 150 ml vegetable oil
- 60g caster sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ½ teaspoon lemon zest
- 80 grams of oats
- 115g all purpose (plain) flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- A few stems of thyme, saving only the leaves.

Method:

- Preheat the oven and line baking sheets with baking paper.
- Whisk the oil, sugar, vanilla, lemon juice and zest together until smooth.
- In a separate bowl, whisk together the oats, flour, baking powder, salt, dandelion petals and thyme.
- Add the wet ingredients to the dry and stir to combine.
- Drip tablespoons of the mixture onto the lined baking sheets.
- Gently press down.
- Cook for around 10 minutes or until beginning to turn golden.
- Then let cool for 10 min on a wire rack.



[i] Powers, R. (2018). *The Overstory*. London: Vintage Publishers.

[ii] Cattabiani, A. (2002). *Florario Miti Leggende E Simboli Di Fiori E Piante*. Milan: Mondadori.

[iii] Alaimo, F. (2007). *Erboristeria Planetaria*. Rome: Hermes Edizioni.

[iv] Brickell, C. (2010). *RHS Encyclopedia of Plants and Flowers*. London: DK.

[v] Adapted from a recipe found at: <https://veggiedesserts.com/dandelion-petal-and-lemon-cookies-with-kale-lemon-drizzle/> [Accessed 28 October 2020].

5

DAISY



Daisy

By Maedeh Pourhamdany with contributions from Jane Riddiford, Jocelyn Vick Maeer, Cassie Adoptante, Lucy Shiekh and Molly Frow.

Bellis perennis

Family: Asteraceae

It was Global Generation's Head of Gardens Sue Amos who first suggested to me (Jane) that we include the humble daisy in our Voices of the Earth plant collection. The Latin name Asteraceae means 'star' in ancient Greek, referring to the star-shaped flowers of the daisy family. Little did I know that this small, unassuming flower has a role in myths and legends which feels particularly important in a time of chaos, change and uncertainty. As with all of the plants we have worked with, I was curious to see what daisy might say to us. Where would we find her? What journey would she take us on? Soon I started to notice daisies everywhere; in the longer grasses of Purchase Street Open Space in Somers Town, in the wilder corners of the Story Garden, beside a stream that ran down to the rocky edge of the coastal path in Cornwall. We discovered that daisy holds a cherished place in myths and time-honoured rituals around the globe; from daisy chains, to a bolstering reminder of the fertility and brightness that can spring from a journey into the sometimes frightening depths of the underworld. In Norse mythology, daisy is the flower of Freya, the goddess of love, beauty and fertility. The name 'daisy' comes from the term 'day's eye' because daisies open their flowers at dawn and close them at dusk. Perhaps it is no surprise then that daisies dance between light and dark has also given her a place in the Greek legend of Demeter and Persephone, a story that was brought to life by the Voices of the Earth Fellows, thanks to the help of Naomi Frederick, an associate of Complicité.



Maedeh's Experience

One of the young people involved with us was Molly Frow. She told us the story of Demeter and Persephone, which we explored through movement. We were invited to contribute our own individuality to the team effort. At first I worried that this would create a jagged and strained conglomerate of individual strengths. Thanks to the help of Naomi, I managed to reframe my anxieties around teamwork simply because something unexpected happened between us all. Naomi taught us to animate meanings and work together as a team by working with bamboo. The bamboo took on a life of its own, helping us weave our way into the depths of the story, illuminating different things for each of us. With Naomi's guidance we put together

our very own voice-less performance with bamboo sticks. It was a brilliant new experience, one which took me very much out of my comfort zone. The bamboo taught us that sometimes it is a good thing to break out of self-constructed barriers. From freely allowing the bamboo to lead our steps, almost as one entity between us, to learning to silently channel a mutual agreement with a partner by finding an equilibrium while balancing bamboo sticks between our fingertips. We instinctively coordinated with one another, swaying with the bamboo in a rhythmic pattern.

This is what Cassie and Jocelyn wrote about their experience:

“The bamboo called to me, she told me that I should be willing to try new things, even if it’s as ridiculous as tapping them on the ground and stomping our feet to represent the world trembling (as Hades and his fierce black horses galloped towards Persephone). The bamboo also called out and told me to push myself to do things. I should honestly just do it and see how much I can achieve.”

- Cassie

“Today the bamboo tapped and scraped and swished through the air. It remained suspended between our bodies as we moved, sometimes slowly, sometimes fast, at times running, laughing, falling to the ground and picking it up again. The bamboo unlocked a creative retelling of the story. The bamboo said, let me lead and trust where I will take you, it made us fluid dancers, weavers, unified. A ‘dynamic relationship’ without prior understanding or intention.”

- Jocelyn

Legend has it that wherever the Greek goddess Persephone walks, daisies spring up from the ground as a reminder that we should always stop and take time in our own underworld, as a way of gaining confidence to be ourselves. Here is what some of the Voices of the Earth Fellows wrote about why it is important for them to spend time in what might be considered an underworld:



It makes me want to pluck up the courage to walk up to and embrace change.

- Maedeh

It’s a place where things are not picture perfect, it’s a place where I’m awake

- Lucy

It’s a time to stop and think and be yourself

- Molly

Listen [here](#) to Molly sharing the story of why Persephone loved to spend time in the Underworld.



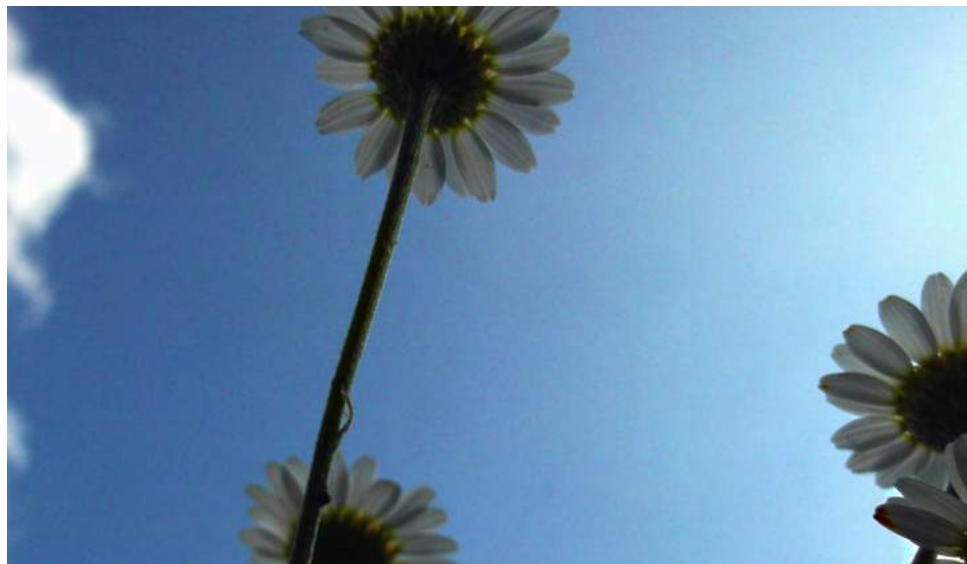
Opportunity for your own inquiry

Think about what spending time in the underworld means for you. Write a short reflection with this thought in mind, take a photograph of something in nature that reflects your writing and post it on Instagram with the tag @globalgeneration.

