

Welcome to the Monastery of St. Gertrude



Hildegard of Bingen



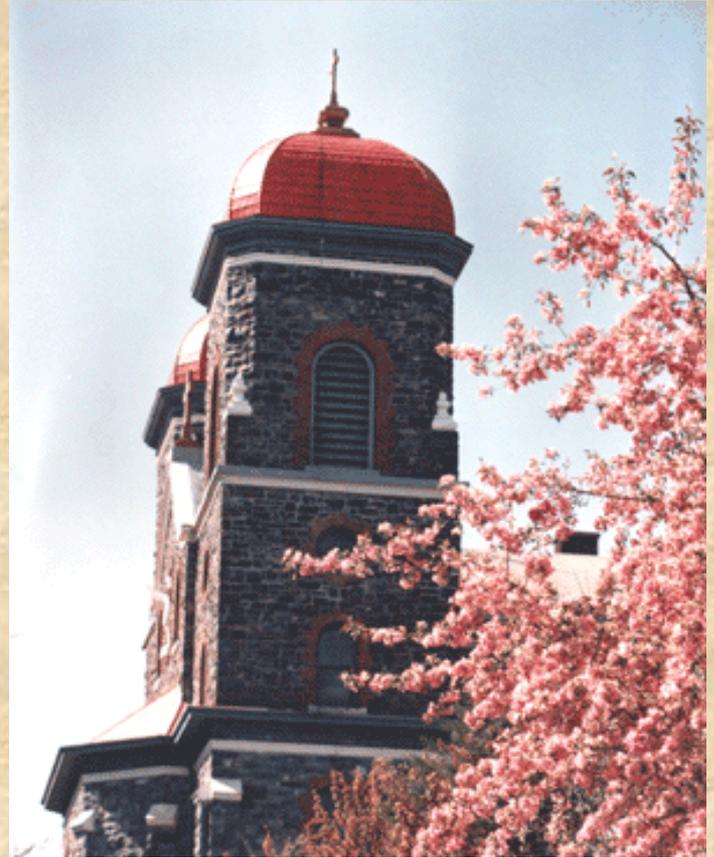
Virtual Herb Garden



Monastery of St. Gertrude,
Cottonwood, Idaho

What is the Hildegard of Bingen Virtual Herb Garden?

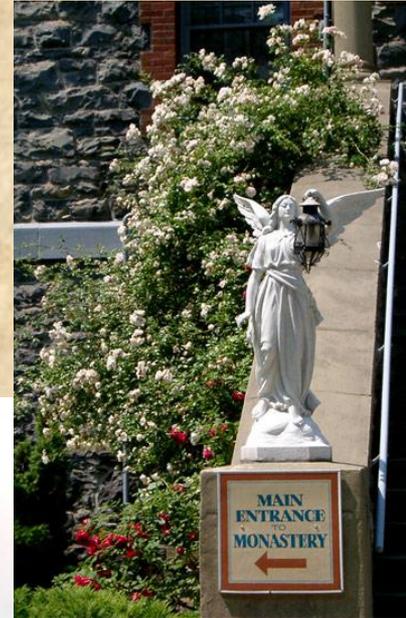
- ❧ The Monastery of St. Gertrude is a Benedictine monastery of women located on over 150 acres of woodland and prairie in scenic Cottonwood, Idaho.
- ❧ As Benedictines we are inheritors of the tradition of St. Hildegard of Bingen, a prophet, visionary and Abbess in medieval Germany who wrote extensively about the use of herbs and plants in healing.
- ❧ In the tradition of Hildegard we are incorporating the use of herbal remedies in our lifestyle. For our friends who cannot visit our grounds and gardens this virtual herb garden will introduce you to the Benedictine tradition of care of the land and the remarkable work of St. Hildegard.



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Welcome to our home...
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Introducing Hildegard of Bingen



Hildegard of Bingen was a renaissance woman several centuries before the Renaissance; an abbess and founder of several Benedictine monasteries, Hildegard was a prolific writer, visionary, musician, artist, public figure and healer.

In addition to three major books of theology, she also wrote two works on medicine and the use of herbs and other natural means of healing.

Hildegard was born in 1098 in Germany, the tenth child of a noble family. When she was eight years old, she went to live with Jutta of Spanheim, a hermit connected with the Benedictine monastery at Disibodenborg. Under Jutta's tutelage Hildegard learned to read and chant the Divine office, the communal prayer of Benedictine monasteries. When she was fifteen, Hildegard entered the monastery at Disibodenbord where she made her monastic profession. During her lifetime Hildegard founded two new monasteries, at Rupertsberg and Eibingen. She died at Eibingen 1179.



