

# Demystify Your Medicine: Early winter Tree workings & welcoming the returning light.



## Yule: *The light half*

**It may seem dark, it may be bitter cold, we may only see life ceased around us as it sleeps under layers of ice and snow. But something is soon to happen. The longest & darkest night will be upon us here in the northern hemisphere. In this people often despair, they feel & fear alike these dark times will never end. But the very next Sunrise Grandmother Sun is happy to show her children they are wrong. You see she stays in the sky offering her gentle warmth a few moments longer each day with the passing of winter solstice. In this we are stepping daily into the light half of the year. We collect these precious moments of light, slowly but surely like the first drip of spring thaw and before we know it we are ready to bloom. The darkness will subside, I promise.**

I know, I know, We are just beginning a long cold winter & I can't tell you how often I am asked by budding herbalists & veterans alike "What do we do during the winter when nothing is alive outside?" the answer is always a question in return "Who told you that everything is dead outside?" to get them thinking on a larger scale of what is living. You see many feel this way because the life they are referring to, the tender green hues of our seasonal allies are often the only ones many think of & are often the only ones given reverence to. This rather folks realize it or not has a lot to do with the mental romanticization many have of herbalists, some woman in a long flowy dress in a warm sunny field full of blooms. I could rant on about how damaging this image is & how grossly social media happily plays into it because spirituality sells but I only have so many pages I can type here!

But no my friends I promise you there is still a thriving community of Plant allies that are just waiting for us to remember them. They are the mighty Conifer Tree people & they have so much to offer. It is no coincidence that the symbol of Yule is a Conifer Tree brought in from the cold & adorned with beautiful offerings or that this was one tradition that was kept in place as Christians appropriated the practice of Yule in an attempt to make their religion more familiar to the colonized Europeans.

These trees represent light, so we string them with light. These trees represent nourishment in dark times, so we drape them in dried fruits and popped corn. These trees offer the gift of home, so we place offerings of hope gifted to others at the base of their trunks. These trees offer warmth, healing & wide eyed wonder. These trees make a promise that the light will return, is returning. Is it really any wonder humans have been bringing these mighty allies into their homes for a milenia in one form or another?



## Walking Amongst The Towering Ones

It is so easy to overlook these mighty allies as our gaze can never take them in fully unless we are far away or they are quite young. Also trees are such a constant thing, I mean they never really go away. They are always just there, so it's very easy to see why we may only really notice them in the spring when they show us the first signs of hope with swollen green leaf buds or come fall they set ablaze with vibrant fire like colors! But these are not Conifers, you see Conifer is a word that represents a vast family of trees that all have one thing in common, they produce cones and primarily don't lose their needles. That is to say they stay "evergreen" which is another common name for them!

The fantastic thing about Conifers is that there is almost nowhere in the world they do not grow naturally & in those places humans have introduced them! What a perfect green ally for our focus!

Think, where do you know of such a tree at this very moment? Maybe outside in your very own yard, maybe in a park, maybe along a river way, maybe you see a large and wild stand every single day as you drive to work or maybe you park under a lone Pine just oozing with pitch! Either way they are there, they are offering healing, they are waiting for you to look up, look closer, to remember they are here for you in the dark times! While the species that are labeled with the word Conifer are many most have the same healing to offer us in the winter, her pitch & needles!

Pitch, also called sap or resin. It is that substance you just can't get off your hands after venturing into the forest or hauling in fire wood (psst...Olive oil will get it off of your skin!). It is essentially the life force of the tree, her blood if you will. It is what she use to heal wounds and It can indeed be harvested year round despite what many believe without hurting the tree. As long as in the winter you are only harvesting crystallized pitch, meaning the really hard stuff that looks similar to amber! Pitch is a serious antibacterial as well as an antifungal this is why she is an excellent choice to add to our infusing oils!

The needles of Conifers are all high in vitamin C but none so much as the lime green tips that the mighty Spruce family push out in late winter/early spring. I have seen tips push out as early as February at 7,000 feet elevation! We look to the Spruce to whisper about spring, Pine/Spruce needle infused oil is awesome for sore muscles, breast health, chest congestion, anti inflammatory, wound healing and as a lovely smelling perfume oil!

