

plants are Magic

VOL. 3 : TIME

FOR MAKERS, DREAMERS
& PLANT LOVERS





Clockwise from top left: *Epilobium hirsutum*, *Ranunculus acris friesianus*,
Centaurea scabiosa, *Papaver rhoeas*

THE MEADOW'S EDGE

Words and photos by Lindsay Buck

A story about discovering a new land through its wildflowers, plus tips on how to start a *Herbarium* — a catalogue of pressed plants.

With the thick black mud tugging gently on my Wellingtons, I trace the well-worn path along the meadow's edge where the grasses bow low from the footprints of many evening strolls. The snow is still clinging to the mountain peaks in the distance, but in these rolling foothills the white winter blanket has been pulled back to reveal an electric green—the colour of the Swiss meadow in Spring. Seemingly overnight, swaths of minute purple speedwells, delicate-petalled anemones and sweet-scented violets have painted the hillsides with their colour and now lend their crispness to the cool air. Not so long ago, these beloved meadows were completely unknown to me.

I can recall my first walks in these meadows. They were uneasy and strained. The mud didn't tug; it pulled naggily at my boots. The air wasn't

crisp; it was cutting. Time—I suddenly seemed to have so much of it. New to Switzerland, I was struggling to embrace the newfound luxury of a slow lifestyle against the backdrop of my previously bustling life. What was I missing out on while standing here, literally stuck in the mud? For the past decade, professional successes had been measured solely by long hours logged in meetings or in front of a screen. With this false façade wearing away, I felt exposed. But nature, as it so often does, offered exactly the comfort I needed to help reconcile the distant past, my recent past, and my future here in a new place.

Spring—it brings that feeling of hope and renewal with an intensity that is somehow surprising every year. Those first early rays of sunshine pulled up bouquets of wildflower blooms, and with them, my rooted childhood

memories. This is why I became a landscape architect in the first place, I remembered—my love for plants, my awe and respect for nature, and an undying belief in the importance of people connecting to their environment. I saw these meadows with new eyes. I became fascinated with the diversity of plant life, both brilliant and diminutive, that I was encountering on a daily basis and wanted to put names to what I was finding. I felt called to test my own beliefs by becoming intimate with my new surroundings.

It started casually enough, with a few wildflowers plucked from the masses, pressed lovingly between pages of books, to be identified and then tucked into my knowledge bank at a later date. But the dabbling affair quickly became so much more: a scientific exploration, and artistic endeavour, and in the end, a lifestyle – the way I now observe my life in relation to time and nature throughout the seasons.

Keeping a herbarium resets your life's clock. Hurriedly running between destinations loses its appeal when a leisurely stroll is so much more fruitful. Who knew the plant riches held between sidewalk cracks or tucked amongst the fence posts? With eyes attuned to wildflowers, the days no longer run together, but become broken up into what's about to bloom or what is now blossoming that wasn't before, sometimes down to the hour. Watchers of plants unwittingly begin to notice other things in the environment: *Mullein growing here?* The soil in this area must be dry. *Are the poppy blossoms curled up?*

Rain must be on the way. Seasonal shifts become both more apparent and incremental as the blossoms on your usual route slowly turn to seed and concede to the next buds that are about to burst.

Working with the plants teaches patience—arranging them just right on the flower press, resisting the temptation to peek while they take their time to dry. Mounting the dried specimens is meditative—applying adhesive means carefully tracing the outline of their structure with the brush, feeling and for the first time noting the different texture and form of each species. The science of identifying the plant and cataloguing its details gives way to the celebration of the unique beauty in each plant: art.

With a current herbarium collection approaching 400 different species, I have come out on the other side transformed, with a true sense of fulfilment. While my days and weeks are still filled with the bustle of career and family life, the time I now set aside to spend learning about my surroundings are the truly enjoyable hours of the day. This is what has given me a renewed sense of inspiration towards my profession as a landscape architect. Researching each plant and learning about its uses—how it connects people to their surroundings—has rekindled my passion for nature and returned my sense of wonder that first inspired me as a child.





tips for starting your own herbarium

Collecting

- Look along pathways, field/woodland borders and fence lines. Edges have the most diversity!
- Be aware of restrictions: never collect from nature reserves and be knowledgeable of species that are protected in your area.
- Collect all parts of the plant that can help in identification, including flowers, seed pods, and basal leaves. Often, a single bloom and leaf from each plant is sufficient, leaving the remainder of the plant alive and intact.
- Don't forget to note the details: recording the date of collection is a potential identification tool. And as a bonus, this helps track how bloom times differ from year to year for each species.

Pressing

- Heavy books work in a pinch, but a simple plant press allows the pressure to be more carefully applied and adjusted.
- Arrange plants to minimize overlapping parts.
- Parchment paper above and below the plants helps retain the colour on delicate specimens, which newspaper might otherwise pull away.
- Most plants need between one and two weeks to be fully dried.

Mounting + Storing

- Use acid-free paper and lightfast, age-resistant glue to ensure preservation of the specimens.
- Touch the dried plants as little as possible as oils from the skin can damage them. Work with tweezers to move the plants and hold them down.
- Work quickly but carefully, applying adhesive to delicate petals last to avoid curling from dried glue.
- Freeze mounted specimens for 72 hours to eliminate any harmful insects or fungus.
- Store final specimens away from direct sunlight to prevent light damage and fading. ✨

To see step-by-step herbarium instructions and an online catalogue of finished specimens, visit www.freshlypressed.ch