



ALCHEMICAL TAROT & GUIDEBOOK



The
Living Altar

*A guide to creating a space for intention,
support, and spiritual practice*

LOLA PICKETT

A place where your attention gathers

An altar is simply a place to focus. It can live on a windowsill, a bookshelf, the corner of your desk, or a flat stone at the edge of your garden. It asks for no religion, no doctrine, and no particular belief. It asks for your presence.

Altars offer a space to hold and uphold your intentions. They give your focus somewhere to land, a physical anchor for the invisible work of becoming. This is where you name what you are calling in, where you ask for the support you need, and where you return, again and again, to the ground of your own practice.

FOCUS

A home for your intentions, so you remember WHY you are doing this work.

SUPPORT

A threshold where you invite help from whatever guides and allies resonate with you.

GROUND

A steady place to return to, so your practice has roots.

Whatever you call the support that meets you here (Spirit, Source, the Ancestors, the land, the animal messengers, or your own deepest knowing) is yours to name. The altar works with all of it, and with none of it. Your attention is the only offering it truly requires.

*You are not alone in holding your space.
Your altar is where you remember that.*

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Honoring where you stand

Every altar rests on land with its own long story. Before you build, take a moment to acknowledge the Peoples who were and are the original stewards of the place where you live, and the healing traditions of your own ancestry, as far back as you are able to see them.

In this way, you meet your practice in fullness, as an equal, rather than coming to spirituality and ritual with hunger and shame. You do not need to borrow anyone else's sacred forms to build an altar that is deeply your own.

REFLECT

| What do you know of where and from whom you emerged?

| Who were and are the indigenous land keepers where you live?

| What teachers, human and wild, would you like to acknowledge on your altar?

| Are there practices from your own lineage you feel called to explore or reclaim?

Notes:

Choosing your space

Altars can be as simple or elaborate as you'd like... A single candle and a stone can hold as much power as a full table. What matters most is that your altar has its own delineated space: a small table, an altar cloth or scarf, a tray, a shelf, or any other place you dedicate to it.

Choose somewhere you will see often, where your altar can rest undisturbed, and where you can comfortably sit or stand in front of it. If you share your home, a small portable altar on a tray or wrapped in a cloth travels beautifully and keeps your practice private when you want it to be.

Think about the textures, colors, scents, and sounds that bring your body into ease. Your altar is part of your "setting," the outer environment that supports your inner one.

REFLECT

| *Where in your home do you already feel most at peace?*

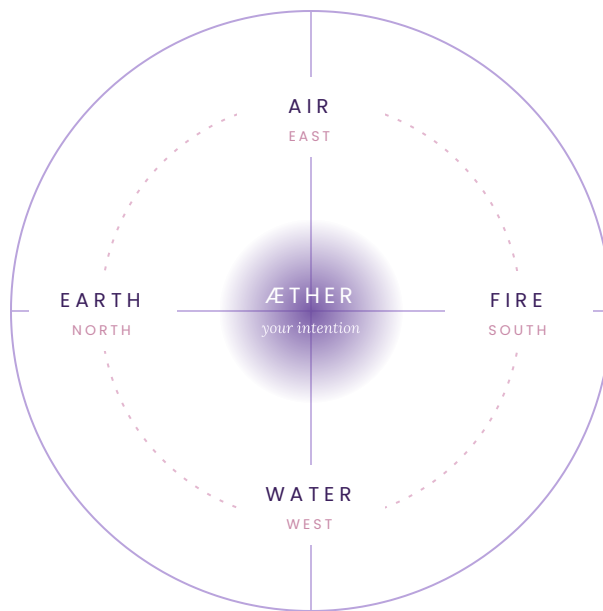
| *What textures, colors, and scents help you feel safe and open?*

| *What do you want to make sure you ALWAYS have near your altar?*

Notes:

The elements as your map

You may choose to align your altar, or the items on it, with the four directions or with sacred geometry. The Wild Messengers move through five elements, and they make a natural map: Air, Fire, Water, and Earth around the edges, with Æther, the quintessence, holding the center.



One common arrangement, shown as if you are standing at the altar facing East. Many traditions place the elements differently. Follow what you have been taught, or what feels true on the land where you live.

- ✦ **Air** feathers, incense, a bell, written words
- ✦ **Fire** a candle, something golden, a symbol of the Sun
- ✦ **Water** a bowl of water, a shell, a symbol of the Moon
- ✦ **Earth** stones, soil, seeds, a living plant
- ✦ **Æther** your written intention, or the Wild Messenger walking with you now

GATHERING

What to place on your altar

We like to include our own power talismans and sacred objects: the things that carry a charge for us, that we've been gifted, found, or made. Here is what we'll often place on our own altar cloth:

- ✦ Smoky Quartz for clearing energy
- ✦ Selenite to keep the space clear and aligned
- ✦ Talismans for the Sun, the Moon, and the Earth
- ✦ Fresh flowers and herbs from the local environment
- ✦ Imagery or icons of teachers, guides, or ancestors

Let every object earn its place. Each decision, object, and expression carries a frequency that will amplify or detract from your intention. When you hold something in your hand and feel a quiet yes, it belongs. When you feel a flicker of *should*, let it go.

Your altar can be as playful, humble, and surprising as you are. A child's drawing, a feather from a morning walk, a note in your grandmother's handwriting all belong here as fully as any crystal. Ego is wrapped up in appearances. Soul is game for the experiment. The more *YOU* your altar is, the more fully it will hold you.

