

# Herb Garden Diary



**The Purple Gate Farm Newsletter**

April 2010

*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.*

"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, The Sensitive Plant

April is upon us already. So much is happening as the gardens wake up from our unusually cold winter. It is fun to stroll the gardens to witness the awakening. Daffodils

filled the spirit with their bright yellow trumpets announcing spring then much too quickly faded,



they were followed by our snowdrops (we call them English Bells) which appeared in great numbers brightening up the gray days.



Delicate peach blooms made us stop to marvel.



Violets and ajuga added a rich blue or deep violet-blue note to the shaded areas while the rose bushes began leafing out. Our red poppies seem to grow a foot a day and are beginning to put on buds to flower any day.

Spring is full of rich rewards to anyone venturing out to experience the wonder and bounty nature greets us with.

**Be aware that the weather of spring is also full of surprises:**

"The sun was warm but the wind was chill.

You know how it is with an April day.

When the sun is out and the wind is still,  
You're one month on in the middle of May.

But if you so much as dare to speak,

a cloud come over the sunlit arch,

And wind comes off a frozen peak,

And you're two months back in the middle of  
March."

- Robert Frost, Two Tramps in Mud Time, 1926

**And another thing to ponder as we experience April.**

"Isn't it appropriate that the month of the  
tax

begins with April Fool's Day  
and ends with cries of "May Day!""

~ Author Unknown

## Resources for Herbal Information

submitted by Mary H. Mills, pgherbfarm.com

I don't know about you but I am often just confused about the claims of herbs used as medicine. The literature about medicinal herbs abounds with claims of "scientific studies and clinical trials", which claim to evaluate the efficacy of the herb remedies. It is important when evaluating these claims to note if the studies were made by reputable people, how many people were studied and how many clinical trials were made. I have found that some of these studies made claims based on few individuals studied over a very short period of time.

### Selection and Concentration

It is also noteworthy that some studies are based on herb constituents extracted for the one or two identified "active" ingredients. These active ingredients are processed, made into liquid concentrations or reprocessed into powder forms to encapsulate or pressed into pills. Commercial herb product manufacturers use a variety of plant extraction methods. One method is viewed as a highly scientific method called standardization. This involves measuring and extracting specific compounds believed to be responsible for the herb's medicinal effects.

Processing to determine the active ingredients, then finding ways to concentrate these ingredients results in more potent herb remedies that are more like drugs in effect. This can lead to undesirable side effects, allergic and other adverse reactions to the herb remedy.

### Traditional Processing

One manufacturing process mixes and macerates the whole herbs and extracts favorable plant essences with hot or cold methods. Using the whole herb is believed by many herbalists to be closer to traditional extraction methods. Herbal formulas that use the whole herb, or the most potent part of each herb, the leaves, flower, bark, or root are believed to balance some of these adverse or dangerous side effects of selective concentrations. Detrimental effects would not be present in large enough quantities to present

problems and dosage recommendations would be based on long traditions and observation.

The many variables to consider when evaluating which herbal remedy to use was accumulated in the historic herbals of India, China, Persia, Egypt, American Indian and in the herbals of Europe. These treasures are our best guides to intelligent use of herbal medicine, especially when they are studied with modern sources and updated with research. [a few listed at the end of this article]

Herbs today are imported from China, India, Africa, Europe and all over the Americas. Modern herbalists have become aware of many unknowns in preparing herbal remedies especially since the popularity of herbal remedies has created a growing demand for these herbal preparations. Questions being asked are:

where was the plant grown

was it gathered by a knowledgeable person at the optimal time

how was the herb handled, processed and shipped

and finally was the person responsible for making the pills, capsules, extracts or tinctures using reliable methods? The expensive, rare herbs have been known to be adulterated with less expensive and often useless fillers.

### Herb Product Labels

Add to the dilemma of selecting herbal remedies are the Food and Drug restrictions on herbal product labels. Herb labels often list herbs by common names (very dubious identification as common names often are used to describe many different plants). Latin names may not be generally familiar to the potential purchaser. The labels provide little dosage information, information about suspected prescription drug/herb interactions or potentially serious side effects. It would help if nutrients, phytochemicals, vitamins and minerals were on the labels to aid in making intelligent decisions.

**Label Definitions** from Herb for Health July August 1998 p22

**Active:** an active compound has been shown through scientific research to have a biological effect.

**Marker:** A marker compound helps identify an herb. It's not necessarily related to efficacy.

**Standardized:** When a product is standardized, the plant material has been scientifically analyzed and adjusted to guarantee it contains an active or marker compound within tight specifications. The analysis gives a chemical profile of the compounds in the herb and helps insure consistency from batch to batch. It does not, however, mean the product is concentrated or more potent.

