

# BIOCULTURAL HEALING

Relational Methods for Extending  
Public Health Sovereignty in  
Eugene, Oregon

Jenna Witzleben



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# Introduction





*Me working at the Solidarity Garden (Photo by Ignacio López Búson)*

## Introduction Overview

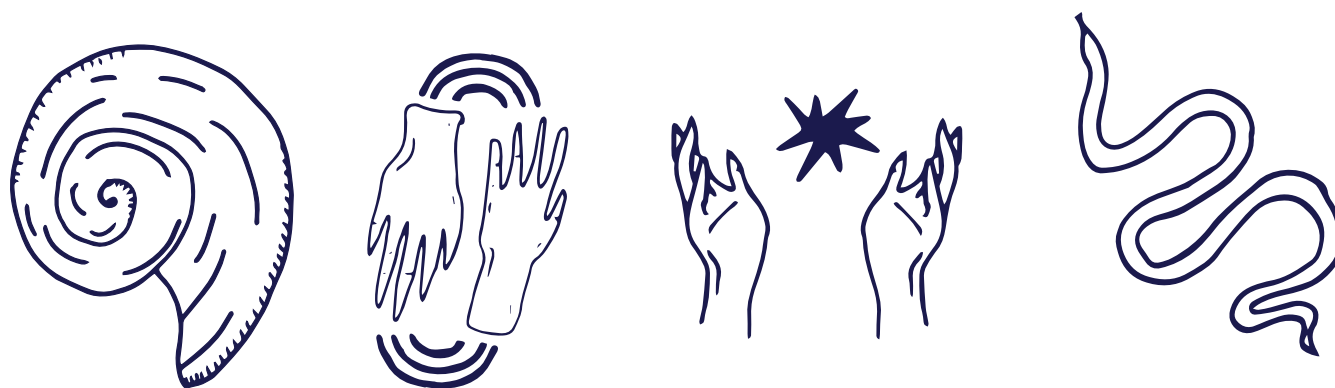
This project was completed as a master's project within the Landscape Architecture department at the University of Oregon from January 2022 to June 2023. In this section, I present the relational methodology, topic focus on culturally-relevant medicinal landscapes, and the key research questions of this project, followed by a short summary of some of the research findings.

As will be described in this section, the body of this project "report" is comprised of letters written to particular audiences, including my community collaborators and mentors. The purpose of this introduction section is to provide an orientation before reading any of the personalized letters. It is also intended to

serve as a summary of the project for a "general audience."

## Positionality

I want to be explicit about my identity and positionality, especially as I am applying lessons learned within the context of Indigenous Research Methods. I am a white queer person of primarily Euro-American descent, and though my grandmother has Mi'kmaq First Nation ancestry, we have not maintained those relationships and I do not currently claim indigeneity. The authors I mentioned before make it abundantly clear that any research using Indigenous methodologies needs to benefit Indigenous people. It was a deep wish



*Project principle icons, from left to right: emergence, reciprocity, open-endedness, flexibility*

and desire of mine to get to work with tribal communities on my project, but I did not receive ongoing follow-up from my outreach. And so I took the decision of respecting those boundaries, applying the relational respect that I learned in Indigenous Research Methods, and not pressuring people to respond. This leaves me in a slightly precarious position where I am applying lessons from Indigenous Research Methods but not working directly with tribal communities. The folks I have had the incredible opportunity to work with and focus on so far are primarily unhoused, Latine, Tibetan, and Vietnamese people. Some of these people likely have Indigenous ancestry but that has not been explicitly discussed. I hope it is okay that these

methods are being used to benefit other groups who have experienced the harms of colonization and white supremacy. I really hope that my having these conversations in the landscape architecture department makes it easier for Indigenous students to do research in the way they want to in the future. And I am sitting with the discomfort of not knowing if this is enough for now.

## **Relational Methodology**

The research methodologies of landscape architects have typically followed suit with white Western scientific methods, ignoring, if not outright devaluing, valid research methods in BIPOC communities. Chilisa (2019) writes about



This respect is much more than an attitude; it requires real commitments and real sacrifices on the part of those who practice it... the scholar should be willing to accept a considerably diminished measure of authority, compared with what most scholars are accustomed to.

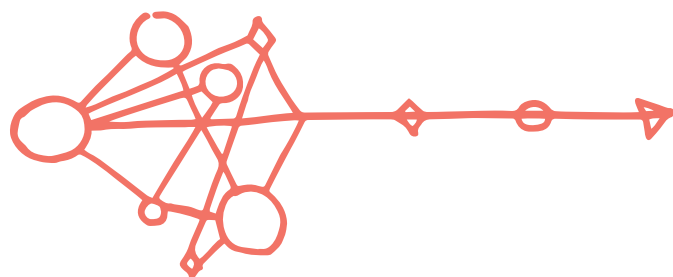
**Eva Marie Garrouette**

how most research has been created by white men to study white men and are often irrelevant to the needs of people (p. 41). Research methods created within BIPOC communities often center relationship-building as research and actively work to push back against the characteristics of white supremacy culture including perfectionism, individualism, objectivity, and worshipping the written word. For my master’s project, I wanted to step away from the dominant and extractive research approaches and focus instead on emergent, respectful, relational, and service-based methods, which are frequently slower and more fluid.

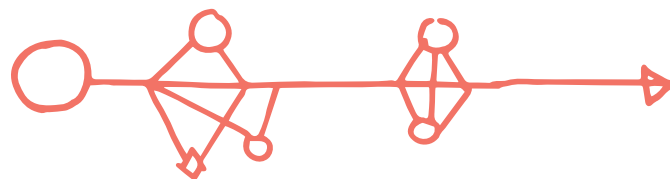
This approach was directly informed by coursework with Dr. Jennifer O’Neal on

Indigenous Research Methods. In Dr. O’Neal’s class, we discussed at length the importance of relationship building and relational accountability in research, especially when addressing topics of cultural identity and power. Shawn Wilson’s ‘Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods’, has been fundamental in my work. Wilson describes the importance of relationality and relational accountability. He also describes how, given that our reality is relationships, a valid methodology is “simply the building of more relations” (p. 79). Building off of this, he recommends that researchers shift their focus from “discovering something new” to building more relationships (p. 114). Similarly, Eva Marie Garrouette (2003)

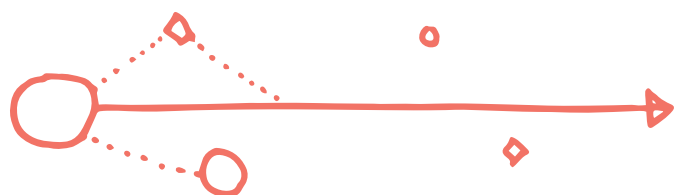




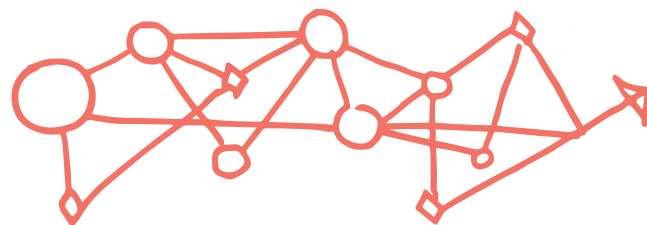
MFA Thesis



Design Strategy at Arup



Landscape Architecture Studios



MLA Project Goal

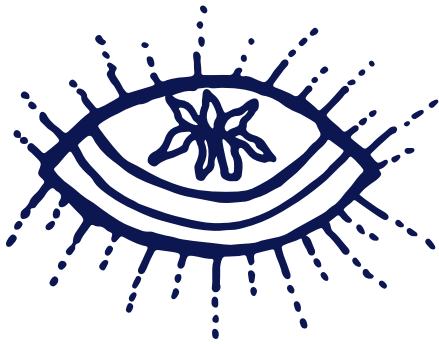
*Sketch diagrams representing relationships (or lack thereof) in my prior work*

describes how these types of methodologies often require sacrifice and a reduced level of control on the part of the researcher. Margaret Kovach (2009) advocates, as part of relational accountability, for researchers to ground their work in “community needs as opposed to the needs of the academy,” (p. 149).

I was also inspired by emergent social research methods in my project. Tami Spry calls on “the body as a site of scholarly awareness and corporeal literacy,” and problematizes the erasure of the body in the process(ing) of scholarship (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006, p. 183). When the body is excluded from research, so too is the knowledge that is stored there, thus limiting the depth, quality, and holisticness of

knowledge transfer in academia. A conversation with PhD student Megan Hayes contributed to the synthesis of these ideas for me personally. She helped to validate how work parties at garden sites are a valid form of research and dissemination, as, even without written or photo documentation, the information and knowledge of the work party is shared and encoded in each of our bodies.

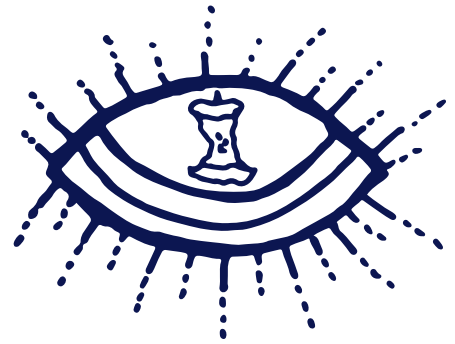
These approaches are not new; they have been developed and practiced in Indigenous and Ethnic Studies and parts of Sociology and Anthropology. However, they are new for me personally and I think still fairly uncommon within design and architecture spaces. In my MFA project, I interviewed 52 different people,



**ornamental and ecological only**



**chemical heavy maintenance regimes**



**non-fruiting plants**

*Sketch diagrams of common anti-foraging Landscape Architecture practices*

but then I just used what they shared with me to create design ideas in my own individual bubble. In my work as a design strategist at Arup, a global engineering and architecture firm, we led community engagement projects, but it was a purely consultative approach: they were not co-directors in the project direction overall and their involvement was discrete rather than continuous. Even here in my landscape architecture studios, I have struggled with the feeling of doing design work about a community with very little, if any, actual understanding of what community members are interested in. With my master's project, I instead wanted to intentionally invite in the complexity, slowness, and non-linearity that comes with

a relationship-centered and service-based approach.

My process principles have included emergence, open-endedness, flexibility, and reciprocity. In practice, this has involved being willing to have patience and wait and see what emerges from the relationships I am building. If people get busy or connections fade, that's okay, I do not have entitlement to their time just because I am supposed to be operating on a timeline. And, inspired by the writing of Robin Wall Kimmerer, Margaret Kovach, and Shawn Wilson, I have been working to reflect throughout this project on what I am offering to the people I am working with in reciprocity.

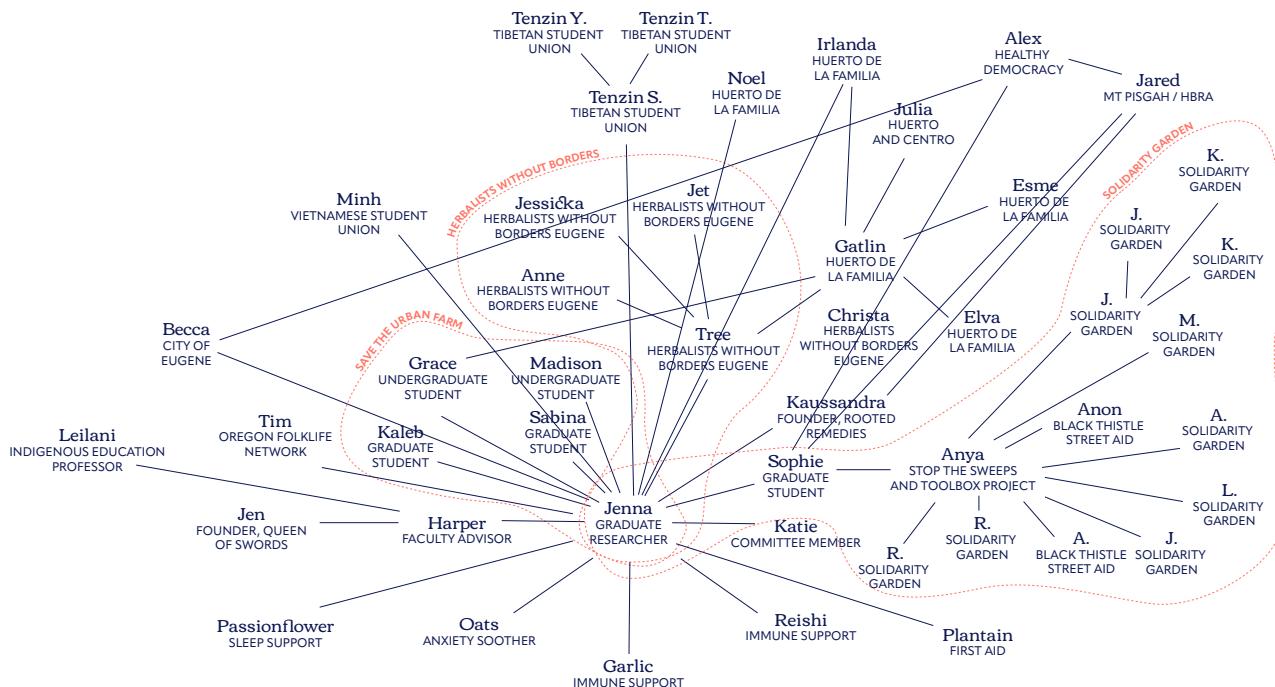


Diagram of project relationships as of May 2023

## Medicinal Landscapes and their Benefits

I am exploring this process through a specific topic lens, which is culturally-relevant medicinal landscapes. This topic focus emerged from the Plants and People class with Dr. Katie Lynch, in particular our reading of an article on urban forest justice. The authors describe the importance of considering culturally appropriate medicine in urban forest planning and the fact that, for many people, the opportunity to harvest is a critical part of the medicine (Poe et. al., 2013).

Within the field of landscape architecture, mainstream practice has historically focused on ornamental and ecological planting strategies. While these can be beneficial, they frequently exclude the culturally diverse ways in which our

communities actually relate to plants, including the medicinal uses of plants. Our planting schemes in public areas have prioritized non-fruiting plants and engaged in chemical-heavy maintenance regimes which add further barriers to harvest.

Paul Gobster refers to this as the museumification of cities (McLain et. al., 2014). If we, as a profession and as public servants, truly want to advance environmental justice with BIPOC, low-income, and unhoused communities, we must look for ways to transform our planting and maintenance approaches to center biocultural diversity. Bioculturally diverse and medicinal landscapes have many benefits they can offer for the



*Weeding and harvesting plantain at the Urban Farm Riverside*

humans in relation with them.

In an article for the Ecological Landscape Alliance, Lewis (2014) argues for not only the economic and social benefits of working with native medicinal plants in landscape designs, but also the ecological benefits at a systems level. They describe how medicinal plants do not contribute to chemical pollution in our waterways the way that pharmaceuticals do. Another major chemical reduction benefit medicinal landscapes can engender is the reduction of pesticide use. If we view landscapes as places for harvesting and gathering, this would change the way we manage them, prioritizing mechanical removal rather than chemical. Hurley et. al. (2015) describes

how plant gatherers are shifting views on underappreciated plants: “To this end, common plantain, purslane, and dandelions represent species that should be valued, not sprayed out of existence.” In their podcast episode on urban wildcrafting, Commonwealth Herbs goes one step further to imagine a future where cities and towns could actually be generating wealth (in the form of community wellness and/or direct revenue) by harvesting “weedy” medicinal plants and processing them into medicine, rather than spraying them with chemicals (Commonwealth Holistic Herbalism, 2019).

