



PHOTOGRAPH BY RUTA ELVIKYTE

Going Natural

Explore the healing power of plants through three pioneers in the field of herbal remedies

Wellness in the mountains of North Carolina can take on different meaning for different folks. For some, it's a steep hike up a mountainside or a home-cooked organic meal. Then there are those who have looked for inspiration from the way healers have been doing it for centuries: the natural way.

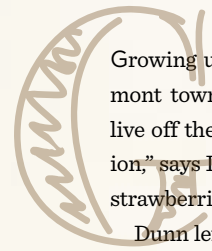
Meet three leaders who have helped cultivate a share of the state's billion-dollar natural wellness industry, which has brought the therapeutic benefits of the region's deep-rooted tradition of herbal remedies and botanical-based interventions from the fringe to your medicine cabinet.

WRITTEN BY **JACK IGELMAN**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **MATT ROSE**

Ancient Wisdom

The age-old practice of wildcrafting to make healing remedies endures through the work of Jeannie Dunn and Red Moon Herbs



Growing up on a multigenerational tobacco farm in the Piedmont town of Efland, Jeannie Dunn learned what it's like to live off the land. "In the 1970s, tobacco was falling out of fashion," says Dunn, whose family looked for other sources—U-pick strawberries, honey, wheat, and vegetables—to pay the bills.

Dunn left for college, and after graduating, she became interested in the mature woods behind her granddad's home, which were owned by a paper mill. "I thought it would be great to get that forest," says Dunn, who'd started studying herbs and their uses. "I remember seeing mayapple, bloodroot, wild ginger, and I knew there were other herbs there too." While Dunn inquired

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—Jeannie Dunn

about preserving the land, it was eventually sold, clear-cut, and reseeded with white pine.

It was really sad for me to see that," recalls Dunn, who, as a result, felt inspired to protect the wild portions of her parents' property, which was part cropland and part meadow. She returned home and began making herbal extracts and

selling herbs and vegetables at a tailgate market in Hillsborough. It became a labor of love, she says.

Eventually, Dunn came to Asheville to practice as an herbalist, but she's kept a tight connection to her farming background. She still harvests herbs from her parents' land and would like to see more family farms find ways to stay afloat, not just for the locally grown crops they produce, but also for the down-home knowledge they preserve.

In 2012, Dunn became the director and owner of Red Moon Herbs, an Asheville-based enterprise that's now in its 22nd year creating herbal products in the Wise Woman tradition—the practice of using common, local ways and plants to heal and nourish. Dunn recalls the older generation in her region bringing peach-leaf tea to calm and soothe neighbors in times of distress. She also remembers a bell on her grandparents'

TO YOUR HEALTH

Corinna Wood (left) cofounded Red Moon Herbs in 1994, and now educates others in herbal medicine through her business, Southeast Wise Women. In 2012, Jeannie Dunn took the reigns of the company and continued its growth.



HERB'S THE WORD

Red Moon harvests a wide range of fresh herbs for an equally wide range of applications. Top left, Dunn collects mint and St. John's Wort; bottom, she air dries poke root. A meadow (center) supplies red clover for extracts, which are stored on the supply shelves at the company's apothecary in North Asheville.

porch. "For the longest time, I thought it was a dinner bell," she laughs. "You would ring the bell if you needed help, in the days before there were phones."

Lately, she's seen an upswing in interest in herbal remedies and traditional ways for wellness. "It's skipped a couple of generations, but I think folks are looking for that now," she says. "Our vision is to tell the stories

and bring back grandma's remedies; it's important we honor what was here."

While the market for herbs and natural cures may be ripe and growing, the real challenge is using fresh ingredients that are organically cultivated or sustainably harvested. Currently, Red Moon harvests plants on two acres at Earthhaven Ecovillage, a sustainable community in Black Mountain, and is committed to growing the business gradually to maintain the integrity and quality of its products.

In the meantime, Dunn hopes to support a sustainable wildcrafting industry in WNC that provides ingredients for cures and reinvigorates the practice of herbal healing by focusing on what's wild and prolific in the area. "We want to preserve the tradition; part of it is nostalgia, part of it is that much of it really works and it's relatively inexpensive," she says.

For those unaccustomed to using herbs, she suggests getting to know one or two common ones, such as turmeric or another spice with medicinal qualities, and incorporate them into favorite dishes. Or better yet, find out what's in your yard, such as chickweed for salad, or lamb's quarters as a spinach substitute in veggie lasagna.

As long it's wild, edible, and nutritious, Dunn encourages using it. "That's the Wise Woman tradition—it's what people did out of necessity. You learned what you have."

LEARN MORE

Visit redmoonherbs.com for products and to learn where they're sold. Get a crash course in plant-based medicine during Herbal Immersion, June 1-6, offered through Southeast Wise Women. sewisewomen.com



GINSENG ROOT
Panax quinquefolius
Good For:
boosting energy
treating depression
bolstering immunity
improving digestion

Medicine Man

Ric Scalzo's spiritual quest led to the creation of one of the largest natural product companies in the nation

After taking a break from his philosophy studies at Clark University in Massachusetts, Brevard-based Gaia Herbs President and CEO Ric Scalzo enrolled at a forestry school in Maine. He knew that his future would involve the links between people and plants, so being among trees made sense.

