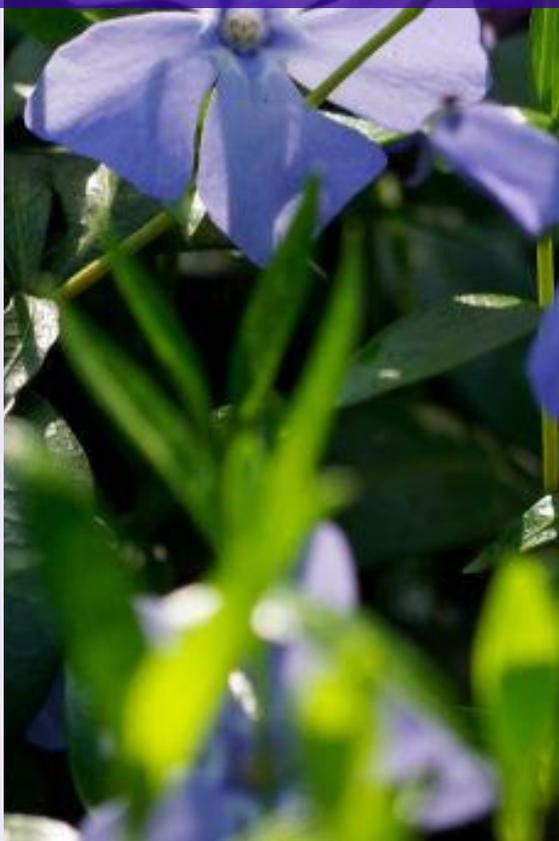


# Notes from the field . . .

PERIWINKLE ESSENCE:  
through cultivation of Self  
comes connection to Other



by Chanelle  
A. Bergeron



*The sky on April 15th was brooding, heaving and grey. For weeks, I had been admiring the touches of purple amidst the tangle of evergreen—along the roadsides, along the trail, near the garden. So I knew, seeing it everywhere, that it was time to seek it out. Periwinkle flourishes, quietly, but with punctuation: singularly, but intricately connected to its trailing vine*



#### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The botanical genus of Periwinkle is *Vinca*, thought to be derived from the Latin, *vincio*, meaning 'to bind'. Growing up, I knew this plant as 'Creeping Myrtle', and recall it in every garden my family ever kept.

Periwinkle has many common names, depending on how far back you look or which country you visit. It has been known as 'Perwynke' in old English texts, 'Joy of the Ground' in Scotland, 'Violette des sorcier' (Sorcerer's Violet) and 'Pucelage' (Virgin-flower) in France, 'Centocchio' (Hundred Eyes) and 'Fiore di Morte' (Flower of Death) in Italy. For as many names and countries, there are an equal number of uses for the plant—medicinal, magical, customary, superstitious, and practical. For instance, perhaps you would recall the

wedding rhyme: 'Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue.' The blue references the Periwinkle flower, which was tied about the bride's garter for the growth and protection of love. Known as the flower of sincere friendship and of love, it was therefore used in love potions, aphrodisiacs, and grown in gardens to ensure a long and joyful life for couples. Additionally, this was a flower of protection. In some places, the Periwinkle was considered to be most potent in driving away evil and "wykked spirits" and, in other places, garlands were laid on the graves of children and babies who had passed, as a means of protection.

#### HISTORICAL USES

Medicinally, it seems as if this plant has been all but lost to the modern world. In all of my studies, I have never once heard an herbalist refer to the healing qualities of this plant. I have often heard that Periwinkle is poisonous. Perhaps this is due to its family, the *Apocynaceae*, which includes a good deal of poisonous plants - like Oleander. Historically, it does seem to have been used widely by herbalists like Culpepper, Dioscorides, and Galen for its astringent, acrid, purgative, anti-inflammatory, and hemostatic properties. I even noticed that a few herbalists claimed its therapeutic benefit specifically as a garland:

