

Land-Based Practices for Cultivating Belonging

I meet people all the time that are longing to weave themselves back into relationship with the Land under their feet. But no one seems to know where to start or how to pick up the threads; they seem hopelessly frayed and tangled. These practices are tools that I have used to remember the things that all our ancestors used to know: our place in the family of things. Many of these practices are teachings I'm passing on from a revered elder in my life. When I write that I was taught something, I mean that this thread was passed down to me. I'm holding it for a time, but it doesn't belong to me. (If you're interested, you can find out more about the elder I reference here and in my posts by looking up Dave Welker and the Blue Heron Outdoor School [here](#).)

- **Learning the Land** // I was taught to value general knowledge about the land I'm on just like I would value knowledge about a person. You can learn a lot about a land's history and character by just simply being curious. Ask questions like: what stage of growth is the land in? What animals live on this land? What's her watershed? Who grows together? Where do people fit on this land and how have they historically related to this place? What stories, music, and art have risen from this land?
- **Plant ID** // To be able to greet a plant by its name is an act of honor or respect - similar to remembering the name of a person - but plant ID is about so much more than being able to find a plant in a field guide. I was taught to recognize a plant by the way it feels first, just like I would know if a dear friend was sitting in the room with me, and then be able to key it out. I was also taught any of the ways people have related to that plant (as medicine, food, cordage, building supplies) because the relationship is more valuable than the taxonomy.
- **Plant Journeys** // Plant journeys are the most powerful, authentic way I know of to learn about plants. I haven't journeyed with every plant in my apothecary, but I make a point to seek them out in their homes whenever I can. I was taught to begin a plant journey by making an offering to a plant, to introduce myself by giving my name and the place I come from, and then to ask the plant to speak to me. Afterwards I usually put a small piece of the plant in my mouth and then lay down or sit with the plant quietly for 10-15 minutes before writing down any insights or impressions. It's worth noting that you should be 100% positive of your plant ID before you put something in your mouth. You don't want to digest something that's poisonous.
- **Mapping the Story of the Land** // Draw out the land - where the plants and trees are, any burrows or homes you know of, etc. - and keep sketches throughout a year. Land is deeply storied. She is the library of the world, holding both knowledge and wisdom and the chance for us to walk in right relationship. When you map her out you unwittingly learn to listen to all a place has to offer. Mapping will also give you insights into the lives of your more-than-human kin and the way life flourishes all around you.
- **Live Out On the Land** // Foraging, camping (especially primitive camping), canoeing - literally almost anything that gets you out on land, will transform and teach you. Dave told me more than once that you learn something new every time you go out onto the land and I've yet to prove that wrong. Make sure to visit the land in all of her seasons and weather. Learn to love all the ways she shows herself.
- **Tracking** // Tracking is really about reading the land and learning about those that live there. It's more of a spiritual practice than a practical skill in a lot of ways. There was a point when I was learning how to track that I began to sense more than see the overlapping ways creatures moved through the forest.
- **[Ethical Wildcrafting](#)** // Relying on the land for food and medicine will teach you another way of being in the world, one based on reciprocal relationship. When you wildcraft ethically you build your awareness of what allows the land to thrive and you learn about how all of us, human and more-than-human, have a place in this wide world.
- **Land-based crafts** // Learn how to move the way your ancestors did, how to hold things in your hands and create something practically beautiful, or even just beautiful. Spin fiber, carve spoons, and make baskets, or learn any of the endless skills your ancestors had for making their way through life.

- **Seasonal Ceremony** // Ceremony and ritual needs to come from your own ancestral lineage or that deep, quiet place inside of you. When it does, it's a powerful tool in reconnecting you to the ebb and flow of the world around you.

*There are two warnings that I would share with someone just beginning to step out onto the land. The first is to always listen for the no. When you go out to the land holding some intention - asking for a specific ally to show up, perhaps, or an experience - the answer from the land is usually going to be yes...unless it's a no. A yes can be a subtle thing, but a no is usually going to slap you in the face. For example, not only will the plant you're looking for not be where you think it should be, but you'll get twisted around on a trail that's straight as an arrow a half-mile from your car. You'll finally slide into the seat of your car long after you expected to be home unreasonably sore, tired, and covered in scratches. That's your no. Be polite when that happens and respect the land's boundaries with you.

The second warning I would offer you is that dark, twisted things happen out in the woods and remote places edging civilization. If you go out often enough it's likely you'll trip across the horrible things people do. Usually, you'll have a feeling of warning or danger before that happens. The hair on the back of your neck will stand up and you'll feel a sinking sensation in the pit of your stomach. Honor your body's wisdom in those things and carefully, quietly back out the way you came. And as a woman, I don't go out alone or unarmed.