

*"I BELIEVE there is a science and a spiritual part of healing. Someday we will look back at this time as the dark age of medicine."*



Photographs by Tom McCarthy Jr./GateHouse News Service

Nancy Venzon, a registered nurse and herbalist, demonstrates how to make a salve during a workshop at Seven Circles Heritage Center in Edwards, a small town near Peoria.

# Medicine woman

Nurse promotes the healing qualities of herbs



## ■ Venzon's Simpler Healing Salve

One heaping tablespoon each of St. John's wort, comfrey and calendula. Place herbs in slow cooker and cover with 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil. Turn heat on low and steep 3 to 4 hours. The lower the heat, the longer you will need to steep the herbs and the higher the quality of your oil. Strain herbs and return oil to pot. Shave 1/8 cup beeswax into oil. Heat gently until beeswax is melted. Add 40 drops of lavender essential oil. Pour into containers. Keeps up to 1 year.

## ■ Venzon's Healing Cream

One-quarter cup each of calendula, myrrh, thyme, peppermint, echinacea, yarrow, anise, cloves, plantain, marshmallow root, rosemary, chaparral, comfrey, chickweed, osha, tea tree, St. John's wort and turmeric. Mix herbs with 6 cups olive oil. Heat over low flame or in slow cooker for 6 to 8 hours. Cool and strain. Add 2 1/4 cups lard and 3/4 pound beeswax. Reheat until melted. Stir in 1/2 teaspoon benzoin powder. Bottle while hot.

By CLARE HOWARD  
GATEHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

**A**s an herbalist and registered nurse, Nancy Venzon bridges two worlds. She values the knowledge and efficacy of each, but believes they are stronger in combination rather than opposition.

Venzon is educated in the Western tradition of pharmaceutical-based medicine and healing. She worked as a registered nurse for 30 years and has certifications in critical care and trauma nursing.

She's also an herbalist working with ancient knowledge of the healing qualities of herbs and plants to treat illness and maintain health.

On a recent Saturday afternoon, Venzon stirred herbs in an olive oil base simmering for hours in a slow cooker in the kitchen at Seven Circles Heritage Center in Edwards, a small town near Peoria. The wind howled outside; inside, the aroma of rosemary, myrrh and thyme filled the air.

Venzon was presenting a workshop on herbal salves. About 20 students encircled her as she poured a warm herbal stew into cheesecloth and squeezed it to separate oil from solids. Then she re-

turned the oil to the slow cooker and added beeswax and lard.

## Lost heritage

Dennis Weaver watched and took notes. His grandparents were Cherokee. His wife's grandparents were Scotch-Irish.

"Our grandparents knew these old recipes, but they passed before they passed on the knowledge. Now my wife and I are trying to learn again," Weaver said.

Venzon, 65, recalled that her grandmother, an herbalist, treated ear infections by squeezing onion juice into a warm spoon and pouring the liquid into the ear.

Her grandmother had been thrilled when Venzon went to college to study nursing. "A better medicine," her grandmother had thought. Venzon had thought so, too, at least until she perceived the common sense of natural healing in a context of integrated medicine.

The healing cream made during her class at Seven

## HERBS

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Circles was based on a recipe Venzon prepares about twice a year. Once the preparation sets, it is a hard cream used for cuts, scrapes, burns, bites, rashes, poison ivy, athlete's foot and fungal infections. It relieves pain and itching and promotes healing.

Each of the 18 ingredients — from calendula, echinacea and yarrow to chaparral, comfrey, turmeric and osha — has a specific range of healing qualities.

"The first time I made this, I measured all the ingredients. The second time, I just added them and prayed over it. People raved about that second batch," she said.

Venzon said Western medicine treats disease rather than the whole person. Traditional herbal, complementary medicine is based on maintaining health as well as treating illness.

"We can strengthen our immune system with a wealth of herbal supplements," she said. "Our society considers athletes the epitome of health, but they peak in their early 20s and 30s. Masters of qigong (a traditional Chinese practice that combines movement, meditation and regulation of breathing) don't peak until their 60s and 70s."

### More than folklore

Venzon said ancient remedies often are dismissed by people locked into the philosophy of Western medicine, but ancient remedies have centuries of wisdom behind them. There are many natural and herbal supplements that can be intermediary steps before starting regimens of Western medicine. For example, borderline high blood pressure often can be successfully treated with herbal teas.

"People ridicule herbal remedies as old folklore. But if I had chronic swollen feet, I might try dandelion tea, a potassium-rich



Tom McCarthy Jr./GateHouse News Service

Pam Hayden takes a whiff from a bag of chickweed held by her friend during a workshop on herbal salves at Seven Circles Heritage Center.

diuretic. Of course, I'd run that by my physician, but it might be very helpful," Venzon said. "In our society, we take a pill for everything. People should ask questions first about intermediary herbal steps."

Venzon said about 10 herbs are the core of treating yourself and your family. She orders herbs from Frontier Natural Products in Iowa ([www.frontiercoop.com](http://www.frontiercoop.com)) and Spice Discounters in California ([www.spicediscounters.com](http://www.spicediscounters.com)).

"I believe there is a science and a spiritual part of healing. Someday we will look back at this time as the dark age of medicine,"

Venzon said.

When spring arrives, she will search for natural herbs on family property.

In the fall, she'll hunt for hen of the woods, a mushroom with cancer-fighting properties.

"Hen of the woods has powerful immune enhancing properties that are used in cancer medications," she said. "Much of the research on herbal remedies was done in Europe, not America. There is no money to be made in dandelion tea."

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