



# Witchcraft From the Inside: Origins of the Fastest Growing Religious Movement in America

*Raymond Buckland*

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The word Witchcraft has been misunderstood for centuries. In the past 500 years, millions of people have faced persecution, torture, and even death after being accused of practicing Witchcraft.

For many people the word "Witch" still conjures up images of secret spells and diabolical midnight rituals. So what exactly is Witchcraft (also called Wica or Wicca), and how did it evolve into one of today's fastest-growing religions?

*Witchcraft From the Inside* presents the history of Witchcraft—from its roots in ancient fertility religions, to the madness of the *Malleus Maleficarum* and the European Witch trials, to the growth of modern Wicca in Britain and the United States. Essays contributed by leading Wiccan authorities explore the present state of Wicca and provide a glimpse into the future of this peaceful nature religion.

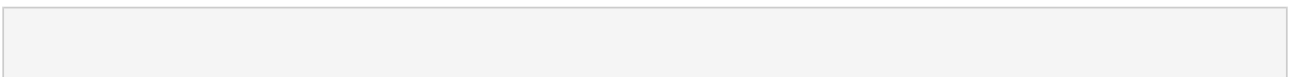
Author Ray Buckland studied Witchcraft under Gerald Gardner, the man largely credited for the revival of Witchcraft and the establishment of Wicca as a modern religion. Mr. Buckland was instrumental in bringing Gardnerian Witchcraft from England to the United States and is considered to be one of the leading American authorities on Witchcraft.

In the following excerpt, Mr. Buckland explains the mundane truths behind the seemingly horrific ingredients of the legendary "witches' brews".

We know, from Shakespeare and other sources, that the Witches threw into their pots the most gruesome ingredients, right? There were things like the tongue of a snake, bloody fingers, catgut, donkey's eyes, frog's foot, goat's beard, a Jew's ear, mouse tail, snake head, swine snout, wolf's foot, and so on. Pretty disgusting by the sound of it—if you take them at face value! In fact these were all the most innocuous of ingredients: normal plants and herbs.

Today all plants have a Latin name, so that they may be distinct and positively identified. Yet years ago they were known only by common, local names. A plant or herb might be known by one name in one part of the country and a quite different name in another part of the country. And these names were colorful ones, frequently given to the plant because of its looks, color, or other attributes.

In the above list, adder's tongue was a name given to the dogtooth violet (*Erythronium americanum*); bloody fingers was the foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*); catgut was the hoary pea (*Tephrosia virginiana*); donkey's eyes were the seeds of the cowage plant (*Mucuna pruriens*); frog's foot was the bulbous buttercup (*Ranunculus bulbosus*); goat's beard was the vegetable oyster (*Tragopogon porrofolius*); Jew's ear was a fungus that grew on elder trees and elm trees (*Peziza auricula*); mouse tail was common stonecrop (*Sedum acre*); snake head was balmony (*Chelone glabra*); swine snout was the dandelion (*Taraxacum dens leonis*); and wolf's foot was bugle weed (*Lycopus virginicus*). So the seemingly fearsome concoctions that the Witches mixed up in their cauldrons were nothing more than simple herbs going into a cookpot!



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