# BRAIDING Sweetgrass

INDIGENOUS WISDOM, SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, AND THE TEACHINGS OF PLANTS



## ROBIN WALL KIMMERER

"A great teacher, her words are a hymn of love to the world." - ELIZABETH GILBERT

## BRAIDING SWEETGRASS

Also by Robin Wall Kimmerer Gathering Moss

# BRAIDING SWEETGRASS

## Robin Wall Kimmerer



© 2013, Text by Robin Wall Kimmerer

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical articles or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher: Milkweed Editions, 1011 Washington Avenue South, Suite 300, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55415.

(800) 520-6455

www.milkweed.org

Published 2013 by Milkweed Editions

Printed in Canada

Cover design by Gretchen Achilles / Wavetrap Design

Cover photo © Teresa Carey

Author photo by Dale Kakkak

13 14 15 16 17 5 4 3 2 1

#### First Edition

Milkweed Editions, an independent nonprofit publisher, gratefully acknowledges sustaining support from the Bush Foundation; the Patrick and Aimee Butler Foundation; the Dougherty Family Foundation; the Driscoll Foundation; the Jerome Foundation; the Lindquist & Vennum Foundation; the McKnight Foundation; the voters of Minnesota through a Minnesota State Arts Board Operating Support grant, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund, and a grant from the Wells Fargo Foundation Minnesota; the National Endowment for the Arts; the Target Foundation; and other generous contributions from foundations, corporations, and individuals. For a full listing of Milkweed Editions supporters, please visit www.milkweed.org.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kimmerer, Robin Wall.

Braiding sweetgrass : indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants / Robin Wall Kimmerer. — First edition.

pages cm

Summary: "As a leading researcher in the field of biology, Robin Wall Kimmerer understands the delicate state of our world. But as an active member of the Potawatomi nation, she senses and relates to the world through a way of knowing far older than any science. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, she intertwines these two modes of awareness—the analytic and the emotional, the scientific and the cultural—to ultimately reveal a path toward healing the rift

that grows between people and nature. The woven essays that construct this book bring people back into conversation with all that is green and growing; a universe that never stopped speaking to us, even when we forgot how to listen"—Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-1-57131-335-5 (hardback : alkaline paper)

1. Indian philosophy. 2. Indigenous peoples - Ecology. 3. Philosophy of nature.

4. Human ecology—Philosophy. 5. Nature—Effect of human beings on. 6. Human-plant relationships. 7. Botany—Philosophy. 8. Kimmerer, Robin Wall. 9. Potawatomi Indians—Biography. 10. Potawatomi Indians—Social life and customs. I. Title.

E98.P5K56 2013

305.597-dc23

2013012563

Milkweed Editions is committed to ecological stewardship. We strive to align our book production practices with this principle, and to reduce the impact of our operations in the environment. We are a member of the Green Press Initiative, a nonprofit coalition of publishers, manufacturers, and authors working to protect the world's endangered forests and conserve natural resources. *Braiding Sweetgrass* was printed on acid-free 100 % postconsumer-waste paper by Friesens Corporation.

For all the Keepers of the Fire my parents my daughters and my grandchildren yet to join us in this beautiful place

### CONTENTS

#### Preface

PLANTING SWEETGRASS

Skywoman Falling

The Council of Pecans

The Gift of Strawberries

An Offering

Asters and Goldenrod

Learning the Grammar of Animacy

#### TENDING SWEETGRASS

Maple Sugar Moon

Witch Hazel

A Mother's Work

The Consolation of Water Lilies

Allegiance to Gratitude

PICKING SWEETGRASS

Epiphany in the Beans

The Three Sisters

Wisgaak Gok penagen: A Black Ash Basket

Mishkos Kenomagwen: The Teachings of Grass

Maple Nation: A Citizenship Guide

The Honorable Harvest

BRAIDING SWEETGRASS

In the Footsteps of Nanabozho: Becoming Indigenous to Place

The Sound of Silverbells

Sitting in a Circle

**Burning Cascade Head** 

**Putting Down Roots** 

Umbilicaria: The Belly Button of the World

**Old-Growth Children** 

Witness to the Rain

**BURNING SWEETGRASS** 

Windigo Footprints

The Sacred and the Superfund

People of Corn, People of Light

**Collateral Damage** 

Shkitagen: People of the Seventh Fire

**Defeating Windigo** 

Epilogue: Returning the Gift

Notes

Sources

Acknowledgments