*"...Lord Bacon himself testifying that a limb suffering from cramp would be cured if bands of green Periwinkle were tied round it; and William Coles, in his Adam in Eden (1657), gives a definite case of a friend who was: 'vehemently tormented with the cramp for a long while which could be by no means eased till he had wrapped some of the branches hereof about his limbs'."*

( Grieve, M., A Modern Herbal, Mackays of Chatham PLC,  
Chatham, Kent 1994)

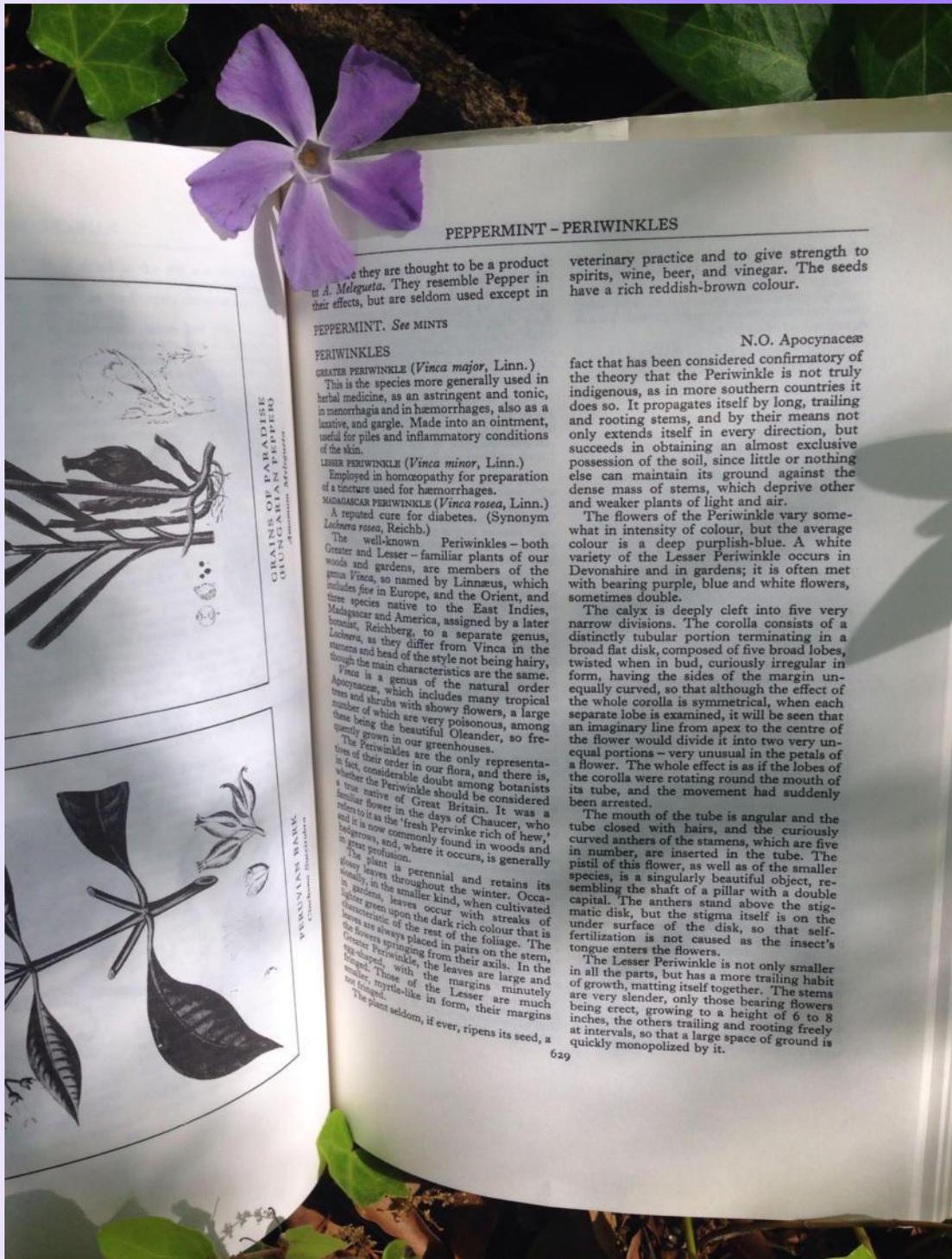
## THE FLOWER'S FORM

*Glancing at the flowering vine, you can see why they were used as garlands and wreaths: the twist and turn of the vine, which stays low to the ground; the lush evergreen leaves like glossy leather, the gorgeous propellor-like petals the colour of twilight.*

