



NATURAL BORN
HEALER



As a child Klayr Hunter was enchanted by the healing properties of plants. Now she's using those natural powers to help people combat ill health and feel great, as she told LIVING

By Natasha Radmehr



Klayr uses a wide range of plants and herbs

IT is as ancient as mankind itself, but herbal medicine is the hip not-so-new kid in town.

Perhaps the increased health consciousness cultivated by the pandemic has had us reaching for alternative cures to our ailments – maybe a deeper appreciation of nature while on those rambling lockdown walks has turned us on to the healing power of botanicals.

It could even be the influential force of Gen Z at play, evangelical as they are about wellness.

Whatever it is, one recent forecast estimated the plant extracts market will almost double in size over the next five years as we seek to live our lives more mindfully.

This might come as a surprise to anyone who

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has dismissed herbal medicine as a load of woo-woo, but it doesn’t actually exist in a separate realm to modern pharmaceuticals.

Several cultures around the world use herbal medicine as their primary form of healthcare and, as herbalist Klayr Hunter points out, many of the pills we shake out of a bottle actually began life in the soil.

“There are so many medicines that have their basis in plants and phytochemicals. Take aspirin for instance – that comes from white willow bark. Then there’s morphine from the opium poppy, while digoxin, a drug for congestive heart failure, is taken from foxglove,” says Klayr, who reckons herbal medicine has shrugged off the hippy connotations that clung to it in the ‘70s and ‘80s.

“There’s been a big change in how people perceive it in recent years. Some people want to take a natural approach to healthcare without chemicals, and more people are aware now of the huge body of evidence that exists about many herbs, such as St John’s wort, which is sometimes prescribed for mild to moderate depression.”

Despite its scientific credentials there is something quite mystical about herbalism – it’s what attracted Klayr to it in the first place.

She grew up on Tiree and remembers being completely immersed in the magic of plants and the quiet beauty of her idyllic surroundings.

“My mum was a keen gardener with a little herb garden, and she was really into carding, spinning and dyeing sheep’s wool. I remember her making natural dyes from the plants and that always fascinated me.

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Klayr is passionate about plant medicine

“We had a herbal book that I used to pore over too; it talked about how to turn plants into medicine and really captured my imagination,” says Klayr, who had an aptitude for science and art from an early age.

“It was almost like reading a fairytale with witches and spells. I used to love playing at mixing up all sorts of potions and concoctions in our kitchen.”

Klayr didn’t realise she could make a career of this ancient craft until she was 14, when renowned herbalist Jacqui Hazzard spoke at a women’s wellness weekend on the island. She was captivated, “I couldn’t believe it was a job – it was exactly what I wanted to do, and from that point on I pursued it.”

While studying physiology at the University of Glasgow, Klayr landed a job at Napier’s The Herbalist – then on Byres Road – which provided her with herbal training and hands-on experience at a busy dispensary, combining teas and mixing tinctures.

Everything fell into place when long-term herbalist Carol Rogers – who authored The Women’s Guide To Herbal Medicine – left the practice and Klayr took over her clinic space.

“That’s when I saw the impact herbs could have on people,” says Klayr. “A lot of my clients were going through the menopause and experiencing night sweats, insomnia and hot flushes – sometimes up to 15 times a day.

“By giving them the right herbs for a month or two, their hot flushes were reduced to maybe three times a day and they could finally get to sleep. It really opened my eyes.”

It became clear women of all ages were suffering every day because of hormonal

“There are some wonderful herbs that can help support immune function”



focuses on women’s health. “It’s a multidisciplinary clinic so there are acupuncturists, counsellors and massage therapists as well as my own herbal clinic – it means people can be supported from all angles,” she explains.

An appointment with Klayr involves a thorough chat about the patient’s health history, symptoms and any medications they’re taking before the herbalist creates a bespoke prescription from the 150 tinctures in her dispensary, which are made from biodynamically produced plants (that means no pesticides or chemicals).

The herbalist is by no means against conventional medicine, though, and says it’s an important part of her job to prescribe herbal medicines safely alongside pharmaceuticals, often working alongside a patient’s primary healthcare team.

No two patients are the same, and what helps one person with premenstrual syndrome, for instance, might not work for another.

Some herbs can render certain medications ineffective; St John’s wort, for example, shouldn’t be used by anyone on the contraceptive pill or warfarin. As tempting as it may be to experiment with herbal remedies on your own, it’s safest to consult with an expert.

Klayr’s knowledge of herbs is so vast she’s become a go-to consultant on a variety of projects. She worked on the first two series of Outlander, validating the accuracy of the herbal information in the scripts due to a central character’s affinity with botany.

Klayr also delivers workshops at the Health and Wellbeing Centre at Dumfries House, which have taken place remotely over the past year.

She practises what she preaches, too. As a business owner and mum of two, she’s always on the go and “couldn’t be without” her herbs.

symptoms. The synthetic hormones they were given by doctors, in the form of the contraceptive pill or Hormonal Replacement Therapy (HRT), weren’t doing anything to address the underlying causes of imbalance.

“I think periods and menopause are seen as these natural occurrences we just have to put up with. But women should not be in debilitating pain or dealing with a barrage of symptoms that negatively impact their relationships and confidence. It doesn’t have to be that way,” says Klayr.

Determined to help as many women as possible, Klayr set up a dispensary of her own almost a decade ago within an integrated health clinic in Finnieston, Nurture, which



ST JOHN’S WORT



ELDERBERRY



“I take nervines, which restore and nourish the nervous system and reduce stress and anxiety,” she explains. “I like adrenal tonics too, which improve your energy, reduce fatigue and strengthen the immune system.”

Immune health has understandably been a concern for many of her clients over the past year. Some have been worried about catching coronavirus while others have been felled by long covid.

“Long covid is a type of post-viral fatigue syndrome so I like to recommend adrenal tonics which contain rhodiola, which improves stamina and cognitive function,” she advises.

“There are wonderful herbs that can support immune function, such as echinacea and elderberry. There’s some really interesting research being done at a hospital in East Kent which is trialling the efficacy of elderberry extract in combating covid.”

To Klayr, herbal medicine is the perfect marriage of science and art – of taking that study-backed evidence and having the skill to understand who it applies to and when.

“There is such a deep connection between human and plant physiology,” she adds.

“The precise evolution of nature and perfect adaptation of phytochemicals that can stimulate our biochemistry to initiate healing.

“This, to me, is real magic and I’m continually in awe of it.”

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