

# Herb Garden Diary



**The Purple Gate Farm Newsletter**

October 2009

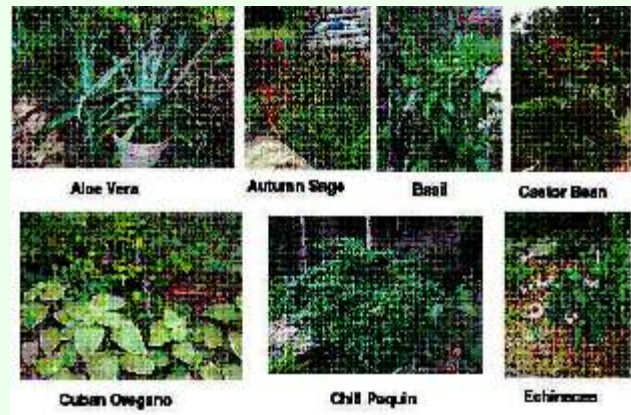
*Our Herb Garden Diary Newsletter explores herbal knowledge, practical garden information with historical insight and current research to reveal the delight and enrichment of life by the growing and using of herbs. We explore the seasons in our south central Texas gardens and share our gardening experiences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

## Heat Loving Herbs

Autumn has officially been announced. There has been a dynamic change in our weather here at The Purple Gate Herb Farm. After months of drought we have had almost two weeks of intermittent rain. It has been the soft rain the Southwest Indians call “female rain” and has gently refreshed the air and land with welcome water that came down slow enough for the earth to absorb most of it. I walked out into the gardens to see which plants have survived the heat of the past few months.

I view this journey into my gardens as an experiment on what plants will thrive here despite the harsh climate of our south central Texas summer months. Please remember that our gardens are enriched with compost, watered with drip irrigation and mulched. Even with these protections for a while this summer, many of these plants displayed stresses. We knew better than to water when we went out and saw many of the plants appearing to wilt. They looked so stressed that we feared they could not possibly survive. The heat would have steamed these plants to death if we had watered them so we let our early morning drip watering every several days suffice and hoped for the best.

Here are some of the best summer survivors:



## Herb Tips

**Always seek advice from a professional before eating or using a plant medicinally. When in doubt, do the research!!! You're better off taking the extra time for study than taking the time for healing.**

In a nutshell herbs are basically just useful weeds, and they grow like weeds! Give them a good sunny spot, they're not terribly fussy about soil type but good drainage is a essential, and regular watering is about all you need to do to have a successful crop.

## Autumn

The hot, humid days of summer are slipping into dim memory as the cooling temperatures encourage outdoor exploration of my gardens. I had “cabin fever”, as I was forced to flee indoors to escape the intensive heat of our south-central Texas summer. Now I venture outside and explore my gardens in the cool, shorter days and refreshingly brisk nights of autumn. I enjoy seeing how the frequent rains we have had recently have revived many plants that seemed lost. I have noticed that some perennials have re-seeded and are germinating. How wonderful to be given a peek at my garden that is coming in the spring.

Feathery seedlings of Larkspur and the pale blue-green Poppy seedlings will appear in January. Many other perennials that like to begin growth this time of year to establish strong roots during cooler weather for the next summer begin to appear. Echinacea is just beginning to sprout and cilantro is poking up here and there.

Some favorite south-central Texas Wildflowers to seed in the garden now: (many of these were considered medicinal by Native Americans)

Bluebonnet, Indian Paintbrush, Black-eyed Susan, Mexican Hat, Wine Cup, Maximilian Sunflower, Drummond Phlox, Mealy Cup Sage, Bluebell, Gaillardia/Indian Blanket, Gayfeather, Lemon/purple Horse Mint, Pink Evening Primrose, and Standing Cypress

When you finish planting these seeds, make note on your annual calendar:

Once the blooms have faded in the spring/early summer, wait until mid-June to mow so that your flowers can set and disperse their seeds. This will provide flowers for the following season. Mow the area to a height of 4- 6 inches

I have been assured in my reading that with a little care and planning we can have a blooming garden almost all year in south-central Texas. Here is some advice I have filed away to achieve this worthy goal:

Some flowering plants can be carried over through spring though they need to be protected in the event of a hard freeze; petunias, Nicotiana, pansies, violas and snapdragons are examples of such annuals.