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The World of Hildegard

In an age when women were largely uneducated and relegated to the home Hildegard had a very remarkable public life marked by her prodigious creativity and willingness to confront the religious and political leaders of the day.

Hildegard wrote three major books: "Scivias" (Know the Ways), "The Book of the Merits of Life" and "The Book of Divine Works." These are theological reflections based on her visions of God's actions in the world. In addition she wrote two books on medicine and herbal cures, "Physica" and "Causa et Curae."



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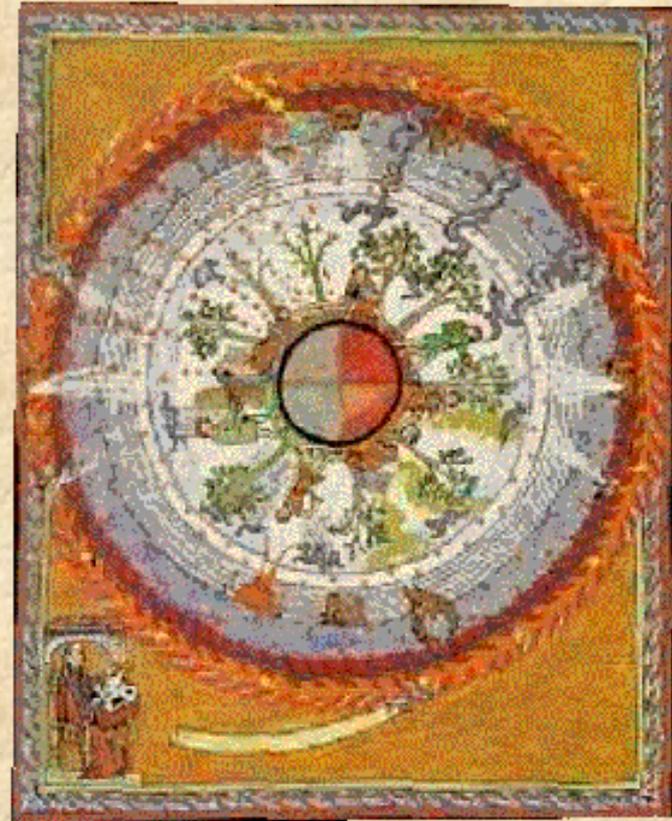


Hildegard was also a prolific correspondent. She wrote to popes, emperors, bishops, and clergy, entreating them on crucial issues of the day. Over 300 hundred of these letters still exist today. She undertook several public preaching tours in Germany confronting the spread of several current heresies.

She was also an artist and musician. Her drawings or "illuminations" which illustrate her visions are still widely reproduced today. Hildegard wrote over 77 hymns which have been recorded by a number of contemporary artists.

The World of Hildegard

In Hildegard's cosmology or understanding of the world, human beings are a microcosm, model in miniature, of the whole world. The four basic elements, earth, air, fire and water, each have a correspondence in the human body. From fire human beings receive their bodily warmth. From air we receive our breath, from water our blood and our body comes from the earth.

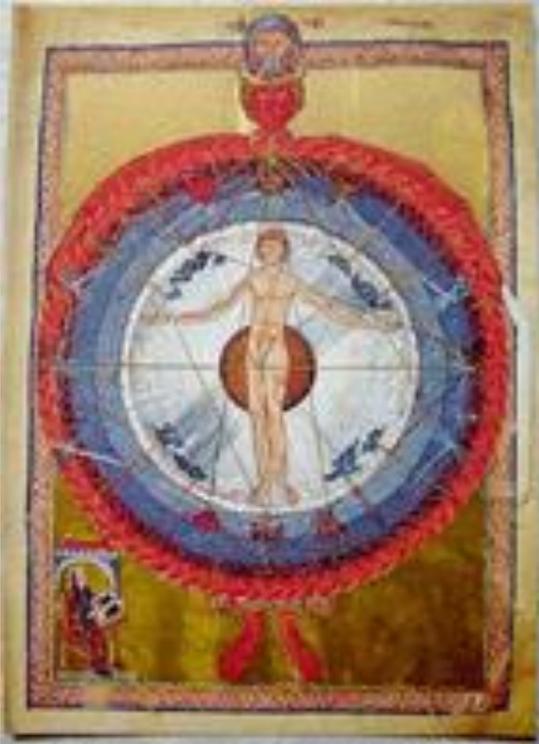


In Hildegard's understanding all of creation reflects different aspects of these fundamental elements. The various elements were seen as being subject to human beings and created by God to serve the needs of humanity.



