

POTPOURRI



The Austin Herb Society Newsletter

December 2009

Holiday Herbs

submitted by Mary H. Mills. pgherbfarm.com

I remember as a child entering my home in Alaska from playing in the snow to be enveloped in delicious, hunger stimulating scents coming from the kitchen. My mother was busy preparing a Thanksgiving feast. Many years later, I entered my daughters kitchen and was enveloped in the same rich scents as she prepared a very similar feast for our family in Texas. We cannot often share holiday meals with family members spread across the country or the world, but I suspect many of us will prepare meals similar to the traditional meals of the past this year and for years to come. Tradition is soothing in this fast paced world.



If you ever doubted the benefits of aromatherapy, late November and December is the time to dispel those misgivings. Just remember the last time you walked into a house where a traditional Thanksgiving or Christmas meal was being prepared. Remember the rich scent of the spice and herb blends used to season all those wonderful dishes? Poultry seasoning from the supermarket can contain several herbs: dried basil, rosemary, sage, marjoram, thyme, oregano and nutmeg. Everyone will have favorite blends that trigger the nostalgic memories of family gatherings during Holidays in the past. Most of these herb blends are used in dressing and desert but there are other ways to enrich holiday meals.

Living in south-central Texas means your herb garden is still producing thyme, sage, rosemary, some mints and oregano into November and December. A mix of all or any of these herbs rubbed onto a ham or turkey before roasting adds rich savory flavor to the meat. Mashed potatoes can be presented with chopped fresh parsley and chives decoratively sprinkled around the edge of the bowl. Sprigs of herbs can visually enhance vegetable dishes and desserts. Herbal table decorations, herbal wreaths to greet guests at the door, sprigs of herbs added to floral bouquets all freshen the air in closed winter houses and fill them with the delightful scents of fresh herbs.



All of these herbs not only uplift our spirits, calm anxiety, entice us to the dinner table with savory scents and reward us with satisfying flavors, they also aid digestion. Thyme is a remedy for digestive and stomach problems. Oregano and rosemary also aid in digestion and contain natural antibacterial properties (wonderful for the cold and flu season). Rosemary, mint and chamomile have calming effects for tension or stress. Parsley contains vitamin A and is a natural breath freshener. As you enjoy your traditional Holidays or invent new meals for gatherings of family and friends, give a silent thank you to these simple enhancements to our lives.

As a popular saying goes "Herbs Make Scents".

Holiday herbs like mistletoe and pine can cure your holiday ailments as well.

Pine (*Pinus* species) is an expectorant and antioxidant and has been used in cough syrups.



Mistletoe (*Viscum album* in Europe and *Phoradendron serotinum* in America.)



Washington Irving wrote in 1820:

At Christmas, the young men had the privilege of kissing ladies under mistletoe, "plucking each time a berry from the bush." Once all the berries had been plucked, no more kissing was allowed.

CAUTION:

The Difference in Mistletoes is important.

European mistletoe (*Viscum album* L.) is safe and has been used medicinally; it has been used in Europe to treat seizures and headaches. Modern herbalists use small amounts to lower blood pressure, promote menstrual flow and as a diuretic.

American mistletoe (*Phoradendron* spp) is poisonous. **Mistletoe berries are extremely poisonous and can cause excessive salivating, vomiting, diarrhea, excessive urination, heavy breathing and a fast heart rate.**

Another caution:

Holly berries are poisonous and can cause gastric intestinal distress, vomiting and diarrhea in small children and pets. Contact the poison control center, your doctor or vet if you think a child or pet has ingested holly berries.



From Lucinda Rudin:

I have learned to take much that is written about herbs by medical professionals with a grain of salt, as they (for the most part) do not subscribe to the use of herbs for medicinal purposes. I don't think we'd put them out of business, but we'd probably prevent a lot of unnecessary trips to the doctor. I wonder how they think people survived in past centuries?

I became interested in herbs when my kids were young and at least one of them was bound to be sick with something at any given time. I got tired of the trips to the pediatrician and started to investigate other ways of preventing and/or treating their ailments.

I came up with goldenseal, which was only available in those days in a powder. As you may know, it tastes horrible, being a bitter herb. However, it is truly antibiotic, and was helpful in treating my kids, as long as I was able to get them to swallow the tea!

Later, when son #1 was in junior high, he was looking for a science fair project. I suggested testing goldenseal and garlic on bacterial cultures. He did so, and found that goldenseal really does kill bacteria. The garlic was a little more questionable. Of course, we were just guessing at concentrations.

