St. John’s Wort (Hypericum perforatum)
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St. John’s Wort is likely one of the most famed herbs in the 20th century- one of the first herbs really recognized by modern culture as having a medicinal virtue. It’s claim to fame? We all know it- “St. John’s Wort is good for depression.” Everyone knows that… right?! But is St. John’s Wort really “good for depression?”

This plant is a classic example of what the supplement industries pigeonholing of herbs does to our knowledge of medicinal plants. Most people think of this plant for depression and stop there, forgetting that it has a whole slew of other medicinal properties, virtues, actions, affinities and uses far beyond the scope of depression. This remedy also brings us the discussion of what true holistic herbalism is all about. Why? Because you can’t just hand someone with severe depression a bottle of St. John’s Wort and expect their depression to magically disappear. It rarely works in that way and if it does is typically palliative and not curative to the root underlying cause- which in the case of depression can be quite complex.

The use of this plant as a medicine goes way back into ancient Europe where it has been held in high regard both as a physical and spiritual medicine, used for all manner of physiological ailments and as a potent spiritual ally for protection, depossession, to cure curses, hexes and all manner of black magic. This humble plant was commonly associated with the fairies, little people, nature spirits, spiritual saints, and all servants of the Light. In fact, St. John’s Wort can be seen as a little piece of the Sun embodied directly here on Earth- and in that way it teaches us about our own inner light, our connection to the Source, our true self, and how to shine that light out into the world to have a positive impact and influence.
• **Common Name:** St. John’s Wort  
• **Latin Name:** *Hypericum perforatum*  
• **Family:** Hypericaceae  
• **Parts Used:** flowers, though many use all aerial parts in flower

**The 5 Keys of St. John’s Wort**

**Tastes**
This is one of those remedies whose taste is (to me at least) a bit difficult to ascertain. The most predominant would be its astringency, with a mild sweetness, oiliness, slight pungency, and bitterness. The oiliness is slightly aromatic in nature, though it does not contain a strong amount of essential oils, but it does lend a warming quality to it. Plants with an oiliness to them typically have affinities for the liver and gallbladder, and this property is strengthened by its bitterness. The sweetness indicates that it has a trophorestorative or tonic action upon the body, specifically in this case with the nervous system as well as the liver. The astringency denotes its common uses as a topical first aid remedy specific for puncture wounds. We will explore all of these dynamics (and much more of course) in the pages that follow.

**Primary Actions**

• **Nervine Sedative and Trophorestorative:** This is the action that is the true vitalist action of St. John’s Wort that is often mistakenly listed as “anti-depressant.” You see the term “anti-depressant” isn’t actually an herbal action, rather it is saying this herb is good for depression. Remember an herbal action should give you an indication of how a plant will shift our physiology. The term anti-depressant doesn’t tell us this, it merely states that the plant is often used for depression. But why is it used for depression? In this case, it is primarily because of its actions upon the nervous system.

This is an extremely valuable remedy because it has both a mildly sedative action upon the nervous system, but not to the point where it will make one drowsy and sleepy like our stronger nervines like Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) or Passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*). Thus I consider it a mild nervine sedative, as opposed to a stronger nerve hypnotic. This action combined with a trophorestorative action makes it an extremely valuable nervous system remedy used for nervous burnout, exhaustion, depression, melancholy, anxiety, nerve pain and a lot more.

• **Bitter Tonic:** Like all bitters, St. John’s Wort has an influence upon the entire digestive apparatus: the stomach, intestines, gall bladder, and liver. The signature of the yellow flowers indicates a liver/gall bladder affinity, and it has long been used as a detoxification agent. But we have to remember that this remedy is not only acting through the digestive system but also the nervous system- thus it has a particular affinity for the “enteric brain” or what I like to call the “neural gut.” This indicates it’s uses as a remedy to “reset” the intelligence of the digestive system and re-coordinate the vastly complex signaling mechanisms that enable it to operate seamlessly and in a timely orchestrated manner. The astringency along with the bitter tonic actions combine nicely also in the treatment of
diarrhea. It's worth mentioning here though that St. John's Wort is not typically used like many standard bitter tonics like Gentian (*Gentiana lutea*), Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*), Dandelion root (*Taraxacum officinale*), but rather is used to operate upon the neural gut and as a hepatoprotective remedy.

- **Hepatoprotective:** This more modern herbal action denotes a remedy which is beneficial in protecting the liver from oxidative stress, inflammation, and damage from poisons. As mentioned above, the yellow flower indicates an affinity for the hepatobiliary system, though it is predominantly used as a detoxification agent, to protect the liver from damage, and for overall hepato-weakness.

- **Astringent/Vulnerary:** St. John’s Wort is one of our best topical agents in the treatment of wounds, specifically puncture wounds. This is revealed through the signature on the leaves which when held up to the light seem to have tiny perforations (hence the Latin species name *perforatum*) or small punctures. This is an important use for St. John’s Wort and should always be differentiated from other standard topical wound healing remedies such as Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*), Plantain (*Plantago major*), or Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*), especially Comfrey which is completely contraindicated for deeper wounds and especially punctures. Luckily in those situations we have St. John's Wort which is a specific. As always, our topical vulnerary/astringents are also valuable remedies for treating leaky gut syndrome of which St. John's Wort is one of our top medicines.

- **Anodyne:** The anodyne action refers to a particular agent which is beneficial in the treatment of pain. It’s important to understand here that the pain response can be complex and due to a relatively wide range of afflictions to different tissue types. The primary way I tend to organize anodyne remedies is as follows: those which influence the nerves, anti-spasmodics used for musculoskeletal tension, inflammation modulating plants, diuretics which relieve swelling and damp accumulation, and strong nervine hypnotics which deaden the senses, nerve response, and distance ones consciousness from the pain. St. John’s Wort is an anodyne with a specific affinity for the nerves, especially for shooting nerve pains, shingles, neuralgia, sciatica, and other pains oriented around the nervous system. It is one of our best specific plants for nerve pain and should always be remembered in this regard. It is also a valuable inflammation modulating remedy and can be used when there is excessive pain due to inflammation.

- **Anti-Viral/Anti-Microbial:** Many authors mention St. John's Wort as being an effective antiviral and antimicrobial medicine. It is not one of primary ways that I personally use it, but I wanted to mention this property here briefly for the sake of completion. I don’t really consider these to be actual herbal actions personally, as it is really saying that this plant has been used for both viral and microbial infections - though I personally feel that there are other plants that are a little more specific than St. John's Wort.

**Affinities**

- **Physical Organs, Systems and Tissues:** These are the primary organs, systems and tissues St. John’s Wort has an affinity for. I will briefly mention these affinities as they relate to the
actions listed above. More detail will be gone into the specific effects this remedy has on these organs systems and tissues later on when we explore clinical patterns and uses.

• **Nerves, Spine:** I would say this is the predominant affinity for St. John’s Wort as a specific mild nervine sedative, trophorestorative, and anodyne for nerve pain. The effects of St. John’s Wort on the nervous system permeate throughout its influence upon many other organ systems of the body, including the digestive system, urinary bladder, and musculoskeletal system.

