

Busy Spring for HFG:

New Apprentice, Research Project, Livestock

A real greenhouse-effect summer has made watering the garden unnecessary, but victory seems uncertain in the ongoing battle with the weeds. Our Chinese medicinal plants seem to be flourishing despite a confusing winter in which the ground never froze solid and the coldest, snowiest month was March.

Thanks to a lot of hard work to remove last year's black plastic mulch, carve out new beds and restore the wood chips, the garden is slowly shaping up to real glory. We hope that many of you can come see it on the Field Day, Saturday, September 12th (see sidebar, right).

Farm Apprenticeship Program a Boon

HFG's first apprentice arrived on May 1st. Victor Kusmin was hired out of about 15 applicants, some from as far away as British Columbia, California, Arizona, and Texas. He found the HFG apprentice position posted on the Internet at the beginning of the year, and corresponded with Jean via email for several months. A recent graduate in Environmental Science of The Colorado College in Colorado Springs, Victor is originally from Connecticut and once again is enjoying convenient access to family and old friends.

Last year Victor spent six months in the jungles of Costa Rica studying *Dracontium pittieri* (ARACEAE) but his field placement ended before the plant bloomed. This means that some other lucky person will reap the benefits of his research and publish the definitive article. Such is the cooperative nature of the natural sciences!

Farm Apprenticeship Listing Services

- ATTRA (Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas) in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Call 501-442-9824 or 800-346-9140 for details.
- NEWOOF (Northeast Workers on Organic Farms) run by the New England Small Farm Institute, P.O. Box 608, Belchertown MA 01007-0608. Call 413-323-4531.

Upcoming Events

August 7-9: NOFA Summer Conference

(Northeast Organic Farmers Association) at Hampshire College, Amherst MA, 978-355-2853. 10:00am-11:30am, Aug. 9: HFG will present *Introduction to Chinese Herbalism for Growers*.

September 12: HFG FIELD DAY*

10:00am-12 noon: Talk and Slides at Philmont Methodist Church, Prospect & Church Streets. 1:00pm-5:00pm: Garden open at Hillview Farm, intersection of Martindale (Cty. Rte. 11) and Stevers Crossing Roads, 1 mi. SE of Philmont.

*Cosponsored this year by the Regional Farm and Food Project, Albany, a membership organization of farmers and consumers creating a healthy food system and opportunities for sustainable agriculture in eastern New York state.

Victor had thoroughly checked out all the postings for farm apprenticeships. Although HFG seemed a good opportunity in itself, a major attraction was its participation in the CRAFT (Collaborative Regional Alliance for Farmer Training) program. Rather than slaving away at one position the whole time, every two weeks throughout the season each apprentice attends a workshop at a different local farm. "CRAFT isn't the only cooperative training program in the country," Victor said, "but it's the best organized."

HFG/UMass Research Project Gets Underway

Victor had no sooner moved his guitar, drums and cases of books into his room than he was off on more travels. In a whirlwind tour of New England, he helped plant the sites for the field trials of six Chinese medicinal herb species, funded in part by the U.S. Department of Agriculture under the Northeast SARE (Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education) Program. Jean Giblette of HFG is the Director and Lyle Craker, Ph.D., University of Massachusetts Amherst, is the Principal Investigator of the project.

The basic idea of the research is to plant the Chinese medicinals at four different sites around the Northeast, all the plants in each species from the same (*continued p. 4*)

An answer to a question we're often asked....

HOW TO FIND A PRACTITIONER

Right now, growing Chinese medicinal plants is a little bit like Microsoft promising the next version of Windows. Expectations are high. But until the product is actually available, what do customers do in the meantime?

Finding a good practitioner is the best way to assure yourself that the product isn't vaporware. Practitioners have access to the best sources of imported herbs, whether from a reputable pharmacy or from companies such as Spring Wood and QualiHerb that sell only to certified practitioners.

