



Diann's Herb Newsletter

WINTER 2008-2009

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The International Herb Society selects the Herb of the Year. Here are a few from the past plus this year's:

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

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Herb of the Year—Bay Laurel (*Laurus nobilis*)

The 2009 herb of the year, Bay Laurel, has a truly noble history. Terms such as poet laureate and baccalaureate come from the Latin word *laureate* which means "crowned with laurels." That's exactly what the Romans did for their outstanding poets and athletes—crown them with wreaths made of bay laurel leaves.



The roof of Apollo's temple at Delphi was covered completely with bay leaves for protection against disease, witchcraft, and lightning. Bay was also dedicated to Apollo's son, Aesculapius, the Greek god of medicine, and for many centuries it was used against disease, especially plague.

Bay is a beautiful evergreen and can be grown in a sunny location in well drained soil; however, since it is not hardy below 10 degrees, it needs to be brought inside for the winter. Leaves can be harvested anytime and may be used fresh or dried.

Probably one of the most versatile plants, bay has many uses--decorative, culinary, household, cosmetic, aromatic, and medicinal. The leaves are used, especially during the holidays, to make wreaths for decoration. Add leaves to soup, stock, stew, sauce, marinade, stuffing, etc. Remember to remove leaf before serving. Use to flavor puddings or custards by boiling leaf in milk. Flavor rice by putting leaves in storage container with rice. Leaves placed in flour will deter weevils. A decoction in bathwater will relieve aching limbs. You may massage blended essential bay oil into sprains and rheumatic joints. Bay leaves will freshen air and can be used in potpourri. A bay leaf infusion is a digestive aid and stimulates appetite.

So how can you be without at least one bay laurel tree?

--some info from *The Complete Book of Herbs* by Lesley Bremness

Workshop Plans for 2009

For several years I have been giving programs on herbs to garden clubs and civic clubs. I will continue to do that. However, several of you have asked for workshops on using herbs. My goal for 2009 is to conduct workshops on some of the following topics: growing herbs, cooking with herbs, making cosmetics and/or soap with herbs, infusing oils and vinegars with herbs, using herbs to decorate, and mixing and brewing herbal teas. During the month of January I will be developing these workshops and planning dates. Please help me to plan what you would like by giving me your input on which topics you would like me to cover and what dates or day of the week would be most convenient for you. I will be sending out a notice with the schedule around February 1.

Recipes

I have tried the following recipes, and my family confirms they are delicious. Both of them come from Jerry Traunfeld's *The Herbfarm Cookbook*.

Bay Laurel Roasted Chicken

1 3½ to 4-pound chicken
12 fresh (Don't substitute dried.) bay laurel leaves
2 cloves garlic
1½ tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ cup dry white wine

1. Chicken. Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Remove giblets and any excess fat from the chicken cavity. Wash it inside and out under cold water and pat dry with paper towels. Bend the wing tips back and tuck them behind their first joint. Using your fingertips, carefully loosen the chicken skin from the flesh. Begin at the bottom of the breast and, without tearing the skin work your hand under the skin all the way up the breast and down into the thigh on each side. Crack the bay leaves to release their flavor by holding both ends of the leaf and twisting (don't break them in half). Cut the garlic cloves into about 5 slices each. Place 2 bay leaves in the cavity of the bird. Insert the remaining leaves under the skin of the chicken, positioning them as evenly as possible—2 under the skin of each thigh and 3 under the skin of each side of the breast. Distribute the garlic slices evenly under the skin as well. Tie the legs together with a short piece of kitchen twine.
2. Roasting. Place the chicken breast side up in a shallow roasting pan, about 11 x 8 inches. Rub the bird with the olive oil on all sides and season it very generously with salt and pepper. Roast until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the thigh registers 165 to 170 degrees, 50 to 60 minutes. The chicken should be beautifully browned, and the juices that run out of the bird when it is tilted should have no sign of pink. If you are still not certain the bird is done, cut between the thigh and body and peek inside near the hip joint to be sure there is no sign of pink flesh. Remove the chicken from the oven and let rest for 10 minutes in a warm place.

The aging process has you firmly in its grasp if you never get the urge to throw a snowball.

--Doug Larson

3. Jus and serving. Tilt the roasting pan, and using a flatware tablespoon, skim off as much fat as you can. Place the roasting pan over medium-low heat and add the wine. As it simmers, scrape up and dissolve the sticky bits at the bottom of the pan. Add ¼ cup hot water if more liquid is needed. Pour the jus into a sauceboat to pass at the table. Cut the twine holding the legs together and carve the bird. Remove and discard the bay leaves from under the skin before you serve the chicken or instruct your guests to do so at the table.

Bay Laurel Leaf Crème Brulee

2 cups whole milk, plus additional 2 tablespoons if needed, or substitute low-fat(2%) milk for a slightly less rich custard

2 cups heavy cream

12 fresh bay laurel leaves, cracked

½ vanilla bean, split and scraped (or one teaspoon vanilla extract)

3 large eggs

5 large egg yolks

¾ cup granulated sugar

1/8 teaspoon salt

About ¼ cup turbinado sugar (Sugar in the raw)

1. Molds, Arrange 8 6-ounce ramekins in a shallow baking pan large enough so they don't touch.
2. Infuse the cream. Pour the milk and cream into a 2-quart saucepan and bring it to a boil over medium-high heat. Add the bay leaves and vanilla bean, push them under the surface of the liquid with a spoon, and immediately remove the pan from the heat. Cover the pan and steep for 30 minutes. Strain the liquid through a fine sieve into a large liquid measuring cup, pressing down firmly on the herbs to extract all the liquid from the leaves. Add fresh milk if needed to measure 4 cups.
3. Custard. Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. In a medium mixing bowl, whisk together the eggs, egg yolks, granulated sugar, salt, and vanilla extract if using until smooth. Stir in the infused cream. Strain the custard through a fine sieve into a large pitcher or liquid measuring cup, then pour it into the ramekins, filling them almost to the top. Set the pan on the center oven rack and pour in enough hot tap water to come about ½ inch up the ramekins. Bake the custards until just set but still jiggly, 30 to 45 minutes. Don't let the custards bubble. The most crucial step is to pull them from the oven at just the right moment, but the baking time can vary greatly depending on the temperature of the custard when it was poured, so check them often. If your oven bakes unevenly, you might need to check each one individually. Refrigerate the custards until chilled, at least 2 hours.
4. Caramelized topping. Preheat your oven broiler to high with the oven rack 4 to 5 inches from the heat source. Just before serving, sprinkle the surface of the custards with a thin layer of turbinado sugar, using about ½ tablespoon for each. Shake the ramekins to even the sugar out. Broil the custards until the sugar caramelizes and turns a deep golden brown, but don't let them blacken. Crème brulee means burnt cream but don't interpret the name literally.

Blessed is the season that engages the whole world in a conspiracy of love.

--Hamilton Wright Mabie