



Diann's Herb Newsletter

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The International Herb Society selects the Herb of the Year. Here are a few from the past plus the new one:

*2008 Calendula
2007 Lemon Balm
2006 Pelargonium
2005 Oregano
2004 Garlic
2003 Basil
2002 Echinacea
2001 Sage
2000 Rosemary*

Spring is when you feel like whistling even with a shoe full of slush.

--Doug Lawson

Be Patient—Last Freeze Date Will Come

Can you believe spring is almost here? With Daylight Saving Time and Easter coming so early, I'm confused. Although temperatures have been in the seventies the last two days, there will still be some freezing nights, so don't be tricked into setting out plants too early. For our climate zone, 6b, April 15 is the average last freeze date. The garden centers will have new plants before then. If you buy them and set them out, you'll probably have to buy new ones again after the first ones freeze. Be patient. This is the time to plan what you want to plant and where.

In the meantime, I'm busy getting the plants started for when you're ready for them. I've spent today planting 7 varieties of lavender seeds (Hidcote, Lady, Purple Ribbon, Purple Lavance, English, Spanish Eyes, and Munstead) and repotting lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*--I love that name). Several varieties of basil, calendula, cilantro, stevia, parsley, hyssop, feverfew, leeks, nasturtiums, cardoon, etc. have spouted, and will be ready for planting next month.

A friend and I went to the Nashville Lawn and Garden Show last Saturday. It was interesting. One of the new things I noticed is that practically every display garden had mixed herbs in with other plants. There is a trend away from separating culinary herbs in a garden by themselves; rather they add interest, texture, and aroma to other ornamentals. Include them in your overall plan.

It's several days later now, and we have almost six inches of snow on the ground. We haven't had this much snow in years, and it's March. With the sun shining, the greenhouse is a cozy 90 degrees.

Happy planning and planting!



While conservation and self-protection might be likened to winter, night, and death, the spirit of pioneering and attempting to realize ideals evokes images of spring, morning, and birth.
--Daisaku Ikeda

Herbs Halt Soil Disease

Killed by lavender? Terminated by thyme? Well...yes, if you are a soil borne fungus.

Spanish researchers mixed dried, ground up stems, leaves, and flowers of French lavender (*Lavendula stoechas*) or Spanish thyme (*Thymus mastichina*) with soil inoculated with *Verticillium dahliae*, a common plant pathogen. When the mixtures were tested three, six, nine weeks later, they showed little or no *V. dahliae*. The lavender and thyme were mixed at a rate of 2 percent by weight.

In another study French lavender and Spanish thyme again were mixed with soil inoculated with the verticillium. Six weeks later, researchers sowed seeds of a type of cotton highly susceptible to the disease in the herb-soil mixtures. Compared to control plants grown in inoculated soil without the added herbs, plants grown in the herb-treated soil showed fewer and less severe disease symptoms. After 18 weeks tests showed no living *V. dahliae* in the herb mixtures. As with the first study the herbs were mixed at a rate of 2 percent by weight.

If fungal disease has been a problem in your garden, try French lavender or Spanish thyme as a companion crop, or mix some of these herbs into the soil before planting the researchers suggest.

--reprinted from *The Herb Companion*, March 2008

Herbal Groundcovers Stop Weeds, Add Beauty

If you've got a slope or other challenging landscape area and don't want to plant overused myrtle or ivy as a groundcover, try herbs. A tough herbal groundcover can provide beauty and fragrance without adding work to your to-do list, suggests a recent study conducted by Cornell University and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center.

In a five-year test of dozens of perennial groundcovers, several herbs ranked among the best for blocking weed growth in difficult sites. Lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*) 'Thriller,' catmint (*Nepeta x foassenii*) 'Walker's Low' and lamb's ears (*Stachys byzantina*) all spread rapidly and form dense canopies over the soil, stifling weed seed germination. Other herbs that scored well but need more time to get established were creeping thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*) and pinks (*Dianthus spp.*).

The creeping thyme and lamb's ears proved to be the most drought tolerant of the plants tested, and the 'Walker's Low' catmint was found to release potent weed-suppressing chemicals. As an added bonus, the catmint and lady's mantle were left alone by deer. All of these herbs have ornamental foliage, flowers, or both.

--reprinted from *The Herb Companion*, March 2008

Recipes

Golden Notes on Calendula

Here are a few ideas to pique your interest in experimenting with calendula's golden color and mild flavor:

Golden Garlic Mashed Potatoes. When heating milk and butter for mashed potatoes, add a handful of chopped calendula petals along with four to six cloves of minced garlic. Drain cooked potatoes, then mash them with the warm, flavored liquid.

Carotene Connection. Play up calendula's pumpkin/squash-like flavor by adding petals to pumpkin/squash soup, puree, bread, and cookies, as well as carrot cake.

Great with grain. Add a handful of coarsely chopped petals to a pot of rice, risotto, millet, bulgur or couscous.

Pot Marigold. Add calendula to stocks, soups, or stews. It will turn chicken and dumplings or cream of mushroom soup a rich golden color.

Sugar. Combine 1 cup of sugar with ½ cup (loosely packed) calendula petals. Pulse in a food processor (or spice grinder, using small batches) to make a golden-flecked sugar for cakes, cookies, breads, muffins or scones.

Infusions. Add petals to milk or cream, then use the liquid in baked goods, frostings, puddings, pie fillings, sauces, and gravies.

Salad. Sprinkle a handful of whole or chopped fresh petals over most any salad—egg, tuna, chicken, pasta, rice, couscous, bean, green, or even fruit salad.

Other Golds. Intensify the color of golden or yellow foods, such as cornbread, egg salad, deviled eggs and cheeses, as well as herb and flower butters.

Egg Salad with Calendula and Chives

12 hard boiled eggs	1/3 cup finely diced celery
½ cup mayonnaise	2 tablespoons snipped chives
2 teaspoons Dijon-style mustard	2 tablespoons snipped dill leaves
2 tablespoons each chopped sweet pickles and juice	
¼ cup thinly sliced green onions or minced onion	
½ teaspoon Hungarian paprika	
Salt and freshly ground pepper	
1 handful fresh calendula petals, coarsely chopped	
Petals for garnish	

Dice eggs and put them in a bowl, along with mayonnaise, mustard, pickles and juice, onions, celery, 1 tablespoon of chives, 1 tablespoon of dill, paprika, salt and pepper. Mix well, then stir in chopped calendula. Refrigerate ½ hour or more before serving.

Remove from refrigerator 5 to 10 minutes before serving. Arrange salad greens on a platter and heap egg salad on top. Garnish with additional calendula petals, and the remaining chives and dill.

Diann's Greenhouse
web site:
[http://www.dianns
greenhouse.com](http://www.diannsgreenhouse.com)
Check it out.

--The Herb Companion, Spring 2008