The act of foraging for medicinal plants can offer subsistence resources and a safety net during times of hardship, both in directly offsetting

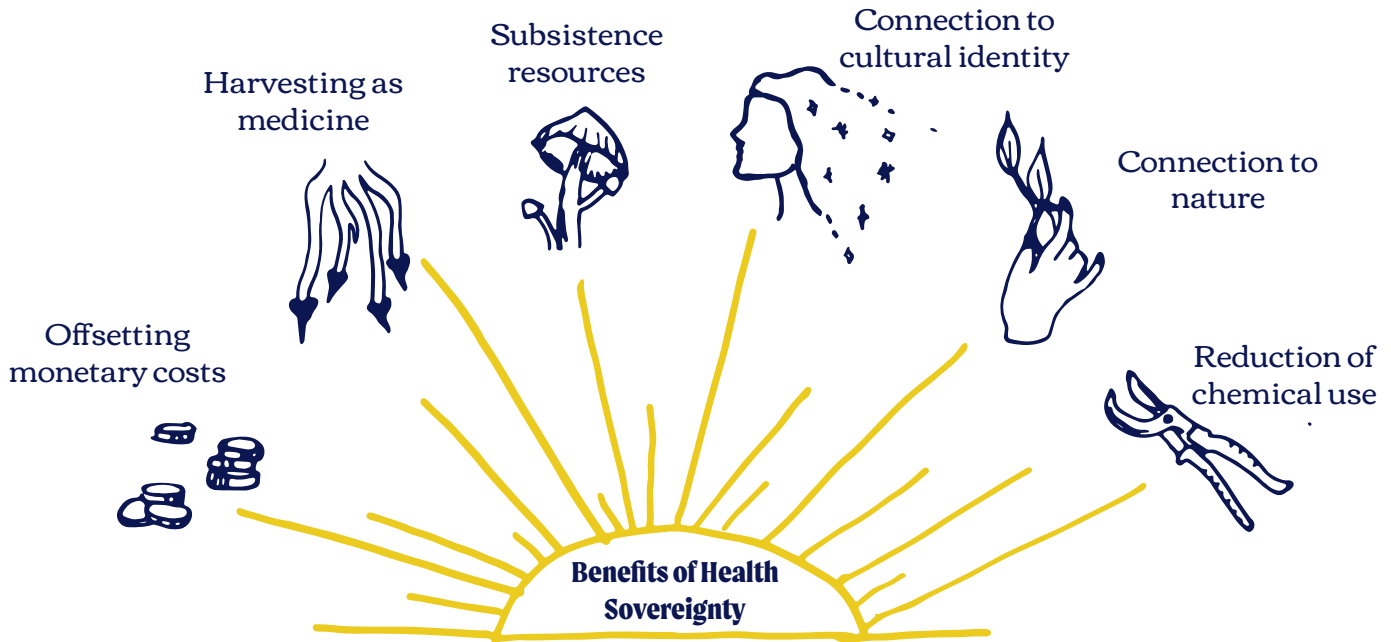


*Making a first aid salve using plantain oil at the Free Herbalism Project (photo by Tree Knowlton)*

monetary costs as well as providing a sense of sovereignty in being able to avoid capitalistic exchange (Shackleton et. al., 2017; Clouse, 2022). Through foraging and wildcrafting, people are able to “assert their rights to subsistence and informal economies,” while also reducing transportation (and thus carbon footprint) and waste associated with neoliberal food and medicine economies (Poe et al, 2013). Foraging for food and medicine can establish a strengthened connection to nature; some of the foragers interviewed by McLain et. al. (2014) discussed how they appreciated the intimate relationship developed from foraging, how the place they live in becomes “part of you and you’re part of it.” McLain (2002) describes

how this intimacy with plants and place often results in many gatherers having substantial amounts of knowledge about the plants and their ecosystems, and that instead of restricting these relationships, our policymakers should be incorporating that knowledge into forest and natural resource management.

Foraging and gathering for medicinal plants can also cultivate a stronger sense of cultural identity and tradition. (Shackleton et. al., 2017). As Clouse (2022) notes, foraging involves cross-generational knowledge sharing about plants and recipes and thus “supports the transference of social, cultural or religious values.” Some plants are not readily available commercially, and can only be accessed through foraging; so if



Sketch diagram of the benefits of Health Sovereignty

these plants are needed medicine and/or central to the continuance of cultural knowledge, then foraging for them becomes even more critical (Poe et. al., 2013). Both Buhner (2004) and Poe et. al. (2013) describe how harvesting is more than a means to an end, but it part of the healing process itself and is part of spiritual wellness for many people. Clarke describes the psychological benefits generated through gathering food and medicine, particularly culturally-relevant plants (Mihesuah and Hoover, 2019). In Eugene and elsewhere, unstable access to food/medicine and mental health struggles are often co-occurring. Establishing public medicinal landscapes can not only contribute to the nutrition and wellness of unhoused and low-income folks, but also

provide psychological support.

The cultural and psychological benefits of gathering, particularly gathering culturally-relevant plants, can be especially beneficial to people who have experienced forms of displacement or diaspora. Aktürk and Lerski (2021) describe how climate change is increasing the amount of climate-displaced people, threatening their connections with land and plant based cultural practices. They share how intangible cultural heritage (ICH), which includes social practices, rituals, and traditional crafts, is often under-considered in climate resiliency and relocation planning. When people are displaced from their cultural landscapes, there is a risk for losing the medicines and

food and other related customs based in those landscapes and ecosystems. Aktürk and Lerski discuss how ICH elements like traditional foods and healthcare practices can help people in the deep emotional processing that typically accompanies displacement and the process of “emotional integration”. Additionally, when host communities offer ways for climate migrants to reconnect with intangible heritage, such as through places for gardening and tending to traditional plants, this can facilitate intergenerational storytelling and help migrant communities in generating a sense of economic resiliency in their host community (Aktürk and Lerski, 2021).

The benefits of medicinal plants are not exclusive

to urban and peri-urban environments. Kassam et. al. (2010) describes how in rural communities in the Pamir mountains, people would have to travel multiple days by foot to get to the nearest hospital. Having the knowledge, agency, and plant allies available within their communities reduces their reliance on these long journeys.

## Definitions of Key Terms

### *Health Sovereignty*

Health sovereignty refers to the ability of a community to define, access, and distribute culturally- and ecologically-appropriate food and medicine. Many definitions emphasize choice and self-governance as the distinguishing features of health sovereignty in comparison to health security. Work that contributes to health sovereignty recognizes the connection between cultural, spiritual, and physical wellness.

Culturally-relevant food and medicine not only directly aid the physical health of individuals, but they also strengthen cultural connections which in turn strengthen physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

### *Medicinal Landscape*

Medicinal landscapes can have many definitions. Landscapes in and of themselves can be medicinal and therapeutic in many cultures. The types of medicinal landscapes I am referring to, however, are landscapes where there are plants that are being tended and harvested by humans for their medicinal gifts. This definition of course includes the stewardship of common herbal remedies like comfrey and calendula, but also includes foods as medicine and the roles that plants like garlic play in human wellbeing.

### *Plant Medicine / Herbal Medicine / Herbal Remedy*

I often use these terms interchangeably, all referring to the process of working with a plant for its benefits to one's physical, emotional, mental, and/or spiritual wellness. Technically, this does include the kinds of things you can buy in the holistic health aisle of the grocery store. However, for the purposes of my project I am more interested in what people are making in their kitchens: salves, tinctures, teas, powdered herb blends, fire cider, etc.

### *Culturally-relevant Plants*

By this I am referring to the group of plants that hold particular significance, tradition, recipes, and rituals in a given culture. My definition of 'culture' is fairly broad in this project; while largely I am referring to culture as it pertains to racial and ethnic backgrounds, there are other groups that might have specific needs related to medicinal plants based on their shared experiences.



## Process Questions

What are successful practices in relationship building and service-based research between landscape architecture students and community groups?

What are relational methods of documenting research that are in service to my community partners?

## Topic Questions

What are different scales and modes of supporting health sovereignty?

What are the barriers and challenges to health sovereignty in Eugene?

## Questions, Methods, and Mission

Bringing together my process and topic interests led me to four primary research questions, as shown in the table above. In order to approach my questions in a way that harmonizes with my process principles of emergence and flexibility, I defined a mission statement for myself for the year, which allowed me to retain a focus while adapting to the daily and weekly needs of my collaborators:

*To support access to and maintenance of culturally relevant medicinal plants through decolonial lenses and methods.*

The methods that I have prioritized are volunteering and relationship building. In order to track my progress, I maintained a volunteer

log of how I contributed with the different groups I have been collaborating with, as will be introduced in the following section. These primary methods informed and were informed by reading, autoethnography, research by design, and interviews. Throughout the project I relied on books, articles, videos, and podcasts to enrich my understanding of plant medicine. I maintained written, sketch, and audio journal entries to reflect on the processes of relationship building. I conducted research by design through the creation of garden plans, pamphlets, and workshop materials. And I had five semi-structured interviews with practicing herbalists, a community garden manager, and a former Urban Farm instructor.

# Subproject Overviews

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*Herbalists without Borders Eugene at Free Herbalism Project, from left to right: me, Anne, Olivia, Tree (Photo by Jet Eccleston)*

## Herbalists without Borders Eugene

Herbalists without Borders Eugene is a local chapter of an international non-profit organization focused on health sovereignty. Each chapter works largely at the local level offering herbal medicine making, distribution, education, clinics, and more, depending on the interests and skills of the members. The chapters are also frequently invited to contribute to a national or international efforts, usually in response to some form of crisis, whether that is climate-induced disaster, gun violence, or war.

This past year as part of my work with Herbalists without Borders (HWB), I contributed to free workshops at Mountain Rose Herbs on making fire cider, elderberry syrup, wild spring greens,

and more. In May, as part of the Free Herbalism Project, we held a first aid salve making class and gave out over 100 salve tins that we had made. The HWB chapter also frequently joins in for the local Solidarity Share Fair, where different groups offer free services and material goods to folks in need. We set up a booth offering syrups, salves, and other herbal goodies to support with immune system strength during flu season.

The Skinner City plot was offered to us by Huerto de la Familia as we had been working with them to distribute COVID care boxes to their members during the earlier days of the pandemic. The intention of this plot is to be a place where we can host bilingual workshops, given the lack of Spanish-language herbal workshops in Eugene.



*Work party to winterize the Herbalists without Borders garden plot*

This year we added more plants to the perennial bed and kid’s patch to get it closer to the original design intentions. In the southeast perennial bed, we introduced plants specifically that can support with wildfire and smoke related health issues, such as marshmallow and anise hyssop, given that this has been a growing challenge here in Eugene. And because it is best practice to rotate out annual crops, especially ones like tomatoes, we rotated out what was formerly a salsa bed, but kept the focus on culturally-specific plants and food as medicine. This year it is a three sisters or milpa garden with corn, squash, and beans that are all heirlooms from central America. Around the border of this bed, we have added epazote, cempasuchil, pericón,

and culantro (different than cilantro) - all of which are culturally significant in the cuisine and folk medicine of central and south America.

## **Huerto de la Familia**

Huerto de la Familia is a local non-profit organization that supports Latine people in Lane County with initiatives related to organic agriculture and food production. They oversee several local community gardens, including co-managing the Skinner City Garden with the city of Eugene. The Mujeres del Huerto is a support group for Latina women, particularly those who have experienced domestic violence. The Mujeres were going to take on a garden bed focusing on growing healing herbs. A large focus of my



*Grass removal at the Mujeres del Huerto plot (unweeded on left, weeded on the right)*

contributions with Huerto this year has been helping to remove the grass from the Mujeres garden bed to prepare it for planting. I also attended a gathering with some of the Mujeres to discuss their goals for the plot. Here we talked about some plants that they had wanted to see in the garden, as well as their interest in having workshops on garden design and organic maintenance. I started to prep some of those workshop materials and I also researched *curanderismo*, which is an umbrella term for folk healing practices in Latin America.

Based on my conversation with the Mujeres, conversations with Gatlin, and my research on *curanderismo*, I started identifying some plants that we might be able to add to the

garden and ordered some seeds and starts. However, I recently learned that one of my main collaborators is dealing with a medical emergency and so the Mujeres garden is on hold until her return. For now, Gatlin has generously offered to support me in shifting my project to take the seeds and starts I had acquired for the Mujeres garden and grow them out in Huerto's greenhouse. These plants and their seeds will then be able to be distributed to the Mujeres or other members of Huerto.

## **Solidarity Garden**

The Solidarity Garden in Jefferson Westside is a collaboration between myself, my partner, Stop the Sweeps, Black Thistle Street Aid, Near-west



*Solidarity Garden before grass removal and planting work*

Eugene Social Trust (NEST), and the UO Urban Farm. MLA graduate, Anya Dobrowolski, had a vision for a community garden space that could offer shade, food, and medicine to our unhoused neighbors, and she invited my partner and I to be collaborators. The garden will connect into work that Stop the Sweeps is doing to support the rights and livelihoods of un-housed folks, and Black Thistle’s work in offering street herbalism to unhoused people. Further, in response to the lack of diversity and representation in the Jefferson Westside Neighborhood Association board, a new group called NEST is forming to take on projects within the neighborhood. The Solidarity Garden will be one of the first of these projects.

The garden is located on land that is currently “owned” by either the City of Eugene, EWEB, or Lane County. Anya called all three of them and asked if they would remove anything if she planted there and they said no. The focus of our work this year has been on planning the garden and plant acquisition. We also conducted soil tests to understand what was safe to grow and what level of remediation we needed.

From there we selected plants within three categories: food, medicine, and remediation. We focused on food plants that are “ready to eat” and/or nutritionally dense. Our medicinal plants list was informed by plants requested by Black Thistle Street Aid, alongside research I did on herbs to support immune system, stress, and



*Initial work party at the Solidarity Garden (photo by Ignacio López Búson)*

first aid issues, as those were common requests that Herbalists without Borders received at the Solidarity Share Fair. We created a planting plan for the whole site, but quickly realized that this was too ambitious for this season, given lack of water access, amount of grass removal, and costs of compost. We got extremely lucky the day before our work party, that one of the neighbors had an excavator we could use. So we were able to actually dig up the whole site and 15 people showed up to help us. It was a wild experience of unexpected abundance, where people brought food, tools, and plants to share. KVAL even showed up and wrote an article about the garden. We will be building on this momentum with weekly work parties on Friday nights.

## **Cultural Diversity at the Urban Farm**

As I was working on my master's project and also taking the Urban Farm class last fall, the Director of the UO Urban Farm, Harper Keeler, and I got into a few conversations about how we could make room for more medicinal plants and culturally-relevant plants at the Urban Farm. In order to move this idea forward, I started reaching out to different cultural groups on campus to see if any of them were interested. Several replied sharing that they were at capacity and could not take on another project. However, the Tibetan Student Association (TSA) and the Vietnamese Student Association (VSA) wanted to be involved. I started with a one-on-one conversation with Tenzin Shepherd, a member



*Tibetan Student Association planting Tibetan Barley seeds in trays (photo by Tenzin Yangchen)*

of the TSA and she shared a list of plants with me that she and other members had compiled. Similarly, I started with a one-on-one chat with Minh of the VSA and she connected me with her mom to create a plant list together.

With the Tibetan Student Association, we were able to source Prickly Ash, Szechuan Pepper, and Tibetan Barley. Three of the members worked with Harper and I to sow barley in trays, pot up a Szechuan Pepper plant, and start cold stratifying other Szechuan Pepper and Prickly Ash seeds. At the time of this writing, I am currently in the process of sourcing the plants requested by Minh and her mom.

## **Save the Urban Farm**

My work with Save the Urban Farm looked quite distinct from these other subprojects and collaborations. The Urban Farm is a beloved site on campus that was the product of grassroots planting and stewardship efforts of students and faculty in the 70s. Since then, it has grown to host several classes each year that fill up within the first minutes of registration. Here students get to learn about growing food, making compost, alongside wider social and environmental issues relating to food systems.

The newest building of the Knight Campus is currently under construction on the eastern border of the Urban Farm. While the footprint for the building did not infringe on the Urban





*Save the Urban Farm march (photo by Gavin Gemez)*

Farm, the building has had a severe impact. Their plan has included a pedestrian area that extended into the Urban Farm along the full eastern border, a plaza area in the southeast corner of the farm, a utilities corridor being constructed through the middle of the farm, and using the Back 40 (which is about one-third of the Urban Farm) for construction staging. Given that the farm has medicinal plants growing throughout its garden beds, and that food is medicine is most cultures, I decided to fold this into my master's project. I strongly believe that we as landscape architects need to be skilled not only in creating new landscapes but also protecting existing ones.

This process has involved hosting student



*Art installation on threatened trees at Urban Farm*

gatherings, creating Slack and Instagram channels, raising concerns and questions in faculty meetings and administrative town halls, working on an ASUO resolution, engaging with local media outlets, planning and hosting the Urban Farm Spring Fest, attending CPC meetings and City of Eugene hearings, drafting Public Records Requests, hosting a march and rally, creating informational social media graphics, and launching a letter writing campaign to University admin and the Board of Trustees. Sadly, despite the immense efforts of our group, the plans have proceeded, the trees have been removed, and the Back 40 is buried in gravel and machinery.

However, our work continues. Last summer,



*Urban Farm Back 40 in October 2022*

as a result of our organizing, the University designated \$1 million to the expansion of the Urban Farm, as a replacement for the loss of current spaces. And in the fall of 2022, they approved the selection of a riverside site to the northeast of the Urban Farm.

