



Presenting November's Plant
Ally:

Chaga

Common names: Clinker Polypore, *Carie blanche spongieuse de bouleau* (spongy white birch tree rot) in France, *Berkenweerschijnzwam* (birch glow mushroom) in Denmark, *Kreftkjuke* (cancer polypore) in Norwegian, & *Pakurikääpä* (Pakuri for short) in Suomi

Botanical name: Inonotus obliquus

Family: Hymenochaetaceae

Temperature: Cool-Cold, Dry

Taste: Woody, sweet

Parts Used: Entire fungi

Constituents: Polysaccharides, beta glucans, betulinic acid/betulin, phytosterols, fatty acids, triterpenes, B vitamins, melanin

Actions/Functions: Adaptogen, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, anti-cancer, anti-tumor, anti-viral, astringent, immune-suppressant, relaxing nervine

November tugs us inwards... it brings with it the weight of longer nights & a longing for quietude. There is a chill to the air which is able to reach the bones. As the trees undress, the stars seem to shine brighter in the crispness of the ever darkening hours. We have officially left the seasons of sun & entered into those of the moon... If you know me even a bit, you will know that the Autumn & Winter are my favorite times of the year. I love the cold, the longer nights, the hibernation, the dark hours. I love wearing layers & sweaters, cooking stews, making decoctions, watching for snow as the herb-infused water slowly rolls on the stovetop. I personally seek dark

medicines during this time of the year—the ones which take me deep, the roots & rhizomes, stones & songs which touch my core. Shungite, alder, hematite; burdock, ruby, calamus...

The first time I ever tried Chaga was while living in Kustavi, the tip of the archipelago off the Southwest coast of Suomi (Finland) in 2011. Every night, we put a pot of *Pakuri* on the woodstove & listened to Kari Rydman on vinyl in Antti's living room. After each pour of tea, we would add more water to simmer. It went on like this until everyone started to wander off to bed, feeling more dreamy than before, sleep-heavy even though the sun was still in the night sky. These first experiences with Chaga are what have made it far & above one of my favorite, most precious remedies.

Antti was the one who told me that in Suomi, there was a legend about the first man who discovered Chaga in the forest. He was older than old, a long white beard that trailed before him & a long stretch of snow-white hair that followed behind him. He was so old that he was unable to stand up straight, though found himself in one of the beautiful birch forests of Suomi where he stumbled upon the first Chaga. Upon drinking it, it was said that his hair turned pitch black & his youth was fully restored both physically & energetically. While that of course is a bit of lore, it is also true that in every myth there is at least a few threads of truth. For instance, we now know that Chaga is extremely high in antioxidants—which directly help to fight the aging process.

Chaga is a strange fungi whose rich melanin content gives it the black color it is famous for. It is *extremely* dense & quite difficult to process or break-apart. Almost indestructable, I would say. I have found myself whacking it with some strange objects in order to make a brew. Often categorized as a medicinal mushroom, it is rather a mass of mycellium which grows primarily as a parasite on the living trees of birch, alder, poplar, sometimes even on pine & oak. In fact, if you pay attention to it, you may even be able to taste the betulin flavor it absorbs from the birch! The spores of Chaga are able to enter in through wounds or broken places in trees, & will begin to spread *a white rot decay* into the heartwood of the tree, a process which can happen for anywhere between 10-80 years before the sclerotum is formed.

This slow maturation process is what makes Chaga so rare, special, & in danger of being over-harvested with its new popularity in our modern culture. I also feel that way about the dark. Everything is lit up, every corner & crevice & we have these portable screens which bear light at our fingertips... Nothing is left to itself any longer, the undiscovered terrain is next to none, the quiet is gone for most people.

Just take a moment to pause on this for a moment. I feel that it speaks volumes to some of Chaga's deepest reaching medicine.

In a way, it is almost pointless to go into a list of all that Chaga is "good for." This precious fungi has much to teach us about how we approach the world, how we take resources, how to get at the heart of what makes us sick as individuals & as a society. I also believe that Chaga is an extremely personal medicine, that drops each of us deep within ourselves, into our own quiet, more so than maybe any other plants or fungi I know. Because of this, I always try to encourage people to intentionally connect with it, to journey with it in a way. Maybe you can even find where your white rot decay is. Besides, the current medicinal "uses" for Chaga are extremely focused on the constituents rather than it as a whole & it has become an umbrella cure for all manner of cancer. It makes me wonder how many modern herbalists & people are doing a deeper work with it, one that isn't driven by our desire to live forever, to find the holy grail, to mass-produce a miracle.

One last note: Chaga is meant to be prepared as a decoction or as a tincture via the double-extraction method. The decoction is my favorite, because Chaga seems to have an endlessly abundant amount of itself to give. Try it out if you ever get the chance—it is almost like the longer you simmer it for, the more & more you can steep from a single chunk, the darker & deeper the water becomes.

Meditating on the Dark :::::::::::::

This practice is to be done in the dark, you can do it either early in the morning or in the evening, but try to find a place of relative darkness. If you fall asleep, that is totally normal! Just pay extra attention to your dreams.

You will need a candle & matches/lighter for this meditation.

If you have some Chaga, you can take this meditation a step further by taking a few sips of the decoction before beginning the practice!

Listen to the meditation by following this link ~

Lovingly yours /
Chanelle + Chaga

