



Story of the Zigzag Clover

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The story of the pattern is rooted in close observation of northern plants and traditional herbal knowledge. It reflects a personal process of rediscovering plant wisdom and encourages slower, more attentive engagement with the nature around us.

In old times, plants were commonly used in food, folk medicine and rituals. Knowledge of plants has been passed down through generations; however, it has been partly lost and forgotten in modern life, where bonds with nature have weakened. Through the zigzag clover embroidery pattern, I seek to invite others to pay deeper attention to the plants around us and the ecological wisdom they embody, echoing Kimmerer's understanding of plants as ancient teachers (Figures 1–2). Moreover, she explains that in some Native languages, the term for plants means *'those who take care of us'*. Kimmerer (2013) calls us to carefully listen to plants and pay attention; by doing so, we can express our care.

While living in the North, my attention has gradually turned toward local plants and their potential as sources of nourishment and healing. Through spending time outdoors, observing, sketching, and

photographing plants during the summer months, I began to notice them more closely, and with growing curiosity. At the early stage of developing my embroidery pattern, I joined an online seminar on northern herbs organised by the Gifts from the Sentient Forest project, where I learned about angelica, nettle, Labrador tea, and many other northern plants that hold deep wisdom and forgotten gifts for humans.

Inspired by the seminar on northern herbs, I sketched and embroidered Labrador tea and angelica, with which I felt a special connection (Figures 3–4). Embroidering these plants felt meditative and calming, and I initially considered developing Labrador tea into an embroidery pattern. However, redrawing the plant's small details, especially the flower petals, into vectors for laser cut of the stencils became quite complex. I therefore continued the exploration of nearby growing plants and a red clover drew my attention. Clovers grow in our yard, and I often observe bumblebees as they gently move from one flower to another. I began to wonder what other quiet qualities the plant might hold, beyond its sweet nectar. I also recall myself as a child searching for a rare four-leaf clover as a sign of luck, something that seems to be shared across many cultures. Looking through a book on northern plants, I found that clover has been valued for its healing properties as well as for food uses (Gray, 2011).

◀◀ **FIGURE 1.** Meadow flowers. Photograph: Tatiana Kravtsov, 2024.

◀ **FIGURE 2.** DIY wool embroidery kit with naturally dyed yarns. Photograph: Tatiana Kravtsov, 2026.

Inspired by its tenderness and wisdom, I sketched various patterns and stitched the clover flowers into the wool fabric (Figure 5). I explored and tested various compositions and stitches, as well as a variety of naturally dyed wool yarn shades and thicknesses. In one test, I used thin yarn for the leaves and thicker yarn for the flower. This combination elicited an encouraging comment from a colleague, who noted that the thick yarn gives the flower petals volume while the leaves look flatter, which is reminiscent of the plant in nature.

I was pleased with the composition, yarn colours, and thickness, but one detail felt incomplete: the leaves lacked a light, moon-shaped spot which is typical to the red clovers. I started exploring one clover species after another, discovering dozens, and one of them caught my attention: a zigzag clover. Visually, this species has narrower leaves, and flowers are deeper purple-red (Ihamuotila, 2011). The plant is native to western Asia and much of Europe, including Southern Finland. The Finnish name metsäaapila reflects its natural wild environment: it can be found growing in edge zones between forest and meadow. By offering nectar to honey bees, bumblebees, and butterflies, and by improving soil fertility through nitrogen fixation, zigzag clover plays a small but vital role in supporting biodiversity (Easyscape, n.d.). Based on these small discoveries, I made a new sketch for the embroidery kit. By combining bright and darker green for the leaves, the pattern became livelier and evoked a sense of sunlight, reminiscent of the shadowy forest and sunny meadows.

Naturally dyed yarn allowed the soft greens and purples of clover to be reflected, gently emerging from the woolly black fabric. Within its tender appearance, I wished to evoke the symbolism it carries. In some folk traditions, including those of Northern Europe, clover was often believed to be a spiritually significant plant, symbolising protection and harmony (Green, n.d). Embroidering each



▲ **FIGURES 3-5.** Embroidery tests: Labrador tea, angelica, clovers. Photographs: Tatiana Kravtsov, 2026.

leaf and flower petal slowly and patiently invites a grounding ritual, nurturing care for both our inner balance and the plant itself. Stitch by stitch, we may begin to reawaken our connection with the plants, listening more carefully to the wisdom they hold.

References:

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