

Curanderismo

The history, traditions, rituals, herbs, and remedies of Curanderismo are a folk healing tradition of the Southwestern United States, Latin America, and Mexico, as well as Native American people.

Since time immemorial, elements of nature were gathered to create herbal remedies and perform ceremonies. Through the study and practice of ethnobotany, also known as traditional ecological knowledge, indigenous peoples established an innate relationship with the environment. Stories, language, art, and ceremonies incorporated plants and contributed to the maintenance of health and cultural practices, which have been maintained by traditional beliefs and close connections with the environment.

Indo-Hispanic healing rituals included holistic treatments for intestinal blockage (*empacho*), spiritual cleansings (*limpias*), laugh therapy (*risa terapia*), shawl alignments (*manteadas*) and preparation of medicinal teas (*tes medicinales*). Curanderas also served as *partera* (midwife), *sobadora* (folk chiropractor), and the *yerbera* (herbalist).

In communities throughout New Mexico, for most of its history, healing the sick and injured fell on those who had the knowledge of local herbs and remedies. Storyteller Ray John de Aragón recounts the history of the Battle of Glorieta Pass in his book, "Haunted Santa Fe", noting that Curanderas were called to treat the sick and wounded soldiers in 1862, because there weren't enough medical personnel provided by the military.

Another legend Ray John shares is a tale from the early 1600s, about the fate of a Spanish soldier, Juan Espinosa, who bequeathed a magic love potion from two witches or *brujas*, at the oldest house located next to the San Miguel Mission in Santa Fe. When the soldier failed to follow the instructions for the charms given, the spell did not work and he sought vengeance. In a skirmish with the witches, Juan fell on his sword and was stabbed in the stomach; his head was then cut off by the witches. The ghost of Juan Espinosa is said to haunt the grounds of the oldest house.

Since 2000, the University of New Mexico has been offering a two-week summer course on Curanderismo. The course uses instructors who are healers and health practitioners from the Southwest, Mexico, and the Albuquerque community to provide information on the history of Curanderismo (the art of Mexican Folk Healing) in the Southwest and Mexico. Students explore integrative approaches to medicine and featured demonstrations that incorporate traditional and holistic health techniques.

Today, traditional healers and Curanderismo practitioners often hold down full-time jobs, taking weekends or evenings to perform ceremonies, consult with the infirmed by phone/email/online, and administer remedies. Located on the southwest side of Santa Fe is a traditional herbal store, *Yerberia*, which sells natural remedies to local residents.

Curanderas, sometimes called witches, have existed in New Mexico for centuries. The practice has been passed down through oral history and apprenticeships, and continues today. The knowledge used in traditional methods of healing are dynamic, and have adapted to our changing environment throughout time. The future practice of Curanderismo might be different due to the impacts of a rapidly changing climate. and the disappearance of biodiversity of plants on our planet.

Sources:

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3. <https://www.nmhistoricwomen.org/location/curanderas-women-who-heal/>
4. [Las Curanderas: Traditional Healers in New Mexico - Mother Earth Living | Healthy Life, Natural Beauty](#)
5. Carol Shepard McClain. Women as healers: cross-cultural perspectives. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989.
6. Video: [Speaking chicana : voice, power & identity / presented by Maria Dolores Gonzales and Margaret Montoya and Women's Tales from the New Mexico WPA: la Diabla a Pie / presented by Tey Diana Rebolledo and Maria Teresa Marquez - UNM CSWR Center for Regional Studies Sponsored Videos - CONTENTdm Title](#)
7. Bobette Perrone, Henrietta Stockel, Victoria Krueger. Medicine women, curanderas, and women doctors. University of Oklahoma Press, 1989.
8. [UNM Curanderismo Class | The University of New Mexico](#)
9. Take a field trip to the Santa Fe Botanical Garden ethnobotany exhibit: [Ojos y Manos: Eyes and Hands Garden – Santa Fe Botanical Garden](#)