

# Fourth Trimester Podcast

## Episode 90: Herbal Medicine for Fertility, Birth and Postpartum with Clinical Herbalist Laura Ash

**Sarah Trott:** [00:00:05] My name is Sarah Trott. I'm a new mama to a baby girl and this podcast is all about postpartum care for the few months following birth, the time period also known as the Fourth Trimester. My postpartum doula, Esther Gallagher, is my co-host. She's a mother, grandmother, perinatal educator, birth and postpartum care provider. I've benefited hugely from her support. All parents can benefit from the wisdom and support that a postpartum Doula provides. Fourth trimester care is about the practical, emotional and social support parents and baby require, and importantly, helps set the tone for the lifelong journey of parenting.

When I first became pregnant, I had never heard of postpartum Doulas, let alone knew what they did. So much of the training and preparation that expecting parents do is focused on the birth and newborn care. Once a baby is born, often the first interaction parents have with medical or child professionals, other than the first pediatrician visits, is the six-week checkup with the OB/GYN. *What about caring for mama and family between the birth and the six week doctor visit? What are the strategies for taking care of the partner and the rest of the family while looking after your newborn?*

Our podcasts contain expert interviews with specialists from many fields to cover topics including postpartum doula practices, prenatal care, prenatal and postnatal yoga, parenting, breastfeeding, physical recovery from birth, nutrition, newborn care, midwifery, negotiating family visitation, and many more.

First-hand experience is shared through lots of stories from both new and seasoned parents. Hear what other parents are asking and what they have done in their own lives.

We reference other podcasts, internet resources and real-life experts who can help you on your own parenting journey. Visit us at <http://fourthtrimesterpodcast.com>

**Sarah Trott:** [00:00:47] Hi, this is Sarah Trott. Welcome back to the Fourth Trimester Podcast. I am here with a special guest, Laura Ash, who I will introduce in a moment. And before I do, I want to remind everyone that we have a website which is [fourthtrimesterpodcast.com](http://fourthtrimesterpodcast.com). Please go check it out and sign up for our newsletter. You can also follow us on Instagram at [@FourthTrimesterPodcast](https://www.instagram.com/FourthTrimesterPodcast). All one word spelled out, and we would love to see you there on social as well.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:01:15] So Laura Ash is our guest today. I have wanted to have her on the show for quite some time. I am a big fan of hers and her business, and I'm a customer of hers actually going way back.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:01:27] And so here's her introduction. I want to spend some time talking about what she does. So she is a clinical herbalist and we'll break that down in a moment of what that means. She's also a mother and she's the owner of the Scarlet Sage, which is an herbal apothecary in San Francisco, California. She is also the founder of the Land of Verse, which is an online healing arts education company. And we'll talk about that as well.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:01:55] And she's also a doula, and she studied women's health with Aviva Romm. And Aviva Romm is an MD and an herbalist and an author of a book focused on hormone health. So we'll put a link to that in the show notes so you can check that out. And Laura, you've had a lifelong passion with alternatives to Western medicine and advancing the research and practice of herbal medicine, which is so cool. And you grew up in the Sierras and you currently live with your wife and your two children and your Labradoodle in Oakland, California. Hi, Welcome to the show.

**Laura Ash:** [00:02:30] Hi, Good morning. Thank you for having me.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:02:32] Yeah, we're so happy to have you here. So, Laura, one of the things that we like to start off with, with a lot of our guests, is to talk about your own fourth trimester experience.

**Laura Ash:** [00:02:42] Yes. I was sharing with you earlier before we jumped on that I have had two beautiful children. I was able to have two very different experiences for many reasons, and I'm happy to share both of them with you and your community today.

**Laura Ash:** [00:02:58] So I'm so happy to be here. I was privileged and lucky enough to have two home births and the first my first child, my son, his name is Tenzing. I was 29 years old when I had my first child, which is like being a baby here in the Bay Area of having my first child. I was living in Atlanta, Georgia. I had just moved there from San Francisco with my husband at the time.

**Laura Ash:** [00:03:25] And I read the book from Ina May Gaskin called Spiritual Midwifery, and a friend of mine, because I was looking at hospital births, I was looking at birthing centers. She said, You know, you should read this book. And it was a total trip. All these rushes, rushes versus contractions. And I was really interested and as an herbalist, I had already been a herbalist for many, many years. I was definitely open to a natural birth. But home birth is illegal in Georgia. And so I ended up driving up to Tennessee to meet the home birth midwives at the farm where Ina May Gaskin started her intentional community.

**Laura Ash:** [00:04:04] And I ended up getting a consult there with Carol, my midwife, and then decided to have a home birth up in Tennessee. So I actually went up there two weeks before my due date and ended up after a 12 hour labor having a home birth at the farm in Tennessee, which was a really beautiful, very intense. It was not rushes, let me just say, that did not fall in that spiritual midwifery. But then right immediately afterwards, I was able to stay there in what they have these little cabins in their community. I was able to stay for five days. And then we drove back home to the suburb of Atlanta where we were living at the time.

