

# A Medicine Chest In A Bottle

By Felix Cross

Wild medicinal herbs have grown in the North Carolina High Country for time immemorial, and have been gathered for centuries by natives and visitors to the mountains from the earliest explorations right up to the present day.

Their gathering - or wildcrafting as it is known locally - has continued as these tried and true natural remedies have been converted to salves and ointments and other potions for home use. But it wasn't until the 1980s when farmer, teacher, and veteran wildcrafter Red Alderman began testing combinations of herbs that anyone had tried to create an all-purposed remedy, one that could be applied to virtually any skin ailment with ease and success.

An avid outdoorsman who knew the value of having a ready-at-hand remedy for stings, cuts, bruises or other typical pitfalls of the active hunter, fisherman, hiker or skier, Alderman worked out of his home in Todd, melding his traditional knowledge with modern techniques to craft a unique multi-purpose ointment.

He would utilize fresh instead of dried herbs to look for "an anti-fungal, anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory agent that would also lessen pain." "I had an herb company set up here in the 1980s," Alderman said, "and I tinkered with it for years, using different herbs, different combinations."

Alderman instituted several changes while using something else developed through time in the field and working with the natural treasure trove of the Southern Appalachians: "my intuition." The final product, a combination of herbs known only to Alderman and daughter Amy MacKay, who runs the now international Wounded Warrior operation from her home in Wilmington, meet the standard he had set from the beginning: "to remedy any skin problem."

Marketing and outreach came courtesy of other local entrepreneurial success stories; through homegrown businesses Bare Essentials natural products store, Boone Drug, and Mast Store outfitters. The latter remain the top two outlets of the hundreds now selling Wounded Warrior nationwide, and the ointment remains one of Boone Drug's top selling single items.

Alderman went to as much trouble finding a suitable bottle as he did a perfect harmony of ingredients; the final easy twist-off container was designed in Europe - no struggling with "child-proof" caps or multiple plastic wrappings.

"It squeezes out easily for folks with arthritis," Alderman said, "and there is no waste left in the bottom of the bottle."

Wounded Warrior Ointment fits in any pocket or pack, good for the slopes, the woods, the glove compartment or purse for any contingency. As the product took hold and moved from a farm in Todd to shelves all around the world, even the Aldermans were surprised by some of the uses and testimonials reported, from pet rashes and acne to razor burn, fire ant bites, jellyfish stings, even rare and debilitating conditions like Darrier's skin disease.

Doctors reported using it where pharmaceutical treatments had failed; one customer who had a 14-year-old bottle told Alderman he found it effective on a spider bite.

Wounded Warrior is now made exclusively by Gaia

Herbs in Asheville, a company Alderman describes as "the top quality herb manufacturer in the United States; they are the only ones who have kept the consistency, who can do it."

"Wounded Warrior is now available everywhere from mom and pop convenience stores to natural food stores to supermarkets," MacKay said, noting it had grown from three outlets in Boone to "over 800 stores in over 30 states and overseas."

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