Some Conifers have very specific uses such as Cedar trees, yes Cedar is a Conifer! She is amazing for opening up stuffy lungs by simply boiling her branches in a pot of water and inhaling in the steam. This is as simple as placing a large towel over our head and then over the steaming pot. Don't burn yourself! This done 2-3 times a day can really loosen up our airways from mucus! I will also infuse oil with her boughs as a chest rub!

Most\* Conifers are safe to use internally but it is important to remember that these are indeed plants and each tree is a type of plant. Like any other plant it is important to confidently ID what Conifer you are working with before deciding to ingest her in the form of tea or a tasty infused vinegar that helps fight colds! Don't feel intimidated here identifying Conifer trees is really a lot easier than most other plant allies as they are so well documented.

But there is something else the mighty Conifers can offer us that is not a Conifer at all. Lichen, Conifers are often the host of Lichen! One in particular known as Usnea a fruticose Lichen but you may call her Old man's beard, Moose moss, Tree moss, Wizards moss & beyond! She is actually not a moss at all but a symbiotic relationship between an algae & a fungus that thrives only in clean air & loves to call conifers her home. Odds are good you have seen these beautiful pastel green tufts of healing hanging from the branches of trees. Much like the Conifers she offers amazing antibacterial, antiviral, antifungal properties and beyond. I feel like she makes an amazing addition to any Conifer based healing salve as they already have a working relationship with one another! But you can also make an Usnea tincture (my go to for strep throat!), or even a powder to add directly to salves or put on minor wounds to help stop bleeding as she is packed with silica! There are over 600 varieties of Usnea Lichen across the world & almost all are used interchangeably! This is awesome news as it's very likely you will find her right alongside your Conifers!



**Mighty Conifers ask us to look to her, to the healing they offer as we wait for the returning Sun.**

*A simple Conifer infused oil can be a powerful tool to have on hand & it is so very easy I promise you are ready to do this!*

*First find yourself an evergreen tree & figure on who she is. Is she a Pine or a Fir? Either will work just fine!*

*Next select a low hanging branch that looks healthy. With a strong pair of scissors begin cutting away the branch from the front working your way to the back right into your jar. Thin pieces of stems & all not just needles.*

*Now walk around her trunk or near by trees trunks looking for pitch. Did you find some? Good! Collect a good amount & bring it home to powder it up (a plastic bag wrapped in a towel + hammer makes quick work & easy cleanup) now add this powder to your jar.*

*Did you find some Usnea? Go ahead & cut her up a bit then put her in the jar too!*

*Then add your oil of choice (but avoid extra virgin olive oil, it goes rancid easily) filling the jar up to the very brim to prevent oxidation! Cap, label, set in cool dry place for 6 weeks max.*

*After straining you can use this as a serum or thicken her up to make a nice salve great for basically any skin issue you or a loved one is having.*

*Put your oil, about 2 cups into a double boiler add 1 cup of beeswax to the oil, turn your burner onto about med-low & wait for the water to heat the oil which melts the wax. Stirring now & then. Once it fully melts let it set there still heating for another 5 mins, this makes for a smoother salve texture! Then carefully pour your hot mixture into tins & allow to cool! Just like that you have a TON of safe simple plant medicine to help get you through the winter!*



## Allowing ourselves to move into light returned

The thing is we were created in the dark we so often run from, we figure warmth giving light is the only way to foster life giving growth. But our mother's womb knew differently as we developed in those dark salty emotion filled waters. Our bodies still know how much the dark is needed, as we mainly heal in our sleep. But after the dark there is light, from the very first time we open our eyes to each morning greeted. So if not for the dark we could never move into the light.