To look closely at the Periwinkle is to see its depth. You see the five-lobed corolla in the shape of a star and, at its very centre, held within, another star - this one the golden glowing reproductive organs that look like a chalice or a trumpet. We find ourselves peering to the heart of the flower to see what is held there. It has an almost kaleidoscopic effect, leading the eye up to the white rays that shoot off from the center and traverse the sides of each petal. Maude Grieve describes the botany of this plant so well in her herbal:

*'The calyx is deeply cleft into five very narrow divisions. The corolla consists of a distinctly tubular portion terminating in a broad flat disk, composed of five broad lobes, twisted when in bud, curiously irregular in form, having the sides of the margin unequally curved, so that although the effect of the whole corolla is symmetrical, when each separate lobe is examined, it will be seen that an imaginary line from apex to the centre of the flower would divide it into two very unequal portions - very unusual in the petals of a flower. The whole effect is as if the lobes of the corolla were rotating round the mouth of its tube, and the movement had suddenly been arrested... The pistil of this flower, as well as of the smaller species, is a singularly beautiful object . . .'*





PEPPERMINT - PERIWINKLES

... they are thought to be a product of *A. Melegueta*. They resemble Pepper in their effects, but are seldom used except in

PEPPERMINT. See MINTS

PERIWINKLES

GREATER PERIWINKLE (*Vinca major*, Linn.)  
This is the species more generally used in herbal medicine, as an astringent and tonic, in menorrhagia and in hæmorrhages, also as a laxative, and gargle. Made into an ointment, useful for piles and inflammatory conditions of the skin.

LESSER PERIWINKLE (*Vinca minor*, Linn.)  
Employed in homœopathy for preparation of a tincture used for hæmorrhages.

MADAGASCAR PERIWINKLE (*Vinca rosea*, Linn.)  
A reputed cure for diabetes. (Synonym *Lochnera rosea*, Reichb.)

The well-known Periwinkles - both Greater and Lesser - familiar plants of our woods and gardens, are members of the genus *Vinca*, so named by Linneus, which includes five in Europe, and the Orient, and Madagascar and America, assigned by a later botanist, Reichberg, to a separate genus, *Lochnera*, as they differ from *Vinca* in the structure and head of the style not being hairy.

*Vinca* is a genus of the natural order Apocynaceæ, which includes many tropical trees and shrubs with showy flowers, a large number of which are very poisonous, among these being the beautiful Oleander, among them being the beautiful Oleander, among them being the beautiful Oleander, among them being the beautiful Oleander.

The Periwinkles are the only representatives of their order in our flora, and there is, whether the Periwinkle should be considered a true native of Great Britain. It was a familiar flower in the days of Chaucer, who refers to it as the 'fresh Pervinkle rich of hew,' and it is now commonly found in woods and hedgerows, and, where it occurs, is generally in great profusion.

The plant is perennial and retains its showy leaves throughout the winter. Occasional, in the smaller kind, when cultivated in gardens, leaves occur with streaks of lighter green upon the dark rich colour that is characteristic of the rest of the foliage. The flowers are always placed in pairs on the stem, the flowers springing from their axils. In the Greater Periwinkle, the leaves are large and egg-shaped, with the margins minutely serrated. Those of the Lesser are much smaller, stryale-like in form, their margins not serrated.

The plants seldom, if ever, ripens its seed, a

fact that has been considered confirmatory of the theory that the Periwinkle is not truly indigenous, as in more southern countries it does so. It propagates itself by long, trailing and rooting stems, and by their means not only extends itself in every direction, but succeeds in obtaining an almost exclusive possession of the soil, since little or nothing else can maintain its ground against the dense mass of stems, which deprive other and weaker plants of light and air.

