

THE BOOK OF CREATURES

THE BOOK OF BLESSED HILDEGARD BEGINS ON THE
SUBTLITIES OF THE DIFFERENT NATURES OF CREATURES
and so on with many other good things.

by Hildegard of Bingen
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BOOK ONE PLANTS (*De plantis*)

PREFACE

In the creation of man from the earth, I am another earth, from which he who is man was fashioned; and all the elements served him, because they sensed his life, and collaborated with him in all his activities, and he with them. And the earth gave its *viriditas* —its green and vital force—according to the genus, nature, characteristics, and entire sphere of man. For the earth, with its useful herbs, reveals the sphere of man's spiritual customs, distinguishing them; but with its useless herbs, it indicates his useless and diabolical ways.

For there are certain herbs that, when cooked with certain foods, make a man quick to eat, and they are light, because a man does not become very heavy: these herbs are compared to meat. And there are the unripe fruits of fruit trees, which are harmful, but when cooked they become light and are compared to human blood. The wood of trees that do not bear fruit is wood and not a tree, but serves as fuel, from which ropes come. And stones are compared to human bones, and the moisture of stones to the marrow of bones, and they also have heat. But stones that are covered and protected are compared to human nails on the hands and feet.

And there are certain airy plants that grow, and these are suitable for human digestion, light and of a cheerful nature, so that they make the man who eats them happy, and they resemble human hair, because they are always light and airy. But there are other windy plants, which grow from the wind, and these are dry and heavy for human digestion, and of a sad nature, so that they make the man who eats them sad; these are compared and resemble human sweat. The juice of useless plants, which cannot be eaten, is poisonous, because they are deadly as food for man and contrary to human evacuation.

And the earth possesses sweat, moisture, and sap. The earth's sweat produces useless herbs, but its moisture produces useful herbs, which can be eaten and which serve other human purposes. The sap then produces its harvest and sprouting trees. The herbs sown by man's work spring up and grow little by little, like domestic animals that man nourishes in his home with care and toil; but those that spring up without man's toil grow quickly, like untamed beasts. And therefore the herbs that grow by man's toil are light and cheerful in nature; but those that grow by the wind are dry and heavy, and sad in nature.

Every herb is either hot or cold, and grows so, because the heat of herbs signifies the soul, and the cold the body; and in this, according to their kind, they thrive, abounding now in heat, now in cold. For if all herbs were hot, and none cold, they would produce adversity in those who use them. If, on the other hand, they were all cold, and none hot, they would similarly cause imbalance in men, because the hot resist the cold, and the cold resist the heat of man. And certain herbs have in themselves the virtue of the strongest aromas and the austerity of the bitterest aromas: therefore they repress many evils, since evil spirits cause them and hate them. But there are also certain herbs that have in themselves a sort of elemental foam, in which deceived men try to investigate the fortuitous things of their fate; and these the devil loves, and mingles with.

Humans, then, by nursing, eating, and growing, are nourished in temperate weather, which is not the case with the aforementioned herbs. However, some of them, in medicine, suppress harmful and unhealthy humors in humans.

I. — Wheat (*De Triticum*)

Wheat is warm and full of fruit, so that there is no defect in it; and since the right flour is made from wheat, then the bread made from that same flour is good for the healthy and the sick, and produces in man right blood and right flesh. But whoever takes the *donst* of the marrow, that is, the fine bran (*griezz*), and separates it from the flour itself, the bread he makes from it is weaker than that which would be made from the right flour, because that *donst* —that is, the marrow—takes away some of its strength and more of the *slim* , that is, the liquid that it produces in man, namely the right flour of wheat. But whoever cooks wheat without the whole grains, not ground in the mill, and thus eats almost another food, it produces neither right blood nor right flesh, but very *slim* , so that it is barely digested; and so it is of no benefit to the weak, even if the healthy can survive this food.

But if a dog bites a man, take a paste similar to flour, mixed with egg white, and place it on the dog's bite for three days and as many nights, to extract the poisonous bite; that bite, from its breath, is poisonous. Then remove it, and finally heal with an ointment as one would normally heal any other wound.

II. — Rye (*De Siligine*)

Rye is warm, yet colder than wheat, and has many virtues. Bread made from it is good for the healthy, and is better for them than peas; and it is beneficial for those with fatty meats, because it reduces their meatiness, yet still makes them strong. But for those with cold stomachs, it is harmful, because it is more difficult to digest, contrary to theirs, since their weakness cannot overcome it through digestion, and for the most part it produces phlegm in them, because they can barely digest it.

