MAKING THE CHOICE TO USE HERBS: PATHWAYS TO THE PRACTICE OF HERBALISM

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Abstract
This study examines how herbal medicine users chose to begin using herbal medicine: How do people learn about, become interested in, and begin using herbal medicine? How do social, cultural, personal, and situational factors uniquely combine in temporally experienced sequences and in varying degrees of influence upon users’ choice to begin using herbal medicine? I thematically analyzed data from 28 intensive face-to-face interviews with current medicinal plant users in Cincinnati, Ohio and St. Louis, Missouri and recorded observations of herbal medicine use in written field notes and photographs. I found that participants tread one of three different paths in the process of choosing to use herbal medicine. A quarter of participants began using herbal medicine out of a general interest in its use cultivated by social and cultural influences and experiences with herbal medicine throughout the life course. Nearly half of participants began their path with an interest in herbal medicine that led them to use herbal medicine in response to a situational condition in tandem with the belief that herbal medicine was safer, more accessible, or a better fit than Western medicine. Over a quarter of participants began using herbal medicine after becoming ill or injured and determining that Western medicine was less safe, less effective, or less accessible than herbal medicine. Nearly all participants indicated varying degrees and different forms of concern about pharmaceutical medicine. Most participants indicated a desire to use herbal medicine before seeking Western medical attention, but acknowledged that Western medicine was preferable in certain circumstances, such as to treat traumatic injuries, sudden illness, and chronic pain. The findings of this research complement and expand the growing body of research on the use of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) in the Sociology of CAM with a qualitative analysis of how current medicinal plant users initially began using herbal medicine.

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There are literally hundreds of safe herb choices you can start using as a beginner to herbalism. Although this is a good thing, this fact is what makes herbalism so overwhelming to the beginning herbalist. Where should you even begin? And why should you be interested in learning about natural health and herbalism in the first place? Here are a few great reasons: You have more control over your own health and wellness. You learn knowledge through study & experiences so you can make good choices for your health and your family’s health. You’ll develop an intuitive sense of when a remedy (a Use these 10 simple ideas and projects to grow herbalism skills that will help you care for your family and home naturally.  My herbal cookery e-course contains 5 lessons to help you get herbs from the garden to the table. It includes lessons on preservation, drinks, main courses, desserts, and more. 5. Preserve Herbs. Herbs can be preserved in a number of different ways for different uses. This is a great way to understand the differences in flavor and use for fresh versus dried or frozen herbs. Make big batches of pesto and freeze it. Dehydrate bunches of herbs for tea or medicine-making later. Simply gather them in-season and save them for those seasons when they can’t be found fresh. 6. Create Body Products. Herbs are used for healing by much of the world's population, yet herbalism has often been considered folk healing and some herbs have been deemed unsafe for general consumption. Some may say that we don’t need to use herbs, because today we have modern medical techniques and a pill for every situation. Find teachers within your community who practice the traditional ways of herbal medicine. Take a class or workshop, or work on an herb farm. Many books on herbs focus on specific plants, medicine-making, or the history of herbs, but I wanted to write a book with a bit of everything, from both the traditional and scientific perspectives. As an herbalist turned biochemist, turned naturopathic physician, I am a gatherer of information.