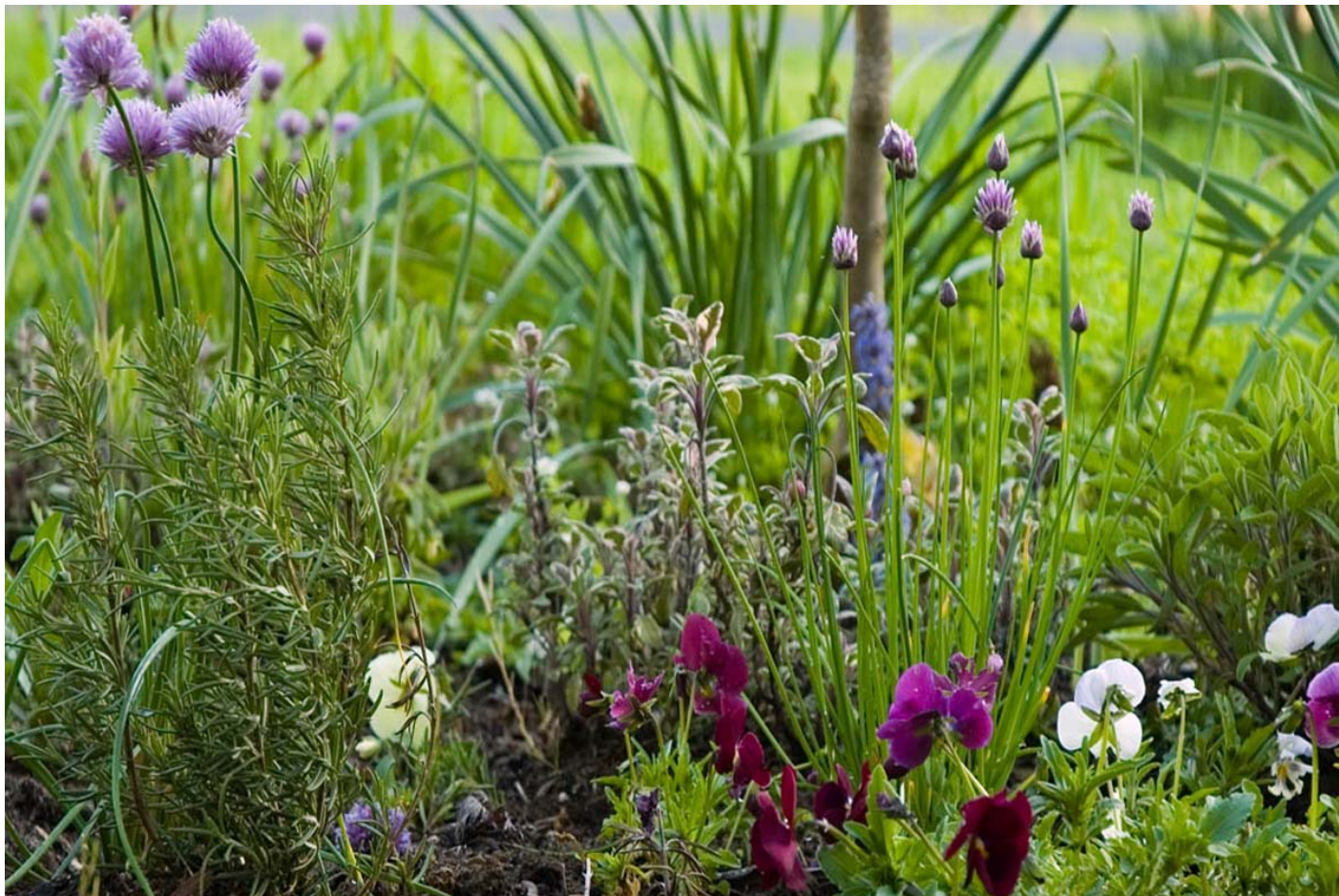


## **An Oceanographer with a Green Thumb**

**Author :** blueseas

**Date :** January 21, 2017



For those who have known me best as an oceanographer, it may seem strange that I've headed off in what appears to be an unusual direction – botany, ethnobotany, herbalism, and permaculture. However, I come by these interests quite naturally. My parents were farmers, and I spent about half of my childhood growing up on a cattle ranch, and the remainder of my childhood living and working on a fruit orchard. I have always had a close connection to the land and living, growing things. I started gardening as a child, and have grown gardens in a variety of locations off and on throughout my life. My mother is an Irish-descent Canadian, and she learned both Celtic and North American plant lore from her parents. Fortunately, I inherited an interest in this type of knowledge.

When I graduated from high school, I decided to take a science degree. I've always enjoyed

## Storytelling

The adventure goes on ...

<http://oceanecology.ca/wp>

---

science and nature, so this seemed like a good course of action. I ended up with a B.Sc. in combined chemistry/biochemistry. While I had enjoyed my studies greatly, when I looked at the potential job options available with my new degree, I discovered that most of them were lab jobs working for the big chemical industries. This wasn't what I had hoped for at all.

It was at that point in my life that I realized that what I really wanted to be was a naturalist, a "jane-of-all trades" scientist who went out and did real field work and didn't just work at a lab bench in some huge plant somewhere. Also, I had begun to develop what has become a life-long love of the sea and the creatures that inhabit it. Thus I decided to continue with my education, and enrolled in a graduate degree in oceanography at UBC with a specialization in both chemistry and biology. I became a "chemical ecologist", a person who looks at the chemicals produced by different organisms and how these chemicals allow organisms to communicate, deter predators, and carry out numerous other ecological roles in their environments. While my personal focus was on the chemical ecology of the natural environment, the lab that I was working at had another focus as well – "drugs from the sea". As a result, I became acquainted with the big drug companies and the long and arduous process of drug screening and testing.

Our lives' journeys take us on interesting paths, and mine took me north to the community of Prince Rupert, where I became an instructor at the local community college for 12 years, teaching chemistry, biology, botany, zoology, ecology, and oceanography. I researched and designed components for my courses involving local and Western ethnobotany, plant collection and identification, and proper herbarium techniques. I led many, many botany field trips with community members during those years.

Recently, I completed my Permaculture Design Certificate, a course that has deepening and broadening by knowledge and wisdom as I take this new path.

So, strange as it may seem, I'm an oceanographer with a green thumb and one foot on land!