transplant

FIELD GUIDE

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Quoted text by Sølvi Goard in “Making and Getting Made: Towards a Cyborg Transfeminism” in Salvage Magazine, 2017. Excerpted from a collaborative dreaming document between Christina and Meech for Afterwords, part of Collective Offerings at the Art Gallery of Guelph.

“Alienation is a two-faced thing: it hurts, and the freedom it gives is not on our terms, but there is also the germ of liberation—we are offered the chance to relinquish any investment in a self-destructive society. The pain felt from our alienation can’t be alleviated by a return to an ethereal state of nature, but has to be embraced, and retooled.”

And perhaps this is exactly where we will meet the plants.

This writing came into being from many places: a small desk a stone's throw away from the Eramosa River which flows through ancestral territory of the Chonnoton (known to others as Attawandaron) and the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit. It came into being in a park shaded by old growth evergreens; and another desk near the near the Columbia and Willamette Rivers that carve through the unceeded terriroity of the Multnomah, Wasco, Cowlitz, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Bands of Chinook, and many other tribes.

It feels like a good place to begin this field guide would be with someone dear to both of us, *plantain*. Plantain is known to the Anishnaabe as Ginebigowashk[1]—White Man's Footprint. It arrived on Turtle Island from Europe with early settlers and was given this name for the way it followed the settlers wherever they went. Growing low to the ground, plantain is often found along the sides of paths, in cracks in the concrete, or in small open spaces growing among diverse plant communities. In the early spring, plantain's tender greens add flavour and nutrients to salads and stews, and can be made into a poultice "for isolating the sting of the poison of an insect bite".[2] Unlike the other plants in this guide, botanists have given plantain the designation "naturalized" due to its ability to coexist and integrate with indigenous ecosystems. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer asks non-indigenous human immigrants to follow the teachings of plantain, to "*live as if this is the land that feeds you, as if these are the streams*

from you which drink, that build your body and fill your spirit. (...) to take care of the land as if our lives and the lives of all our relatives depend on it. Because they do."[3] In a time of ongoing settler colonization and ecological crisis, this invitation is deeply generous and generative.

The plants in this book are typically regarded with the designation *invasive*, describing the ways they multiply and grow without consideration to limits. The need to attend to the negative impacts of these species is real. However, we propose resistance to language and thinking that deems these species as a threat in need of control and eradication. This kind of orientation reproduces a binary inherent in colonial thinking–being that echoes xenophobic and militaristic responses to "foreign" or deviant human bodies. Instead, we propose the term transplant as a way to consider connections between plant and human bodies beyond colonial categorization. Transplant thinking provides a shift in positioning, inviting us to think about interconnections between plants that have migrated without agency, ways that human bodies have been transplanted against their will through displacement and enslavement, and cyborgian transfeminist ethics that offer pathways toward radical queer and anti-capitalist futures. While attending to the ways transplant species impact biodiversity and ecosystem health are necessary, making kin with transplants allows us to sit with disturbance, providing modes of understanding the unique ways in which we all require each other. This field guide threads together histories, stories, contributions of specific plant species and meditative invitations into generative entanglements with transplant beings.

Wild Fennel

Foeniculum Vulgare

Common Names rezene, finocchio, μάραθον (marathon), μάραθος (marathos), anise, aniseed, sweet fennel

Wild fennel is growing tall on the bluff; wispy fronds waving, brushing the landscape with a gorgeous fragrance. It's midsummer and their bright yellow umbells are cradling the hillside. Skeletons of last year's stalks are shooting up from the base; marking what these leaves will soon become.

Wild fennel doesn't form bulbs like the cultivated variety, but the flavour is the same, and perhaps slightly more delicate, making the plant a wonderful herb for foragers and invasivores[4] to collect for edible and medicinal use.

Native to countries that border the Mediterranean Sea, in non-native habitats, wild fennel *has become a problem in disturbed areas*. Like many plants labelled as *invasive*, the plant reproduces easily through the spread of tiny, anise-flavoured seeds or root crowns carried by water, forming dense monocultures that shade out native plants. When established, fennel is persistent; seeds may lay dormant in the soil without germinating for several years and, and once they decide to sprout, they may do so from spring until late fall in favourable climates.

