

# SageWoman

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## *Herbal Goddess*

**Celtic Traditional Plant Magic · A Sisterhood of Healers  
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# Fierce Mother

The Brave Heart of Lady Hawthorn



BY DARCEY BLUE FRENCH

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It was the day after a record blizzard. I had just driven — together with all my earthly possessions — in the back of my Toyota Corolla from Arizona to Boulder, Colorado. I hadn't even finished unpacking the car when the blizzard stormed in, snowing me in the bare apartment without so much as a sack of groceries. When the storm finally passed, I wandered out into the zero-degree sunshine to take stock. I located my car — buried in two feet of snow — but left the task of shoveling it out for later. Wandering down the street on a freshly-cleared sidewalk, I made a startling discovery. Tucked next to my mailbox was a snow-drenched tree covered with shiny black thorns and ruby-red ice-coated drupes. "Hello, I am Hawthorn," whispered the tree to me.

Did this tree just speak its name to me in English? I had never met a hawthorn tree, before, although I knew of its heart-healing medicine. I was elated that such a tree medicine would share itself with me. Although this was my first encounter with Hawthorn, it was far from my last. This fierce, Fae Goddess-tree is one of the most potent healers acknowledged by western herbalism.

Several years later I moved to a one-hundred acre homestead in western Maine

at the beginning of winter. Having left my beloved desert home behind, I found myself isolated without friends or family in the midst of a Maine winter and I sank into a deep depression. During that bitter season, the only thing that kept me sane was the countless hours I spent sitting with the scraggly hawthorn trees in the fallow pasture. They spoke to me of magic, of the Fae, of the spirit of the land, and held my aching heart in their thorny embrace for many moons. I thanked them with offerings of chocolate, tobacco, rose flowers, and shiny trinkets for the Fae. When I finally found the courage that spring to leave the sterile relationship that had brought me there and broken my heart, I gathered hawthorn blossoms and brewed them into a tincture to continue the healing.

One of the most beautiful and poignant gifts that our plant allies have is knowing the precise moment of our need to show up in our lives. They have a way of knowing, even before we do at times, that their healing gifts will be of use. You might find a new volunteer plant growing in your yard or a bottle of its medicine might make its way to you by surprise. I always try to pay close attention to the plants that show up unexpectedly, and put their gift to use right away. The healing power of the plants is not limited to the tea or the tincture bottle: sitting with your plant friend, and bringing the branches, leaves or flowers of the plant into your home or altar also invites the energy and healing gifts of the plant ally into your life. Those beloved hawthorn trees held me in their medicine all year long, while my heart was challenged by life choices I had made.

**H**awthorn is a powerful healer and protector of the heart. In my work as an herbalist, I've come to rely on the protection and healing of hawthorn for many situations. Hawthorn fruits, called haws, are deep red drupes with a large seed and mealy flesh, rich in anthocyanins and plant pigments. Hawthorn is food for the heart and is capable of strengthening circulation and protecting the veins, arteries, and heart muscle from oxidation damage. Many western herbalists use hawthorn berries for cardiovascular health conditions such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol balance. My favorite way to use hawthorn berries is as an elixir in either tincture form or as an infused vinegar; it can be taken freely by anyone, as it is a food level herb, but tends to be best suited to those who have sluggish digestions or poor digestions and tend to get overheated. Hawthorn leaves and flowers are rich in antioxidants, and are useful as mild astringents, good nervines for mild anxiety, and as aphrodisiacs.

But the real magic of hawthorn is to address heart



ache. Hawthorn is a thorny tree, and a fierce protector of your spirit when your heart is feeling vulnerable. A fierce herbal mother, hawthorn holds your broken spirit within a space of safety so that healing work can begin. Hawthorn does not erase your memory or make the pain of your grief disappear, but gives you the breathing room to do what is necessary — whether that is through spiritual work, ceremony, counseling, coaching, journaling or even simply allowing yourself to cry — to move forward.

