

Herbs Make Scents



THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
VOLUME XLIV, NUMBER 1

SOUTH TEXAS UNIT
JANUARY 2021

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Jan. 2021 Calendar

All in-person **Day and Evening Meetings** are cancelled until further notice!!!!

Jan 11, Mon. at 7:00 pm

Members Only Business Meeting

Jan 20, Wed. at 7:00 pm

Zoom Program – “Good Nature vs. Nature Bad – Scientifically Proven Herbal Immune Support,” is presented by Mark “Merriwether” Vorderbruggen, PhD. (page 4)

Jan 20, 2021

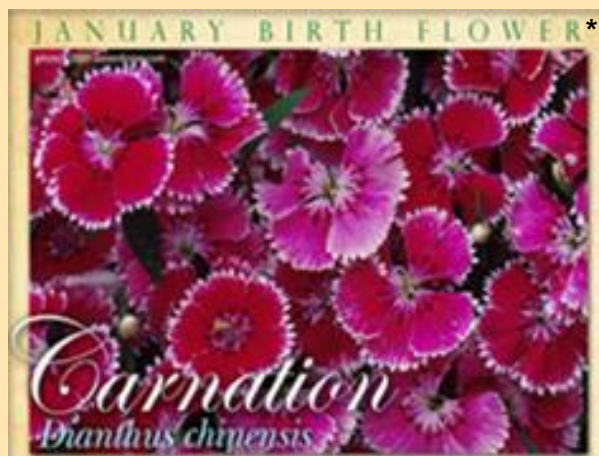
Deadline for Member’s Survey (see page 2)

Feb. 2021 Calendar

Feb 17, Wed. at 7:00 pm

Future programming is still under construction

Newsletter deadline: the 25th of every month
(February editor Linda Alderman)



Carnations belong to a genus of about 300 species that are commonly called “pinks” whether they are or not. They are probably native to the Mediterranean region and have been cultivated in many locations around the world for as many as 2000 years, so their native habitat is in question. Some scholars believe the common name *carnation* has the same origin as coronation; the flowers were used in ancient Greece in celebratory garlands or crowns. The fresh petals of the clove pink (*Dianthus caryophyllus*), with the bitter white base removed, are used in salads, candied, pickled, and made into syrup. Historically, they have been used in traditional medicine for nervous disorders and to lower fevers. *Dianthus chinensis* (Chinese or Indian pink) is antibacterial, lowers blood pressure and fever, and stimulates the urinary and digestive systems.

*From an ecard, courtesy of the American Botanical Council, A member benefit.

Happy Birthday!

Donna Wheeler (1/6)





Chairman's Corner

Greetings to each and every one of you in the new year! May it be lighter and brighter than 2020!



Here is a brief run-down of our last Board Meeting:

Programming

The Board has decided that all programming, at least through March, will be held virtually. Our January speaker will be Mark "Merriwether" Vorderbruggen. Don't miss it! He is never dull, and you will walk away from the meeting with at least one thing you didn't know! If you have speaker suggestions for subsequent programs, let Karen or me know.

Herb Day 2021

We had an absolutely awesome Herb Day planned for 2020, "Slow Down and Savor Each Day". Our incredible line-up of speakers included Felder Rushing (Slow Gardening), Teresa Sabankaya (author of The Posy Book), and Kim McHugh (of McHugh's Tea). With all the continued uncertainty about how soon it will be safe to meet in person again, the Board discussed having Herb Day on Zoom. The virtual format would include a speaker or speakers on a chosen topic. Many virtual programs charge a participation fee for access to the speakers talk. Obviously, we have never done this before, and many ideas and options were discussed. We think we can put something together that will be educational and possibly even profitable financially.

Having an online sale of our products to coincide with the virtual Herb Day was also discussed. Other units have been successful with this model. This would entail LOTS of prep work up front with selecting, making, packaging, photographing, marketing, and delivering our products. I would like to gauge the willingness of the general membership to this endeavor before we make a commitment to go forward with an online sale. The Board will meet again soon to make a decision about how to do Herb Day and whether or not to include an online sale.

