



Diann's Herb Newsletter

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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

Through the
open door
A drowsy smell of
flowers,
Gray heliotrope,
And white
sweet clover
And shy
mignonette
Comes faintly in.

--John Greenleaf
Whittier

The Fragrant Garden

Gardeners through the ages have tended to focus on different elements. The Persians included three essential elements in their gardens, running water, shade, and scent. They accomplished the latter by planting aromatic trees, herbs, and flowers. This blending of aesthetic elements was an attempt to create heaven on earth—a place to transport the visitor from an often less-than-perfect environment into a sanctuary or refuge. Remember the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.

Later during the Middle Ages, gardens in monasteries focused on food and health, which included culinary, medicinal, and fragrant herbs. The garden was a place for gaining knowledge and spiritual contemplation. As gardens became popular among the rich, fragrance was still part of the ambiance.

By the 18th century, however, scented plants had lost their popularity as the influence of the contemporary formal landscape movement took hold. Fortunately, modern gardeners are reviving the interest in fragrant gardens. There are many options for nose-leaning gardeners from sweet-smelling vines to sharp, musky groundcovers. Here are a few herbs that will add aromas to your garden:

Bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*) According to Troy Marden of Volunteer Gardener, this variety of the native North American plant is not assertive like its relative *Monarda didyma*. It is easily recognized by its sweet and stimulating lemon-mint scent. It's also a favorite of hummingbirds, butterflies, and bees.



Borage (*Borage officinalis*) Borage has a cool, cucumber scent and has a historic reputation as a plant that "maketh a man merry and joyful." Its edible blue flowers and grayish foliage form a lovely contrast in the garden.

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) Used extensively during the Civil War and the 1st World War to treat wounds, calendula is still used today to keep pests away. The entire plant gives off a sharp, green, earthy scent. Calendula has many cultivars to choose from.

Dianthus (*Dianthus coryophyllus*) With more than 300 species in a rainbow of colors, dianthus is one of the most popular flowers grown today. Commonly known as carnation, it has a rich, spicy, and exotic aroma which boosts the mood.

Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*) Native to southern Europe and the Mediterranean, lemon balm is the most common of the lemon-scented plants found in the garden. Bees and gardeners alike love its strong uplifting scent—similar to lemon furniture polish.

--some information from Katherine Weber-Turcotte, *Herb Quarterly*, Spring, 2011

And Spring arose
on the garden fair.
Like the Spirit of
Love felt
everywhere;
And each flower
and herb on
Earth's dark breast
Rose from the
dreams of its
wintry rest.

--Percy Bysshe
Shelley

Recipes

Grilled Fish and Herb Salad (4 servings)

Here's a great fish dish whether you are abstaining for Lent or not.

2 medium shallots, peeled

2 tablespoons sherry vinegar, or champagne vinegar

Thinly sliced zest of 1 lemon (removed with a zester)

1 ½ to 2 pounds medium firm fish fillet, such as halibut, snapper, or salmon, with or without skin

5 tablespoons Chive Oil (See recipe below.)

Kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Herb Salad

¼ cup fresh small spearmint leaves

¼ cup fresh French tarragon leaves

¼ cup fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves

½ cup watercress leaves

¼ cup torn sorrel leaves, or additional watercress

Optional: 8 to 12 nasturtium flowers

Shallots: Cut the shallots in half from root to tip and remove the dense core as the base with a small V-shaped cut. Very thinly slice the shallots, again from root to tip, using a sharp thin knife or a mandoline. Toss the shallots with the vinegar and lemon zest and let sit at room temperature for at least 30 minutes to soften and mellow.

Fish: Build a hot fire in a charcoal grill or preheat a gas grill on high. Make sure your grill rack is very clean and lightly oiled. Check for and remove any bones in the fish and cut it into 4 equal pieces. Place the fish in a shallow bowl with 2 tablespoons of the chive oil, ½ teaspoon salt, and a few grinds of pepper. Turn the fish to coat each piece evenly.

Finishing the salad: Stir 2 tablespoons of the remaining chive oil into the shallots. Add the herb leaves, nasturtiums if using (inspect first for insects), a large pinch of salt, and a few grinds of pepper; toss gently.

Grilling the fish: When the coals are asked over and glowing or the gas grill is very hot, grill the fish 4 inches from the coals until the bottom is well marked, 3 to 5 minutes. Turn the fish and grill it on the other side until the fish is barely translucent at the inside center, 3 to 4 minutes longer. Transfer the fish to warmed dinner plates. Loosely arrange the herb salad in a band across the fish and drizzle the remaining chive oil on the plates.

Chive Oil (Makes ½ cup)

1 cup coarsely snipped fresh chives

¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Blending: Put the chives and oil in a blender and puree until the oil begins to warm, 2 to 3 minutes.

Straining: Pour the oil into a very fine strainer, or a coarse strainer, lined with a double layer of cheesecloth, set over a bowl. The oil that drips out can be used immediately, but let it continue to drip for about 1 hour to extract as much as possible. Let the oil drip at its own pace for the clearest oil. Discard the contents of the strainer and store the oil in a covered container in the refrigerator. It will keep for up to 1 month.

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

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