



some seasonal notes

June
2021



A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a ball of light green yarn and a small yellow flower with a green stem, both resting on a rustic wooden surface. The right side of the page is a solid blue background with white text.

contents

- 5. Jane's letter
- 6. What to see this month
- 7. What to eat this month
- 9. Plantain
- 15. Recipe - garlic scapes
- 17. LION quilt
- 19. Strawberry Moon
- 20. Dyeing wool with herbaceous leaves



What to see in June

I always think of June as the time of butterflies here. One week there is just the odd Cabbage white fluttering around the cabbagey biennials and then the next there seems to be a kaleidoscope of basking butterflies everywhere.

There are 59 species of butterfly in the U.K. Fifty seven of these are natives, spending their whole life here and two - the Painted lady and Clouded yellow - are migrants who fly in from North Africa.

Most butterfly species have been in decline for many years - mainly as a result of changes to agricultural practices and woodland management.

There are several things that you can do to encourage butterflies and help them survive in greater numbers.

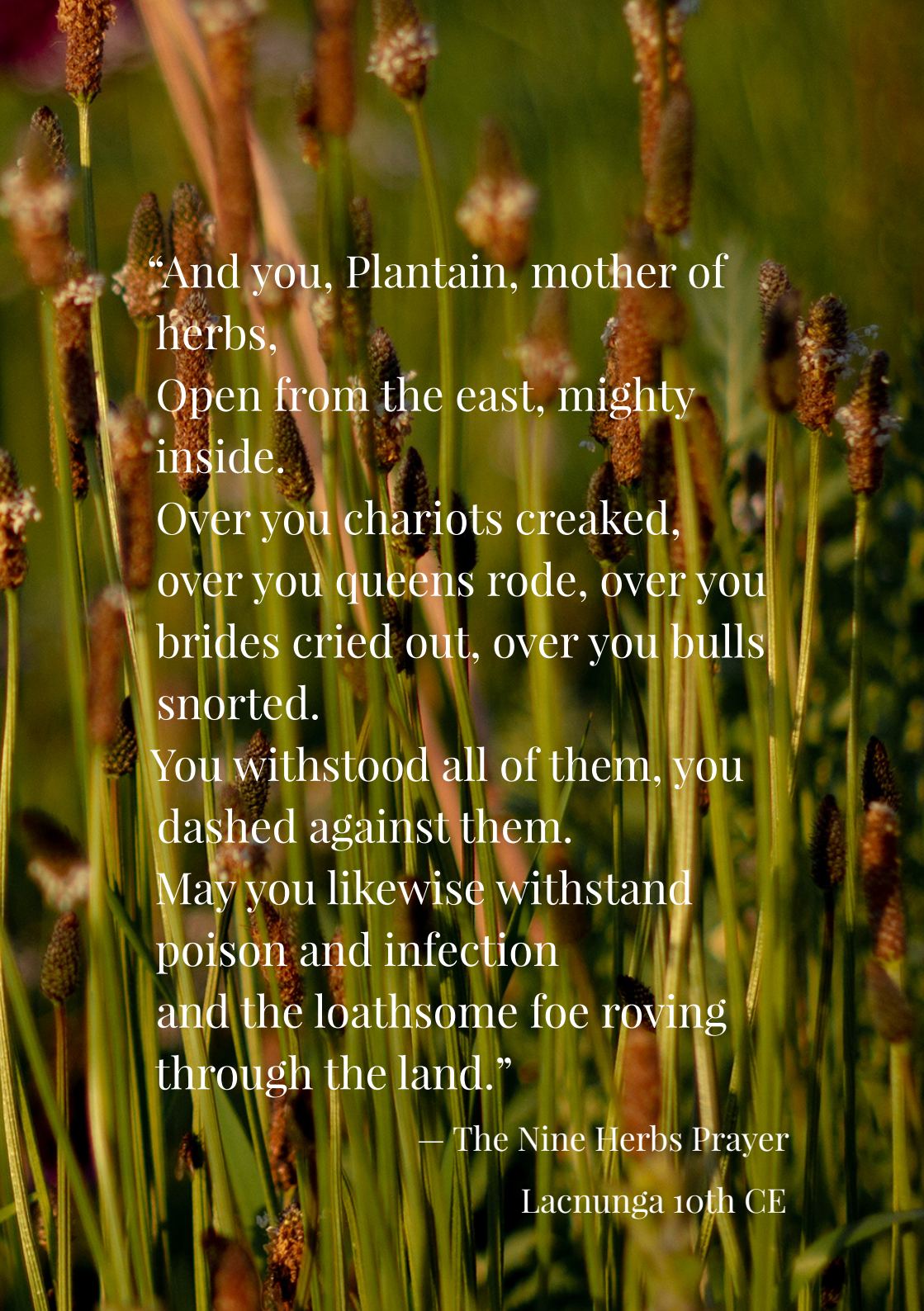
Firstly leaving a wild patch somewhere, ideally with some nettles in the mix as young nettles are the food source for the caterpillars of small tortoiseshell, red admiral, peacock and comma butterflies. Even a tiny patch of nettles in a pot in an out of the way area makes a difference.