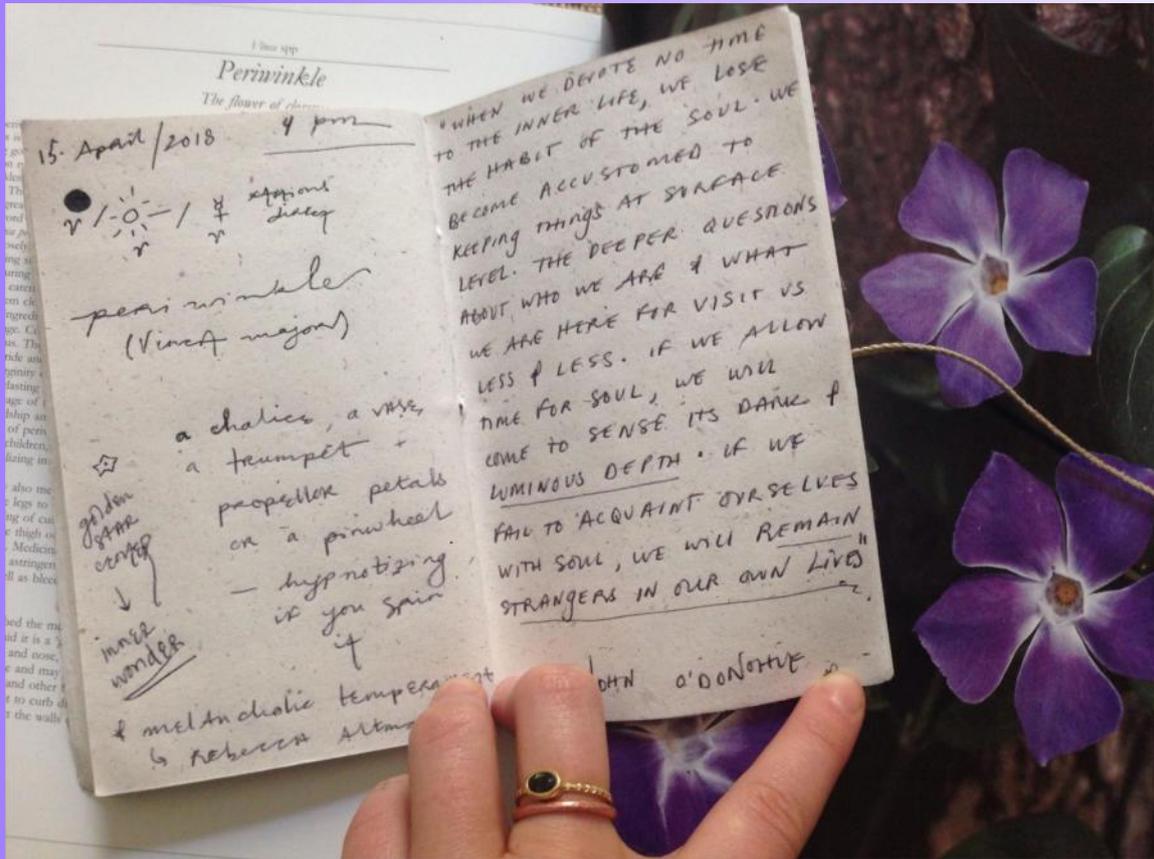
N.O. Apocynaceæ

The flowers of the Periwinkle vary somewhat in intensity of colour, but the average colour is a deep purplish-blue. A white variety of the Lesser Periwinkle occurs in Devonshire and in gardens; it is often met with bearing purple, blue and white flowers, sometimes double.

The calyx is deeply cleft into five very narrow divisions. The corolla consists of a distinctly tubular portion terminating in a broad flat disk, composed of five broad lobes, twisted when in bud, curiously irregular in form, having the sides of the margin unequally curved, so that although the effect of the whole corolla is symmetrical, when each separate lobe is examined, it will be seen that an imaginary line from apex to the centre of the flower would divide it into two very unequal portions - very unusual in the petals of a flower. The whole effect is as if the lobes of the corolla were rotating round the mouth of its tube, and the movement had suddenly been arrested.

