medicine for late Summer

earth



Isabel Lu Li-Lan Hsiang Weiss Alexis McKenney

Yang governs the day & peaks at midday.

everything contains a seed of the opposite.

Light
Sun
yang
warm
Brightness
South
Heaven
Activity
East

Yang

陽

日 'sun'

旦 'sun over the horizon'

勿 'rays of light'

Yin Yang

The two opposing, complementary, & interconnected forces that govern everything around us.

Simply, it is a story about light and shadow; what is in the light (yang) vs. what lives in the shadow (yin).



Yin

陰

'hill' 阝

'cloud' 云

five paths* "wǔxíng"

*There are several common English translations of 'wǔxíng'. 'Wǔ' means five.

'Xíng' can be translated as 'path', 'element', or 'phase':

Element may refer to the state of the natural element.

Phase can denote a relationship of movement and change.

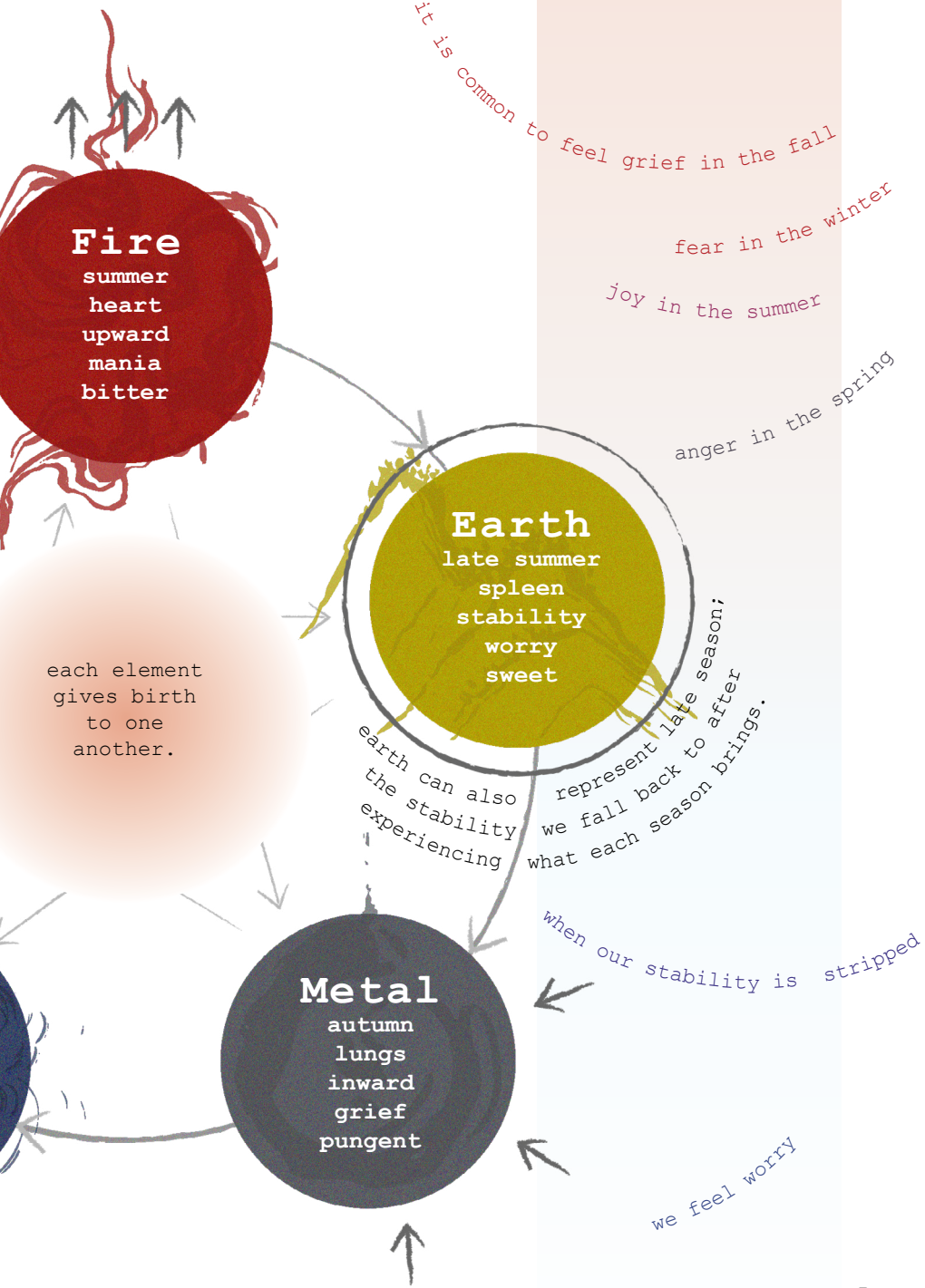
Path refers to all the various characteristics and relationships that encompass the practice.

