The impact of plants on human history has been immeasurable; it started even before humans first cultivated plants more than 10,000 years ago. Plants provide nourishment, shelter, fibers, fuel, transportation—the list goes on. But one contribution that has significantly influenced the lives of humans is the medicinal benefits that plants provide.

In Pompeii, an ancient Roman city famous for its gardens and flower culture, plants were, and still are, used as healing agents. After the sudden eruption of Mount Vesuvius in the year AD 79, layers of hot ash and volcanic debris buried the city, preserving plant material that would later be discovered by archaeologists. Early excavations revealed frescos depicting plants, many accurately enough that genera and some species could be recognized.

Wilhelmina Jashemski, professor of ancient history and pioneer of the field of garden archaeology, contributed extensively to our knowledge of medicinal plants used by ancient Pompeians. On an early summer morning in 1966, during an excavation in Pompeii, Jashemski observed workers digging up bright green weeds to bring home at the end of the day. These plants, as she would soon find out, were gathered by modern Pompeians for medicinal purposes. Excited by the possibility that in ancient times these plants might have been used for the same purpose, she began studying carbonized plant material, pollen, and plaster casts of root cavities to determine which species Pompeians were growing.

Plants of Pompeii: Ancient and Modern Medicinal Plants features plant portraits created by Victoria I and Lillian Nicholson Meyer for Jashemski’s book *A Pompeian Herbal* (1999). The portraits illustrate those plants identified in the excavations, some of which still grow in Pompeii today. Many of these can be found outdoors in the Botanic Garden, in the Lyman Conservatory, and maybe in your own garden.