

POTPOURRI



March, 2003

Volume 10, Issue 7

www.austinherbsociety.org

HERBAL GREETINGS

Spring is right around the corner. Can you feel it? Can you smell it? Some how the air seems softer and the breeze is fragrant with newly blooming herbs and flowers. I'm already out looking at new varieties of herbs for my containers and herb beds. There are many new varieties available for small gardens and/or containers that are just waiting to come home and take their places right beside all of your beloved older varieties. Some new varieties are only obtained by mail order so you may have to order them directly but I'm sure that you'll find many beautiful plants at our Sponsors' nurseries and at the Zilker Garden Fest. A new creeping thyme to look for is 'Ohme Garden Carpet' (*Thymus serpyllum*) which is a 3" thick ground cover with mauve-pink flowers that is heat tolerant and available through High Country Gardens (800-925-9387 or www.highcountrygardens.com). If you want a showstopper and something different from the usual coneflower then 'Razzmatazz' (*Echinacea purpurea*) is an obvious choice. This new variety of coneflower is a bright pink double flower that is 3" to 4" in size and very heat tolerant and is available from Wayside Gardens (800-845-1124 or www.waysidegardens.com). Another smashing one comes from Jung Seed (800-247-5864 or www.jungseed.com). Called "Vintage Wine", it is a raspberry red with 3" to 5" flowers. And a lovely new allium, a white chive named 'Album', is so pretty you'll want to use it as a border plant. This one spreads slowly so you won't have to worry about it invading your garden. It is a little shorter than most chives at just 12 inches high, and is heat tolerant. It is available from The Fragrant Path (The Fragrant Path: P. O. Box 328, Ft. Calhoun, NE 68023, catalog \$2). Now aren't you just itching to get out there and plant those little gems!

Herbally yours,
Michelle Chaput,

DATES TO REMEMBER

Tuesday, March 4

General Meeting, 9:30 AM, Zilker Botanical Gardens
Our own **Cindy Phillips** will be speaking on 'Natives'. Cindy has been studying native plants for several years while living on the Pedernales River. Come and enjoy this wonderful presentation.

Thursday, March 13

Study Group, 7 PM at Zilker Botanical Gardens
Vee Fowler & Eloise Doherty "No Bites - Herbal Insect Repellants". (No this isn't a repeat. The schedule was changed around to fit our speakers.)

Tuesday, March 18

Executive Committee Meeting at 9:30 AM is held at Zilker Botanical Gardens. Executive Meetings are held each 3rd Tuesday of each month. Contact Michelle Chaput at president@austinherbsociety.org or 343-7677.

Thursday, March 20th

Our March field trip heads to **Bamberger Ranch** for a tour of this remarkable 5500-acre Hill Country paradise. We will learn more of the history of our Hill Country, see a bat cave, a wild herd of Antelope and discover many native plants along the way. There is a \$10 charge for the tour. Call Ellen Zimmerman at 301-5838 for information.

Tuesday, March 26th

Mayfield Park Gardening Day is the 4th Tuesday of each month starting at 9:30 AM. Bring your trowel and gloves and come enjoy this wonderful home and garden. Contact Anna Prothro at 476-8025.

March 29th & 30th, Zilker Garden Festival

10 am to 5 pm. Come and enjoy this wonderful event that helps support Zilker Botanical Gardens. For gardeners of every age! Purchase advance tickets for \$3.00 from Anna Prothro at 476-8025, or at our March meeting. Tickets at the Gate are \$5.00.

Saturday, March 15th, Zilker Park Herb Garden

Word Day Join us at 9:30 am to tidy up the garden. Bring pruning shears and hand tools. Regularly scheduled work days are on hold until we have a new chairperson for the garden committee.

OPPORTUNITIES

Bring Refreshments to Share! We encourage our members to bring a favorite dish to share each month at our general meetings. If you did not sign up at the last meeting please call Roberta Showerman at 442-8018 and let her know what you're planning to bring!

Experience Not Required!

We have many new volunteers for our committees but we still need chairpersons. The following positions are open and need **YOU**. Remember that we can't function as a club with out your help.

These two chair position need filling immediately: Chairperson(s) for both Mayfield Park and Zilker Herb Garden. This person(s) will create a volunteer committee to work in the herb garden. You don't need to have a lot of gardening experience, just a willing spirit to do this job. These positions can both be co-chaired.