Each correspond to patterns across nature, helping to explain fluid movements & cycles between states of being:

seasons
organs
directions
emotions
tissues

flavors
colors
times of the day
and more..




it is common to feel grief in the fall
fear in the winter
joy in the summer
anger in the spring
Fire
summer
heart
upward
mania
bitter
Earth
late summer
spleen
stability
worry
sweet
Metal
autumn
lungs
inward
grief
pungent
each element gives birth to one another.
represent late season; we fall back to after what each season brings.
earth can also the stability experiencing
when our stability is stripped
we feel worry

Earth

the path of...

transition & stability

The Earth element represents the late Summer, as well as transitional periods between seasons & between Yin and Yang.

In between the expansion & growth of Spring/Summer, and the inward energy of Autumn/Winter, the Earth elemnt is a place to come back to our center, nourish ourselves, and find stability.

transformation & nourishment

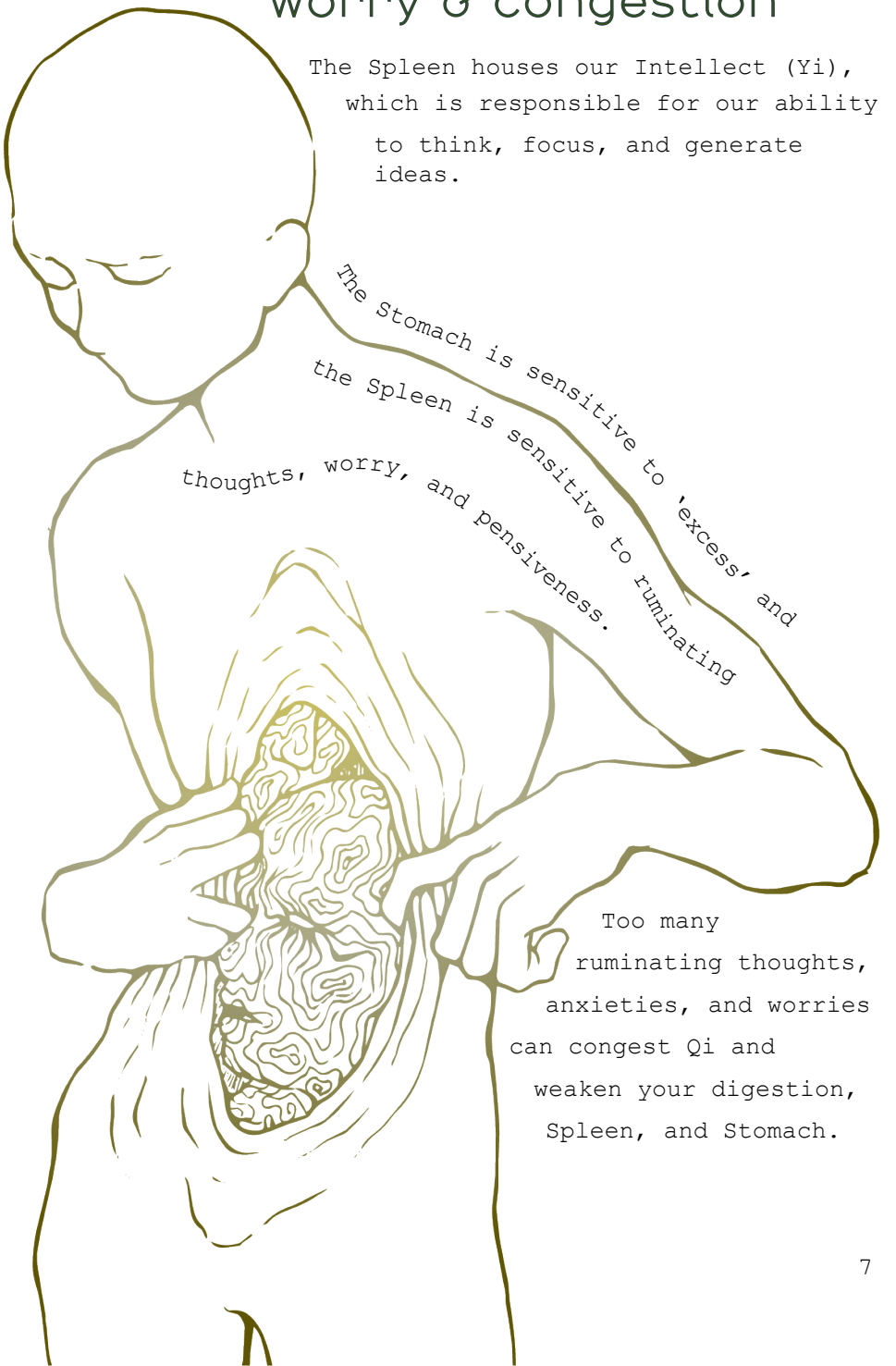
The Earth element represents the Spleen and Stomach organs. The Stomach recieves food and fluids; it 'rottens and ripens' food and fluids, breaking it down for the Spleen to recieve it.