FENNEL

Last year a friend took me to a secret fennel forest on a bluff. It's a special place, overlooking the train tracks, and overflowing with anise-scented herbs. I found it on Google maps earlier this year and it had a few reviews. These are my favourites:

- beautiful open sky, large trees, and tall grass
- a grassy cliffside knoll with an industrial backdrop. The blinking lights and braking freight trains do nothing to mar the spectacular sunset
- a really nice undeveloped slice of land, let's hope it stays that way. A great place to pick wild herbs like mint and fennel
- I played there since I was a kid. Hopped my first train… we rode bikes down the hill, made forts
- nice in the summer for picnics. Easy to find garden snakes
- I've watched this area blossom into a beautiful place
- this place has a lot of weeds a lot of bugs and spiders
- there are fennel plants everywhere, smells great!
- cool little park in the rough of a post-industrial wasteland…makes for a killer sunset but one look down at the river and you are reminded of Oregon's most TOXIC Superfund site…the wildflowers are plentiful and it's a little bit of habitat remediation for an area that so sorely deserves it… something to be TRULY cherished.

FENNEL

European Buckthorn

Rhamnus Cathartica

Common Names highwaythorn, waythorn, ram's thorn, hart's thorn, purging buckthorn

A traveler found in the edge places—forest edges and openings, riverbanks, disturbed lands and remnant patches of soil, buckthorn's prolific black berries contain seeds that find their way across the land in part through the droppings of birds who will eat the berries when there is little else available. European buckthorn is a deciduous shrub, or small tree, with roots from the area of the British Isles, south to Morocco and east to Kyrgyzstan. From grey-brown bark and often thorny branches, rounded and finely toothed leaves turn from glossy green to mustard yellow as the days get shorter and summer has turned to fall. The common name purging buckthorn alludes to the severe laxative effects caused by ingesting the seeds and leaves, which are mildly poisonous to most animals, including humans.

In medieval times, buckthorn berries were used to produce the colour 'Sap Green' that artists used in painting and illuminated manuscripts. The technique for making Sap Green was recorded by Italian painter Cennino Cennini (c.1360) in Il

libro dell'arte, a how-to book on late Medieval and early Renaissance painting. Depending on the technique, the part of the plant harvested (bark or berries) and the time of year, pigment can be extracted to produce yellow, green, purple, or pink shades.

Buckthorn

Recipe for Buckthorn Ink or Dye

Collect about 2 cups of buckthorn berries, which mature in September in the Northeast. Crush the berries to release their juices and cover completely with water in a pot or slow cooker. Simmer on low for 1 to 4 hours until the desired hue is reached. Transfer to a glass jar. *Note:* adding a scant teaspoon of alum acetate acts as a fixative and changes the hue from a range of purples to a deep green.

Bullthorn

Crown Vetch

Securigera Varia

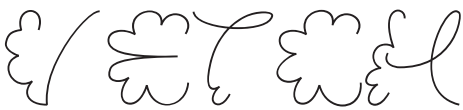
Common Names common pea, axeseed, arvejilla morada (creeping crown vetch), В'язіль барвистий (colourful knitting), curly pea, rabbit clover

In the light of the sun setting over the hill of the landfill, crown vetch's pink and white pea-like flower clusters are glowing as they gently quiver in the breeze. Growing low to the ground, their delicate compound leaves, adorned with numerous round and pinnate leaflets are accompanied by tendrils that allow them to climb nearby vegetation, reaching for the light.

Below ground, their deep and tenacious root systems hold steadily onto the soil, even in the most challenging situations on steep banks and in thin and dusty soil. Vetch thrives in the poorest conditions and can tolerate both drought and moisture very well, forming dense layers of vegetation that shade and crowd out other plant neighbours. Like other leguminous plants, it works to add nitrogen to the soil by forming root nodules in association with rhizobial bacteria, improving soil health and quality.

Hailing from Europe, Asia, and northern Africa, several reports of crown vetch occurred on Turtle Island in the mid-to-late 1800s. In 1935, research began into crown vetch's suitability for erosion control and revegetation of degraded sites. By the 1950s and beyond it was planted extensively on roadside and railway embankments and on abandoned mines and landfills and on other sites with very poor and disturbed soil.

