



Diann's Herb Newsletter

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The International Herb Society selects the Herb of the Year. Here is a list of the ones from the first decade of the 21st century:

2010 Dill
2009 Bay Laurel
2008 Calendula
2007 Lemon Balm
2006 Pelargonium
2005 Oregano
2004 Garlic
2003 Basil
2002 Echinacea
2001 Sage
2000 Rosemary

Repel Mosquitoes with Herbs

While I was planting seeds in the greenhouse several weeks ago, I heard the distinct buzzing we can all recognize as mosquito honing in on red blood cells. The warmth of the greenhouse is not just good for plants, but it also brings out the creepy, crawly, flying critters early. Most of them are friendly, and many are good to have around, but what real purpose does a mosquito serve? Even flies serve a purpose—they help to decompose things.

I try to avoid chemicals whenever I can, and bug-zappers are annoying, plus they kill many beneficial insects. So what's left? Mosquitoes don't like familiar herbs that you can use to stay bite-free this season. It's not the plants themselves that repel the insects but the essential oils that have that quality. So keep the crushed leaves of these plants in a small container at intervals on your deck or patio. Except for marigold and wormwood, which can cause contact dermatitis, you can rub the crushed leaves on your skin for added protection.

Scented Geranium (*Pelargonium 'citrosa'*) A tender perennial in our Zone 6b. It's a lovely plant in the garden or in a pot, grown more for its scent and foliage than its blooms. The leaves of this plant can be used to flavor sugars, cakes, and cookies. It's used commercially in perfumes and cosmetics.

Catnip (*Nepeta cataria*) A perennial, catnip has been found to be 10 times more effective than DEET at keeping mosquitoes away. Cats will crush this plant if it is in a garden bed, and it has a tendency to become assertive, but keeping a couple of plants in hanging containers helps avoid both problems. Personally, I enjoy the fragrance when my cat joins me in the garden and rolls around in the catnip.

Marigold (*Tagetes spp.*) This sun-loving annual also repels aphids and is an excellent companion plant for your vegetable garden. Marigolds are an easy-to-care-for border plant and the simplicity of collecting seeds for next year's planting makes this plant an affordable addition. Note: Do not rub on skin.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) The oil of this shrub smells heavenly to most humans (not my husband), but disgusting to mosquitoes. It's an attractive plant for containers or herb gardens

that requires little water and also is delicious when used for cooking meat, soups and egg dishes.

Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus* or *C. nardus*) This plant has a lemony scent that mosquitoes hate. It prefers full sun and good drainage. Keep in mind that this tropical plant won't tolerate freezing temperatures. *C. citratus* is the culinary variety; *C. nardus* is not. The only variety I sell is *C. citratus*.

Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*) This perennial has silvery foliage and can be grown in full sun in most zones. Makes a unique border plant and the pungent odor keep mosquitoes at bay. Note: Do not rub on skin.

Mint (*Mentha spp.*) (pictured) Most mints' oils are unpleasant to mosquitoes, so keep a pot or two of these hardy and aromatic plants around. Since they spread easily, mints are best cultivated in containers.



--taken in part from *Herb Companion*, May 2010

Some Herbs Boost Metabolism

There is a category of herbs known as thermogenic herbs. These plants boost our basal metabolism—the rate at which we burn energy --by chipping away at stored 'energy' or fat. Cayenne and other hot peppers and green tea fall into this category.

It's important to maintain solid energy levels as we diet and exercise. Inhaling peppermint perks up our energy, and drinking green tea gives an energy boost before and after exercise.

If you're having a hard time passing up unhealthy treats, herbs can help level the playing field. You may be able to curb your cravings with Holy Basil (*Ocimum sanctum*), which has also been shown to be helpful in lowering blood sugar in diabetics.

--taken in part from Groves, Maria Noel, "Herbs for Weight Loss," *Herb Quarterly*, Spring 2010

2010 Herbal Workshops

The Propagating and Growing Herbs workshop went well in spite of the fact that it was cold and drizzly. We all huddled in the greenhouse among the many scented plants and talked and planted. The next workshop, "It's a Dilly of a Lunch," is May 5, 2010.

Check www.diannsgreenhouse.com or call me (931-648-8701) for details on the herbal workshops for 2010.

I'm not a glutton.
I am an explorer
of food.

-Erma Bombeck

Recipes

The following recipes are not for eating but for your skin, which needs nourishment also, especially after a harsh winter.

Lettuce Cleansing Lotion

Crisp, fresh lettuce from the garden makes a sublime facial lotion that suits sensitive skin. This simple cleansing solution will also relieve sunburned or irritated skin. Lettuce contains vitamins, sulfur, silicon, and phosphorous—all important ingredients for healthy skin.

½ head fresh lettuce
4 cups of water

Place lettuce in a medium size saucepan and cover with water. Bring the water to a boil and then lower heat and let simmer for 45 minutes. Remove from heat and allow the mixture to cool completely. Strain out all solids and pour liquid into a clean container. **To use:** Massage a small amount of cleanser into your face and neck. Rinse well with warm water. Store cleanser in the refrigerator. Yield: 16 ounces.

Herb-scented Milk Bath

For centuries, humans have looked to fresh milk to beautify the skin. It's high in protein, calcium, and vitamins, and the skin easily absorbs it. This recipe uses powdered milk. You may also substitute powdered goats' milk or rice milk if you wish.

2 cups dried powdered milk
1 Tbls dried orange peel
2 tsps dried lavender flowers
2 tsps dried rosemary

Mix together all the ingredients and pour into a clean container. **To use:** Pour ½ cup of the milk mixture into a warm bath and stir through the water. Soak in the tub for 20 minutes. Yield: 16 ounces, enough for 4 baths.

—Cox, Janice, 'A Spring Makeover,' *Herb Quarterly*, Spring, 2010

Taking joy in living
is a woman's best
cosmetic.

—Rosalind Russell

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