Identify

The common daisy has:

- A round flower head with many long, white, petal-like ray florets around a yellow disc floret at its centre. This forms two flowers in one!
- A single hairy, thin, green stem, generally no longer than 10cm, with no leaves.
- Spoon-shaped leaves that form a rosette at the base of the stem, hugging the ground; these may be smooth or hairy.



Where to find daisies?

You can't miss the English daisy! It is a beautiful perennial plant which loves to grow anywhere there is short grass. A handful of places you can spot them is in your garden, the park or school field...



Healing properties

The daisy, as a symbol of spring, with its bright and optimistic flowers have many healing properties and can be used to treat certain ailments.

Daisy is an old remedy:

- It has been a celebrated wound healer, the brew of daisies being used as a lotion for wounds and bruises. Now it is a less well known herb with plants like arnica taking its place.^[1]
- Did you know because the English daisy is known for healing bruises that it's also known as Bruisewort.
- Daisy's young buds and leaves are edible but questionably so, rather than the common daisy, try oxeye daisy. It's leaves are still potent and strong but are palatable in salads and cooking.^[1]

Recipe

Try this delicious recipe!

Sautéed Daisy Greens With Roasted Beetroots⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾

Serves 2 (As a starter or side dish)

What you will need:

- 12 medium sized daisy leaf rosettes
- 8 baby beetroots
- 3/4 garlic cloves (remove their skin)
- Small handful of fresh thyme (chopped)
- Small handful of fresh sage (chopped)
- Olive oil
- Balsamic vinegar (alternative: rosehip syrup)
- Vegetable stock
- Butter
- Pepper

Method:

- Preheat your oven to 200C.
- Start off with washing the daisy leaves and dry them using a towel.
- Clean the beetroots, cut the top and tail off but keep them whole.
- Crush the garlic cloves with a kitchen knife and slice or dice them to your liking.
- Get a large thick sheet of kitchen foil or parchment paper, and place your beetroots in a row with some garlic in between each beetroot.
- Next drizzle over enough olive oil until the beetroots are lightly glazed and then drizzle over the vinegar (or syrup) as if dressing a salad.
- Now sprinkle over the chopped thyme and sage.
- Gently fold up the foil to seal in the beetroots and bake in an oven for an hour at 200C or until the beetroots are tender.
- Now remove everything from inside the foil, except the juice.
- Pour the juice into a saucepan with a knob of butter and melt then add the washed daisy leaves and stir continuously.
- Then add a splash of stock, add some pepper and reduce the heat quickly before serving with the beetroots.

[i] De Bairacli Levy, J. (1996). *Common Herbs for Natural Health*. Woodstock: Ash Tree Publishing.

[ii] Renton, M & Biggane, E. (2019). *Foraging Pocket Guide: Food for all seasons from Britain's woods*. Hereford: Wild Food UK.

[iii] Harford, R. (2015). *The Eatweeds Cookbook*. Exeter: Eatweeds

6 ASH



Ash

By Jane Riddiford

Fraxinus excelsior

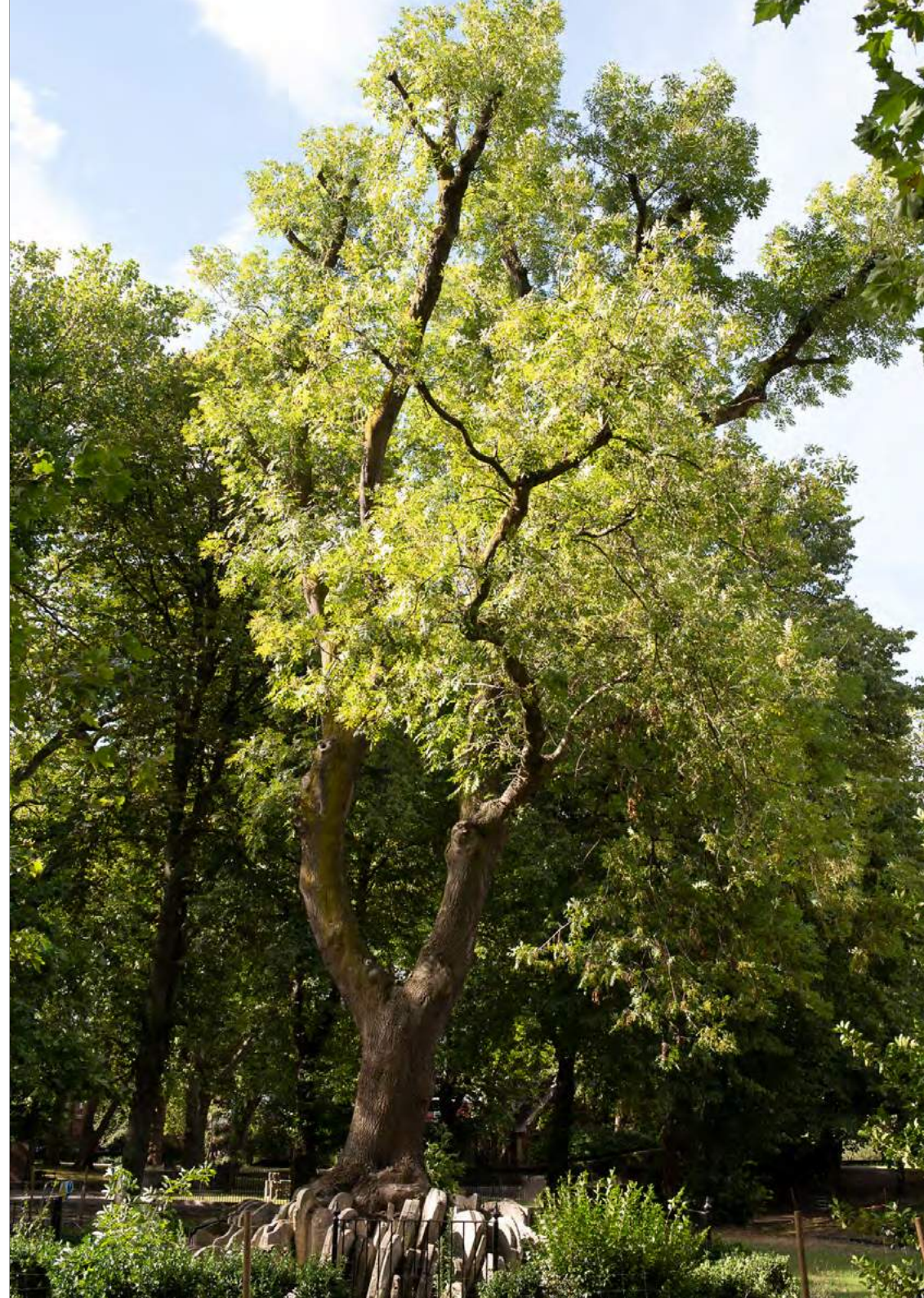
Family: Oleaceae

With rapid changes in the cityscape of King's Cross, it feels especially good to step into St Pancras Churchyard; a small pocket of graves and green that is anchored in an unchanging kind of time. The silence and the power of the place is palpable. This former pagan site, now the gardens of an early Christian church, is a place of stillness and stories; old stories about Boudica, the River Fleet and Joseph of Aramathea, Mary Wollstencraft and the rights of woman, her daughter Mary Shelly (who wrote Frankenstein), and Charles Dickens and the workhouses that once surrounded the gardens. For the Voices of the Earth Fellows, it has been a place for the making of new stories found in the branches of the trees that find a home here. The largest of all is the ash, known to many visitors as the Hardy Tree.

