

Methow Visions & Goldenrod



The Methow Valley is the major drainage of the east slopes of the northernmost part of the North Cascades mountains. I live and farm in the Methow during the growing season.

Methow, I send my thanksgiving for your beauty and your medicinal plants. The Methow is rich in natural resources and natural beauty.

There is a practice in permaculture we call "reading the landscape". It is a practice known by indigenous people around the world. The patterns of plant vegetation tell stories. We can read the story, or at least parts of it. When I look at a landscape, I read its health. I read its health in relation to its potential, What it would have looked like before white settlement. I can look at the present and see back into its past. Thanks to Robert Daubenmire and a generation of ecologists since, we have an idea of what Methow's ecosystems were like before white settlers arrived.

I can also look at a parcel of land and envision numerous pathways for that land to evolve into. Because I am a restorationist, I can envision what the site would look like if the native ecosystem was restored, inasmuch as possible. Because I am a permaculturist I can imagine ways to enrich it with plantings to create bountiful landscapes for humans and native species. Because I have seen some of the worst erosion in the world, I can imagine what the land could look like after several hundred more years of abuse. I pray and work for the first two of these three options.

What are the relationships between art and permaculture? Depends on your definition of art. Perhaps art is the capturing or portraying of form and patterns to bring forth beauty or inner meaning. If Nature is an artist and the landscape is her canvas, then plants are one of Nature's major paints. We all enjoy the scenery. Most of us notice the major vegetation changes, but how many of us know each plant intimately. Know each plant intimately through the seasons and can recognize it by seedling, in first bud, in flower, in fruit, by withered up stalks, or by root alone. Some of us plant enthusiasts aspire to such knowledge, but we can never know the depth of the knowledge of the Native peoples who made their living from the local plants. They knew each plant and all its uses and when and how to gather and process it. They had stories and myths for many of the plants. They knew which plants gave food and which were medicine or fiber and the

properties of every wood available to them. This kind of knowledge takes many generations to build.

On the other hand, there is a kind of knowledge today not available in the past. Through the study of botany and taxonomy I can learn the relationships of plants around the world. I can find out how many goldenrod (*Solidago*) species are currently named by science and their distribution. I can look up the ethnobotany (indigenous plant uses) for *Solidago* throughout its range.

Methow as a source of medicinal herbs.

Medicinal herbs could be a major source of diversified income in the Methow from:

- 1) wildcrafted native medicinals;
- 2) wildcrafted non-native medicinals;
- 3) cultivated native medicinals; and
- 4) cultivated non-native medicinals.

In my experience, about half of the plants growing wild in any given area have medicinal properties. Of these only a small proportion are marketable and/or are of sufficient quantity in the landscape to sustainably wildcraft.

Knapweed (*Centaurea*) species are common weeds in the methow and are mentioned in various herbal books for healing properties, but alas the current market has not been developed.

Dalmatian toadflax (*Linaria dalmatica*) is another methow weed which has herbal potential also, but the market has yet to be developed. *Linaria vulgaris* has a long history of medicinal use and was once highly regarded. Deni Bown says of *Linaria vulgaris* " - a bitter, acrid, astringent herb that cleanses toxins from the tissues, and is diuretic and laxative. It acts mainly on the liver. Used internally for skin diseases, enteritis, hepatitis, gall bladder complaints, and edema. Not given to pregnant women. Externally for hemorrhoids, skin eruptions, sores and malignant ulcers. For use by qualified practitioners only; dosage is apparently critical."

St. John's wort is an eastern Washington weed that is currently worth a lot of money. One ranch in the Kamloops region of British Columbia (north of the Okanogan) reportedly contracted to deliver 400,000 pounds of St. John's wort in 1998. There is not much St. John's wort in the Methow, yet, but it has been increasing along roadsides over the past few years. It is against my ethics to harvest from alongside well-travelled roads. So St. John's wort along Methow's

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roadsides will remain the responsibility of weed control people rather than of wildcrafters.

While it is true that Methow has many wild medicinal plants in abundance, there are few in such abundance that I hesitate to point many of them out. I would hate to see the Methow ransacked for its medicinals. There is room for some conscientious sustainable wildcrafting, but not for unbridled greed. Sustainable wildcrafting needs to be looked at on a species by species basis and a site by site basis.