The simplest way to use Hawthorn for heartache and grief is as a tincture, 10-60 drops several times a day. I often blend hawthorn leaves and flowers with allies like linden, oat straw, vanilla, cacao, rose, vervain, skullcap or tulsi in a heart-nourishing sweet tea. So often when dealing with emotional pain, heartache, and grief, we instinctively turn to sugary sweets, as an attraction to sweet flavors is ingrained in our primal brain as a nourishing flavor. But, of course, modern sweets aren't that nourishing, so instead I find it is comforting to have medicine that is sweet and delightful. When I prepare teas for heartache, I like to include beautiful flowers, bright colors and silky textures, sweetened with a kiss of honey or maple syrup, laced with spices and pleasing smells. Hawthorn tincture is naturally sweet, but when dealing with real turmoil, I often add honey into the tincture when preparing it, so that the resulting medicine is a sweet and comforting elixir.



Many believe that the Faery protect the hawthorn because it is a guardian of the doorways and portals between this realm and the Faery realm. I can say from personal experience that hawthorn trees are indeed crossroads between the worlds, and meditation, journey and herbal work done beneath or even just near them requires less effort and can be especially potent. Legends abound — like that of Thomas the Rhymer — that describe people who are taken away to the land of Faery while sleeping underneath a hawthorn tree.

Hawthorn is one of the twenty trees included in the Ogham, an ancient Celtic alphabet and writing system inscribed on twigs of each of the twenty sacred trees. In that system, Hawthorn, known as *Huath*, symbolizes a magical barrier or obstacles in the path forward. To get this tree in a reading indicates that you should take no short cuts, there may be a possible delay or setback.

Hawthorn is a powerful spiritual ally that can help us to learn to integrate and heal the divine feminine and divine masculine aspects within ourselves. Hawthorn flowers have a strange rank smell — some say it smells like death, while others compare it to the odor of sex — which attracts ants and flies as pollinators. Hawthorn trees bloom at the beginning of May and garlands made of hawthorn flowers are often included in Beltane rituals or wedding celebrations, in honor of the sacred union of male and feminine energies in nature. This celebration

of fertility, of community love, of sacred sexual energy is precisely the healing energy hawthorn can bring into our personal lives and our community. I've never read anywhere that hawthorn is an aphrodisiac, but I believe that the smell of the flowers and the magical energy of its relationship with Beltane and the Sacred Marriage, make it an ideal plant ally for working with to improve your own relationship with sexuality and the creative force of sex energetically.

In my work with hawthorn, I have also found that it is a strong teacher about giving death to whatever no longer works in our lives, or about accepting death when it comes as a part of life. Hawthorn's medicine is helpful for easing the grief of losing a loved one, but it also helps us learn to know when (and how) to let go of what needs to "die" with ease, and to transform the energy of death into fertile ground for what is coming next.

There are many ways to work with the medicine of a plant for physical, emotional, spiritual and magical healing purposes. One of the simplest ways to do so is to carry a piece of the plant with you in your day-to-day activities, either in your pocket, in a medicine bag around your neck, or even just tucked into a square of cloth and tied into a bundle. Carrying the fruits of hawthorn will bring a sweet and nourishing energy, while using flowers and leaves may bring in a more sexual, Fae experience. Carrying the thorns will, of course, be protective.

Those moons I spent under the hawthorn trees during that long-ago winter brought me the medicine that helped me make many profound changes in my life. The whispers and wisdom, strength and protection that hawthorn gave assured that out of the ashes of my present, a new future would grow.

When we cultivate a relationship with a plant ally, we open ourselves to a partnership that is deeply, magically healing. Respect and honor your plant allies, and they will gift you many times over. May you find your own fierce mother to protect, defend, and awaken you. ☺



**DARCEY BLUE FRENCH** was called to the shamanic path by a Juniper tree in 2003 and has been talking with plants ever since. Find out more about her work online at <http://shamanaflores.com/>.

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