

# Herb Garden Diary



*The Purple Gate Farm Newsletter*

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*Our Herb Garden Diary Newsletter explores herbal knowledge, practical garden information with historical insight and current research to reveal the delight and enrichment of life by the growing and using of herbs. We explore the seasons in our south central Texas gardens and share our gardening experiences in this environment.*

## Food for Thought

It seems that so many things that should be simple are getting more complicated every day. The magazines and television are full of advice on how to keep our bodies strong and our minds full of an energetic zest for living. Usually they are recommending some pharmaceutical product. Food Fads come and go; many are very unbalanced nutritionally. We are left to sort out confusing and conflicting claims.

There are basic foods that provide healthful and tasty meals containing proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins and trace minerals to enhance the quality of our lives and strengthen our bodies. These basic foods enhanced with herbal seasonings can make coming to the table a daily life enhancing experience that we anticipate with relish.

Americans enjoy an over abundant supply and enormous quantities of foods to choose from at our super markets, yet we often eat without thinking. Fast food has become a mantra for busy people who will often eat just to fill the void and get on with life. It is easy to ignore the warnings that over salted, fat saturated and unbalanced foods are the causes of many health problems that can endanger the body and perhaps shorten a healthy life.

I have this theory: the body knows what it needs and will crave food to provide the specific vitamins, minerals, hormone enhancing substances and body functioning elements needed to be healthy. We eat in response to the body's demands for these nutrients. If we eat foods that do not provide the needed nutrients, the cravings do not stop and we will still feel hungry and eat more. I think this is one very important cause of obesity--eating a lot of the wrong foods.

We overeat to try to quiet the body's demand for nutrients. The answers to many food-related problems are simple. Eat a variety of fresh foods to get the nutrients needed for a healthy body and positive mind. Vitamin pills are not the complete answer. There are trace elements in fresh food that the body needs that pills may not provide. Variety is an answer to some of these problems and adding herbs to

food preparation is another way to enhance the diet both for taste and nutrition.

Herbs are not simply seasoning--they provide many of the life enhancing nutrients the body needs to function well. Many herbs have small amounts of protein, carbohydrates, fat and trace elements. Many herbs also include medicinal chemicals that help us have healthy bodies. Here are some very important nutritional elements that have been documented in a few essential culinary herbs:

**Basil** One ounce of fresh basil leaves provides 91 mg calcium, 0.3 mg iron, approximately 12,380 IU Vitamin A, and 8 mg Vitamin C.

**Chives** One tablespoon raw chives contains 2 mg calcium, .05 mg iron, 192 IU Vitamin A and 2.4 mg Vitamin C. Chives also contain phosphorus, sulfur, iron and pectin.

**Coriander (cilantro)** One teaspoon of coriander seed provides 13 mg calcium and 3 gm iron.

**Dill** One teaspoon of dill provides 32 mg calcium, .3 mg iron and 1 IU Vitamin A.

**Oregano (or marjoram)** One teaspoon of oregano provides 12 mg calcium, .3 mg Vitamin C and 48 IU Vitamin A

**Rosemary** One teaspoon dried rosemary provides 15 mg calcium, .4 mg iron, .8 mg Vitamin C and 38 IU Vitamin A  
**Sage** One teaspoon ground sage provides 12 mg calcium, .2 mg Vitamin C and 41 IU Vitamin A

**Thyme** One teaspoon ground thyme provides 26 mg calcium, 1.7 mg iron and 53 IU Vitamin A

Add any of the above herbs to food and beverages. This will include herbs easily into our daily lives and add nutrition and health benefits to our diets. We do not have to take cooking courses--all we need are curiosity and an experimental mind set to add variety, flavor and nutrition to our food.

Tea is one easy way to enjoy herbs daily. To make a delicious cup of herb tea:

Select a nonmetal teapot or cup to keep the herb flavors pure.

Add 1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon of dried herbs per cup depending on how strong you want the tea. If you want ice tea, after brewing, you probably want to start with a stronger brew.

Bring fresh, cool water to a rolling boil.

Pour the boiling water over the herbs.

Cover the teapot or cup to retain the heat and herb flavors.

Let steep about five to ten minutes.

Strain as soon as the tea reaches the desired strength.