• **Digestive System:** Here we see this remedy acting upon the stomach itself, balancing its acidity/alkalinity, weakness of the stomach, poor appetite, leaky gut, diarrhea, uncoordinated digestion (IE secretions happening at inappropriate times, valves being too constricted or lax etc.) and overall weak digestion. It's actions on the GI include tonic-astringency/vulnerary, bitter tonic, and warming, as well as acting upon the enteric brain, or the nervous systems innervation of the gut.

• **Liver:** St. John’s Wort has a powerful influence upon various liver detoxification pathways, enhancing the bodies capacity to throw off endogenous and exogenous toxins and metabolic waste products. It is this affinity and action that makes this plant especially difficult to administer to people taking pharmaceutical drugs because it influences their metabolism and thus effects on the body. We will cover this all important dynamic of this remedy under the pharmacology and safety data later on in this monograph.

• **Bladder:** This is oftentimes an affinity overlooked with this remedy, but it is a specific for over irritation of the bladder due to excessive nervous system activity leading to a heightened bladder sensitivity making one need to urinate more frequently. It is also used for bedwetting and wounds in the urinary tract, as well as excessive heat in the system.

• **Skin:** Here we have the topical actions of St. John’s Wort being used for wounds as a vulnerary and astringent. This extends to the skin that lines the digestive system as well. It is an excellent remedy in the treatment of sunburns, deep puncture wounds, and inflamed wounds.

• **The Spirit:** All plants have their own unique operations upon the spirit, but St. John’s Wort is such a specific for spiritual sickness that I had to mention it here as a primary affinity because it has been used for the spirit as a medicine for a very long time because it works. Here we see it acting upon the ill effects of sorcery, witchcraft, black magic, as well as a defensive/protection remedy for prevention of these types of illness.

**Energetics**

• **Temperature, Moisture and Tone:** St. John’s Wort has a predominantly warming and drying effect upon the constitution, though it is worth noting that is also has an oiliness to it which does bring a degree of moistening action- though in this case it is most likely only to the nerves. This can be seemingly contradictory in ways, as it is a remedy classically used to treat irritable and inflamed tissues which need to be cooled down. This is likely an issue of dosage. While it is a warming plant, it is by no means pungent and hot like our spicy carminatives and
stimulants like Cayenne (*Capsicum annuum*) or Garlic (*Allium sativum*), rather I consider it a gently warming remedy but not likely to drive someone too far out of balance unless they already extremely hot constitutionally.

It’s a little bit confusing studying the energetics of this herb, as some authors classify it as a warming remedy, and others as a cooling remedy. In Ayurveda, they say it has a cooling energy, yet a pungent post digestive effect (which would indicate a warming quality).

It’s effects on tone I would say are the most marked energetic property of St. John’s Wort in that it is a relaxant, quite specific for tension and conditions associated with Wind. This energetic influence is particularly associated with its influence upon the sphere of the nerves and senses, helping to on the one hand relax and calm, and on the other uplift, gently stimulate and shine it’s light upon consciousness.

• **Effects upon Doshas:** We can see from it’s effects on temperature, moisture and tone that St. John’s Wort is a wonderful remedy for the vata dosha because of its relaxant properties combined with warming effects on the temperature. This makes it especially applicable for excess vata affecting the nervous system leading to hysteria, nervousness, anxiety, insomnia and tension, especially when aggravated by cold, dark or wind. Though as usual we vata, we want to exercise a bit of caution not to overly dry them out with this remedy.

It is also beneficial for treatment of kapha with its warming and drying properties (remembering that kapha tends to be cold and damp). While it is a relaxant remedy, it by no means will promote the heaviness and lassitude that kaphas can be prone too- which is why we often want to avoid very strong nervine hypnotics with that constitution. This is the beauty of St. John’s Wort is that it calms while uplifts, making it one of the better nervines for our kapha constitution. The melancholy and depression that St. John’s Wort received it’s claim to fame is a pretty classic kapha constitutional characteristic.

Because it is primarily warming in quality, it’s important to exercise caution in using St. John’s Wort in people with strong pitta constitutions, unless formulated with other herbs to cool it down and buffer it’s effects on temperature. It is quite wonderful for strongly driven pitta types that are prone to nervous system burnout and adrenal exhaustion, as well as the specific type of melancholy David Winston refers to as “stagnant depression,” which isn’t what we typically consider true “down and out” depression which is a lower energy state. Stagnant depression is delineated by the presence of irritability, frustration, and aggravation- it is a higher energy state often associated with a degree of liver stagnation. Strongly driven pittas with high stress levels, adrenal excess, and nerve burnout can be much more prone to this type of depression, and with St. John’s Wort’s influence upon the liver and nerves it becomes a very indicated remedy. I tend to like to formulate it with gentle liver stimulants like Dandelion root (*Taraxacum officinale*) and bitter nervines like Motherwort (*Leonurus cardiaca*) and Blue Vervain (*Verbena hastata*), as well as nerve tonics like Milky Oats (*Avena sativa*) and Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*).

• **Effects upon Tissue States:** The primary tissue states that St. John’s Wort is most indicated for are wind/tension, dry/atrophy and cold/depression. It’s effects upon wind/tension are
It influences the dry/atrophy tissue state, once again predominantly in regards to the nervous system. Here we see not necessarily the influence of wind creating tension and a lack on coordination, continuity, and regularity, but rather the impact of dryness leading to atrophy of the nervous system. This might seem confusing, as St. John's Wort is predominantly a drying remedy, but here we want to look at the dynamics of atrophy associated with this tissue state as opposed to the moisture quality. When a tissue becomes atrophied, it loses its function, the structure becomes weakened and is in need of strengthening. This is where I see the oiliness of St. John's Wort comes into play. Oils in general tend to have an affinity not only for the liver and gallbladder, but also for the nervous system, which is coated in lecithin and fats. I see this remedy acting as a sort of coating agent, which covers the nerve sheath, nourishing, strengthening, soothing, and calming any excessive response. This would be quite indicated in states of what the old doctors called neurasthenia, or nervous system burnout from long term stress, insomnia, anxiety or other nervous type conditions. Atrophy may also be a possible underlying tissue state behind depression, when the function of the nervous system is lacking and deficient.

The cold/depression tissue state is also a predominant pattern which St. John's Wort is especially beneficial. Of course the word “depression” is in the title of the tissue state which is quite fitting, but it’s important to understand the further implications of depression not just in the mind like we usually think of it, but to translate that into the tissues and organs themselves. St. John's Wort is an excellent remedy for depression of the digestive system when it is deficient and lacking strength, the liver for when it’s detoxification mechanisms are inadequate, and of course the nervous system when it is lacking a degree of stimulation. I think of this plant as operating on the spectrum of nervous system related disorders- on the one hand it is beneficial to stimulate the nerves when they are depressed and lacking in function and on the other hand to relax and calm them when they are overly stimulated, tense, hot and irritated (such as in nerve pain). So we have this polar action on the nerves in terms of under-stimulation (cold/depression) and over-stimulation (wind/tension).