**Potency** In the case of most herbal products potency refers to concentration of certain compounds. Potency doesn't necessarily mean that a product is strong or effective.

**Extract** In a general sense, this means the plant has been concentrated in a solvent, such as alcohol to have more predictable results.

**Extract ratio:** a ratio such as 25:1 indicated the change in weight during processing. The first number indicated the whole, raw herb; the second is the final extract. So 25:1 means twenty five pounds of raw herb were used to create one pound of extract.

The best way to use herbs is to become informed. I have tried to locate the most reliable sources for information on medicinal uses of herbs. Here is a partial list of my favorites. If you would like to add to the list of reliable herbal information to the Potpourri, send me information at [pgherbfarm@aol.com](mailto:pgherbfarm@aol.com).



## American Botanical Council

is an organization right here in Austin, Texas. It is a resource of many of the best sources of reliable herbal information. This is where I got my CD of the German Commission E monographs. The website includes an herbal library, monographs on medicinal herbs, and catalogues of books available for sale. There is a wonderful magazine- HerbalGram well worth the subscription cost as it contains informative, interesting and timeless information on herbs. This is a most valuable resource for the responsible use of herbs and medicinal plants.

[http://abc.herbalgram.org/site/PageServer?pagename=Homepage\\_2009](http://abc.herbalgram.org/site/PageServer?pagename=Homepage_2009)

## German Commission E.

In 1978, the German government established an expert committee, the Commission E, to evaluate the safety and efficacy of over 300 herbs and herb combinations sold in Germany. These monographs are used to prescribe herbal treatments by doctors in Germany. They are a compilation of information on the benefits of herbal remedies.

**James A. Duke, Ph.D.**  
a few sample books



a prolific writer of informative, common sense approaches to herbal remedies. His friendly manner makes his comprehensive, entertaining books hard to put down. He recommends herbs for healthy living backed by solid research.

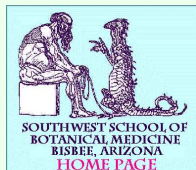


## Michael Moore

Recently deceased, he has left extensive books covering Indian, Spanish and modern herbal traditions of separate regions of the United States. His books are filled with a conversational style and his facts are based on his own experience as well as his research. Check out his many books and his website.

His website with his writings, collections of historic herbals and photos:

SW School of Botanical Medicine, <http://www.swsbm.com/homepage/>



## Michael Roland Shaw Moore

**January 9, 1941 - February 20, 2009**

Husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, friend, teacher, musician, herbalist.

So very beloved.

## Henriette's Herbal Homepage

<http://www.henriettesherbal.com>

This page features frequently asked questions (FAQs) about medicinal and culinary herbs, downloadable plant name databases, and herbal shareware for DOS. By far its best feature however, is a plethora of links to other sites and online older herbals.



## PDR

The Physicians' Desk Reference for Herbal Medicines. Published by the Medical Economics Company of Montivale, New Jersey. This exhaustive source includes research data, adverse effects known, formulations available over the counter, and recommended dosages. Included are a Homeopathic Indications Index, an Asian Indications Index, a Safety Guide and a Manufacturers Index



## The Herb Research Foundation

[www.herb.org](http://www.herb.org)



The Herb Research Foundation is a nonprofit educational organization that focuses on medicinal plants. This site features news, scientific research, regulatory updates, a photo gallery, and "soapbox" where you can read and leave comments. You'll also find extensive herb links from the Herbalist Maureen Rogers.

## Texas Gardener frustrations

submitted by Mary H. Mills, [pgherbfarm.com](http://pgherbfarm.com)

To garden successfully in Texas one must learn about your geography and climate to determine what can and cannot grow here.

Large temperature fluctuations, especially in winter and warm autumns with hard cold spells and winds ( 50-60 degrees in few hours).

Excessive rains in summer can water-log many herbs and cause root rot while summer drought can over stress many herbs.

Annual and perennial recommendations for growing herbs that are found in herb books or periodicals and on herb packages may be specific to other areas of the country. For example- Comfrey will be a low clump in the south and it may reach 6 feet in the northeast. Recommendations for other parts of Texas may not apply to your area. Texas is a big state!.

### Solutions to Southern herb growers

Read Herb books specifically for your area.

Exchange information with other herb growers in your area. Herb societies offer information for local growers.

Visit local display gardens. Observe herbs growing in your area and take notes and photos.

### A few tips:

Most herbs and vegetables require 6 hours of sunshine a day. In the south, high shade from overhanging trees (west) will protect them from excessive mid day summer heat.

Plant in raised beds or beds with good drainage.

For a summer harvest of cool season plants, plant in semi-shade areas.