The Member's Survey on Herb Day & Herb Gardens

The possibility of having a STU garden is exciting to me. Ever since we met with Rebecca Larkin at the McGovern Gardens, I think about how gardening knowledge and herbal wisdom would so effortlessly be passed on, by just digging in the dirt with another gardener. This is the heart of Back to Our Roots. A couple of potential avenues for participation in existing gardens have come to my attention recently. Before pursuing them, I need to get a handle on how members feel about having a garden, and whether or not they would volunteer in the garden. It feels important to me, but it might not be a fit for the group. If you know of other gardening possibilities where we could fit in, please let me know.

Members should look for an email message with a link to the survey. It is designed to gather information about **both** volunteering in a **garden** and volunteering for a possible **online sale** to coincide with Herb Day. We can't move forward with either of these projects without knowing where the members stand. **The deadline for responding is January 20.** You can respond anytime it is convenient right up until then. If you would rather call me with your response, that's fine. I look forward to hearing from you.



Scholarships

I have emailed the updated scholarship criteria to our members to review. We will vote on the proposal on **Monday, January 11 at 7 pm via Zoom**. Please make an effort to attend so that we have a quorum. As with all Member Business Meetings, any member in good standing may make a motion to discuss other matters, either from the floor or ahead of time.

Julie Fordes
Unit Chair

Every Garden Needs a Protector, Who's Keeping Watch in Yours?



Years ago I noticed an injured Mockingbird in my small backyard garden. I decided to help when I observed the Mockingbird hobbling on its injured leg and unsuccessful in capturing insects. I put small pieces of apple in a jar lid & secured the lid to the top of a fence. The Mockingbird devoured the apple pieces. As a result of our new relationship the Mockingbird recovered, stayed in the garden and in Spring brought a brood to the apple. Over the years I have continued to provide an apple and have enjoyed several additional Mockingbird broods. The Mockingbird is the State Bird of Texas. They eat insects such as grasshoppers, caterpillars beetles...and apples. Every Garden Needs a Protector, Who's Keeping Watch in Yours? Send your story and photo to [Janice Freeman](#), so we can hear about your garden protector.

Photo Courtesy of Janice Freeman

Member Concerns



**Elayne Kouzounis-
illness**

**Robert Jucker-
death in the family**



The HERB SOCIETY of AMERICA

How to Sign Up for Email Delivery of New HSA Blog Posts

- 1.) Go to herbsocietyblog.wordpress.com
- 2.) On the right side panel under search, recent posts, and archived posts, find "Follow Herb Society Blog"
- 3.) Enter your email where you'd like to be notified
- 4.) Click "Follow Herb Society Blog"



WHAT DO THESE BACKYARD HERBS HAVE IN COMMON?

JOIN US FOR OUR NEXT MEETING AND FIND OUT!

*“Good Nature vs Nature Bad –
Scientifically Proven Herbal Immune Support”*



Our Special Guest Speaker:

Mark "Merriwether" Vorderbruggen, Ph.D.

Jan 20, 2021 07:00 PM Central Time

Zoom Meeting

Meeting ID: 882 5478 6131

Dial-In (Audio Only): 346-248-7799 US (Houston)



“Volcano Mulching” is damaging trees in Houston Neighborhoods

Susan Gail Wood

As of Saturday, December 5, 2020, I counted 108 trees along the Bellaire Boulevard esplanade suffering from volcano mulching. What is volcano mulching? Read on to see the symptoms and solutions that every homeowner can easily make to prevent or remedy the situation in their own landscape.

You have probably seen it all around town . . . “volcano mulching.” Mulch is piled high around a tree trunk in the mistaken idea that this is helpful to preserve soil moisture and reduce the amount of water the tree needs. Wrong! Volcano mulching causes the base of the tree trunk where it meets the ground to decay. Once decay and rot sets in, the door is open for insect damage and eventual death to the tree.