**Laura Ash:** [00:04:44] And so my postpartum journey really started there. I started with my husband at the time and my son, and I was able to nurse immediately, 45 minutes after he was born, he latched very easily. And so nursing, thankfully, was very, very easy for me. I had an overproduction issue and I didn't realize what that was until about five days in where I was like, I am having such an intense time with this. Thankfully,

mastitis never happened, but I can get into that because that happens about a month later.

**Laura Ash:** [00:05:19] But my postpartum journey really started there in my bed, in the cabin with my son and my ex-husband. And I absolutely was hit over the head with a hammer. Did not realize how exhausted I would have been. [00:05:35] I now describe it as you're running a marathon, bleeding on the side of the road and then not sleeping for two weeks. It's like, that's labor and that's postpartum. And People really don't talk about it, which is why I'm so excited that you talk about this. [00:05:49]

**Laura Ash:** [00:05:49] I say this often to a lot of customers that come into Scarlet Sage looking for post birth support, post birth herbs. I'm like, [00:05:56] You are going to be exhausted and bleeding the whole time. And people don't realize that they absorbed or they didn't break down all of this blood. 50% more blood when they're pregnant and they're actually losing the majority of that blood within a couple of weeks after they birth. Plus, a lot of blood in birth as well. And I think that is so deeply exhausting and in of itself of healing from the actual labor. [00:06:24]

**Laura Ash:** [00:06:24] So right after I had my son, I was able to sleep a little bit and then woke up and had to sneeze. And then I had a huge hemorrhoid come from the sneeze. So I learned right away to use my sitz bath.

**Laura Ash:** [00:06:39] So I was able to make my sitz bath. Thankfully, I had it with me. [00:06:44] One of the best pieces of advice I got from my midwife is to put sitz bath on pads, post birth pads and freeze them and have a stack of them in the freezer. And so you can put them directly on when you're wearing, you know, wearing a pad, you have to wear pads so much after your birth. It's wearing it. It would cool down all this inflammation. But then as it's thawing out, you would be sitting in your sitz bath. So [00:07:11] you're not sitting in a warm tub, which is the last thing I wanted to do.

**Laura Ash:** [00:07:15] And so I was having these frozen sitz baths, which I say, hopefully your readers are okay with this. It literally saved my ass because it was cold. It was all the herbs that are astringent. So it helps that hemorrhoid heal.

**Laura Ash:** [00:07:26] I couldn't walk for a few days. I labored a lot on my legs. I'm standing up. So my legs were really atrophied. And so I actually had a very intense postpartum healing because I was just so deeply exhausted from natural labor that I was mostly standing the whole time. I did birth on the bed on my side and on my back, which was also really hard. My son had a very large head, so that was my first labor.

**Laura Ash:** [00:07:55] Immediately afterwards, I would say I was clinically depressed during my pregnancy. I was very sad, very challenged by me moving from San Francisco to Atlanta while I was pregnant. I felt very alone. And so after my birth, I would say I felt better. [00:08:16] So I'm not sure if I had postpartum depression, but I absolutely had pregnancy depression, which I know happens in about 30% of people that are pregnant, which we don't talk enough about as well. And so I did feel okay because now I had something to do right. The pregnancy was more challenging being alone because I just had to sit and wait and be tired all the time and be nauseous. [00:08:36]

**Laura Ash:** [00:08:36] But I felt like I could eat. I felt like I could now take care of my new child. And that felt better to me. My milk came in within a few days and actually it came in significantly. And then thankfully I only had two stitches. I only tore a little bit with my birth. And so that healing was really quick, which was great. And I do have to say those sitz baths really helped that healing significantly. But that was my postpartum experience with my first child.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:09:12] Yeah. Thank you. I've never heard that tip about putting the sitz bath on the pad. That's amazing. What kind of pad? One of the bigger, thicker ones?

**Laura Ash:** [00:09:21] Really big maternity pads. Yeah, You can get any. If you're someone that gives birth in the hospital, they give them to you. These really large, almost like diapers because you're bleeding so much. Right? So I would switch it back and forth between the dry one because you're bleeding and then the frozen sitz bath one. It was so phenomenal.

**Laura Ash:** [00:09:41] I've had a few midwives tell me, Oh, no, no, no. Never put anything frozen after birth on your perineum. And I was like, have you ever had a child? I need to know if you've ever had a child naturally, you know vaginal birth. Because the last thing I wanted to do and I'm curious if you're if you had the same experience or some of your listeners had the same experience, was sit in a tub with hot water because I was so inflamed and so I was so grateful. I wasn't ready to take an actual Sitz bath with warm water for probably two weeks. It was just too painful to be inflamed.