It's hard to believe now that for years I couldn't tell the difference between an ash and the small red-berried rowan. The compound leaves of both trees are made of opposite leaflets and their branches were carried as staffs and spears in the legends of old, but that's as far as the similarities go. As the name excelsior indicates, ash is tall and lofty, reaching skywards, her bark is grey, more smooth than rough and in the axil of her leaves are the buds, the most identifying feature of all.



New buds are dark and velvety, like tiny, perfectly-formed hooves of deer. It is said that the old stories were half made by humans and half by the earth. Is it any wonder then that there are four stags that harbour under the branches of the great ash Yggdrasil, the world tree of Norse mythology? When you look carefully you can see that her leaves turn upwards like the feathered wing of an eagle^[1], and in the legend of Yggdrasil in her crown is perched an eagle. Yggdrasil's three great roots spread the whole way around the world connecting all things; one in the realm of water, one in the earth and one in the air. My heart skipped a beat when I heard from



Dontae, one of the young Voices of the Earth Fellows, that when the world tree dies this universal order will wither away. At the time I was looking at the graves that encircle the base of the Hardy Tree; a poignant reminder perhaps that across the UK the survival of many ash trees are threatened by a pathogen called Chalara or ash dieback.

According to the Woodland Trust^[ii], Chalara arrived in the UK naturally, however its spread was inadvertently helped by the large scale importing of ash saplings from European nurseries. Sadly, for many property developers importing trees from abroad is seen as a more affordable option (for the short term) than growing trees locally. Until 2012 the UK was importing thousands of ash plants from infected parts of Europe until a ban came into place in 2012. Now with bio-security border controls the practice continues (albeit more safely), often hastened by planning requirements of councils to achieve a specified and ambitious tree height and cover on new developments within what are arguably unrealistically short time periods. This raises questions about the value and risk of what could be termed 'false greening' and the need for real education about how a forest grows. In his book 'The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate' ecologist Peter Wohlleben describes how many trees, like the ash, in their original habitat live far longer than humans, with roots reaching out far more extensively than many of us realise. He explains that other trees can no longer hear or speak, having been force-grown in nurseries and uplifted for transplanting in park landscapes and forestry plantations^[iii].

Barn Carder, author and spoon carver^[iv] who lived under a tarpaulin in the woods for several years on end, says it is worth considering that if we want to increase the amount of tree cover, then where possible, natural regeneration makes more sense than planting.

The ash has a number of healing properties but most of all she teaches us that patience is key. Myths and legends like Yggdrasil took thousands of years to grow and spread to other parts of the world. Rather than instant pop up park landscapes, it is amidst the gentle seeding and growing of trees in local neighbourhoods that new and patient stories, so needed in our times, can grow. During the Voices of the Earth journey we found solace, strength and hope for a different world in the slow undulating and

healing rhythms of the trees of St Pancras Gardens. As we moved amidst the trees a sense of trust grew between us. Local resident and 18 year old Dontae Jacobs, reflects this in a monologue he shared about his own story woven into the legend of Yggdrasil. As with the daisy and the story of Demeter and Persephone described in the last chapter, the fellows worked with Naomi Frederick of Complicité to produce a physical theatre piece which brought Dontae's story to life.

Listen [here](#) to Dontae's story and what happened when he encountered the Ash in St Pancras Churchyard.





Identify^M

- Shape -** Tall and lofty reaching for the sky.
- Leaves -** Compound which means they are made of multiple leaflets. The leaflets occur in opposite pairs with the exception of the terminal leaflet at the end of the leaf. They are lighter on the underside.
- Buds -** Small dark and velvety like a deer's hoof.
- Bark -** Mostly smoothish and grey, except for in mature trees where the bark is deeply fissured.
- Seeds -** Come in the form of keys or helicopter seeds which hang down with a single wing.

Did you know

Essence of Ash is associated with strength and being in tune with your surroundings. Wearing garters of green ash bark was once believed to offer protection against the powers of magicians. Sleeping with fresh ash leaves under your pillow is said to bring colourful dreams.

Activity

Make a posy of ash leaves and write out your wish of who you would like to dream about and where you would like to be. Go to sleep with a pencil and paper beside your bed. On waking, before you speak to anyone, write down whatever dream you can recall. Don't worry if you didn't dream, you can always write down what you think you might have dreamt - your imaginings have power in them.



Recipe

The seeds that follow tiny purple flowers, form in clusters. They take the form of a winged 'key', bearing some resemblance to the seeds of sycamore, *Acer pseudoplatanus*. Common ash keys have only one wing, rather than the symmetrical wing-nut shape of sycamore.

Pickled Ash Keys courtesy of Robin Harford^[vi]

What you will need:

Makes 2 jars

- 2 cups of ash keys without stalks
- 1 tsb of ground cloves
- 1 tsp. ground cinnamon
- 4 bay leaves
- 8 peppercorns
- 1 tsp allspice
- ½ tsp. ground ginger
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tsp brown sugar
- 2 cups cider vinegar
- Water



Method:

- Wash your ash keys, place them in a pan covered with cold water, bring to the boil and simmer for 5 minutes.
- Strain off the water and repeat.
- Drain of the water again, dry slightly and then pack into warm dry jars. Allow an inch of space from the top of the jar.
- Put the spices, salt and sugar into a bowl and add the vinegar.
- Put the bowl into a saucepan (cover it) add some water (not to the bowl just to the pan) and bring slowly to the boil.
- Allow to gently boil for about 5 minutes, then remove the bowl and let it sit for about 4 hours or until it is cold.
- Strain the liquid through a sieve into a jug and pour over the ash keys filling the jars right to the brim.
- Screw on the tops. Store for 3 months and let the pickle mature.



[i] Griffith, J. (2020). *Ash*. Written to accompany the launch *Ash to Ash by Ackroyd & Harvey*, commissioned for “The Ash Project” by Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. <https://www.theashproject.org.uk>, <https://www.theashproject.org.uk/ash-by-jay-griffiths/> [Accessed 28 October 2020].

[ii] Woodland Trust (n.d.). *Ash Dieback*. Available at: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/tree-pests-and-diseases/key-tree-pests-and-diseases/ash-dieback/> [Accessed 28 October 2020].

[iii] Wholleben, P. (2015). *The Hidden Life of Trees: What they Feel, How they Communicate – Discoveries from a Secret World*. Vancouver/Berkeley: Greystone Books.

[iv] Carder, B. (Barn the Spoon) (2020). *Spoon: A Guide to Spoon Carving and the New Wood Culture*. New York: Scribner.

[v] Kirtley, P. (n.d.). ‘*Know your Ash from your Elbow: How to Identify an Ash Tree*’, Paul Kirtley. Available at: <http://paulkirtley.co.uk/2013/how-to-identify-an-ash-tree/#:~:text=Ash%20has%20a%20compound%20leaf,are%20arranged%20in%20opposite%20pairs> [Accessed 28 October 2020].

