



Image courtesy of Wilder Botanics

# Everyday Herbal

**In conversation with Rachel Landon  
of Wilder Botanics**

Words by Beccy Candice Clarke

At the London Fields end of Broadway Market in East London sits the very small but perfectly formed herbal apothecary, Wilder Botanics. A family-run business, launched in 2018, by husband and wife team, Rachel and Charlie Landon, Wilder breathes fresh air into the surrounding city with a carefully curated selection of herbal remedies and treatments, created to foster a deeper appreciation for and connection to nature and the wild herbs around us. High vibrational teas, biodynamic tinctures, soaks and oils are formulated using the finest quality wild-crafted and organic ingredients. With the greatest reverence for their natural intelligence and healing potential, each herb is transformed into small-batch, everyday remedies using centuries-old naturopathic methods of infusing, macerating and drying, that preserve the plant's potent vitality. Here, I talk to Rachel about her prolific career as a model, naturopath, iridologist, herbalist, yoga teacher, shopkeeper and mother of four. And, with winter just around the corner, she shares some of her favourite ways to gracefully meet the colder months, embracing the changing of the seasons with ease and flexibility.

**Beccy: Could you start by talking a little bit about your background. I read that your love of plants began during childhood, very much informed by your mother, a successful business woman and single mum of four, who grew all her own seasonal fruits and vegetables. What was life like as a child and in what ways did your upbringing shape who and where you are today?**

Rachel: I grew up in the English countryside, a half hour's drive from Manchester city centre. Home was an old farm, where I lived with my mum, Agnes Beryl, and my three siblings, Jane, Sara and Patrick. My mum was both formidable and incredibly kind. I always understood how stretched she was, not because she complained or overshared, but because I admired everything she did and I could see it was a lot! She was always *doing* and this definitely shaped my future. I never feel like I do enough. The garden was where I felt most connected with mum and where I best understood her. She didn't work with medicinal herbs; her love was for her working garden and tending to her apple trees, gooseberry bushes and vegetables, mowing the lawn, netting the raspberries and clearing the beds for autumn. This is how she relaxed. We had an acre of land which she utilised very well. Day to day, life was practical. Mum worked hard, always cooked from scratch, baked on a Sunday and filled the cake tins up for the week ahead. She was an older mother of the post-war generation who used food carefully and seasonally. I loved sitting in the front room with her, stretched out in front of the fire, knitting and listening to music together.

**B: After this bucolic upbringing, how did you come to be a model, travelling and living between multiple cities? How did the differences in these two very different lifestyles manifest in your physical and emotional self?**



R: I had a great time growing up in the countryside. I had the best of both worlds, enjoying all the city had to offer during the time of The Hacienda's\* heyday and then having the countryside to retreat back to. But around the age of 18, I began to feel very lost. I didn't want to go to university, I just wanted to travel. So, I started my journey, visiting a school friend who had moved to Dublin and it was here that I was asked to join a model agency, Elaine's Model Management, and began working with John Rocha and Katharine Hamnett. It was a gentle introduction into the world of fashion which led to many opportunities and my travelling began, to London, Tokyo, Paris and New York.

**B: You've spoken openly about the anxiety that you suffered with during this time. What triggered these feelings and how did they influence the choices you went on to make in your career and in life going forward?**

R: I've always been shy and I realise now that I'm naturally an introvert, so being the focus of attention in a room or in front of the camera wasn't something I thrived on. Looking back, I can see that these experiences were good for me because they pushed me out of my comfort zone. There were times when I was terrified and would have done anything to avoid getting on that plane or walking down that runway, but each time I survived it, I became stronger as a person. I could walk into a room full of strangers, often very difficult strangers, and hold my own, which is invaluable, but physically, living on adrenaline like this took its toll. However, I learned to use the industry to my advantage, to travel and strengthen my own personal boundaries, which were great lessons.

**B: What brought you full circle back to the herbs and plants of your childhood? What was it that drew you to this healing modality over and above any other?**

R: From childhood, I've innately felt that there was more to healing than allopathic medicine. I gravitated towards natural medicine through the height of my career (and anxiety), realising I had to support myself as best I could. This was a decade when no one talked about their emotional self and we were all faking it. I knew I needed to find a way to ground myself, so I started to read lots of books on many different modalities, I practised yoga and went into therapy. New York was the catalyst for my studies. The information that was available to me was so inspiring and from there, I took myself home to London to study. When it comes to healing any complaint, I believe you have to look to the whole person, so working with just one modality didn't make sense to me. You have to understand how a person is feeling emotionally, whether they are happy in their job and relationships, what their diet is like, how their eliminative organs are functioning

and so on. Studying naturopathy and looking at prevention first and foremost really made sense to me.