Dean Adrien Parr, however, has put the project development on hold and has indicated that she intends to assign the project to an un-named tenure-track faculty who will be hired to direct this space. We take strong offense to the Dean's narrative that the process was "consensus based" and feel that her plan for the Urban Farm Riverside is not only in opposition to student requests but also the campus planning process itself. We are currently working to ensure that

the riverside site is within the programming and culture of the existing Urban Farm and pushing back on the dean's monopoly over Urban Farm Riverside, and we need student, faculty, staff, and community to help us do so.

Another key part of this subproject has been to stay with the grieving of what we have lost. Working with plant medicine this year helped open my eyes to the ways in which having fragments of the farm, like plant material and soil, to continue interacting with softened the sharpness of the loss. When I returned from winter break to see the farm for the first time after the razing, there was not much left that had not already been turned into wood chips. But a couple cedar and bay branches fell to our side of



*Urban Farm Back 40 in March 2023*

the fences. These were from the row of cedars that used to make me feel so protected and I miss them dearly. It turns out that cedar and bay leaves are both anti-inflammatory and can be supportive in topically addressing pain relief, so I have worked with these plants to create an infused lotion to share with fellow members of Save the Urban Farm.

# Research Findings Overview

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### Relationships with Community Collaborators

Immersion  
Grout Work  
Multidirectional  
Learning  
Deep Caring  
Rolling with the “No’s”

### Relationships with Academic Institution

Navigating Institutional  
Tension  
Working with Mentors  
Collaboration over  
Competition  
Synthesizing Messy  
Processes

### Relationships with Plant Collaborators

One Plant at a Time  
Reciprocal Gathering  
Practices

*Table summarizing my main lessons on relationships building*

## What are successful practices in relationship building and service-based research between landscape architecture students and community groups?

I was initially focused on learning about relationship building with community partners and this has been the main focus of my project, but it also has been important to reflect on how to navigate my relationship with this institution and, just like with humans, how to build slow, respectful, and mutually beneficial relationships with medicinal plants. Thus, I have had insights and lessons about relationship building across these three categories, as shown in the table above.

## What are different scales and modes of supporting health sovereignty?

This project helped me to understand both conceptually how health sovereignty can be supported at different scales from public to private landscapes, and also tangibly how the different groups I have been working with model different approaches to supporting health sovereignty.

When I started this project, I was probably most interested in the fully public commons model. These are places, often overseen by a city government, from which anyone can harvest. Thus, they also tend to benefit the most economically disadvantaged folks, as people who do not own land or a plot in a community

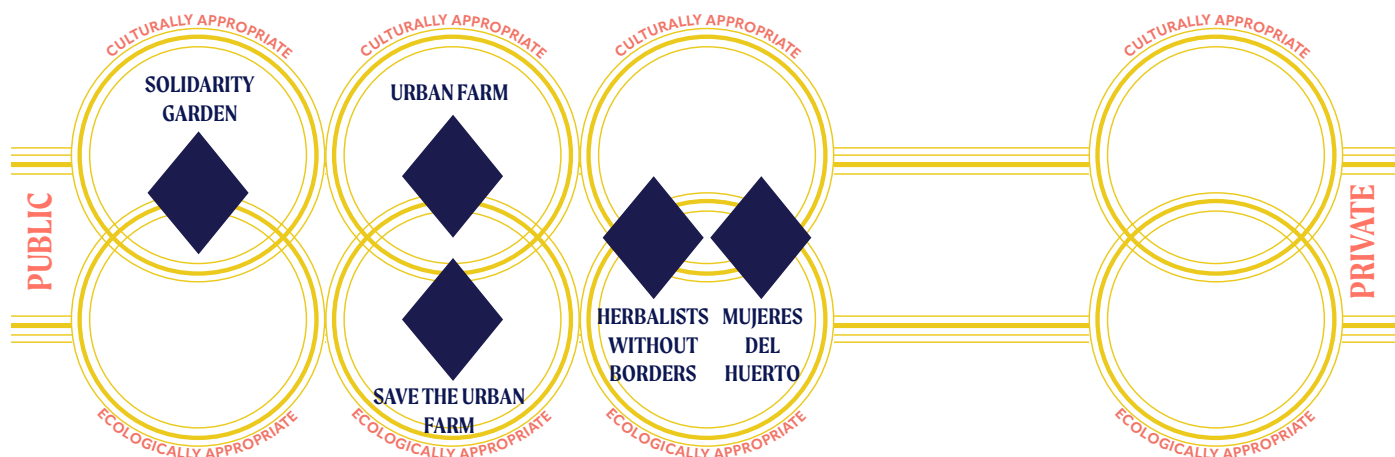


*Diagram of scales of health sovereignty from public to private*

garden can still access the plants. Examples of this include the Bronx River Foodway and the Beacon Food Forest. Through reading and volunteering, however, I also learned of the importance of semi-public and private landscapes for supporting health sovereignty.

I would classify a community garden as a semi-public space, as they are often fenced and locked, only accessible to those who have a plot, but within the garden there can be sharing of knowledge, labor, and resources. My bias at the start of this project was that this setup is less than ideal in comparison to fully public swaths of urban commons. However, I have learned that they act as powerful hubs and protected spaces.

Langwick (2018) describes how members of different TRMEGA gardens in Tanzania share cuttings, seeds, transplants, medicinal information, and stewardship knowledge with each other. They argue that this leads to each garden being “an actual extension of other gardens, an extension of their social relations, physical matter, and storied histories,” thus challenging the notions of borders and ownership. I experienced this concept in my work with Huerto de la Familia and the Mujeres del Huerto garden plot. They are viewing their plot as a place for them to share knowledge about plants and gardening, and to be able to have cuttings and transplants that they can bring into their home gardens. Additionally, it



*Diagram of how subprojects fit on health sovereignty scale*

does seem beneficial to have a level of privacy and protection for groups that are more marginalized. For example, Huerto de la Familia has a plot for people who are recovering from substance use and the Mujeres del Huerto plot was intended to be a place for women healing from the trauma of domestic violence. The partial exclusivity of this space can create a sense of safety amongst these groups.

Given my prior assumptions, I had a similar shift in perspective around private medicinal landscapes. At the start of this project, I would have assumed that these were situations of power-hoarding owned by wealthy (and usually white) people. However, private medicinal landscapes can be created as a way of shifting

and building power within underprivileged communities, and there are times where this is not only appropriate, but required for the safety and success of the initiative. One example is Wapato Island Farm in Portland. They aim to protect the BIPOC community they are comprised of by restricting access. They require all of their volunteers to submit an application and read their resources list on topics of white supremacy and trauma before attending any volunteer events.

With this in mind, it has become clear that there is not one scale of enacting health sovereignty that is universally better than others. Instead, it is about working with appropriate levels of access, depending on the group of people who



*Signage at Solidarity Garden*

are going to do the tending and harvesting work. With these different scales in mind, I want to describe the ways the different subprojects and collaborations I have worked on support health sovereignty in Eugene.

### ***Solidarity Garden***

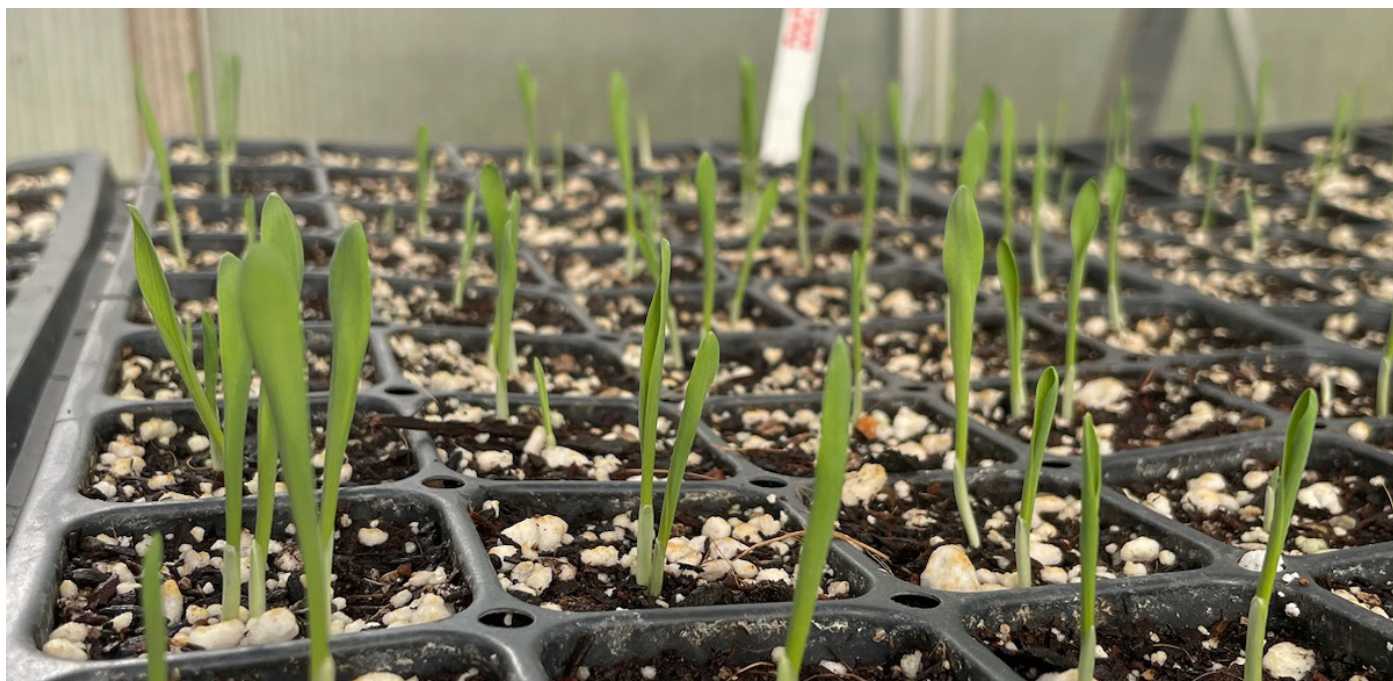
The Solidarity Garden is the closest to a public commons model of health sovereignty. The intention is for anyone to be able to harvest from the food and medicine in the garden. We are also intending for this to tie into existing programs of free medicine distribution. We can donate the materials to Black Thistle Street Aid to process and distribute, and/or work with others in our neighborhood to process the medicine and bring

it to the Little Free Pantry nearby. We plan to host gatherings and workshops to connect with both our housed and unhoused neighbors, and invite people in for knowledge exchange and stewarding.

### ***Cultural Diversity at the Urban Farm***

The work I have been doing with the Tibetan Student Association and the Vietnamese Student Association at the Urban Farm is intended to address one of the key parts of health sovereignty, which is the ability to work with culturally-relevant plants. Not only are we hoping to offer the plants to the Tibetan and Vietnamese students on campus, but also we hope to have opportunities for them to tend and





*Tibetan Barley sprouting at the Urban Farm (photo by Harper Keeler)*

harvest the plants, if they want to, as harvesting is a part of the medicine.

It also is intended to create a precedent for other culture-centered student groups to do projects like this at the Urban Farm in the future. While many other groups were at capacity and unable to be involved within the timeline that I am starting work on this, I hope that if in the future they are interested, they can reach back out to me and/or Harper to move through a similar process.

### ***Save the Urban Farm***

Perhaps it is less immediately clear how the work of Save the Urban Farm feeds into health sovereignty. For many students, the Urban Farm

class is their first experience of harvesting their own food, and for some it's their first experience of getting their hands in the soil at all. The class literally teaches students how to have food and health sovereignty by growing and preparing their own plants. Fighting to protect this space that has already been working towards health sovereignty, as well as pushing back against competing visions for the Riverside site, seem to be a no brainer given the mission of my project.

Even the work of grieving the losses we have had, I believe, is a part of health sovereignty. Grieving helps us to not forget: to not bypass the emotions associated with losing such a special place: to not paint it over with thick silver linings: but to recognize that this was wrong and



*Me at Solidarity Share Fair event with Herbalists without Borders (photo by Jet Eccleston)*

did not have to happen; and to remember that we have every right and responsibility to keep fighting for threatened medicinal landscapes in the future.

### ***Herbalists without Borders Eugene***

I think Herbalists without Borders Eugene supports local health sovereignty through their combination of education and distribution. They are striking the balance between offering immediate aid and sharing knowledge to help with community capacity building, so people do not have to rely on us if they do not want to. Bringing in opportunities for education allows us to increase the number of people within our community who have the skills and ability

to grow and make medicine. Further, HWB Eugene tries when possible to create spaces for knowledge exchange rather than unidirectional teaching, often asking our workshop attendees to share their experiences and knowledge about a given topic or plant. This helps us steer our work towards a direction of mutual aid, rather than philanthropy. Herbalists without Borders is also dedicated to centering cultural relevancy in their medicinal offerings through both the ongoing partnership with Huerto de la Familia, as well as in other past projects such as sending herbal aid in response to a request from the Navajo nation during COVID.



*Fire Cider Workshop with Huerto de la Familia*

### ***Huerto de la Familia***

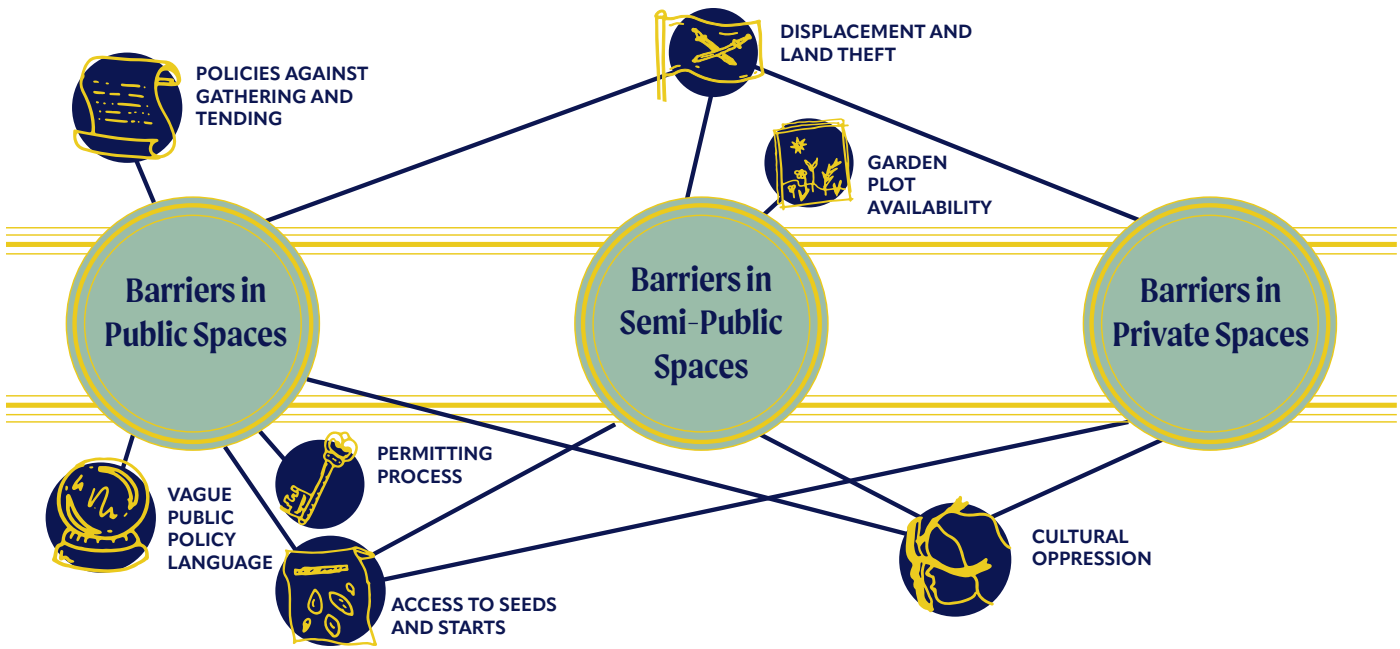
There are an abundance of ways in which Huerto de la Familia is support health sovereignty. For the purpose of this presentation I am going to focus on the Mujeres del Huerto plot. One of the ways this plot supports health sovereignty is by establishing a place where this group can have reliable access to cultural plants. As previously stated, community gardens may not be as open and public as a commons but the soil quality is known, the maintenance practices are known (and organic), and they get to have full autonomy over what is planted.

Additionally, these collaborations are slowly creating places for people to share knowledge

with each other. Some of the women in the Mujeres del Huerto group already know a lot about gardening and organic practices, but others do not. This is why they asked for workshop support. Not only can I share what I know and/or research, but more importantly it creates space for them to share what they know with each other.