**Laura Ash:** [00:10:19] And I'm a small person and I had a child with a 98 percentile head, so I feel like I had a lot of inflammation that my body was healing from. So it was really phenomenal actually. And I have many, many women and people pregnant post pregnant people come to me and share that. They were so grateful for that tip.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:10:40] Yeah, no, that's great. Thank you. Yeah, I definitely used ice. I know a lot of women who did as well. Good.

**Laura Ash:** [00:10:47] Good, good, good. I know it restricts blood vessels, but goodness sakes, you really need that afterwards.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:10:58] We had a midwife recently on our program and [00:11:02]I'll include this information in the notes as well. [00:11:05] But I mean, the lesson there is just don't leave the ice on too long because it can restrict and actually cause problems. So, you know, 15, 20 minutes, something like that, but not 24 over seven for two weeks after birth. Like that's way, way too much like you can do damage there. So. Right.

**Laura Ash:** [00:11:21] Agreed. And the nice thing about the sitz baths and pads is that they thaw within probably a few minutes. And so it's this immediate relief which feels really good. And then because they're so full of this sitz bath, you are sitting directly in this bath. So you're getting all those healing properties from the herbs, antibacterial anti-inflammatory properties, from these herbs directly on your perineum. So it's really lovely.

Sarah Trott: [00:11:48] Serena Saeed-Winn was the midwife I mentioned earlier. That's amazing.

**Laura Ash:** [00:11:55] And then my second child I had become a single parent with my second pregnancy. Very traumatic divorce separation. Right. When I found out I was pregnant with my second child and we'd been living in East Africa and I conceived my second child and then we moved to Madison, Wisconsin, and separated. So I was a newly single mother with a three year old and my second child in Madison, Wisconsin.

**Laura Ash:** [00:12:27] So I did plan for a home birth with my second. And I learned from the first experience that I really didn't like having a home birth outside of my home. I appreciated the importance of being on the farm and the significance of being on the farm and having that experience. But the drive there and the drive back with a newborn afterwards was actually really challenging.

**Laura Ash:** [00:12:51] So I really wanted a home birth in my own home. And so I had these amazing midwives. Madison, Wisconsin is a great place to do a home birth and two midwives that were present and I was able to birth in the water my second child in our living room. So I had this big tub that they fill up with water. And that was a really beautiful experience and something that if you ever get a chance, if anyone here ever gets a chance to experience, which is I know you have to be in a really easeful pregnancy and labor in order for that to happen, which I was very lucky for, but it was just a really beautiful experience.

**Laura Ash:** [00:13:30] My body pushed her out for me. I didn't even consciously push. It was so cool. My midwife is like, Just breathe through this, but don't consciously push. And my body just did it. I was like, Oh, this is how people birth when they're like passed out, right? There's like, This is possible. This happens. It was just so cool. And with my second too, I wasn't as I didn't need to worry about it as much. At least that's how it felt. It felt like I was able to ride those waves a little bit more comfortably.

**Laura Ash:** [00:14:01] So she was born, which is really beautiful, full moon eclipse, and immediately got on my chest and I got out of the water, went on the couch and checked her. She nursed also within 30 minutes. Immediately latched, which was great.

**Laura Ash:** [00:14:19] And then my healing was very different. And I didn't bring this up the first time because I actually tintured my placenta the first time I gave birth with my son. And I was thinking I heard, Oh, if you tincture, which is an alcoholic extract of plants, how that's usually do it. So I put it in alcohol to use for menopause. That's what people were saying is that, oh, it's really great for menopause. So if you can preserve it and tincture it and then have it for like 20 years down the road, that's great.

**Laura Ash:** [00:14:49] So I was like, Oh, I'm going to do that. I saved the placenta. I tintured it. And my second one, I had it encapsulated by someone that encapsulates placentas. I believe they were an acupuncturist. And I took that and I felt like a superwoman. I was so blown away with how much better I felt that deep exhaustion was still there, That deep bleeding on the side of the road after a marathon was still there. And then I got the placenta the day after I gave birth and I was elated. I had energy. I stood up even though I was still having a hard time walking, the labor was a lot easier. It was only three hours for my second baby and I felt so good and I was like, This is why people talk about it. This is pretty phenomenal.

**Laura Ash:** [00:15:38] And even my mood was significantly better even in the situation that I was in. I felt like I could do stuff. I had the motivation to get my life back together, go back to school, figure out what my next journey and my next chapter was with now my two children and I did all the same self-care pieces with the sitz baths and with, you know, taking, you know, sleeping and nursing. I did all of the right foods and all of the right stuff, but the placenta was the biggest transition for me from my first to my second of that postpartum experience.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:16:18] And placenta encapsulation is...