The Spleen transforms the food and fluids from the stomach into material used to produce Qi and Blood.

worry & congestion

The Spleen houses our Intellect (Yi), which is responsible for our ability to think, focus, and generate ideas.

The Stomach is sensitive to 'excess' and the Spleen is sensitive to ruminating thoughts, worry, and pensiveness.



Too many ruminating thoughts, anxieties, and worries can congest Qi and weaken your digestion, Spleen, and Stomach.

Earth

the path of...

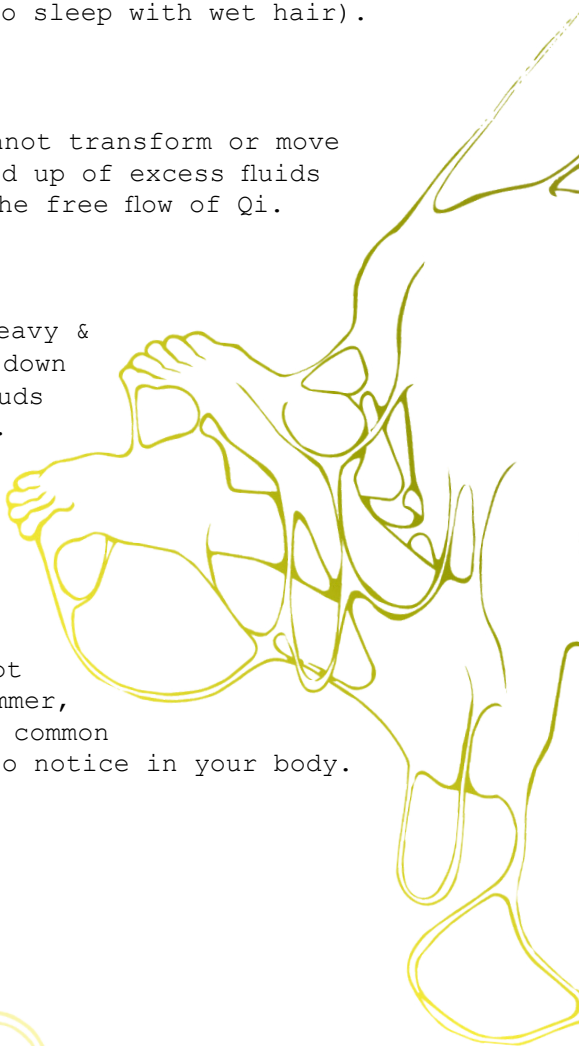
dampness

In Chinese medicine, dampness is an external pathogen that is charaterized by climate (humid weather), living conditions (living in basement, poor air circulation, humidity coming from the bathroom), and habits (wearing wet swimsuit after swimming, sitting on damp grass, going to sleep with wet hair).

