



Herb Newsletter

JANUARY 13, 2007

VOLUME 2, NUMBER 1

2007 Herb of the Year: Lemon Balm

Although lemon balm was not initially a unanimous choice for Herb of the Year, it is winning hearts as people get to know it better. Some people consider it invasive, but it's really rather easy to control because it does not spread by runners like other members of the mint family but by seeds, so you just have to keep the seed heads cut off. That's easily done if you're making the best use of lemon balm.

Lemon balm has been cultivated for at least 2000 years and was probably harvested from the wild long before that. Its botanical name, *Melissa officinalis*, suggests one of its characteristics. *Melissa* is the Greek word for bees, and bees are especially attracted to the clusters of tiny white or pale yellow flowers. The plant forms a mound approximately 2 feet by 2 feet and gives off a very pleasant lemony fragrance when brushed or when leaves are crushed.

A hardy perennial (Zone 5), lemon balm is easily started from seeds or propagated from root divisions. Like many herbs, it prefers a sunny location and well-drained soil. Leaves can be harvested as soon as a sufficient number appear. The plant benefits in several ways from being cut back to a few inches 2 to 3 times during the growing season. It will grow back brighter, bushier, and stronger than it was. Although you can dry lemon balm, it loses most of its aroma and flavor in the drying process. The dried leaves may be used for a subtle, soothing tea.

It may be used as a calming agent or as a stimulant. According to Charles L. Voight in [The Herbarist](#), "Equal parts of lemon balm, chamomile, and catnip make an effective nightcap tea, while balm, mint, and anise hyssop create a delicious breakfast brew." Other culinary uses seem to be limited only by your imagination. Any dish or drink that benefits from a dash of lemon would welcome the addition of lemon balm. It mixes well with other herbs because of its mild flavor. Jerry Traunfeld in [The Herbfarm Cookbook](#) partners lemon balm with basil, chives, dill, mint, and parsley. He proposes using it to flavor fish, carrots, beets, peas, cucumbers, asparagus, citrus, ginger, fruits, and berries.



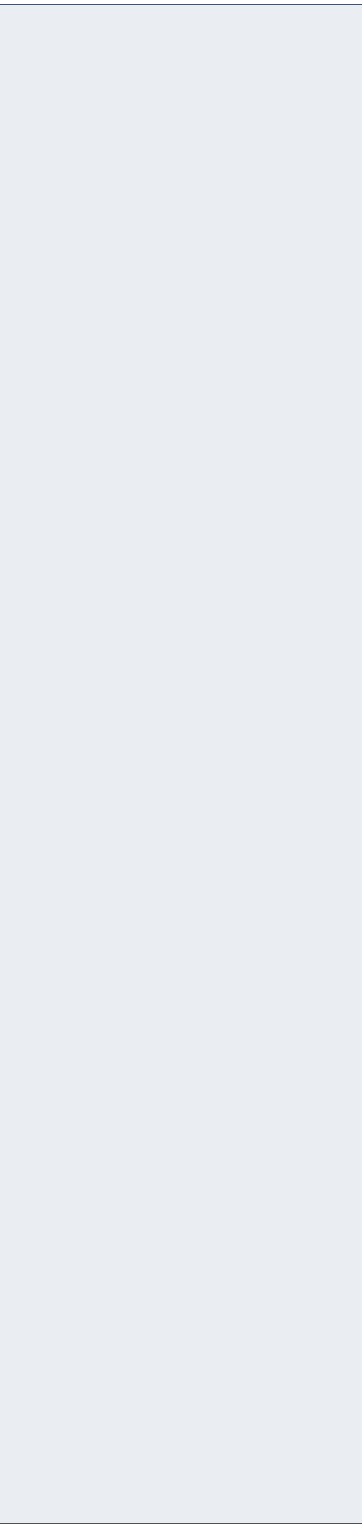
There is much literature about the possible medicinal attributes of lemon balm. [The Complete Family Guide to Natural Home Remedies](#) says, "Melissa is well known for its healing properties, and it is particularly useful for treating depression. Used in massage or in a bath, Melissa has a calming yet uplifting effect and is helpful in treating migraines, headaches, neuralgia, tension due to stress, and hysteria that is manifested around the neck and shoulders. It helps skin conditions such as eczema and shingles, the menstrual cycle, and assists ovulation in natural methods of birth control."

The versatility of lemon balm makes it a very desirable plant to have around.

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

2006 *Pelargonium*
2005 *Oregano*
2004 *Garlic*
2003 *Basil*
2002 *Echinacea*
2001 *Sage*
2000 *Rosemary*

Diann's Greenhouse now has a web site: diannsgreenhouse.com. Check it out.



"We think lemon balm should be in every herb garden! Its fresh leaves burst with lemon when squeezed, and strolls through the garden will be punctuated by a dash to the lemon balm for a fresh whiff. A truly delightful tea made from the dried leaves our favourite 'anytime' tea as it both stimulates the heart and calms the nerves. Fresh chopped leaves are also interesting in salads, soups, and stews. Recent studies have proven that lemon balm, or Melissa, is effective against herpes."
--Richters 2007 Herb Catalogue

**Diann's
Greenhouse**

3072 Nicole Rd.

**Clarksville, TN
37040**

931-648-8701

**dinance@dianns
greenhouse.com**

RECIPES

From The Herbfarm Cookbook by Jerry Traunfeld

Zucchini Strands with Lemon Balm

2 small to medium zucchini squash (1 pound)
½ teaspoons salt
1 tablespoons olive oil
1 clove garlic, finely chopped
2 tablespoons finely shredded fresh lemon balm
Freshly ground black pepper

Cut the stems and bottom tips off the zucchinis and slice them on a mandolin or other vegetable slicer into long spaghetti-like strips, about 1/8 inch thick. Toss them with the salt in a medium mixing bowl, then transfer them to a fine sieve or colander and set it over the mixing bowl. Let the zucchini sit for 15 minutes at room temperature, then gently squeeze it in your hands to extract some of the water. It will give off at least ½ cup.

Heat the olive oil in a large (12-inch) skillet over medium-low heat. Add the garlic to the pan and stir until it loses its raw fragrance but is not browned, less than 1 minute. Add the zucchini and lemon balm and toss with tongs just until heated through, about 1 minute. Taste and season with pepper.

Roasted Beets with Chives and Lemon Balm

6 medium beets (about 2 pounds trimmed)
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
¼ teaspoons salt
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
2 tablespoons coarsely snipped fresh chives
2 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh lemon balm
About 1 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice

Preheat the oven to 425 degrees. Trim the beet stems to ½ inch and wash the beets. Put them in a shallow baking dish large enough to hold them in a single layer, pour in ½ inch water, and cover the dish with a lid or aluminum foil. Bake until a paring knife easily pierces the center of a beet, 30 to 60 minutes, depending on their size. The water will form a syrupy liquid and bubble up. You may need to add a little more water near the end—don't let it dry up completely. Remove the pan from the oven, uncover, and let the beets cool. Cut the top and tail off each beet and rub them under running water to slip off the skins (wear rubber gloves to avoid staining your hands). Alternatively you can hold the beets in paper towels and use the towels to rub the skins off. Cut each beet into 8 wedges. If the beets are larger, cut them horizontally in half, then cut each half into 8 wedges.

Melt the butter in a medium (10-inch) skillet over medium heat. Add the beets, sprinkle with the salt and pepper, and toss until the beets are heated through, about 2 minutes. Toss in the chives and lemon balm and remove the pan from the heat. Taste and season with the lemon juice and additional salt and pepper if needed.