Although I have not mastered the “little care and planning part”- I keep hoping. Meanwhile, I enjoy the yaupon berries and American Beauty Berries that ignore care and planning and brighten up our autumn and winter days. I

have been sitting in our gazebo covered with the exotic flowers of the passion flower and admiring the white trumpet flowers of the Datura blooming nearby. I get a whiff of rosemary on the brisk breeze and when I walk around I am amazed at the fruit on the sumac and persimmon trees. Maybe I will just relax a little and stop and smell the faint fragrance from the last blossom on the cereus cactus (it has bloomed 4 times this year!!).

Yes, wildflowers and native plants in Texas can be rewarding year round!

## For everything there is a season.....

I walked for an hour in the garden. The sky was festooned with shades of gray and gentle misty rain blew gently against my bare arms. The leaves fell from many trees mesmerizing me as I watched their slow decent into the heaps beneath the trees. Along my path, as I continued my slow stroll, the crunch and rustle of leaves released the unmistakable scent of autumn. A slight tug of melancholy swept past me in the breeze. As the shortened day darkened around me, I quickened my pace toward home. Autumn. A time for rest, contemplation and lingering reflection.

## Here are a few other reflections on autumn.

Everyone must take time to sit and watch the leaves turn.  
~Elizabeth Lawrence

I prefer winter and fall, when you feel the bone structure of the landscape -- the loneliness of it -- the dead feeling of winter. Something waits beneath it -- the whole story doesn't show.  
- Andrew Wyeth

Every leaf speaks bliss to me,  
Fluttering from the autumn tree.

**Emily Bronte**

For man, autumn is a time of harvest, of gathering together. For nature, it is a time of sowing, of scattering abroad.

**Edwin Way Teale**

Autumn, A Haiku Year.

Autumn is a season followed immediately by looking forward to spring.  
- Doug Larson

### **Cilantro/Chinese Parsley/Coriander**

Cilantro is a favorite seasoning for Mexican and Tex/Mex dishes in my kitchen. If it is called for in Chinese recipes, the same plant is called Chinese Parsley. Later, when the seeds appear, they are called the spice-coriander.

Cilantro is one herb that re-seeds several times a year in my garden and here it is in October-November making an appearance. I plant the annual seeds in the spring directly in the garden as it germinated readily. The feathery foliage appears quickly and can be harvested as soon as the plant is about 6-8" high since only one or two sprigs are needed to season many dishes. Before the heat of summer the plants bolt (produce seeds early).

You can harvest the seeds and store them for recipes that call for coriander. Be sure to leave some seeds on the plants to re-seed. If the summer is not too hot a second harvest is possible from the seeds that drop and germinate. The second harvest cilantro plants may also bolt quickly due to the heat. From this generation of cilantro, gather some seeds as soon as they turn brown and store them for spring planting. If you leave some of these seeds to drop, they will germinate in the fall and grow until the first frost. We have grown three generations of cilantro from early spring into December at The Purple Gate Herb Farm.



I cut the entire mature, brown seedhead and hang it upside down in a paper bag with a few holes punched in it to allow air to circulate. I hang the bag up in a dark room to dry the whole seedheads. I shake the stems to release the dried seeds and store them in an air tight jar when they are thoroughly dry. Seeds can be infused in vinegar. Harvest roots in the fall. They are used in tinctures for a variety of medicinal remedies.

Cilantro is a favorite in Mexican and Tex/Mex dishes in my kitchen. One or two sprigs is all that is needed to enhance salsa, soups, chicken and pork chop dishes.

Coriander/Cilantro has been used in Western folk medicine for several thousand years. It was valued as an antispasmodic, appetite enhancer, and to relieve gas or calm the stomach. It was also used as a mild sedative and to flavor various medicines. An essential oil of coriander/cilantro was added to ointments to massage into painful rheumatic joints and muscles. In China, the whole herb, including the roots and seeds, were used medicinally to help digestion, to benefit the lungs and spleen as well as to relieve measles. For internal use the Chinese boiled the entire plant with its root in water and drank the decoction. Ripe seed was sun-dried in China to be used to stop bleeding, treat hemorrhoids, constipation and dysentery and break up phlegm.