[vi] Harford, R. (n.d.). *Pickled Ash Keys, Eat Weeds*. Available at: <https://www.eatweeds.co.uk/pickled-ash-keys> [Accessed 28 October 2020].

7 YARROW



Yarrow

By Cassie Adoptante with contributions from Mirzeta and René Hadzig

Achillea millefolium

Family: Asteraceae

Yarrow produces flat-topped inflorescences and, not surprisingly, it is often mistaken for one of the umbellifers in the Apiaceae family which flower in a similar way. However, like marigold and daisy, yarrow is also a member of the Asteraceae (daisy) family.

Traditional names: Devil's nettle, old man's mustard, seven year's love.

Habitat: Yarrow can be found nearly everywhere except Antarctica. It usually grows in dry soils and meadows, and can often be found along path-sides where it can grow up to 3 feet tall.

Yarrow has a feather-like leaf texture, easily camouflaged in the grass. The name 'Millefolium' refers to its many leaves. The plant develops its flowers around the early summer to early autumn.



Cassie's experience

When I became a Voices of the Earth Fellow, I was 16, starting a new school with a new environment and harder courses. I was constantly doing revision, worried about my grades and completely ignoring my mental health. I was a frantic robot working day in, day out. It was a tough decision joining this project as I felt guilty not using the time to revise, however becoming a Fellow was probably the best decision I could have made. I found a lot of peace; not only did the team at Global Generation teach me how to connect with myself but with nature too. The Voices of the Earth project has been a perfect way to relax without feeling as though I wasn't being productive. The people involved were always more than happy to listen to my personal struggles in school as we had regular check-ins, which made a large difference for my mental health. I have always had a personal interest in nature, finding ways to save the environment and in general how I, as a young person, could expand my knowledge and understanding of the living things around me.

When COVID19 occurred, I was stuck indoors. We had regular Voices of the Earth Zoom calls to find our way into the project and to come together as a group. A few of the project activities we took on included researching different plants and making a fact file for them. This gave me a reason to leave my bedroom and go into my garden, which helped me as I was out in nature and feeling the sun on my face. When lockdown was slowly being lifted I was very hesitant about leaving my house, as my only source of information about what was going on revolved around the news. Nonetheless, I found the courage to leave and headed to Kentish Town station where we went to a little garden in the middle of Caversham GP practice. It was so beautiful and such a contrast to the four walls I had been surrounded by for 3 months. I felt like I was dreaming as my mind processed everything around me. We had the opportunity to meet different people; far better than having an electronic screen to communicate with.

Around mid-June, the school year had officially ended and I was in a state where I found interest in different cultures and religions, looking into different rocks, crystals, plants and their meanings. I also looked into Greek mythology and each God and Goddess. When I finally visited the Story Garden for the first time in months, everything had blossomed, the garden

was full of love and colour and it made me feel connected to nature and society again. It didn't feel unrecognisable, it felt nostalgic; this was the first time I had properly seen the garden past the computer screen of our Zoom calls. We met a woman who depended mostly on herbs to treat her patients, which really resonated with me as I was looking into the medicinal properties of plants, their uses and meanings. Something that will really stay with me is sharing the Achilles story of yarrow which came to us from René, one of the young boys who was involved in the Voices of the Earth primary school workshops. His mother, Merzeta, had told him the story of when she was a little girl growing up in Bosnia.

When I was growing up, during every visit to our Grandma I would go on a long walk with my Mum down to the fields on a nice sunny spring day to find some strawberries, or up to the woods to find some mushrooms after it had been raining. Mum loved mushrooms, me not so much. I only went because I enjoyed running and playing. Whenever I cut myself on grass or bruised myself when I fell down my mum would find a magic plant to heal my wounds. She would tell me the old stories about heroes who got injured during battle. They would use yarrow and the blood would magically clot. I felt so lucky to have this plant to heal my heroic wounds. It always looked so powerful, almost like a feather because of its many leaves. The plant is named after the greek hero Achilles who would use yarrow to heal the wounds of his soldiers; Achillea millefolium, Achilles thousands of leaves.



Learning about other people's cultures and their personal stories relating to plants, which I would have walked past in the streets, made me far more aware of my surroundings and other people's cultures and beliefs. For example, learning more not only about yarrow but also sugar cane helped me keep an open mind when looking at certain plants and thinking about their histories. All the while, singing songs relating to plants helped us grow and connect with each other as a community.

I was fortunate enough to record the story of yarrow and Achilles, which as Merzeta described, is heavily linked to Greek mythology. It made me realise that all plants have stories behind their names, which makes them somewhat magical.

For the story of Yarrow listen [here.](#)



Identify^[1]

Flowers - Small disk flowers which range from white to pink. They grow in small groups and on a whole plant there can be 15 to 40. The inflorescence is produced in a flat-topped capitulum cluster and the inflorescences are visited by many insects, meaning it features in a generalised pollination system.

Leaves - These are the most telling features of Yarrow. They are feather-like and evenly distributed along the stem, with the leaves near the middle and bottom of the stem being the largest. The leaves have a varying degree of hairiness.

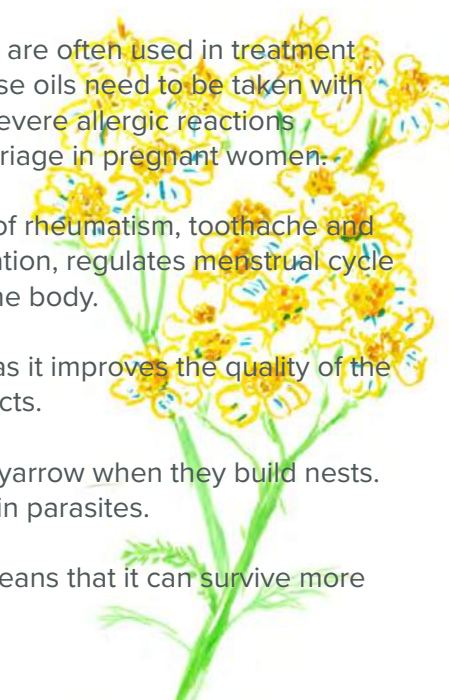


Identifying wild and cultivated Yarrow

Wild Yarrow usually has white or pale flowers and is used for its medicinal properties. You can often find brighter coloured ornamental Yarrow flowers growing in gardens, but these are hybrid varieties and usually don't hold the same medicinal properties.

Did you know?^[1]

- Yarrow was used as food in the 17th century. Leaves were prepared and consumed like spinach. Yarrow was also used as an ingredient in soups.
- Yarrow is known as “Poor man’s pepper” due to its bitter and pungent taste. It even alters the taste of cow’s milk (it becomes bitter) when the cow eats too much yarrow.
- Combination of yarrow, marsh rosemary and sweet gale was used for the production of beer known as gruit ale during the medieval times.
- Essential oils extracted from yarrow are often used in treatment of influenza and common cold. These oils need to be taken with caution because they may trigger severe allergic reactions on the skin and even induce miscarriage in pregnant women.
- Yarrow can be used in a treatment of rheumatism, toothache and sore throat. It also stimulates circulation, regulates menstrual cycle and eliminates excess water from the body.
- Yarrow is beneficial for the garden as it improves the quality of the soil and repels certain types of insects.
- Birds such as common starling use yarrow when they build nests. Nests made of yarrow do not contain parasites.
- Yarrow is a perennial plant which means that it can survive more than two years in the wild.