**B: Let's go back to basics for those who are new to herbalism. Why are herbs good for us? What makes them such an invaluable healing tool?**

R: Herbs contain such a vast range of chemical constituents, inorganic salts, sugars, carbohydrates, complex proteins and alkaloids. Each herb has its own unique spectrum of actions that not only work with specific organs, but with the whole body system. Energetically and physically they work with a person as an individual, addressing that person's unique needs.

**B: Where did you study? And are there any particular influences, teachers or mentors (human or otherwise) who have empowered you on this path or helped to guide you?**

R: I studied naturopathic iridology and herbalism at the Holistic Health College in London. My mentor was a man named Christopher Hedley. An amazing man; a towering 6 feet 4 inches, all gentle mischief and kindness, with crazy white hair and a beard, and an anarchist sensibility. He was otherworldly, like an elf and incredibly wise. He'd say things like, "You should really be paying your patients, because they teach you so much more than you teach them." Christopher was all about connecting to the plants that grew locally, taking his students out on the streets, showing us different herbs, pulling up burdock root down by the canal. We'd talk for hours about a particular plant, not just about the chemical constituents, but the energetic qualities too.

**B: I've heard other herbalists talk about the idea that plants mirror back what we are willing to see and express within ourselves, with the ability to reflect light on certain issues and point us in new directions. Is this something you resonate with?**

R: Absolutely! There's The Doctrine of Signatures, an ancient treatment system, which decrees that a plant will aesthetically mirror the part of the body that it can best support. For example, the nut and leaf of the Ginkgo plant looks like the brain and has been used and studied for centuries as a neuroprotector. Then there is Dr Edward Bach, who developed the Bach flower remedies based on the philosophy that plants use vibrational energies to connect

*\*The Hacienda was one of the UK's most notorious nightclubs and music venues. From 1982 to 1997, it was at the forefront of music and youth culture, widely viewed as the spiritual home of acid house music.*



Image courtesy of Wilder Botanics

with our higher nature. His remedies work in a similar way to homeopathy, supporting our emotional wellbeing and helping us to move forward or away from something more easily. We adhere to this methodology when creating our Wilder Flower Essences.

**B: Your book, *Super Herbs*, which is an invaluable guide to adaptogenic herbs, came out in 2017. For those who haven't yet read it, could you tell us a bit about it and how you came to write it?**

R: This came out of the blue as I never thought I would write a book, but I was approached by a lovely editor from Piatkus Books, who asked if I would be interested in writing something. I had just had our youngest child and was juggling a lot. I was completely exhausted, but I remember the excitement of the project and the breast-feeding hormones got me through. *Super Herbs* is a herbal guide book for modern living. Many of our customers at Wilder share that they feel overwhelmed and anxious, that they experience insomnia or hormonal imbalances. *Super Herbs* offers practical tips, recipes and knowledge of adaptogenic herbs, which can help the body better cope with the stressors of modern life by regulating our individual stress-response systems.

**B: How did Wilder come to be born? What made you take the leap and set up your own business?**

R: Wilder had been on my mind for many years. Working with clients for over twenty years, I realised that many were interested in natural medicine but were cautious and confused as to what herbs to use and how to take them. I wanted to demystify this process and foster a way of connecting people to the seasonal herbs around them, to inspire wildness and foraging. When I started contemplating Wilder, supplements were aplenty, but it was difficult to find herbs in their natural form, being formulated through the centuries-old methods that we use. Our products are created through a process that combines science with practical, hands-on client work and intuition, feeling into what we, as a community, need. We showed our first collection of herbal teas and oils at The Hand Sale, a bi-annual shopping event for independent makers, and they sold! The rest has been a natural progression, a wonderful journey that definitely has its ups and downs.

**B: How have your early years informed the way you do things now, both as a business owner and as a mother of four, yourself?**

R: My early years with my mum influenced my work ethic greatly. I've always felt I needed to provide for my kids, studying and changing direction when needed. After

qualifying as a naturopath and herbalist, I went on to train as a special needs yoga teacher and worked in schools for many years. Looking after a family with a diverse age range and running a small business can be a crazy juggle that my husband and I are fortunate enough to manage together.

**B: What does your life look like today?**

R: We are currently based in London, as we have a teenage boy and respect his desire to stay in the city, which we also love. One day, we hope to move to a smallholding in the countryside, that's the dream. For now, we grow as many vegetables as we can in pots, as well as all our favourite culinary and medical herbs. We love taking our family out of the city to walk in the countryside at least twice a month and for day trips to the Chiltern Hills, but London also offers incredible wild spaces to forage in scrubland and heaths. Life is busy but beautiful (without eye rolling). I'm grateful to be able to go to the studio or shop every day, although it's not without major stress. Running a small business through Covid, Brexit and now financial crisis is a journey, that some days, is overwhelming, but we love what we're doing.