Vice President for Fieldtrips will need to be filled the coming year. Ellen Zimmerman's business is "blooming" and she needs to devote more time to it. Come forward and lend a hand, you'll meet interesting people and have a great deal of fun as you arrange field trips.

Treasurer also needs to be filled for the coming year. Current treasurer Lydia Cates has the records up to date and in good order. She will work with you to provide a smooth transition.

If you'd like to serve on the Board of Directors or on one of the various committees or know of some one who would like to serve, please contact Michelle Chaput at 343-7677 or pres@austinherbsociety.org. Positions run from May through the next April of each year, are for two years but may be held for one year at a time. Nominations are presented and voted for at our April meeting each year and installation of officers is in May meeting.

Zilker Garden Festival Booth

Volunteers are needed for the **Austin Herb Society Booth at Zilker Garden Festival, March 29 & 30.** Volunteer for shifts on Friday afternoon, Saturday or Sunday. Friday volunteers will set up the booth. On Saturday and Sunday we will work in shifts to sell books and distribute club information. Take down is Sunday evening. If you volunteer by March 4th we will provide your entrance ticket. Call Michelle Chaput at 343-7677 or pres@austinherbsociety.org. You can also sign up at our March 4th meeting. We can't do this without YOU!

Committee Volunteers!

Action Committee

Cindy Burrows, Paula Middleton, Julie Crouch, Jan Bland, Joyce Billings, Michelle Chaput

Zilker Herb Garden

Susie Thomas, Julie Crouch, Sue Kothman, Peter Berry, Jean Bazar, Barbara Broering, Carie McGinnis, Michael Zitz-Evancih, Flora King, Karen Hayward, Kay Edwards, Nancy Wackerbarth, Sandra Holland. Chairperson Needed.

Mayfield Park Herb Garden

Judith Craft, Vee Fowler, Anna Prothro, Peter Berry, Julie Crouch, Michael Zitz-Evancih, Barbara Broering, Jean Bazar, Daphne Lambert, Peggy Stewart. Chairperson Needed.

Outreach/Education Program

Lydia Noble, Gwen Sederholm, Karen Hayward, Kay Edwards

Thanks to each and every one of you!

SPONSOR NEWS

Check with **our sponsors** for all your herbal needs. Local Austin nurseries have wide selections of herbs, vegetables, ornamental plants and friendly advice

EZ Herbs will be offering a series of classes on herbalism as well as hands on experience in the garden and a class on making herbal cosmetics, a hands on work day in the garden as well as a series of classes on herbalism. Contact them at 301-0959 or www.ezherbs.net

With a little planning and planting you can easily make this wonderful potpourri, found on page 166 of our very own *Austin Herb Society Cooks*.

Lemon Lust Potpourri

2 C. dry lemon-scented geranium leaves
2 C. dry lemon balm leaves
1 C. dry lemon verbena leaves
1 C. dry yarrow blooms
¼C. powdered orris root

Mix all ingredients and put in a tin or jar for a week or more for scents to meld and enjoy. To keep it lemony all year long sprinkle 3 or 4 drops lemon verbena oil on mixture from time to time.

A Note From Anna Prothro - Bring money to the March meeting!! This is your last chance to buy tickets for \$3, cash or check only. Tickets are \$5 at the gate. Also, be sure to sign up as a volunteer for the Festival. A tee shirt will be given to volunteers who work four or more hours. Call Anna at 476-8025 for more information.

Time to Get Growing

Ann Marie Wilson

So, this is the year, you are finally going to plant an herb garden. During the dead of winter you have imagined yourself sipping a steaming cup of lemon balm tea as you stroll through your garden clipping aromatic herbs to add to your evening meal. Sitting in your armchair, you can smell whiffs of rosemary as your imaginary walk takes you down a path full of thyme, peppermint, sage and rosemary. Well, DO IT! But, where to start...

