

the Herbal  
e Healer

**Paula Grainger**  
unlocks the medicinal magic  
of South Bay plants. BY JULIE VALLONE

**WHEN DAN DION FROM SANTA CRUZ** first met herbalist Paula Grainger, he had been previously diagnosed as pre-diabetic (Type II) and was looking for ways to lower his blood sugar. His wife, Jill, who had attended one of Grainger's workshops and had consulted with her, suggested Dan visit the herbalist to see what she had to offer him. Dan was willing, but somewhat doubtful that Grainger's services would help. But when Grainger gave him a tincture made up of herbs like hawthorn and holy basil, he was pleasantly surprised by its effects.

Portrait by CHRIS SCHMAUCH

MAKEUP: ROSE HILL



## She obtained her degree in 2004, began practicing in London, and after a few years, opened up an herbal clinic and apothecary called Lemon Balm.

"I had been trying to control my blood sugar with diet, exercise and pharmaceutical medicine. I added the herbal tincture, and it dropped 15 percent," he says.

Jill Dion is also getting help from Grainger for arthritis conditions, and she says Grainger's herbal preparations have been helping her with the pain. She adds that they work hand-in-hand with the conventional arthritis medicine prescribed by her rheumatologist.

"She's just so knowledgeable about plants. You could listen to her forever," says Jill, adding tongue-in-cheek, "It helps that she has an English accent. That always sounds better to me."

The Dions are among a growing number of Bay Area residents who have been introduced to the power of plants by Grainger, known as "the English Herbalist in Santa Cruz." In addition to

helping clients with medical issues, she also teaches people how to make skincare items like lotions, lip balm and body butter. She shares her knowledge in a variety of ways, including consultations, classes, workshops, birthday parties and herb hikes in the surrounding area.

"An herb walk is an opportunity to get out in nature; UC Santa Cruz is great for that," explains Grainger. "Its farm and garden have lots of things growing, both wild plants that I can identify and share with people and more cultivated things in the garden."

Although she calls the walks "herb hikes" (pronouncing the "h" in herb as they do in England), she says they are not difficult or demanding treks.

"I find it hard to go more than 50 feet in half an hour because there's always this plant and that plant. We really just walk around and identify the plants, discuss what they do and how I use them medicinally, and learn a little bit about their history. It's really fun," she says.

Grainger says people are often surprised to learn that plants nearby and familiar to them have medicinal uses.

"Yarrow is a really good example of that. It stops bleeding and is particularly good for bites and stings. You can chew it, or you can mush it up in your hand and put it right on a bite or sting. It just takes the sting right out of it and reduces the inflammation," she explains.

"Plantain—not the one that looks like a big banana but the kind that grows all over Santa Cruz with its strap-like leaves—that's another really good anti-inflammatory that helps with all kinds of bites and things."

Clockwise from bottom right: Paula Grainger leading an herb walk at Wilder Ranch, Paula at home with her husband and son, Paula (center) with her parents and grandparents in Surrey, England.



### Calendula

These bright orange flowers brighten gardens all over the world. Calendula is an anti-inflammatory that heals and protects against infection. Drop a few flowers into hot water to make a tea to help clear acne and eczema or make an infused oil to create a beautiful, golden healing salve. Calendula is a short-lived annual, but if you allow a few flowers at the end of the season to go to seed, it will happily pop up all over the garden.



### California Poppy

While illegal to collect from federal lands, this colorful and drought-tolerant plant is easy to grow in the garden, where you can harvest the leaves and flowers. To make a tincture which herbalists use to help insomnia, just harvest a few handfuls of leaves and flowers, chop them and place in a jar, then pour vodka over so that the plant material is fully submerged. Leave to stand in a cool, dark place for a couple of weeks then strain as above and bottle the resulting liquid. Add 20-40 drops to a little water and drink at bedtime. The tincture will keep for at least a year.

### Garden Sage

Make a strong tea by pouring boiling water over a small handful of torn sage leaves and allowing it to steep for 10 minutes before straining. Add honey to the hot tea and drink to soothe and relieve a sore throat, or allow it to cool and sip the cold tea to reduce hot flashes.