Putting Yarrow to use:^[iii]

Tea:

For colds and flu

Yarrow is a well known help in common colds and flu, it mixes well with sweet herbs like elderflower, mint and meadowsweet.

Homemade plaster:

For cuts or prevention of bleeding.

Spit Poultice:

This is a great way to make a first aid remedy when out on a walk without plasters to hand. It is one of my favourite ways of using this plant; it's lots of fun. If you've cut yourself out walking, firstly correctly identify yarrow, picking a number of leaves where dogs wouldn't have weed, put them in your mouth. Give everything a really good chew, and don't swallow the saliva that's created as it will be bitter and green. Instead, spit this all out onto the bleeding cut. If you can, wrap something over it to cover the spit poultice or simply leave the plant matter on the cut for a few minutes to stop the bleeding.

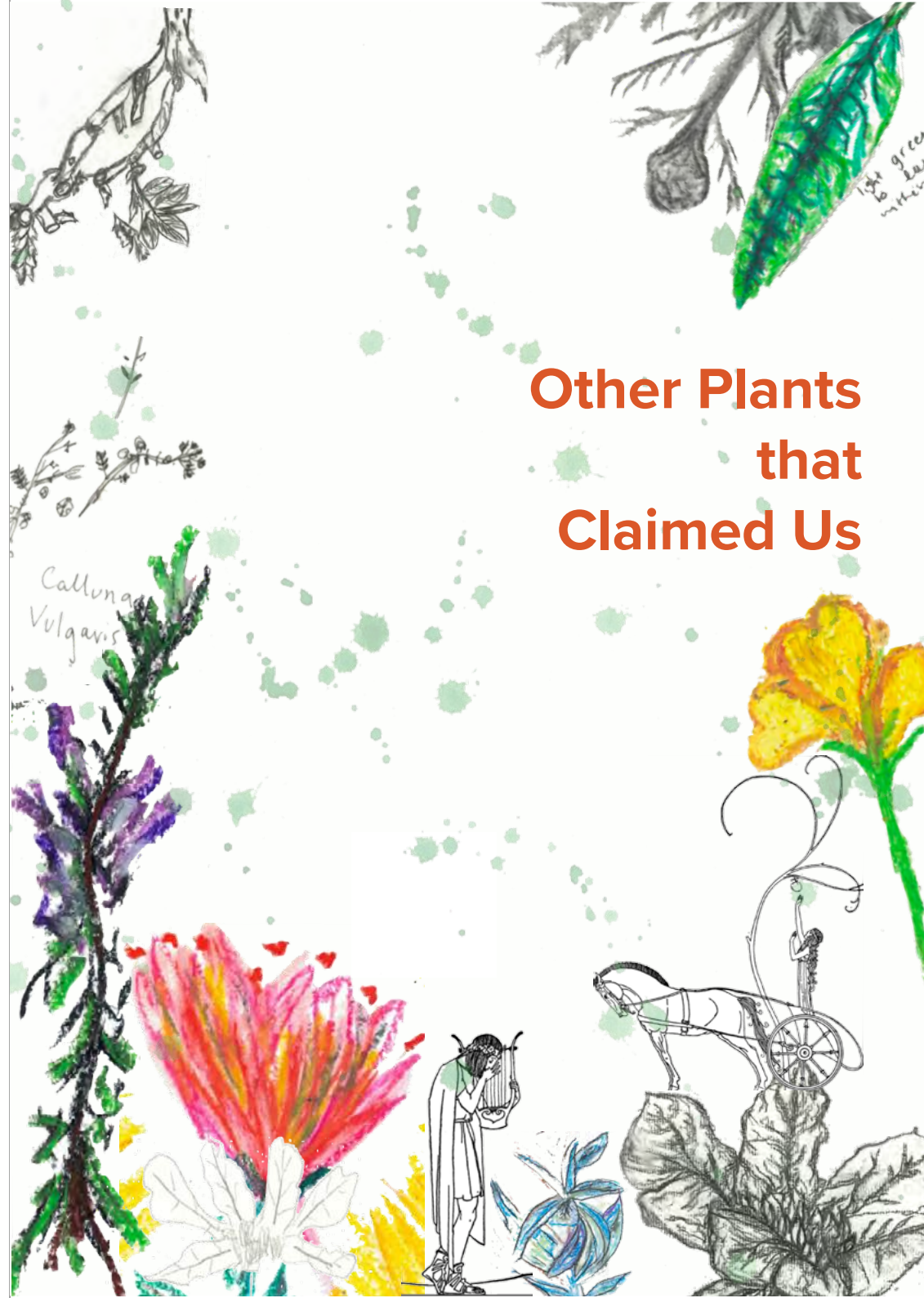
Toothache:

Take a piece of yarrow root and soak it in a few drops of water to rehydrate it. Place the root next to the tooth that is hurting along the gum line and replace it every hour or so to see if this helps.

[i] Wood, J. (2020). 'Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)', *Totally Wild UK*. Available at: <https://totallywilduk.co.uk/2020/04/29/identify-yarrow/> [Accessed 11 October 2020].

[ii] Soft Schools (n.d.). *Yarrow Facts*. Available at: https://www.softschools.com/facts/plants/yarrow_facts/669/#:~:text=Yarrow%20has%20feathery%20leaves%20that,2%20to%204%20inches%20wide.

[iii] Growing Up Herbal (2013). 'How to Identify and Use Yarrow', *Growing Up Herbal*, 15 July. Available at: <https://www.growingupherbal.com/how-to-identify-and-use-yarrow/> [Accessed 11 October 2020].



Other Plants that Claimed Us



Other Plants that Claimed Us

by Charlotte Gordon, with contributions from Jocelyn Vick Maeer, Emma Trueman, Lucy Sheikh, Cassie Adoptante, Aesha Raham and Maedeh Pourhamdany

Our journey started last winter in the Story Garden. When we met for the first time, the light had already gone and the garden was dark by 4pm. We gathered in the yurt with a fire and food to welcome the beginning of this journey, a journey of opening ourselves to the voices of the earth. Discovering we were united in our love and passion for the natural world, we went out to explore the garden and ourselves.

Choosing a plant to sit next to, we watched the world go by in their company, quieting our busy minds, letting ourselves grow accustomed to the space the plant occupied and our relationship with it.

The plants all have their own stories to tell. The fennel was dancing in the wind and looked soft and fluffy and full of joy. It was happy to meet me and happy to spend time with me. Today, sitting alone gazing at a weed had somehow reflected my emotions and thoughts inside my head, something I have never encountered before

- Lucy

This was the beginning of our plant journey, starting to recognise the possibility of learning directly from the plants, that these beings provide nourishment for us humans in ways we may not have realised before.

From winter to spring. This year our spring was hot and bright. As the weather and soil warmed up, birds sang and fresh life really burst forth whilst for the first time people were told to stay indoors. For those who were able to, the pavements, gardens, parks and heaths became our place of refuge, celebration and peace.

