



# Diann's Herb Newsletter

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*The International Herb Association selects the Herb of the Year (HOY). Here is a list of the ones starting from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:*

**2016**

**Capsicum**

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

I fear one day I'll  
meet God, he'll  
sneeze, and I won't  
know what to say.

--Ronnie Shakes

## Planting a Low-Allergen Garden

If sneezing and watery eyes keep you from enjoying gardening, maybe choosing low-allergen plants will help you get back to the pleasure of your yard. With a better understanding of what can trigger your allergen response, along with some careful planning, you can create a beautiful, fragrant, and serene garden landscape to enjoy—without a box of tissues. Grasses are lovely; however, they release a large amount of pollens making them second only to trees at producing allergens.

Plants producing the lowest amount of pollens are often the ones that bloom beautifully in the garden and attract pollinators. Many blooming plants depend on birds, bees, and butterflies rather than the wind to carry their pollen. Here are several plants (recommended by Rickie Wilson in the Summer 2016 *Herb Quarterly*) that you might want to include in your backyard:

**Butterfly bush (*Buddleja spp.*):** This plant keeps its pollen encased in tube-like flowers. (It's also drought tolerant.)

**Butterfly weed (*Asclepias tuberosa*):** As with butterfly bush, this plant attracts the winged beauties and produces bright orange blooms.

**Carnations (*Dianthus*):** These popular favorites attract bees.

**Foxglove (*Digitalis*):** The pollen site is deep inside in the tubular flowers, preventing it from becoming wind-borne.



**Hibiscus (*Hibiscus spp.*):**

Another pollinator-attracting plant, hibiscus blooms are literally stunning.

**Lavender (*Lavandula spp.*):**

The pollen is actually enclosed in the flowers, so pollinators work hard to extract it.

**Mint (*Mentha spp.*):** Bees love it!

**Nasturtium (*Tropaeolum spp.*):**

This herb has very low pollen distribution.

I used to wake up at 4 am and start sneezing, sometimes for five hours. I tried to find out what sort of allergy I had but finally came to the conclusion that it must be an allergy to consciousness.

--James Thurber

**Oregano (*Organum vulgare*):** A culinary favorite, it tends to attract butterflies.

**Parsley (*Petroselinum crispin*):** Here's another culinary herb that attracts bees.

**Peonies (*Paeonia*):** This ornamental boasts bright, romantic flowers with very low pollen.

**Rose (*Rosa spp.*):** This classic beauty is a low pollen-producing flower. Look for more mild scented ones, as the fragrant varieties can trigger allergies.

**Sage (*Salvia officinalis*):** This herb attracts both bees and butterflies.

**Thyme (*Thymus vulgaris*):** This earthy delight attracts bees.



Plant herbs. Most herbs attract pollinators and tend not to have the problems that flowers and vegetables do. Additionally, most herbs don't produce a lot of pollen.

Bulbs, like iris and daffodils, are great as well. They produce lovely flowers and bloom at a time when the pollen count is low. Learn what triggers your symptoms and carefully choose plants and locations for planting.

## High Blood Pressure? Try Hibiscus

Michael Castleman reports on another study affirming hibiscus (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) again as a treatment for high blood pressure. The researchers recruited 75 people newly diagnosed with moderately high blood pressure and gave them one of three treatments: a placebo, a widely used blood pressure drug (hydrochlorothiazide), or hibiscus tea (an ounce of dried, powdered flowers brewed in one liter of water). Participants took the treatments once a day before breakfast. After four weeks, the flower reduced blood pressure a bit better than the pharmaceutical and with no side effects.

How does hibiscus work? According to the researchers, it has two actions: it's a diuretic, which reduces the fluid volume of the blood, and it serves as a vasodilator, opening the arteries and reducing the fluid pressure on artery walls. (Hydrochlorothiazide is a potent diuretic.)

Consider adding this delicious herb (It tastes great hot or iced.) to your daily routine. Talk to your doctor about adding it to your current medications.

## Recipes

### Herbal Syrups

The fragrance of flowers spreads only in the direction of the wind. But the goodness of a person spreads in all directions.

--Chanakya

Herbal syrups capture the delightful, sweet flavor of herbs. Art Tucker and Susan Belsinger in their new book, *The Culinary Herbal*, include some master recipes for herbal syrups that can be used in a refreshing libation or to glaze a cake.

Although the amounts of herbs and flowers used in herb syrups vary, here are some recommendations. These amounts of herbs and flowers will produce a well-balanced, nicely flavored syrup.

**Anise hyssop:** 6 to 8 sprigs with flowers, or a handful of flowers

**Basil:** about 8 sprigs of anise, cinnamon, green, or lemon basil, or a handful of flowers

**Bay:** 6 to 8 leaves

**Chamomile:** about 2 tablespoons fresh flowers

**Gingerroot:** one 3- to 4-inch piece sliced thinly into coins

**Lavender:** 8 to 10 flower spikes, or 1 scant tablespoon fresh flowers

**Lemon balm, lemon thyme, or lemon verbena:** 10 to 12 sprigs

**Lemongrass:** about ½ cup minced stems

**Mint:** about 12 sprigs of orange, peppermint, or spearmint, or a handful of flowers

**Rosemary:** 5 to 6 sprigs, or a handful of flowers

**Rose petals:** a large handful of fresh petals (these vary in flavor, so taste first or use recommended cultivars)

**Sage:** about 4 common sage sprigs, or 6 fruit-scented or pineapple sage sprigs

**Scented geranium:** a handful of flowers, or 12 to 15 leaves (can be bitter)

**Tarragon or Mexican tarragon:** 7 to 8 sprigs

**Violas:** violets or pansies, use a large handful of fresh flowers

**Herb seeds:** about 1 tablespoon bruised anise, coriander, or fennel seeds (slightly green are best; they should be simmered gently in syrup for ten minutes)

### Simple Herb Syrup

A simple syrup is generally made with a one-to-one ratio of water to sugar. For a rich herb syrup, the sugar is doubled, so the ratio would be one part water to two parts sugar, which will result in a thicker, much sweeter syrup.

1 ½ cups water

1 ½ cups sugar

Herbs (Follow recommendations above.)

Combine the water add sugar in a small saucepan and bring to a simmer over medium heat, stirring constantly with a spoon. When the sugar has dissolved, remove the pan from the heat and add the herbs. Bruise the herbs against the side of the pan with the back of the spoon. Cover the pan and let stand for at least thirty minutes, or until cool, Using a slotted spoon or strainer, gather the leaves and squeeze them to extract their essence into the syrup, then discard the leaves. Pour into clean, airtight containers and label. This syrup can be kept in the refrigerator for ten to fourteen days.

--Belsinger, Susan and Tucker, Arthur O., *The Culinary Herbal*, Timber Press, 2015.

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