## Top 5 Medicinal Herbs to Grow



### Rose

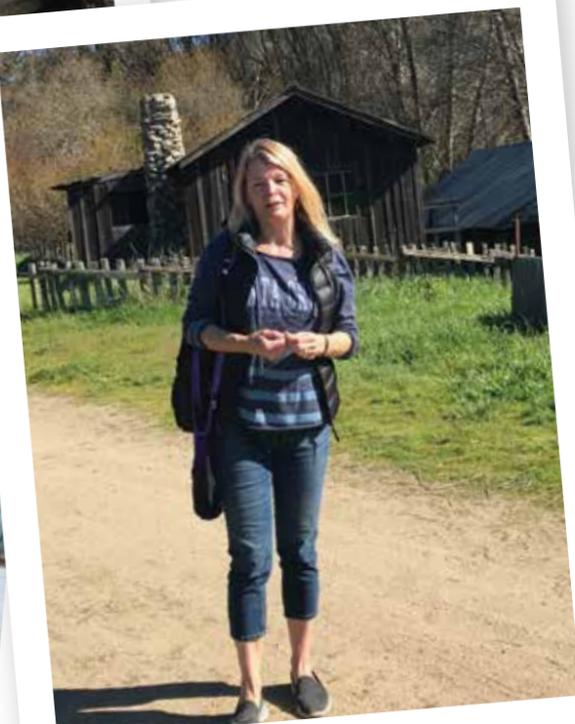
Herbalists believe that rose lifts your mood and opens the heart to love. Make a simple syrup by heating equal parts of water and sugar until the sugar is fully dissolved, and then dropping sweet-scented rose petals into the hot syrup, covering the pan and allowing it to cool. Strain the syrup through a sieve lined with a double layer of cheesecloth and add a little to lemonade or prosecco for a delightful summer cocktail. It is also delicious poured over strawberries or raspberries. The syrup will keep for a week or so in the refrigerator.



### German Chamomile

Chamomile loves the Bay Area sunshine. You can grow it from seed or buy young plants from a garden center. Harvest the flowers to make a delicious tea which will ease anxiety, calm your mind and help you sleep.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF PAULA GRAINGER; SHUTTERSTOCK (4); OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM RIGHT: PHOEBE LIERMANN; RACHEL HARPER; COURTESY OF FRANK GRAINGER



## Calendula and Lavender Salve

This recipe for salve from Paula Grainger makes effective use of garden herbs. Apply a little with clean fingers to insect bites, small cuts, and grazes or burns to soothe, reduce inflammation, and help prevent infection. Beeswax and containers can be found in herb stores or online. Makes two 2-oz. tins or pots.



### For the infused oil:

- 10 large fresh calendula flowers, petals torn off
- 4 lavender flower spikes, flowers stripped off (you can discard the stalks)
- 6 oz. good-quality organic extra virgin olive oil
- A pint Mason jar with lid

### To make the salve:

- 2 slightly heaping tablespoons of beeswax pellets
- 25 drops lavender essential oil

- For the infused oil, place the calendula petals and centers with the tiny lavender flowers in the Mason jar. Pour in the olive oil, making sure the flowers are fully submerged. Leave the jar to stand in a sunny spot, occasionally shaking it. After a week, strain the oil through a sieve lined with a double layer of cheesecloth. Squeeze the cheesecloth to extract as

much of the oil as possible.

- For the salve, line up clean, dry tins or jars with the lids off. Measure 4 oz. of the infused oil into a heat-proof glass jug, add the beeswax and place it in a double boiler. (If you don't have a double boiler, you can stand the jug on a heat-proof trivet in a pan of boiling water). Be sure not to let any water get into the jug of oil.

- Gently heat the water until the beeswax has fully melted into the oil, then using a cloth (as the glass will be hot), carefully remove the jug from the pan and place it on a heatproof surface. Add the lavender essential oil and stir, then immediately pour the golden liquid into your prepared tins or jars. Allow the salve to cool fully before replacing the lids and labeling. The salve will keep for at least a year in a cool place.

And then there are dandelions. "Everyone knows dandelions, and gardeners spend a lot of time digging them out of their lawns," notes Grainger. "But dandelions have been shown to improve liver function. There was even one study that associated using dandelion roots regularly with reduced level of cancer. Cancer is a place where I tend not to go, but certainly as a preventative, there are studies on it out there."

Grainger truly enjoys interacting with people and sharing her knowledge, and says that working with children is one of her favorite things. In addition to birthday parties, Grainger teaches an herbal medicine elective course for the middle school at Gateway, a private school in Santa Cruz. Her son is a student there, and she is president of the board.

