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# MWSHS Student Newsletter

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Autumn 2023

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## MWSHS Alumna Profile

### Erica Ikeda

In 2019, Erica Ikeda enrolled in the Herbalism Certificate Course that Matthew Alfs was teaching at Normandale College. “I had studied many different types of healing regimes, including diet, exercise, spiritual health, relationships, and mental health,” she related, “but this was the first time ever hearing about herbs and all that they can do. After taking this course, I knew I wanted to learn more!” And so, also in 2019, Erica enrolled in MWSHS’ Master-Herbalist Diploma Program. She notes here: “After hearing that there was an Add-on option, I knew I had to do that as well. I was lucky enough to have been able to experience the first year or so in person with so many kind and like-minded, strong women who had a passion to learn what herbs could do; also afterwards, when COVID hit and we went online”



One thing Erica really appreciates about MWSHS’ herbal program is its flexibility. As she puts it: “As someone who is a full-time mom, but also working part-time, I knew I would have the flexibility to learn at my own pace. After joining the Add-on, that helped me carve out that one night a week when I would be learning and working on the lesson questions. I did set aside an hour each evening, as well, to study, and I would make sure to find a quiet spot and a consistent time to help with getting through the material in a timely manner. I loved taking the lesson questions out and working on them as I read the interesting material and would highlight important words or names to help me find that information as I was reading. The material was easy enough for the layperson to understand, but in-depth enough that I am sure doctors or nurses could be challenged.”

What would Erica say about the benefits she derived from her foray into herbalism with MWSHS and especially for those persons considering studying with the School? “The amount of joy and excitement I got from this course I cannot even describe in words. First of all, learning about all these medicinal herbs that are right in our own back yards has given me such a love and admiration for nature and foraging. Because I was only a few months into the program when COVID hit, getting outside and into the woods with my kids is what saved me during those long, lonely evenings. (Continued in column 2)

## Recent Graduates

We offer congratulations to the following recent graduates of the Western-Herbalism module:

**Pamela Pomplun-Morgan**

**Erica Ikeda**

We look forward to hearing from these graduates as they apply what they have learned in their lives!

### Erica Ikeda Profile *(continued from column 1)*

When I was learning about a specific herb and then found it in nature, I would yell in excitement to my kids and friends! I quickly became obsessed with being outside and finding healing herbs. I learned how to make tinctures and was hooked. I also learned where to harvest herbs and the correct way to ask the plant if I could use it. The love for the outdoors was always there, but now that I am foraging, the love has expanded so much more. Experimenting in the kitchen has also been so much fun! I love making fire cider in the winter, homemade apple cider vinegar during the fall, nettle soup in the spring, and chokecherry lemonade in the summer. The benefits I have experienced simply by saying yes to this course continue each and every season.”

Having graduated from the Western-Herbalism module, what are Erica’s goals now? “I intend to complete the Master-Herbalist Program in the next 1-2 years,” she explains. “My long-term goals are to continue to learn how to heal myself and my kids and then also friends and other family members. I am in a time of my life where foraging and taking care of my family is enough. I’m learning to slow down and realize what is most important. This spring or summer I may lead herb walks, but then again I may not. I think enjoying time in the kitchen with my kids—showing them all I know about these amazing healing herbs—is more than enough. I want to teach the future generations that we are one with nature and how to respect the land and the animals with whom we share this beautiful world.”

In conclusion, Erica wants to say: “I want to give a huge shout-out and thank-you to my teacher, Matthew Alfs. He is such a kind, gentle man who teaches with such love and dedication. I feel blessed to have been able to learn from him. The amount of time he dedicates to his students is above and beyond what most teachers would do.”

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### Inside This Issue

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## WORKSHOP CREDIT OPTIONS

Except where noted, all of the below-listed events qualify as Workshop credits toward the Master-Herbalist program. Each hour of *verified* attendance (e.g., per instructor-completed workshop-credit slips as supplied by MWSHS) counts toward an equivalent hour of Workshop Category #3 credits (up to the student limit of 20 hours), unless another category is specified or unless one attends a particular workshop at one of these events that is *strictly* in one of these other categories.