**Laura Ash:** [00:16:22] Placenta encapsulation is. Yeah, this is a great thing because a lot of people don't know what this is. [00:16:28] A lot of people have heard of like people



eat their placenta or do placenta smoothies. And the idea of this, it's a very old idea of actually ingesting what you basically create. You create your own organ when you create a placenta when you're pregnant. And that organ obviously is discarded and people often plant it or use it for other things. But it's extremely high in iron and trace minerals. B vitamins, a lot of things that you're losing with basically just bleeding, right? All of this blood that we're losing and all of these fluids we're losing during birth are really intense and can shock our bodies really easily. And so you're just basically supplementing that back in your body. And so what they do, as far as I know, is they dehydrate the placenta and it's all sanitary. Make sure you get someone that's highly sanitary. They dehydrate it in a dehydrator and then they powder it and put it in capsules. So that's placenta encapsulation. So you're just taking your own dehydrated placenta. Your body recognizes it at you as you it's very bioavailable, which means it absorbs extremely well. And you will experience if you're it's like taking an iron supplement if someone is anemic and I don't know if anyone's anemic here, it just feels like you have energy. Feels like there's some vitality and some force there. [00:17:48]

**Sarah Trott:** [00:17:48] Thank you for explaining that. Yeah, we've had stories of women who took all of their placenta, the encapsulated placenta, which is just taking it in pill form, and they consumed it in like 48 hours. All of it is it. And they felt fine and it was like, yeah, no adverse effects. And other women sometimes will eek it out and take it even over the course of a year or save a couple for their children's birthdays as something that's special and connected, which is really neat.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:18:17] All right, so we have a lot to cover. Thank you for sharing your stories. Really different experiences for you and both beautiful.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:18:25] So here are our topics we wanted to talk about. So we want to cover an introduction to herbal medicine. What is it? How does it work? Really high level. We're going to talk about the benefits of herbal medicine specific to pre and post birth. We're going to talk about women's health and the use of herbs for flourishing even beyond the fourth trimester. So there are things that we can do in terms of self-care that I want to dig into for women specifically. And then any tips on how women and families can benefit from herbal medicine right away. So any listeners who are listening to us

right now can go home and put these learnings to use right away for themselves. So those are our topics. Let's start with herbal medicine. What is herbal medicine? What do we mean by that?

**Laura Ash:** [00:19:14] I love herbal medicine so much. So I didn't grow up with herbal medicine in my home. I had what we would consider a traditional white American family upbringing, very Christian, very Doritos and Diet Pepsi kind of home. Healthy food was like granola bars, like the Nature Valley ones. You know, bless my parents' hearts, they did everything they could.

**Laura Ash:** [00:19:38] So herbal medicine actually was quite new to me. So what I understood originally when I was 19 and getting into my own version of what I would consider being a herbalist. Herbal medicine looks like bottles. It looks like packages. It looks like supplements. It looks like essential oils, Right?

**Laura Ash:** [00:19:56] But really, all of our ancestors were herbalists. So herbal medicine is the origin of what we would consider medicine today. So allopathic medicine or Western medicine actually is derived from herbal medicine. So herbal medicine is how all of our ancestors stayed alive. So why we're here today, it's been used forever by animals and by humans. And really only the last 100 years we've got what we consider Western allopathic medicine, which is modern medicine.

**Laura Ash:** [00:20:25] And so herbal medicine is in all of our DNA. It's our medicinal foods. What we would consider superfoods these days, things that made our traditional ancestors feel happy, feel ready to go to war, even. There's some stories about traditional medicine feeling energized, which we would consider adaptogens these days, right? They also warded off the plague. They helped people's wounds heal quickly.

**Laura Ash:** [00:20:51] [00:20:51] So herbal medicine really is all forms of healing with plants. And we can use it as food. We can use it as a tea, we can use it as a salve external, or we can use it obviously internally now through supplementation, capsules, tinctures, which are alcoholic extracts. And then now we get things like essential oils

which are distilled from plants, which is a very traditional way of extracting the healing constituents from plants. So that's all encompassing herbal medicine. [00:21:24]

**Laura Ash:** [00:21:24] I'm a clinical medical herbalist, so I use herbs that have a physiological action very quickly. Some people are traditional herbalists and they use more spiritual plants, so they use it for people with grief or even people that feel like they want to ward off evil or protection against people trying to get at them. And that's more traditional indigenous medicine. And there's a lot of traditions there.

**Laura Ash:** [00:21:51] I'm trained as a Western herbalist. I'm 100% Western European descent. My family's been in the States since the 1700s. So I'm really borrowing a lot of indigenous medicine if I'm using local plants. But I often use a lot of Western European plants that have localized here through white settlement, and that's herbalism in general. And there's so many different facets of herbalism. But what I practice is clinically researched and traditionally used and how those cross over and how modern humans use herbs today.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:22:26] Okay. So this is something that's just been from the dawn of humans. It's very common for us as humans to use what we have around us as a resource. So, specific to pregnancy and the postpartum period: how do you see women and families using herbal medicine?