REFLECT

| What objects already carry power or memory for you?

| Is there any perfectionism around your tools and practices? Where can you simplify?

Notes:

Setting your intention

Intention is EVERYTHING. (Okay, almost everything...) Without a focused intention, it can be hard to release into trust and remember why you are doing this work.

Being intentional means to begin, and behave, with the ideal result in mind. Your altar becomes the visible form of that intention, a place your eyes and heart return to each day.

THE RECIPE FOR A POWERFUL INTENTION

- ✦ A simply stated desired result. Keep it short enough to remember. Simple is supportive.
- ✦ Non-attachment to form and timing
- ✦ Trust that ALL is now unfolding in support of the intention
- ✦ Trust that what you receive is what you're available to receive

Sometimes we receive the opposite of what we asked for in the process of calibration. An intention may create dissonance so that resonance becomes more obvious. This is part of the path, and your altar holds steady through those waves.

PRACTICE

Write your intention in a single sentence. Read it aloud once, then place it at the center of your altar, beneath a stone, a candle, or the card that speaks to it.

My intention:

OPENING

Calling in support

Clear the space. Begin by clearing and cleansing, according to your own teachings or lineage. Herbal or resin smoke is a classic ally, and its scent helps shift you into a ritual mindset. Sound clears beautifully too: a bell, a rattle, a drum, or your own voice. So does water, a mist of Agua de Florida or another aromatic ally, or simply opening a window and letting fresh air move through.

Invite your helpers. Remember that you are not ALONE in holding your space, and trying to hold it with your energy alone will exhaust and deplete you. Support needs to be INVOKED and INVITED in order to assist you. You might call in the directions, invoke the elements, speak to your Ancestors, welcome the healthy Spirits of the land, or place a specific item on your altar as a sign of welcome.

Hold your boundaries. You have a SAY in what you experience, and in how you perceive it. If you are ever unsure whether a presence is beneficial, ask three times: "*Are you here for my best and highest good?*" Beneficial Spirits will reveal themselves as such, and anything else can be asked to leave.

REFLECT

| *Are there traditions from your lineage for calling in sacred space?*

| *Who or what do you want to invite to your altar? How will you welcome them?*

Notes:

Tending your altar

An altar is alive. It asks to be visited, refreshed, and listened to. A few breaths in front of it each morning will do more than an elaborate ritual once a month.

Your altar is also a place to come back to your body. When you feel scattered or overwhelmed, let your eyes rest on your altar. Attend to your breath. Feel the ground beneath you. Let your senses tell you where you are.

Healing and growth happen in waves. The quiet stretches, the dips and lulls, are where integration happens, even when they look like nothing is moving. Your altar keeps your intention steady through every part of the wave.

WAYS TO TEND

- ✦ Light a candle and speak your intention aloud
- ✦ Replace wilted flowers with fresh ones from your surroundings
- ✦ Add something each time you notice a sign or receive an insight
- ✦ Shift the arrangement as the seasons and moons change
- ✦ Dust, wipe, and clear. Care is its own form of devotion.

REFLECT

| When in your day can you pause at your altar, even for one minute?

Notes:

CLOSING

Closing and clearing the space

Closing a ritual is just as important as opening it. A clear ending helps you return to ordinary life and lets what you received begin to settle in. The same is true when an intention has been fulfilled and it's time to take your altar down or begin again.

- ✦ Thank and release the Spirits, Ancestors, Elements, Directions, or anything else you invited in
- ✦ Snuff any candles you lit
- ✦ Use water, smoke, or sound to clear the space
- ✦ Visualize your energy returning to you, palpably, all the way home
- ✦ Return flowers, herbs, and natural offerings to the earth

THERE WILL BE SNACKS

After any ritual, come back more fully into your body and into the present moment. Food is an important ally here. A cup of tulsi rose tea, a square of dark chocolate, a handful of berries... even a few bites support you as you rest and integrate.

Let what you received percolate. Think of it as a private inner fire to cultivate and nurture. Once it's strong, with plenty of internal fuel, you can share it with discernment.

Notes:

Inviting a messenger to your altar

The animals of the Wild Messengers deck are allies, teachers, and mirrors. Placing one at the center of your altar gives your intention a living guide, and gives you a presence to return to each day.

A SIMPLE PRACTICE

Clear your space and light a candle. Hold the deck in both hands and breathe until you feel settled. Ask: *"Who walks with me now?"* Draw one card and place it at the center of your altar, in the place of Æther.

Sit with your messenger. Notice its eyes, its posture, the landscape around it. Read its words in the guidebook, then set the book aside and listen for what it has to say to you alone. Keep it on your altar for as long as it feels alive, a day, a moon cycle, or a full season.

When its time is complete, thank it and return it to the deck. Another will come forward when you are ready.

REFLECT

| Which messenger came forward? What did you feel when you first saw it?

| What is it asking you to release? What power is it helping you reclaim?

Notes:



A blessing for your altar

*May your altar hold you
the way the earth holds the roots,
quietly, completely,
and without condition.*

CONTINUE THE JOURNEY

Your altar is a beginning. The rest of my work lives at Embody the Dragon,
where the practices in this guide grow deeper roots.

embodythedragon.com

Instagram: [@its.thedragonoracle](https://www.instagram.com/its.thedragonoracle)

WILD MESSENGERS ALCHEMICAL TAROT

wildmessengers.com

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