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the eight months since relocating from rain-soaked Portland to beautiful southern Oregon, I’ve had the pleasure of visiting Sanctuary One on several occasions. During a recent walk on the property, amid a sea of powdery blue chicory flowers buzzing with honey bees, I was struck by the sheer “aliveness” of the land here. Not only have the staff and volunteers at Sanctuary One created a beautiful and prolific permaculture-inspired garden, they have also thoughtfully and respectfully nurtured the natural landscape.

As an herbalist, I feel like that proverbial kid in a candy store when strolling the grounds at Sanctuary One. From eight-foot-tall giant mullein to Oregon grape to “lowly” chickweed—a robust variety of medicinal plants thrive on the property. What’s more, these plants can be used as medicines for common health conditions in animals here at the farm. Talk about the healing power of the earth—in the most literal sense!

One of the more visually striking medicinal plants found on the property—and throughout southern Oregon—is mullein. It’s considered an invasive weed by many folks, so no worries about over-harvesting it! Its thick, velvety leaves contain a mucilaginous sugar that’s not only soothing to irritated mucus membranes, but is antibacterial and expectorant as well. This is a great herb to aid in the treatment of dogs with acute tracheo-bronchitis—commonly known as kennel cough. Put four or five leaves in a quart of water and boil for five minutes, then add a bit of honey. A medium-sized dog can drink a cup or so three times a day. (It can also be added to the food of a dog or cat. Add honey if needed—the tea is quite bitter tasting.) For horses with acute tracheo-bronchitis, add a few dried leaves to the feed daily.

Another plant that thrives here is plantain, also considered a weed by many gardeners, but one with a long history of medicinal use. Plantain is a low-growing green plant with oval, ribbed, short-stemmed leaves. In late summer, it sends up multiple stalks laden with seed heads. The seeds are used commercially as fiber laxatives, such as Metamucil®. Crushed leaves rubbed directly on irritated skin will help with a long list of ailments, including rashes, wounds, ulcerations, burns and insect bites. If the bruised leaves are held in place on the affected area with a bandage, they act as a poultice, reducing swelling from injuries and possibly even drawing out splinters.

A tea made of plantain and oak or blackberry leaves makes a great topical treatment for “hot spots” on dogs, and other inflamed, moist skin lesions in any species. The soothing astrigent action of this combo can also be effective as a given internally for simple diarrhea.

Animals newly arrived at the care farm may initially suffer emotional stress and anxiety. Luckily, there’s a plant found in abundance at Sanctuary One that provides relaxing, calming effects: vervain. It’s a common perennial in the mint family that grows up to four feet tall, and has tiny pale lilac flowers. This plant has been valued in many cultures over millennia for a multitude of medicinal uses, but its most common modern use is as a nerve “tonic” for overwrought emotional states. Put a handful of dried leaves in the feed of a stressed horse or goat, or make a tea to be added to the food of a dog or cat. Add honey if needed—the tea is quite bitter tasting.

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