When your body cannot transform or move moisture, this build up of excess fluids can distrub the free flow of Qi.

The body feels heavy & lethargic, slows down digestion, and clouds mental function.

In the humid and hot weeks of late Summer, dampness is a common imbalance to notice in your body.



shame



To be seen is to open ourselves up to shame. Shame exists in our relation to others. When we are seen, we start to recognize our autonomy over our bodies and actions.

Tissues and movements that don't align with the values and desires in society around us can be seen as dirty, heavy, diseased, and disordered.

Stuck.

Hidden.

Congested.

Shame often manifests with dampness.

herbalism for Earth

food energies

The classifications mostly speak to the energies of the foods & how one prepares it, rather than just the temperature the foods are eaten as.

foods can be classified as:

cold

cool

neutral

warm

hot

cool foods slow us down & move energy downwards. In excess, it can make us sluggish.

warm foods move energy upwards & outwards, warming us from the inside out. They speed us up.

fast growing plants tend to be cooler (lettuce, zucchini, herbs)

slower growing plants tend to be warmer (roots, rhizomes like ginger)

animal foods tend to be warmer(meat, eggs, dairy)

frozen/raw = cold

steam = cool/neutral

boil = neutral

stew/stir-fry = warm

bake = more warm

deep fry = hot

roast/grill/ barbecue = most hot

nourishment for late /ummer

sweet

The flavor associated with Earth is sweet. Sweet foods help to ground and strengthen the body, espeically the Spleen and Stomach. Imbalance in the Earth element can present as experiencing worry, ungroundedness, and craving sweet foods.

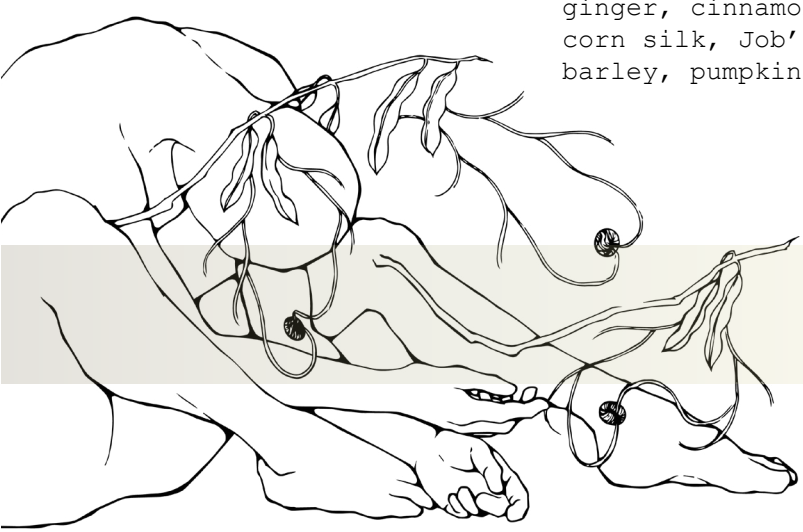
sweet foods & herbs:
grains (Job's Tears or coix seed, sorghum, rice, corn), sweet potato, yam, jujube, palm dates, longan , legumes (soybeans, mungbeans, chickpeas), stevia, licorice root, fennel, and anise hyssop

draining

Certain foods can help drain and move fluids and emotions that have accumulated in the body from dampness. When eaten in excess, certain foods can contribute to dampness, especially raw and fried foods.

damp-inducing foods:
fried foods, raw and frozen foods, dairy, iced drinks, sugar/sweets

damp-clearing foods:
ginger, cinnamon, corn, corn silk, Job's Tears, barley, pumpkin, radish



Plant Allies
for Earth season in North Carolina

Here in North Carolina, Summer usually runs right into the Fall season. It's often mid-October before many of us begin to incorporate the change of season in our daily lives.