### **What are the barriers and challenges to health sovereignty in Eugene?**

Health Sovereignty within Eugene is not without challenge. One of the main barriers to health sovereignty in the public realm has to do with anti-foraging policies and the fears and biases that lie underneath them, such as



*Sketch diagram of barriers to health sovereignty at different scales*

fear of damage to ecosystems, biodiversity loss, and overharvesting. These fears, however, are often misheld. For example, Rebecca McLain and her co-authors describe how foragers are usually responsive to how the plants change over time, harvest only a portion of what’s available, remove invasive plants, and tend plant populations.

Even if community members could benefit from additional training in order to harvest ethically, this should not be used as an excuse to retain the status quo. Current holders of power need to trust that other members in their community are fully capable of tending to a public commons and can learn what they do not know to become “responsible sovereigns,” (Waldstein, 2016).

In the meantime, these laws about harvesting in public parks can act as barriers to tending and gathering. As part of our work around the Solidarity Garden, my collaborators and I were pruning an apple tree adjacent to the plot. Within thirty minutes, however, the city Park Watch showed up. They were not there to help or guide or offer to take care of the tree themselves, merely just to tell us not to or else risk being banned from the park. One of my collaborators, who is also a professional landscape contractor, had received permission to do this landscape work from the city, but there was no record of this and Park Watch would not take our word for it. It is highly ironic, as most cities struggle to fund enough staff to take care of all of the park



*Apple tree pruned by Solidarity Garden*

spaces. The Park Watch staff we interacted with even acknowledged that they are short-staffed. So why not be more receptive to people who are volunteering their time to harvest and tend to public park spaces?

If policies do not make it clear that foraging is not allowed, usually their vagueness is enough of a deterrent for folks. One of my interviewees shared how this is one of the main reasons she goes outside city limits to harvest medicine.

And when there is foraging allowed, often times it requires a permit and the complex process associated with acquiring one. The same interviewee shared with me how complex this process is. Even to harvest an undesired plant

like teasel at Buford Park, she had to go through a permitting process.

Within the semi-public realm, one of the main barriers in Eugene is the limited number of spaces at community gardens and the limited distribution of them. I spoke with a staff member of the city's community garden program who shared with me that this past year they had about 60 spaces available and received 200 applications. The city has wanted to expand the garden program into River Road and West Eugene but has not yet dedicated funding or committed to a timeline.

Other barriers across scales include challenges in sourcing the plants. I was only able to find half



*Pamphlet for Herbalists without Borders garden plot*

of the plants requested by the Tibetan Student Association, despite a long search process. The seeds I did acquire required many different orders from different sources ranging from local nurseries to niche suppliers of medicinal plants to Etsy sellers.

Another major barrier, though it did not necessarily come up directly in my project, is the inequitable distribution of land access, especially for Indigenous people and people who have experienced diaspora. For tribal communities, only some of their rights to gathering traditional medicines have been honored despite treaty agreements, and the U.S. government forcibly displaced tribes to reservations that are a small fraction of the original lands they used to rely

on. Native ecologies and their medicines in many places have been displaced by industry and settlement. In addition to this, cultural oppression has created a sense of shame around traditional foods and medicines both for Indigenous people and for people of color who migrate to the United States.

### **What are relational methods of documenting research that are in service to my community partners?**

In alignment with the desire to correct historic power imbalances, I have been working to identify ways in which my project documentation can be intentionally designed around the relationships I have been building.



*Making fire cider with friends (photo by Ignacio López Búson)*

This is inspired by scholars like Margaret Kovach, who describes the importance of research and its forms of dissemination being grounded in community needs, rather than those of the academy. There are five main types of relational documentation that I have been thinking about.

First is the creation of context-specific educational materials like pamphlets and workshop outlines with Herbalists without Borders and Mujeres del Huerto. These are materials that they have directly asked me for, and I have used my time and graphic training to produce. These will help to disseminate information about our garden plots in the spirit of free public herbal education.

The next two forms of relational documentation that I have been experimenting with are medicine making and garden work parties. These are both forms of corporeal documentation, where the spirit and emerging nature of plants and place is being documented into our minds and bodies. People learn about the plants, the garden, the medicine, and their roles in those relationships through embodied practice that they can physically remember and share with others. The fact that visitors to the Urban Farm Fest made plantain tea bags with me using plantain harvested from transplanted Bačk 40 soil at the riverside, establishes a unique connection and understanding between them, my project, the plants, and the landscapes where



*Work party at Solidarity Garden (photo by Ignacio López Búson)*

the plants are from.

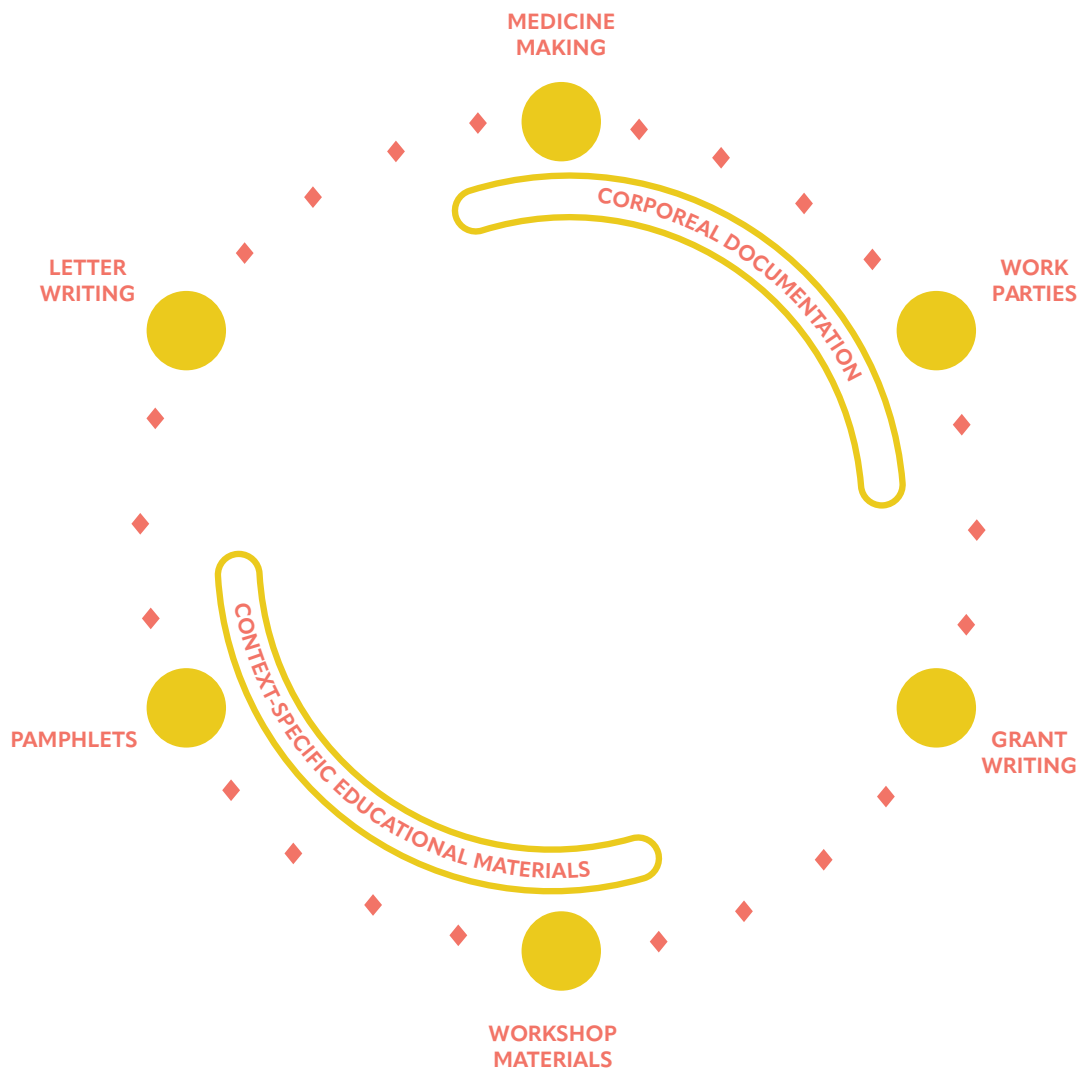
The fourth type of relational documentation is grant writing. Early on in my project, when trying to identify ways I might document the project that could tangibly benefit the people I was working on, I thought about how grant writing often requires similar types of writing to master's projects. For example, both often include some at least quasi-academic documentation of the impact and benefits of the work you are doing. I unfortunately ran out of time to see this through. However, I hope to reuse my writing and research for this purpose as I continue to work with each of these groups.

The fifth form was strongly inspired by Shawn

Wilson and how he framed his book. To embed relationality in his writing, he structures several of his chapters as letters to his sons. I wanted to humbly learn from his practice and offer my written project documentation as a series of letters directed to the many people that have been in relationship with me and this project. As a result, the majority of my written report is dedicated to these letters. Following these, I conclude with some closing thoughts and ideas for future work.

Please note that several of the letters contain intentional redactions. This is to both protect the identities of some of my collaborators as well as to protect cultural wisdom that is not mine to share publicly.



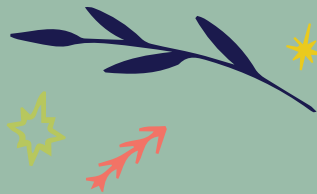


*Diagram of different forms of relationship documentation tested in this project*





# A Letter to Herbalists without Borders Eugene



Dear Tree, Jet, and Anne,

It has been a tremendous pleasure and honor to get to work with you all over this last year. As some of you may know, I have been working on my master's project in the department of landscape architecture at the University of Oregon. My project has been focused on culturally-relevant medicinal landscapes but specifically approaching that topic through a relationship-centered and service-oriented approach. So, rather than be off in an ivory tower theorizing about medicinal landscapes, I wanted to learn by openly volunteering with folks in our community who are already engaged in this work - you all! This approach was inspired by an Indigenous Research Methods class that I took with Professor Jennifer O'Neal here at the University of Oregon, along with readings from Indigenous scholars like Shawn Wilson and Margaret Kovach. (If you are interested, I would definitely recommend reading 'Research is Ceremony' by Shawn Wilson as a starting point!) These people taught me the importance of focusing on relationship-building rather than some objective product (i.e. a specific design, output, etc.) in my work, especially when working with folks who have been negatively impacted by colonialism and white supremacy.

A large part of my project has also been to think about ways in which my research could more directly benefit the people that I am working with. Too many master's projects sit on dusty shelves after having been designed by and for the academy, rather than community. Again, I was inspired by people like Shawn Wilson; in his book, several of the chapters are written as letters to his sons to embed relationships in the

sharing of the information. Building off of this, I wanted to write letters to different individuals and groups that have been involved in my project to customize my sharing and messages to you.

It has been incredibly enriching to get to be a part of the MRH Annex workshops, Share Fair, care package creation, and Skinner Garden plot tending with you all. In addition to working with HWB Eugene, I have also been collaborating with someone who is connected to Stop the Sweeps and Black Thistle Street Aid on a guerrilla garden plot in our neighborhood that we hope can support herbal street aid work. My work in our Skinner Garden plot also led me to begin additional relationships with Huerto de la Familia and I have had the opportunity to work with a women's group there on tending their garden plot. At the Urban Farm I have been working on both protecting existing food and medicinal plots from the impacts of the Knight Campus development, as well as looking for ways to make the plants at the farm more reflective of the cultural diversity of the UO student body.

In the rest of this letter, I've summarized some of the things I have been learning about that seem most relevant to you all and Herbalists without Borders generally. That being said, I hope you know that this can be an ongoing conversation and I would love to hear any questions you might have for me!

**The workshops** at Mountain Rose Annex were an incredible learning experience for me. They taught me about researching herbalism, ways to make medicine, and ways to share plant medicine with others. At first I was intimidated to jump into contributing to these workshops because,

well, what do I know about plant medicine? Not nearly as much as you all. But you all were so supportive in inviting me to research and contribute the knowledge I do have, like evergreen identification. One thing I really appreciated learning from all of you in these workshops was how to facilitate multi-directional learning. You all are so talented at inviting others to share their experiences and knowledge about different plants, making the workshops feel more community-driven rather than didactic. This felt especially powerful for me as a beginner in the herbalism world, demonstrating how I might still help engage in workshops when I am certainly not an expert. This seem really strongly aligned with some of the wisdom of herbalists recognizing that there are many types of expertise within herbalism and it is important to have receptivity and openness to the many types of teachers you might have: from kitchen witches to book authors to the plants themselves.

It seemed like we all have been learning together about different parts of the workshop: how we want to prepare, how we want to advertise, etc. It seems like the google agenda template has been working really well, as has the times when we have been able to have a meeting or two ahead of the workshop to discuss. I wonder with the workshops and with the garden if there are more things we can play with around outreach and social media. I feel like there are lots of other organizations in Eugene that would be interested in what we are up to and maybe they just do not know about us yet? I would be happy to help out with some strategizing around outreach and communications if that is of interest!

**The garden** and research related to it also provided many learning

opportunities for me. One thing I talked about in my project presentation is the different scales of enacting health sovereignty. These include fully-public commons, community gardens, and some forms of private garden spaces. I think at the start of this project, I may have had a bias towards fully-public commons. They just seemed so much more ideal than anything behind a fence. That being said, I have learned over the course of my time working in both the Herbalists without Borders plot and the Mujeres del Huerto plot that community gardens often act as powerful hubs of sharing resources and protected spaces for marginalized communities. One of the articles I read in parallel helped to frame what I was experiencing in the gardens. In 'A Politics of Habitability: Plants, Healing, and Sovereignty in a Toxic World,' Stacy Ann Langwick writes about a garden network in Tanzania dedicated to supporting people living with AIDS. She describes how members of the different gardens share cuttings, seeds, transplants, medicinal information, and stewardship knowledge with each other, leading to each garden being "an actual extension of other gardens" thus challenging the notions of borders and ownership. This, in combination with seeing how our garden and the Mujeres del Huerto garden actually do this, helped me understand community gardens as more porous and less bordered than I previously thought.

It was an incredible opportunity to get to help with the garden design planning process. I really enjoyed getting to learn from and build off of your existing ideas as well as contribute some of my own. I know Tree has been closely involved in this, but just to summarize for Jet and Anne, we added more plants to the perennial bed and kid's patch. In the

southeastern bed, we introduced plants specifically that can support with wildfire and smoke related health issues. And because it is best practice to rotate out annual crops, especially ones like tomatoes, we rotated the southwestern salsa bed out but kept the focus on culturally-specific plants and food as medicine. This year it is a three sisters or milpa garden.

One of my favorite parts was researching and finding the plants to include. The perennial bed plants were the easiest to source, as they are fairly standard herbs to purchase. Many of the plants we already had in the garden or at TreeStead; while the oregano and echinacea were easy to source from Michaela at Humming Bee Nursery. In the kid's patch, the new plants can be found at Humming Bee or Strictly Medicinals. These included lavender, german chamomile, roman chamomile, calendula, strawberry, and violets. These plants are all gentle enough that kids can interact with them without concerns about side effects.

The plants we included in the smoke and wildfire patch were largely informed by a combination of an HWB members resource on herbs for wildfire support as well as a Bay Area Herbal Response Team's 'Herbs for Fire Season' YouTube video. I tried to select a mix of plants that address different fire-related issues. Marshmallow root helps to hydrate and soothe sore throats. Similarly, Self-heal is also mucilaginous and cooling. Thyme is a great lung opener and can be great in teas and steams. Anise hyssop and Mullein can be helpful in treating coughs. Mexican Lobelia can be supportive as an anti-asthmatic and anti-inflammatory. Purslane is a great source of Omega-3 which helps to reduce inflammation in the body. These were all sourced from either Humming Bee or Strictly Medicinals.



