

## Herbal remedies: A blueprint for modern medicine

**Shelby Rowe | Posted: Tuesday, November 26, 2013 7:53 am**

Round glass containers filled with a grainy green longevity remedy sit atop a clover green tablecloth among an assortment of other homemade herbal treatments, adding a spark of color to the gray winter weather.

Another glass container holds chyawanprash, a compound of various herbs and spices, which increases longevity and is infused with raspberry leaves grown in Bellingham, Wash. It includes a medley of sweet and spicy herbs such as honey and cayenne pepper.

Cheeks slightly flushed from the cold air, Western Washington University senior Alyson Simeone is wrapped in a puffy black coat and smiles while she talks to shoppers and neighboring jewelry vendors about her homemade Ayurvedic remedies at the Bellingham Farmers Market.



Ayurvedic herbal medicine is a lifestyle choice that incorporates meals, yoga exercises and herbal remedies, Simeone said. It's the blueprint for modern medicine and the oldest written medical system in the world, stemming from India 5,000 years ago, Simeone said.

Simeone began selling her products at the market Nov. 9, and averaged about \$50 to \$75 each of the two times she was a vendor, she said. Simeone plans to use the money to donate to Sarita Shrestha, the first female Ayurvedic doctor in Nepal and Simeone's mentor, she said.

In October 2011, Simeone started on a year- and-a-half-internship in India and Nepal after she was chosen for Fairhaven College's Adventure Learning Grant in 2011. The program allows students to explore their country of choice without being on a strict study or intern regime, she said. During this time, she interned at clinics and hospitals in Nepal, assisting with gynecological exams and Ayurvedic herbal treatments.

Living in India gave Simeone a better understanding of how herbal medicine nourishes the body from the inside out, she said.

In the U.S., Simeone makes her products by using a mixture of local herbs and traditional plants and spices that promote a natural way to heal and center the body with nature, she said.

"[Ayurvedic medicine] treats the cause of the disease rather than just the symptoms," she said. "So it's getting to the root of the problem, and it's going to provide long-term results rather than just putting a Band-Aid on something."

### **Traveling to Ayurveda's birthplace**

During her internship in India, Simeone was immersed in a culture centered around natural healing where Ayurveda began, she said.

While interning for Shrestha at various clinics, Simeone remembers some of the exhaustive 13-hour days treating patient after patient from morning to night, she said.

"It's a total marriage between Himalayan mountain peaks and the turbulence of being a devoted, committed healer," she said.



The clinics and hospitals she interned at were clean, but worked with the most basic materials, she said.

Once while giving a gynecological exam, Shrestha didn't have any lights so she improvised by borrowing a nurse's phone as a light instead, Simeone said.

"When you're in a third-world country, you're able to access and see procedures that you would never be allowed to here as an undergraduate, non-medical student," Simeone said

During her 2011 trip to India, after being in the country for only a couple days, Simeone came across a street vendor selling fresh pomegranate-lime juice.

The juice is one of her favorites from a previous trip to India, but her body wasn't acclimated to street food yet and she contracted Giardia — an intestinal infection caused by a microscopic parasite.

After a month of terrible stomach pain and nausea, Simeone sought ayurvedic treatment, she said. A 12-day Panchakarma cleanse rid her body of toxins, and she no longer had Giardia, Simeone said.

"It was a really good way for me to experientially learn," Simeone said.

### **A full-circle health plan**

A key difference between Ayurveda and Western medicine is the customized aspect that focuses on each person's individual needs, said Juliet Jivanti, owner and director of Bellingham's Ayurvedic Health Center and Wellness Shop.

"I always think of them more in conjunction because, honestly, both work well," Jivanti said. "In the U.S., Ayurveda works as preventative medicine and Western medicine works more as acute medicine."

Western medicine has specialized the surgical field, but Ayurveda works better for treating disease of the body and mind because it works with the body's natural healing process instead of trying to halt it with medications, Simeone said.

"I think the downfall with Western medicine is that it operates under this philosophy that it is the finest medical system and can eventually treat everything," Simeone said. "I don't believe that."

In general, Western medicine is more one-size-fits-all than Ayurvedic medicine, Jivanti said.

Ayurveda customizes a specific wellness plan that works best for each person and uses healing properties of food, plant supplements and exercise, she said.

There is not a universal solution, such as a type of food or herb, which every person can take to have a dramatic change in their life, she said.

"In the West, we love the idea of super foods to counter all the stresses of regular life," she said. "But from an Ayurvedic perspective, there is no super food because it does depend upon the person."

Plants are helpers on the path toward optimum health, but food is also a cornerstone of good health, said Kate LaSpina, an herbalist at Wonderland Herbs, Teas and Spices on Railroad Avenue.

People have become increasingly afraid of saturated fats because they are thought to be extremely unhealthy, LaSpina said.

By turning to veganism and vegetarianism, people are cutting out foods that humans have been eating for thousands of years and are replacing them with refined carbohydrates and tofu, she said.

### **Moving on**

Even as the weather becomes colder, Simeone will continue to sell her products at the fringe of the Bellingham Farmers Market until it closes for winter on Saturday, Dec. 21, she said.

After graduating from Fairhaven College this quarter, Simeone will join her boyfriend in Asturias, Spain on the lower slopes of the Picos de Europa mountains in a small house in the forest.

Her devoted years of studying Ayurveda affirms nature's perfection as an avenue for body healing, she said.

"[Ayurveda] feels like something I innately know," Simeone said. "I think when we're guided by that and when we listen to that feeling in ourselves and follow it, that's when we're able to resonate and that's where we're led to truth."



Photos by **Drew Castellaw**