So in these nights that many wish were still hot and sultry summer dreams it is important that we face the cold, our now, our hurts, challenges, doubts and nightmares alike. Because as Grandmother Sun slowly climbs up into that sky hanging on just a little longer each evening the seeds of change we plant now grow stronger. Soon these seeds swell, crack and root deeply. You see roots of mighty beings do their growing in these dark times, in these depleted times where going deeper and looking harder for what we need is vital for survival.

Just ask the mighty Conifer and she will smile knowingly.

But these times are also vital to growing dreams, for beginning the reality of new paths claimed. One step taken into the returning light at a time with hope and optimism now will lead us into the brightest spring our tired eyes have ever seen. So my dear friends I hope to see you on this path of facing terrors and fostering dreams in this season of deep rooted growth, Because the path is so much smoother when many feet walk upon it.

## The Magic of Conifers

*While these amazing plant allies can heal us deeply on psychical levels they can also do so much for us on a spiritual level. Our ancestors no matter what culture(s) they came from have used their smoke, scented oils and resins for purification and beyond.*

**Cedar**~ In all of her compassion smudging with her helps us wash away excess emotions that we are carrying around so often in these dark times. Especially helpful for those who have a tendency to hold on to our feelings of a situation to the point it does more harm than good. A personal ally of mine I smudge myself often with her as well as use her with steam. She also aids with helping us maintain focus on what truly matters, which I feel is directly related in how she aids us in letting go of excess emotions.

**Spruce**~ He is one of the few plant allies I see as a he! In his masculinity he strives to be fierce protector not afraid to draw blood. Which really is no surprise to anyone who has bumped into his razor sharp needles, his energy is that of the protective father, husband, brother. In this he has a special affinity for mothers and children helping to block out the energies that would do us harm. I have always felt this is why spruce oil is an amazing breast health ally. But he is also the keeper of old knowings and I utilize his burning resins when doing ancestor work, especially in these dark times when the extra protection is needed.

**Pine**~ She is many but they often stand as one, in this her energy is all about community. Calling in the help we may be needing rather we know it our not! She deeply cleans areas of old stagnant energy that often keeps us feeling stagnant, in this she makes space for inspiration. In this inspiration we often find ourselves thriving in ways we could never imagine. She is deeply linked to rebirth of self which is really what Yule is all about. So it's no surprise that burning a pine log and collecting the ash on the darkest night to use her throughout the coming year is common practice. In her burning we release her to the returning fire, the returning light of rebirth, the returning light of self. I have never not burned a pine branch/log during yule as this ash is vital to me. I also use the remaining charcoal in specific pine salves to make a drawing to really pull out deep seeded energy that is holding me back.



## Grandma Audrey's Celtic Solstice Cakes

*These little cakes make me feel safe, for me they are a sincere comfort food that hold the highest magic. A Grandmas promise the Sun will return tomorrow! Traditionally we were given these cakes just before bed on the darkest night of the year to keep us safe in the dream lands.*

Ingredients:  
1 stick butter, room temp  
2/3 cup sugar  
2 eggs, beaten  
1/2 tsp vanilla extract  
Zest of one Orange  
3/4 tsp baking powder  
1 1/4 cups flour  
1 TBSP milk  
1/3 cup golden Currants

*Cream the butter and sugar together until light and fluffy. Beat in the eggs, vanilla, and orange zest. Sieve the baking powder and flour together and add to the butter mixture. Add a little milk to create batter of dropping consistency. Fold in the currants and spoon the mixture into well-greased muffin cups.*

*Bake at 375 F for 25 minutes. Serve with a good smearing of Spruce needle icing!*

**Spruce Needle Icing:**  
2-3 TBSP fresh Spruce tip needles  
1/4 tsp Vanilla extract  
1 tsp Lemon zest  
1/4 cup heavy whipping cream  
1- 1/4 cup powdered sugar (less if you want it thinner, more like a glaze.)

