

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a yellow and blue patterned dress and a smartwatch, is smiling while holding a branch of a rose bush with several bright red rose hips. The background is a soft-focus outdoor setting with greenery and a white pillar.

EDIBLE NOTABLES
PLANT POWER

*The English Herbalist brings natural health
and wellness to Santa Cruz*

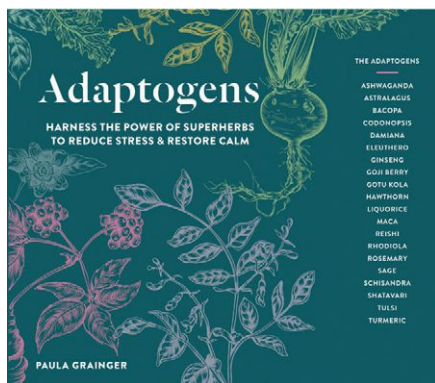
BY LAURA NESS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CRYSTAL BIRNS

Paula Grainger harvests rose
hips from her home garden.



She says every herb garden should start with calendula (shown above), chamomile and lemon balm.



Santa Cruz herbalist Paula Grainger believes deeply in the power of herbs to improve overall physical and mental wellbeing. And do we ever need that now. Our ability to cope is stretched, sometimes beyond previously explored limits. Alcohol, anti-depressants and sedatives may not provide optimal solutions; sometimes, ancient herbal remedies are the best choice.

“It is so important to practice self-care at stressful times like these,” says Grainger, who was born and raised in England. “The simple act of brewing oneself a cup of herbal tea can be transformative.”

Nature abounds with herbal treasures, just waiting to be rediscovered. “The line between medicinal herbs and healthy foods is quite close. They are all plants, after all, so there is a huge potential for improved health and wellness, as well as alleviation of chronic physical and psychological conditions using herbs,” she says.

For Grainger, who has been busier than ever since COVID, her path to herbalism began in childhood. “My mother and grandmother were both keen gardeners,” she says. “Britain has a long tradition of herbal healers and I was always fascinated by the idea of plants as medicine.” After realizing in her 30s that being an herbalist was a vocation, she earned a degree in herbal medicine from London’s University of Westminster.

She is here on the Central Coast due to an act of nature, in particular, a volcano. She and her husband and young son were visiting California in 2010 when a massive volcanic eruption in Iceland forced them to delay their return to England. “We found ourselves stranded in Santa Cruz

on a road trip up Highway 1. And we loved it! We ended up being here for nearly two weeks, instead of two nights!”

They ended up falling in love with Santa Cruz, moved here the following year and became citizens in 2019.

In the U.S., Grainger’s profession is termed a clinical herbalist. In England, she was a medical herbalist and permitted to write prescriptions from her apothecary Lemon Balm, named for one of her favorite herbs.

Like a prism, her craft has many facets and thus she has many roles. First, she is a gardener, growing more than 100 herbs that can be put to use in teas, powders, tinctures, balms, lotions and massage oils. Next, she is an herbal wellness consultant, a combination of sympathetic listener, life coach, therapist and herbalist. Third, as a botanical skin care specialist, a byproduct of a lifetime of dealing with her own finicky derma, she always looks for the right combinations of oils and herbs to soothe and heal. Fourth, as a fan of fragrance, she concocts tinctures that uplift and delight. Fifth, she avidly develops new recipes, honing her love of flavors and cooking to help nourish. Last, and perhaps most important, she is a teacher, sharing her love and knowledge of plants in classes and workshops.

Grainger recently published a book called *Adaptogens: Harness The Power of Superherbs to Reduce Stress & Restore Calm*, in which she cites ancient favorites and their benefits, including ashwaganda (thyroid support, energy), eleuthero, (reduces jet lag, combats altitude sickness),



Grainger has also written a book on therapeutic herbal teas called *Infuse*.

ginseng (endocrine support, lowers cholesterol, stimulates blood flow), rhodiola (heart support, helps stamina, fibromyalgia, seasonal depression) and schisandra (improves liver function, boosts mood, regulates lung function). These have been employed in Ayurvedic and other ancient traditions for thousands of years.