### "Where Do I Find Qualifying Workshops in My Local Area?"

Aside from the *MWSHS Student Newsletter*, which lists resources from around the country of which we become aware, you can check holistic newspapers that are available in many larger cities. In these areas, as well as in less populated communities, you might check local, independently-owned health food stores and food co-ops, which may have bulletin boards or knowledgeable staff who may be aware of local teachers of holistic-assessment skills, herbal-medicine-making, or who may lead wild-plant walks. (Local nature centers, plant nurseries, greenhouses, horticultural clubs, and native-plant-appreciation societies may know of local wild-plant-walk instructors as well.) Finally, check the phone book for local naturopaths, herbalists, acupuncturists, and other holistic-health professionals who may be willing to mentor you on some of these skills or allow you to "shadow" them as they see clients.

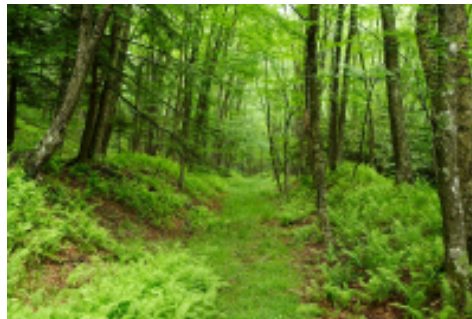
### Workshops, Conferences, Lectures, & Events in Herbal Studies Across North America

**Integrative Healthcare Symposium, February 15<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup>, 2024.** Hilton Midtown, New York, NY. For more info or to register: <https://www.ihsymposium.com/>

**Thirteenth Annual Florida Herbal Conference, March 1-3, 2024, Camp Winona FL,** will feature scads of workshops, including wild-plant walks, which qualify for Workshop Category #2 "Wild Plant Walks". For more info or to register, visit the website: [www.floridaherbalconference.org](http://www.floridaherbalconference.org).

**MWSHS April-May 2024 workshops** (one on assessment skills and one on wildcrafting and medicine-making) to be announced in forthcoming newsletters.

**Medicines from the Earth Herb Symposium, May 17-19, 2024.** Blue Ridge Assembly in **Black Mountain, NC.** Keynote Address is: "The Herbal Path: What I've Learned in Fifty Years of Study and Clinical Practice" with Mary Bove, ND. Many other speakers—both herbalists and naturopaths—will be making presentations. For more info, see the website at <https://www.botanicalmedicine.org/2024-herbal-conferences/>



### November Assessment-Skills Workshop a Resounding Success!

Our Nov. 12<sup>th</sup> workshop on holistic-assessment skills for the cardiopulmonary and respiratory systems was highly attended and appreciated. Below are some comments by attendees:

"Awesome! Learned so much and feel much more equipped."

"This was a great opportunity to test some knowledge of least learned materials and helped solidify some things on biotypes." "This is fantastic! I can't wait for the next one."

"Very impressed. Loved getting together and enjoying tea with like-minded people and learning so much."

"Very helpful. It was also great to talk with and to get to know the other students."

*We hope that you, dear student reading this, can join us for our next workshop—in the Spring!*

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# Getting to Know the Plants as Our Teachers

by Matthew Alfs, MH, RH(AHG)

There is an old legend common to various Native-American peoples that goes roughly like this: When the two-legged ones (humans) began to hunt animals without mercy and respect, the various animals held councils to decide whether and how to strike back. The plants, however, felt sorry for the two-legged ones and decided to come to their aid, especially relative to the discomforts and diseases brought about by the insects. When reflecting upon this story, I've often thought that the plants displayed real empathy here, as they themselves had been continually harassed by insects that had infested them, sucked their juices, and even devoured them.

It is this very example of insect molestation that leads us to a most fitting illustration of how the plants offer their assistance to us two-legged ones. Here, in Minnesota, where the School is located, we are particular harassed by a little winged creature that we jokingly refer to as "Minnesota's State Bird"—namely, the mosquito. But we also harbor a healing herb that is the greatest repellent of mosquitoes known to us Midwesterners, which happens to be that feline delight known as catnip (*Nepeta cataria*). As a long-time outdoorsman who has chewed leaves of this odoriferous mint and applied them as a rub on my exposed skin for decades, I can testify to its remarkable effects in this regard. So can many other outdoorsmen (Tom Brown, Jr. especially comes to mind.) In fact, two different scientific studies have shown catnip essential oil to powerfully repel mosquitoes. (For references, see my book *Edible & Medicinal Wild Plants of the Midwest*, under "Catnip.")

I have a special fondness for this plant, as it was the very herb that introduced me to the power of herbal medicine (*ibid.*) and has offered its assistance to me ever since—in a plentitude of ways—including the aforementioned topical application as a mosquito repellent.