- cut to the ground once they have finished flowering so that they don't become invasive*

Secondly choose plants that are full of easily accessible nectar - primroses, campion, and bluebells in the Spring, herbs and buddleia in the summer, ivy in the winter, Single flowers are better than double ones in general as a side effect of all that frothy mass of petals is that the nectarines are no longer fully functioning. The more like a child's drawing a flower is the better it is for insects.

Thirdly don't be too tidy and pick up fallen fruit in the autumn - rotting apples especially are a great source of food for butterflies. If you don't have any fruit trees you can tuck a mouldering apple somewhere for them.

**Though you could also let the nettle seeds form and then harvest them before they spread. Nettle seeds are an amazing thing to dry and store and add to porridge, salads and smoothies. the seeds are full of vitamin C and fatty acids and also gently support the adrenals, helping with adrenal fatigue.*



“And you, Plantain, mother of
herbs,
Open from the east, mighty
inside.
Over you chariots creaked,
over you queens rode, over you
brides cried out, over you bulls
snorted.
You withstood all of them, you
dashed against them.
May you likewise withstand
poison and infection
and the loathsome foe roving
through the land.”

— The Nine Herbs Prayer

Lacnunga 10th CE

Plantain

Plantago

Ribwort plantain (the low ground dwelling plumbago, not the banana relative) is one of the most common plants on the planet.

It grows everywhere apart from Antarctica, usually having been originally introduced by European immigrants who brought it in their herbal supplies.

The tiny seeds then were spread about on boots and hooves and wheels until it grew everywhere, undeterred by being trampled underfoot or having only a rough patch of earth..

It has adapted quickly to different climactic conditions in a sure footed way - the size of leaves, the texture of leaves, the angle of the stems, all change quickly when they settle somewhere new.

Often two individual plants will look completely different but have the same original parent.

It is such an adaptable plant that there is a lot of research being done on whether it can be used to help grasslands and grazing areas cope with climate change stress.

Plantains were one of the Nine Herbs that were at the heart of European herbalism in pre-medieval times (the others were mugwort, shepherd's purse, nettle, fennel, chervil, crab apple, chamomile and betony).

Together these plants were macerated in oil and boiled up before being mixed with beeswax and made into an easily carried balm to treat wounds and skin infections.

The Lacnuga is the name of an Anglo-Saxon herbal, now in the collection of the British Library, which lays out various old herbal recipes.

One is called the Nine Herbs Prayer, It is written in Old English, and each of the herbs is addressed in turn - they are addressed directly, as sentient beings in a way that shows that people related to plants in pre-industrial times in a very similar way to indigenous people today. There is not the same idea of separation from or exploitation of the natural world.

The verse written to plantain highlights how it survives being trodden on and driven over, a plant of the road - its hardiness passed into its use as a medicine protecting from infection, poison and war wounds.

Plantain is indeed an amazing all purpose herb - it is anti-microbial, anti inflammatory, works as a pain killer and stimulates cell regeneration.

As an emergency treatment you can use plantain leaves to heal blisters - ideally you would make a poultice for a skin complaint, but you can also just squash up some plantain leaves into a mush and put them onto your blister.



The plantain will reduce inflammation, help the skin to regenerate, it is antiseptic and has some pain relieving effect.

Or alternatively . . . make a small tin of balm following the instructions on the next page and take it with you!

You can eat plantain - some people make roasted leaf crisps by peeling out the stringy veins and tossing the torn up leaves with a little oil and then baking in an oven for 10 minutes at 150 degrees until they become crunchy. I'm not 100% convinced personally - kale crisps are less hassle and taste better and all the medical properties are denatured by the heat - but if you are fancying a foraged only meal they make a nice appetizer.

More straightforwardly the flower buds - picked when still smooth and brown, and before the white halo appears - taste of mushrooms. They truly taste of mushrooms in a slightly disconcerting way - add them to a salad and get people to guess what they are.