These are the predominant tissue states where St. John's Wort should be considered. It is also worth briefly mentioning the heat/excitation tissue state. As mentioned above, St. John's
Wort does have a predominant warming energetic property, yet it is commonly referred to as an anti-inflammatory used in excessive hot, irritated tissues- which is in essence the heat/excitation tissue state. It's a little confusing when we see contradictions like this within the herbal literature. Indeed there are many plants that have an energetic warming influence upon the tissue yet are potent anti-inflammatories and are used for the heat/excitation tissue state. What's up with that?! It's one of those great mysteries about plants that perhaps we cannot rationally explain or reduce down to logic, but simply have to witness and observe.

All that being said, St. John's Wort has classically been used for burns, sunburns, irritated tissues, inflamed wounds, irritable bladder, irritable bowel, inflamed and sensitive nerve pain-all of which are associated with heat/excitation.

**Prabhava/Specific Indications**

- **Pulse and Tongue Indications:** From my personal research I have not found any particular pulse or tongue indications that point to the specific usage of St. John's Wort. Though based on it's general energetic picture, especially for depression, we might look to a pale tongue that quivers upon extension due to tension and a low weak pulse indicating depression of the tissues.

- **Psychological Picture:** The psychological picture that points to the use of St. John's Wort is much more rich than the pulse and tongue indications. As we have mentioned, this is one of our great psychological medicines used for melancholy and depression (though it is worth saying again that these types of situations are complex and can be due to a number of underlying factors).

The pattern we see with St. John’s Wort is that it is to be used when someone feels entrapped in the darkness and they cannot find the light. They have often lost hope, faith, trust, believe, and the ability of their own willpower and strength to effect change in their lives. It is as if their inner light is dimming-not in the sense that they are dying, but rather the light of their consciousness. It is a remedy commonly used for children with insomnia due to fear of the dark, or who cannot sleep due to nightmares, and is also one of our top remedies for the completely made up syndrome SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder), aka the wintertime blues. I think it’s important for us as a culture to understand that it is completely natural and normal to not feel all bright and chipper in the middle of winter (especially in the PNW) when it is cold, dark, grey and cloudy. That being said, some people feel really down and out during the winter, and St. John’s Wort is a great remedy to give to support people during that time (along with hefty doses of vitamin D- ideally at least 5000 IU per day). Sharol Tilgner states, “It is indicated for depression due to feelings of isolation, lack of community and a sense of being disconnected from the rest of the world.”

The St. John’s Wort person oftentimes lacks a connection to their instinctual self and their ability to trust themselves. This can be seen as a weakness in the solar plexus, or *manipura chakra*, (whose color is yellow just like St. John’s Wort flowers), and is typically accompanied by low willpower, self-esteem, confidence, and strength of character. They often feel weak and can play the “poor me” card and have a victim mentality. These dynamics can manifest due to energetic/spiritual reasons, or due to simply burnout or chronic fatigue.
The indications of the flower essence works on a spectrum associated with the light of consciousness. On one end of that spectrum, we see a disconnection from the inner light, leading to depression, sadness, melancholy, and even being attacked by malevolent spiritual forces. On the other side, we see an over-sensitivity or being “lost in the light,” manifesting as an individual who is overly sensitive, lacks clear boundaries, and is too “up and out” in their vital force. We could see this as obsession with spiritual practices to the neglect of the practical aspects of life. Patricia Kaminski and Richard Katz state, “At its deepest level of transformation, Saint John’s Wort helps the soul to circulate light through the body and into the Earth. Rather than experiencing light as an external and merely physical reality, light works within the Self as a spiritual force which can illumine and anchor the consciousness.”

It’s interesting to note that taking this remedy at physiological level doses makes one more UV sensitive and more prone to sunburning, while the topical use of the oil is commonly used as a natural sunscreen. This is another example of this polar spectrum upon which this plant operates.

**Clinical Patterns and Uses**

St. John’s Wort is one of our first remedies studied in this course that has a much simpler clinical pattern than some of our polycrests studied over the last few months. While the modern supplement and phytopharmaceutical industry espouses it to be a miracle herb for depression, here we will take a look at it’s broader spectrum of applications and traditional
uses that are in accordance with it’s true nature- not just what some double blind placebo controlled study says about a couple isolated constituents.

1.) Neuralgic Pain: One of the most classic uses of St. John’s Wort is for traumas involving the nerves. This often leads to a sharp, electrical, shooting pain that traverses a very particular pathway through the body. _Hypericum_ homeopathic is commonly used in this regard, but the bulk herb can be used as well. Anytime there is sharp shooting inflamed nerve pain, always consider St. John’s Wort as it is highly unique in this way and one of our only remedies with this specific an action on nerve related pain.

In herbalism it is commonly used topically in this regard, though it can (and should) be used internally as well. Here we see it being applied for sciatica, neuralgia, pinched nerves, shingles, spinal cord injuries, and tooth pain, as well as other rheumatic pains, arthritis, gout, muscular spasm, cramping, and stiffness, sprains, strains, and bruising. That’s a long list. Basically any type of injury it is beneficial for, but where it really shines is when the nerves are involved. To quote Sharol Tilgner ND, “St. John’s Wort is specific for injuries to the spinal cord and nerves, including nerve injuries to fingers and toes. It is to be considered with all chronic pain in conjunction with nervous exhaustion or pain with a sharp shooting characteristic.”

It’s influence upon the nerve extends to other regions of the body. It is commonly used as an agent for hypersensitivity of the bladder nerve and tension, leading to bedwetting or simply excessive urination. It helps to coat and sooth the nerve so it is less sensitive.

2.) Melancholic Disposition: This is St. John’s Wort’s true claim to fame. A boatload of biochemical research was done on this plant for the treatment of depression. It’s a bit of a mixed bag as far as it’s effectiveness- it truly helps some and does absolutely nothing for others. Why is that?

In my personal and clinical experience with this remedy and in the treatment of depression and melancholy (which I did a lot of when I lived in NW Washington) I found that these types of conditions are complex. People can have feelings of sadness, loneliness, and depression for a very wide variety of reasons. If someone is depressed because of the death of a loved one, the loss of a career, or simply situational life stressors, St. John’s Wort is not going to fix that. There’s a natural and healthy grieving process that is simply a part of life, and in my opinion, those experiences and feelings are essential for they advanced the maturation of the soul. Giving every depressed person a bottle of St. John’s Wort and expecting it to magically take away their issues is unreasonable and is likely why the research results are mixed.

That being said, much of the research done on St. John’s Wort concluded that it does have some biochemical effects which might lend some of it’s “antidepressant” properties (and I use that term very hesitantly). While the specific mechanisms are mostly unknown, the proposed action is through inhibition of an enzyme called monoamine oxidase (MAO) and by influencing the reabsorption of serotonin in the post synaptic region of the nerves. It is also thought to influence the serotonin-melatonin metabolism, which would explain it’s influences
upon our reception of light (photosensitivity?). The constituent hyperforin has been shown to inhibit the uptake of serotonin, dopamine, noradrenaline, GABA and L-Glutamate—all of which will have a powerful influence upon the nervous system and the mood as a whole. Of course, the total global effects of St. John’s Wort cannot be reduced to a single isolated compound, but can only be related to the actions of the whole plant—which is truly the best way to use it.