“Adaptogens are a wonderful group of herbs which, in essence, help the body to deal with the effects of stress. They are the superheroes of the herbal world,” says Grainger. Renowned for their ability to increase stamina, prevent adrenal imbalance, strengthen the immune system, deal with chemo and lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol, each of these storied herbs is given a chapter in her book in which she explains their purpose and how best to use them.

This is not to say there’s no room for Western medicine in your health-care repertoire. “There is unquestionably an important place for manufactured drugs in healthcare and they save many lives,” notes Grainger. “I do think herbal remedies are underutilized. In general they tend to be milder and more ‘balancing’ in their actions and they invariably have far fewer potential side effects. Thankfully, this community is very open to embracing natural medicine as part of an overall approach to wellness. It’s not uncommon to have doctors here refer patients to an herbalist.”

One way to promote self-care is to cultivate plants. “At a minimum, grow chamomile, calendula and lemon balm,” she says. Lemon balm tea is great to drink in the wintertime, as it is an antiviral that also calms digestion and lifts mood on dark days. Also plant sage, which helps fight infections, and incorporate turmeric in cooking, as it lowers inflammation, supports good liver function and may help fight cancer.

Grainger launched The English Herbalist botanical skincare line in 2014, which includes First Aid Salve made with rosemary, plantain,

calendula and yarrow, luxurious facial serum oil and whipped body butter made with high quality shea and cocoa butters, coconut oil and golden jojoba oil.

She creates personalized regimens for her clients, including custom-blended teas, but if you want some quick remedies, she recommends her After Dinner tea for supporting good digestion. Another, Happy Tea, as the name suggests, is a blend to lift spirits and alleviate stress. People also love her Bright Skin blend, which incorporates herbs traditionally used to cleanse the system and improve skin health.

What she loves about being an herbalist is that she works to promote wellness, rather than treat specific medical conditions. “I see people with all kinds of things going on—women’s hormonal issues, including menopause and fertility issues, digestive complaints, stress, anxiety and sleep, skin conditions.”

Fortunately, there’s an herb for that.

We asked her what some of the best non-herbal immune system boosters are for the winter months.

Get outdoors daily. Exercise. Meditate. Eat healthy. “Get into some cold water every day,” she adds. “Use herbs, including adaptogens, and lifestyle techniques to manage stress and get enough sleep.”

Laura Ness is a longtime wine journalist who contributes regularly to *Edible Monterey Bay*, *Spirited*, *Los Gatos Magazine* and Wine Industry Network, sharing stories of the intriguing characters who inhabit the world of wine and food.

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Apple, Raisin and Cinnamon Adaptogen Granola

Courtesy Paula Grainger

This recipe uses codonopsis and ashwaganda for a gentle adaptogenic boost, but use whichever herb powders you like best, and add a few handfuls of goji berries to up the adaptogenic ante. As well as in granola, Grainger recommends using dried herbs and adaptogen powders in teas, smoothies and soups.

- 3½ cups jumbo rolled oats
- 1 cup pecans
- ½ cup slivered almonds
- 3 tablespoons raw, shelled sunflower seeds
- 3 tablespoons raw, shelled pumpkin seeds
- ½ teaspoon sea salt flakes
- 3 tablespoons coconut oil
- ⅓ cup maple syrup
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons codonopsis powder
- 1 teaspoon ashwaganda powder
- ½ cup raisins
- ¼ cup dried apple rings, chopped

Preheat the oven to 340° F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Combine the oats, nuts and seeds in a large bowl. Sprinkle with salt. Set aside.

Put the coconut oil and maple syrup in a small saucepan, set over low heat and melt them together. Then stir in the cinnamon, codonopsis and ashwaganda powders.

Pour the liquid ingredients onto the dry ones and combine using a couple of wooden spoons or, if you don't mind getting sticky, your hands.

Spread the mixture evenly over the prepared baking tray. Bake for 25–35 minutes. Stir the mixture 2 or 3 times and keep checking it, because if the granola burns, it will taste bitter. It should be light toasty brown and smell delicious when ready. Set aside to cool and crisp up.

Transfer cooled mixture to a clean bowl and stir in the raisins and chopped dried apple. Store in an airtight container for up to 1 month. Serve with milk or yogurt, or just enjoy handfuls straight from the jar. *Makes 1 pound 9 ounces.*