The base of a tree develops a “root flare” where the trunk meets the ground as it ages. This root flare is important to the health and stability of the tree. Think of it as the tree’s feet. Smothering the root flare with soil or mulch limits the amount of oxygen that the tree needs in this important area. The integrity of a tree’s root flare needs to be protected by keeping it free of mulch or added soil. Mulch should be applied starting a foot or more away from the tree trunk. The distance away from the trunk depends on the age and size of your tree. Old oaks may need a diameter of five feet or more clear of mulch. Want to add soil underneath your trees? Add only about one inch a year and never up against the tree trunk.

Spread mulch with a depth of a few inches starting away from the tree trunk and root flare out several feet toward the drip line—the outside perimeter of the tree’s branches. Doing this helps moderate hot and cold soil temperatures and preserves moisture for your tree. Replenish the mulch when needed but do not think you can save work by applying too much mulch at a time. A heavy layer of mulch can prevent water from soaking down into the roots of your tree. Replenish your tree’s mulch in fall and again in spring each year. Use natural mulch, not one dyed with harmful chemicals. Rubber mulch? Never! As a natural mulch breaks down it enriches your soil which greatly benefits the health of your trees.

There are severe cases of volcano mulching among the beautiful, old oaks along Bellaire Boulevard. These trees have grown

Janis Teas dismayed by Volcano Mulching

I have long been dismayed by the volcano mulching that has taken place. The history of this mulching process has gone back probably to the 1960 era, when mulch consisted of pine bark chips which was a byproduct of the lumber mills. The bark was considered a waste product, and I remember as a small girl a dump truck driver approaching my father, Ben Teas, who had a nursery in Spring, about trying these composted mulch chips for mulch. The mulch chips would decompose in about a year, and re-mulching every year would not be a problem. Today's mulch is ground up pulp wood that decomposes much slower, and the buildup around trees, as Susan mentioned, is very detrimental.

Unfortunately, many of the landscapers use this as an add-on sale for the months that grass is not growing as rapidly. Many put annual mulching in their contracts. I commend Susan for bringing light to this problem.

Janis



steadily for decades but are now in danger. I used the Bellaire online website to report the problem on November 11, 2020. I was told the mulching was done properly and that the soil and mulch piled against tree trunks was necessary to keep mowers from damaging tree trunks. Oh dear!

A wonderful video explaining all you need to know about mulching trees is available on YouTube. When you Google “Morton Arboretum Mulch,” you will become a mulch expert in two minutes. Also, google Howard Garrett, aka “The Dirt Doctor,” to see him narrate a slide show about improper volcano mulching and planting depth of trees. Guess which city he proclaims as the worst in the world for tree maintenance and preservation? Sad but true. Trees are incredibly valuable to our landscape and our future.



Volcano mulch on Bellaire Blvd. 2020



Root flares along Boulevard Oaks, South Blvd. 2020.

There are a lot of wonderful herbal trees to protect too. My bay trees are a delight in my own garden. My olive, avocado, peach, Mexican lime, and Meyer Improved lemon also outstanding in their field. My almond verbena has grown much taller than predicted with blossoms that bring the bees in droves. The ten-foot loblolly pine tree I planted about fifteen years ago is producing pinecones which, of course, contain pine nuts. Banana trees rescued from a neighbor's home before demolition – love them too. My scarlet buckeye is a tribute to my grandparents from the buckeye state. Pecans keep the squirrels happy. My sassafras tree has leaves turning red right now before they drop. It then has intriguing lime green blossoms in early spring before leafing out again. The huge oaks bordering my property belong to my neighbors; their acorns can be pulverized to make flour.

Update: I brought the volcano mulching problems to the attention of City of Bellaire officials and City Council by speaking and presenting a power point presentation on December 21, 2020. I was only allowed five minutes but had emailed information to them prior to the meeting. I doubt they can resolve the problems without endless debate. Stay tuned: I may instigate a “Free the Root Flare” grass roots initiative among concerned citizens. Can you dig it?

Photos courtesy of SusanWood



Susan Wood fixing tree mulch problem



Introducing More of Our Newest Members!

Deborah (Debbie) Lancaster
Bellaire, TX

I think my favorite is Bay. I grew up in New Orleans and it always goes in my Red beans, Gumbo, etouffees and soups. I also like to put it in my drawers as a bug deterrent. I think it works. I'm looking forward to learning and growing with the South Texas Herb Unit.



