



*The School of*  
**Evolutionary Herbalism**

LESSON 3:  
THE 5 ELEMENTS OF  
AN HERBAL FORMULA

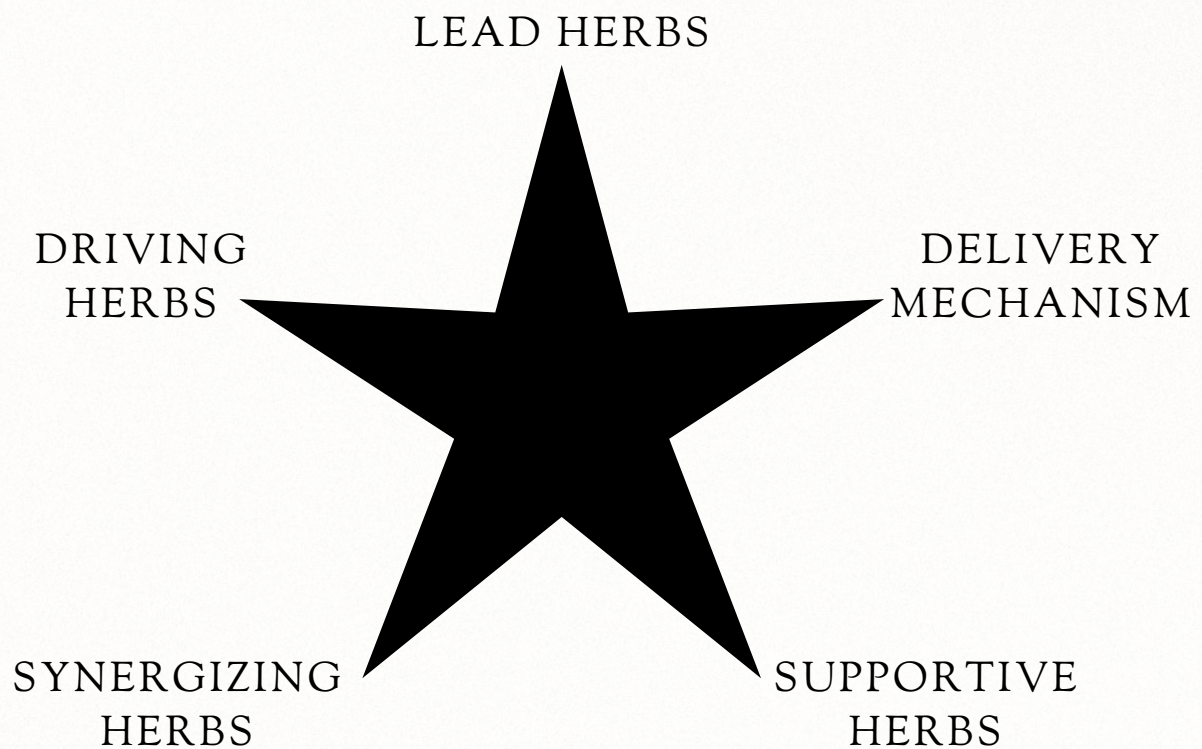
THE VITALIST HERBALISM MINI-COURSE





## THE 5 ELEMENTS OF AN HERBAL FORMULA

For an herbal compound to be strategic in its design, it's important to consider the various components of a formula, what their purpose is, and the relative weight of importance (and thus concentration) those particular plants will have to achieve the desired result. I like to use the pattern of the 5 Elements to break down the various parts of a formula.





## ETHER

*Lead or Chief.* This is the top of the formula and typically consists of a single, pair, or triplet of herbs that have the most specific property, action, and therapeutic principle you are going after. These are the focus of the formula and everything else is geared towards supporting the influence of the lead.

## AIR

*Supportive Remedies.* This would be 1-3 herbs, that support the lead via any secondary herbal actions or organ affinities that would help the main herbs do their job more effectively.

## FIRE

*Drivers.* These would be herbs that help to deliver the plants to their desired site of action more efficiently and effectively. Many herbalists oftentimes use circulatory stimulants to help dilate the vasculature and stimulate the flow of blood so the other herbs get to where they need to go. Typically 1 or 2 herbs are used as drivers.

## WATER

*Synergists/Corrigents.* These are remedies that help to synergize and bring the formula together. An old term for this is a corrigent, which is usually just thought of as something that makes the formula more palatable, but in truth what they do is correct the energetics of the formula. So if you look at your lead, supportives, and drivers and find it is too far on one end of the energetic spectrum, you can use a synergist to either warm, cool, moisten, dry, relax, or tonify your formula more.

## EARTH

*Delivery Mechanism.* Lastly, we come to the form the medicine will take. Is it a tincture, infusion, decoction, capsule, tablet, syrup, flower essence, bath, powder, etc.? I also like to think of the frequency and dosage of the formula here as well, as the Earth Element encompasses all of the practical considerations of the formulation process.