But after just one day, he left.

"I thought I was going to Nirvana in the forest and would have this amazing connection with nature and really find myself," Scalzo recalls with a broad grin, confessing that his contact with plants up to that point had consisted solely of gardening with his grandfather. "I needed something deeper to wrap myself around."

Scalzo left for France to study meditation, but when he returned, he "realized that plants were a vehicle" to probe his existential questions. Along his spiritual journey, he studied herbal medicine in Utah, and had a successful stint as a biological consultant at a New England medical center. He grew weary of juggling a large patient base, though, so in 1987 he launched Gaia Herbs, which quickly flourished. Scalzo's pursuit led him to cultivate one of the largest

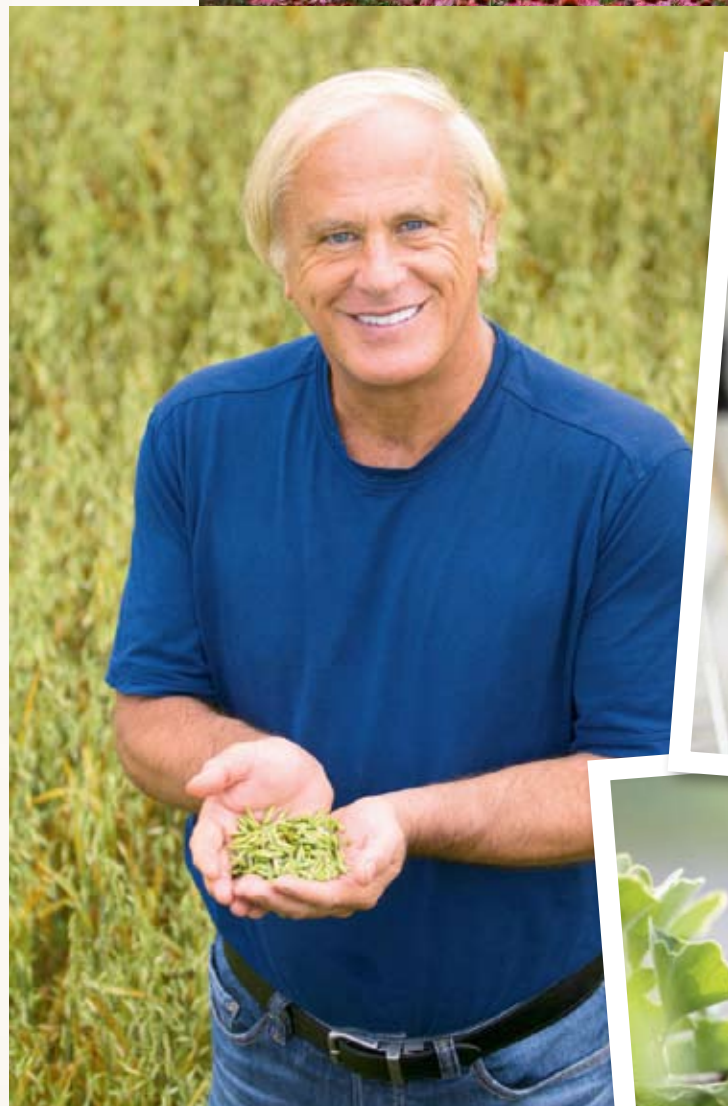
natural products companies in the country and help pioneer a scientific approach to proving their value.

A decade after starting in Massachusetts, the expanding

operation invested in land in Transylvania County's French Broad River valley, taking advantage of the fertile soil, ideal growing conditions, and biodiversity there. Soon though, Scalzo says, "It was clear that once

GROWTH SPURT

Gaia Herbs' founder and CEO, Ric Scalzo, arrived at natural medicines after a long spiritual quest. Here, he holds milky oat tops at the company's Brevard farm, where it also grows echinacea (top), ginkgo biloba (bottom center), and grindelia (far right). Other plants are grown at Gaia's 65,000-square-foot greenhouse in Mills River (center), and the herbs are processed at the factory (center left).



PHOTOGRAPHS: (7) COURTESY OF GAIA HERBS; (1) BY MATT ROSE



JUJUBE DATES

Ziziphus jujuba

Good For:
boosting energy
improving digestion
lowering stress
constipation

we started farming, it didn't make sense to keep shipping the harvest," so he packed up and moved the headquarters to Brevard.

He hasn't been disappointed here, as business is booming: Over the past three years, Gaia has grown at strong double digit percentages annually, steps ahead of an already soaring sector. In North Carolina, the \$1 billion natural medicine industry stands to continue its growth spurt, but according to Scalzo, the market is evolving. More males are entering the once female-dominated customer base and, nationwide, a larger share of the population is progressively more open to the idea of natural remedies. To meet the expected demand, Gaia has stayed on the cutting edge of innovating natural products and established a fine-tuned global supply chain.