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The World of Hildegard



For Hildegard, God is the source and sustainer of all creation and human beings represent the center piece of creation.

“God created the world out of its elements to the glory of the divine name. God strengthened it with the wind, connected it to the stars and enlightened it by them, and filled it with all manner of creatures. God then surrounded and fulfilled humankind in the world with all things and gave them a tremendous power, so that all creation would support them in all things. The whole nature should serve them, so that they can live with it, because humankind cannot live or survive without nature.” (PL 755B)

This understanding of the role of humanity in the cosmos is reflected in her famous illustration of the cosmic circle:

“Humans stand at the center of the cosmos, since they are of greater meaning than all other creatures which remain dependent on the world. Although they are small in stature, they are great in the power of their souls. Their heads are directed upwards and their feet stand on solid ground. Thus they are able to put the loftiest as well as the lowest things in motion.” (PL 761B)

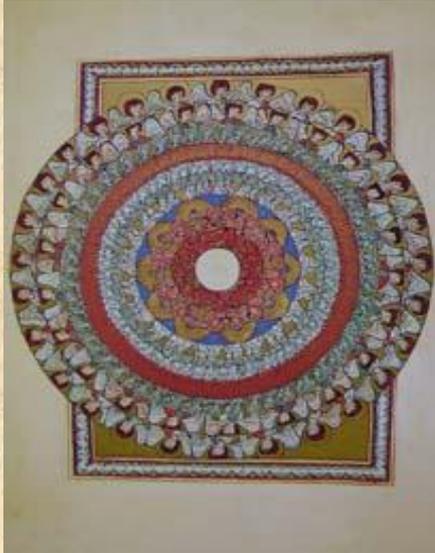


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Hildegard's Use of Herbs

In Hildegard's understanding the whole natural world was a macrocosm of the human body. Her elaborate treatises on medicine and the use of herbs are based on the various qualities of herbs and other remedies. It was important to understand these different qualities to create a balance between the qualities of the herbs and the imbalance which was causing a person to be ill.



Hildegard wrote that the earth produces various plants and fruits corresponding to the functions of the human body. In this way the earth has “sweat, moisture and juice.” The “sweat” of the earth produces “useless herbs.” The “moisture” of the earth brings forth “useful” herbs and the “juice” of the earth brings forth “grapevine and germinating trees.”

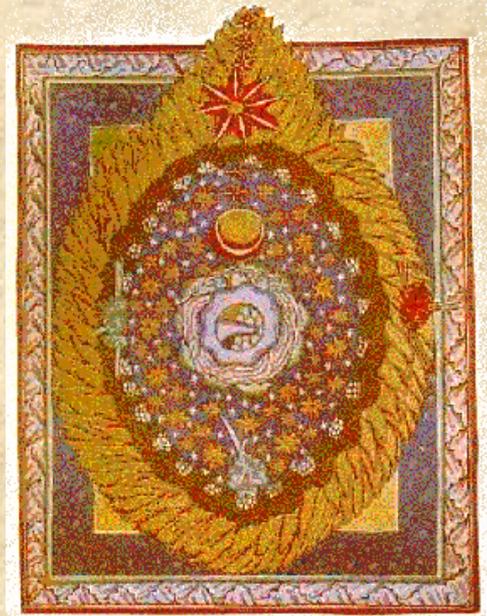


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Hildegard's Use of Herbs



The “useful” herbs grow to meet the spiritual needs of humanity while “useless” herbs reflect the “useless and diabolical ways” of humans. Useful herbs help in different ways. Some herbs “grow in air” and are good for the digestion and are assimilated into the hair. Other herbs are “dry and heavy of nature” and make a person “harsh.” These herbs are comparable to and assimilated into a person’s sweat. Some “useless” herbs should not be eaten since they are comparable to a person’s waste.



Herbs are also classified as “warm” or “cold” and “dry” or “moist.” The warmth signifies the soul and the cold signifies the body. The properties of these herbs are then used to address the imbalance in a person which has resulted in an illness.



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Specific Herbs Used by Hildegard

Savory

Savory is warm and moist. It has a moderate amount of moisture in it. It is good and useful for both the sick and healthy to eat. There is something sour, or bitter, in it which does not bite the insides, but makes the person healthy. Let whoever has a weak heart or a sick stomach eat it raw and it will strengthen the person. Also, a person who has a sad mind will be made happy if he or she eats savory. If eaten it also heals and clears the eyes.