The central plants of the three sisters bed were, of course, corn, squash, and beans. It felt important to source specific varieties that were linked to Mexico or other parts of Central America. Native Seeds Search was an incredible resource for finding such plants. We also needed to find plants that were appropriate sizes for our small bed. Sakwapu is a Hopi Blue corn that tends to be shorter than 5 feet. Cunti Muni de los Yaquis is a bushy-pole bean. Both of these are heirlooms to the southwest US and northern and central Mexico. Grey Zucchini and Chilacayote are common squashes used in Mexican cooking. These seeds I had to get from Etsy sellers. We also included several other culturally-relevant herbs in that bed, including Epazote, Mexican Tarragon/Pericón, Culantro, Aztec Marigold/Cempasúchil, and Mexican Arnica. All of these came from Strictly Medicinals, except the Culantro which I sourced from Seed Needs, Hello May Garden (Etsy), and Tomorrow Seeds (Etsy). I was inspired to find Pericón and Cempasúchil after watching HerbRally's session with Atava Garcia Swieciński on Medicinal Plants of Mexico. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

It is exciting to reflect on how moving through a full year cycle with the garden can inspire seasonal gatherings and activities for our hub and community. I have started to imagine annual end-of-season gathering and turnover work parties, during which we can dream together about the year to come. We can have cozy winter gatherings where we put these ideas on paper over cups of tea or cocoa and start looking for any plants

we need. Then we can be ready a little earlier in the spring for weeding, bed preparation, and planting. I am also looking forward to building off of our pamphlet to create a maintenance and harvesting guide for each of our plants. That way we know when we need to go out and gather from each plant at the optimal time. This, of course, is likely embodied knowledge that you each have. So it may be more of a self-serving tool. But I would be happy to share if any of you would like to see it (if/when I make it)!

Speaking of maintenance, it feels helpful to me - and maybe to you - to synthesize what kinds of maintenance we have found to be helpful together, so I will share that here: At the end of fall, we removed the annuals, grass, and any unwanted volunteer plants, paying special attention to the good neighbor bed. Then at the start of winter, we covered our dormant beds with a healthy heapful of leaves. At the start of spring, we want to get right on grass removal before it becomes overgrown and do any relocations and new plantings early so they are not trying to establish in the heat of summer. In spring we can water a couple times a week, ramping up closer to everyday during the heat of the summer.

**Partnering with Huerto de la Familia** has been an incredible opportunity. It was one of the parts of Herbalists without Borders Eugene that really appealed to me from the beginning. I think this interest is largely informed by an article I read a while ago about climate migration and intangible cultural heritage. In 'Intangible cultural heritage: a benefit to climate-displaced and host communities,' Gül Aktürk and Martha Lerski describe how climate change is increasing the amount of climate-displaced people, threatening their connections with land

and plant based cultural practices. They share how intangible cultural heritage (ICH), which includes social practices, rituals, and traditional crafts, is often under-considered in climate resiliency and relocation planning. Aktürk and Lerski discuss how ICH elements like traditional foods and healthcare practices can help people in the deep emotional processing that typically accompanies displacement and the process of “emotional integration.” Additionally, when host communities offer ways for climate migrants to reconnect with intangible heritage, such as through places for gardening and tending to traditional plants, this can facilitate intergenerational storytelling and help migrant communities in generating a sense of economic resiliency in their host community.

To prepare myself to work with Huerto de la Familia, I have been reading a lot of books about curanderismo. Some of my favorite books have included ‘Curanderismo: The Art of Traditional Medicine without Borders’ by Eliseo “Cheo” Torres, ‘Healing with Herbs and Rituals: A Mexican Tradition’ by Eliseo “Cheo” Torres, ‘Living Well in Los Duplex’ by Anna Waldstein, and ‘Voices from the Ancestors’ by Lara Medina and Martha R. Gonzales. These authors describe the healing practices of temazcal, baños, and sweats.



[REDACTED]

Other plants that were included in some of these sources about Central and South American herbalism are: cola de caballo, diente de lion, yerba buena, lavanda, osha, sabila, tagetes erecta, estafiate, yerba mansa, gordolobo, anis, garlic, epazote, tomillo, and hinojo. One of the first plants I heard about from Gatlin was ruda (or rue).

[REDACTED]

Herb Rally's interview with Atava Garcia Swieciński covered several important medicinal plants in Mexico, including chocolate, corn, vanilla, chili, chip, napal, avocado, yarrow, salvia, elderberry, peyote, and more. I have more extended notes from these readings and videos that I would be happy to share anytime.

I have been trying to pay special attention to what forms of support and collaboration that Huerto de la Familia seem to be wanting. When I asked Gatlin this earlier in the year, she plugged me into helping weed grass from the Mujeres del Huerto garden and invited me to share any transplants we might have. Continuing to help weed and offer seeds and starts can be something we consider doing with Huerto. Gatlin and I have also continued to talk about signage and educational information both at

Skinner and Churchill gardens. Any graphic material we develop, I think we should be sure to share with them too!

**Researching Herbalists without Borders and other hubs** has been a helpful supplement to my experiences within the Eugene chapter. Some of the things I learned about the broader organization that most excited me included medicinal seed saving and trauma training. I would love to support seed saving and seed distribution efforts at our garden, especially with some of the culturally-significant plants as then we can share the seeds with Huerto. I think trauma training also seems really important to support our ongoing collaboration with Huerto. I do not know if this is something that you all were able to do as part of Occupy or herbalism training courses already, but it is not something that I have had structured learning about. Given that there are many folks within Huerto's network that are dealing with trauma related to race, immigration, domestic violence, poverty, and other issues, it could be really helpful for us to practice in a trauma-informed way. I could not find any information online for when/if these trainings will be available again through HWB. If any of you know or see anything about this, I would love to hear more.

Tree and Jet, you were not kidding when you talked about the extensive resources available through the HWB member portal! I found resources on community gardening, queering herbalism, plant monographs, and more. They even had very specific files and folders, for example on forest fire and smoke support. This is what inspired the idea to bring fire and smoke supportive plants into our garden this year.

Reflecting on our chapter in the context of the international network also helped me to understand how we are fitting into the work of health sovereignty, and where we could continue to grow. One of the main ways I see HWB Eugene supporting health sovereignty is through our combination of education and medicine donation. Donation-only models can risk falling into the category of health security, where a community stays dependent on the provision of food/medicine from others. Bringing in opportunities for education also allows us to increase the number of people within our community who have the skills and ability to grow and make medicine. Further, as I mentioned earlier, I have really appreciated how you all make space for knowledge exchange rather than unidirectional teaching, especially through our workshops where you all invite our participants to share what they know.

The one challenge I have started to notice is that, though we combine education and donation, we are not always doing those two things with the same groups. Many of our donations go towards unhoused, low-income, and Latine members of our community, while the people who attend our Mountain Rose Herbs workshops seem to be more financially secure, white, older women. Has this always been the case? Have you found ways to engage a more diverse group of workshop participants in the past? I imagine this is why it is so important to be intentional about creating space and capacity for bilingual workshops. It would be great if we could offer more workshops in collaboration with Huerto, and/or if we could increase the accessibility of our monthly workshops somehow. I would love to hear any thoughts any of you have on this!

I also wonder if this might be reason to circle back to some other possible collaborations that arose throughout this past year. Jet and I had a conversation about working with Sponsors to grow and make medicine with folks who are transitioning from incarceration. And I believe the founder of Eagletree Herbs, who is a Dakota woman, expressed interest in working with us at the Free Herbalism Project. It would be great to follow-up with you all on some of these ideas! I know we are a small group right now, but it could be exciting to discuss our interest and capacity for these other partnerships.

**My project emphasized not only learning about medicinal landscapes, but also about relationships.** All of my significant lessons about relationship building were informed by my work with Herbalists without Borders, including learning about deep caring. I grew up in a culture where it was not the norm to deeply engage with other people's problems and challenges. Maybe you offered your condolences, but otherwise went about the interaction as if everything was normal. So it has been a lot of very personal work for me to shift those behaviors and conditioning during this journey of relationship building, to slow down, and actually engage with other people as humans.

During one of our early work parties, Tree sent me home with Tulsi and Yarrow hydrosols and a lavender oil roller to support my school stress. Later, at a garden work party in early winter, she brought a pot of hot chai tea and calendula balms for all of the volunteers. Similarly, Jet shared some of her beet fire cider with me, knowing how much I enjoyed it. I started to understand these as the "tools of a community herbalist," and

to build out my own, investing in an airpot and finding opportunities to make and share medicine with others.

Beyond these tangible offerings, however, the work of deep caring can be a lot more vague and nonlinear

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. I hope to continue to learn with and from you all, so that I can offer care when you need it.

**I want to close this letter with a lot of gratitude.** I do not think that I can capture it all on paper, but I want to explicitly acknowledge some of the many kindnesses you have all shared with me and express how thankful I am for them. You have invited me into your group and connected with me about medicine, plants, and beyond. You have made space for me to learn and have offered your knowledge and guidance with me on countless occasions, teaching me to make my very first salves, fire ciders, and more. The medicine you shared with me offered me not only bodily support but also a sense of belonging. As someone who is still very new to this coast and this town, with all of my family back east, this has started to help me feel grounded in community. Our one-on-one conversations have been rich with inspiration and delight over common interests. You have trusted me with testing out my different ideas in workshops and in the garden (which is very generous considering the different levels of experience we have!). And when I have gotten busy or sick or



overwhelmed, you have always offered me a lot of grace and compassion in needing to change my plans. Thank you all so very much for all that you have shared with me in the past year. It is so wonderful to know you and continue getting to know you!

In gratitude and solidarity,

Jenna





# Una Carta a Huerto de la Familia



Queridos Gatlin, Elva, Julia, y Esme,

It has been such an honor to get to know you and work with you over this last year. As you know, he estado trabajando en mi proyecta de master in the department of landscape architecture at the University of Oregon. My project has been focused on culturally-relevant medicinal landscapes but specifically approaching that topic through a relationship-centered and service-oriented approach. So, rather than be off in an ivory tower theorizing about medicinal landscapes, yo quería aprender by openly volunteering with folks in our community who are already engaged in this work. This approach was inspired by an Indigenous Research Methods class that I took with Professor Jennifer O'Neal here at the University of Oregon, along with readings from Indigenous scholars like Shawn Wilson and Margaret Kovach. (Si están interesados, yo recomendaría leer 'Research is Ceremony' de Shawn Wilson as a starting point!) Estos escolares me enseñaron la importancia de focusing on relationship-building rather than some objective product (i.e. a specific design, output, etc.) en mi trabajo, especialmente cuando trabajando con gente who have been negatively impacted by colonialism and white supremacy.

Un gran parte de mi proyecta fue pensando sobre ways in which my research could more directly benefit the people that I am working with. Too many master's projects sit on dusty shelves after having been designed by and for the academy, rather than community. Otra vez, yo estaba inspirado de gente como Shawn Wilson; en su libro, several of the chapters son escritos como cartas a sus niños para embed relationships

in the sharing of the information. Building off of this, yo quería escribir cartas a personas y grupos que han participado en mi proyecto para customize my sharing and messages to you.

It has been energizing and meaningful to get to work with Huerto de la Familia and las Mujeres del Huerto este año. In addition to working with you, también yo he colaborado con Herbolarios sin Fronteras, the UO Urban Farm, the Tibetan Student Association, Vietnamese Student Association, Save the Urban Farm, and a guerilla garden space in Jefferson Westside in collaboration with members of Stop the Sweeps, NEST, and Black Thistle Street Aid.

In the rest of this letter, I have summarized some of the things I have learning about that may be most relevant to you. That being said, I hope you know that this can be an ongoing conversation y me gustaría recibir algos preguntas que tienen para mí!

**Yo quería compartir algos de the readings** that have inspired me in this project. ‘Real Indians’ by Eva Marie Garroutte, ‘Research is Ceremony’ by Shawn Wilson, and ‘Indigenous Methodologies’ by Margaret Kovach established a foundation for my relationship-centered approach. ‘Urban Forest Justice and the Rights to Wild Foods, Medicines, and Materials in the City’ by Poe et. al. and ‘Gathering “wild” food in the city” by McLain et. al. set a foundation for why I wanted to study medicinal landscapes.

An article by Aktürk and Lerski titled ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Benefit to Climate-displaced and Host Communities’ describes how climate displacement (as well as other forms of displacement) is

threatening peoples connections with land- and plant-based cultural practices. When host communities can work with displaced people to create ways for them to reconnect with cultural plants and related heritage, this can facilitate intergenerational storytelling, economic resiliency, and emotional processing.

**He completado otras lecturas sobre curanderismo** que quería compartir con todos. Mis libros favoritos son ‘Curanderismo: The Art of Traditional Medicine without Borders’ de Eliseo “Cheo” Torres, ‘Healing with Herbs and Rituals: A Mexican Tradition’ de Eliseo “Cheo” Torres, ‘Living Well in Los Duplex’ de Anna Waldstein, y ‘Voices from the Ancestors’ de Lara Medina y Martha R. Gonzales. Herb Rally interviewed Atava Garcia Swiecicki sobre las plantas medicinales mexicanas which can be viewed on YouTube.

Con estas lecturas, yo aprendí más sobre la importancia de medicinas verdes y remedios caseros en tradiciones mexicanas. Torres escribe como curanderismo includes material, spiritual, and mental health and that common preparations include tés, herbal smokes, tinturas, microdoses, macerations, poultices, and washes. Other authors describe practices como temazcal y baños.



Las plantas quienes pueden ayudar con estos rituales son manzanilla, pasiflora, toronjil, albahaca, salvia, ruda, pericón, calendula, romero, y rosa.

Otras plants que fueron incluidos en algunas de las lecturas sobre curanderismo en Centroamérica y Sudamérica son cola de caballo, diente de lión, yerba buena, lavanda, osha, sabila, cempasúchil, estafiate, yerba mansa, gordolobo, anis, ajo, epazote, tomillo, y hinojo. Unas de las plantas que me habló Gatlin es ruda. ]

One of my favorite things to learn about was the benefits of two tagetes species: Tagetes erecta o cempasúchil y Tagetes lucida o pericón.

**A proxima, yo quiero compartir con todos sobre las plantas que buscaría** para el huerto de las mujeres. Muchos de las plantas son de la lista de las Mujeres del Huerto. Ellas querían chipilín, epazote, chiltepe, yerba buena,

culantro, y suculentas. Algunas de las plantas son de una lista de Gatlin y son otras plantas que son importantes a la comunidad de Huerto como ruda, calendula, estafiate, y manzanilla. La lecturas sobre curanderismo me inspiraron a buscar por cempasúchil y pericón. Porque nuestra taller de cidra del fuego fue muy popular, quería plantar una cama de cidra del fuego con cebolla, ajo, habanero, y tomillo. I also made a deck of cards of many of these plants with their medicinal benefits on the back. Podemos usarlas en conversaciones sobre plantando en la futura.

Para preparar por plantando, quité el pasto en el lote y he buscado por las plantas en la lista. Mis fuentes principales fueron Strictly Medicinals, Humming Bee Nursery, Seed Needs, Native Seed Search, and various sellers on Etsy. [REDACTED] we had shifted gears to growing out the plants in the Churchill Community Garden for redistribution to the mujeres o otros miembros del Huerto de la Familia.

**In my meeting with the mujeres, I heard about their interest in talleres** de disegno y organicos por el jardín. Muchos de estas temas están cubiertas en el taller “Siembra a Cena” de Huerto de la Familia. Quería enseñarme sobre las temas, pues yo puedo compartir más día-a-día con las mujeres, además de “Siembra a Cena.” Yo buscaría por libros sobre estas temas y he encontrado muchos. Mis favoritos hasta ahora son ‘Herbal Remedy Gardens’ by Dorie Byers, ‘Herb Garden Design’ by Ethne Clarke, Using Herbs in the Landscape by Debra Kirkpatrick, and Groundbreaking Food Gardens by Niki Jabbour.

**One of my favorite lessons from working with Huerto de la Familia is about the**



**power of community gardens.** I had been reading about a garden network in Tanzania which is focused on supporting people living with AIDS. The author, Stacy Ann Langwick, describes how members of different gardens share cuttings, seeds, transplants, medicinal information, and stewardship information with each other. She describes that this leads to each garden being “an actual extension of other gardens, an extension of their social relations, physical matter, and storied histories,” thus challenging the notions of ownership and borders. Ha sido potente verlo en realidad con Huerto de la Familia y las Mujeres del Huerto. Las mujeres están viendo su lote como un lugar para compartir información sobre plantas y jardinería, y un lugar para tener cuttings and transplants que pueden llevar a sus jardines domésticos.

En esta carta, yo quiero compartir las plantas que están en el lote de Herbolarios sin Fronteras este verano en caso de que quieren cosechar allí. Tenemos cuatro camas en el lote. En el noroeste es perennial herbs como romero, oregano, echinacea, milenrama, y arnica. En el noreste es una cama por niños con manzanilla, lavanda, calendula, violeta, y hierba gatera. En el sureste es una cama por hierbas que pueden ayudar con health issues related to smoke and wildfire. Estas plantas son tomillo, verdolagas, malvavisco, anís hisopo, y self-heal. Estoy muy emocionada sobre la cama al suroeste. Esta es una milpa o jardín de tres hermanas. He encontrado maíz, frijoles, y calabaza que son reliquias de México de Native Seed Search. A presente, el maíz está un pie de alto. Estamos planeando a cosechar y compartir estas plantas y sus sembrillos con Huerto de la Familia.