The mouth of the tube is angular and the tube closed with hairs, and the curiously curved anthers of the stamens, which are five in number, are inserted in the tube. The pistil of this flower, as well as of the smaller species, is a singularly beautiful object, resembling the shaft of a pillar with a double capital. The anthers stand above the stigmatic disk, but the stigma itself is on the under surface of the disk, so that self-fertilization is not caused as the insect's tongue enters the flowers.

The Lesser Periwinkle is not only smaller in all the parts, but has a more trailing habit of growth, matting itself together. The stems are very slender, only those bearing flowers being erect, growing to a height of 6 to 8 inches, the others trailing and rooting freely at intervals, so that a large space of ground is quickly monopolized by it.



### CONNECTING WITH PERIWINKLE

From the first inklings I received, bidding me to make an essence with this gorgeous flower, I sensed that the timing had to be just right. On one day I would think, "Today I will find the patch of Periwinkle from which to make this essence" but would never follow through. It struck me that this was part of the Periwinkle's message: the medicine of that melancholic temperament which seems to emanate from the flower itself - is to build towards the right time, have patience, let slowness be your guide.

Melancholics deal intimately with time, pattern and perspective. I love how herbalist Rebecca Altman says this of the melancholic temperament:

*If you slow down enough to observe it, you'll uncover a world within a world, layer upon layer of interesting things that you might never discern if you just give it a quick glance and then walk away."*

From "On Earth: The Melancholic Temperament"

Everything about Periwinkle has asked me to slow down, luring me in to *truly* look: to admire the little intricacies of the green-leafed tangle at the edge of the busy road and the flowers as bruised in color as the gloaming sky. Rebecca also points out that the melancholic's focus is "primarily inward". How fascinating, considering the draw inward of the Periwinkle's inflorescence! Does this remedy bestow the positive qualities of the melancholic? Yes, I believe this essence to be incredibly beneficial for people who cannot seem to 'slow their roll' and appreciate a moment, or those who cannot look inside or and reflect upon their internal landscape. It seems to draw us in to further and further discovery of self. It invites us to devote time to our inner world, to the seat of our soul -to explore and wonder at our "luminous depth" (John O'Donohue "Beauty: The Invisible Embrace"). Though Periwinkle brings us inward, it also reminds us we will not get lost there - for the surface is just as enticing in its colour, beauty, and movement.

### A LOVE CHARM

Periwinkle is a plant said to bind together friends and lovers alike. From a deep, inner knowing of the self, we can truly share our lives with others. To traverse one's inner realms is to know the depths, desires and crevices that make up your personality. With this knowledge, we know how to change and how to grow; we are confident and we are singular.

It is from time spent, learning and knowing the intricacies of another, that we truly learn how to love that person - their nuances and their capacities.

These foundational experiences take time, take patience, and ask us to turn from the panoramic view of the world outside to the vast and limitless details of one's inner life. All that I have learned of love and friendship over the years tells me that understanding the self (to the best of one's ability) and others is paramount in building a long-lasting relationship where mutual respect is one pillar and the desire to discover an infinity within one another is the second pillar. These are the things which Periwinkle reminds us and teaches us. That true love is fecund and bound by the weaving of time—which is said to reveal all.

### A FINAL WORD

It may be seen as a coincidence that, on the afternoon I made this essence, the sky was melancholic, heavy, and wet as a river stone; but I do not believe in coincidences. I believe in timing: in an instinctual sense of collaboration. This essence was made while the storm rolled in, while the new moon sat in the constellation of Aries - the sign of self. Later that night, my partner and I stood, hip to hip in our kitchen, and gazed into the depths of the Periwinkle flowers I used to make this essence, remarking upon what we saw as the wind howled outside.

#### IMAGES:

All images by Chanelle A. Bergeron, except  
Periwinkle image on article first page from  
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