Welcome back to our walk through the woods!

We hope our talk on toxicity and plant lookalikes from our last lesson hasn’t deterred you from going out there and getting your foraging groove on.

The world of wild plants is bountiful and can provide us with healing and nourishment, but it’s important to know that not all wild plants are harmless. As the saying goes: “There are old foragers and there are bold foragers, but there are no old and bold foragers!”

HERB 10: Skunk Cabbage

Wild Rose College Of Natural Healing
Today, we encounter one of those plants that’s a bit of an odd duck... We think skunk cabbage (*Lysichiton americanus*) has a lot to teach us about the way we show up in the world.

Skunk cabbage is another one of these interesting wild plants that should be approached with respect, as with many other herbs with a rich folkloric heritage as a sacred herb among First Nations. It’s one of the oldest herbs in the forest here, with some species of skunk cabbage being over several hundred thousand years old.

Curious? Come along with us and discover skunk cabbage with Terry and Yarrow in today’s video.

**FAMILY:** Araceae (Arum)  
**PART(S) USED:** Roots and rhizomes  
**WHERE DO YOU FIND SKUNK CABBAGE?**  
Skunk cabbage favors riverbeds, marshy habitats, and forest understories.  
You’ll find skunk cabbage throughout North American wetlands.  
**HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY SKUNK CABBAGE?**  
Skunk cabbage is one of the first plants to appear in the early spring thanks to its ability for thermogenesis to warm up the ground around it. Like other primitive plants, it is able to orchestrate internal temperature control.

Leaves are large and very green. They disperse a skunky smell when crushed.
Flowers are on the spadix, surrounded by a bright yellow spathe. Skunk cabbage’s large yellow flower is one of the first signs of spring.

**THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS OF SKUNK CABBAGE**

The part we like to use medicinally is the skunk cabbage roots and rhizomes. Like Yarrow explains in today’s video, the roots are ropey, spaghetti-like (some herbalists have even used the words “squid” or “octopus” to describe them!)

The massive cabbage-like leaves should not be consumed as they can cause rashes in the mouth and otherwise burn mucosal tissues.

**BENEFITS:** Skunk cabbage root is not used in clinical settings, but it’s known to act as a decongestant to help clear stagnation.

**MAIN PROPERTIES:** Antispasmodic, broncho-dilator and bronchial decongestant, expectorant

**HOW DO YOU USE SKUNK CABBAGE?**

Bears eat skunk cabbage in the spring to assist with cleansing and to decongest the body post-hibernation.

For therapeutic uses, skunk cabbage roots are used as an alternative to lobelia in asthma attacks or bronchitis, to act as broncho-dilator and antispasmodic. When we look at where skunk cabbage likes to grow (swampy, stagnant environments), we see the action it may have in helping clear stagnation from the body - such as the lungs.

Skunk cabbage preparations may also help clear stagnation from depression and other mental states, considering it contains serotonin and has been used to bring about change in our neurochemistry.

But we look to skunk cabbage roots for the ancestral wisdom it possesses and what it can teach us about the way we show up in the world.

Skunk cabbage medicine lends itself well to drop dosing, or using about 1-2 drops of tincture per day (as opposed to the usual dropperfuls).

Skunk cabbage is an old and wise plant. Even if you don’t harvest its roots and consume it, you can learn and gain a lot from being with it and connecting with it out in the wild.