What we do find, is that St. John’s Wort is an incredible remedy for the nervous system. I consider it to be one of our great nerve trophorestoratives alongside Skullcap (Scutellaria lateriflora) and Milky Oats seed (Avena sativa), helping to replenish and restore a burned out nervous system from long term periods of stress, tension, insomnia, or anxiety. As we will see next, it is also a powerful detoxification agent for the liver, helping it to better metabolize cortisol and other endogenous metabolic waste products. David Winston describes a particular type of depression he calls “stagnant depression,” which is not the type of depression that is low energy, lethargic, deep and dark, but rather is accompanied by a degree of irritability and frustration— it has a higher level of energy and vitality behind it. Stagnant depression is really a manifestation of the liver and can oftentimes be cleared by helping to move stuck liver chi. Because St. John’s Wort has such a strong hepatic affinity, it can be deduced that perhaps some of it’s “antidepressant” properties are due to it’s ability to move stuck liver energy and promote detoxification, alongside it’s influences upon the nervous system.

It is best suited for mild depression or melancholy, especially during the wintertime, with feelings of isolation, disconnection from community and the world and feelings of loneliness. I also have found that people that respond well to this plant tend to feel disconnected not only from the outside world, but from themselves—from their true self. They feel like they aren’t living our their life purpose, have lost contact with their spiritual nature, and lack the energy and willpower to make the changes they need in their life to make it better. There is often a degree of accompanying nervous system exhaustion or burnout, the desire to simply give up, and the need to take time to reconnect to their essential self. I love how Matthew Becker puts it, “St. John’s Wort loves to grow in the sun, the hotter the better…. it brings a lot of the energy and warmth of the sun into your own body—it is very noticeable. It’s not just an antidepressant, it actually can warm your psyche, make you feel more comfortable, more relaxed, and loosen up the mental joints that are stiff from the cold and dark. It is a wonderful remedy.”

For more severe depression, I always suggest a client to see a qualified therapist, counselor, or social worker to help them talk through some of their issues alongside with using an indicated formula of which St. John’s Wort is typically a part of. The ingestion of sugar and potential food allergens are also commonly associated with depression, and many people have been cured of severe suicidal depression simply by removing sugar, gluten and dairy from the diet. It’s always imperative to not simply rely upon our plants to heal someone, but to look at the wholeness of the person and the various facets and factors that are influencing their healthy physiologically as well as psychologically. The dynamics around gut health are critical for the treatment of depression, and we will see that St. John’s Wort has a powerful influence upon the health of the gut as well.
3.) Liver Detoxification: St. John’s Wort has one of the clearest signatures of a hepatic remedy, which is the bright yellow colored flower. Yellow coloration often indicates a remedy which has an affinity for the liver, gall bladder, and solar plexus region as a whole- other remedies here include Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*), Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*), Greater Celandine (*Chelidonium majus*), and Dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*).

The oiliness and bitterness of St. John’s Wort also indicate it’s affinity for the liver. It has been shown to enhance the phase II liver detoxification pathways, called cytochrome P450 which impacts the metabolization of various compounds in the liver. This is why it has so many contraindications with pharmaceutical drugs by reducing their activity. According to David Hoffman, this includes “non-sedating antihistamines, oral contraceptives, certain antiretroviral agents, anti epileptic medications, calcium channel-blockers, cyclosporine, some chemotherapeutic drugs, macrolide antibiotics, and selected anti-fungals.” That’s a pretty hefty list- we’ll cover contraindications and such later on in its own section in this monograph.

With the liver in general, we have a general polarity of symptoms: liver excess or inflammation, and liver deficiency or stagnancy. St. John’s Wort is unique in the sense that it can be used for both, and it is at the top of the list as the best remedy that operates upon both sides of liver pathology. It is relatively gentle in it’s detoxification capacity, which is in fact one of it’s greatest strengths, as sometimes you don’t want to drastically push someone’s liver too hard! According to Paul Bergner, the effects of St. John’s Wort upon the liver is one of it’s primary reasons it is beneficial in the treatment of depression.

This is more often than not one of the most overlooked properties of St. John’s Wort that is not to be forgotten! It’s an incredible remedy for the liver and should always be considered when a relatively mild, safe and gentle detoxification strategy is needed when the really strong liver stimulants and alteratives might be too much for someone- especially if they are depleted, tired, and don’t have much vital force to handle the load that those stronger remedies can release.

4.) Weakened Digestion: Another commonly overlooked property of St. John’s Wort is it’s influence upon the digestive system. It’s interesting to note that all of this research has been done on this plant showing it has all of these effects on serotonin and the nervous system, but that people forget that there is more serotonin in the gut than there is in the brain and that the entire digestive system is completely coordinated and overseen by the autonomic nervous system! If you think about it, the digestive system functions in a very orderly fashion: secretions happen at just the right moment, the peristaltic contractions move the digestate down the tract at the proper rate, the sphincters and valves open and close when they are supposed to, the right ratio of enzymes and bile are secreted that matches the quality of the food ingested etc.

What is very common in the modern world of antibiotic trauma, genetically modified and processed foods is that people’s digestive system becomes disordered- a sort of GI confusion is taking place on a mass scale. The nervous systems capacity to properly coordinate and oversee the digestive functioning becomes deranged and the timing gets thrown off, leading to a wide
range of digestive imbalances. Russian research has shown that St. John's Wort helps to reset the neural gut. Fred Siciliano states, “It decongests the liver and removes mild tension that accompanies this. It harmonizes the stomach, spleen, pancreas, liver, and gallbladder, so that weak digestive organs are not pushed over by a too-strong action of the liver.”

As mentioned above, many nervous system and mood symptoms can ultimately be traced back to the gut—whether it’s constipation, leaky gut syndrome, food intolerance, inflammation or otherwise, many psychological complaints tend to resolve themselves when the health of the gut is corrected. I was always taught that the digestive system is the “root of the vital tree,” and if that root is unhealthy, the rest of the tree will be affected. When in doubt, start with the gut.

Through its influence on the nervous system, as well as its bitter tonic properties and warming oils, St. John’s Wort effectively helps to reset the digestive system, astringe any “perforations” or leakiness in the gut, re-engage the neural component of digestion, and overall strengthen the solar plexus as a whole. It enhances the absorption of food from the small intestine and removes canker, or ama (stagnancy) from the stomach and small intestine. This makes it an ideal remedy for people with malabsorption type issues. The strengthening of the solar plexus reflects up into the energetic and spiritual properties of St. John’s Wort as strengthening will power, gut level instincts, a sense of connection to the true self, and personal empowerment and protection.

5.) Puncture Wounds and Sunburns: St. John’s Wort is likely one of our most important topical remedies in the western materia medica next to Plantain (Plantago major), Calendula (Calendula officinalis), and Comfrey (Symphytum officinale). But here it is specific for deep puncture wounds which are highly prone to infection. Unlike a plant like Comfrey which heals from the top down, which often traps infection and prevents a deeper wound from draining properly, St. John’s Wort heals from the inside out. It’s antimicrobial properties help to disinfect the wound, it reduces the inflammation, and helps to heal from the deepest part of the wound out towards the periphery. It is especially beneficial anywhere there has been wounding in areas rich in nerves as mentioned previously.