When the Eastview Landfill in Guelph closed in 2003, the clay cap that enclosed the waste was planted with crown vetch to prevent the erosion and exposure of waste and methane. At the ReMediate[5] garden, which sits at the foot of the landfill where a hill used to be, the vetch has crept in, choking out the milkweed, wild columbine, coneflowers, liatris and other wildflowers growing there. For years I pulled and cut the vetch, trying to make space for the other wildflowers to grow. Several years ago, an Elder who was visiting the garden with me chuckled when I expressed my frustration with the vetch crowding out the other plants. She pointed out that there was a reason the vetch was there and I should listen to why. Since then, I have sought to shift my relationship with the vetch. I appreciate how in times of intense drought - which is experienced so harshly at the barren landfill—the vetch is often one of few plants to flower. I am beginning to understand the work the crown vetch is doing in the garden, adding nitrogen and healing and improving the poor and severely damaged soil. I still hold the intention to make space at ReMediate for a kind of diverse habitat that would both heal the soil and support the specialized needs of pollinators.[6] But I have learned to become curious and grateful for the labour of regeneration that the vetch is doing now and the wisdom in why it is there. *CK*



Japanese Knotweed

Reynoutria Japonica

Common Names 虎杖 (Itadori), Tiger Cane, Donkey Rhubarb, Fleeceflower, Billyweed, Elephant Ears, American or Mexican Bamboo

Each spring, Japanese knotweed's hollow shoots break ground. These young stems stand solidly, often next to last year's dried up relatives towering above, over two meters tall. In Japan, the plant is known as tiger cane or itadori, meaning "pain puller" or "takes pain away". An edible, medicinal and ceremonial plant, itadori is used as herbal medicine, young shoots are eaten by foragers in both savory and sweet preparations,[7] and its floral nectar is adored by bees alongside other late bloomers at the end of summer.

Brought in the 1820s from Japan to the garden of a German botanist and surgeon named Philipp Franz von Siebold (through the Dutch East Indies Company), by the 1850s, itadori's migration had begun. Shipped to Kew Gardens in England as an ornamental, the plant was later prized by gardeners who adopted an "exotic" taste in plants—and as erosion control, to retain soil and stabilize embankments with its deep and vast underground rhizomatic structure.[8] In Japan, itdaori is found on the sloped sides

of volcanoes in Nagasaki prefecture, where it's regulated by native miscanthus grass, bamboo, soil-borne disease, fungi, pests, and the hostile environment of lava slides and volcanic ash. Outside of this environment, itadori spreads both through underground rhizomes and the dispersal of seeds. Itadori can reproduce asexually, notably from a piece of rhizome "the size of a fingernail". It is theorized that plants found outside of Eastern Asia are all clones of a single female.[9] Thus, in most non-native habitats, itadori is often described as a vigorously growing and *disruptive* weed.

ITADORI

In April, I moved into a new place with a yard. There are remnants of ornamental trees and shrubs planted by the last homeowners, but our landlord doesn't do landscaping, and the majority of the yard is filled with self-seeded plants that many would call weeds. Itadori is one of them, returning often in hidden spots, or growing new shoots off of old stems.

I've struggled a bit to find ways of managing their persistent growth. Other plants in the yard I've enjoyed foraging or I simply composted to make room for more diversity. But once it's pulled, itadori only returns with more vigour. The neighbors have let their itadori grow and I know that some things are not worth the effort. In a little over a year, our houses will be demolished to make room for a new apartment building. Our gardens and apple trees will be dug up and composted into rubble.