There is nothing quite like a beautiful spring; the plants that have rested all winter flourish so quickly and so abundantly. Huge swathes of yarrow cover

a small triangular verge next to the main road and dandelions grow in their hundreds along the street and tuck into strange places. Spring has its own rhythm, dandelions, nettles and cleavers are some of the first loved plants of the season giving us something to pick and eat.

During the height of lockdown, the Voices of the Earth Fellows and Global Generation facilitators met online to discover what plants were close at hand, and through these plant meetings facilitated a creative outlet for ourselves. I discovered friends and those that feel familiar in the cracks of the pavement.

On our journey of listening to the voices of the earth, Dandelion, Nettle and Archangel Nettle were some of the first plants of the year to call us into the undergrowth, to find comfort and new-found appreciation for what they offer.

An Ode to Nettle:

The humble stinging nettle.

Urtica Dioica

Famous for its sting, this wonderful plant is a favourite food. It is rich and deep in flavour, the tea made from the leaves quietly subduing, creating a peaceful, full-bodied sensation. The plant can be used as a spinach replacement, picking the fresh green leaves before the seed heads come out and chopping them up to mix into big pots of stew or curry.

This is a great first plant to meet - it asks for your absolute attention, asking for precision when picking. Try picking nettles without any gloves is a great way to stay very much in the moment, avoiding the sting.

Nettle is an excellent accompaniment to eggs. Pick a small handful of fresh-looking nettle leaves, take them home to wash and chop up. I like to put nettle in with scrambled eggs.

Nettle will always be one of my most loved plants, it is here most times of the year and feels like a constant companion. The world will keep changing and there will always be nettle to find.



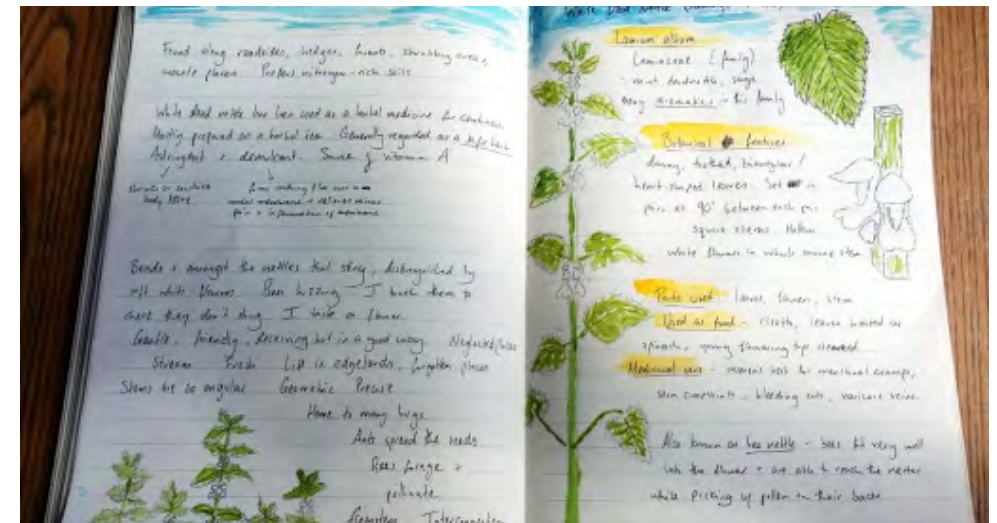
Archangel Nettle

Lamium album

As the reality of the pandemic set in, our Fellows zoom calls kept us connected to each other and to the truths of Nature's changing seasons. As the days lengthened and the sun grew warmer, we were invited to venture outside to discover some of Nature's spring gifts. One of these was the Archangel Nettle, also known as White Deadnettle.

Archangel nettle is deceitful, but in a friendly and gentle way. She grows in forgotten places and wastelands, occupying verges, banks and forest edges. With leaves shaped just like those of a stinging nettle, she plays a trick on curious browsers. Her leaves are actually soft to the touch, and edible - she is a relative of aromatic herbs like thyme, mint, basil and sage. Her flowers are also delicious, with a subtle taste of mushrooms. I like to make a risotto from leaves and flowers at the top of the stem, adding garlic, mushrooms, sumac and black pepper to the mix.^[1]

- Jocelyn



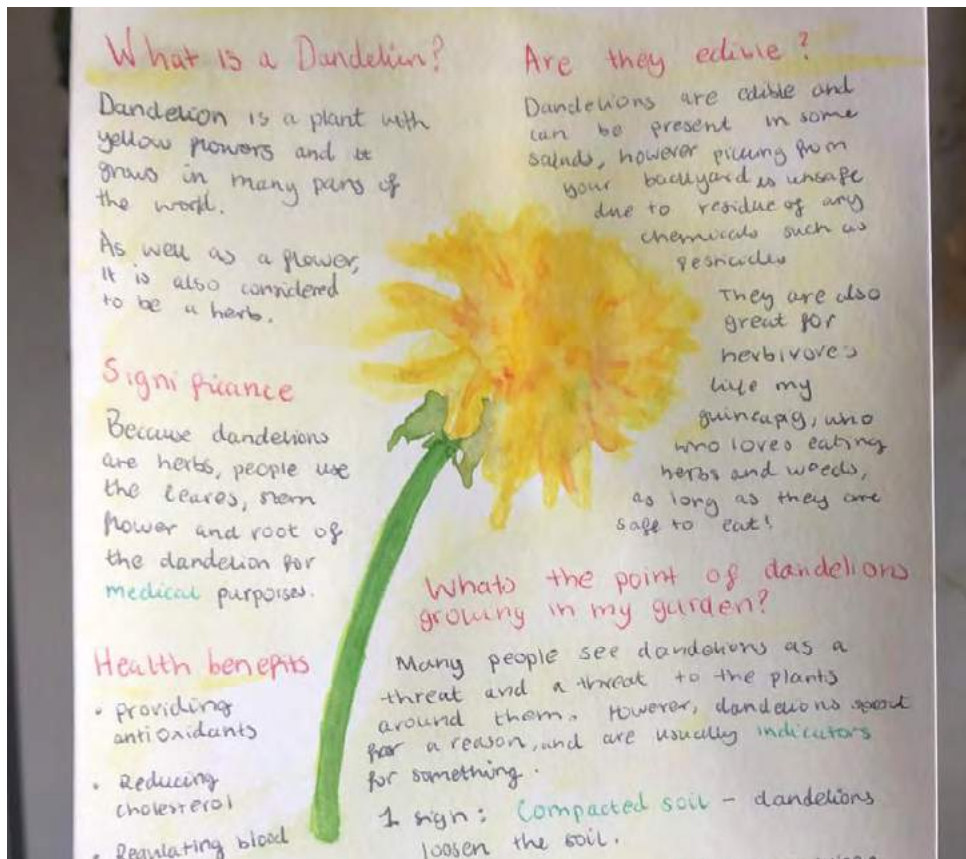
[1] Rensten, J. (2016). *The Edible City*. London: Boxtree, Pan Macmillan.

Dandelion

Taraxacum officinale

“The tooth of the lion”, or perhaps “the heart of the lion” is a better description.

