



Matthew Wood Institute of Herbalism

DOCTRINE OF SIGNATURES GUIDE

DOCTRINE OF SIGNATURES

ENVIRONMENT 1

Environment plays a big role in the Doctrine of Signatures:

ARNICA

Arnica montana

Growing on **cold, north facing slopes** can indicate a remedy for cold conditions, like the hock, bruises, and lack of circulation.

PLANTAIN

Plantago spp.

Growing in **compact ground** can indicate a remedy for pressed and bruised feeling of plantar fasciitis.

MARSHMALLOW ROOT

Althaea officinalis

Tolerating **saltier and moister soils** can help with issues of water balance and softening tissue via its intelligence for salt management.

GRAVEL ROOT

Asclepias tuberosa

Growing between the **gravelly areas between water and land**, help Gravel Root specialize in removing kidney stones and calcifications.

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DOCTRINE OF SIGNATURES

ENVIRONMENT 2

Environment plays a big role in the Doctrine of Signatures:

PASQUE FLOWER -PULSATILLA

Anemone spp.

The **wind-loving** Pulsatilla is nicknamed "windflower," making it good for changable personalities and scattered **mental activity**.

CEDAR

Thuja occidentalis

Although this plant is a favorite ornamental, Cedar favors **free-flowing waters**, making it an excellent **lymphatic** herb.

BURDOCK

Arctium lappa

Burdock can often be found at the **edge of an environment**, along paths, in the transition between shade and sun. Burdock is a well-known **normalizer**, helping restore balance to many body systems.

GROUND IVY

Glechoma hederacea

One of the few plants you may see growing in the **shady, damp places** in your yard, this trailing plant can help swampy **lymphatics**.

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LEAF SHAPE

Leaf shape and design can be a clue to finding a signature:

WILD YAM

Dioscorea villosa

Wild Yam's leaf is **shaped like the hip bones**, making it an excellent remedy for the **pelvic region and women's issues**.

ST. JOHN'S WORT

Hypericum perforatum

The leaf has **pin prick holes** in it, making it ideal for **nerve pain** that feels like pins and needles.

HEPATICA

Hepatica nobilis

Uniquely **lobed shapes** resemble a liver, and Hepatica is a historical **liver herb** - so much so that it's named after the liver.

YARROW

Achillea millefolium

The **vein-like** look of Yarrow leaves indicate that it's for **deep cuts** down to the vein and artery level.

GROUND IVY

Glechoma hederacea

The **rounded leaf shape** and **opposite leaf arrangement** demonstrates its affinity for the **ears**.

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STEM STRUCTURE

A plant's stem can represent the intelligence or signature of a the plant:

BLACK COHOSH

Actaea racemosa
(syn. *Cimicifuga racemosa*)

Black Cohosh's **whip-like shape** and **motion** make it an excellent herb for **whiplash**.

MOTHERWORT

Leonurus cardiaca

The **regularity** and **rhythmic placement of leaves and flowers** arranged on the stem indicate that it's good for the **spine** and calming a **nervous heart**.

MULLEIN

Verbascum thapsus

Mullein's **large, sturdy stem** that last all winter long signifies its **spinal properties**.

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COLOR

Color can often indicate a possible signature:

BLUE VERVAIN, SKULLCAP

Verbena hastata, Scutellaria lateriflora, S. galericulata

The **blue-purple** of Skullcap, Blue Vervain, and other mints show an affinity for the **nervous system**.

CELANDINE

Chelidonium majus

The **yellow** of Celandine's sap and flowers show that it's good for **bile** and the **gallbladder**.

HAWTHORN

Crataegus spp.

The **bright red** of Hawthorn berries show it's connection to the **blood** and the **heart**.

BEET ROOT, SUMAC BERRIES, YELLOW DOCK

Beta vulgaris, Rhus typhina, Rumex crispus

The **dark red** and burgundy of Beets, Sumac berries, and Yellow Dock Root seeds indicate the presence of **iron** and a **blood-building** quality

BAPTISIA, ECHINACEA

Baptisia tinctoria, Echinacea spp.

The **black** of Baptisia pods and dying Echinacea leaves indicate an ability to handle **septic conditions**.