**Laura Ash:** [00:22:49] One thing I love seeing on a daily basis, I feel like I have one of the best jobs ever is people coming back and being like, I feel so much better. I even see doctors using herbs starting to integrate herbs in their practice and they're like, People just come back so much better, right? It's like we don't have to have these crescendo moments where, Oh my God, this totally saved my life overnight, which does happen sometimes with herbs. [00:23:14] But what we do see is that herbs have nutritive qualities such as red raspberry leaf. We'll talk a lot about it's this old wives tale that it's good for induction. It's actually not good for induction. It's very specific for high mineral content and supporting the uterus, the entire pregnancy. And then even post-partum our uterus is going back into shape. It actually helps that uterine tone back into shape. So we're seeing herbs that are very nutritive, like red raspberry leaf. It's high

in B vitamins and high in trace minerals, [00:23:48] even nettles, that's high in protein, high in trace minerals and B vitamins that are really just supporting our blood, supporting our nutrition. And then we see these other categories of herbs in pregnancy and postpartum that we would consider having strong actions. And when we look at herbs, we say, what are their actions? Are they astringent? Which means pulling up tissues, right? Just like if you sucked on a black tea bag, you're like immediately like, Oh, that's intense. That's astringent, right? It absorbs, it tightens up tissue and absorbs water.

**Laura Ash:** [00:24:23] And then there are certain herbs which we consider demulcent. And so that's soothing membranes. That's like if you had a big rash, you would want to put something soothing on it. And that can happen internally as well. So there's these different actions that we use herbs as categories, calming herbs or herbs that are Nervines and Nervines are herbs that work with their central nervous system.

**Laura Ash:** [00:24:49] And so anything that we see with pregnancy, we can do some general herbs for everyone. So we'll use our tonic herbs, red raspberry leaf, nettles to really support that uterus, support that nutrition, support nursing because we're really feeding our body. And then those actions are really supporting our detoxification pathways gently to make sure we're still moving anything we need to move through our bodies on a daily basis.

**Laura Ash:** [00:25:16] And then we want to have calming herbs because it is a very stressful, very stressful transition. And I love these herbs. These herbs are called Nervines. They calm down the central nervous system and these are herbs like lavender, which is a very, you know, red carpet herb. It's a Beyonce of herbs, and lavender is used in essential oils. It's used in dried form. You can grow it, you can smell it, you can put it in a bath, a couple drops. It's very safe on the skin. It's very safe for babies. So we really like lavender a lot. You just if you're using the essential oil, you just dilute it. If you're using it on your baby. And it's very calming.

**Laura Ash:** [00:25:58] And chamomile is one of the best Nervines we have. And it's safe. What one of my teachers says it's safe for children of all ages. So really good for

calming. I like actually what I did with my children is put chamomile tea and made a strong chamomile tea and poured it in their bath and it just calmed their entire body down. And of course, then I'm drinking the chamomile tea as well to support my ability to stay calm and start napping when they're napping and sleeping when they're sleeping, which is the hardest thing, I think, for a new parent to do. If they're also busy and they want to get up and do things is to actually rest.

**Laura Ash:** [00:26:36] And so Nervines are definitely your jam postpartum for sure. But also in pregnancy. It's so stressful in these transitions. These are safe while pregnant. Chamomile is definitely safe while pregnant. And so it's catnip. Catnip does the opposite to us as it does to cats. So it actually calms down our entire nervous system and really good as a milk producing herb as well.

**Laura Ash:** [00:27:02] And then the last category of herbs that I would consider for pregnancy and postpartum are herbs that reduce stress load and the safest ones to use without any adverse effects if someone has autoimmunity. We're always aware of adaptogens with anyone with autoimmune disorder and adaptogens are really reducing cortisol or helping our body break down cortisol. So we know cortisol is the stress hormone and it can cause a lot of havoc. Burnout is one of them. If we have a long term cortisol, inflammation, digestive distress, obviously that can lead to other major things down the road if it continues.

**Laura Ash:** [00:27:41] [00:27:41] And adaptogens have been used forever, have the best research of adaptogens through traditional Chinese medicine, but some of the best category of those and the safest for pregnancy and postpartum are mushrooms and very popular these days. I'm not talking about psychedelic mushrooms. That's a whole nother podcast if you want to jump into a different one. But I'm talking about medicinal mushrooms that are amazing for this foundation of health. And I really see mushrooms. If we look at a pyramid of how herbs are used and that foundation at the bottom, which is the immune system, right? It's the core thing that keeps us getting up on our feet faster, reducing or healing from any of these tissue tears, from birth, from trauma, from injury. Our immune system is the thing that's coming in and cleaning things up. It also keeps us from getting sick all the time. It gets us out of bed when we're feeling a little

unwell. We know we can do it. It's that deep sense of resilience. That's where mushrooms hang out. So Reishi mushroom is one of the best ones. Keep that deep, strong, resilient and deep immunity. And that's when you would take it daily and that's the one that you could put in your coffee, put in your tea, make in a broth if you want to. Easy to find these days. Thankfully, mushrooms are really popular, so you can absolutely take it in a lot of different forms. [00:29:01]

**Sarah Trott:** [00:29:02] And it sounds like these are going to be useful not only pre and post birth, but can continue to help women and men, everyone flourish. Kind of going on to the next topic, even for the long term. Even beyond that. So how does that look?

