

The Second Annual Gullah Geechee Herbalist Gathering

Khetnu Nefer

My name is Khetnu Nefer, and the Gullah Geechee Herbalist Gathering is a creation I built out of pure passion. I am also the owner and operator of, A Soulful Touch Wellness.

The second annual Gullah Geechee Herbal Gathering was held on March 27th, 2021, on my family's private property, on the picturesque Johns Island, South Carolina. The mission of this herbal conference is to provide a space for Black and Indigenous herbalists and the communities that they serve to converge and learn from each other. It is the first event of its kind that merges traditional Gullah Geechee culture and herbalism from the perspective of Black and Indigenous Peoples.

We hosted 11 herbal and Gullah Geechee cultural workshops taught by Black and Indigenous herbalists and culturists from around the country during the conference. This year's workshop topics included herbs for respiratory health, Gullah Geechee concoctions, Indigo

as a culture, the importance of detoxification, womb health, Afrilachian herbal culture, and a local plant walk to help identify herbs and fauna indigenous to the area. Presenters included Yuma "Docta Yew" Bellomee, holistic health educator and herbalist Lucretia VanDyke, Gullah Geechee herbalist Khet Waas Hutip, and artist, herbalist, and activist Ayo Ngozi Drayton.

The Gathering opened with a Libation ceremony led by Chieftess Dr. E-Star, president of the Linna Indigenous Medical Board and West African drumming from Ni Dembaya African Drum and Dance Ensemble out of Washington, DC. Attendees danced and swayed to the rhythms under the beautiful warm South Carolina sun. After the opening ceremonies, they were encouraged to attend the first of three breakout workshop sessions held under tents so that attendees could enjoy being outside in the Low Country while providing adequate social distancing measures.



Khetnu Nefer, is the Author of *28 Days to A Soulful Life* and *28 Days to A Soulful Life Guided Journal*. By day, she is the Chief Enthusiasm Officer of A Soulful Touch Wellness, her mobile holistic health practice for women located in Washington, DC which aids women in seeking tranquility and greater health through practical holistic health solutions like massage therapy, womb steams, holistic health coaching, auricular therapy, reiki, and her artisan tea blends.

During the second set of breakout sessions, attendees had the opportunity to support the African Marketplace, which included Black and Indigenous vendors from around the country. Gullah Geechee owned Heirloom Spiritual Apothecary offered various products like artisan herbal tea blends, books, hoodoo-inspired t-shirts, incense, salves, and other herbal goodies. Squeals of delights could be heard from vendor tents as attendees discovered goodies and chatted with the vendors.

The gathering also included hands-on healing sessions. Acupuncturist Geoff “Geo” Edwards offered moxibustion sessions, while reiki and heart touch healing sessions were offered by breath master Aaron Mottely and his wife Trina. This was a vital component of the gathering. It illustrated the need for opportunities for Black and Indigenous people to receive quality holistic services from people who look like us. In addition, local food vendor Wings N Things

food truck provided delicious meal options for attendees to enjoy as they enjoyed themselves and networked.

The conference ended with heartfelt closing words from myself and a raffle of gifts donated by sponsors. One of the most coveted raffle gifts was the book *Krak Teet: A catalog of Black Savannah’s Biographies* by Trelani Michelle, which chronicles first-hand accounts from Gullah Geechee elders of Savannah, Ga. In addition, we offered copies of my book *28 Days to A Soulful Life* and the accompanying journal, *28 Days to A Soulful Life Guided Journal*. Finally, we concluded our day with drumming from the Ni Dembaya African Drum and Dance Ensemble, as attendees danced and celebrated a beautiful day of herbal knowledge and community.

This event was such a success because of the support of many generous and amazing sponsors, which included Acres of Ancestry, a mutual aid group helping Black farmers regenerate land





ownership; Chestnut Herbal School; Hood Herbalism: a BIPOC community herbal education project; Herb Pharm; Traditional Medicinals; The Gullah Geechee Sea Island Coalition and the Collective Health Initiative, a group of Black and Indigenous holistic health practitioners from Washington, DC who banded together to educate and heal the underserved in their community.

I am currently the sole organizer of the Gullah Geechee Herbal Gathering. As this work continues, I am interested in expanding the conference from a one-day event to a two-day event next year. The tentative dates for next year's gathering are March 26-27, 2022, at John's Island, South Carolina. Next year's conference is moving towards including children's programming and the opportunity for overnight camping on family land.

This year I was overwhelmed with the enthusiastic response that I received for this year's gathering. There were moments I had to turn away interested attendees to adhere to South Carolina's restrictions due to the pandemic. However, these regulations did not stop attendees who traveled from as far

away as Toronto, Canada; New Jersey, DC, and Atlanta from being in attendance. Many expressed their sheer gratitude for the event, many remarking that they felt that they found their "community," which is genuinely one of the goals I set out for the event.





To learn more about the Gullah Geechee Herbal Gathering, please visit the website at www.gullahgeecheeherbalgathering.com and follow their social media at [@Gullahgeecheeherbs](https://www.instagram.com/Gullahgeecheeherbs) on Instagram.