St. Johnswort grew abundantly where we lived and a friend's German father taught me how to make an oil with the flowers. He also told me of other ways to use it, particularly in treating menopausal symptoms. I also learned how to make elderberry wine from him. He had kept his family healthy during World War II by using his knowledge of herbal remedies. It boggles my mind that we have almost lost some of the knowledge that people used to have before there were doctors and pharmaceutical companies. [Thanks for sharing, Lucinda!]

Mayfield Herb Garden Workday is the third Thursday morning, beginning at 9:00 a.m. This month harvest lemongrass and trim Mexican Oregano. Mayfield Preserve is near Camp Mabry (fork left at end of 34th St) next to Austin Art Museum of Art (Laguna Gloria). Join Preserve volunteers on second Saturdays at 10 to noon.

Julie Crouch, Co-Chair



A Rose by any other name is still a Rose?

submitted by Mary H. Mills, pgherbfarm.com

In England, the very common plants, and those used as medicines had many names. Bird's-foot Trefoil for instance has been given 72 different English names and some of the common names attributed to it were used to describe other unrelated plants. There are two different species of plants commonly known as skunk cabbage, many different species of plants are called tumbleweed, dozens of plants are known commonly as daisies and hundreds of different plants are just called moss. Some way needed to be devised to communicate about a specific plant with people in other areas of the world.

The Latin language offered botanists a solution to the confusion. Latin had been a universal language and a root language to many languages in use today. Latin isn't spoken by anyone now so it does not change over time as a living language does. A Latin name can mean exactly the same thing as it did 300 years ago. Carl Linnaeus (1707-79) chose a naming system which was based on Latin. The Latin names he gave to plants had two parts. The first part of the name was called the **Genus** (like our surname). For instance, Speedwells were called *Veronica* for the first name and after that followed another name to make it different from any other Speedwell. That second or **species** name (like our given name) might describe where it was found, its anatomy, life cycle, temperature tolerance or growing habit (tall or creeping, for example). Species names may also include the plants uses (Is it toxic or edible? Is it medicinal?) and it may include information about the plants habitat (Is it found in swamp, woods, open fields etc). Species names may commemorate the name of its discoverer or a botanist who worked on the plant.

When we write officially about plants we always use the Latin names but this isn't as

straightforward as it sounds. Although Carl Linnaeus started the naming system, professional scientists have other methods of finding out which genus (first name) a plant belongs to. If they find that a plant has been classified incorrectly they change the name. Sometimes some plants will have more than one Latin name, either because research has assigned a different Latin name to a plant that already has a Latin name or because not all scientists agree on everything. In both cases the two names are often cross-referenced to be sure the same plant is being discussed. In the future, plant identification will change due to the genome project that will allow botanists to classify plants using DNA.

For us, Latin names are clues to the type of plant we are finding in nurseries and catalogues for our gardens. Latin species names give us some idea of the shape of the plant or describe the plant in some way, for example:

Latin	English meaning
acutus/acuta	sharp pointed
annuus/annua	annual, living 1 year
lanceolatus/lanceolata	narrowly elliptical
officinalis	used in medic

A Rose by any other name

Is Still a Rose

But--which rose do you mean ?



The Mediterranean Diet: Exploring Provence

Submitted by Mary Miller

Chris Wenk-Harrison became interested in the foods and herbs of Provence, France when she and her husband and mother-in-law traveled there several years ago for a vacation. Chris believes the climate of the Texas Hill Country and Provence are very similar so since her trip she has spent time exploring the region's cuisine.

At the October meeting of the Culinary Group, Chris, Sharon Frogh, Jane Clarke and Judy Schlotzhauer treated members to a sampling of foods based on ingredients from Provence. Much of the information shared and some of the recipes were taken from the cookbook, *The Provence Cookbook*, by Patricia

Wells. The recipes in the book are healthy and quite adaptable.

To help the group envision the environment, Chris described the outdoor markets she visited where she purchased cheeses, herbs, nuts, wine, meat and fish, fruits, vegetables, truffles, olives and olive oil. She brought samples of some linens she bought, with striking blue

and yellow patterns featuring the ever popular cicadas. The cicada is a common insect image, signaling the vacation season.