Serve the tea with honey, lemon or orange slices. Add a fresh sprig of herbs you included in your tea mixture.



**Read a good book lately? or do you have a favorite book about herbs? Many older books are still available online both new and used.**

**Write a review for us to share. Here is one of my favorite books. (Mary Mills)**

**Ladybugs, Tiger Lilies & Wallflowers. A Gardener's Book of Words. Robert Hendrickson. Prentice Hall, 1993. First Edition.**

Published in 1993 and out of print, this delightful book is available from several sites on the internet for under \$10. You may even find the small volume tucked into a shelf at a used book store. Any nature lover will enjoy the old lore, legends and stories behind the names of garden flowers, vegetables, fruits, trees, herbs and insects. Robert Hendrickson, a noted wordsmith and garden writer enjoys sharing an informative, entertaining and "groundbreaking" look into the origins of many garden related phrases and words that have become common parts of our language. This is a book worth seeking out and adding to your garden book shelf.

### **Simple Heat Shield**

Richard (Dick) Nelson, a member of the Austin Herb Society recommended solutions to the problems of our garden plants wilting from our Texas heat. He reported that simply surrounding the plants with a layer of 4-5 sheets of newspaper and covering this with grass or leaf mulch has made a substantial difference in his plants ability to withstand the heat. The newspaper effectively blocks the weed seeds from germinating and eventually decomposes adding organics to his garden beds,. He added a soaker hose to the garden and the mulch combined with a hose has given his plants a new vigor during this heat spell. Protecting the roots will certainly pay him back with fewer plants lost due to excessive summer heat. Helping the soil hold moisture will be reflected in the reduction of Dick's water bill. Simple and terrific!



## Thank a Green Plant Today

My next door neighbor, Susan, came bouncing into my home often with the greeting, “Hi, have you thanked a green plant today?” Once she even recommended that I read up on the sex life of oak trees! I didn’t give much thought to her comments I considered her enthusiasm a bit goofy and the result of her majoring in botany at the local university.. Years later I began a small herb garden. This opened up a whole new world of study that I suspect will last my lifetime. As I found more and more history and uses for the herbs I was growing, I began to have Susan’s reverence for plants in general and wonder at the versatility of the herbs.

We all know that roots, stalks or leaves of vegetables provide valuable nutrients to keep us healthy. Spinach, salad greens, collards, kale and the tops of turnips and beets protect overall health. On this list we should include the flower buds of asparagus and artichoke as well as the seed and pods of beans and peas. The list of culinary plants available to us has expanded with the introduction of many vegetables from other countries into our grocery stores. Cookbooks describe how to enhance the flavors, add variety and visual appeal to our wealth of edible plants. Prominent in these recipes are the seasoning herbs that add depth and savory richness or a burst of fresh flavor to our food preparations.

The benefits of herbs have been recognized for thousands of years and in many cultures around the world. In addition to enriching our diets, herbs revive energy and spirits, restore health, sooth, beautify and heal many physical discomforts. There are many ways to describe what a herb is and there are many opinions. Here is a description by Judith Benn Hurley in her book, *The Good Herb*.

To me, a herb is an aromatic plant whose properties are indispensable in cooking, health or body care.

Other ways to appreciate herbs are to recognize the wide range of plants that are valued for their flavor, fragrance, medicinal and health supporting qualities as well as industrial uses, pesticidal properties. Designing, maintaining and harvesting herb gardens

provide intellectual, physical and creative challenges. Even weeding a herb garden fills your lungs with uplifting “ Living Aromatherapy”.

I am finding that historically and in the present, herbs play a greater role in our lives than most of us realize. The study of horticulture, botany and the science of bio-medicines derived a wealth of information from the study of herbs. Early mariners explored and colonized vast areas in the world in part because of the quest for herbs and spices. To add to my list of the benefits of herbs, I must count the entertaining and enlightening study that have occupied hours of evenings I spend entranced in reading authors who share my curiosity and interest. I often fondly picture, my botany student, neighbor, Susan, bouncing into my livingroom and radiating her enthusiasm and her appreciation of the plant world.

Thank you, Susan, for planting that seed of thought into my brain. It took years for it to develop and bloom into real appreciation of the plants around me. So now, I ask you-all,

“Have you thanked a green plant today?”