**Laura Ash:** [00:29:17] Like we had a pregnancy out as a sample the other day at the store and we had to put on there for everyone and all these people, men identified and older, older women and they're over 60 or like, Oh, that's not for me. I'm like, We need to change this title to the tea that says high mineral tea, right? Because what it is, is that it's so supportive of us as humans.

**Laura Ash:** [00:29:43] We evolved with plants. The only way we're here, you know, the most successful humans, which are Homo sapiens, had a diversity of food, which is why they survived so well. They were able to eat a lot of plants, a lot of meat. They were able to get nutrients from a lot of things. And because of that, we have been a successful species. And I work with indigenous communities and the Maasai in East Africa in the in the highlands of northern Tanzania, have studied herbal medicine from the animals. They watch the seeds, they eat, they watch what the giraffes eat, they watch what the birds eat and the elephants eat and use.

**Laura Ash:** [00:30:22] And so we have this tradition with herbal medicine that is for all times of life that I think it's often easy to forget and it's often deemed as witchcraft if someone uses herbal medicine. I have a vendetta around herbal medicine because of the cultural view that it can have. When I see people getting better every single day and living their best life every single day because they're integrating it, even if they're taking medication, even if they are on chemo, even if they are choosing a C-section planned

birth, they are going to feel better and they are going to heal quicker if they start using and integrating herbal medicine into their life.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:31:14] The negative connotation seems a little old fashioned at this point.

**Laura Ash:** [00:31:18] Agree. People are still, they're not everyone, but people are still there.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:31:24] Yeah. Listeners, open your mind. It's time to embrace alternatives that are safe, that are not like jumping to the deep end of other kinds of medication. Also, our bodies are very intuitive and we have a lot of what we need inside of us to heal. And I'm a big believer in that. And our power of thought and our power of thinking. We have so much power inside of us to influence our mind and our neurons and our hormones inside of our body. So I think that there's an interesting question that we could pose for listeners: what are the possibilities for my body and for being healthy?

**Laura Ash:** [00:32:07] Yeah. And one of the things that to add to your point about positive thinking, what I see herbal medicine do is let's say you are a clinically depressed person and that positive thinking feels like it's so far out of your realm. I see herbs as that bridge to even get to that point because they do, they can help increase Gaba, which is that quieting of that anxiety quieting of that monkey mind. I see them as this bridge of getting to the point where you can get out of bed and go look for a new job. Right? And these are herbs that help support you.

So this there are these in-between bridges with the goal of wanting to get to that mindset, the goal of wanting to have enough energy to go look for another job, send that email, you know, connect with friends that you feel want to feel connected to. They really can help shift these what we would consider energies in our body that we feel like it's all us. And a lot of it is because we're depleted. A lot of it is because we're not getting the right nutrients. A lot of it is because we're exhausted. And how do we support our body to kind of get up that things that are really good for us and do feed our

soul and our purpose in this life? I've seen herbs really shift people's chronic anxiety significantly, so they are living their best lives.

And that's the piece that I think people forget, is that they are great tools to get to the other side of not needing them every day. Right. They're not medication. You don't have to take it for the rest of your life. Actually, the more you take herbs, the stronger they get. Your body's being trained to find those new neurotransmitter pathways. If you're taking it for anxiety, your body is trained to or your digestion is healing taking herbs that are helping your digestion heal. Right? It's not forever steroids where if you stop taking them, everything goes back, right? It's very different in that way. It works with our body's own healing practices.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:34:15] Yeah, agreed. So now is the time where I'm going to put a disclaimer out there, which is so first of all, don't interpret anything we're saying as not to consult with your doctor. We wholeheartedly encourage anyone listening if they're interested in using herbal medicine, consult with your medical team, with your physician, your midwife. Talk to your medical team support team so that you get the okay to move forward because everyone's different around this. And also, we are believers in using what's right at the right time for your body. So we're not saying forgo other types of medicine, other types of Western medicine necessarily. Go to your doctor. If you break your arm, you need to go get that set. You know, there's their degrees to how this works.

**Laura Ash:** [00:35:02] Don't call me if you break your arm.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:35:04] No, no, no, no. So just want to make sure we're clear on that point. The point is about being open to the full spectrum of how you can use herbal medicine as a layer in your self-care and as your medical care and what that is that how that can be appropriately integrated into your health.