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SOURCE: Beetroot. (2023). In Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Beetroot&oldid=1148199184>.
SOURCE: Wood, M. (2009). *The Earthwise Herbal: A Complete Guide to New World Medicinal Plants*. North Atlantic Books.
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FLOWER SHAPE

A plant's stem can represent the intelligence or signature of a the plant:

MONARDA-SWEETLEAF

Monarda fistulosa

The **tube-like flowers** indicate that this is an herb for the small, narrow tubes of the **ears** and the **kidneys**.

ASTERS: CHAMOMOMILE, CHICHORY

Matricaria chamomilla, Cichorium intybus

The flowers are very much like **eyes** with their many **fine lashes**. Often, these are **liver remedies**; in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), the liver is associated with the **eyes**.

PASQUE FLOWER-PULSATILLA

Anemone spp.

Pulsatilla's **cup-like flower** hints at the intelligence of dealing with a **watery, emotional nature**. The cup also symbolizes **receptivity**, showing that it's for those that are very **receptive to others' opinions**.

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SOURCE: Cichorium intybus (Blue Sailors, Chicory, Cofficweed, Common Chicory, Cornflower, Italian Dandelion, Succory) | North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2023, from <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/cichorium-intybus/>

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LIVER

Often times, parts of the plant can indicate and organ:

COLOR

Yellow is often associated with the visceral organs which are located around the **third chakra**. Examples of liver signatures include:

- the yellow flower and sap of **Celandine**
- the yellow flower of **Dandelion**

TASTE

The emotion associated with the liver is **anger** or **resentment** (boiled down anger). This is revealed in the **bitter** taste of:

- **Dandelion**
- **Artichoke**

SHAPE

Since the liver is lobed, many plants that have **lobed leaves** will act on the liver. This includes:

- **Hepatica** - it's even named after the liver!
- **Oak** - this is a traditional herb for alcoholism

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LUNGS

Often times, parts of the plant can indicate and organ:

COLOR

Green is often associated with the visceral organs which are located around the fourth chakra. Examples of lung signatures include:

- plants that focus their energy on **generating large green leaves** more than sizable flowers
- **Coltsfoot** - the large leaves appear after the flower, showing their **prominent green display**.

SHAPE

The lungs are a **large** organ that is **bifurcated**. Look for **leaves that are also large**; sometimes, but not always, they are **paired oppositely**. You can see these features in:

- **Sunflower** - the leaves are large, but the seeds are traditionally used in cough syrups
- **Elecampane** - large leaved and excellent for bacterial infections in mucosal areas.

SOUND

An unusual signature, but relevant! When the wind interacts with a plant, it can **sound like breathing**! You can hear this in:

- **Pine** - the **soughing** of the needles sound like **breathing**. Just the scent makes you **inhale** deeper; Pine is great for **green, sticky mucus**.

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KIDNEYS

Often times, parts of the plant can indicate and organ:

SHAPE

Kidney-shaped and places that are shaped to **hold water** parts are for the kidneys. That can include **tube-like** structures that are inside the kidney. You can find examples in:

- the leaves and tube-like flowers of **Ground Ivy**
- the tube-like flowers of **Monarda**
- the ability to hold water like the leaves of **Teasel** (working on the "kidney essence" or "jing")

ENVIRONMENT

The kidney's job is **filtration** of water and **protein processing**. Many kidney herbs will grow in areas that work on filtering or breaking down matter, such as the **gravelly areas** between water and land or **areas rich in protein**. Herbs included are:

- **Nettles** - they can often be found around septic tanks
- **Gravel Root** - grows where water meets land
- **Goldenrod** - favors gravelly ditches

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SOURCE: Wood, M. (2008). *The Earthwise Herbal: A Complete Guide to Old World Medicinal Plants*. North Atlantic Books.

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NERVES

Often times, parts of the plant can indicate and organ:

COLOR

The color most often associated with the nerves is **blue** or **blue-purple**; it's, electric, as well as calming. You can see this color in the flowers of:

- **Skullcap**
- **Motherwort**
- **Violet**

SHAPE

Squares and **90° angles** are often seen as signs of tension, especially in astrology. The angle is two forces coming together to create an impass. You can see this in the stems and leaf arrangement of:

- **Blue Vervain**
- **Peppermint**
- **Lemon Balm**

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FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

Often times, parts of the plant can indicate and organ:

COLOR

The color associated with the female reproductive system is the same as the kidneys/urogenital system and blood: dark red. You can see its presence in:

- the dark red flowers of **Trillium** and **Wild Ginger**

TEXTURE

A soft or furry texture can often be seen in female remedies, seen in:

- the hairy flowers of **Mitchella**
- the downy stems and leaves of **Pulsatilla**

SHAPE

The shape comes in two forms, although both similar: **the heart** (or "hip" shape) and the **grouping of three**. You can see either in:

- the leaves and fruit of **Wild Yam**
- the leaves of **Shepherd's Purse** and **Wild Ginger**
- the triad leaves of **Cramp Bark** and **Blue Cohosh**
- the leaves and petals of **Trillium** and **White Easter Lily**

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LYMPHATICS

Often times, parts of the plant can indicate and organ:

GROWTH PATTERN

Many plants that have their aerial parts or rooting systems **close to the ground** can demonstrate lymphatic affinity; these types of plants also like to **trail** and **creep** along the ground or have runners. You can see this in:

- the creeping nature of **Ground Ivy**
- the runners and roots of **Sweet Violet**

ENVIRONMENT

The lymphatic system is a **soggy, shady**, and **water filled**, or areas that transition from this type of area. Environments that house plants that grow in similar areas can indicate lymphatic herbs, including:

- the shade loving **Sweet Violet**
- **Cleavers**, growing where sun meets shade

SHAPE

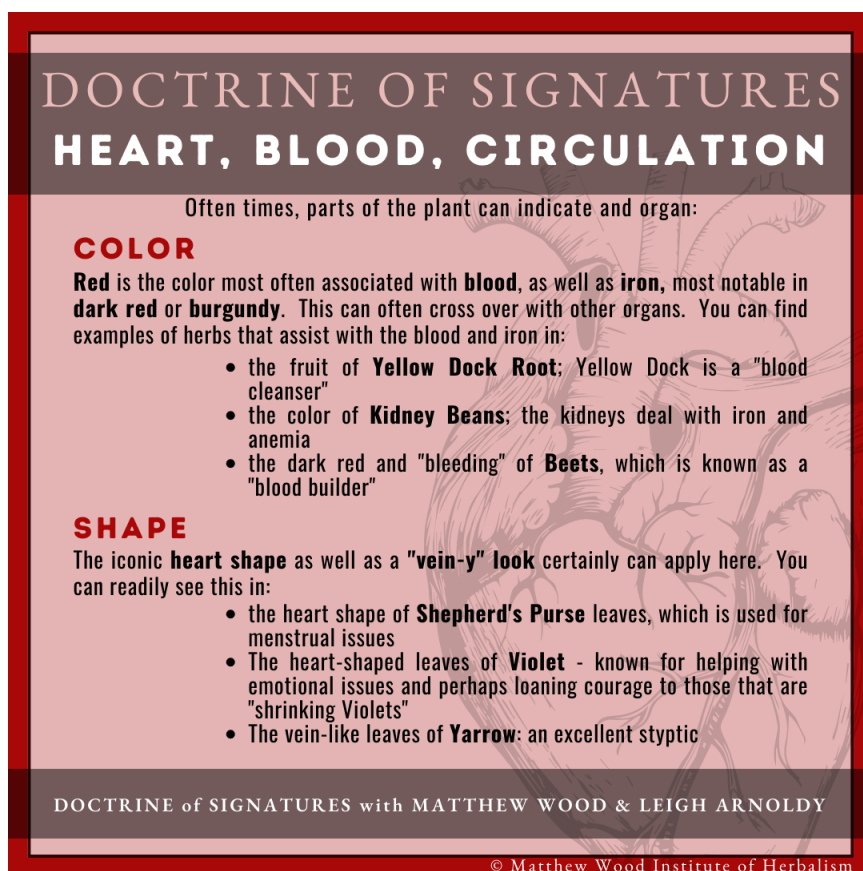
Plants with obvious **node-like** structures can indicate the lymph as well. You can see this in:

- the galls on the leaves of **Ground Ivy**
- the node-like fruits of **Scrophularia**
- the globular fruits of **Red Root**

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SOURCE: A Modern Herbal | Violet, Sweet. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2023, from <https://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/v/vio12.html>
SOURCE: Ceanothus americanus (New Jersey Tea). Minnesota Wildflowers. (n.d.). Retrieved April 11, 2023, from <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/herb/new-jersey-tea>

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