Lindsey Pollock
Houston, TX

I am a public school principal in the Houston Independent School District. I am an ardent supporter of outdoor education and our school gardening program! One of my favorite herbs is sweet basil. Not only does it have healing properties, I am a pesto addict. Even better, basil is one of the herbs that flourish in my small backyard garden! Lindsey's interests include herbal symbolism and folklore, children projects, history, fragrance and aromatherapy, and the nutritional benefit and culinary use of herbs.

Noreen Hoard
Houston, TX

Noreen's interests include herb gardening, commercial growing, botany, garden design, symbolism and folklore, crafts, fragrance and aromatherapy and the culinary use of herbs. She is a member of the Native Prairie Association and the Native Plant Society.

Catherine Wampler
Houston, TX

Catherine's interests include herb gardening, botany, garden design, symbolism and folklore, crafts, fragrance and aromatherapy, the nutritional benefit and culinary use of herbs. Catherine is a Master Naturalist.

Welcome to all our new members!

We are looking forward to getting to know all of you, plus working and learning together!



Slow Down and Savor the Day



“Slow down. Life is crossing the road.”

— Debasish Mridha

Photo Courtesy of Catherine O'Brien

Ever wonder what to do in your Garden in January?



Visit the South Texas Unit Website for a Monthly “To Do” list!

[Monthly To Do List](#)



You shop. Amazon gives.

An AmazonSmile account has been set up for the South Texas Unit. Be sure to sign up for www.smile.amazon.com and select the South Texas unit as described below. Each quarter the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price of eligible items to our unit.

The shopping experience is the same as shopping through amazon.com with the added benefit the foundation will donate to our organization.

Five Easy Steps to Support the South Texas Unit

1. Go to smile.amazon.com
2. No account? Create one! Have an account? Sign in.
3. Select charitable organization. Found near the top of the smile.amazon.com home page.
4. Type in Herb Society South Texas Unit and click Search. Once the name comes up hit Select.
5. Enjoy shopping!

Questions? Problems? Contact Maria Treviño at maria@burger.com



Herb of the Month (HOTM): January 2021 - Parsley

Susan Gail Wood

Catherine O'Brien noticed the Herb of the Month feature on www.herbsociety.org website and suggested South Texas Unit add that in our newsletter. Great idea, Catherine! STU newsletters started featuring HOTM with our very first newsletter in May 1970 featuring *Capsicums* and it ceased in 2017.

We are re-introducing that feature this month which can be embellished however you like. Rather than recreate the wheel, please visit our national website at the beginning of each month. Detailed information is available on the home page. For example: cinnamon is the HOTM for December with 1 ½ pages of "Fun Facts" and 4 pages of recipes. If you wish to volunteer a short article or musings, contact Catherine O'Brien at: vibrio13@gmail.com to throw your hat in the ring. Remember, deadline for submissions is the 25th of the month before publication. (See next page for HOTM listing.)

Parsley (*Petroselinum crispum*)