**Hay muchas lecciones de diseño de jardines que aprendí en este proyecto,** y muchas son de ustedes. Pues son lecciones que ya saben. Pero quería compartirlas como un agradecimiento y una referencia por nosotros.

*Uno:* Aim for as universal accessibility as possible, including people of all ages and abilities. This looks like including spaces for kids having ADA pathways, and harvestable areas accessible to people in wheelchairs.


*Dos:* Make the space feel welcoming with entrances that invite people into the garden.

*Tres:* Understand both cultural and ecological/biodynamic skills of different plants. For example, knowing how nettle and yarrow are medicine for people as well as for the soil.

*Cuatro:* Don't be too precious about the design plan. Each season is an opportunity to learn and iterate and invite others' ideas into the mix.

*Cinco:* Spread the word in many formats, for example, signage, interpretive pamphlets, and educational events. This should also help to increase legibility of the garden so anyone who is visiting can know which plants are which.

**Estoy muy emociada que puedo continuar este colaboración** con Huerto de la Familia y también ayudar con y enseñar sobre más de sus programas. Gatlin y yo hablamos de un plan que yo vengo al huerto cada Viernes para regar y desherbar en las camas medicinales. También voy a asistir con la programa de cempasúchil y planeando para el huerto en Cottage Grove.

, podemos hablar sobre si quieren que voy a ayudar con plantando y desherbando otra vez.

**Finalmente, yo quiero compartir mi gran agradecimiento** a Huerto de la Familia y las Mujeres del Huerto. Yo sé que soy una extrajera en su comunidad y quiero apreciar que me dieron tiempo, confianza, y gentileza. Gatlin, gracias por viendo the approach I was trying to take and inviting me in to meet with others and help with garden projects. Gracias a Julia por reuniendo conmigo, me invitando a talleres y a reunir con las mujeres. Gracias a Gatlin y Elva por me compartiendo recursos del jardín y de la idioma Español. Y también gracias a Gatlin y Elva por volver a conectar conmigo y me ayudando al huerto Churchill. Muchas gracias a Gatlin por me apoyando en el transición fuera de Universidad, trabajando conmigo en the internship plan y me enviando trabajos posibles. [REDACTED]

Estoy muy contenta que yo conozco a ustedes!

Muchas gracias a todos,

Jenna





# A Letter to the Solidarity Garden



Dear Garden Co-conspirators,

Thank you SO much for all that you have given and all that you are hoping to give to this project. I have been absolutely astounded by the abundance, organizing, and generosity of this group. It is an honor to be involved.

For those of you whom I have not yet met, my name is Jenna Witzleben and I recently completed my master's degree in Landscape Architecture at the University of Oregon. The Solidarity Garden has been a part of my master's project on culturally-relevant medicinal landscapes.

I specifically wanted to approach my master's project through a relationship-centered and service-oriented approach. So rather than be off in an ivory tower theorizing about medicinal landscapes, I wanted to learn by openly volunteering with folks in our community who are already engaged in this work. This approach was inspired by an Indigenous Research Methods class that I took with Professor Jennifer O'Neal here at the University of Oregon, along with readings from Indigenous scholars like Shawn Wilson and Margaret Kovach. (If you are interested, I would definitely recommend reading 'Research is Ceremony' by Shawn Wilson as a starting point!) These people taught me the importance of focusing on relationship-building rather than some objective product (i.e. a specific design, output, etc.) in my work, especially when working with folks who have been negatively impacted by colonialism and white supremacy.

A large part of my project has also been to think about ways in which my research could more directly benefit the people that I am working with. Too many master's projects sit on dusty shelves after having been designed by and for the academy, rather than community. Again,

I was inspired by people like Shawn Wilson; in his book, several of the chapters are written as letters to his sons to embed relationships in the sharing of the information. Building off of this, I wanted to write letters to different individuals and groups that have been involved in my project to customize my sharing and messages to you.

It has been incredible to work closely with Anya on the planning for this garden and get to meet and collaborate with so many of you over the last few weeks at the work parties. In the rest of this letter, I have summarized some of the things I have been learning about that seem most relevant to folks involved with the Solidarity Garden. That being said, I hope you know that this can be an ongoing conversation and I would love to hear any questions you might have for me!

**My interests in projects like the Solidarity Garden emerged from learning about the many benefits of public medicinal landscapes.** You may already know many of these things, but just in case it creates additional meaning for you around the Solidarity Garden, I figured I would share. The act of foraging for medicinal plants can offer subsistence resources and a safety net during times of hardship, both in directly offsetting monetary costs as well as providing a sense of sovereignty in being able to avoid capitalistic exchange (Shackleton et. al, 2017; Clouse, 2022). Through foraging and wildcrafting, people are able to “assert their rights to subsistence and informal economies,” while also reducing transportation (and thus carbon footprint) and waste associated with neoliberal food and medicine economies (Poe et. al., 2013). Foraging for food and medicine can establish a strengthened connection to nature; some of the foragers interviewed

by McLain et. al. (2014) discussed how they appreciated the intimate relationship developed from foraging, how the place they live in becomes “part of you and you’re part of it.”

Foraging and gathering for medicinal plants can also cultivate a stronger sense of cultural identity and tradition. (Shackleton et. al., 2017). As Clouse (2022) notes, foraging involves cross-generational knowledge sharing about plants and recipes and thus “supports the transference of social, cultural or religious values.” Some plants are not readily available commercially, and can only be accessed through foraging; so if these plants are needed medicine and/or central to the continuance of cultural knowledge, then foraging for them becomes even more critical (Poe et. al., 2013). Clarke describes the psychological benefits generated through gathering food and medicine, particularly culturally-relevant plants (Mihesuah and Hoover, 2019). In Eugene and elsewhere, unstable access to food/medicine and mental health struggles are often co-occurring. Establishing public medicinal landscapes can not only contribute to the nutrition and wellness of unhoused and low-income folks, but also provide psychological support.

The cultural and psychological benefits of gathering, particularly gathering culturally-relevant plants, can be especially beneficial to people who have experienced forms of displacement or diaspora. Aktürk and Lerski (2021) describe how climate change is increasing the amount of climate-displaced people, threatening their connections with land and plant based cultural practices. They share how intangible cultural heritage (ICH), which includes social practices, rituals, and traditional crafts, is



often under-considered in climate resiliency and relocation planning. When people are displaced from their cultural landscapes, there is a risk for losing the medicines and food and other related customs based in those landscapes and ecosystems. Aktürk and Lerski discuss how ICH elements like traditional foods and healthcare practices can help people in the deep emotional processing that typically accompanies displacement and the process of “emotional integration”. Additionally, when host communities offer ways for climate migrants to reconnect with intangible heritage, such as through places for gardening and tending to traditional plants, this can facilitate intergenerational storytelling and help migrant communities in generating a sense of economic resiliency in their host community (Aktürk and Lerski, 2021).

**Many barriers exist to creating these landscapes,** however, despite the many benefits. Many of the barriers to health sovereignty, particularly when enacted in a public commons, have to do with anti-foraging legislation and the fears and biases that lie underneath them. Several studies have described how in many cities, there are bylaws against foraging which are often based in fears around the damage to ecosystems and biodiversity loss, “unsightly damage” of city assets, overconsumption and overharvesting, the reduction of food for other species, maintenance costs, and public health concerns (such as fallen fruit and contamination) (Shackleton et. al., 2017; Hurley et. al., 2015; Kormelink, 2020). These fears however are often misheld, as it is commonly acknowledged that foragers hold a significant amount of ecological knowledge which they then share with others (Shackleton et. al., 2017). For example, McLain et. al. (2014) describe how foragers are usually responsive to how the plants change

over time, harvest only a portion of what's available, remove invasive plants, and tend plant populations through pruning and propagating. Further, many scholars call out the hypocrisy in restricting foraging given how other forms of land use, development, and resource extraction have far greater impacts on ecological wellness of species and green spaces than foraging does (Shackleton et. al., 2017; Hurley et. al., 2015). Kormelink (2020) similarly notes that the stated concerns that foragers will reduce food needed by other animals is inconsistent with the fact that the same city managers are intentionally planting non-fruit bearing trees, thus removing a possible food source for both human and more-than-human animals.

In the meantime, these laws about harvesting in public parks create systems of power and permission that can act as barriers to foraging and gathering. I would have assumed in a place like Eugene, people have an environmental politic that is more welcoming of grassroots stewardship and harvesting in public spaces, but I have learned that is not the case. As part of our work around the Solidarity Garden, a few of us were pruning an apple tree adjacent to the plot. The tree was tangled and had many injured limbs. I have learned through my work at the Urban Farm that pruning is not only beneficial for the health of the tree, but also can create larger fruits for those harvesting from it. Within thirty minutes of our working on the tree, however, the city Park Watch showed up, informing us that they had received a call reporting our pruning. They were not there to help or guide or offer to take care of the tree, merely just to tell us not to or else risk being banned from the park or dealing with the Eugene Police Department. One of us had sought and received permission to do this

landscape work from the city, but there was not record of this and Park Watch would not take our word for it.

It is highly ironic, as most cities struggle to fund enough staff to take care of all of the park spaces. The Park Watch staff we interacted with even acknowledged that they are short-staffed and would not be able to send someone else out to prune the tree we were working on. Some cities have created room for residents to help fill the gaps. When I lived in New York, I participated in a neighborhood garden club that adopted street trees as, after the big political “One Million Tree” project, the city did not have the capacity to maintain all of the trees they just invested in. We made sure these over-heated trees got water, compost, and a small groundcover layer around them. Clouse (2022) points out how acts like our tree pruning and other forms of “DIY urbanism” should be more supported by the city “as they represent participants’ willingness to make would-be improvements to a place. . . in a sense doing professional urban designers’ work for them.” Urban designers and planners are always struggling to get community members to engage in the planning, design, and maintenance events. Why not be more receptive to people who are volunteering their time to tend to public park spaces?

Many colonial regimes often undermine the ability of people to self-organize and self-govern and so these regimes resist the dissemination of power. Histories of white supremacy, patriarchy, and classism have contributed to false assumptions that the knowledge held by community members is inadequate, especially when it exists within a different epistemology outside of the western academic context and its

worship of the written word. Even if community members could benefit from additional training in order to perform acts of stewardship, it just means that needs to be included in the process of transition rather than being used as an excuse to retain the status quo. Current holders of power need to trust that other members in their community are fully capable of tending to a public commons and can learn what they do not know, if necessary. This is addressed in Waldstein's definitions of sovereignty, as she writes, "A responsible sovereign weighs the relative costs and benefits of various healing/health practices for the self, the community, and the environment." (p. 161). Similarly, Hoover and Mihesuah define food sovereignty as being comprised not only of "rights to," but also "responsibilities to" and "relationship with." If we restore intergenerational knowledge sharing as part of the creation of public food commons, that should adequately dismiss the concerns of anti-foragers worried about poor stewardship.

Landscape architects and urban designers are historically complicit with the creation of barriers to gathering in public spaces. Shackleton et. al. and McLain et. al. describe how urban greenspaces have been designed by landscape architects and planners to prioritize recreational, aesthetic, and ecological values, rather than provisioning ones. Gobster (2007) and Kormelink (2020) call this process the "museumification" of cities and link it specifically to early park design by landscape architects in 18th century Europe. The over-emphasis on inedible plantings is compounded by the presence of environmental toxins like heavy metals, insecticides, herbicides, and other industrial contaminants. These make it difficult to confidently and safely harvest foods, especially as the information about

site safety is difficult to access and often requires expensive testing.

**We studied the site history and soil at the Solidarity Garden** in order to address these concerns about site toxicity. I started by reaching out to the OSU Extension Service in town to get their guidance on soil testing. They pointed me to Simply Soil Testing in Washington state where I was able to have the soil tested for basic nutrients and pH as well as heavy metals. OSU also recommended looking into the site history. Based on aerial photographs and maps it was clear that, at least since 1936, this site has always been at the boundary of residential areas and the fairgrounds. While there is still risk of contamination from traffic and lead paint in the houses, we at least did not have to worry about any major industrial pollution. When the soil test came back, we were pleasantly surprised by the results. All of the nutrients were in moderate to high levels and all of the heavy metals were far below the recommended limit for vegetable gardens. We still want to include some phytoremediation plants in there, as the site is right next to a roadway and parking lot, but it is good to know that this should not be a substantial barrier to start planting food and medicinal plants there.

**I also took a look at precedent examples** to see if there are any similar garden sites that we might draw inspiration for. Some of my favorites included the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone, the Community Garden and Memorial at Echo Lake, Dent Street Community Garden, Swale NYC, and the Bronx Foodway. The Community Garden at Echo Lake was created by unhoused residents in LA during the pandemic. They have been growing food, flowers, and medicinal plants like chamomile and aloe. They also

included a communal kitchen space and a memorial for people whom they lost. The Swale project in NYC began as an art project to advocate for growing food on public land in NYC. It is a floating edible landscape on a reclaimed barge which leverages marine common law to subvert public land laws that restrict edible plants. Their work led to the creation of permanent food forests in the Bronx and Governor's Island. The new food forest in the Bronx is called the Bronx Foodway. It is a quarter acre full of edible plants and is the only legal foraging site in NYC. They have a strong focus on culturally-significant plants, particularly those important within the Black community. One of their recent artists-in-residence was herbalist Journei Bimwala, who has been working in the food forest to offer asthma remedies, as the food forest is located in what is known as the "asthma triangle" given the proximity of highways and industrial facilities.

There were also other inspiring readings that I found while looking for precedent gardens. These included Paige Emery's writing on Radical Gardening, Ron Finley's position piece in Caring Magazine, and Johan Niklasson's master's thesis on Horticultural Therapy for Homeless People.

**The bulk of my work has been to identify and source different plants** for the garden. The focus of my master's project was on medicinal plants, however this garden really blurs the line between food and medicine. Food is such an important foundation of health and, in many cultures, food is medicine. Recognizing the needs of the people we wanted to serve in this garden, we wanted to incorporate foods across the food-medicine

spectrum.

The food plants we selected for our initial list prioritize foods that are ready-to-eat and/or nutritionally dense. This way people do not need cooking equipment in order to benefit from these plants. Blueberries, Sungold Tomatoes, Snap beans, Cucumbers, Peppers, Carrots, Broccoli, Arugula, Asparagus, Jostaberry, Autumn olive, Basil, Alfalfa, Cilantro, Parsley, Red raspberry, Red clover, Rose, and Thyme were the plants we selected to meet these categories.

The medicinal plants combined plants that were requested by Black Thistle Street Aid supplemented with research I did on herbalism and street aid. Black Thistle shared that they often are looking for Spilanthes, Calendula, Lavender, Skullcap, Catnip, and California Poppy. From my work in Herbalists without Borders, particularly at the Solidarity Share Fair, I have learned that immune support, stress support, and first aid are common requests. Oregon Grape, Wood Betony, Chamomile, and Helichrysum can be used for first aid medicine. Yarrow, Oats, Tulsi, and Motherwort are very supportive for stress and trauma. Elderberry and Echinacea are great immune boosters, and Garlic, Onion, and Jalapeno are key ingredients in fire cider, a folk cold remedy.

For the remediation plants, I consulted the book 'Phyto' to see its recommendations for contaminants found in areas adjacent to roadways. It is really challenging to extract lead from the soil using plants. For these and other metals, the authors recommend instead focusing on erosion prevention so the lead does become airborne or waterborne. However, there are many plants that can break down any petroleum that runs off

into the site. I cross checked their list to identify plants that were also native to the Pacific Northwest and herbaceous (rather than trees). This led me to Little Bluestem and Canada Goldenrod (Kennen and Kirkwood, 2015).

Of course this project is and will continue to be emergent. This was an initial list for my and Anya's purposes, but we wanted to invite our neighbors and collaborators to bring what they wanted to the project. We have received donations of tomatoes, corn, beans, basil, and many others. Each week the garden weaves the resources and ideas of many different people.

**With our plants selected, we sketched out an initial planting plan.** Again our plan has continued to evolve with the input of our collaborators. Our initial plan included a central path through the garden with food plants on one side and medicinal plants on the other. That core design has remained, though the path orientation has changed and the tree placement has shifted north.