With puncture wounds, it’s quite common for them to be made by some sort of sharp metal object which will leave the person susceptible to tetanus. This is most common from old rusty nails or screws, but can occur from deep puncture wounds in general. St. John’s Wort has successfully been used to prevent the onset of tetanus and even once it has set it. This is why it is an incredibly important remedy to remember for puncture wounds, as tetanus is no joke!

This is also one of those plants that is quite good to have around in the hot summer months when you are likely to get sunburned. A simple infused oil or salve made from fresh St. John’s Wort flowers applied to a sunburn helps to draw out the heat and reduce the inflammation which rapidly promotes the healing process. It can be used for other types of burns as well. For this purpose, it combines quite nicely with Calendula flowers and Lavender essential oil.

6.) Spiritual Protection: Matthew Wood makes an interesting note about the genus name Hypericum and how the Greek name is hypericon. “This seems to indicate that it was placed
“above the icon,” or possibly that it has the power “over the image,” or specter. Such ideas only gained momentum with the centuries. During the Middle Ages, St. John’s Wort was used to protect people against demons, witchcraft and lightning.

The perforations in the leaves mentioned previously are not only a signature for puncture wounds to the flesh, but also puncture wounds to the astral or sidereal body, leading to a “leaky” energy body allowing the vital force to drain out and to make one more susceptible to malefic influences. As we have seen, this remedy helps to fill up the reservoir of our inner light- to make us whole again by bringing us back into contact with the truth of who we are and to be filled with that essential self. In this way it helps to heal these “leaks” in the energetic field and seal us off from spiritual attack, preventing the darkness from entering.

This is one of the most indicated remedies for spiritual protection and works quite well. In European folk traditions they would hang it above their doors and windows to protect the home, as well as fumigate it to banish any negative energies. It is the top remedy to consider for anyone complaining of nightmares, seeing specters or ghosts, feeling like they have been cursed or hexed by another, and other forms of misuse of spiritual power. While the remedy does work in this way, I believe it is important to “meet the plant halfway” and engage in prayer, protection work, and other form of spiritual healing to clear these types of influences.

**Pharmacological Data**

- **Primary Constituents:** Volatile oils (caryophyllene, methyl-2-octane, n-nonane, n-octanal, n-decanal, alpha and beta pinene); naphthodianthones (hypericin, pseudohypericin); xanthine derivatives (norathyriol); phloroglucinols (hyperforin); catechins; proanthocyanidins; flavonoids (hyperoside, rutin); tannins

- **Mechanisms of Action:** The predominant theory of St. John’s Wort’s action upon the nervous system and thus treatment for depression and melancholy rests in its capacity to block the neural update of serotonin, norepinephrine, and dopamine. It is also said to inhibit monoamine oxidase (it is an MAOI) as well as COMT (catechol-O-methyltransferase) and GABA (Gamma Amino Butyric Acid). The latter is known for its mild sedating effects upon the nervous system and ability to improve tranquility and sleep. While science has been busy studying isolated compounds in the plant to see what is the “active ingredient,” it has been revealed to be a wide variety of compounds in the plant, such as hypericin, hyperforin, flavonoids, and xanthones. This plant is an exquisite example of the
importance of constituent synergy and how plant compounds work in an orchestrated manner together to produce the net global effects of the medicine. The hypericin has been shown to contribute to the photosensitization and thus adjustment of melatonin levels, helping with sleep and insomnia.

**Contraindications and Safety**

- **Contraindications:** There are no major contraindications for St. John’s Wort, except for the multitude of herb-drug interactions listed below, of which there are many. It is critical to exercise caution in using this plant when someone is taking any of the drugs in the categories listed below. It is contraindicated for use when being exposed to direct sunlight for prolonged periods of time due to an increase in photosensitivity.

- **Energetic/constitutional side effects:** The constitutional effects of St. John’s Wort are relatively mild, though it is slightly warming and thus people with Fire, Mars, Sun, or Pitta type constitutions may want to exercise some caution.

- **Herb-Drug Interactions:** Let’s just say this plant doesn’t exactly play nicely with others… this is because of it’s profound impact upon phase II liver detoxification pathways which affects the body’s metabolizing processes of prescription drugs. In general, it is recommended to avoid using St. John’s Wort when taking other monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOI’s) or selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI’s) due to a potentiizing effect upon the drugs which can potentially be quite dangerous. In essence, never give St. John’s Wort in conjunction with other antidepressants - which can be nothing short of frustrating clinically, but you have to learn to work with what you can in those situations (lifestyle, diet, etc.)

It is also contraindicated for use with other sedative or hypnotic drugs, immunosuppressants, non-sedating antihistamines, contraceptives, antiretroviral agents, anti-epileptic drugs, calcium channel blockers used for high blood pressure, cyclosporine, chemotherapy, macrolide antibiotics, and certain anti-fungals.

**Preparations**

- **Fresh Tincture:** It is widely accepted that the fresh tincture of St. John’s Wort is far superior than any extracts prepared from dried plant material. Because of the presence of the volatile oils, it is considered best extracted in a higher percentage of alcohol. Michael Moore suggests all fresh plants to be extracted in pure 95% alcohol, though I tend to prefer a bit lower - around 70% yields a very nice, blood red tincture which is quite effective.

- **Infused Oil:** An infusion of the fresh flowers in a carrier oil, such as olive oil, is an excellent way to prepare this remedy. It extracts the volatile constituents quite nicely and works well in topical applications for nerve pain, nerve damage, sunburns, wounds of all sorts (but especially deep puncture wounds), bruises, contusions, and all other manner of injury. The infused oil can then be prepared into a salve, but the oil itself works wonderfully as well. When preparing an oil from fresh plant material, it’s important to infuse it warm with a lid off in order to evaporate any water thus preventing spoilage, as well as making sure not to press the plant material too intensely when separating the marc.
from the oil which would squeeze out some of the water in the plant. Many herbalists recommend gently wilting the fresh plant materials to remove some of the water prior to infusing the oil as well.

- **Infusion:** While most espouse the benefits of only the fresh plant tincture or infused oils, St. John’s Wort does indeed prepare quite nicely as an infusion from dried plant material. Here we will see a slightly different biochemical profile as opposed to a high alcohol tincture. It has a relatively mild and pleasant flavor, and formulates nicely with nerve tonics and sedatives.

**Dosage**

An important factor with St. John’s Wort in the case of using it for depression or melancholy is that results are typically cumulative over time with consistent use. Most do not feel it upon the first dose! It is generally recommended to take the plant daily and consistently for at least 3-6 weeks to begin to notice the effects.

In British Herbalism, the general recommended tincture dosage is 2-4 mL (2-4 dropperfuls) 3x a day of a 1:5 extract in 40% alcohol. I would assume that percentage of alcohol is based on a dried herb extract- a fresh herb tincture should be made in a higher percentage alcohol (70%-95%). Dosage for water extraction is 2 tsp per 1 cup of water, prepared as as infusion for 15 minutes covered, drank 3x a day.