Plantains grow pretty much anywhere - ones growing in poor soil tend to have small, tougher leaves. If you can find them growing in good fertile soil they will be bigger and more tender. Leaf size doesn't matter at all for making balms but try to harvest from somewhere where there will not have been a lot of pollution.

If you are harvesting from near to a road, soak the leaves in warm water for an hour to remove surface pollution and then carefully dry.

I would not personally eat anything that grew next to a road as tyre dust and exhaust fumes coat the plants.



MAKING PLANTAIN BALM

You need

- enough plantain leaves to fill your jar
- oil of your choice (I use almond)
- jam jar
- piece of breathable fabric like muslin or an old t-shirt
- elastic band
- beeswax (or soy wax)
- old pan
- container for balm

Step one

Prepare your leaves.

You can either use leaves fresh or you can dry them out before you put them in the oil.

If using fresh you must be very careful in ensuring all the plant material stays beneath the oil or it may go mouldy. To dry leaves either use a dehydrator or hang the leaves up in a warm and airy place until they are completely dry. Chop or crumble leaves and put in your jar.



Step two

Make plantain oil

Fill the jar with oil. I use almond as it is light and easily absorbed but you can use any food grade oil you like. Olive oils and rape seed oils often give a lovely golden colour to the finished balm.

In Anglo Saxon times they would most likely have used animal fat to make balms.

Cover the top of the jar with fabric held on with an elastic band. The fabric is to let the oil breathe, and the moisture from the leaves evaporate. It also stops dust getting in.

Put somewhere warm and sunny for 4 weeks and check every day that the leaves are submerged. Poke them down or top up the oil if necessary.



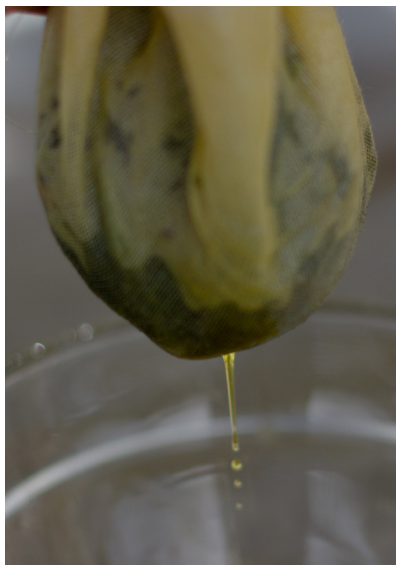
Step three

Drain the oil.

After 4 weeks the oil will have taken on a slightly green tone from the steeping plantain.

Use some fabric - muslin, a tea towel, old t-shirting - and put it in a sieve over a bowl and then pour the oil through, letting it gradually drip through into the bowl.

At this point the oil can be used as a topical skin oil for insect bites and rashes or a spoonful can be added to a coolish bath if you have irritated skin.



Step four

Make the balm

Weigh your oil and make a note of the weight.

Heat the oil very gently in an old pan or set up a bain marie with water in a pan and the oil in a bowl above the boiling water. You will not be able to easily use the pan/bowl again for anything other than balms so don't use anything good.

Add your wax at 8-10% of the weight of the oil. Any natural wax will work but they all have slightly different properties. I use beeswax - either pellets or the grated ends of beeswax candles at 8% weight for a general balm, 10% for something more solid or used in a hot country. Soy wax is similar.

Heat very gently until the wax is just melted. Pour into your containers and leave to cool very gently so that they don't crack. If the consistency is too solid reheat and add more oil, if it is too sloppy reheat and add more wax.





Variations

Lots of different balms can be made in this way by simply adding in different ingredients when you are making the initial oil.

Nettles are a great anti-histamine and perfect for a balm used for insect bites.

Calendula is soothing and great for any kind of sore skin.

Daisies work against bruises in the same way as arnica.

Or you could make a modern version of the Nine Herbs balm and collect your plant materials through the year, making separate oils and mixing them up before you add the wax.

You can also add in a few drops of essential oils to the mix of oil and wax as you take it off the heat.

Lavender essential oil is calming, tea tree is antiseptic.

Children love making these balms and carrying them around for bumps and scrapes - magic remedies.

GARLIC SCAPES



If you grow your own hard-neck garlic you are probably aware of garlic scapes - the twisting stem and bud of a garlic flower that needs to be snapped off in June so that the bulbs don't put their energy into making flowers.

They are beautiful things - looping round on themselves, a foot or so tall.

If you don't grow garlic you can buy them online from garlic farms (the Really Garlicky Company in Scotland sell them in June).