Anyone who has scrofula (*scrofulous glands*) in their body, of whatever kind, should heat rye bread in a fire or oven, and while it is still hot and broken, place it on the glands, and the heat of its strength consumes them and makes them disappear; and do this until they disappear. And if anyone has scabies on the head, let him take warm rye bread, make a crust of it, and with it crush the bread into powder, and sprinkle the powder on it, because this removes the disease. And after three days let him anoint the same place with olive oil, because the oil is hot, and so be healed. And if there are cancers, that is, thin worms, that eat away the flesh of the man, let a warm mica of that bread be placed on them; and let him do this often, and from the heat of it they perish.

III. — Oats (*De Avena*)

Oats have a warm, sharp flavor and a strong vapor (*fumi*), and are a joyful and wholesome food for healthy people, providing them with a cheerful mind, a pure and clear intellect, a good color and healthy flesh; and they are happy whether in bread or in flour, and are not harmful. But for those who are very weak and cold, it is harmful to eat, because it increases their cold and makes them fierce. Those who are naturally cold and lack vigor, because they have difficulty digesting, should prepare *muesli* with oats.

But he who is fatigued by *virgichtiget* , that is, by paralysis, and therefore has a divided mind and vain thoughts, so that he is somewhat beside himself, should be effectively washed in a bath in which oats have been cooked in water; and let red-hot stones be poured on him, and do this often, and he will come to his senses and recover his health.

III. — Barley (*De Hordeo*)

Barley is cold, so it is colder and weaker than the aforementioned grains; and if eaten in bread or flour, it is as healthy for the weak as for the healthy, since it does not have as much strength as other kinds of grains. But anyone who is already weak in the whole body should boil the barley thoroughly in water, pour that water into a bath, and bathe in it, and do this often until he is healed, and his body recovers, and he attains health. And anyone who still cannot recover from extreme weakness should take barley and oats in equal weight, and add a little fennel, and boil it likewise in water. And after cooking, strain the juice through a cloth and drink it, almost in place of food, and from this he will be strengthened.

And he who has hard and harsh skin on his face, which cracks easily because of the wind—what is called *schebet* , that is, harshness—should cook barley in water, and then with that water, strained through a cloth and kept moderately warm, he should gently wash his face, and his skin will become smooth and soft, and have a beautiful color. And if the man's head is infirm, he should wash himself often with that water, and he will recover.

V. — Spelt (*De Spelta*)

Spelt is the best of grains, and is warm, rich, and powerful, and is sweeter than other grains; and it makes the flesh of those who eat it upright, and produces upright blood, and brings a cheerful mind and joy to the soul of man. And however it is eaten, whether in bread or other foods, it is good and sweet. And if someone is so weak that, due to his weakness, he cannot eat, take whole grains of spelt and cook them in water, adding fat or egg yolk, so that he will eat it more willingly because of its better flavor; and give it to him to eat, and it heals his bowels from within, like a good and wholesome ointment.

VI. — The pea (*De Pisa*)

Peas are cold and somewhat phlegmatic. They are harmful to all ailments and have no inherent power to drive away illnesses. However, those who suffer from pain in the forehead from excessive phlegm should chew some pea juice between their teeth until it becomes a paste, mix it with the purest honey, and place it on their temples, binding it with a bandage and compressing it; and do this until they feel better. But those who have internal inflammation should drink warm pea juice frequently, and they will feel better.

VII. — The broad bean (*De Faba*)

The broad bean is warming, and is good and healthy for strong men to eat, and is better than the pea. In fact, if the weak eat the broad bean, it does not harm them much, because it does not produce as much phlegm in them as the pea. Broad bean flour is good and useful for both the sick and the healthy, because it is light and easy to digest. But if someone has pain in the bowels, cook the broad bean in water, add a little fat or oil, and after separating the broad bean, sip the *soff*, that is, the warm juice; do this often, and it heals them internally and restores their health.

And he who has swellings and scabies and burning ulcers of any kind in the flesh, let him take bean meal and a little powdered fennel seed, and temper this with a little wheat flour in water until it can be mixed; and thus let him make cakes, put them on the fire or expose them to the sun, and place them hot on the ulcers, and they will draw out the pain and heal it.