It’s very common in the supplement industry to use standardized extracts of St. John’s Wort, which are typically standardized to 3%-5% hyperforin. 300 mg 3x a day is pretty standard.

**Formulation Strategies**

As you have seen, St. John’s Wort has a relatively wide variety of applications and uses lending to it’s benefit in a broad range of formulas. I have found it especially useful in nervous system formulations, as it seems to drive other nervines deeper into the nerve tissue and enhances their restorative and calmtive actions. Let’s take a look at some ways you can start thinking through St. John’s Wort in formulation.

**Nerve Trophorestorative**

St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) 33%
Milky Oats seed (*Avena sativa*) 33%
Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) 33%

This is an incredible simple triplet, combining St. John’s Wort with our 2 top nerve trophorestorative remedies in western herbalism, Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) and Milky Oats seed (*Avena sativa*). This simple 3 part formula is a wonderful addition to any other formulas for nervousness, anxiety, tension, insomnia, or depression. While it is mildly sedative, it’s primary action is to restore the structure and function of a worn out or depleted nervous system with exhaustion.

**Nerve Pain Pair**

St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) 50%
Prickly Ash (*Zanthoxylum americanum*) 50%

These 2 plants work *very well* together. Matthew Wood states that if you use St. John’s Wort for pain and it doesn’t work, the next best remedy to try is Prickly Ash. This remedy is unique in that it works at the juncture of nervous, muscular, and circulatory systems, driving blood flow into the tissues, dilating the peripheral circulation, and relieving stagnation of fluids. This pair is a great addition to a pain formula, especially when there is deficiency of blood flow and nerve pain.

**Nerve Pain Formula**

- St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) 40%
- Wild Lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*) 15%
- Jamaican Dogwood (*Piscidia erythrina*) 15%
- California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) 15%
- Prickly Ash (*Zanthoxylum americium*) 15%

Here we take Prickly Ash and St. John’s Wort and put them together with a strong anodyne triplet to make a more complex pain formula. With St. John’s Wort as the primary lead (as it’s the most specific nerve pain remedy), it is supported by Wild Lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*), Jamaican Dogwood (*Piscidia erythrina*), and California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*). These 3 remedies are potent nerve sedatives, musculoskeletal relaxants/anti-spasmodics, and pain relieving anodynes. Prickly Ash warms up the whole formula and drives it into the muscles and nerves and opens the body up to receive the other remedies on a deeper level.

**Melancholy Triplet**

- St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) 33%
- Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) 33%
- Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) 33%

I love these 3 plants together. Here we have 3 mild nervines that have a distinct sedative quality that will not make one sleep or tired, but rather have an uplifting quality on the spirit and mind. I have used this as a core triplet that is the foundation of more specific formulas for melancholy, nervousness, and stress. Let’s take a look at how this base triplet can be added to for more specific actions.

**Melancholy Formula I**

- St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) 20%
- Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) 20%
- Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) 20%
- Milky Oats seed (*Avena sativa*) 15%
- Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) 15%
- Devil’s Club (*Oplopanax horridus*) 5%
- Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) 5%
Building off of our foundational triplet, to this formula we add our nerve tonic pair of Milky Oats \((Avena sativa)\) and Skullcap \((Scutellaria lateriflora)\) to give it a more distinct nerve restoration action. The Devil’s Club \((Oplopanax horridus)\) is present here to bring about a deeper level of core strength to the solar plexus, and the Rosemary \((Rosmarinus officinalis)\) helps to volatilize the entire formula into the nervous system. This formula would be specific for melancholy with nervous exhaustion and weakness.

**Melancholy Formula II**

- St. John’s Wort \((Hypericum perforatum)\) 20%
- Lemon Balm (Melissa officinalis) 20%
- Tulsi \((Ocimum sanctum)\) 20%
- Ashwaganda \((Withania somnifera)\) 15%
- Shatavari \((Asparagus racemosus)\) 15%
- Schizandra \((Schizandra chinensis)\) 5%
- Licorice \((Glycyrrhiza glabra)\) 5%

This formula adds an adaptogenic quadruplet to our base melancholy triplet, which is achieved with equal parts of Ashwaganda \((Withania somnifera)\) and Shatavari \((Asparagus racemosus)\), a classic rasayana pair from Ayurvedic medicine used to replenish a depleted vital force or energy reserve. To this a small amount of Schizandra \((Schizandra chinensis)\) and Licorice \((Glycyrrhiza glabra)\) are added to strengthen the immune system, move any stuck liver chi, and harmonize the rest of the formula.

**Melancholy Formula III**

- St. John’s Wort \((Hypericum perforatum)\) 20%
- Lemon Balm (Melissa officinalis) 20%
- Tulsi \((Ocimum sanctum)\) 20%
- Milky Oats \((Avena sativa)\) 10%
- Gotu Kola \((Centella asiatica)\) 10%
- Calamus \((Acorus calamus)\) 10%
- Rosemary \((Rosmarinus officinalis)\) 10%

Our 3rd melancholy formula here focuses on enhancing cognitive function, mental power, concentration and focus with the addition of 3 nootropic remedies: Gotu Kola \((Centella asiatica)\), Calamus \((Acorus calamus)\), and Rosemary \((Rosmarinus officinalis)\). The prior 2 are commonly used together in Ayurvedic medicine as the “universal mind tonic,” helping improve cognition, memory and focus. The Milky Oats \((Avena sativa)\) is added to help replenish the nerves.

**Melancholy Formula IV**

- St. John’s Wort \((Hypericum perforatum)\) 20%
- Lemon Balm (Melissa officinalis) 20%
- Tulsi \((Ocimum sanctum)\) 20%
- Dandelion root \((Taraxacum officinale)\) 10%
- Oregon Grape \((Mabonia aquifolium)\) 10%
Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) 10%
Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) 10%

This would be a formula focused on stagnant depression, where there is a degree of liver stagnation, irritability, and stuck liver chi. The Dandelion root (*Taraxacum officinale*) and Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) provide a solid foundation to move the liver in a mild to moderate manner (not too strong) through their bitter tonic actions. Turmeric (*Curcuma longa*) and Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) also help to enhance liver detoxification, along with circulating the blood, improving digestion, and moistening up a pretty drying formula.

**Antidepressive Formula**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. John’s Wort (<em>Hypericum perforatum</em>)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kava-Kava (<em>Piper methysticum</em>)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milky Oats (<em>Avena sativa</em>)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleuthero (<em>Eleutherococcus senticosus</em>)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skullcap (<em>Scutellaria lateriflora</em>)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamomile (<em>Matricaria recutita</em>)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schizandra (<em>Schisandra chinensis</em>)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lavender essential oil</td>
<td>to taste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange essential oil</td>
<td>to taste</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This formula comes from Sharol Tilgner. Here we see St. John’s Wort as the primary lead, supported by a nervine pair of Kava-Kava (*Piper methysticum*) and Milky Oats (*Avena sativa*). I like the Kava here as it does have a nervine effect but won’t make you too tired and sleepy, and tends to promote an overall positive disposition and good feeling. Eleuthero (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*) provides an adaptogenic effect and strengthening the endocrine system, which Schizandra (*Schisandra chinensis*) is achieving as well. Skullcap (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) and Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) also help to strengthen the nervous system and the Chamomile especially I find works similarly to Lemon Balm and Tulsi in its uplifting quality. The addition of the essential oils is interesting here and isn’t something I personally do very often in formulas- but these will certainly add a stronger volatile affinity for the formula driving it into the nerves, as well as making it taste nice.