While Scalzo has a deep respect for the region's tradition of wildcrafting plants from the forest, the scale of Gaia's production prohibits it from harvesting herbs from the wild. Rather, the company grows its raw materials on Gaia's 350-acre organic farm in Brevard and sources other ingredients from sustainable growers from nearly every corner of the planet.

On that note, Scalzo enthusiastically displays digital images of Gaia's lush Costa Rican farm that will harvest turmeric, a spice that's been used for centuries as a traditional medicine, and will be the base of a future line of Gaia products that tout health benefits for a long list of ailments.

Scalzo believes Gaia's growth is largely due to the integrity and strength of its products and their scientific backing. Indeed, stroll past a fountain in the Gaia lobby and you enter a world far removed from the shady coves of the Appalachians. Here, scientists in white lab coats use state-of-the-art equipment to measure, test, and validate the potency of current and future products.

That approach has helped many experience the therapeutic properties of plants—a connection that's not just physical, but spiritual too.

"There's a wisdom between plants and people that has been co-evolving for hundreds of years and is relevant today," says Scalzo of the plant-based tradition of wellness. "Our job is to help translate to people its benefits."

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— Ric Scalzo

The Teacher

In addition to producing healing tinctures, CoreyPine Shane educates others through the Blue Ridge School of Herbal Medicine

A small drop of the light brown liquid has a big kick. It tingles like mouthwash, but the flavor is earthy, peppery, bitter. Frankly, it tastes kind of bad, like medicine—though not the typical over-the-counter potions. The serum in the glass bottle is made from red root, elderberry, and prickly ash, with each plant harvested from the woods of Western North Carolina.

The tincture was mixed by CoreyPine Shane, an herbalist, wildcrafter, and educator who, for three decades, has been helping people reap the healing powers of wild plants.

“It’s not just about substituting an herb for a pill. Medicinal plants are a way to connect to something bigger than ourselves.”

—CoreyPine Shane

herbalists in conventional health care.

The bearded and bespectacled 45-year-old could easily pass for a literature professor, but he’s most comfortable harvesting plants from the forest or teaching in the small classroom of the Blue Ridge School of Herbal Medicine in Weaverville, which

he directs. The school’s flagship course, a six-month Holistic Herbalist curriculum, typically has a waiting list and offers entry into the work of a plant-based healer. It’s an educational pathway that was scarce when his interest in the field of using plants for health blossomed.

As a college student, the Philadelphia native took to studying botany and natural remedies, though it was just a hobby. But while living in the Pacific Northwest in the early ’90s after graduation, he concluded that his savvy application of natural medicine was good fortune. “I realized that knowing the right herbs to help treat a cough and other common ailments effectively and cheaply was helpful,” he says.

Shane studied the trade and moved to Asheville in 1996, opening an office on Lexington Avenue in downtown. It was around

The difference now: Herbal remedies are gaining traction, and Shane has played a central role in legitimizing the practice of using plants as medicine. “The basic level of knowledge of natural medicine has gone up in the public consciousness,” he says. Still, he’s hoping to see a bigger role for modern

that time that natural remedies, while still on the margins, surfaced in the mainstream. He recalls a national news segment in the late ’90s that featured St. John’s Wort, a medicinal herb traditionally used as an antidepressant. At the time, he was working at an Asheville food co-op, and today he laughs that they sold out of every product with a trace of the now-famous herb.

“I appreciate and respect modern medicine, but there are people that modern medicine does not serve well,” like those with chronic ailments that may benefit from alternative therapies, he asserts. With a growing body of science backing up the alternatives, Shane has observed that the mainstream has become more willing to acknowledge modern medicine’s shortcomings and more accepting of other options.

Although Shane spends two days a week working with patients at an integrative medical practice in Asheville, he believes his biggest impact has come through his school. Since 1999, more than 200 people have graduated from the holistic herbalist program. While most people become community herbalists, aiding friends, family, and neighbors, they’re helping carry on a centuries-old custom in Western North Carolina using ancient remedies for modern ailments. It’s a tradition, he says, that grew from need.

“The southern Appalachians were isolated for so long that natural remedies were all that they had,” says Shane, who sees himself as a bridge between people and plants. “It’s not just about substituting an herb for a pill,” he says.

“It’s really about another way of seeing the world. Medicinal plants are a way to connect to something bigger than ourselves.”

MOTHERWORT LEAVES

Leonurus cardiaca

Good For:
treating hyperthyroid
heart disease
shingles
pain
hormonal balancing

Go online for Shane’s medicinal recipe for Herb-infused Bone Broth. For details on the Blue Ridge School of Herbal Medicine, visit blueridgeschool.org.



PHOTOGRAPHS: (1) BY MATT ROSE; (3) COURTESY OF COREYPINE SHANE



TREAT YOURSELF

From his apothecary in Weaverville, CoreyPine Shane runs the Blue Ridge School of Herbal Medicine, which offers several course programs that vary from 130 to 450 hours. From top left, students go on field trips to learn how to identify and sustainably harvest plants and other wild ingredients, such as slippery elm bark and striped wintergreen. They also learn how to process them into medicine.



JAPANESE KNOTWEED ROOT
Fallopia japonica
Good For:
Inflammation
skin disease
sore throat
toxic conditions



