

Plant Health & Culture: Plant Medicine—Exploring Nature’s Healing Potential

Faculty: Dr. Giulia Friso, Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Associate, School of Integrative Plant Science, Plant Biology Section

Week Two: July 12 – 18, 2026

Schedule: Monday - Friday, 9-12 and 1:30-3:30; no class Wednesday afternoon.

Location: Kennedy Hall, room 105 and some field work

Welcome to Plant Medicine—Exploring Nature’s Healing Potential!

My name is Giulia, and I joined the Plant Biology Department at Cornell University in 2001. Since then, I have been actively involved in both research and teaching. My scientific education and training span multiple disciplines, including protein biochemistry, analytical chemistry, pharmacology, plant biology, and ethnobotany.

One of the main goals of this course is to introduce you to the fascinating world of plants - exploring how they can address health and dietary issues while connecting different disciplines and cultures. We will dive into the ancient uses of plants around the world, uncover the myths and legends tied to them, and explore how they continue to play a vital role in cultural heritage and traditions today. We will also examine the pharmacological properties and potential toxicities of plants, explore the principles of culinary medicine and the core foundations of healthy diets, discuss the link between food and health, and introduce both traditional and modern plant-based remedies—highlighting how they have been used throughout history and continue to shape our world today.

In doing so, we will also highlight how sustainable, ethical research is crucial for preserving biodiversity, ensuring that we can continue to unlock the therapeutic potential of plants for generations to come.

During this course, you will participate in a guided tour of the vibrant Cornell Botanical Garden to explore its diverse collection of medicinal plants. You will have the opportunity to collect plant samples, which you will later process into specimens at the Cornell L. H. Bailey Hortorium Herbarium. Additionally, you will enjoy a guided tour of the herbarium, including access to its ancient Materia Medica collection, and participate in hands-on activities. Other outdoor activities include a visit to a local herbalist farm to explore medicinal plants and remedies.

Although we may come from different academic backgrounds, I hope we can create an engaging and welcoming space where everyone feels comfortable sharing ideas and asking questions.

If you’d like to learn more about my scientific background and interests, please feel free to visit my personal Cornell blog at <https://blogs.cornell.edu/my-blog-giulia-friso/>.

This course is designed to create an inclusive, student-centered learning environment. I look forward to working and interacting with each of you.

Wishing you all a peaceful and healthy 2026!

Giulia