"I'm really passionate about helping kids reconnect with nature," she says. "If you start recognizing the plants around you and know what they can do, it completely changes everything. Even the walk to school becomes different."

### AN HERBAL EPIPHANY

Grainger began officially working with herbs back in 2001, leaving her corporate job in publishing in search of a more fulfilling path. Plants seemed a natural choice. She had learned to love them as a child growing up in Surrey, England. There she spent many happy days in the garden and fields, helping her mother and grandmother gather blackberries, elderflowers and dandelion flowers for her grandfather's homemade wine and her grandmother's jams and jellies.

"It really was just a road to Damascus thing," she says of her decision to change her career. "I've always been fascinated by plants. I was that little girl in the garden, gathering things in the hedgerows for my guinea pigs. I just suddenly had this very clear idea of what I wanted to do."

After deciding that plants were her passion, Grainger discovered, applied to and was accepted into the herbal medicine program at the University of Westminster in London. She obtained her degree in 2004, began practicing in London, and after a few years, opened up an herbal clinic and apothecary called Lemon Balm.

Grainger credits a volcano with her family's decision to move from the U.K. to Santa Cruz. In 2010, she, her husband (a novelist), and 5-year-old son took a vacation to California, where they drove up the Pacific Coast highway from Los Angeles to San Francisco. They decided to stop in Santa Cruz for a couple of days, and during their stay, someone in the hotel pool mentioned something about a volcano.

"I thought, 'Well, we really don't have volcanoes in England.' So I checked it out on the news channel and sure enough, this volcano in Iceland had blown up and created this massive ash cloud that was covering the Atlantic and preventing any flights from the U.S. to the U.K. and the rest of Europe."

Finding themselves stranded in Santa Cruz for what would be two weeks, she and her family began exploring the city and surroundings and fell in love with the place.

"We looked around a bit and saw that this would be an amazing place for us to bring up our child, and a great place to live and work."

When they got back to England, they began making plans for a

trial move. About a year and a half later, they came back to Santa Cruz and moved into a rented house with three suitcases, a big box of Legos and her husband's guitar. After another year, they decided to stay.

The decision meant Grainger had to close up her apothecary and clinic. It also meant she had to change the way she ran her practice. She even had to change her professional identity.

### MAKING A MEDICAL DISTINCTION

Unlike the United Kingdom, the United States doesn't recognize herbalists as medical professionals, so Grainger can't diagnose maladies or prescribe medicines here, or call herself a medical herbalist, as she does in the U.K. In the U.S., she's an herbalist.

Grainger points out that there are a number of countries besides England that do recognize herbalists as medical professionals, or that use herbal medicines in conventional practices.

"If you go to China or India and go see a conventional medical doctor, they're as likely to give you herbs or acupuncture as they are conventional medicine," she explains. "There are many parts of the world where herbal medicine is just medicine. In Germany, it's very widely used, but it's something that doctors were trained in and only they are allowed to prescribe and use. It's the same in France."

She notes that one of the reasons herbal medicine is more recognized and respected in the U.K. dates back to the reign of

**In addition to helping clients with medical issues, she also teaches people how to make skincare items like lotions, lip balm and body butter.**

Henry VIII in the 1500s.

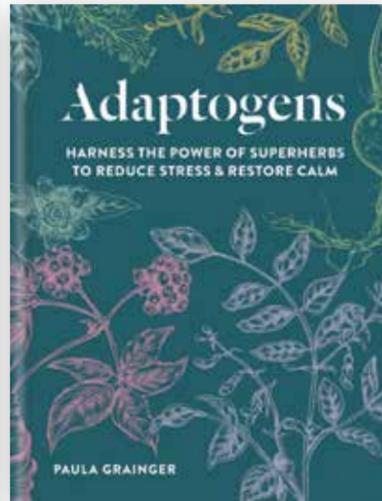
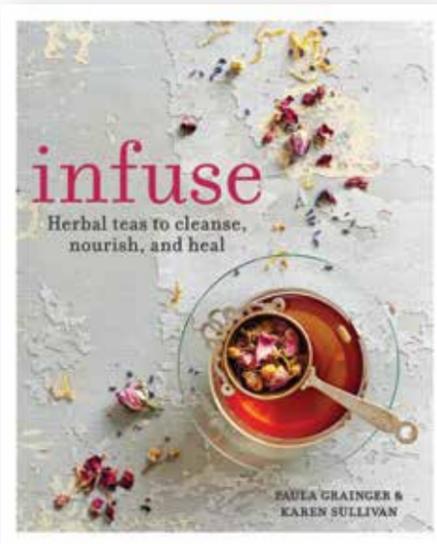
"At some point during his reign, Henry VIII got very sick and was given herbs. He was so impressed by their effect that he wrote a charter saying that no herbalist should be mistreated or prevented from practicing. Astonishingly, it's still around and still protected," she explains.