**Our initial work party** was one of the most inspiring experiences I have ever been a part of. We had been planning to downscale our plan, as we were anticipating needing to do grass removal manually, and we also did not have a clear plan for water access and the compost bill was adding up quickly. However, we got extremely lucky the day before our work party, that one of the neighbors had an excavator we could use. We were able to actually dig up the whole site and fifteen people showed up to help us. It was a wild experience of unexpected abundance, where people brought food, tools, and plants to share. KVAL even showed up and documented



our project. We have been building on this momentum with weekly work parties on Friday nights.

**This momentum makes me even more excited about the future possibilities** of this project. For the rest of this season, we are hoping to continue planting, adding signage for the plants, adding pavers along the path, and cover cropping unplanted areas to nourish the soil and prevent erosion. One of my classmates did her master's project on ollas, which are a clay pot irrigation system. Since they slowly release water into the soil over time, they could be a good option for us to test out on site. We can also start building out our distribution networks for sharing and processing the plants on site. The intention is for anyone to be able to harvest from the food and medicine in the garden. However we can also tie into existing programs for food and medicine distribution. We can donate materials to Black Thistle Street Aid and Herbalists without Borders to process and distribute. We can also process the medicine and food ourselves and bring it to the little free pantry nearby.

One thing I have learned from working in Herbalists without Borders is how important it is to combine education and distribution in health sovereignty work. I am excited for the momentum to host workshops, knowledge sharing, and other events at the Solidarity Garden. This way we can build capacity amongst our community in the growing and processing of food and medicine.

**I wanted to also share some of the resources for foraging best-practices** that I have learned through this process. I imagine that many of us are interested in being thoughtful and ethical about how we harvest from

our community garden space. Some of these resources may support us in having some common language around this. One of my favorite guides around urban foraging is one of the episodes on the Commonwealth Holistic Herbalism podcast on Urban Wildcrafting Ethics & Guidelines (Commonwealth Holistic Herbalism, 2019). They break down their guidelines into four categories: knowing the plant, knowing the land, knowing the community, and knowing yourself. In order to know the plant, one must know its life cycle, how to identify it, poisonous look-alikes, medicinal benefits, whether it is at-risk or endangered, ways we can help the plant thrive, how the plant changes over time, and when is the best time to harvest. Additional plant-centered ethics can include taking no more than 5% of what is available, harvesting based on the plant's needs, and asking the plant for permission (Harris, 2022; Berry, 2015). McLain et. al. (2014) describe several common ways in which foragers cultivate their relationships with the plants through being responsive to the plants over time, harvesting only a portion of what's available, tending individual plants or populations, pruning and propagating, removing invasive plants, and bringing in transplants to areas where the population is diminishing. Devon G. Peña writes in his chapter in *Indigenous Food Sovereignty in the United States* about the importance of learning the ecological or biodynamic roles of plants in addition to their cultural ones (Mihesuah and Hoover, 2019). Foragers can utilize this knowledge to inform which plants they harvest, how, and when.

In order to know the land, one must understand whether they have permission to harvest in a place, be aware of plant neighbors, know about possible sources of toxicity in the area, and know how the place changes

over the course of a year. They recommend to start by “wildcrafting for pictures” in order to get a sense of the place and its seasonal shifts. Others suggest to avoid areas prone to pollution, avoid plants along gutters and roads, avoid areas where dogs may have pooped and pesticides might be applied, and get familiar with local foraging regulations (DiBenedetto, 2020; Ahmed, 2020; Harris, 2022). Many of these recommendations are more relevant to wild harvesting than community gardens, but still good to keep in mind. To know the community also involves understanding who else is relying on this plant, including other humans, other animals, other plants, the soil, etc. And to know yourself means to be clear about your intention, your internal state, and how much you actually need (Commonwealth Holistic Herbalism, 2019). Lara Pachecho reminds us of the important addition of positionality in all of these considerations, and how people should “check-in with their inner colonizer” before harvesting, especially given the history of botanical extractivism at the hands of white settlers (Irvine, 2021).

**I want to close with sharing my immense gratitude for you all** and my overflowing excitement about this project. Anya, you are a brilliant visionary, organizer, and creator of community. Thank you for imagining this garden and sharing your vision with the rest of us. Thank you for encouraging me to jump in and take initiative around planting and planning for this space. Thank you for grounding us in the realities of the site and the challenges we might face, while simultaneously making connections that allow us to skirt around those challenges with apparent ease. Thank you to Sophie for connecting me with Anya and this project, for understanding me and my interests, and getting so deeply

and authentically excited when you find ways for me to connect with community around them. Thank you to [REDACTED] for being such enthusiastic and generous collaborators! It was beyond my imagination that we could have an excavator and additional soil for the site and it made the world of difference. Thank you to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and so many more for sharing your time, energy, love, and material resources, for setting up the signal and the Instagram and the signage, for taking parts of this project and running with them, adding your own flavor to the garden. I am so excited for the future of this space, so excited that it will be a part of NEST, and so glad you to be on this journey with you all.

In Solidarity,

Jenna







# A Letter to Future Landscape Architecture Students



Dear Future Student,

Welcome to the messy, hope-filled, purposeful, frustrating, and organic world of landscape architecture. If you currently, or within the next few months, find yourself immensely confused, lost, and doubtful, I want you to know that you are not alone. It was not until my third year of the MLA program that I found out that half of my cohort had considered dropping out at one point or another along the journey; I was not the only one. I think so many people come into landscape architecture wondering if it might finally be the home for the connective, multi-disciplinary, creative, earth-loving work that they have been dreaming of pursuing, and then they find that this house needs a lot of work. Especially if you are reading this letter, you are likely someone who cares deeply about engaged, relational, and community-centered work, as well as topics of intersectional justice, and you therefore may find yourself at one point or another worried about whether landscape architecture is fertile soil to be doing that. When you applied, maybe it seemed like the practice of the field was so focused on social and environmental justice, and the values were so in sync with yours, but now you find yourself surrounded by the history and ongoing patterns of classism and racism that are so embedded in this field, and every time you look for a job it seems like capitalism is hindering you from trying to step outside of these patterns. No wonder so many of us go through these minor existential crises.

I am writing this letter largely because my master's project methodology is all about relationship-building and I wanted to find a way of sharing what I have learned during my project in a more relational way that is



addressed to specific people or groups of people. Rather than having to read a whole long PDF document with sections that may or may not be relevant, you can get what is hopefully more tailored information from just a single letter (and of course feel free to read the rest of my project afterwards if you are interested). I did not invent this method of using letters as a form of content sharing alternative to academic prose written to no-one-in-particular. I was inspired by the incredible Shawn Wilson, Indigenous scholar and author of 'Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods.' In his book, several chapters are written as letters to his sons to ground the information sharing in relationships.

I am also writing this letter as there are lessons I have learned about working with relational methodologies as a landscape architecture student that I really want to share with you. It can be really confusing to understand how to engage in relational methodologies within our field: there is not a defined set of steps or list to check-off, nor do I think there should be. I hope that this discussion of my process can help you to reflect and ideate for yourself, to critique and build on and fill in to what I and others have done. And my last goal with this letter is that it provides you with some ideas for how you can find your own way in this program and how you can make decisions as you define your path from here.

I figured I might start by sharing my thoughts on why landscape architecture school can be so disorienting and also why I chose to stay. I, like many of my classmates, found out about landscape architecture through reading about high profile, super edgy projects. For me it was SCAPE. They were doing all of this radical oyster-tecture work and

ecological restoration that also looked at restoring social infrastructure: it was amazing. I thought: “If this is what landscape architects do, sign me up!” I only half listened when a few mentors warned me about the reality of the profession being more about beautifying parking lots than creating social and ecological resilience in the face of climate change. Not only are these fancy forward-thinking projects not actually the norm in many firms, but they have also yet to impact the pedagogy of landscape architecture schools. As an accredited program, landscape architecture departments have to adhere to the requirements of the Landscape Architecture Accreditation Board (LAAB). While their requirements have some flexibility, they establish a long laundry list of course requirements limiting the amount of room for diverse interests. As far as I am aware, there are no requirements relating to issues of justice, inequity, power, social systems, and interpersonal dynamics. Further, the fear that these accreditation reviews strike in faculty seems to be unparalleled. No wonder they feel limited to creatively re-imagine the curriculum, as doing so might risk losing accreditation. Yes, landscape architects need to have certain skills to be able to safely conduct their work, but it is outdated to believe that this just means technical skills.

If students do not come into landscape architecture because of inspirational projects, they often are attracted to the unique set of skills that landscape architects develop combining plants, ecology, construction, art, creative processes, environmental issues. In an era marked by climate chaos and biodiversity loss, it is no wonder so many of us want to be a part of creative and artistic and nature-based responses to these crises. The trouble is that, while yes landscape architects work

at this intersection of skills and topics, the application of those skills are often totally mismatched to the contemporary ambitions of students. And while landscape architecture departments often engage in critical systems-level discourse, they still frequently shy away from radical changes in practice, and instead stay complacent to systems of capitalism and private property. This largely has to do with the roots of the field being steeped in white supremacy and classism, serving the fancies of royalty and wealthy elite, as are many disciplines and fields of study in dominant western academia.

One of the hardest pieces of advice that I received while considering whether to stay or leave pointed to this very fact that landscape architecture is not unique in its complacency with patterns of injustice. My correspondent told me, they did not know of any MLA programs that engage with topics outside of white-dominated western science and that “it is up to you to bring into your own work methodologies and themes which push the potentialities of design outside of its current boundaries.” This was of course extremely discouraging at the time, but the underlying message has stayed with me. Most disciplines and departments have flaws and we need people in all of them doing the work of disruption and transformation.

I almost left the MLA program that I was in during my first year. I considered transferring and also applied to several PhD programs; I even got an offer at two of them. However, this advice about bringing in my own methodologies and themes was ringing in my brain, and I was noticing a personal pattern of always running to the next (and hopefully

better) thing. I wanted to try something different and see if I could make something work where I was, since I was going to have to confront the flaws and limitations of any program I went to, especially when it comes to topics of justice and decolonization. I was also fortunate that the process of talking to faculty at PhD programs elsewhere was actually exposing me to incredible faculty in other departments at the University of Oregon. Many of the PhD advisors I spoke with were surprised by my experience at UO because they did know of faculty at this university who were deeply immersed in feminist, Indigenous, and queer epistemologies - they just were not in the LA department. I drew optimism from knowing about these other faculty, hoping I could take their electives or otherwise seek out their mentorship, and decided to stay.

This decision led me down a journey that has been far from perfect, and has required a significant amount of extra effort, but has indeed provided me many of the learning experiences I was hoping for. I have reorganized my course plan to make room for an elective on ethnobotany. I struggled through my studios to create design work that adhered to my values, and I have worked through my master's project to take a non-traditional approach.

The rest of this letter focuses on some of my most cherished lessons from my journey as I pursued community- and justice-oriented work in landscape architecture school, especially within the context of my master's project. I hope that some of these may be helpful to you, or at the very least support you in knowing that you can create your path and seek out your own lessons in this program.

### ***Get Out of the Department***

Okay maybe this subtitle is a little dramatic and jarring. I do not necessarily mean you should drop out. But try spending some of your time outside of landscape architecture classes. It would be amazing if one department could address all of our academic interests, but usually that's not the case. Landscape architecture is a cross-disciplinary profession, but that does not mean that landscape architecture classes can teach you everything about everything; it's still important to actually go and learn from and with other disciplines. If there is one thing I would recommend to any other student it would be to take a classes in the Indigenous, Race, and Ethnic Studies department. Take as many as you can! If you are reading this and are a student at the University of Oregon, there are some really rad things happening in that department as well as the Environmental Studies, English, PPPM, and Global Studies departments. One of the most rewarding experiences I have had was to go outside of the department for my area-of-concentration courses. I was able to take an Indigenous Research Methods class with Professor Jennifer O'Neal, a Plants and People class with Professor Katie Lynch, and an Ocean Conservation class with Professor Stacy Alaimo. I found that it can be most helpful to take these classes earlier on so you have time to let their lessons soak in and inform your final comprehensive or master's project. But there is no "right" or "wrong" time to take them - if you are already doing your final project and have space in your schedule, take them before your graduate! (But also it is okay if you don't fit it all in; I wish I could have taken at least three or four more elective courses before graduating but I couldn't work it into my schedule. I hope that there will be some

continuing education opportunities for me to enroll in these kinds of courses as a non-matriculated student).

In addition to getting outside of the department for area-of-concentration and elective courses, it has been an important part of my journey to get involved in community on- and off-campus. During my first year of the program, I got involved with Sunrise Eugene - the local chapter of a national youth-led climate organizing movement. This was particularly nourishing for me, as I moved to Eugene from New York City in summer of 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and did not know anyone here. Being in Sunrise Eugene helped continue nurturing my activism flame (which had been sparked in Extinction Rebellion in NYC), helped ground me (and my early landscape architecture work) in local environmental politics, and connected me with some rad organizers. I also started volunteering at the Urban Farm early on in my studies at UO and building relationships with folks working there. This was fortified during my second and third years when several of us joined together to form the Save the Urban Farm coalition, now known as Students for the Urban Farm, to protect the farm from the impacts of the Knight Campus development.

I did not want my master's project to be solely anchored to what I personally want to see in the world, but to be anchored in what my community wants to see in the world; so joining in with local organizing spaces helped me to plug into larger movements, networks, and campaigns from early on. It helped me get a sense of the individuals and groups involved in different parts of environmental justice work

locally, how they are connected, and what are the political mechanisms for making change in a place like Eugene (especially given that it is very different from what I was used to in New York City!). The program where I received my MFA in Design instituted an assignment in the year after I graduated that required thesis students to incorporate volunteering in the project, as the department noticed how much richer and more grounded student work was when they were immersed in the systems they were studying. I know landscape architecture school is intensive, but this approach of volunteering is so worthwhile and can even lead to ideas and inspiration for your homework assignments. If you need to, you could even look into making it a part of an independent study so that it feels more formally incorporated into your curricular plan.

### ***Start Early, if Possible***

I knew going into my second year of the three-year track program that I wanted relationship building to be central to my master's project. And, as I had taken Indigenous Research Methods, as well as Design Research in my MFA program, and had several years of experience doing design research work, I was able to waive the two required Research Methods courses within the Landscape Architecture department. In place of these, I setup two independent study courses in the Winter and Spring terms of my second year to pursue the beginnings of relationship building. In these independent studies, I listed out the topics I was interested in and then researched the local and regional groups who are doing work in those spaces. I then drafted outreach emails, prioritized which groups I thought would be the best fits, and started getting in contact with them. It

was important to take this part slowly. I did not want to contact them all at once and then have to rescind offers of collaboration if I had too many to manage, so I contacted only one or two at a time. Starting this in the winter, then continuing in the spring and the summer, enabled me to have a rough sense of who I could work with by the time the fall term begun.

I want to recognize that it was a relatively special circumstance that I was able to set it up this way and carve out dedicated time for outreach by waiving two required courses. If you can make this work, that is amazing, but if you can't then I think there are ways you can still find flexibility and time. Is the current research methods professor willing to work with you to adapt the requirements and constraints of the course to fit your research approach? The more of us having these conversations with the faculty, the more space we can create for alternative approaches to final projects.

Worst case scenario is that you don't get to start early. Maybe it's not until the summer or fall that you can really start dedicating time to outreach and volunteering. It is okay for that to be a part of your process. In my opinion, it is okay if your whole project is relationship building. There are other departments that have dedicated staff who tend to relationships with community organizations and are able to act as a bridge between the organization and students. While there are a few faculty in our department who can offer it, it is not an established part of our department's operations and culture. It is not your fault that there is a lot of foundational work that needs to happen for your project to move forward. I am in deep gratitude to Jennifer O'Neal and Shawn Wilson for



teaching me that relationship building is research.

### *Go Slowly*

There are numerous ways to say it: “move at the speed of trust,” “move at the speed of relationships,” or just slow down. The department will likely expect you to have all of your questions and methods defined at the end of your second year and a research plan laid out for yourself for the following year. This, in my experience, is not how relational approaches to research actually work. It requires being much more flexible and non-prescriptive than this. Effectively, the starting research question is “what are the priorities and needs of the group that I am working with?” Other more specific questions will emerge as you build relationships with the people you are working with.

That being said, it still was a challenge to engage with the departmental processes with this level of open-endedness. People will inevitably want to know “what specifically you are doing.” In these circumstances, I found that it was clarifying to communicate some of the more tangible things I was doing, i.e. tending four garden spaces, creating workshop materials, research and acquiring plants, etc. These can be changing and evolving and not be pre-defined by you as the researcher, however offering these kinds of details can help ground your advisors and department in the nitty gritty of the project.

