



Diann's Herb Newsletter

SPRING 2011

VOLUME 6, NUMBER 2

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:

2011 Horseradish

2010 Dill

2009 Bay Laurel

2008 Calendula

2007 Lemon Balm

2006 Pelargonium

2005 Oregano

2004 Garlic

2003 Basil

2002 Echinacea

2001 Sage

2000 Rosemary

Of the faculties of the mind, memory is the one that is the most easily led by the nose. There is a secret power in the sense of smell which draws the mind back into the pleasant land of old times.

-Henry Van Duke,
Little Rivers

Plant a Fragrance Garden

Several days ago Grant Achatz, a very creative chef, was interviewed on public radio. He serves unique multi-mini-course meals at his Chicago restaurant. He spoke of the importance of smell to taste, so one of the many interesting things he does is fill a small plastic bag with scented air; he pricks tiny holes in the plastic, inserts the bag into a linen pillow case. The weight of patron's plate set on the small pillow releases the scented air slowly so aroma remains throughout the course.

It set me to thinking about how important the sense of smell is to all of us although we're often not aware of it until we lose it when we have a cold. As humans we relegate the importance of using that sense to lower animals, even as we douse ourselves with overwhelming perfumes. My first "Aha" moment came when, half-way around the world, I was riding on a bus through a strange country in the spring and caught a whiff of freshly-turned soil in a field—I was instantly transported back to the Texas farm where I had spend a wonderful childhood. Fragrance may be more important to our overall well-being than we can even comprehend.

Throughout history gardeners and landscapers have planted gardens with various emphases. Fragrant gardens can be traced back 2500 years to the Hanging Gardens of Babylon in Persia (present-day Iraq). The garden was a source of food and pleasure with the intent to create a refuge to transport the visitor to a kind of "heaven on earth" especially if the outside world was a desert or not so perfect. Perfumed plants were a vital part of the garden.

Monastic gardens during the Middle Ages emphasized more of the practical food and culinary and medicinal herbs; they were also for study and spiritual contemplation. So fragrant plants were still very important. They were usually enclosed and provided an escape from the squalor of the streets.

For some reason, by the 18th century, there was less emphasis on fragrant plants in the landscaping styles. Many of us are aware of the beautiful roses that were developed without a fragrance because the focus was on appearance and hardiness—not fragrance. Now there are many newer fragrant roses on the market. Fortunately, people have again become more interested in fragrant plants in the garden, so here are a few fragrant herbs that you might want to incorporate into your landscape.

There is a continual spring and harvest there. For all the plants do scented blossoms bear. Among the shady leaves, their sweet delight. Throw forth such dainty odours day and night.

-Spencer on *The Garden of Adonis*

Some information came from Weber-Turcotte, Katherine. *The Fragrant Garden. The Herb Quarterly*, spring 2011

Bergamot (*Monarda didyma*) is also known as bee balm and Oswego tea. This Native American plant has a sweet and stimulating lemon-mint fragrance. It is a hardy herbaceous perennial that blooms in August and attracts hummingbirds, butterflies, and bees.



Borage (*Borago officinalis*) is a lovely plant with grey-green foliage and bright-blue star-shaped flowers; it has a cooling cucumber scent. Add the leaves and flowers to drinks or salads. Borage is an annual.

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) is a hardy annual that prefers the cool seasons of spring and fall. It was used during the Civil War and WWI to treat wounds. It is also a culinary herb, adding color to salads. Both the leaves and flowers give off a sharp, earthy scent.



Carnation (*Dianthus caryophyllus*) is very familiar with its rich, spicy, and exotic aroma which lifts the spirit. Its name comes from the Greek: *Dios anthus*, or 'flower of God.' It was used to make crowns for coronations, which gave it its more common name. Unfortunately, some varieties do not have a fragrance, so be aware when you buy them.

Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) is the quintessential herb: it smells good, looks good, and is good for you. The perfume is soothing and calming. It also repels moths, fleas, and lice. A tea made with lavender flowers can help you sleep.



Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) is the most common of the lemon-scented plants. I could do a whole newsletter on lemon-scented plants. Lemon is a stimulating, up-lifting perfume. Although lemon balm is related to mints, it is more easily confined and controlled. The foliage makes a wonderful tea for digestive upset, and it boosts the immune system.

Moonflower (*Ipomoea alba*) is a lovely vine that boasts huge saucer-sized white flowers that release an intoxicating sweet- and spicy-scented perfume. Since it blooms only at night, this plant is a must for a white moonlight garden.

Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is one of the most versatile and useful herbs in the kitchen, in the home, and in the medicine cabinet. Its unmistakable woody aroma permeates the leaves, flowers, and stems of the plant. For thousands of years it has been associated with remembrance. Currently it is being tested for the treatment of senility.

Sweet Woodruff (*Galium aparine*) is a low-growing herb with vivid green smooth leaves that grow in whorls. The bloom is a small, star-shaped, white flower. When dried, it smells of freshly mown hay. This herb makes an excellent ground-cover in the shade.



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

-Doug Larson

2011 Herbal Workshops

Space is still available in the Propagating and Growing Herbs workshop scheduled for March 19. Call me at 931-648-8701, or go to www.diannsgreenhouse.com for details of the herbal workshops for 2011.

Fettuccine Fines Herbes (2 servings)

(Here's a great dish for Lent or anytime you need a quick meal.)

- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1/3 cup whole-milk ricotta
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped chives
- 1 tablespoon chopped tarragon
- 2 tablespoons chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 2 tablespoons chopped chervil (or additional parsley)
- 3 tablespoons finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- 6 ounces fresh fettuccine noodles
- Freshly ground black pepper

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Put the butter in a large stainless steel mixing bowl and set it on top of the boiling water. When the butter is melted, take it off the water and stir in the ricotta, herbs, Parmesan, and salt.

Boil the pasta until tender but still slightly firm, usually 2 to 4 minutes. (If not using fresh, follow package directions.) Scoop about 1/2 cup of the cooking water from the pot, then drain the noodles. Using tongs, toss them with the ricotta and herbs mixture, along with as much of the reserved water as it takes to create a creamy sauce. Grind some black pepper on top and serve in warm bowls.

Asparagus in Frothy Tarragon Sauce (6 servings)

(What better spring dish than asparagus!)

- 2 pounds fresh asparagus, preferably fat stalks
- 4 large egg yolks
- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 cup water
- 3/4 teaspoon kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons chopped tarragon (You may substitute dill, chervil, or lemon thyme.)

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and choose a stainless steel mixing bowl that will sit on top of the pot without touching the water.

Cut off the bottom of the asparagus spears where they turn light colored and tough. If the asparagus is thick, peel the bottom two-thirds of each spear with a sharp vegetable peeler. Whisk the egg yolks in the mixing bowl with the lemon juice, water, salt, and a few grindings of black pepper and set it aside.

Boil the asparagus until it's tender but still has some snap, 4 to 6 minutes. Test is by holding a spear by the bottom with tongs held horizontally; it should be limp and bend like a bow toward the floor. When cooked, use the tongs to remove the asparagus from the water and arrange it on a warm platter.

Put the bowl of sauce ingredients on top of the rapidly boiling water and whisk vigorously until it is very thick and foamy. This will take 2 to 3 mins., and you will easily be able to sense the point when the sauce becomes custardy and fully cooked. Whisk in the butter and, when it's incorporated, add the tarragon.

-Recipes from Traunfeld, Jerry. *The Herbal Kitchen: Cooking with Fragrance and Flavor*

For back issues of newsletters, go to www.diannsgreenhouse.com.

You may contact Diann at 931-648-8701 or diann@diannsgreenhouse.com.