She adds that when Henry VIII was around, a kind of competition between chemical and plant medicine was just beginning. For example, many doctors gave their patients mercury to cure



COURTESY OF PAULA GRAINGER (2)

**Grainger says she might treat two people with very similar issues in a very different way, giving them herbs based on what suits their constitution.**



Grainger's love of herbs has inspired two books.

diseases, but at the same time, it poisoned them.

In the U.S. (as in the U.K.), Grainger doesn't present her herbal remedies as alternatives to traditional medicine. She takes an integrative approach to her work.

"I'm not about to say to people with diabetes, 'Hey; stop your insulin.'"

She says that she's not a fan of the idea that modern medicine has nothing to offer.

"It has changed lives; it's fabulous," she notes. "But we do know, for instance, that antibiotics are becoming much less effective. The World Health Organization has put out repeated warnings about this. People are repeatedly given antibiotics for viral infections, which don't work and can lead to increased resistance.

She believes that one of the reasons the medical community is slow to recognize herbal medicine is the inability to patent and make a lot of money off herbs, as can be done with synthetic drugs. That money is needed to fund studies on a drug's effectiveness, which tend to be very expensive. For that reason, there are far fewer studies on the impacts of herbal medicines. You can't patent a plant.

Another reason: in herbal medicine, one size doesn't fit all. Grainger says she might treat two people with very similar issues in a very different way, giving them herbs based on what suits their constitution. That approach complicates any effort to do a randomized control clinical trial in which people are randomly divided into separate groups to compare different treatments.

Finally, herbal medicine has been thought of here as kind of a folk medicine, mainly used by women to keep their families

and communities healthy. "It hasn't really poked its nose out from that to be a kind of profession that's good at standing up for itself and getting laws changed and so on," she explains.

To raise awareness and to share her knowledge about the power of plants, Grainger published "Infuse," a book of herbal teas and remedies. A second book, "Adaptogens," is due out in October.

#### HEALING COMES FULL CIRCLE

Over the past few years, Dr. Stephanie Cooper Kochhar, an anesthesiologist from Saratoga, has come to appreciate the value of herbal medicine and of Grainger as a guide to it.

"She's a great teacher," says Kochhar. "I learn something new at every class. They don't have any training here in the U.S. equivalent to what Paula has been through

in the U.K., so I think she's very unique in her knowledge, and I've just really enjoyed getting to know her."

Kochhar says she's fascinated by how Grainger makes her tinctures to help treat people with very different health issues. "It feels like that's how medicine kind of started, with people using plants, and then came Western medicine with artificial chemicals and tablets and pills, and now it's like it's coming full circle back to plants. To me, they just seem safer, with fewer side effects."

Kochhar has brought her daughter to Grainger's holiday classes where the participants often make gifts such as skincare products out of plants and other natural substances, like beeswax.

"I like her philosophy that if you can eat it, it's safe on your skin," says Kochhar.

Among the things she has learned from Grainger is that red clover can help with menopause, sage and rosemary can help with mental clarity and borage, among many other uses, can give you courage.

"I was running a triathlon and I was nervous," she recalls. "I really think it helped."

For her part, Grainger says she really likes people and plants, and her business gives her the chance to connect the two.

"I just love it when people are interested and say, 'Oh, I've done this and tried that and it really worked.' When people feel healthier and can address some long-term health issue they've had, that is just so gratifying and makes you feel really good about the world."

She also loves living in the South Bay and meeting the people who live around her. "I think it's just a kind of fairyland. And I love the way things grow." ■

# SEMIANNUAL DINING GUIDE



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FROM LEFT: COURTESY OF HAMLIN; COURTESY OF GAIA BOOKS

SHUTTERSTOCK