

MEET

People Sharing Their Passions

The Healer Gatherer

AN HERBALIST IN SOUTH PHILADELPHIA EXPLORES THE MEDICINAL POWERS OF PLANTS AND SHARES HER HARVEST.

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by LINI S. KADABA

LADY DANNI MORINICH, the proprietress of an online herbal medicine shop called Landed Gentress, prepares one of her favorite teas for a visitor: chickweed with a splash of ivy syrup. “We’re going to let this steep for a little bit,” she says, carrying a couple of steaming mugs to the tiny brick patio behind her South Philadelphia home. “Chickweed [*Stellaria media*] is good for respiratory issues and joint pain,” adds the 57-year-old herbalist as she settles onto a stool. “This tea is one of the things I make for myself.”

The patio holds containers of plants that many gardeners consider weeds but that Morinich views as valuable sources of healing and well-being. There’s a pot of sweet Annie (*Artemisia annua*), which has antiparasitic properties; one of goutweed (*Aegopodium podagraria*), good for fighting joint pain; and of course some chickweed, which grows near a trellis covered in English ivy (*Hedera helix*).



Morinich grows and forages for medicinal plants that she uses to make teas and tinctures.

COLLECTING RESOURCES

Since her father’s death in 2016, Morinich has purposefully connected with the natural world and its plethora of plants. She began doing this to honor her father, who was an avid outdoorsman. But soon she became intrigued with the medicinal properties of many species, especially those that other herbalists often overlook.

“Plants speak to me in a way that nothing else does,” she says. On the third floor of her house, a tall shelf—her personal apothecary—is jammed with jars of ingredients that she grows in her

garden, buys from local growers, or forages from the urban wilds. “I can grow some things,” she says, “but I’m more about gathering wild leaves.” Using Maida Silverman’s *A City Herbal* as her guide, Morinich often forages on Lemon Hill (in Fairmount Park) or at FDR Park, which is near her home in South Philly. She uses the various ingredients to make tinctures and teas she sells from her Etsy shop.

The name of the shop and her title of “lady” stem from her roots as an Anglophile. About 10 years ago, friends,

knowing her affection for the British Isles, bought her and her husband 1 square foot of land each in Scotland, making them “laird” and “lady” of their land and part of the country’s “landed gentry.” Morinich laughed at the joke at first. But in 2013, when she started the Etsy shop to sell her handcrafted products, she decided to parlay the jokey title into a catchy name for her business and Instagram feed (@ladydanni1).

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

When she isn’t working her day job as a medical reprint sales rep, Morinich is outdoors, regularly giving tours. These are usually free and often sponsored by Wild Foodies of Philly, a volunteer group that educates the public on uncultivated plants that can be used for sustenance. “It’s amazing the amount of medicinal plants we have literally at our feet but disregard as ‘weeds,’” says Rebeca Cintrón-Loáisiga, organizer for the Philadelphia chapter of the nationwide food justice collective



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—Lady Danni Morinich

Veggie Mijas, which took one of the tours. “Lady Danni gave us a greater appreciation for the land.”

For a long time, Morinich was the only Black person at foraging walkabouts, and she is especially interested in teaching more people of color how to help themselves to wild plants. She loves showing novices the benefits of “weeds” such as common plantain (*Plantago major*), which grows even in sidewalk cracks. “This plant is like a little medicine cabinet,” she says, citing some of its many uses: treating toothaches, sore throats, inflammation, and more.

“It’s probably the most radical thing I’ve done,” Morinich says, “reconnecting to the land, finding plants that I can use to heal people. I’m the girl who wants to take you out there and show you what’s possible.”

Before trying any of Morinich’s suggestions for using healing plants, check with your health care provider. Learn more about her herbal products at landedgentress.com.

A large photograph of a garden with raised beds, trellises, and a greenhouse in the background. A red banner at the top left contains the text: "2022 PHS Philadelphia Flower Show tickets make great holiday gifts!". Below this is a small green leaf icon and the text: "June 11 – 19, 2022 | FDR Park, Philadelphia". At the bottom right, another red banner says: "Buy today at: PHSONline.org/the-flower-show". A white leaf icon is visible in the bottom right corner of the image area.

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