**Laura Ash:** [00:35:25] The majority of clients that I have are on medications and so a good practitioner will know what drug interactions exist. And integrative medicine is the future of medicine. It is the ability to take care of ourselves. And when a Western



medicine is needed, it's needed and we say yes to that. So I think the team of caregivers is a lucky thing to have if you have access to it. But do the research, you'll know of those medications. If you're on medications or a doctor puts you on medications and it works well for you, the research is out there on which herbs you shouldn't take when you're on it. And it's very straightforward. So a good herbalist will work with you on that.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:36:10] Perfect. So as we wrap up, let's talk practically for a moment. I'm someone listening to the show right now. I'm interested. I want to get started. Maybe pregnant, maybe postpartum, maybe the whole concept of children is a twinkle in your eye. They want to get started right away. What can they do? And some of the things that we touched on earlier: I know you have online education, You have the shop, even outside of your offerings. What can someone do right away if they're interested?

**Laura Ash:** [00:36:40] Yes. The biggest piece that I've seen with fertility when I've helped people try to get pregnant is stress, and for all genders and all partners. And so reducing stress load is an easy thing for me to say, but I can give some tools of helping reduce stress load. So especially if you're over 35 trying to get pregnant, stress is a really important piece. So stress and nutrition, so reducing stress load, there's the herbs adaptogens we've talked about. Feel free to research your own. Tulsi is one of my favorites. It's really lovely. Holy Basil. It's a lovely tea. Easy to find every natural food store. You'll see some tulsi tea in a tea box. You can start drinking it and feel like, Oh, I feel like I can handle some stressful situations a little better and I'm not as overwhelmed. And there's these little pieces that you'll start feeling about how these adaptogens are working.

**Laura Ash:** [00:37:38] Mushrooms we talked about. That's a great place to start. One of my favorites is Ashwagandha, especially if your partner is male. Ashwagandha can help actually increase virility for men and for people with penises. Maca is a great herb for all genders to help with actual semen count as well as motility. So there's some really good herbs out there that you would be able to find to start supporting this idea. I want to be as fertile as possible when I start trying or I'm trying right now and I haven't checked all these alternatives. Any midwife or OBGYN that's helping you with fertility knows about

these plants. And if they don't, it's easy to find clinical research on them and give them say, Hey, I'm interested in this, this is what I want to do.

**Laura Ash:** [00:38:27] I have presented many people's doctors with clinical trials. I love clinical trials. I'm involved in some new ones right now with skullcap for Anxiety. So I'm all for the newest research out there. And they're actually really wonderful support systems for you and your allopathic doctor. If that's something you want to go into, PubMed is a good place to start if you want to look for those.

**Laura Ash:** [00:38:50] And then the nutrition part of it is really important. I have seen people's fertility increase significantly by drinking bone broth. So one of the biggest challenges I've seen is people not eating as their ancestors ate when they're trying to get pregnant. So I always guide people into the direction of what did your ancestors eat? So my ancestors are of British and Swedish descent, and my ancestors ate reindeer nine months out of the year in order to survive The Arctic Circle. They also ate a lot of fish. So I actually survive a lot with protein, animal protein and with high fatty fish. That increased my vitality significantly. And so I would look at your ancestry and see what kind of foods they ate on a regular basis. Vegetarianism is usually not the best place to be supporting your fertility, and there's some good research on that. But if that's something that someone has a hard time with, I usually recommend just doing bone broth once a week as a medicine for them to support that fertility and that virility as they are really getting prepared to have a child again with all genders. And those are the two pieces, healthy fats, healthy proteins, and then really nutritive herbs and stress-supportive herbs for someone that is preparing to have a child.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:40:20] Perfect. And for pregnancy. Are there any tips for hands on things they can do right away?

**Laura Ash:** [00:40:29] A good prenatal is everything. I was very nauseous with both of my babies, so I swear to God, my prenatal was the one thing that gave them all their nutrition, a really good food based prenatal. There's a few companies that I know are doing really good ones. I don't know if we can talk about brands on this podcast, but my favorite is New Chapter, they're fermented foods and herbs, highly absorbable. Again, I

was very nauseous. I did not get nauseous with this supplement, so I do recommend them more than I recommend any other prenatal. And I did not experience any neon yellow urine or any constipation with both of my pregnancies. And I've seen a lot of people have extremely good results with that prenatal. It does have methylfolate. If you are someone with an mtf, mtf hr mutation, so you need methylated folate in order to get folic acid that is already in that supplement. So I would highly recommend that first because nausea does create such an extreme loss of nutrition. So you really need to make sure you're taking one of those. If you are someone with extreme nausea or if you're just someone that wants to eat donuts all day long, I think that's really important.