*Remove fresh needles from branch so there is nothing but green, place in food processor or coffee grinder, blend as finely as possible. Add in your zest & Vanilla, blend well. Slowly add in 1/4 cup of your sugar 1 TBSP at a time until a paste forms. Place Spruce paste in bowl & add in the remaining sugar/cream until desired consistency. Chill and spread on your cooled little solstice cakes! Tip: Taste the Spruce you are going to use if he is very strong tasting scale back the amount of needles used!*



## Inviting Conifers into our homes

This is the time of year that hundreds and thousands of people world wide bring a tree into their home, many celebrate Christmas but some such as myself and I suspect a few that are reading these words are celebrating Yule. That is to say the winter solstice, we know by bringing these trees into our homes that we are not just inviting in the promise of light returned and hope given but a plant ally that wants to heal us.

That's right no matter the reason you bring a tree into your home or what it may or may not mean to you if she is real she can offer you healing well into the springtime. But there are some things to consider here when choosing.

The first thing I want to put out here is that choosing a plastic tree does not help preserve our forests. Actually it helps harm our lands as plastic is pumped out by the metric ton daily to produce these trees this time of year and demand equals output. But did you know that if someone is going to harvest Yule/Christmas trees rather it be one or many they are required to purchase a Yule/Christmas tree permit and that every dime paid goes directly into forest restoration within your state? Mainly the replanting of trees come spring which is deeply needed with all of the devastating fires.

So when you opt into buy a tree cut from the wild a few things occur. One you support your local lands, two you support an individual i.e small business owner in your area, three you purchase a renewable resources versus a plastic product that will no matter what you tell yourself end up in a landfill for an eternity, four you have a supply of safe untainted 100% wild Conifer medicine to use in your workings!

That last bit for us walking this wise womans path in some ways is the most important! Because all too often the live trees that you buy from a local chain store have been shipped in from a tree farm and do you know what farms do? The fertilize and spray with pesticides to ensure their crops are profitable, because of this it's not a good idea to use these trees for internal or external medicine. However if you have a local tree farm you may be able to ask them about their fertilizing/pesticide practices. I would still choose a farm grown tree if grown in my area over a plastic tree.

The great thing about buying a tree from a local person is I guarantee you they know exactly what species of conifer they are selling so this is a great way to step into the world of tree medicine if you are feeling timid about identifying one for yourself the first time round!

Really just don't want to do harm to the tree people? Another thing to consider while still bringing this magic into your home for a time is to buy a live potted tree! This can be a really deep offering to our allies as we are not just bringing them into our home and promising to use them with deep respect but to actually keep them alive and well until spring comes and the ground is soft enough to plant them! If you own your home and have the space to do so this can be an amazing tradition as you plant one every year soon you will have a forest of deeply known Conifer allies!

## Apothecary Happenings

*I am almost speechless in typing this, you see the November shop update I rambled about so much since September... Well it was life changing. The profits set aside put us over HALFWAY to our saving goal for opening the non profit dinner still needs cooking herbal learning farm this spring! At this point I have no doubt with your amazing continued support we will take the first steps in opening in 2018!*

*So whats next?! With the finishing up of this newsletter I am jumping deeply into my book, yes my book! It has been a long hard write where I share how my traumas and plant allies are deeply connected. I am hopeful to be done in late January or early February! Also I hope to see you all at the first shop update of 2018 come the end of January as we move into dark winter medicines!*

*Thank you all for changing not just my life but the life of so many others simply by supporting me on our shared path!*



## Some Ways To Celebrate Yule

*Venture safely into nature with yourself or family to select a Yule log! A Yule log is the log we burn when the light returns but before that we drill small holes to hold our tapered candles that we light each day as the Sun falls. Giving us the promise of light even in the darkest times.*

*Have a winter solstice bonfire with family and friends alike! Write wishes for the returning sun as well as things you would like to let go of on a piece of paper and toss them all in the fire at the same time!*

*Have a Yule dinner! This can be a full on feast to a simple bowl of hearty warming soup and bread with those important people in your life. Yule is in many ways about being close to loved ones in the dark times!*

### Resources for identifying Conifer trees

<https://www.arborday.org/trees/whattree>

<https://tidcf.nrcan.gc.ca/en/trees/identification/conifers>

<http://www.realtimerendering.com/trees/trees.html>

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## We Are Healing.

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