Hello again! There’s one week left for our month-long foraging expedition with you, and we have some great herbal allies to meet still.

Have you been noticing cow parsnip, skunk cabbage, and fir tips growing near you since our last few lessons?

Going on a herb walk this month has made us reconnect with all these herbs and also with their whole plant community.

Today, we encounter an old-time favorite: horsetail (Equisetum arvense). When we say it’s and old-time favorite, we really mean it. Horsetail is one of the most ancestral elders here on earth, and is considered a living fossil.

Horsetail is the last remaining member of its spore-producing plant family, which proliferated during the Carboniferous Period.
The Carboniferous Period spanned a total of 60 million years, about 300 million years ago, during the late Paleozoic Era.

Like Dr Terry says in today’s video, at one time these horsetails were as tall as the cedars we find on the coast, growing as high as ninety feet, in ancient tropical forests of horsetail trees.

Horsetail leaves are reminiscent of this era: similar to fir tips, which we explored in our last lesson, horsetail’s leaves are stiff and conifer-like. But we’re getting ahead of ourselves! Ready? Let’s dive right into horsetail.

**FAMILY:** Equisetaceae

**PART(S) USED:** Aerial parts

**WHERE DO YOU FIND HORSETAIL?**

Horsetail is commonly found in moist and shallow aquatic habitats, wet grasslands, marshes, and ditches.

**HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY HORSE TAIL?**

Horsetail is a perennial plant with jointed, branched, creeping root stocks.

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**Horsetail is the last remaining member of its spore-producing plant family, which proliferated during the Carboniferous Period.**

The aerial stems are jointed with scale-like leaves at the nodes, which are encased in a toothed sheath.

The internodes are hollow, which branches whorled from the nodes when present.
Therapeutic Benefits of Horsetail

When it comes to the therapeutic benefits of horsetail, it might be helpful to revisit the doctrine of signatures, which we delved into on May 6 during our lesson on cleavers.

In today’s video, Yarrow points out how horsetail is shaped almost like a spine, with little discs or rings along the stem like vertebrae.

Indeed, horsetail has a strong therapeutic affinity with the musculoskeletal system: bones, muscles, cartilage, tendons, ligaments, joints, and connective tissue.

Benefits: As a connective tissue tonic, horsetail provides silica among many other minerals and nutrients. This benefits both the musculoskeletal system and the urinary system, since horsetail strengthens the connective tissue of the bladder and acts as a diuretic and kidney tonic.

Horsetail also supports elasticity of blood vessels along with the health of the hair, skin, and nails thanks to its effect on collagen and elastin.

Main properties: connective tissue tonic, mineral-rich, kidney tonic, diuretic

How Do You Use Horsetail?

Aerial parts of horsetail should be harvested in the spring as opposed to later in the season - if you plan on using horsetail internally - because its silica content can become too concentrated and hard on the kidneys.

Use spring horsetail as a herbal tea to alkalize the joints and support kidney health.

Horsetail is also a great herb to use for hair health, used as a cold infusion as a hair rinse.

To extract a wide range of minerals from horsetail, extract it in organic apple cider vinegar.

Horsetail can also be dried and powdered, used externally as a compress or poultice for wound healing.

This spring, spend some time in the company of horsetail - it’s a herbal elder that has a lot of wisdom to share.