**Laura Ash:** [00:41:46] The second one would be pregnancy tea. We talked about Red Raspberry Leaf is supportive. It's a uterine tonic, so it actually tones the uterus the entire pregnancy so safe pre pregnancy in pregnancy and post pregnancy. It's not just for induction, it's not just for labor.

**Laura Ash:** [00:42:04] Many people walk into my store and they're like, Oh, I want this baby to come tomorrow. I need red raspberry leaf. And I'm like, I have other herbs for that. But you should have been doing this for nine months. I don't say that in that moment, but it is not going to make the baby show up. What it is, is when we're in labor and our our bodies contracting, we need tone. We need muscles, we need the ability to contract in order to push that baby out. Red raspberry leaf does that. It helps keep that tone the entire pregnancy. So when you're in labor, it actually supposed to make labor faster, make labor more efficient in some ways. And it has all those minerals. So red raspberry leaf is really important.

**Laura Ash:** [00:42:48] Nettles are really important. Nettles are these high mineral content, very traditional English herbs. You'll read them in all the traditional herbals. Nettles have always been a food and a traditional herbal medicine, but it also helps with edema. So any water retention that some pregnant people have can help reduce that water retention with nettles.

**Laura Ash:** [00:43:11] And then I like Nervines. Catnip is one we talked about earlier, and oat straw or milky oats - they're like those grassy oats that you see probably here in

California like all summer. And what those do is they actually nourish your nervous system so much that it's considered even stress reducing. And so it's a really good one to take in pregnancy and postpartum.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:43:37] Okay. And so anything specific to postpartum that you'd highlight if someone did one thing, what would it be?

**Laura Ash:** [00:43:50] Well I always make sure you have lactation herbs available because. Under production can be so scary for people about to nurse if you're nursing. Blessed Thistle is one of the best herbs and goat's Rue is one of the best herbs for milk production. Hops are actually one of the best herbs for milk production and I'm so glad hop water's exist now, so make sure you have some of those in your fridge because if you need extra milk production, hops is really good and hops are also calming and they're a really good Nervine, hence beer makes you very chilled out. And so hops are a really good way to get that postpartum support for milk production and calming your nerves.

**Laura Ash:** [00:44:34] And then I would say any sitz bath herb. So really using those astringent so calendula is one of the best herbs externally for any scarring, any wounds, any tears that you might have, your perineum or your vagina, you can use Calendula Salve, which is basically like a beeswax olive oil salve cream with Calendula. Calendula increases healing. It helps stitch skin cells back together and it reduces scar tissue. So sometimes if people have a C-section, they can actually drink calendula tea internally. It works with our lymph system. It's very good for our lymph, but also helps heal that scar tissue, reducing that scar tissue internally as well.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:45:15] Wow, that's amazing. So I'm going to take the opportunity to share that you have very generously offered to give a discount off of all the products on Scarlet Sage, 10% off using the code FOURTH. So please, if you're interested in trying some of these things today or later, remember that and use it and see what you think. I'd love to hear your feedback. So would Laura. Let us know.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:45:47] She also has the online courses, I think both on the verse as well as on Scarlet Sage. And some of them are free, so some of them are absolutely 100% free. You can go do some online education around herbal medicine if this is really piquing your interest, go deeper, go find out more. Check that out and then we will have all of this information on [Fourthtrimesterpodcast.com](http://Fourthtrimesterpodcast.com) as well.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:46:10] The site to go to for scarlet Sage is [scarletsage.com](http://scarletsage.com). And for the online education. Beyond that, you can go to [landofverse.com](http://landofverse.com). You can follow Laura @thescarletsage on Instagram as well as @landofverse. So we'll have links to those on the site as well. And there's even a special collection of pregnancy post birth products: <https://scarletsage.com/collections/pregnancy-post-birth>. We've talked about a lot of them today, but you can go and find that collection online, which is really neat.

**Sarah Trott:** [00:46:45] And this has been absolute gold dust. It's been amazing conversation and a lot of great practical information that women and families can put to use right away. And in fact, even beyond women and families, everyone, it sounds like, can put to use right away for using herbal medicine in their lives. Thank you so, so much, Laura. We really appreciate having you on the show. Thank you.

**Laura Ash:** [00:47:07] Thank you so much, Sarah. It was lovely. Thank you.

**Sarah Trott:** You can find out more about Esther Gallagher on <http://www.esthergallagher.com/>. You can also subscribe to this podcast in order to hear more from us. [Click here for iTunes](#) and [click here for Google Podcasts](#). Thank you for listening everyone and I hope you'll join us next time on the Fourth Trimester. The theme music on this podcast was created by Sean Trott. Hear more at <https://soundcloud.com/seantrott>. Special thanks to my true loves: my husband Ben, daughter Penelope, and baby girl Evelyn. Don't forget to share the Fourth Trimester Podcast with any new and expecting parents. I'm Sarah Trott. Goodbye for now.