VIII. — The lentil (*De Lente*)

Lentils are cold, and when eaten, they provide neither marrow nor blood nor flesh, nor do they increase one's strength at all, but merely satiate the belly and fill one with vanity; they excite unhealthy humors in men to the point of a storm. But if someone has scabies spots and dirty hair, which have the root of ulcers on the man's head, and from which they grow, he should grind lentils to powder on a red-hot stone, and gently with a tortoiseshell, and this powder—gently mixed, in equal weight with the powder—should be placed on the spots; and this will wipe away the odor of the disease itself, and thus heal.

IX. — Millet (*De Hirs*)

Millet is cold and has little heat, because it provides neither blood nor flesh to a person, nor does it give him strength, but merely fills his belly and lessens hunger there, because it has a watery and refreshing taste. It also makes his stomach warm and sluggish, and it stirs up the body's humors to a storm, and it is almost *unkrut* —a weed—nor healthy for a person to eat.

Translator's note: The German word *unkrut* means "weed." Migne identifies this plant as *Panicum. miliaceum* (common millet) and refers to chap. 193, *De milio* .

X. — La venich (*De Venich*)

Venich *is* cold and has a modest heat, and is of little value, because it provides modest refreshment to those who consume it, but nevertheless does not harm them, although it usually does little harm; nor does it strongly stir up unhealthy humors and pestilences in humans, nor does it cause much harm. But

those suffering from burning fevers should cook *venich* in wine, and drink that warm wine often, and they will be cured.

Translator's note: The identification of this plant (*Venich* , sometimes *Venig*) is uncertain; it has been linked to fenugreek or a species of vetch.

XI. — Hemp (*De Hanff*)

Hemp is warm, and grows when the air is neither very hot nor very cold, and so is its nature. Its seed is healthy, and is good for healthy people to eat; it is light and beneficial for their stomachs, because it removes some of the *slime* —the slimy mucus—and is easily digested, and it diminishes bad humors and strengthens good humors. However, if someone is weak-minded and empty-headed, eating hemp can easily cause a slight headache. But if someone has a healthy head and a full brain, it does not harm them. And if someone is very ill, eating it causes a slight stomach ache. However, if someone is moderately healthy, eating it does not harm them.

But if someone has a cold stomach, boil hemp in water, and after wringing out the water, wrap it in a cloth, and then place it warm on the stomach frequently, which comforts him and restores his sense of well-being. And if someone is light-headed, eating hemp can easily cause a slight headache; but if someone has a healthy head and a full brain, it does not harm them. Hemp cloth is good for binding ulcers and wounds, because it tempers the heat of the hemp.

XII. — The darnel (*De Ratde*)

Darnel (*Ratde*) is hot and dry, and is of no use to man in any food, because it would cause pain. It is of no use to cattle, nor does it cause much harm. But if a man has ulcers on his head,

yet it is not yet scabies, darnel will subdue that disease and dry it; and mixed with lard, and with it the ulcers that are on the head, it is anointed often, and it bites and heals his ulcers. And if there are many flies, and where there are many flies, it makes lines on the wall, that is, streaks (*striche*); and the flies that have tasted of it will become ill, and will fall down and die.

Translator's note: Migne identifies the *Ratde* with *Zizania* (the darnel, the weed that infests the wheat fields in the Gospel parable). The word *striche* means "lines, streaks."

XIII. — The galangal (*De Galgan*)

Galangal (*Galgan*) is entirely hot, and has no cold in itself, and is potent. A man who has a burning fever should grind galangal into powder and drink it in spring water, and it will extinguish the burning fever. And he who has pain in the back or side due to unhealthy humors should often drink galangal in warm wine (*welle*), and the pain will cease. And he who has pain in the heart, and he who is weak of heart (*unmecht*), should quickly eat enough galangal, and he will feel better.

And also a man who suffers from a foul breath, which rises to the lungs, so that he even has a hoarse voice, should take galangal and fennel in equal weight, and an equal amount of nutmeg and pepper, equal to the weight of those two, and grind this into a powder and mix it in the same way; and of this powder, with a small crumb of bread, let him eat every day on an empty stomach; and immediately eat a little mulled wine, and other noble herbs that have a good smell; thus, whether fasting or full, let him eat them frequently, so that their good smell will quell the stench of his breath.