High Falls Gardens is working toward domestic cultivation of Chinese medicinal botanicals as a means of developing our own knowledge of plant medicine. In the interim we endorse responsible use of the imported Chinese remedies. Not all practitioners act responsibly in this regard; even if responsible, their experience and depth of herbal knowledge vary considerably. Good practitioners are still scarce, but there are ways to find them.

Differences in Training

The U.S. currently has 28 colleges of Oriental medicine accredited by the ACAOM (see sidebar), which are graduating a collective total of over 1,000 practitioners per year. A certifying body, the NCCAOM, tests and issues certificates of competency to practitioners. At present, 32 states and the District of Columbia license acupuncturists, with some states now moving to license herbalists as well.

In addition to the licensed and certified practitioners, there are naturalized citizens who were trained in China and other countries abroad, graduates of various unaccredited schools, those who have been apprenticed or trained without formal schooling, conventionally Western-trained health professionals who have studied Oriental medicine, herbalists of other traditions who incorporate Chinese herbs into their practice, as well as naturopaths and chiropractors who use Chinese herbs. How does one find the right practitioner in such a welter of possibilities?

Personal referrals are ideal, but you may also find someone in your area by using the referral services of the NCCAOM or the professional associations (see sidebar). Remember, you're hiring a partner in the management of your own health care. Go for an initial consultation and evaluate him or her, keeping in mind the following.

One can find excellent practitioners who do not speak English well, and this may be perfectly acceptable. Your description of symptoms isn't essential to them because they get information about you by sensory and intuitive means other than your words.

However, be aware of the historical ironies involved. After Mao took over, the medical traditions of China were reconstituted in a reduced form that minimized spiritual content. A diaspora occurred -- many practitioners fled when the Nationalists retreated and their heirs have continued the traditions abroad. Therefore, contemporary training in China may be more limited than that obtained elsewhere. On the other hand, practitioners gain a wealth of clinical experience in the hospitals there.

While some might want to hedge their bets by finding a Western-trained doctor or nurse who has taken up Chinese medicine, consider this. The figurative and elliptical thought patterns behind Oriental medicine contrast dramatically with the linear, literal, materialistic mind set of the West. It's almost right-brain versus left brain, and when a Westerner studies she can almost feel her mind trying to rotate 180 degrees. It's a serious question whether most people, if trained intensively for many years in one mind set, have the intellectual flexibility to handle a shift. A learned Western doctor may grasp the concepts enough to describe Oriental medicine well, but in actual practice may be short of the intuitive skills necessary to tune in to the individual patient. One can always find exceptional people. But look beyond the diploma hanging on the wall.

Another factor in choosing a practitioner is his or her experience with herbs. Remember that acupuncture was "discovered" by the U.S. media when Nixon went to China in the early '70s. Soon after, acupuncture developed as a separate occupational group in this country. But it was another 10-15 years before people understood that acupuncture is only a technique and actually dietary therapy, including herbs, is more central to Chinese medicine. In ancient China, training of acupuncturists took four years, but for herbalists, ten. Now the older American acupuncturists are taking continuing education to catch up, while a young person who attends one of the accredited colleges will receive more comprehensive training. Schools that focus on Chinese herbalism have also been established.

The Chinese were literate 2,000 years ago and their culture contains the world's most complete description of ancient plant medicine. Many herbalists of the Western traditions are keenly interested in absorbing this knowledge. But at this early stage, some herbalists too readily assume advanced skills -- they may use a Chinese herb as a simple, combine it with Western herbs, or make substitutions. Such practices may yield positive results for the patient; however, it's not traditional Chinese medicine. In another generation, North American herbalists will have done the collective empirical research sufficient to support the mix-and-match approach, but right now it's a blunt instrument. Consolidation and accreditation for

Oriental medicine in the U.S. has been rapid, undoubtedly to distinguish its practitioners from the crowd.

Having found someone with acceptable training, in your first interview pay attention to your gut reaction. Do you feel comfortable with the person? How healthy is he or she? (Traditional practitioners are admonished to heal themselves first before they try to help others.) Does he or she seem trustworthy? If so, stick with it and give it a fair try. You'll gain a learning experience and can always switch to another practitioner later, if necessary.