Many of the foods and herbs that grow in abundance during the late Summer months in NC can offer cooling nourishment and sweetness that help us ground in the midst of both seasonal and life transitions. These are elder plant spirits that have been allies to the indigenous peoples of Turtle Island, Africa, and their descendants for many generations. These are crops that remind us of sweetness during bitter times. They ground us in the soil underneath our feet.

okra

Okra is native to West Africa and is part of the mallow plant family that includes cotton, coffee, and hibiscus. In NC, it's one of the last Summer crops to ripen. Okra is often fried, stewed, or added to thicken dishes like gumbo.



Fresh cut okra steeped in water overnight creates a hydrating drink that supports gut health, balances blood sugar levels, and has even been used to help expecting mothers prepare the birth canal in the days before labor.

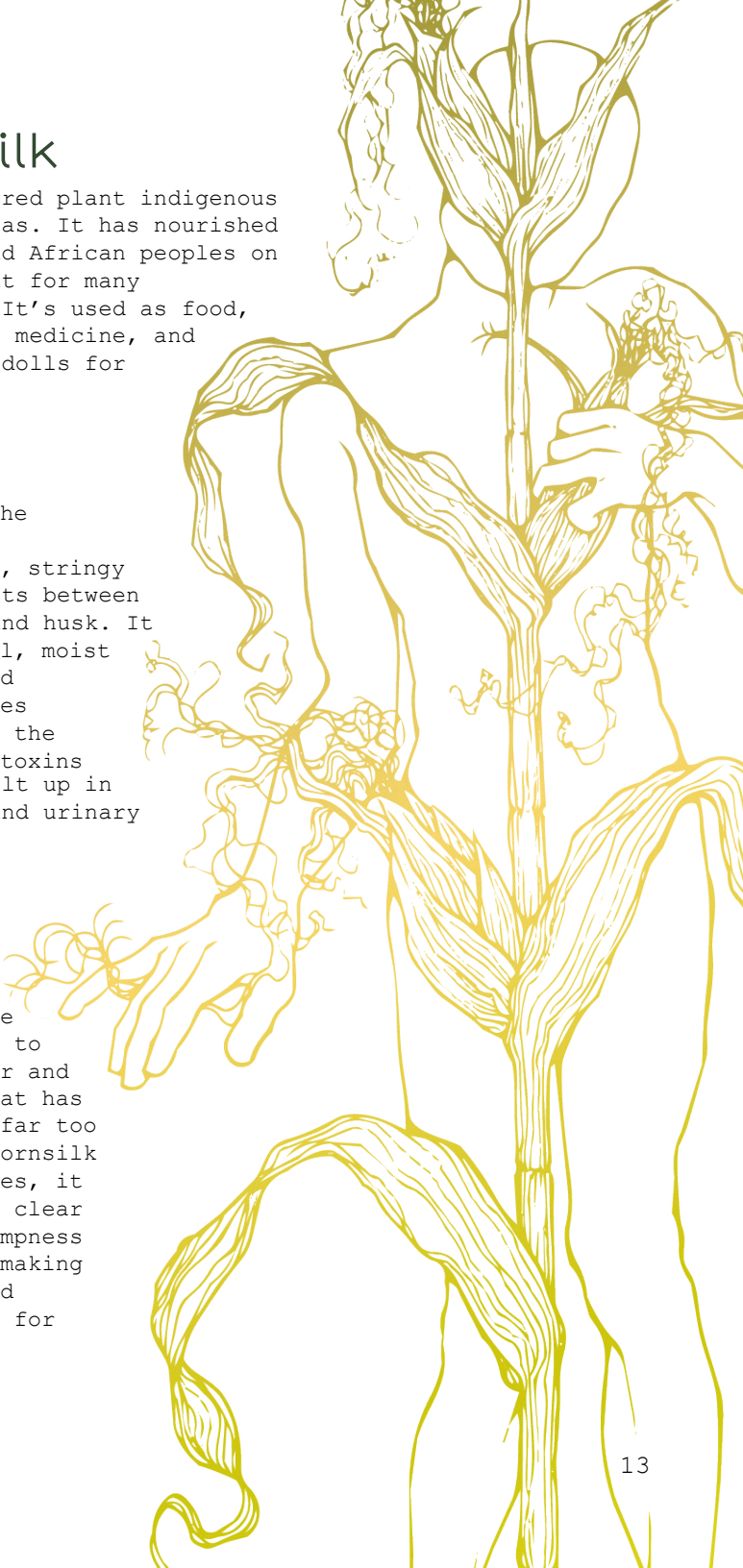
Okra is cool, sweet, and moist. Its mucilage (or sliminess) is supportive both physically and energetically in creating flow in our gut and in our lives.

