



A GLIMPSE INTO THE DOCTRINE OF SIGNATURES

THE LOST ART OF UNDERSTANDING PLANT COMMUNICATION:
LISTENING TO PLANTS AS TEACHERS FOR HEALING

The Doctrine of Signatures, perhaps “as ancient as humankind itself” (Graves 2012), is a practice of direct observation that proposes there is an innate intelligence encoded in nature suggesting a connection between a plant’s outward appearance and virtues (color, texture, shape, scent, taste, and habitat) reflects its internal qualities and the conditions it may support in the body.

Some may find the concept of the Doctrine of Signatures to be a bit unpalatable, as it is often viewed to be steeped in the realms of mysticism and pseudoscience. Whether or not you choose to accept or reject the validity of this ancient approach, it can provide an interesting theoretical framework to begin strengthening your relationship to the plants around you and understanding some of the potential medicinal uses of herbs—It is a fun approach to reconnecting with plants that feels personal.

The Doctrine of Signatures is really a language of poetics and a way of reintegrating ourselves in the natural world. It is the art of seeing ourselves in nature and seeing nature within ourselves; Noticing our similarities rather than our differences—It is a gentle reminder that we are an embedded part of nature and not an external force that exists outside of it. Here are some brief examples of plants that illustrate the Doctrine of Signatures:



Examples of The Doctrine of Signatures:

DANDELION (*TARAXACUM OFFICINALE*)

Dandelion is one of the most well-known and researched herbs for the liver, aiding in stimulating digestion through the release of bile. The signature of this herb lies within its bright yellow flowers, “it is indeed striking to see just how many of the classic liver/gallbladder remedies are intensely yellow, just as are those two organs to which they gravitate, due to them being saturated in bile” (Graves 2012). The leaves and roots of the humble dandelion are incredibly bitter—mimicking the nature of bile and signaling to us that it may be a useful herb for ailments within this system.



MULLEIN (*VERBASCUM THAPSUS*)

Mullein is often revered as a powerful remedy for the lungs—and rightfully so. Mullein acts as an expectorant, moving stagnant fluids up and out of the lungs while soothing irritated tissues with its mucilaginous qualities. The large leaves are a signature for the respiratory system and their velvety texture a signature for mucous membranes with villi or cilia (those tiny hair-like projections found within the lungs and digestive tract). In addition to being a healing lung remedy, mullein has a lesser-known medicinal quality—a soothing effect on the digestive tract. Similarly to Dandelion, the bright yellow flowers are an indication for the digestive system, offering relief from constipation and stagnant or slow digestion by adding moisture to dehydrated tissues.