A truly seasonal food - only available for a few weeks - though they can be frozen and pickled. Mainly though I just eat them sautéed in butter with new potatoes.

Garlic scape butter.

Add 50g butter to a pan and melt very gently. Chop your scapes into small pieces and add to the butter, keep the butter at a low heat until the scapes are tender - 15-20 minutes, gently stirring every now and again, add a pinch of salt after a few minutes. This is wonderful over potatoes or grilled sweetcorn. You can cool it and put in a jar in the fridge for a week or freeze in an ice cube tray and then store the cubes in the freezer for three months. This is amazing in mashed potatoes.

Beans and garlic scapes.

Chop the scapes into 5cm lengths and blanch for 1 minute in boiling water then drain. Cook French beans as normal and drain. Make a dressing from lemon, salt and olive oil, mix the beans and scapes, dress while warm and serve hot or at room temperature as a side dish or mix into a grain salad.

Garlic scape pesto.

400g scapes, 250g oil (I use half olive, half organic rape), 100g grated parmesan, small handful pine nuts, juice half a lemon. Put all the ingredients in a blender and whiz until everything is smooth. Use as a pasta sauce or add a spoonful to salad dressing. It will keep in a jar in the fridge for a few weeks or again can be frozen in ice cube trays. I have a separate ice cube tray that is used for this kind of thing to avoid the problem of garlicky G&Ts.

creativity

Walrus
Hockney

Oak on
Hemp/silk

Scotland

Made with lion
goat/sheep from London

Leaf
Finland



Figured
Hockney

Figured with
lion
Dorsetshire
allotment

Folding
Forest

Doct
leaf
Hockney

ONLAN SKIN
Northamptonshire

Racial justice is land justice

Quilting and activism have always gone together. Political hopes stitched into the seams, protest finding an outlet through thread and fabric.

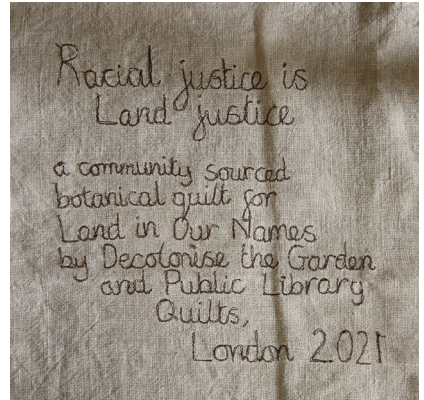
At the end of last year quilter and textile historian Jess Bailey of *Public Library Quilts* and Sui Searle of *Decolonise the Garden* began a collaborative patchwork quilt project to raise funds for the racial justice organisation Land in our Names.

A call was put out on Instagram for plant dyed fabrics to use and over fifty different dyers from eleven countries packaged up their precious pieces and sent them to London.

I immediately cut in half all the bits of plant dyed linen and hemp that I had in my cupboard and sent one part of each down to become part of the patchwork.

The point of the project was to community source fabrics and to make them into a quilt that could raise money to address inequality - a coming together, in some ways as emotionally important as it was financially.

Jess wrote *"For Black people and people of colour living in the U.K., access to land and green space is blockaded by systemic racism and the lingering ramifications of British Colonialism. Horticulture and farming rank as two of Britain's least diverse professions. A recent study has shown that communities of colour are 60% less likely to have access to nature, compared to their white counterparts."*



Land In Our Names works towards redressing this imbalance in access to land in the UK and the funds raised by the quilt - £18,000 in total - have gone to create Growers Grants to support black people embarking on careers in farming and horticulture.

The full story of the quilt has been written up by Jess and published in the online magazine Tatter Blue.

I was asked to embroider a panel of fabric for the back of quilt, Racial Justice is Land Justice -

There is a free PDF of the star block pattern on Jess's website www.publiclibraryquilts.com.

Photos copyright Jess Bailey.