One thing that herbalists have long appreciated, however, is that, if we are willing to pay attention, *the plants themselves* can inform us as to how they can be used for healing.

## **The Doctrine of Signatures**

Herbalists have long appreciated that a plant's color, shape, habitat, and even personality can clue one in to its medicinal applications. This understanding has been called The Doctrine of Signatures. Let me illustrate this with a landmark discovery in my clinical career: A little over a decade ago, I was struggling with how to help some clients with autoimmune joint conditions that produced terrible stabbing pain and stiffness. Perhaps providentially, I came across an old herbal that related how an elderly female folk herbalist from the hills had healed a young girl afflicted with just such a malady (nowadays referred to as a spondyloarthritis) with the



herbage of bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*), the scariest looking of all the thistles, with its nasty spines that can jab a person something fierce and even blind an eye that comes in contact with them. Looking at the photo of the plant as featured here, you can observe the sharp spines and the overall stiff look of

the plant, which practically shout out its healing potential to those afflicted with stiffness and stabbing pains. In fact, the plant proved to be nothing short of miraculous in helping my suffering clients to heal. Nowadays, then, whenever I run across bull thistle in the wild, I thank it profusely for its aid here. In doing so, I get the strong impression that it has been very happy to help out, per the Native-American story referred to above.

Hawthorn shrubs also have large, stabbing thorns and, correspondingly, have been used for the lancinating pain of angina. This was further surmised from the color of the flowers and fruits—red, the color of the heart and blood. Interestingly, almost every herb used to support cardiovascular health is red or reddish in color. Think cinnamon, motherwort, prickly ash, red sage, rose, rosemary, wild bergamot, anise hyssop, bloodroot, and wild cherry. Shepherd's purse has heart-shaped seed pods and thus has also been used to support cardiovascular health, esp. with reference to hypertension and bleeding.

Plants that are deep or dark yellow and thus the color of bile have been thought to heal the hepatobiliary system, and thus we think of dandelion, celandine, toadflax, turmeric, yellow dock, yellow goatsbeard, yellow root, goldenseal, and boldo. Many nervines, on the other hand, have bluish or purplish flowers, e.g., skullcap, pasque flower, some asters, catnip, chicory, and blue vervain. The latter plant has very stiff flower stalks and has thus been thought to be helpful for stiffness in the upper part of the body (especially the back of the neck and the upper trapezius), as well as for stiff personalities.

Leaves shaped like a brain have induced herbalists to use them as nootropics. Ginkgo biloba and gotu kola are prime examples. On the other hand, plants rich in fluid and with translucent stems revealing such, including jewelweed and clearweed, have been recognized as

having the ability to heal illnesses fed by stagnant fluids such as yeast/fungal infections. Mullein leaves are shaped like lungs, with their hairs approximating cilia, and so have traditionally been used to heal pulmonary affections. Self-heal flowers bear prominent lips and have been applied to close the lips of wounds and to heal herpes sores on oral/vaginal lips.

Even the location of plants has provided clues as to their ideal applications. For instance, fireweed grows only in burned-over areas because its seeds need a high temperature in order to germinate, thus serving to heal the burns of the earth. And so, it has effectively been used to heal burns in people as well. Boneset grows in marshy areas and heals infections (yellow fever, dengue, malaria, etc.) brought about by the mosquitoes that proliferate in such regions.

### ***The Value of Spending Quality Time with the Plants***

While plant signatures may provide clues as to how to use a plant in a general sense, it is most important to be open to any sort of assistance that the plants are willing to provide, which may involve a more mystical means of communication than simply the apprehension of their signatures. This may come by way of dreams, by visions, or by strong impressions. *Spending quality time with the plants in their environment* is most helpful in securing this type of illumination, as I will illustrate below.

In my herbal novel published in 2017, *Diary of a Country Herbalist*, I related an experience that I myself had in real life that I projected onto the protagonist in the story—an herbalist named Samuel Rogers—from which I will quote, below:

“I re-entered The Meadow. There, I noticed something that had earlier eluded me: a lone spiderwort (*Tradescantia* spp.) plant, flowering in a particularly sunlit area. Although I was supposed to be in the Meadow



on a mission involving other plants, I felt the spiderwort pulling me toward it, like some kind of irresistible magnet. ‘OK, my little, blue-violet friend,’ I spoke to the plant softly, as I lay myself down beside it. ‘What do you wish to tell me about your power to heal?’ I felt prompted to ask that question because I knew so little about this odd-shaped wonder of the fields. I knew only that

certain Indian tribes had used it for stomachaches from over-eating and, in some undefined way, for skin cancer. Yet, I was desirous of learning something more about this plant—something that I would then be able to apply

toward complaints that I hear more often from herbal clients than the gastrointestinal aftereffects of gluttony.