And anyone who has any pain in the lungs should avoid fatty meats and abstain from food heavily saturated with blood and from undercooked food, because they cause putrefaction

around the lungs. Let him eat peas, lentils, raw fruits, raw vegetables, and nuts, and avoid oil, because they cause putrefaction in the lungs. If he wants to eat meat, let him eat lean meats; and let him eat cheese, not raw, but cooked, not dry, because it quells the bad putrefaction. And if he wants to eat oil, let him eat it sparingly, so that he does not contract putrefaction in the lungs. Let him avoid water, because it is not good, since it causes putrefaction around the lungs. But let him drink new must, which has not yet cast off its impurities by boiling in the heat: it does not yet purge, and so does not harm him much, because it is cooked. Let him drink alcoholic beverages, because they do not harm him much, since they are cooked. Drink wine, because it benefits the lungs with its good heat; but watch the humid and cloudy air, because with its humidity it harms the lungs.

If bad humors overflow in a person's bowels and spleen, and bring much suffering to the heart due to melancholy, take equal weights of galangal and pepper, and an equal amount of white pepper; or if you don't have white pepper, take four times as much *pfeffertruch* —the pepper plant—or white pepper, and grind it into a powder. Then take bean flour, add the aforementioned powder, and mix all this with fenugreek juice, without water or wine, or with another liqueur. Once this is done, make cakes from all these ingredients and dry them in the heat of the sun. Therefore, in summer, while the sun is available, do this; in winter, however, keep them in a warm place. Then eat the same cakes, whether full or fasting.

XIII. — The zedoary (*De Zituar*)

The zedoary (*Zituar*) is of moderate heat, and has great virtue in itself. For a man who trembles in his limbs, that is, who is seized with trembling (*bibet*), and whose strength fails, if a little galangal (*galgan*) falls into the wine he drinks, and a little honey is added, and thus it cooks in the wine, and he

drinks it while it is still hot—that is, the *melch* —the trembling goes away from him, and he recovers his strength. And he who has much saliva and much foam in himself, should powder the zedoary , and bind the powder in a cloth, and thus put it in a container, pouring water over it, so that the water may take on the flavor of it; and thus let him drink that water often at night on an empty stomach, and the saliva and foam will cease.

And whoever has a severe headache, should moisten his forehead and temples with the same powder, tied in a cloth, and a little water, and he will feel better. And whoever has a stomach burdened by bad foods and is very heavy, should grind the zedoary powder , and with the same powder and flour, similarly mixed with water, make a cake, and bake it in the sun or in a nearly cold oven. Then reduce the same cake to powder, and licking this powder with his hand on an empty stomach, often—that is, the *lecke* —and thus, when he goes to sleep at night, he relieves the stomach discomfort.

Translator's note: Migne identifies *Zituar* with *Amomum zedoaria* (the zedoary). *Bibet* here translates to "trembling"; *melch* indicates the hot drink; *lecke* means "to lick."

XV. — Ginger (*De Ingeber*)

Ginger (*Ingeber*) is very hot and spreading, that is, *zufloszlich* —expanding—and is harmful to a healthy, fat person, because it makes them foolish, dull, and lascivious. But for a parched, sick person, whose body is almost fading, it is good to eat, and thus it reduces their strength, and leaves nothing indigestible in the person, but ensures good digestion.

If someone has *citerdross* in his body—that is, swollen glands—let him add that aforementioned powder bound in a cloth, with a little vinegar, and a little wine if he has any, so that it is not too pungent; what is called *zanger* —pungent—

and with the skin, with that cloth and that powder, anoint the place where the glands are, and thus be cured.

Translator's note: Migne identifies Ingeber *with* Amomum . zingiber (ginger). *Zufloszlich* means "expanding, fluid"; *zanger* "pungent, acrid"; *citerdrose* refers to glands or swellings.

XVI. — Pepper (*De Pipere*)

Pepper is very hot and dry, and has a certain hastiness, and if eaten in large quantities it harms a person, producing pleurisy , and destroys even more of the body's moisture because it is hot. Anyone who eats fruit or pears and feels pain should eat pepper immediately and will feel better. But anyone suffering from spleen pain and aversion to food should eat pepper with bread, and their spleen will feel better and will lose the distaste for eating.

Translator's note: Migne identifies pepper with *Piper longum et nigrum* (long pepper and black pepper), and adds an entry on the pepper tree (*De arbore piperis*).