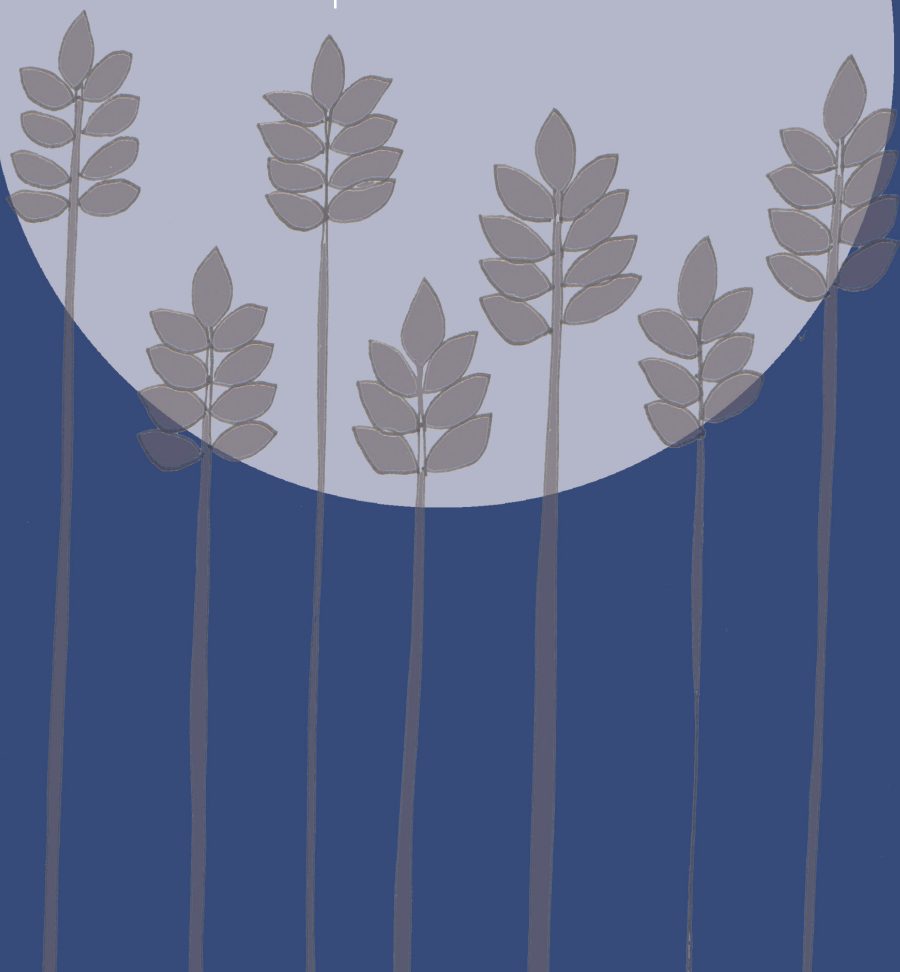
THE STRAWBERRY MOON

The full moon in June is named for wild strawberries that appear in North America and Europe in June.

In Germanic countries the old name was the Rose Moon and in England it was the Mead Moon – named for meadows rather than the drink!

Like April and May's full moons this year's Strawberry Moon will be a super moon – bigger and brighter than normal because it is slightly closer.

Strawberry Moon
24th June



Plant dyes - herbaceous leaves

This is the time for dyeing with herbaceous leaves. They are growing fast and have a lot of colour in the leaves - they will also regenerate easily and you can pretend that your harvesting is a particularly thorough version of the 'Chelsea chop' where cutting stems back by a third means later flowering and a staggered season.

The photo shows yarn I dyed with cat mint (nepeta) which I then rinsed post dye in iron water, changing it from primrose yellow to a pistachio green.

Method.

- Cram as many leaves as you can into your pan - the more leaves the more pigment and not only will the colour be stronger but it is also more light fast.
- Add 1-2 tablespoons of washing soda - depending on the size of your pan - and fill with water. This makes the dye pit alkaline and extracts more dye from the leaves.
- Bring to a gentle simmer and hold it there for an hour. Leave to cool and steep overnight.
- Drain through a colander into a clean pan or bucket and check the Ph. with indicator paper or a pH meter.
- Usually the steeping is naturally acidifying and the dye liquid will have reverted to neutral or even acid. If it remains alkali add a tablespoon of vinegar, stir and then check again. The dye pot must be under 7 before you add wool or it will roughen the feel.
- Add yarn (I am now tying my skeins of yarn with reusable cable ties which has stopped my tangling issues), gently raise the heat to hand hot and then leave it to gradually cool and leave to steep overnight.
- If you want to modify the colour with iron put the yarn into your iron water (water which has had rusty nails and a splash of vinegar in it for 6 weeks before being strained) for ten-fifteen minutes and then rinse immediately.
- Leave to dry, after a week you can wash and wind it.

A bundle of dried, yellowish-brown herbs hangs from a wooden post on a rustic wooden wall. The herbs are long and thin, with some fraying at the ends. The wall is made of horizontal wooden planks, some of which are painted a faded green. To the right, a wooden door with a small window is visible. The overall scene is rustic and aged.

Nettle
Dock
Sweet Cicely
Cow Parsley
Cat mint
Mint
Bracken