“It was then that I became quite absorbed in the dainty spiderwort and proceeded to drink in its sublime beauty for hours, experiencing a peace beyond practically anything I’d ever felt. During that most grand encounter, my attention was drawn to the perfect symmetry of the plant’s three flower petals, which suggested to me its power to harmonize the three components of man: body, mind, and spirit. That idea certainly accorded with the flower’s blue-violet color, which has always been nature’s way of highlighting medicines for the nervous system.

“As I lay beside the plant still further, I witnessed its flower head slowly close, upon which a jell-like fluid began exuding from the ball-like enclosure that it had become. It almost looked as if *the spiderwort was crying*. At that moment, I remembered that an alternate name for the plant is ‘widow’s tears.’ I then began to wonder: ‘Is *that* the secret of this plant? Is it the long-sought remedy for the sadness and crying that can occur when the body, mind, and spirit are out of harmony? Could it perhaps be the harmonizer *par excellence*—the long-sought key to mind-body-spirit homeostasis?’”

“Convinced that this was a notion worth pursuing, I implored it to lead me to a colony of its brethren so that I could gather a few leaves and flowers here and there in order to tincture for use with melancholic clients. In this, I was not to be disappointed, for I soon encountered just such a colony, from which I was able to gather a small sack of plant segments. Then, as the task for which I had originally come to the Meadow had been forgotten, I turned to head for home, infused with joy at the ecstatic encounter I had just experienced.”

Note how that spending a good amount of time with the spiderwort plant (see photo of it in the column to the left)—watching it intently and even lying with it—led to a realization of its ability to heal the deep kind of sadness that results in tears and to reintegrate mind, body, and spirit. Although such an application of the plant is not widely appreciated by today’s herbalists, it is of interest that the blossom is nevertheless used in flower essence therapy for “releasing emotional trauma” (<https://livingtheenchantedlife.com/products/spiderwort>) and for a “merging of mind, body, and spirit.” (<https://www.pegasusproducts.com/shop/flower-essences/spiderwort-tradescantia-virginica-positive-attitude/>) You may find it interesting to know that I only discovered these uses of the flower essence *long after* I had the mystical experience with the plant that I wrote about above.

### ***Concluding Thought***

You, dear students reading this article, will no doubt discover, in your own herbal journey, a number of plants that will speak to you and which you will find to be most effective as healing agents, as long as you bend your ear to listen and to learn of them.

## Book Reviews

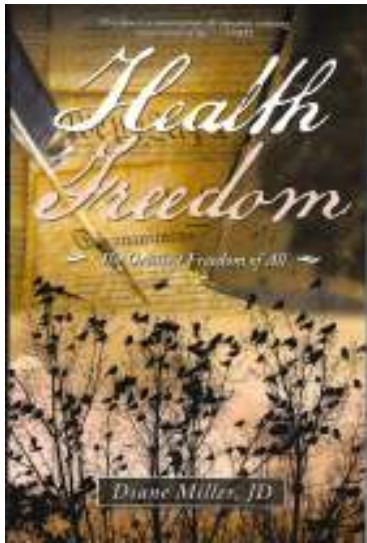
In this issue of the *MWSHS Student Newsletter*, we review two important books dealing with the subject of health freedom. This freedom has been challenged since the get-go, but has especially experienced upheavals in this 21<sup>st</sup> century and most lately, with the rise of COVID-19 and its aftermath.

Health freedom encompasses a variety of aspects, including the freedom to control one's body and to resist unwanted medical treatments, in harmony with the Nuremberg Code. But it also includes the right to offer complementary and alternative healthcare services to others and for the public to seek such services—both, without repercussion. The books reviewed below discuss both of these aspects and we trust that you will find them of interest and of service in your own lives.

**Miller, Diane. *Health Freedom: The Greatest Freedom of All*, iUniverse, 2021, softcover, 236 pages, \$18.95**

[www.iuniverse.com](http://www.iuniverse.com)

Reviewed by Matthew Alfs, MH, RH(AHG)



The author of this fascinating book, attorney Diane Miller, J.D., has been an advocate of health freedom for almost 30 years. She began her career in this regard by successfully defending a dairy farmer who was providing colostrum to his Minnesota dairy customers and who was charged with “practicing medicine without a license.” That case

wound up being dismissed, to Miller’s great satisfaction.