corn silk

Corn is a sacred plant indigenous to the Americas. It has nourished Indigenous and African peoples on this continent for many generations. It’s used as food, textile fiber, medicine, and even to make dolls for children.

Cornsilk is the green-yellow, almost golden, stringy fiber that rests between the kernels and husk. It creates a cool, moist barrier around inflamed tissues while helping the body release toxins that have built up in the kidneys and urinary tract.

These health imbalances are often related to internal anger and irritation that has been held in far too long. While cornsilk softens tissues, it also can help clear out excess dampness in the body, making it a sweet and balanced ally for Earth season.



maypop
(passiflora incarnatae)

Maypop, or passionflower, is a native NC herb that vines along grassy areas and fences. The leaves and purple flowers are medicinal to stressed and overactive nervous systems by helping to quiet the mind and supporting deep, restorative sleep.

Energetically, maypop is an herb that gently allows us to opt out of exhausting and exploitative rhythms of work and tap back into connection, joy, and rest.

oats
(avena sativa)

Most associate oats with warm, nourishing bowls of oatmeal on cold mornings, but both the grass and the milky oat tops that emerge in late Summer as the plant matures are also deeply nourishing to the body, mind, and spirit.

Oats in any form are wonderful for exhausted bodies and minds. They also contain mucilage like okra that hydrates on a cellular level while offering additional support to the nervous system.



Late summer nourishing infusion recipe

by Alexis McKenney

ingredients:

- ⅓ cup Oatstraw
- ⅓ cup Passionflower
- ⅓ cup Cornsilk

instructions:

1. Place each herb in a 32 oz jar and fill the jar with water.
2. Leave the jar in the fridge overnight and strain in the morning.
3. Enjoy this nourishing, hydrating infusion cold or you can warm it up and add honey for some more sweetness.

sweetness is more than taste

How does sweetness in community look like to you? What do you see, how does it feel, what are its values?

How does sweetness manifest through your senses: taste, touch, sight, hearing, smell?

sweet earth

a mural by Isabel Lu located in Dix Park in Raleigh.



Indigenous Land

Dix Park was originally the land of the Coharie, Cherokee, Haliwa-Saponi, Lumbee, Meherrin, Occaneechi, Sappony, and Waccamaw-Siouan people.

Spring Hill Plantation

In the 1700-1800s, the land was colonized and named Spring Hill Plantation, where enslaved men, women, and children worked on the land.

Dix Hospital

Built by the labor and skills of enslaved people, Dix Hospital opened to White patients in 1856. Separate wards for Indigenous and Black patients opened in later years.

"We nourish our Earth Path when we remember the strength of our ancestors"

~ Li-Lan Hsiang Weiss



Dix Park

The city of Raleigh purchased the land in 2015 to turn the land into a destination park.

The mural tells shared stories of this land's people and their medicine through grains: Job's Tears, sorghum, and corn silk. These three grains strengthens and sustains communities across African, Indigenous, and Asian cultures.