I keep thinking about a friend's words, *how many gardens will I have to leave?* And Christina, carrying her gardens with her in each move. W*hat beings will I hold onto?* There are moments when I question the use of putting so much time into something that is so temporary. As I write this I feel loss for a home I've just moved into. I watch the pollinators flutter around the baby pink, star-shaped blooms on the milkweed plants, the sungolds beginning to bgm lush, or my fingers meeting new worms while digging in the soil. It's bittersweet. It's a moment in a dark movement that will continue to sweep us off our feet. I want to imagine the lives that will exist here, below a ghost house, deep under concrete. I know that when the foundation fails we will continue as we always have, moving stones and amending the dirt until it's ready to hold us again. *MB*

BETWEEN

Periwinkle

Vinca Minor

Common Names Devil's Eye, Joy on the Ground, Sorcerer's Violet, Unsterglichkeit (Flower of Immortality), Fiore di Morte (Death's Flower)

Periwinkle spreads their long trailing stems along forest floors and among the roots of tall trees, their dark, smooth evergreen leaves shining in the dappled shade. Their namesake shows itself in the delicate colour of the blue phlox-like flowers that are visited by bumblebees throughout most of the growing season. Introduced to Turtle Island in the mid-1800s, periwinkle's roots are in Europe, northwest Africa and southwest Asia.

The botanical name *vinca* is from the Latin *vincire*—to bind or entwine. Periwinkle has a rich folklore history in Europe and has cultural associations with love, longevity, immortality and death. Their twining nature allows their stems to be woven easily, and they were used in medieval Europe to make chaplets, and circlets of leaves and flowers that people adorned for celebrations on their heads. They were also woven into garlands for the graves of children

and their branches decorated the condemned on the way to the gallows.[11] Folklore suggested that if you gazed upon the periwinkle, lost memories would be restored to you.

Scholars have noted the presence of periwinkle, and other plantings such as yucca, in the graveyards of enslaved Americans, and suggest that some Black communities used a botanical language of grave marking.[12] Particularly in the Southern United States, periwinkle has guided researchers to abandoned gravesites of enslaved communities that would have otherwise gone undetected.

While periwinkle has a long history in folk medicine, alkaloids extracted from vinca species are currently used to create chemotherapeutic agents such as *vincristin* and *vinblastine*, important in the treatment of some leukemias, lymphomas and childhood cancers.

PERIWINKLE

The forest floor between the oak, maple and pine trees at my great-great grandparents' summer cottage was covered in swathes of periwinkle. They choked out the oak savanna wildflowers—butterfly weed, smooth rose and wild geranium—who sought out the sandy spaces the periwinkle had yet to find. One of the great aunts had transplanted a single plant from the riverbed. It was a remembrance of something…I have always wondered what. In the summer of 2000, as the vinca bloomed and spread in the shade, a plastic IV pumped a cocktail through my veins. It contained *vinblastine*, intended to stop the spread of cancer through my lymph. I hated chemo. It is difficult to articulate the horrible feeling of being slowly poisoned. I hold that truth alongside the complexity of knowing this poisoning is likely why I am here today, writing this. After treatments, I would often retreat to my grandparents' cottage and sit and walk among the periwinkle. I only know now the role it played in treating my illness. And this is the imagination that comes to me now: as vines and roots and tubes and veins entwine, cycles of proliferation and diminution spiral like tendrils seeking sun and plants becoming soil. *CK*

PERIWINKLE

notes

1. Mary Siisip Geniusz “Plant Have So Much To Give Us, All We Have To Do Is Ask: Anishnaabe Botanical Teachings” University of Minnesota Press, 2015. Pg 201
2. Mary Siisip Geniusz, Pg 203
3. Robin Wall Kimmerer “Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants” Milkweed Editions, 2013. Pg 214-15.
4. A term that refers to people who primarily eat invasive species.
5. ReMediate (2014-ongoing) is a collaboration between Christina Kingsbury and poet Anna Bowen in the form of a 3000 square foot quilt made for the former Eastview Landfill in Guelph. The quilt was made from handmade paper embedded with wildflower seeds and is now a garden for pollinators and other threatened species. Anna Bowen produced a series of poems for the project.
6. Indigenous pollinators and plants co-evolve together in a region over thousands of years and many have specialized relationships that make them most suitable to success together. Planting a diversity of plants indigenous to an area means supporting a diverse group of pollinating insects - especially those pollinators who are not currently privileged in the landscapes around us.
7. The Japanese Wikipedia entry notes that children enjoy the acidic taste of peeled stems, a product of oxalic acid, and foragers describe shoots as “a delicacy with a dampness” I assume to describe the mucilaginous quality of the stems.
8. Ironically, causing embankment erosion is one of the primary reasons conservationists now cite for the removal of the plant.
9. Item 34: “Polygonum Sieboldii” in the Kew Garden’s records. https://slate.com/technology/2019/05/japanese-knotweed-invasive-plants.html
10. This classification has led to baffling language comparisons. While I believe other records of it have since been taken down, I was still able to find one instance where itadori was referred to as a thug (https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/may/15/plantwatch-glyphosate-is-only-way-to-manage-japanese-knotweed)
11. J. Goody, “The Culture of Flowers”. Columbia University Press, 1993.
12. Lynn Rainville, “Hidden History: African American Cemeteries in Central Virginia. University of Virginia Press”, 2014.