**The Enteric Brain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>St. John’s Wort (<em>Hypericum perforatum</em>)</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wood Betony (<em>Stachys betonica</em>)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemon Balm (<em>Melissa officinalis</em>)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrimony (<em>Agrimonia eupatoria</em>)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chamomile (<em>Matricaria recutita</em>)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peppermint (<em>Mentha piperita</em>)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fennel (<em>Foeniculum vulgare</em>)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a super unique formula that I’ve been developing over the last few years. It essentially combines gentle nervine remedies that also have strong digestive affinities. Wood Betony (*Stachys betonica*), St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) and Chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*)
all provide a mild bitter tonic action, and the Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*), Peppermint (*Mentha piperita*) and Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*) provide a warming carminative effect, giving it a mix of bitter and carminative actions, cooling and warming energetics. This formula is for disordered, nervous, and uncoordinated digestion.

**Gentle Liver Alterative Pair**

Dandelion root (*Taraxacum officinale*) 50%

St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) 50%

This simple pair is a great place to start for a gentle liver formula- Dandelion root (*Taraxacum officinale*) providing a gentle liver stimulant action, and St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) providing a gentle liver relaxant quality. This simple base pair can be used to build a more complex gentle liver formula.

**Gentle Liver Alterative Formula**

St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) 30%

Dandelion root (*Taraxacum officinale*) 20%

Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) 20%

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) 20%

Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) 10%

This is a relatively gentle formula to move the liver energy. I love how Paul Bergner describes the liver, he says it’s like a sleeping guard dog- you don’t want to wake it up too fast or will explode on you! (IE you don’t want to push things out too strong and too fast). Rather you want to slowly, gradually wake it up. Here we see the common gentle liver stimulant pair Dandelion root (*Taraxacum officinale*) and Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) to support the detoxification actions of St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*). Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is added here not only for it’s actions on the liver as a gentle stimulant and relaxant, but also to warm the formula up and circulate the blood. Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*) also helps the liver to detoxify, but it also provides much needed moisture to a pretty drying formula.

**Sunburn Salve**

St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) 50%

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) 50%

Lavender essential oil (*Lavandula officinalis*) as needed

Olive oil carrier

Beeswax solidifying agent

This simple formula makes a great topical oil or salve for the treatment of sunburns. I always use as much plant materia as possible to the amount of oil I am using, and will add enough Lavender essential oil so that it is distinctly aromatic. Lavender oil on it’s own can be used neat (IE directly on the skin with no carrier oil) in the treatment of sunburns, but the addition of St. John’s Wort and Calendula makes it even more effective. I got a really bad sunburn while working on an herb farm in California during the summer that raised blisters all over
my back. After just 1 day of this formula the blisters were gone and the burn was completely healed.

**Arnica Oil Trauma Compound**

St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) 25%
Arnica (*Arnica montana*) 25%
Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) 25%
Rue (*Ruta graveolens*) 25%

*This formula comes from Sharol Tilgner. This is a great formula for all manner of contusion, broken bones, nerve damage, and pain other forms of injury. Arnica (*Arnica montana*) is our great injury remedy and will heal bruising and move stagnant blood like nothing else - it also greatly helps with the pain. St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) as you have learned is our specific for nerve pain and injury, and the Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) helps to heal any open wounds, cuts, scrapes, lacerations, and punctures, as well as reducing the overall inflammation and moving stagnant lymph. Rue (*Ruta graveolens*) is not a remedy I have much personal experience with, so I’ll quote Sharol on this one, “*Ruta graveolens* is anti-inflammatory, strengthens capillaries, and is especially good for cartilage and periosteum. It is specific for injuries to tendons, ligaments, and joints.”

**Sports and Rheumatic Formula**

St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*) 35%
Arnica (*Arnica montana*) 35%
Rue (*Ruta graveolens*) 15%
Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) 15%
Cayenne (*Capsicum annum*) as needed
Wintergreen essential oil (*Gaultheria procumbens*) as needed
Tea Tree essential oil (*Melaleuca alterniflora*) as needed
Camphor essential oil as needed
Menthol crystals as needed
Olive oil base

*This formula comes from Sharol Tilgner. This topical compound takes the above trauma oil formula to another level by adding Cayenne (*Capsicum annum*) to increase blood flow and circulation, as well as to mediate the pain response through its rubefacient property by draining Substance P from the local area. We also see the addition of Wintergreen, Tea Tree and Camphor essential oils which are also rubefacient and increase local circulation to decrease pain. They are also antimicrobial and will prevent infection in open wounds. The menthol crystals help to decrease pain and to reduce muscular spasms (like icy hot!).
Energetic Architecture

- **Ruling Planet:** From our astrological perspective, St. John’s Wort is a plant that corresponds quite strongly to the archetypal force of the Sun. We see the signatures of the Sun in the fact that it prefers to grow in wide open spaces, southern facing slopes, and in direct sunlight - the hotter and dryer the better. The plant itself displays strong solar signatures in the bright yellow coloration of the flower, which appears to be shining out light rays from its stamens. I always think it looks like light rays - like when you are walking through the forest and see the sun shining through the trees and and see the distinct rays of light.

The physical actions and properties of St. John’s Wort (both physical and spiritual) also bear strong correspondences to the Sun. First, we see that it is predominantly a warming remedy with its volatile, balsamic flavor and warming energetics. It makes sense that it would be our primary remedy for melancholy and depression, for these types of imbalances could be seen as a deficiency of the solar force (thus it makes sense that Portland and Seattle have the highest rates of depression because it’s cloudy, grey and rainy all the time!). As Matthew Becker states, “it brings a lot of the energy and warmth of the sun into your own body… it actually can warm your psyche.” That truly summarizes how this plant works.

Whenever we are determining a planetary correspondence of a plant, we want that plant-planet relationship reflect the vital essence of the plant, or it’s core pattern. This is often
reflected in its physical properties, but also on its evolutionary function or as the alchemists called it, the “initiatic virtue.” St. John’s Wort initiates us into the sphere of influence of the Sun, which represents the core of who we are, our gravitational center. The Sun is all about coming into direct contact with our essential self, being strong in that, and learning to shine our truth out into the world in a way that is of service and benefit to the whole.

The people that St. John’s Wort is quite specific for have lost touch with that essential part of the self. The darkness has crept into their psyche, they have lost their confidence, lost touch with their essential self, their path, their purpose- they feel alone, isolated, and disconnected from Life. A certain heaviness weighs on them and they feel “down.” It is a sort of spiritual sickness.