XVII. — The cumin (*De Komel*)

Cumin (*Komel*) is of moderate heat and is dry, and is good and useful and wholesome to eat for the man who has a healthy taste (*danphet*), however he eats it; but it is harmful to him who has pain in the heart, because the heart does not warm itself perfectly, since it must always be warm. For the healthy it is good to eat, because it gives him good wit and temperament, and does not bring on sweat; and to him who is too hot, everyone harms him; but if he who is sick eats it, it excites the plague in him, except he who has pain in the lungs.

A man who wants to eat cooked or roasted cheese, to avoid pain, should sprinkle cumin on it and eat it. He who feels nausea should take cumin, an equal amount of pepper, and a little bit of bibinella—that is, a quarter of cumin—and grind it into a powder, mix it with a similar flour, and add some powder, and mix that powder with wheat flour. Then, with egg yolk and a little water, make cakes. Either in a hot oven or under hot ashes, make cakes; and eat the cakes thus baked.

They suppress the hot and cold humors that bring nausea to a person.

Translator's note: Migne identifies *Komel* with *Cuminum* (cumin). *Danphet* indicates a good, robust flavor; *bibinella* (burnt pimpinella) is a unit of measurement/ingredient here.

XVIII. — The bertram (*De Bertram*)

Bertram (Bertram) is mildly warm and somewhat moist, and maintains virile strength because it is good and wholesome. When eaten by a healthy person, it diminishes putrefaction and increases good blood, and gives him a pure intellect. But in one who is *sick* and almost faint in body, it reduces strength and leaves nothing in the man that is indigestible, but gives him good digestion. And in a man who has much phlegm in his head, it diminishes it; and when eaten often, it drives away pleurisy from a man, and prepares pure humors in him, and purifies his eyes. And however it is eaten, whether dry or in food, it is useful and good for the sick as well as for the healthy. In fact, if a man eats it frequently, it drives out putrefaction and prevents him from becoming sick. When eaten in the mouth, it attracts moisture and saliva, and for this reason, that is, because it draws out bad humors, it gives health.

Translator's note: Migne identifies *Bertram* with *Anthemis. pyrethrum* (the pyrethrum, today *Anacyclus pyrethrum*).

XIX. — Licorice (*De Liquiricio*)

Licorice (*Liquiricium*) has a mild heat and is good for humans, because it makes their voice clear (*claram*), however it is eaten; it makes their mind sweet and their eyes clear, and it softens the stomach for digestion. And it is very beneficial to the frantic person, if eaten often, because it extinguishes the fury of their brain.

Translator's note: Migne identifies *Liquiricium* with *Glycyrrhiza glabra* (licorice). In the Bamberg area, Migne notes, it was widely cultivated, according to a report dating back to the Empress Saint Kunigunde.

XX. — The cinnamon (*De Cynamomo*)

Cinnamon (*Cynamomum*) is very hot and has strong virtues in itself, and also a modest humidity; but its strong heat compresses that humidity, and whoever eats it often, diminishes the bad humors in him and prepares the good ones.

Translator's note. Migne identifies *Cynamomum* with *Laurus Cinnamomum* (cinnamon), and adds a note on the cinnamon tree (*De arbore cinnamomi*): its bark, he says, is very hot; anyone suffering from paralysis, or from quotidian or tertian fevers, should boil the bark in water in a steel vessel, and pour good wine into that water. Using the wood and leaves of the tree, take the bark and make a poultice, place it over a boiling fire, and apply it frequently while hot, and you will be cured.

XXI. — Nutmeg (*De Nuce muscata*)

Nutmeg has great warmth and a good temper in its powers. And if one eats nutmeg, it opens one's heart, purifies one's senses, and instils good intelligence. Take nutmeg, an equal weight of cinnamon, and a little clove, and grind this; then, with the same flour and a little water, and with the egg yolk, make small cakes, and eat them often. They soothe the bitterness of the heart and mind, and open your heart and your dull senses, and make your mind cheerful, and purify your senses, and diminish all harmful humors within you, and bring good blood to your blood, and make you strong.

Translator's note: Migne identifies *Nux. muscata* with *Myristica moschata* (the nutmeg), and — under the name of the nutmeg tree (*De arbore nucis muscatae*) — describes the tree on which nutmeg grows, whose wood and leaves are useful in medicine, and which is very warm and has a good temperament. When a person eats it, his heart opens and his senses are purified; and with an equal weight of cinnamon and a little ground clove , and flour, cakes are made.

XXII. — The Rose (*De Rosa*)

The rose is cold, and this same cold has in itself a...

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