### *Immerse Yourself*

With most of my collaborators, I was and remain an outsider. This type of relationship holds a very important role for students, as that often is the

fundamental setup of cross-cultural and diverse partnerships. It did feel extremely helpful and stabilizing, though, for one of my relationships to be as a member of a group, rather than a collaborator with the group. For me, this occurred within my connection to Herbalists without Borders Eugene. They were actively looking for volunteers, and over the course of the last year I have become a member of the chapter. This meant that I was on all of the email and text message threads, I got to attend all of the events and meetings, and had a comprehensive insider understanding of all of the projects going on in the group. By contrast, with some of my other collaborators, I only have had glimpses into their different initiatives and events. Another large benefit of being immersed within HWB Eugene is that I have connections with multiple people in the group. This felt particularly helpful when one of my key contacts had to take some leave time and I could reach out to other members of the group to offer my assistance. With other groups I may only have one main contact and, if they get busy, I would lose my entire connection to the organization.

I think ideally students would be able to pursue a mix of both immersive and outsider relationships. Connecting to groups where I am an outsider, if they were interested in my doing so, allowed me to create relationships outside of my spheres of lived experience and be a co-conspirator in someone else's struggle. Meanwhile, being involved in Herbalists without Borders provided a sense of stability and continuity within my project. In times where other groups got busy or became distant, I did not have to worry that I no longer had a project; I had multiple groups I was working with and some of them I was deeply embedded within.

### *Take Time for the Grout Work*

When you are prioritizing relationships in an academic project, there are so many tasks and activities that may not typically be categorized as the role of a landscape architect (or whatever your field of study is). But these were the tasks that held my project together and made the more design-focused work possible. They were the unglamorous connective medium, or the “grout,” of my project.

Meetings and emails were one of these types of tasks, as communication, outreach, and listening were all so critical to relationship building. Also, attending events with the people you are working with - even if they do not seem directly relevant to your project - is a key form of this grout work. For example, within Herbalists without Borders, I could have “stayed in my lane” as a landscape architect and only showed up when something was happening with the garden space. But I knew that not only was learning about medicine making key to my understanding of medicine growing, but also that these types of events allowed me to strengthen my connection with my collaborators. This is how I was able to meet other members of the group and achieve that sense of immersion.

In order to make room for doing the grout tasks, a key “innovation” of my project was to define a mission statement, rather than a research objective. That way, anything that I could link to supporting people in accessing and maintaining medicinal landscapes could qualify as masters project work, from emails to workshops to learning Spanish.

*Practice Multidirectional Learning*

To some extent, I knew coming into this project that it was important to recognize many types of experts and that someone does not need to have written a book to be considered an expert on something. But I appreciated how this was reinforced throughout my journey.

At one point during my project, I connected with Jen Surdyk, owner of Queen of Swords botanical goods, and she shared an article with me on food and health sovereignty work with low-income folks. The article critiques a dominant narrative that low-income communities need to be educated on nutritious foods, and instead highlights research that shows that these communities know about and value nutrition but face the barrier of cost (Prasertong, 2023). Relatedly, it felt really helpful for me to attend the Solidarity Share Fair event with Herbalists without Borders and hear from the folks there that they know what they need in terms of herbal support, vitamins, and minerals but cannot always afford or access it. Without these reminders, I may have risked edging too far into education with my project. Instead, I understand that many people who might be accessing this garden know the plants and their benefits and just need more places to harvest them safely.

Another place where this came up is in working with Mujeres del Huerto. I was invited to attend some of their gatherings and to start helping out with their garden plot. During one of our meetings, they asked me if I would be willing to host some workshops on garden design and organic maintenance. Some of them were very new to gardening and so there were perhaps things I could share with them, while others had

significant experience. Given the differing levels of experience within the group, it seems important for these workshops to be more of communal skill-sharing rather than unidirectional dictation. In other words, these workshops should function more as spaces for them to share what they know with each other, rather than for me to share my knowledge with them. I can learn from other Herbalists without Borders members about this, as they frequently bring this approach to our herbalism workshops through including many prompts and questions for our workshop attendees to share what they know and how they currently work with the different plants.

### *Engage in Deep Caring*

I grew up in a culture where it was not the norm to deeply engage with other people's problems and challenges. Maybe you offered your condolences, but otherwise went about the interaction as if everything was normal. So it has been a lot of very personal work for me to shift those behaviors and conditioning during this journey of relationship building, to slow down, and actually engage with other people as humans.

Some steps have been easier than others. For example, learning from my collaborators about how you show up to a gathering and what you bring with you has been very inspiring. Having a airpot with tea and herbal medicine in abundance to share are small gestures of humanizing experiences where someone is offering you aid. During one of our early work parties, Tree from Herbalists without Borders sent me home with Tulsi and Yarrow hydrosols and a lavender oil roller to support my school stress. Later, at a garden work party in early winter, she brought a pot of

hot chai tea and calendula balms for all of the volunteers. Similarly, Julia from Mujeres del Huerto has shared that she always brings café y pancito to any work party or meeting of the Mujeres. I started to understand these as the “tools of a community herbalist,” and started to build out my own, investing in an airpot and sharing fire cider and infused oils with people who have helped me.

Beyond these tangible offerings, the work of deep caring can be a lot more vague and nonlinear. Generally, being trained in trauma-informed approaches seems highly valuable, as that supports you in showing up with people who have had physically or emotionally traumatic experiences, and, from my experience, people who are struggling with many mental health issues. This was actually one of Gatlin’s (from Huerto de la Familia) earliest recommendations for me: in addition to studying Spanish and learning about Latine herbalism, she advised me to read up on trauma informed care. Lara Pachecho recommends that the foundation of trauma-informed care is to show up without an agenda and listen to what people are needing and wanting (Irvine, 2021). Herbalists without Borders has historically offered trauma trainings and is planning to host some more online trainings this year.

One of the most potent examples of this learning has been in responding to two cancer diagnoses within my collaboration community. As these are still new relationships, I do not know what they might want or need, I do not know that much about cancer treatment. What would be appropriate of me to offer? I have not found the answers to this question yet, but I think the processing of questioning is a first step on my journey.

***Roll with the “No’s”***

It has been incredible to get to work with so many incredible groups over the course of this project. There were also many groups that I reached out to who did not end up having capacity. Some knew that from the start, while others were optimistic that we could collaborate but then ended up drifting away. It was hard to maintain an abundance mindset during the periods of disconnection. But I also did not want to put undue pressure on people to work with me, as not only is that not aligned with values of respect and reciprocity, it is also not aligned with trauma-informed care. I did a lot of practicing both inviting in and letting go over the past year. As I mentioned before, establishing close connections with one group made this fluctuation with other groups more manageable.

Beyond having groups share that they are at capacity, or simply stop replying to my messages, I also had some experiences that were in-the-middle between close relationship and ceased relationship, where I was partnering with groups but having to make decisions while have unanswered questions and not hearing back from my collaborators. It was hard to navigate when I felt I had enough input that it was appropriate to move forward and when I needed to just wait until I heard back. This occurred the most when I was working on planting plans and ordering seeds. The nice thing about garden-scale work, is that it is easy to change. If I plant something and people do not like it, we can revisit it the next season. This is not always the case in landscape architecture work, and so different approaches should be taken depending on the scale of impact. But even with plants, I did not want to plant things that we solely based on my decisions. I needed to get the input of Herbalists

without Borders, Mujeres del Huerto, Black Thistle Street Aid, the Tibetan Student Association, and the Vietnamese Student association before ordering plants for their respective garden spaces. I struggled with how to do this and also be able to get seeds or plants in time for this coming season. For several of the gardens, I ended up taking a hybrid approach where I had some specific input, but then ended up supplementing it with my own research. For example, with Mujeres del Huerto, they asked for six specific plants. I included these alongside a fire cider bed and other Latine medicinal plants that I had been researching. With Black Thistle Street Aid (for the Solidarity Garden), I got a list of six specific plants also. I combined this with my own research on plants for supporting unhoused folks with first aid, nutrition, food, stress, and immune support, and shared this with my collaborator in Stop the Sweeps for her feedback.

*Spend Time Thinking about Documentation*

Margaret Kovach (2021) describes the importance of documenting research in a way that centers the needs of the community you are working with. It is puzzling to think about how rarely that looks like a standard research report. Whether it is a pamphlet, website, video, cookbook, or something else entirely, community-driven documentation is likely to feel in tension with departmental requirements. I found it critical to my process to dedicate time to reflecting on and mapping out how I wanted to center community needs in my documentation while satisfying the departmental requirements. This had led me to work with five main types of relational documentation.

First is the creation of context-specific educational materials like



pamphlets and workshop outlines with Herbalists without Borders and Mujeres del Huerto. These are materials that they have directly asked me for, and I have used my time and graphic training to produce. These will help to disseminate information about our garden plots in the spirit of free public herbal education.

The next two forms of relational documentation that I have been experimenting with are medicine making and garden work parties. These are both forms of corporeal documentation, where the spirit and emerging nature of plants and place is being documented into our minds and bodies. People learn about the plants, the garden, the medicine, and their roles in those relationships through embodied practice that they can physically remember and share with others. The fact visitors to the Urban Farm Fest made plantain tea bags with me using plantain harvested from transplanted Back 40 soil at the riverside, establishes a unique connection and understanding between them, my project, the plants, and the landscapes where the plants are from.

The fourth type of relational documentation is grant writing. Early on in my project, when trying to identify ways I might document the project that could tangibly benefit the people I was working on, I thought about how grant writing often requires similar types of writing to master's projects. For example, both often include some at least quasi-academic documentation of the impact and benefits of the work you are doing. I unfortunately ran out of time to see this through. However, I hope to re-use my writing and research for this purpose as I continue to work with each of these groups.

The fifth form was strongly inspired by Shawn Wilson and how he framed his book. To embed relationality in his writing, he structures several of his chapters as letters to his sons. I wanted to humbly learn from his practice and offer my written project documentation as a series of letters, such as this one, directed to different audiences.

***Consider a Wide Range of Relationships***

I was initially focused on learning about relationship building with community partners and this has been the main focus of my project, but it also has been important to reflect on how to navigate my relationship with this institution and, just like with humans, how to build slow, respectful, and mutually beneficial relationships with the medicinal plants.

As part of my self-teaching in medicine-making, I wanted to learn how to make the herbal medicines that I currently rely on. In an herbal mentorship with Madeleine Keller, they recommended I start by tending relationships with just one or a few herbs, before trying to jump to blending tinctures together. This guidance from them resonated deeply, as it echoed the process I had been working on throughout the rest of this master's project. Just like with humans, we need to cultivate slow, thoughtful, and respectful relationships with the plants we are working with, and there are a few reasons why. This approach helps me better understand the plant, better understand myself, and better understand how we interact. In other words, it led to my ability to create better medicine if I focused on and deeply understood how my body responds to each plant. In addition to this, building slow relationships with plants is a huge part of most foraging protocols, as it leads to more ethical,

reciprocal, and ecological practices of harvesting. Related to this, the paradigm shift of relationship-building with plants helps us to shift towards more therapeutic relationships rather than commodified ones. It is easy to fall in the trap of replacing commodified practices of buying and taking pills with buying and taking random herbal supplements. Langwick (2018) describes how, in medicinal gardens, “[p]lants are not only agents with active ingredients. . . [they are] not only resources to be capitalized on. . . [they are] collaborators in the making of nourishing and nourished spaces. . . pockets where people and plants mutually reinforce the cultivation of vitalities.”

### *Closing Thoughts*

Relationship building can take a lot of temporal and emotional work, but it is worth it. I want to close with an example story of how I have gotten to know folks at Huerto de la Familia and what their response to my work has been. I reached out to Gatlin, who was our contact within Huerto at Herbalists without Borders. She asked me more about my project and process and was encouraging of my approach to offer labor open-endedly. She shared with me how often Huerto de la Familia gets researchers contacting them just to get a quote for their paper, without actually offering any support directly to the organization and their wider community. From here, Gatlin connected me with Elva who works in the garden program and Julia who works in the mental health program. She also recommended that I could start weeding a plot for the Mujeres del Huerto, a program that provides resources and services to women who have experienced domestic violence. Over the last several months

I have been removing grass from this plot. Julia also invited me to meet with her and three of the mujeres to talk about the garden. Their names are intentionally confidential. I also started to see Elva more at the garden, and got to work with her and Esme, another garden program staff member, on a fire cider workshop with Herbalists without Borders. I have also been delighted at how many of the gardeners, like Irlanda and Noel, have stopped by to say hello and share with me about what they are planting when I am doing work at the Skinner City Garden plot. I recently learned that the coordinator of the Mujeres del Huerto group is dealing with a medical emergency and so this garden is on hold until her return. Instead, Gatlin has generously offered to support me in shifting my project to take the seeds and starts I have been acquiring for the Mujeres garden and grow them out in Huerto's greenhouse and medicinal raised beds at the Churchill Community Garden. These plants will then be distributed to the Mujeres or other members of Huerto. I will be continuing this work in a volunteer capacity over the summer.

I hope that some of these approaches and lessons are relevant and interesting to you. I know I focused on relationship-building approaches in this letter. If you happen to be interested in medicinal landscapes or any other part of my project that I did not address in the letter, please contact me and we can find a time to talk about it together! Writing even this customized letter has its downsides, as the writing becomes stagnant and does not change as I continue to change and learn. For this reason, I am very open to the idea of having conversations about this work so I can share my reflections as they inevitably evolve.

I want to wish you the best of luck in your projects and encourage you to keep going through the obstacles that may come up for you (though of course please also rest and take care of yourself!). We need you and the brilliant work that comes from your mind and heart.

Sincerest regards,

Jenna





# Conclusion





*Chamomile blossoming at Herbalists without Borders plot*



*Corn growing at Herbalists without Borders plot*

It feels difficult to articulate a “conclusion” for this project, as the process of continuance, rather than conclusion, seems more appropriate for the project and the relational methodology. This work will not end here. I will continue to be a part of Herbalists without Borders Eugene, working on workshops and the garden as well as other new ideas that emerged over the course of this project. I will be volunteering with Huerto de la Familia for at least the rest of the summer, but hope that this is the beginning of an ongoing relationship as well. We recently onboarded a new group of students to head up the Students for the Urban Farm (formerly Save the Urban Farm) and they are energized and excited to build on the work we have been doing. I intend to

be available to them in any support they might need from me. The momentum of the Solidarity Garden seems to just keep growing, as we continue to have 10-15 people at the work parties each week, and I plan on being one of them. And for cultural diversity at the Urban Farm? It seems like that will continue too. There will be more tending to do of the Tibetan plants and I just ordered some Vietnamese plants to put in with Minh and her mom. Harper and Jennifer O’Neal had a chance to connect at the presentations and plan to have Harper visit Professor O’Neal’s classes. Harper said that there will be a Jenna-sized hole at the Urban Farm after I graduate. But I do not think I am ready for that yet. At the very least, I hope to return frequently, as this



place is near and dear to my heart. I sincerely hope that all of the relationships in my relational diagram continue to deepen and branch out.

There are also several letters that I have not had the chance to complete yet and thus are not included in this report. These include letters to the Tibetan and Vietnamese Student Association, to my advisors and mentors, and to the landscape architecture faculty. I plan to work on those over the coming weeks so that I can fulfill my relational documentation vision.

Another important act of continuance is the process of seed harvesting, saving, and sharing. The benefits that many of the gardens have to offer in terms of health sovereignty largely rely on the continual distribution of seeds and transplants. Later in the year, when the plants are ready, we will harvest seed and share it with the appropriate communities.

In addition to this continuance, there are other questions that I would love to explore that I had not gotten a chance to within this past year. I had mentioned grants as a form of relational documentation and had intended to find and even apply for grants applicable to the different groups I am working with. I hope that the writing and research I have done can eventually be repurposed as part of a grant application and

would be thrilled to help my collaborators with this. I also learned during this project about the current state of culturally-relevant food within the food banks run by FOOD for Lane County and Huerto de la Familia. COVID-era grants that supported the acquisition of more culturally-relevant foods are running out and it sounds like the folks in charge of those programs are trying to determine their next steps. I would love to hear more about what they are considering and whether they need any assistance with this. An unexplored thread of the Solidarity Garden was to identify other plots within Eugene similar to this one that could be turned into a community garden space. This would likely involve some combination of GIS and on-the-ground research, and I would be eager to assist with this work. Finally, there is so much more work for me to do in terms of continuing to build relationships with Native communities so that these methods that I am learning about can actually benefit them. I am looking forward to continue connecting with Professor O'Neal, reaching out to Eagletree Herbs through Herbalists without Borders, and attending events at the UO Longhouse to offer my support and allyship to the Indigenous community in Eugene.

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