Chris discussed the native herbs of Provence: basil, rosemary, marjoram, thyme, lavender, and bay and shared recipe tips and ideas. A dried blend of these herbs is called for in the preparation of many dishes. One suggestion is rolling fresh goat cheese in this mixture for addition to a cheese tray. Here are a few other tips:

- **Basil**-some people believe a basil plant in the window will prevent mosquitoes
- **Summer savory**-grows wild in Provence and dishes are often served with a small sprig of this herb
- **Bouquet Garni**-use a tea infuser to contain the mixture in a soup.
- **Rosemary**-to freshen a room, toss a sprig in the oven or fireplace
- **Sorrel**-use as a bed for fish
- **Lavender or rosemary**-grind with salt



A stunning array and variety of dishes were served. Unless otherwise noted the recipes are from *The Provence Cookbook*:

1. Nicoise Figs Stuffed with Fennel Seeds and Walnuts
2. Spicy Tomato, Fennel and Orange Sauce
3. Lentils with Capers, Walnuts and Mint (using French lentils or they are also called Lentils du Puy)
4. Rainbow Olive Collection
5. Winter Grain and Bean Soup with Tomatoes and Rosemary
6. Summer Herb Bread
7. Zucchini Tuna Salad (from Judy Barrett's *Joy of Gardening Cookbook*)
8. Yeast Bread with Fennel & Poppyseed (*Sharon Frogh's Recipe*)
9. Scottish Shortbread with Lavender (*Chris Old Family Recipe*)

Here are a couple of the recipes served that day:



Winter Grain and Bean Soup with Tomatoes and Rosemary

1 cup "epeautre" (spelt, or substitute wheat berries)
1 cup dried kidney beans
1 cup dried cranberry beans
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Several large sprigs fresh rosemary, in cheesecloth
Sea salt
one 28-ounce can peeled Italian plum tomatoes in their juice (pureed in blender)

about 2 ½ quarts cold water
extra virgin olive oil, for the table

1. Place the spelt and beans in a sieve and rinse under cold running water.

Set aside.

2. In the stockpot, combine the spelt, beans, oil, rosemary, and 1 teaspoon sea salt. Add the pureed tomatoes and 2 quarts of the cold water. Simmer

covered, over low to moderate heat until the grains are tender, about 45

minutes, adding additional water as necessary.

(Cooking time will depend

upon the freshness of the grains—older grains take longer) Remove and

discard the rosemary. Taste for seasoning. (This soup is better the 2nd

day, after flavors have had time to ripen).

3. Serve piping hot, drizzled with olive oil.

8 servings

Chris' Preparation Notes: Substituted kidney beans for the cranberry beans. It is not necessary to put the rosemary in cheesecloth if you remember to take it out before serving. Used diced tomatoes and didn't blend.

ZUCCHINI TUNA SALAD

4 cups julienne-sliced zucchini or summer squash

1 six-ounce can tuna

1 ½ cups canned white beans, rinsed

1 tablespoon capers

½ cup sliced black olives

1 tablespoon minced green olives

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

3 tablespoons minced scallions

3 tablespoons lemon juice

¼ cup olive oil

1 tablespoon minced fresh basil or 1 t dried

1 tablespoon minced fresh tarragon or 1 t dried

2 garlic cloves, minced

salt and pepper

In a large bowl, combine the zucchini, tuna, beans, capers, olives, parsley and scallions.

Whisk together the lemon juice, olive oil, herbs

and garlic. Pour over the salad and toss to coat. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Chill at least 1 hour before serving on a bed of lettuce.

Chris adjusted the recipe as follows: Used dried great northern white beans, increased the green olives and sliced rather than minced, substituted red onion for scallions, and used Mexican mint marigold for the tarragon.

Recipe is from *Joy of Gardening Cookbook* by Judy Ballantyne (Storey Communications) and printed in Judy Barrett's Homegrown publication, <http://www.homegrowntexas.com/index.html>

Here are a few other books and resources on Provence:

Visit Patricia Wells' web site (<http://www.patriciawells.com/>) for details on her cooking school, which takes place at her summer home in Provence, and her numerous books. The website also includes recommendations on where to stay in Paris, as well as her top restaurant picks.

Cezanne—A Taste of Provence by Jean Bernard Naudin and Giles Plazy, is a lovely art book and cookbook.

Another beautiful book shared at the October meeting is *Monet's Table: The Cooking Journals of Claude Monet* is by Naudin and Claire Joyes.

An enjoyable book on Provence is the book, *A Year in Provence* by Peter Mayle.

If you are interested in Provence fabrics, the women who sell at some Hill Country festivals and markets also have a web site. Their name is Les Tresors de Provence and they specialize in imported French Table Linens. www.lestresors.us.

The Culinary Group is open to any Austin Herb Society member and meets at the Austin Botanical Council from 10 AM- 12 PM, the 3rd Friday of every month September-May, except for the month of December. Contact Judy Schlotzhauer, johnandjudy@austin.rr.com for more information.

Submitted by Mary Miller

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