St. John’s Wort functions to help to strengthen the inner Sun, to bring the light back into someone’s life. It feeds that inner light, fans and brightens the flame of consciousness, and where that light shines the darkness dissipates. Rather than focusing on what’s wrong, what’s not working, and what is holding one back, this remedy teaches our minds to find the positive in every situation, to take our challenges and struggles and transform them into our teachings, our strength, and our power. In this way it is “above the apparition” (the meaning of the Greek word hypericon), and helps us to face our inner demons and conquer them.

I see the healing process of St. John’s Wort in a way that starts at the core of who we are, it finds the light of our consciousness and starts to feed it, to strengthen it. As that light brightens within the self, it begins to push the subconscious fears and traumas up and out so we can face them and deal with them. Progressively over time our inner light (which is simply our truth, purpose, and power) shines out from within and re-establishes the structural integrity of the astral body, healing any “punctures” to our etheric field so that we are no longer leaking our vital force out, nor are we susceptible to the malefic influences of others. We are not protected from the outside in, but rather from the inside out- we are filled with the truth of who we are so that there isn’t any more room for other people’s projections to enter.

Eventually this inner Sun radiates out into the world. We have faced our demons, overcome our traumas, healed our wounds, and transformed them into our teachings, strength, and personal power. We now have the will to act in accordance with our truth and to live our lives from the heart, to walk our true path and live out our life purpose. As this light shines out into the world we become servants to that light and truth, doing everything in our power to have a positive impact and influence upon the world, to anchor more light into this world which at times feels filled with the darkness of unconsciousness, greed, envy, war, and fear.

In this way, St. John’s Wort is (in my opinion) a most important herbal remedy for herbalists, healers, and people striving to create positive change on this planet. For it assists us all in breaking through our own limiting thoughts and beliefs so we can get down to doing the hard work of making this world a better place by being an anchor and a vessel for the Truth and the Light that is reflected through the Sun, and little yellow flowers of St. John’s Wort.
• **Ruling Element**: When we observe the morphology of St. John's Wort, we see that it is a thin, slender, relatively dainty plant which is an indication of the Air Element. When we are working with a 4 Element system of correspondence, the Air Element governs the functioning of the nervous system (in a 5 Element system it would be Ether governing the nerves and brain). As we have seen, St. John’s Wort is an incredible remedy for the nervous system, through its tonification actions, as well as its ability to reduce pain, heat and inflammation within the nerves.

Air also represents the nature of the mind and thinking. We can think of depression or melancholy as a deficiency of the Sun in the Air Element, meaning that the mind is in a state of darkness or despair. The virtue of St. John’s Wort is that it enhances the functioning of the inner Sun which ultimately shines its light into the nervous system and the mind, helping to uplift the spirit, purify the thinking, and orient it in a positive manner. I’ve always found that the St John’s Wort person tends to have a particular mode of thinking that focuses on the problems, struggles and challenges of life (IE complains a lot) and have a difficult time orienting their cognition on the many blessings.

When the Sun is deficient in the Air, the mind is sluggish, slow, dull, and dark, and the nervous system is dulled, weak and deficient. The energetic virtue of this remedy is that it helps to stimulate the nerves into a greater level of activity and to remove that heaviness and dullness so it can uplift, expand, and radiate out- as the Air Element is supposed to do. This would be reflected as the cold/depression tissue state that St. John’s Wort is so specific to.

• **Ruling Principle**: The Philosophical Principle that relates most strongly to St. John’s Wort is the Sulfur Principle. We see this in the bright red coloration of both tinctures and infused oils of the medicine- this color is also revealed upon crushing the fresh flowers between your fingers. The Sulfur Principle is similar in nature to the pitta dosha, which the plant increases in the body and is denoted by pungency, warming nature, bright colors (the flowers and redness of the extracts), and volatile oils (which the plant contains).

While I have personally never been able to distill any significant quantity of essential oils of St. John’s Wort through steam distillation, what I have noticed with its spagyric preparation is that it yields a very high amount of what is called “fixed Sulfur,” “honey,” or the “salt of Sulfur.” This is extracted after distillation of wine and evaporation of the residue (what is left in the boiling flask, what I often call the “watery wine”) which cooks down into a thick, bright red paste. I have found St. John's Wort yields a relatively greater quantity of honey than many other plants prepared in this manner (and I have prepared over 50 different plants in this lengthy process over the last 7 years of preparing spagyrics).

The Salt of Sulfur. This could be translated to “the body of the soul.” To me, this relates to the capacity of St. John’s Wort to further anchor the expression of the Soul into the body, to facilitate in our ability to be vessels of the Light which I described in detail under the planetary correspondence. This matches the flower essence indications, which state it is specific for when the consciousness is too “up and out” and is less able to fully incarnate into the body and tend to the practical realities of life. “These individuals have a very active
psychic life- the astral body expands greatly during sleep, often distorting its connection with the physical and etheric bodies, or with the ego. This weak association to the other bodies results in a propensity for invasion or attack from negative elemental forces or other entities, especially during sleep.” (Patricia Kaminski and Richard Katz)

In alchemy, a primary guiding doctrine is that of sympathetic medicine, meaning that the energetic architecture of a plant (it’s ruling Planet, Element and Principle) will target the sympathetic, or corresponding aspects of the human organism. Being associated with the Sulfur Principle, which relates to the soul of humans, this indicates that St. John’s Wort has a primary affinity and action for the human soul- helping it to be strengthened, activated, and better incorporated and integrated into the spirit and body. Hence, this is one of our greatest spiritual medicines in the western materia medica and should always be considered when there is some form of spiritual or soul sickness.

**Esoteric Significance**

Observing this energetic architecture of St. John’s Wort- the Sun, Air, and Sulfur- we see that it has the same constellation of influences as Rosemary. Though in my research on the esoteric, what I find is that it corresponds slightly differently to the Tarot than Rosemary. Because St. John’s Wort is such a perfect embodiment of the Solar Force, I correspond it to the major arcana card XIX- The Sun.

This card represents the Sun as the prime symbol of life itself, shining it’s light throughout all of creation and imbuing it with the vital essence. We see on the card the 12 Signs of the zodiac rotating around the Sun in the center, showing that it is the Sun which is central and the closest representation to God that we have in our manifest universe.

The male and female dancing children represent the celebration of life itself, with their butterfly wings showing the transformation that happens with spiritual realization and illumination. The Rose and the Cross at their feet represent the intersection of spirit and matter that is achieved through the heart, as well as the four cardinal directions and points the Sun makes as it traverses through the sky represented by the Equinoxes and Solstices. The coming together of the Sun and the Rose represents the unification of opposites that occurs when we merge with the Source of life.

This card represents an unyielding acceptance of life as it is and overcoming our inner darkness of doubt and fear. It is about coming into direct contact with the Source and illuminating our minds and hearts to wake us from our sleep, and to overcome our shadow side so we can celebrate in the beauty, joy and gift that is life itself. The Sun is about building our self confidence and having our will being aligned with the Divine Will so that we can become instruments of God and thus have a positive influence upon the world. As this light shines from within, it dispels all darkness, depression and melancholy and instills a new sense of purpose and meaning. In essence, all aspects of this card relate quite strongly to the initiatic virtue of St. John’s Wort and it’s healing affinities for the soul and spirit.