



## MEDICINAL PLANT SPOTLIGHT

### Health with Hops featuring Erika Harlow

by Laura Walker

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Erika remembers being just a 5-year-old kid when her interest was piqued by medicinal herbs. She grew up in Seattle and spent most of her summers, vacations and holidays at the Breitenbush Hot springs in Oregon, a beautiful homestead nestled within nearly 80 acres of raw forest land and featuring natural hot springs where people would bathe and drink of its water for health benefits.

Erika was a working member of the community during summer breaks from college. Having a vast background of farming, her family understood what it took to produce and grow organic vegetables and herbs. Her aunt, Rebecca, was the herbalist and midwife caring for the alternative living

community there and became Erika's mentor. "I got lucky. My aunt was at my birth. I didn't seek out a teacher; I was born with one," reflected Erika.

Continuing to embrace herbal medicine into her adult life, Erika was grateful to have her friend, Stephanie Iverson, make all the tinctures and medicines for her herbally-assisted pregnancy. Additionally, her aunt who brought her into the world was even present to assist Erika as she gave birth to her own child. Midwife Jackie Stratton, who had taught Erika so much during those years, was with her as well. Jackie has continued to work with herbs and healthcare for Erika's son and herself well into his adolescent years. Though her degrees were in philosophy and women's studies, Erika's upbringing continued to lead her back to herbology. Erika said, "I recall asking my aunt what would make an apothecary good. She responded it would just be the quality of the herb, how they were treated and where they were harvested."

Erika is indigenous to Washington state so **Hops**, *Humulus lupulus*, is the medicinal plant that she was eager to highlight. In fact, this painting by **Robert Benney** called **The Hop Harvest** inspires her and hangs on Erika's wall. Upon reflection of her journey to incorporate natural medicines into her life she said, "The way I think about herbs...when you need medicine, you learn about it, find out what's available to you and how to use it." Read on to learn the history and properties of this amazing plant.

Historically Hops has had an important history in Washington state. Hops were first planted in Olympia in the mid-1860s by a brewer named Charles



Wood. He cultivated the plants in his garden with hopes of brewing beer. In March of 1865, he gave Ezra Meeker of Puyallup some of his cuttings and offered to buy any hops Meeker could produce. A huge success, the crop flourished in that climate, however, in 1892, the hop louse infested the hops and the Western Washington industry was devastated. Fortunately, hops were being grown on the east side of the Cascades in the Yakima Valley sometime between 1869 and 1872 by Charles Carpenter, and the sunny conditions turned out to be ideal for growing. Today, Washington is the nation's #1 hop producer, followed by Oregon at #2, and Idaho at #3. The Pacific Northwest is the nation's leader in hop production; these three states have over 99% of the nation's hop acreage and about 25% of worldwide acreage.

Source: [https://www.yakimaherald.com/news/local/happened/it-happened-here-hops-become-a-major-cash-crop-for-yakima-county/article\\_o8e32dba-65e3-528b-8b4a-85c1c2b0755e.html](https://www.yakimaherald.com/news/local/happened/it-happened-here-hops-become-a-major-cash-crop-for-yakima-county/article_o8e32dba-65e3-528b-8b4a-85c1c2b0755e.html)

Source: <https://hopmintstress.wsu.edu/hops.html>



Hops is dioecious, meaning the male and female flowers are on separate plants. Male flowers are found in loose bunches or panicles and the female flowers develop into leafy cone-like catkins, called *strobiles* consisting of a number of overlapping, yellowish-green bracts. These can be collected and dried for use. Both fruit and bract are sprinkled with a yellow powdery substance, which contains Lupulin. This is the bitter principle to which Hops owe much of their tonic properties and can be harvested by shaking the strobiles.

Pictured here is Erika's harvest. She has learned from experience and emphasized that the hops harvest will deteriorate with light and heat quickly. It is important to dry and store the hops in amber bottles in cool storage or even frozen in zip locked bags once dried to maintain potency.

Source: <https://www.botanical.com/botanical/mgmh/h/hops--32.html>

But it turns out that hops offer many more benefits than just a favorite tasty beverage at your local pub and surprisingly, hops itself does not contain alcohol. Erika finds hops most useful infused to create bitters and tonics to improve appetite and digestion. Herbal Highway, her current favorite podcast, recently featured the values of hops as a plant that slows down the central nervous system but contrary to popular belief it is not a mood depressive. It is found to be useful for any activity that you wish to slow down such as irritable bowel, seizures, nightmares, ADHA or hyperactivity. Hops is also antimicrobial and antibacterial, so a salve made with hops is useful for topical bacterial infections such as scabies and ringworm.

Source: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/kpfa-the-herbal-highway/id78624707>

An infusion of the leaves can be used for hop tea. In fact, if you'd like to try it for yourself, Erika's Hoplark Hoptea can be found at our very own Orcas Coop made with Black, Green or her personal favorite, Chamomile. Erika has one plant she planted this year that she received from a dear friend Sara Ross from Taproot Farm, a huge influence and amazing farmer, sharing many resources with her. Due to its calming factors, Erika plans to use her hops to make a Hops Dream Pillow for a good night's sleep!

We hope you're inspired to try this special medicinal herb too.



**Disclaimer** ~ While the Orcas Island Garden Club shares information about using essential oils, natural oils, and herbs, these items are not regulated by the FDA. The content included in these monthly medicinal features are for those who are looking for alternative ways to lead a more natural lifestyle. You must not rely on the information in these articles as an alternative to medical advice from your doctor, healthcare provider, or other professional.