If you go to your local extension agent or garden shop guru the answer is likely to be the same--START WITH THE SOIL. But, that's no fun at all. Building raised beds, shoveling in soil amendments, turning compost piles--that's hard work. Instead, buy a plant, or better yet, make that three plants. Visit several nurseries if you can and find out what herb plants really appeal to you. Limit yourself to the purchase of three plants that can be easily grown in pots while you toil with soil. Make it an emotional purchase with a little factual decision-making thrown in. Plants with long tap roots like parsley and fennel really want deep garden soil. Instead, look for rosemary, Greek oregano, sage, mints or lemon balm. Think about the season. Basil needs to be kept above 40 degrees F. Cilantro is a cool weather crop in the South. Only buy a plant if you like its aroma, or even better, its taste, but before nibbling be sure the nursery hasn't sprayed it with some nasty substance. If you see a little sweet bay (*Laurus nobilis*) buy it! Sooner or later all herbies want a bay tree. These slow growers are a bit hard to find so you might as well make the purchase, even if you have never thrown a bay leaf into a stew in your whole life.

Get your new herb babies off to a good start by growing them in well draining potting soil. Use either clay or plastic pots but be warned, accidental drownings are much more likely to occur in plastic pots. A drink of a dilute seaweed (kelp) solution will stimulate root growth of your newly transplanted herbs. Place them in a sunny location and water only when dry. Stick your finger into the dirt to decide if it is time to water. Feed monthly with the fertilizer of your choice. Overfeeding produces a lush, green plant with low levels of the aromatic oils that herbs are grown for.

You can put plants with similar care requirements all in the same large pot. For example, rosemary, oregano, sage and thyme will all do well together. Mint is best kept alone; it grows vigorously and may strangle companions. One nice idea is to do a potted theme garden. What could be more fun than a pizza garden of oregano, basil and

chives with a patio tomato placed in the middle! Other themes could be a tea garden (lemon catnip, lemon verbena, spearmint, chamomile and anise hyssop) or a citrus scented garden with lemon grass surrounded by lemon balm, lemon basil and an orange scented geranium. How about a five senses garden for your children, use tricolor sage for sight, lamb's ear for touch, lemon balm for scent, chocolate mint for (yummy) taste and....???...cilantro....for sound! Cilantro seeds, known to cooks as coriander, make great rhythm shakers. Just put the seeds in a little box and decorate with colored paper and ribbons.

Remember, herbs are to enjoy so place your new container garden in a location where you will see it and touch it daily. Harvest your herbs, too. Novice gardeners are often reluctant to snip their darling babies but trust me, your plants will be bushier and healthier if you pinch and prune. A general rule of thumb is that an herb plant can be cut back by 1/3 at all times of the year except late fall, pruning at that time can encourage a new flush of growth that might be too tender to survive a visit from Jack Frost.

You've shopped for herb plants. The plants have become like members of the family. You've fallen in love with more herbs than you can possibly ever grow in containers. Congratulations! You are now an official "Herbie". What next? LABOR. Start thinking about putting herbs in the ground. Whatever the design, successful herb gardening starts with a well draining soil. Consider raised beds. These can be very attractive and reduce the amount of bending and stretching involved with garden maintenance. Consult local garden centers for the appropriate soil amendments, compost always improves soil quality and sand may be useful with heavy soils.

The herb garden should be placed where it receives 6-8 hours of sun daily. However, if you have a shady lot, don't despair. A few herbs do actually require shade and many will survive, but not be at their best. There are few absolutes in life, but don't try growing lavender in anything less than bright sun. You will be setting yourself up for heartbreak. Rosemary, lemon balm and mints will grow in light shade. Basil will tolerate a little shade but won't be as flavorful. Pineapple sage, sweet violets, ginger, comfrey and patchouli welcome shade.

Herbs are fun and easy to grow. They are lovely additions to the landscape and to the kitchen. As you grow more and more herbs you may be accused of becoming obsessed with the scented sweeties. Don't be upset by such accusations, just go bake your critics a rose geranium pound cake and see how quickly they, too, become fanatics.

The Austin Herb Society, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to the purposes of providing education regarding the benefits of cultivating and using herbs to promote better health and well-being, encouraging the growth and use of herbs for many beneficial purposes, and providing charitable and volunteer support to community gardens, libraries and/or other community projects.

Disclaimer: The information in this newsletter is for educational purposes only. It is not meant to diagnose, treat, or replace the advice of a health professional

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Be sure to thank our sponsors when you visit their establishments this year, check www.austinherbsociety.org for news and updates in our sponsor listings



The Austin Herb Society, Inc

Zilker Botanical Garden

2220 Barton Springs Road

Austin, Texas 78746

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