



Diann's Herb Newsletter

WINTER 2014

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The International Herb Association selects the Herb of the Year. Here is a list of the ones starting from the beginning of the 21st century:

2015 Savory
2014 Artemisia
2013 Elder
2012 Rose
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

*From times of old
Subtle yet bold
In sauces fine with
meat or fish,
Tarragon defines the
dish.*

--Anonymous

The Art of Artemisia

I suppose it's time for us to experience a real winter, but I was really getting used to Tennessee's milder winters. Anyway, this is a good time to stay inside and write this newsletter on the 2014 Herb of the Year, Artemisia.

Artemisia enjoys a long, rich history. There are two theories about its name, which may well have come from both sources. Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt and of the moon, was probably the inspiration, but Queen Artemisia of Caria, a Turkish botanist who lived about 400 B.C., probably was the immediate source for the name.

As a member of the Asteraceae family, the Artemisia genus contains over 300 species of herbaceous perennials and shrubs. They are known by many names: mugwort, southernwood, Powis Castle, Dusty Miller, sweet Annie, wormwood, tarragon, etc. Most artemisias are used for crafts and for moth and other insect repellents. Hardy to Zone 5, they generally like full sun in the cooler zones, but many are native to hot, dry regions. Easy to propagate from cuttings, division, or seeds, they all prefer very well-drained soil. They are striking in the garden because of their variety of color and texture; they range from green to gray and many have silky-haired leaves.

Artemisia is probably one of the most useful herbs, but only one variety is generally used in the kitchen—French tarragon, *Artemisia drancunculus* (little dragon because of the dragon-like root structure). The rich, peppery anise-like flavor is used throughout Europe, most especially in France, where it is classic in béarnaise sauce and the herbal blend of *fines herbes* (with parsley, chervil, and chives). Its addition compliments fish, eggs, chicken, and grilled meats; it is dramatic in salads and dressings; and it enhances the flavor of vegetables like peas, potatoes, tomatoes, and cauliflower. French tarragon is best used fresh. Heat brings out the flavor of tarragon, so cooked dishes usually need less. Since dried tarragon does not retain much flavor, the best way to preserve it is to fill a jar with cuttings and



What savour is
best, if physic be
true, for places
infected than
wormwood and
rue?

It is as a comfort,
for heart and the
brain, and
therefore to have
it, it is not in vain.

--Thomas Tusser

cover them with vinegar. Store it in the pantry. Use the cuttings as well as the vinegar to flavor foods. Tarragon vinegar in decorative bottles makes very nice gifts. Tarragon may also be frozen in airtight plastic bags for future use.

French tarragon must be started from a cutting or by root division because it does not bloom or make seeds. It thrives best in rich soil where it has good drainage; it does not like very hot summers or very mild winters, so Tennessee is not the best place of grow French tarragon. A possible alternative is Mexican tarragon, *Tagetes lucida*, which is in the marigold family and not true tarragon. It can be grown from seeds, and has a coarser but similar flavor to true tarragon.

Three commonly grown varieties of Artemisia are southernwood, *A. abrotanum*, wormwood, *A. absinthium*, and sweet Annie, *A. annua*. Although southernwood can be rangy, it can be easily trained into small hedges with foliage finely divided and greenish. Its camphor scent is repellent to most insects.

Wormwood has been used against the roundworm and for fungal infections, such as ringworm, and is still used in some topical antifungal preparations, especially for athlete's foot. For a period of time absinthe, a potent green liqueur made from wormwood, was illegal because it was erroneously thought to be addictive. Sweet Annie is one of the few annual artemisias, and has become very popular for use in dried wreaths because of its strong aroma. Recent research suggests that *A. annua* has anti-malarial qualities. Sweet Annie grows to about 10 feet and reseeds, so it can become very common in your garden, but its lacy foliage and pleasant aroma are redeeming qualities.



--Arthur O. Tucker and Thomas DeBaggio. *The Encyclopedia of Herbs*. 2009

Herbal Workshops

I am still working on the Schedule of Herbal Workshops for 2014. Thanks for your suggestions for workshops. Please let me know if there is a particular workshop you would like for me to include. If the weather cooperates, we will have the hypertufa workshop in February. The Propagating Herbs workshop will definitely be in March. I'm researching doing a fairy garden workshop for little girls and their moms.

I will send an email notice soon when the schedule is posted on www.diannsgreenhouse.com.

Winter Market

Starting Friday, January 10, I will be at the Friday Morning Winter Market at the Smith-Trahern Mansion located at 101 McClure St. in Clarksville. Crafts and fresh produce are also available at the market.

Recipes

French Tarragon Chicken Piccata

2 servings

2 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1½ tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup dry white wine
Thinly sliced zest of ½ lemon
1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
2 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh French tarragon
2 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh parsley

Put each chicken breast half between pieces of plastic wrap and pound them with a meat pounder or the side of an empty wine bottle, using just enough force to gently spread the meat without tearing it, until each piece is ¼ inch thick and about 5 inches wide and 6 inches long. Season both sides of the chicken with salt and black pepper.

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat until the oil begins to smoke. Using tongs, lower the chicken breasts into the oil. Cook until lightly browned on the underside 2 to 3 minutes, then turn and brown the other side for the same amount of time. At this point the chicken should be firm and fully cooked. If you are not certain, cut into the thickest part with a paring knife to be sure there is no longer any sign of pink or translucence. Remove the skillet from the heat and transfer the chicken to warmed dinner plates.

Pour off any oil in the skillet, then pour in the wine and stir to dislodge the browned bits in the pan. Cook over medium heat until the wine boils down to half its volume. Add the lemon zest, lemon juice, and butter; swirl the pan until the butter is melted and incorporated. Stir in the French Tarragon and parsley. Taste and add additional salt and pepper if needed. Spoon the sauce over the chicken and serve right away.

--Jerry Traunfeld. *The Herbfarm Cookbook*. 2000.

Easy Moth Repellent

Makes 6 cups

Amounts may vary. This is an easy project and will repel moths from your clothing and linens. Place them in your hanging closets, on shelves, or tuck them into drawers. They last about 6 to 8 months.

3 cups dried Artemisia leaves (southernwood or wormwood)
1 cup dried lavender flowers
1 cup dried rosemary leaves and flowers
1 cup dried cedar chips

Combine all of the ingredients in a large bowl and toss. Fill small muslin or cloth bags, or tie the herbs up in a lovely piece of fabric, and tie closed with a ribbon or string. Half to one cup is a good quantity per bag. These bags make nice gifts.

--Susan Belsinger. *The Herbal Calendar 2014*

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