Take goldenrod for an example. Goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*) is found in moist habitats around the Methow. It is a common, but not overly abundant plant in the landscape. Sustainable harvesting of goldenrod in the Methow would keep a few wildcrafters busy during the flowering season, but not many at current amounts. I would recommend it as a crop to grow under irrigation. There is a fair demand, which is likely to grow. A third avenue to explore is to plant goldenrod in additional wild habitats where it currently doesn't exist. In other words, increase the native stands of goldenrod in the Methow. This might be considered semi-cultivation. Even more desirable in the long run is to increase the number of suitable moist habitats in the Methow. This involves strategies of holding rainfall (and snowmelt) longer in the landscape. The Methow was once a moister place. It could be so again. Restoration, erosion control and permaculture have techniques to make this vision a reality. A greener, richer Methow - with lots more goldenrod.

An Ode to Goldenrod

Goldenrod. . . The name evokes memories for many northerners around the globe. Childhood memories of golden plumes, the stems used for spears and the knobby "bonkers" made from the galls on the goldenrod stem. Today I salute and commemorate your golden-flowered spray. *Solidago*, your genus name derived from the Latin name *solidare* (to make whole or strengthen) referring to Goldenrod's healing medicinal properties. Another name for *Solidago* is "Aaron's rod, an allusion to its great properties", noted in *Health Plants of the World* by Francesco Bianchini and Francesco Corbetta.

There are about 130 species of *Solidago*, native chiefly to North America, with a few species in Europe, Asia, the Azores and South America. *Solidago canadensis* is native on the West Coast from British Columbia to central California, east to the Rocky Mountains and in Baja, California. It is also found from Newfoundland to Manitoba and south to Virginia and Illinois.

Goldenrod is most conspicuous during its bloom time in late summer. It goes to seed quickly; 2-4 weeks after bloom and the seed is ripe. The seed disperses moderately quickly depending on the severity

of wind storms. It likes to send its parachutes aloft when the wind is the strongest. Hundreds of parachuted seeds will be sent aloft during especially strong gusts. The luckiest parachuters may travel up to a mile hoping to land in a suitable habitat.

Goldenrod likes to grow in moist, moderately-disturbed habitats, in full sun or partial shade. Goldenrod grows best in well drained, moisture retentive soil. I have noticed that irrigation ditch banks is one of your most favorite places to grow. River floodplains being another. Along roadside ditchbanks and abandoned places you can also be found. Sunlight being a necessity to make those golden sun flowers. Deni Bown, in *Encyclopedia of Herbs*, says that "the flowers of *Solidago* attract many different beneficial insects, such as lacewings and ladybugs."

Harvest flowerheads in early flowering stage in July/August and use fresh or carefully dry. Leaves and flowering tops are dried and used in infusions, liquid extracts, ointments, powders, and tinctures. Goldenrod currently wholesales for \$8 to \$14 a pound for dried flowerheads.

Goldenrod's medicinal uses:

Goldenrod, *Solidago canadensis*. Aromatic, Carmine, Stimulant, Astringent, Diaphoretic.

"A bitter, astringent, relaxant herb that stimulates the liver and kidneys and reduces inflammation; it is expectorant, improves digestion, and promotes healing. It is also a good urinary antiseptic. Uses: Internally for urinary infections, chronic excess mucus, skin diseases, influenza, whooping cough, flatulent dyspepsia associated with nervous tension, and kidney stones. Externally for wounds, insect bites, ulcers and sore throat." Deni Bown in *Encyclopedia of Herbs*.

David Hoffman in "*Holistic Herbal*" says that goldenrod is perhaps the first plant to think of for upper respiratory catarrh, whether acute or chronic. It may be used in combination with other herbs in the treatment of influenza. As an anti-inflammatory urinary antiseptic, Golden Rod may be used in cystitis, urethritis and the like.

The Chinese used *Solidago* for hemorrhages, wounds, menstrual disorders, cholera, diarrhoea, and hemorrhage from the bladder in children." Li Shih Chen in *Chinese Medicinal Herbs*.

Goldenrod has a reputation as a major cause of hay fever. Less well-known is that goldenrod taken as a tea is a relief for hay fever. Goldenrod is also mentioned as an herb helpful for people coming off of addictions, which certainly gives it a huge market potential.