Soon thereafter, she got involved in the case of a naturopath who was similarly being charged. From these two cases—in which, it is important to note, not a single person was harmed—Miller determined that what was actually occurring was “a turf battle in the healing arts.” Minnesota law needed to be changed, she realized, and she formed a non-profit group to work on paving the way for a new statute that would allow unlicensed holistic practitioners to pursue their trade and for clients to engage their services without retribution. This book is the story of that journey and of the successes obtained along the way.

In chapter two, Miller relates that her advocacy group eventually got a proposed bill before a MN House of Representatives subcommittee, in March of 1999. The

testimony of visiting attorney Michael Meyers was powerful at that time, as Miller explained: “He stated that, literally, the way the laws have been structured, if a person is diagnosed with cancer and chooses not to undergo chemotherapy, radiation, or surgery, the only other option available legally to them is to go home, sit in a rocking chair, stare out a window, and wait to die.”

Thankfully, the bill passed the subcommittee on that every day. Then, in amended form, it passed the full House committee on the 15<sup>th</sup>. Finally, by tacking the bill onto a large omnibus bill, it eventually passed the House, in early May of 2000, and then the Senate, four days later. On May 11<sup>th</sup>, Governor Jesse Ventura signed the bill into law. (Page 57 of the book shows the grassroots group standing with Governor Ventura.) The “Complementary and Alternative Health Care Practices” statute 146.A went into effect in July 2001 and is reproduced in full on pages 175-197 of the book. (Right around this time, I remember attending a meeting that Miller had arranged for alternative-care practitioners, clarifying how the statute would affect our respective practices. I was happy that the publication of the statute allowed me to move my existing herbal consultation practice into a more public setting.)

Three months after the bill had passed, Miller and her cohorts founded the National Health Freedom Coalition and began to support health freedom more broadly—i.e., not just in Minnesota, but throughout the country. This organization is still in existence today (see the website at [www.nationalhealthfreedom.org](http://www.nationalhealthfreedom.org)) and thriving—vigorously supporting health freedom throughout the USA.

Then, too, as Miller’s book was published as COVID-19 was raging across the country and heavy-handed restrictions were being implemented by authorities claiming emergency powers, she appropriately includes a section on “Coronavirus Response and Personal Freedom” (pp. 102-104). In it, she quotes the praiseworthy conclusion of the Wisconsin Supreme Court’s ruling against a stay-at-home order that had been issued in that state: “It is especially in times of emergency that we must protect the rights of the people, lest we establish a dangerous precedent empowering less benevolent government officials in the future to oppress the people in the name of exigency.”

Finally, a section on vaccine safety and exemption rights is most appropriately included (pp. 142-146), succeeded by chapters on the responsibilities of government and on reclaiming health freedom in an atmosphere of fear and denial. A wide range of appendices follow (pp. 173-211) and then the book concludes with bibliographic references (213-221) and a 14-page index.

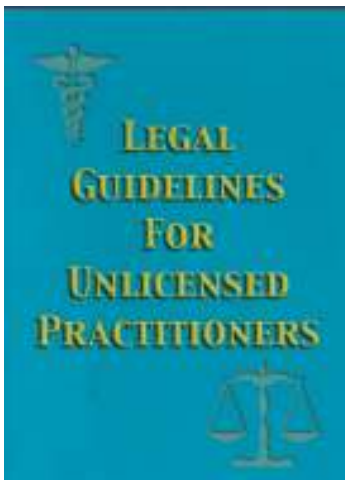
All in all, this opus—which was selected as an Editor’s Choice title by the publisher—should find its way into the library of any person interested in health freedom—the most precious freedom, as Miller reminds us, of all.

**Wilson, Lawrence. *Legal Guidelines for Unlicensed Practitioners*, softcover, 2014 ed., 136pp. \$14.99**

[www.drlwilson.com](http://www.drlwilson.com)

**Reviewed by Matthew Alfs, MH, RH(AHG)**

The author of this slim book, Lawrence Wilson, has a medical degree from Mexico, but has worked as a nutritional consultant in the U.S. for over 40 years. A disclaimer appears on the copyright page as follows: “The author is not a lawyer. Material in this book is not intended as legal advice, or to replace the services of qualified legal experts.”