What To Expect

The first session is long, typically 45-90 minutes, because the practitioner will take your history and make notes of his/her initial observations. Proper training includes considerable drill on observation of the patient's posture, body language, tone of voice, color, brightness of the eyes, smell, and other subtleties. Classic tongue-and-pulse diagnosis is an elaborate art and the practitioner will spend considerable time on it or perhaps do it repeatedly. Expect more attention than you would get from a conventionally trained allopath!

The diagnosis will most likely be followed by advice on an assortment of lifestyle choices including exercise, meditation and, especially, diet. Acupuncture may be recommended. The needles are disposable these days and come in presterilized, wrapped packets. A traditional herbal formula consists of 10-15 columns of Chinese characters written on a piece of paper. This is taken to a pharmacy to be filled. Or, the practitioner may recommend, and perhaps sell you, specific packaged products.

Many practitioners prescribe patent remedies (established formulas) that can be obtained in pill form or premixed powders, because compliance -- the patient's ability to take the herbs regularly each day -- is a big issue. They may feel that pills and powders are more acceptable to Westerners than the traditional method of decocting (boiling) the dried herbs, straining and drinking the liquid.

However, consider another aspect. Traditional pharmacists believe the dried herbs to be clearly superior. For one thing, it's hard to get enough of the material inside the patient in pill form, especially into tall, fat American bodies. Certainly this is another instance of the superiority of whole foods over refined. The whole fraction of the plant and its cell structure is intact in dried herbs and it's fresher, with more of the essences, vitamins, trace minerals and other goodies that plants have to offer us.

Personal experience in taking the Chinese patents in pill form suggests that it can be more difficult to remember to take the pills four to six times per day than to make a decoction. As for the bitter taste, you get used to it -- especially after you see results. Teacher and Taoist priest Jeffrey C. Yuen says that the taste is an essential part of the experience and prepares the body for change.

Practitioners' fees are typically lower than what you would pay without insurance for a Western doctor. Imported Chinese herbs are very inexpensive at present; the herbs or herbal products should not be more than a small fraction of the practitioner's fee.

Follow-up sessions (typically, from one to four times per month) will also last 30-60 minutes, especially if acupuncture is involved because you're expected to relax on the table with the needles stuck in you. (Don't worry, it is possible to relax.)

Traditional practices in expert hands can yield relief of symptoms in 24-36 hours for acute problems -- for example, a cold due to Wind-Heat. For chronic problems, expect the course of treatment to last several months. Changes may occur right away but progress won't necessarily be linear, for healing crises such as fevers or discharges of mucus are normal aspects of the body's rebalancing act.

The single biggest obstacle to effective use of traditional Chinese medicine for chronic degenerative problems is not the scarcity of qualified practitioners. It's that Westerners expect a quick fix and fail to stay the course. ■

Referral Sources

- **ACAOM** (Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine), 1010 Wayne Ave., Ste. 1270, Silver Spring, MD 20910, 301-608-9680. Has a list of accredited schools and colleges. Check www.acupuncture.com for this list also.
- **NCCAOM** (National Certification Commission for Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine), 11 Canal Center Plaza, Suite 300, Alexandria, VA 22314, 703-548-9004. Send \$3 for a list of certified acupuncturists in a state, \$20 for the full directory. Or, get the information free from www.nccaom.org
- **AAOM** (American Association of Oriental Medicine), 433 Front Street, Catasauqua PA 18032, 610-226-1433. Has a list of state associations (another source of referrals) posted on its webpage, www.aom.org (email aom1@aol.com).
- **NAOMA** (National Acupuncture & Oriental Medicine Alliance), 14637 Starr Road SE, Olalla, WA 98359, 253-851-6896. Phone or check the page at www.healthy.net/pan/pa/acupuncture/naoma.

Other relevant websites:

www.amerchiro.org
www.healthy.net/aanp/aanpsearch.htm