

Annet Breuer - Healing Plants

Jon: I'm with Annet Breuer I'm phoning her, she's in the Hague, but she's going to come to Brittany in a couple of weeks' time to talk about plants. So Annet, Hi

Annet: Hi

Jon: Could you tell us what the talks are going to be about?

Annet: Um, yes, I'm going to do two talks and a French one
.....Sunday, and it will be about plants that most of the people know, like stinging nettles or dandelion

Jon: Right, I've got lots of those in my garden if you need some

Annet: Yeah, well the thing is so many people have them in their garden or they grow along the road but not many people know really a lot about the history of those plants, um, so I will talk about the history and folk tales where they are main characters in, but show actually their role in our culture.

Jon: OK.

Annet: Also the symbolism they have or the way they used to be used and sometimes still could be used.

Jon: So can you tell us about one of the uses of the stinging nettle for example

Annet: Well, the stinging nettle is that you...is a very stimulating plant, it could stimulate blood flow, for example the Romans when they came into the colder regions of, well, France, Brittany, Netherlands where I come from they used stinging nettles and hit themselves with stinging nettles to keep their blood flowing to get more warmth.

Jon: Right – and presumably then they boiled the stinging nettles because they're not very pleasant

Annet: Er not, well, the way for that use is externally so they really hit their skin with it.

Jon: Wow.

Annet: But, yes you can also, um, make a tea of it. You don't need to boil it beforehand but you can just pour the hot water on it. You can also eat it raw if you get the really young.....

Jon: Yes, I have. I've eaten the tip of a nettle raw and I think I've also had a soup made with nettle in Greece

Annet: Yes, that could very well be. Actually, it has often a beautiful colour as well. It's a bright, very bright green

Jon: Why Brittany anyway, why are you coming to Brittany to talk about these plants?

Annet: Well, when I, when I was studying, I was actually started, my background is languages and culture. I studied languages and cultures actually, especially the Arab language and culture, but when I started to study plants I started with medicinal plants and for my studies I went to Brittany, to learn, like an internship, at the plant nursery in Brittany Aromatiques close to Scaer and Benodet where, that's also the place where I will give these lectures now. So because after that, after that first period that I spent there at the plant nursery I went back and I um, I really liked the place, to learn more and also to keep in touch with the knowledge that there is there and, and I made friends there and so that's also.....

Jon: Good idea

Annet: Yeah, so after studying the medicinal properties of plants or how plants can be used, I started more to delve into the histories, which actually suits also my background as somebody who has studied languages and culture and so on, that's where that stories came back.

Jon: Really, and the stories they have the about these plants in Brittany for example are they similar to the stories of the plants elsewhere. Is there any kind of commonality between them?

Annet: In the uses of the plants, you mean?

Jon: Well, not so much uses, but the kind of folk lore.

Annet: The folk lore?

Jon: Yep

Annet: Yeah. I really like to study the plants that are common on various continents and there's, for example that's a plant I will talk about as well coming Sunday, the Mugwort, Mugwort. It grows, well here in Europe, it grows in Asia, and I have, for example Egyptian tale about it, folk tale about it, Japanese folk tale about it, and, yes there are some similarities, because in every continent this plant is very well known for the um, its ability to relieve pain.

Jon: Oh wow, we'll have to look out for that one.

Annet: There is a slight difference in the way it's used, it has been used exactly or like, yeah, it's nice to study that kind of plant.

Jon: n Right, the next time I have toothache then I shall look out for this Mudwort, how will I recognise it? Does it have a flower?

Annet: Mugwort, um, yeah it has flowers but not very, how do you say it, not very bright or big ones, more a bit like stinging nettle, small greenish flowers, but the - I think, yeah, I mean, one of things you will be able to recognise Mugwort, it almost always has a very greyish, whitish sign on it, some Mugwort species have it only on the back, how do you say it, on the lower side of the leaf and other species have two sides of the leaves, greyish, whitish colour. But it's not enough really to recognise the plant, I guess.

Jon: It's a useful plant to have around? OK. So, you're giving two talks altogether and they'll be, what, illustrated talks are they, using slides or will you be taking people out?

Annet: Well, it will be at the plant nursery, Aromatiques, so, most of the plants I will be talking about are there, growing there so that we have live examples. Um, and if not, I will have pictures with me, but most, like 90 per cent of the plants, will be there.

Jon: And do you do the similar, a similar kind of thing over in Holland?

Annet: I do, yes, yes. I work here, yes, for all kind of organisations, also in communal gardens and it's my aim actually to help people connect more with their environment and to, also with our roots in that sense, our own history, our own culture. But in the broad(?) not only of this region I really like also to, because we have this diversity of cultures in the Netherlands as well, a lot of immigrants and it's also have stories from various cultures and, like you said, also to compare them, it's really nice.

Jon: Sure. Ok Annet, well thank you very much for talking to us. By the time this goes out it'll be December, unfortunately. So, after this November are you due to make any further visits to Brittany?

Annet: Oh, I definitely will. Yes, I will come back in summer time again, yes, somewhere in July.

Jon: Sounds good. Thank you very much. We'll look out for you, and enjoy the talks.