The book was originally published in 1996 and has gone through a number of editions and revisions, with this 2014 edition being the most current. It was part of the package of materials offered to students of the now-defunct Global College of Natural Medicine.

An outline of the book’s chapters perhaps provides the best summary of the volume. Chapter One is entitled “Laws and Their Purposes” and discusses the hierarchy of laws in the U.S. This idea is drawn out in more depth in the next chapter, “Legal Concepts about Health and Healing,” which discusses the law as it relates specifically to healthcare practices. That subject is expanded in the next chapter, “Practice Options,” which, among other matters, highlights the exemptions in the law developed for alternative practitioners that have been won in Minnesota and in California.

The succeeding chapter is one of the most helpful, focusing on terms that unlicensed healthcare practitioners should avoid, such as “cure,” “diagnose,” “prescribe,” and “treat.” Nor should they refer to themselves as “doctor” or “physician.” It also emphasizes the need for dress that does not imply that one is a licensed practitioner and the importance of maintaining a clean and “odor-free” office. (That latter urging brought back to my mind a visit I made to an alternative-medicine clinic in the early 1990s that reeked of urine, which disgusted me. Not surprisingly, when I checked on the clinic several months later, it had closed.) A good, high-quality air purifier would seem essential here, especially in this day and age when clients might be arriving reeking of marijuana smoke

. Chapter five discusses forms, including those for informed consent, while the next chapter provides valuable info on record keeping and insurance.

Differences between licensing and certification are spelled out in detail in Chapter Seven, while Chapter Eight tackles “The Case against Medical Licensing” and summarizes the infamous Flexner Report of 1910 and its tragic repercussions for alternative healing and health freedom. Chapter Nine covers the “Psychology of Licensing,” focusing on the need felt by authorities to control people and how many among the public feel a need for that very control.

A detailed discussion of the Constitution encompasses the next three chapters, while Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen offer thoughts on legal disputes and trial by jury. The final two chapters offer much information on forms and contracts, including employment contracts.

An appendix page follows that lists ten different health-freedom organizations, with full contact info. The book is capped by a Bibliography and an Index.

### **Further on Legal & Regulatory Issues**

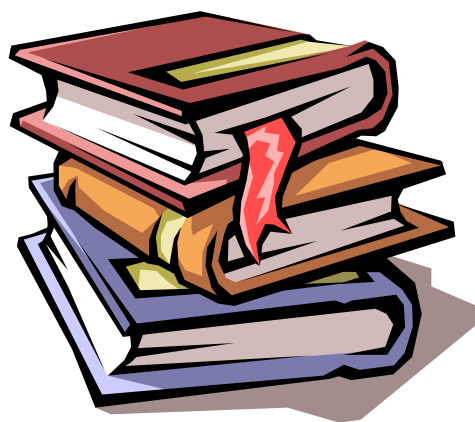
The website for the American Herbalists Guild has an excellent page of Frequently-asked Questions by herbalists regarding Legal and Regulatory Matters <https://www.americanherbalistsguild.com/legal-and-regulatory-faqs>

That page also provides a link to a remarkably astute and lengthy discussion by a Colorado herbalist, Roger Wicke, Ph.D., on legal matters regarding herbalist practice.

<http://www.rmhiherbal.org/aa/f-ahr3-rights.html>

Wicke also has another page in this regard:

<http://www.rmhiherbal.org/aa/f-ahr5-summ.html>



Below, we print some workshop credit slips to use for workshops not conducted by MWSHS

### WORKSHOP CREDIT SLIP

Workshop Title:.....  
Workshop Date & Total Hours .....  
Workshop Presenter & Credentials.....  
Workshop Presenter's Signature & Date.....  
Student Name..... Student I.D. #.....

When completed and signed by workshop instructor, make a copy for yourself & submit to:  
**Midwest School of Herbal Studies, P. O. Box 120096, New Brighton MN 55112**

Or image as a .pdf and send as an email attachment to us at [MWSHS@aol.com](mailto:MWSHS@aol.com)

(For Internal Use Only:) Credits Assigned..... Director's Signature.....

### WORKSHOP CREDIT SLIP

Workshop Title:.....  
Workshop Date and Total Hours .....  
Workshop Presenter & Credentials.....  
Workshop Presenter's Signature & Date.....  
Student Name..... Student I.D. #.....

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