A special thank you to Hadassah Patterson for contributing their knowledge and research to the mural.

what Earth needs

by Li-Lan Hsiang Weiss

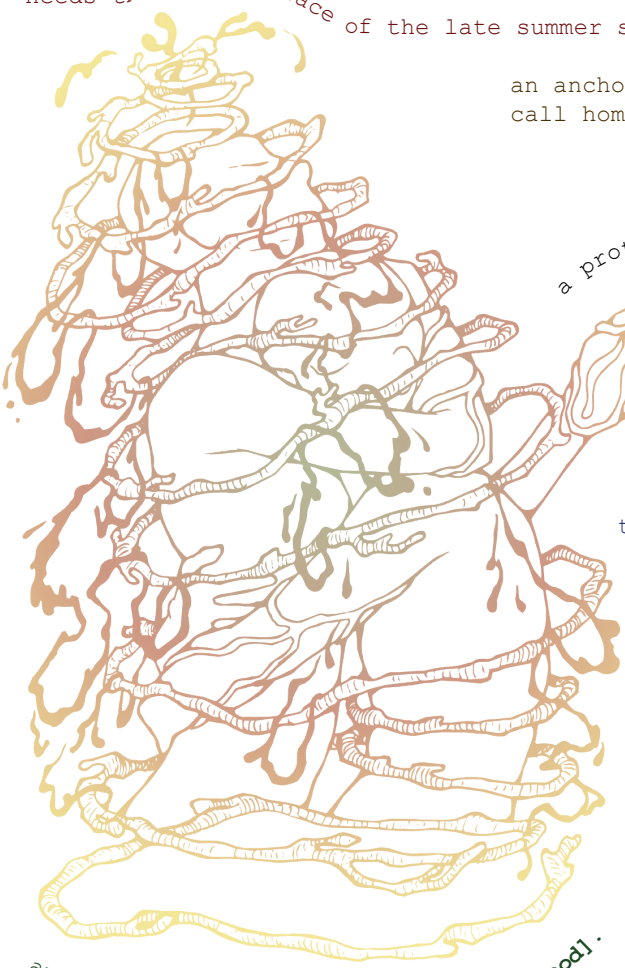
A fruit's ripening...

needs the warm embrace of the late summer sun **[Fire]**,

an anchor to which it can call home **[Earth]**,

a protective armor that has withstood continuous battles **[Metal]**,

the refreshening cleanses of effortless tears, from the sky **[Water]**,



and a supportive hand to hold onto **[Wood]**.

Most of all,
it needs the patient passing of time to develop the sweetness that can only come from allowing nature's cycles.

[How is your Earth fruit ripening?]

Many of us drew a house when we were young.

Do you remember the feelings and thoughts of that drawing? At your current awareness and life stage, how would you represent or describe HOME?

What is the ancestral/familial story of home for you? What aspects feel nourishing to return to?

Isabel Lu *any pronouns*
Isabel is an artist based in Raleigh, NC. Their work unpacks binary ideas of the diagnosis, remedy, and the body. Through painting, community engagement, and herbalism, Isabel reflects on the moral hysteria surrounding categories of gender, disorder, and treatment. Inspired by Western and Chinese routes of wellbeing, they layer portraiture with silly yet meaningful symbols from medicine and mythology.

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Li-Lan Hsiang Weiss *she/her/they*
Li-Lan Hsiang Weiss is a licensed acupuncturist in Durham since 2005. She founded and stewards Armonia Health LLC, a wellness center with Spanish and English speaking practitioners. She has taught and facilitated various meditative workshops on digestive, reproductive, and inner resiliency practices using Chinese and Maya medicine. She is collaborating with artist Isabel Lu on a zine series of the Chinese Five Paths and is a 2025 Taproot Artist with the NC Climate Justice Collective.

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Alexis McKenney *she/her/hers*
Alexis McKenney is an AfroCarolina writer, herbalist, and cultural worker based in Durham, NC. Through weaving together her writing, cultural arts, and land justice practices, Alexis explores and preserves embodied archives of African ancestral technologies in the South. Alexis started her herbalism journey as a medicine making apprentice with the DC Mutual Aid Apothecary. She went on to complete the Iwilla Remedies Herbal Medicine for the Soul certificate program which included over 100 hours of clinical herbalism studies. Alexis is the founder of Kongo Cafe, which offers coffee ceremony, herbal medicine, and community cultural work through a lens of African indigenous wisdom and solidarity.

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This zine is part of a larger series, ***Told & Retold***.
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