Hildegard's Healing Plants p. 36



Sage

Sage is warm and dry of nature. It grows more from the warmth of the sun than from the humidity of the earth. It is useful against sick humors since it is dry. It is good to eat raw or cooked by one who suffers from noxious humors since it checks them. Take sage and pulverize it. Eat this powder with bread, and it diminishes the overabundance of bad humors in you. Also, let whoever suffers a stench from some rottenness put sage in his or her nostrils, and it will benefit the person. But if a person abounds in an overabundance of phlegm or has stinking breath, let them drink it often. The bad humors and phlegm will be diminished. But let whoever is worn out somewhat by stiffness cook sage in water and drink it; the humors and phlegm will diminish.

Hildegard's Healing Plants p. 58



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Specific Herbs used by Hildegard

Thyme

Thyme is warm and dry. If someone adds thyme to good herbs and condiments, it perforates ulcers with its strength and does not heal them if placed over them. Let whoever has leprosy season this herb with other good herbs and condiments. Rub this on any type of leprosy, and it lessens the foulness of the leprosy with its warmth and strength.

Hildegard's Healing Plants p. 179-180



Parsley

Parsley is of a robust nature and has more warmth than cold in it. It grows from wind and humidity. It is better and more useful raw than cooked in food. When it has been eaten, it reduces fevers that strike but touch a person only lightly. Nevertheless, it generates seriousness in the mind.

Hildegard's Healing Plants pp. 67-68



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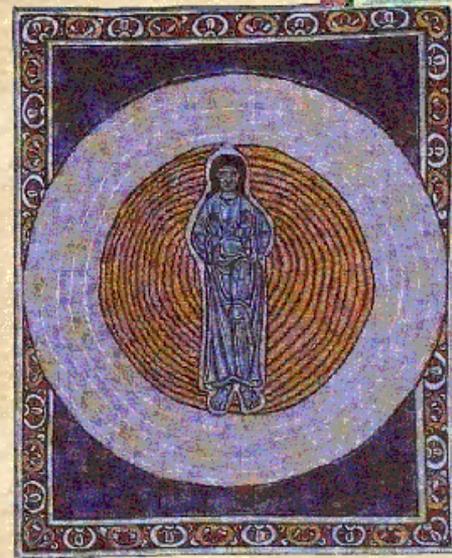
The Legacy of Hildegard



As Benedictine women we take seriously the legacy of our foremother, St. Hildegard of Bingen. Following in her footsteps, we strive for a life that balances our Benedictine values of prayer, work, and community while giving special attention to our relationship with the land.

Some of the specific activities of our monastery that speak of our legacy as daughters of Hildegard include:

- ✚ The use of essential oils, herbal tinctures, massage and cranio-sacral therapy for complementary healing.
- ✚ Our emphasis on being stewards of our 900+ acres of woods and cropland in accordance with our community's "philosophy of land use."
- ✚ Raising and preserving a substantial part of our own food in our gardens.
- ✚ Making our own herbal soaps and salves and maintaining a herb garden.
- ✚ Sponsoring eco-spirituality retreats and activities through our spirituality ministry.
- ✚ Speaking out and acting for justice.
- ✚ Seeking to live a life in community centered on God and in accordance with the Rule of St. Benedict in the tradition of Hildegard and our Benedictine foremothers.



We welcome seekers who want to share our way of life as:

- Retreatants
- Volunteers
- Oblates
- Community members (Sisters)

We invite you to contact us:
monastery@stgertrudes.org



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For Further Reflection

The literature about Hildegard is voluminous. Most of her writings are available in English, as are numerous books about her. Several recordings of her songs are also available.

Books of Hildegard's Writings and Art:

Hildegard's Healing Plants: From Her Medieval Classic Physica
Bruce Hozesk (translator)
Beacon Press 2001

Hildegard of Bingen: On Natural Philosophy and Medicine
(Causa et Cure)
Margaret Berger (translator)
Boydell and Brewer 1999

Hildegard of Bingen: Scivias
Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop translators
Paulist Press, 1990

Hildegard of Bingen's Book of Divine Works: with Letters and Songs
Matthew Fox editor
Bear and Co. 1987

Illuminations of Hildegard
Matthew Fox
Inner Traditions International Limited 2003

Web site:

The recently re-founded
Benedictine Abbey of St. Hildegard
in Germany:

<http://www.abtei-st-hildegard.de/>

Music of Hildegard

☞ Vision: The Music of Hildegard of
Bingen
Angel Records 1994

☞ A Feather on the Breath of God:
Sequences and hymns by Abbess
Hildegard of Bingen
Hyperion Records 1984

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