Dandelion gives us a welcome ray of sunshine. Its bitter properties wake the body up after it's winter's rest. Chewing on dandelion's leaves is sure to give you courage and fire within yourself. This plant is a real treat: its flowers are sweet like honey (they are favoured by the bees) and its stem and leaves contain a bitter white sap that stimulates digestion and can clear the head.



As the year progressed, other plants caught the attention of the Voices of the Earth Fellows. This is how they described their experiences

Cassie

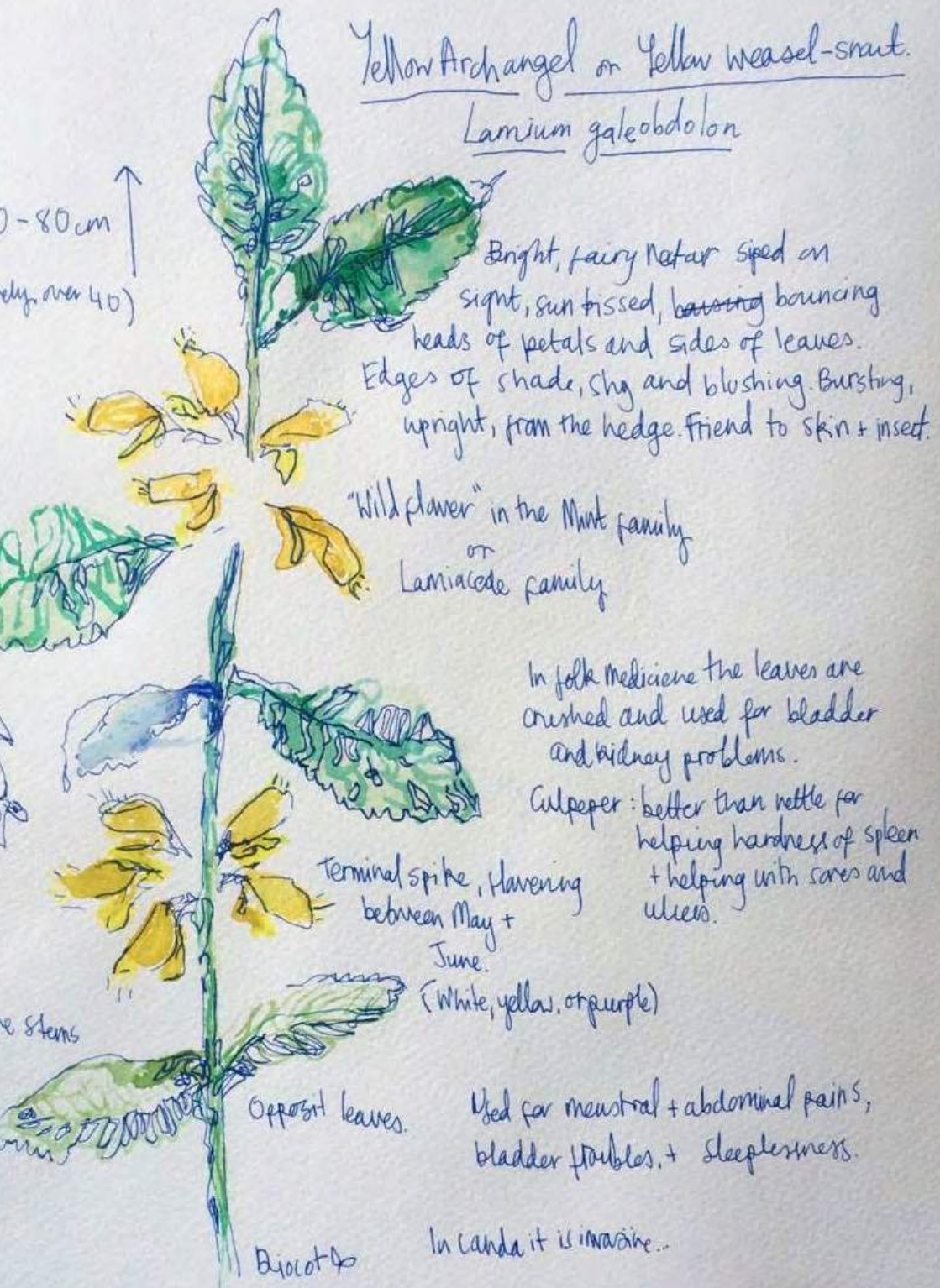
I was out running when I noticed this rose which had just started growing near someone's fence outside. I doubt the person knew it was there, it was solitary and practically growing around the fence. I saw how small and fragile it was, it was being heavily battered by the wind and its colours were so vibrant. It made me reflect on how little it had been raining recently; and it made me notice how plants need a lot of water right now. In that moment it made me feel in touch with the world, to and to notice how the world still turns even when you feel like time has stopped. I am grateful to have had these moments of watching plants and observing them, feeling peaceful sitting in the sun with them.

Aesha

This plant is inside my house, close to the windows where a lot of sunlight can penetrate through the leaves. It's my mother's plant. It produces chillies that are a big part of my south Asian culture, and it's dear to me to see how my mother nurtures it and makes use of the chillies in her cooking. It reminds me of a small jungle; the small branches spread out in different directions and it has a lot of fully green leaves. The contrast of the orange chillies and the green ones remind me of how beautiful nature is and how much it benefits us in this world.

Maedeh

Humanity stopped for a while but things continue in Nature. Nothing is really unexpected and it is always flourishing. When human beings try to stop it, nature can't be really disrupted in its flow. It is consoling to know, to realise that nature is not as fickle as the human temperament can be. I'd like to be in the plant part of nature.



Afifa

In these pages of immense beauty that we had the chance to see at the British Library, we went through history and discovered the power of plants and their significance to the world. We saw how plants helped in the past and how people were connected to them as if they were friends who could help them survive. From the life of Elisabeth Blackwell I understood why we need to preserve our past and respect the natural world.

A last word...

Exchanging stories is an age old way of communities coming together and making meaning. Rather than an exact science, storytelling is often an imaginative endeavour that meets the needs of each situation. The old stories shared in this anthology and in the accompanying audio pieces, developed new beginnings and unexpected twists and turns that you may not find elsewhere. Under our watch we found good reasons for yarrow to turn golden, for daisy to draw us into the unknown depths of the underworld and for Yggdrasil, the Ash of Norse Mythology, to inspire a young trumpeter to listen to the rhythms of the earth. We would love to hear how the stories of the Earth are shaped and shared by you.

Jane Riddiford

Audio - Sound Design and Voice Credits

Oak - Story Garden Oak Circle

Sound Design Daniel Balfour

Voices: Charlotte Gordon, Dontae Jacobs, Jocelyn Vick Maeer

Sugarcane - Story Garden Polytunnel

Sound design: Eben Lewis

Voices: Afiifa Abdirahman, Malaika Bain Peachy, Eben Lewis

Marigold - Story Garden Willow Dome

Sound Design: Daniel Balfour

Voice: Rod Sugden

Thyme - Francis Crick Institute Herb Garden

Sound Design: Daniel Balfour

Voices: Silvia Pedretti and children involved with planting Thyme in the Francis Crick Institute Herb Garden; Anna Fitzmaurice, Angelika Davey, Sapphire Brown, Michelle Onukegbe, Jimmy Frow.