**B: How do you create healthy boundaries between your work and family life or does one tend to feed into the other?**

R: I work with my husband, so it's hard to sometimes find those boundaries. The kids probably hear too much about the business side of Wilder and not enough about the fun, creative side. We're working on that!

**B: How do you find time for yourself? What practices do you call to during times of rest and reflection?**

R: Yoga, walking, and being with friends that I have known most of my adult life. Incredible women that I love.

**B: You have four children of varying ages. Have any of them shown an interest in learning about herbs and plants? Have you passed on any of the knowledge you learned from your own mother?**

R: I have two daughters, aged 22 and 8 and two sons, aged 15 and 7. So, the family has very different needs that I sometimes feel I fail to meet, with my attention often going to one child more than another at different times. All admire what we do. The older ones have pushed back gently, while the youngest two are still very much immersed in it all and love learning the names of the different foraged herbs and what they can be used for, often creating their own potions and lotions.

great ally here too, as it contains prebiotic and probiotic herbs that help feed the gut microbiome.

**B: What are some simple ways to nourish our nervous systems over autumn and winter as we take a step back from the expansive energy of summer and go inwards?**

R: Wintering, the practice of allowing yourself to rest and retreat during the darker months, following the example of nature, is something we should all try to lean into. Embracing low light, nourishing the body with wholesome, seasonal foods and upping our intake of nutrients like vitamin D. This alone will greatly benefit the health of our nervous systems. Siberian ginseng is perfect for those burning the candle at both ends and astragalus can be of support when we're feeling low or convalescing. Ashwagandha is nourishing to the hypothalamus, pituitary and adrenal axis. All of these herbs can be found in our Inner Peace Drops.

**B: Can you talk a bit about sustainable herbalism. How can we work with plants and herbs in a responsible way, honouring our local environment?**

R: You may need to ask permission, then pick only what you need, not pulling anything up by the root or taking a whole section of herb. Forage from plentiful populations and leave plenty behind. Don't disturb any endangered species. Cowslip, for example, is becoming quite hard to find.

**B: In Traditional Chinese Medicine, winter is the season of the water element and the organ pair, the bladder and kidneys. Do you have any suggestions for ways in which we can connect to this aspect of our inner and outer environments?**

R: That's beautiful. I talk a lot about herbs that help rebalance the kidney energy in *Super Herbs*. A favourite of mine is reishi, the star of our Reishi Hug recipe, which is a drink full of antioxidants.

Rachel's Reishi Hug recipe

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|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 cup of nut milk      | 1 tbsp of honey        |
| 1/2 tbsp of chia seeds | 1/2 cup of dates       |
| 1/2 tbsp of flaxseeds  | 1 tsp of turmeric      |
| 1 tbsp of chia seeds   | 1 tsp of reishi powder |
| 1 tbsp of coconut oil  | 1/4 ginger powder      |

Simply blend and drink

**B: As we move toward winter, I would love to pick your brain about some of the herbs that we can turn to for support during this time. How can we reconnect to the cycle of the seasons through herbs?**

R: I always point everyone towards nettle. It's diverse, nourishing and works to bolster all of the body's systems and functions. Nettle is incredibly mineral rich, strengthening the efficiency of the eliminative organs, the skin, lungs and digestive system. Then there's our Solstice Tea which we created to combat any cold or flu-like symptoms, using elderflower, peppermint, yarrow, cinnamon and bay; there's elderberry syrup for all the family, and echinacea, calendula and astragalus which support the immune system. I recommend taking herbs potent in vitamins and minerals such as our Flourish Tea which combines nettle, dandelion and red clover. It's also important to work with grounding, seasonal foods. Walking and foraging in nature with a good guide book is a great way to begin to familiarise yourself with the herbs and berries that are there for you every season.

**B: The holidays are fast approaching. Many of us will be travelling and out of our kitchen-comfort-zones. Are there any particular herbs, practices or daily rituals that can help us find balance when away from home?**

R: When travelling, take what you need with you, whether it be a bottle of elderberry syrup or a pack of herbal tea. Preparing a tea of culinary herbs like sage can feel very supportive when you're away from your own pantry supplies. I love to practice box breathing (inhale for 5, hold for 5, exhale for 5, repeat) when feeling stretched and I turn to our flower essences if I feel stuck or anxious on a long journey.

**B: How can we support the health of our livers over the holiday season when we might be indulging a little more in alcohol and rich foods?**

R: This is exactly why we created our Hangover drops. Not to promote indulgence or excess, but to help the body rebalance when we've been celebrating. Milk thistle is a powerful liver support, while burdock root is the queen of blood cleansing. They also include oat flowering tops to strengthen the nervous system which can become imbalanced when digestion is sluggish.

**B: Gut health is the foundation of good health in general. How can we maximise the efficiency of our digestive systems during winter?**

R: By eating plenty of seasonal and fermented foods and limiting alcohol and rich, sugary foods. Our Beauty Tea is a