An Invitation
Plant Meditation

Begin with noticing the plant beings around you. Sense into who is here and who might be open to working with you. If you are drawn to a particular plant, introduce yourself to them. If you sense that they are open to working with you, begin with an offering that feels appropriate and right.

Spend as much time as needed exploring and getting to know the plant you are working with—listening with your body and heart. This could include; deeply breathing in the scent of the plant; exploring shapes and colours, growth patterns and the texture of stems, leaves and flowers; observing any insect or animal visitors and their relationship to the plant; listening for movement or sounds. Notice any sensations and responses in your body as you are working with the plant, including thoughts, imaginations or feelings that emerge. Allow whatever you notice to arise and observe it with open curiosity.

When you feel complete with the meditation, offer your gratitude to the plant in a way that is appropriate for you. Part as you do with a beloved friend or teacher and consider your responsibility to what you have received.

This meditation is adapted from "Following in Plantain's Footsteps", an artwork Christina made in collaboration with plantain, Anishnaabekwe nookomis Waabanokwe N'dodem Aijijaak Zhashagi and Danielle Gehl.

Further Questions & Invitations

- What did you learn from the plant you spent time meditating with? Was there a feeling, a lesson or an imagination that resonated with you? How might this shift your way of being in the world?

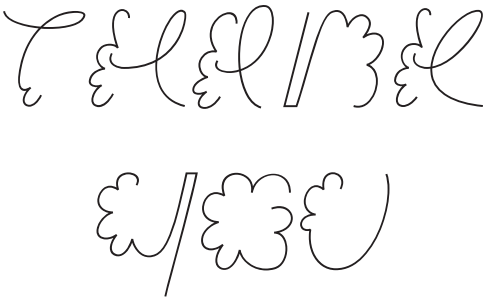
- Notice a plant that recently arrived in a place you spend time in. Get to know them and consider what they might be offering to the beings that spend time in that place (including you).

- Are there particular plants that feel like 'home' to you? Interpret this in any way that is meaningful.

- Is there a plant that stirs upsetting feelings or judgemental thoughts within you? If so, spend time just being with this plant and get curious about who they are. Notice what comes up.

- Notice a plant you pass by often but never learned about. Consider their smell, shape, look, and feel. Afterward, maybe learn their common names.

- Talk to a neighbor about how the plants, trees, soil and the water have changed over their lifetime. Or, talk about the ways in which they've adapted to stay the same. Ask about the colour of their favourite flower from home. Ask them about the games they played with plants as a child, or if there are plants they remember that they don't see anymore. Ask them if they've ever been pricked by thorns picking berries, if they've ever eaten a flower whole, or if they've ever watched trees fall in a storm. Ask them about the things you remember. Ask them how the weather feels today. Write down patterns.



Meech Boakye (B.A. Visual Studies, University of Toronto) is an artist and writer based in "Portland, OR" Their practice is rooted in relationships with floral, fungal, and microbial kin as armatures for learning how to be in community.

Christina Kingsbury is a white settler artist and educator living in Between the Lakes Treaty 3 territory whose work is rooted (often literally) in the ecology of the Grand River Watershed. Her work explores care, labour, and inter-species relationships.

SAVAC (South Asian Visual Arts Centre) is a non-profit, nomadic artist-run organization dedicated to fostering imaginative thought among artists and curators of colour and integrating them into the Canadian contemporary arts ecology through frame-works of self-representation.

We would like to thank Vince Rozario and the rest of the SAVAC team for comissioning this project and for their support along the way.