Daisy - Purchase Open Space

Sound Design: Daniel Balfour

Voices: Molly Frow, Maedeah Pourhamdany and Lucy Shiekh,

Ash - Hardy Tree, St Pancras Gardens

Sound Design: Daniel Balfour

Voice Dontae Jacobs and Molly Frow

Yarrow – Canal Tow Path at the edge of the King's Cross Estate

Sound Design Daniel Balfour

Voices: Cassandra Adoptante and Maedeah Pourhamdany

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Page 9: Global Generation (2020), Tsion.

Page 10: Global Generation (2020), Eben.

Page 11: Global Generation (2020), Lucy.

Page 12: Vick Maeer J. (2020), Jocelyn.

Page 13: Osgerby E. (2020), Ellie.

Page 14: Abdirahman A. (2020), Afifa.

Page 15: Raham A. (2020), Aesha.

Page 16: Yemane A. (2020), Maedeh.

Page 17: Ainslee S. (2020), Samirah.

Page 17: Global Generation (2020), Dontae.

Page 18: Osgerby E. (2020), Painting of oak.

Page 20: Sheikh L. (2020), Story Walk, Dontae, Cassie, Jocelyn and Pamela, Hampstead Heath.

Page 22: Global Generation (2020), Writing, Jane, Cassie, Lucy and Dontae, Hampstead Heath.

Page 24: Global Generation (2020), Ayaan and her daughter, Story Garden.

Page 24: Global Generation (2020), Michelle drawing an oak, Story Garden

Page 28: Osgerby E. (2020), Painting of oak leaf.

Page 29: Global Generation (2020), Cassie, Maedeh, Jocelyn, Lucy, Hampstead Heath.

Page 30: Adoptante C. (2020), Oak

Page 33: Osgerby E. (2020), Painting of sugarcane

Page 36: [Anon.] (2018) The Cane Press. [Online] Available at: <https://peckhamlevels.org/peckham-perspectives-the-cane-press/> [Accessed 24 October 2020].

Page 37: Clark, W. (1823) Sugar Plantation Mill Yard, Antigua, West Indies, 1823. Slavery Images: A Visual Record of the African Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Early African Diaspora. [Online] Available at: <http://www.slaveryimages.org/s/slaveryimages/item/1142> [Accessed 24 October 2020].

Page 38: Fietzfotos (2020) Trestia de Zahar Culturile. [Online] Available at: <https://pixabay.com/ro/photos/trestia-de-zahar-culturile-5525004/> [Accessed 24 October 2020].

Page 39: Global Generation (2020), Eben watering, Story Garden.

Page 40: Global Generation (2020), Malaika preparing sugarcane for young people, Story Garden.

Page 42: @curiousordinary (2019) Kama, the Hindu God of Love. [Online] Available at: <https://entomologymanchester.wordpress.com/2020/08/05/bees-and-their-symbolism-in-indian-mythology/> and <https://twitter.com/curiousordinary/status/1177131502137556993/photo/1> [Accessed 24 October 2020].

Page 47: Osgerby E. (2020), Painting of marigold.

Page 48: Bayoumy-Lewis F. (2020), Holding a marigold.

Page 50: Ainslee S. (2020), Tania Lewis with daughters Fatma and Indea, writing in the Story Garden's yurt.

Page 52: Global Generation (2020), Families and marigolds, Story Garden.

Page 53: Vick Maeer J. (2020), Marigolds and poppies.

Page 54: Osgerby E. (2020), Painting of marigold.

Page 55, top-left: Aweside Farm (2020), Calendula flowers. [Online] Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CERWu09HPw0/>

Page 55, bottom-left: Bornemann, R. (n.d.) French marigold (*Tagetes patula*). [Online] Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/plant/French-marigold#/media/1/219266/21866>

Page 55, top-right, bottom-right: Vick Maeer, J. (2020) Calendula flowers.

Page 57: Global Generation (2020), Calendula Balm Making, Story Garden.

Page 59: Osgerby E. (2020), Painting of thyme.

Page 61: Global Generation (2020), top-left, top-right and bottom: Young People gardening with Silvia at Francis Crick Institute's Garden.

Page 62: Page 62: [Anon.] [n.d.] Le mondine di Porporana. [Online] Available at: <https://ilcappellodelmonsu.blogspot.com/2015/01/il-riso-partei-dalle-mondine-alla.html> [Accessed 24 October 2020].

Page 63: Canva (2020), Thyme's leaves.

Page 64: Global Generation (2020), Samirah, Story garden.

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Page 66: Global Generation (2020), left: Young People gardening at Francis Crick Institute's garden. Right: Nathan recording in the Roundhouse, Story Garden.

Page 69: Pedretti S. (2020), Thyme in M.A.

Page 71: Osgerby E. (2020), Painting of thyme.

Page 73: Osgerby E. (2020), Painting of daisies.

Page 75: Global Generation (2020), Daisies, Story Garden.

Page 77: Ainslee S. (2020), Performance, Purchase Street Open Space.

Page 78: Global Generation (2014), Daisies from Photography Project with young people.

Page 79: Osgerby E. (2020), Daisies

Page 83: Osgerby E. (2020), Painting of Ash.

Page 84: Osgerby E. (2020), Painting of Ash's bud.

Page 85: Ainslee S. (2020), The Hardy Tree, St Pancras Old Church Gardens

Page 87: Ainslee S. (2020), Performance, St Pancras Old Church.

Page 88: Ainslee S. (2020), Dontae, storytelling, St Pancras Old Church.

Page 89: Abdirahman A. (2020), Ash's leaves.

Page 90-91: Osgerby E. (2020), Painting of ash seeds and ash tree.

Page 93: Osgerby E. (2020), Painting of yarrow.

Page 94: Abdirahman A. (2020), Yarrow, Purchase Street Open Space

Page 96: Global Generation (2020), Merzeta and her daughter, Story Garden.

Page 97: Oakeley, H. F. (n.d.) Achillea Millefolium, RCPGdnHerbarium (19). jpg [Online] Available at: <http://garden.rcplondon.ac.uk/Plant/Details/18> [Accessed 24 October 2020], courtesy of Royal College of Physicians, thanks to Jane Knowles, Henry Oakeley and Katie Birkwood.

Page 98: Global Generation (2020), Anna watering, Story Garden.

Page 99: Osgerby E. (2020), Painting of yarrow.

Page 101: Voices of the Earth fellows (2020), Drawings of encounters with plants, Story Garden. Also [Anon.] [n.d.] Orfeo [online], <http://www.supercoloring.com/it/disegni-da-colorare/orfeo> [Accessed 24 October 2020] and [Anon.] [n.d.] Persefone e il melograno [online], <http://www.supercoloring.com/it/disegni-da-colorare/persefone-e-il-melograno>.

Page 104: Gordon C. (2020), Nettles

Page 105-108: Vick Maeer J. (2020), Trueman E. (2020), Sheikh L. (2020), Monographs, Online sessions.

Page 109: Global Generation (2020), Fellows in a session with Alex Lock, Curator of Modern Archives and Manuscripts, British Library.

Back Cover: Global Generation (2020), Fellows hands, St Pancras Old Church.



**GLOBAL
GENERATION** **Complicité**