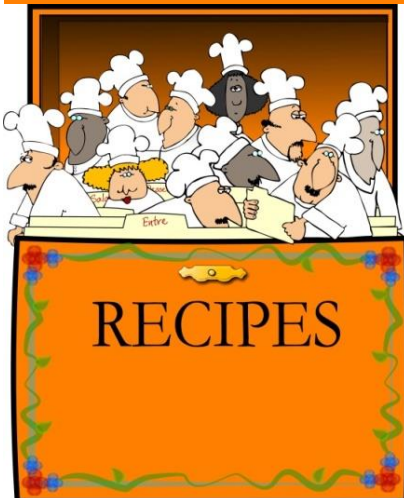
- Madalene Hill used to say the seed of parsley "goes to Hell and back 4 times before it germinates". I have no idea how long it takes to go to Hell, much less return from Hell. Suggest you purchase small seedlings now since it is late to sow by seed in January.
 - Parsley is a biennial. When buying seedlings, get a 4" pot with several small parsleys in it because parsley has a tap root and doesn't like to be transplanted when bigger. Space the seedlings about 12" apart in garden or pots. The first year it will stay somewhat small -- outside leaves can be harvested, protecting the crown. The second year it will flower and go to seed.
 - I am not crazy about the taste of parsley although I know it has many health benefits. I think that curly parsley is perhaps one of the most used herbs for garnish and the herb most often left on the plate. Flat leaf parsley is said to have better flavor.
- My favorite recipe using parsley is for a hair rinse. If you want your hair to look incredibly shiny and healthy, grab a bunch of parsley. Chop it up to fit inside your largest teapot. Pour boiling water over it, cover, and allow to infuse for about 15 – 20 minutes or more. Once cooled, strain out the parsley and use as a final rinse after shampooing your hair. I like to put the concoction in the bathroom sink and soak my hair in it for several minutes. It is amazing!
 - One of my early presentations was called "Cosmetic Use of Herbs". I changed the name to "Beauty Herbs" to get publicity for a STU event at Saks Fifth Avenue in 1975. The Houston Post picked up the story and sent a photographer. Saks provided a model for me to show the various beauty herbs. She arrived with full makeup and was dismayed when I asked her to remove it. We posed her with her head on a beautiful pillow. Her gorgeous hair was full of springs of parsley, a dab of banana/honey facial on her forehead, a fresh sliced cucumber over each closed eyelid and a strawberry in her mouth. Judy Lunn said it was the most commented upon photo she had ever featured in her column.



2021 Herb of the Month (HOTM):

Month	Common Name, Botanical Name
January	Parsley, <i>Petroselinum crispum</i>
February	Pink Peppercorn, <i>Schinus molle</i>
March	Heartsease, <i>Viola tricolor</i>
April	Chervil, <i>Anthriscus cerefolium</i>
May	Pineapple Mint, <i>Mentha suaveolens 'Variegata'</i>
June	Green tea, <i>Camellia sinensis</i>
July	Summer Savory, <i>Satureja hortensis</i>
August	Cayenne Pepper, <i>Capsicum annum</i> Cayenne Group
September	Horehound, <i>Marrubium vulgare</i>
October	Medlar, <i>Mespilus germanica</i>
November	Carob, <i>Ceratonia siliqua</i>
December	Cloves, <i>Syzygium aromaticum</i>

STAY-AT-HOME RECIPES



Carolyn Kosclskey

January is named after Janus, the ancient Roman god of gates and doors symbolizing endings, beginnings, and transitions. He's depicted with two heads: one head looking at the past and the other at the future. It's a month for rest and quiet reflection, for staying close to hearth and home and counting blessings. It's a time to welcome in the winter months as we prepare to rest our bodies, nurture our souls, and make gentle plans for the year ahead. A new month, a new year and a new decade, and every day from now on will be a little bit longer and a little bit lighter than the day before.



Reflecting back on how we changed the ways in which we ate in 2020, many of these changes will continue with us into the new year and become even more refined. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* was released in late December announcing foods and beverages we consume have a profound effect on our health and recommending nutrient-dense foods and beverages, choosing a variety from food groups and paying attention to portion control. Their theme is “make every bite count.” Grocery store sales as well as home cooking have both increased over 30% from previous years, and unlike in our herb world there is no vegetable of the month or of the year, that all vegetables are important to our diet. Travel continues to be risky, both international and domestic, so more focus will be on American food with emphasis on local food prepared in the comfort and safety of our homes along with produce and herbs from our gardens or local farmers markets.

CHICKEN ENCHILADA SOUP

From www.hungry-girl.com

3 cups fat-free chicken broth
1 ¼ cups finely chopped celery
½ cup diced sweet yellow onion
3 cups green enchilada sauce
One 15-oz. can pumpkin puree (not pie pumpkin)
10 oz. cooked boneless skinless lean chicken breast, chopped or shredded
1 cup frozen white (or yellow) corn
Optional: dash hot sauce, or more to taste
Optional toppings: shredded fat-free cheddar cheese, crushed baked tortilla chips

In a large pot, bring broth to a low boil on the stove. Add celery and onion, and simmer for about 5 minutes, until slightly tender. Stir in enchilada sauce and pumpkin. Once soup returns to a low boil, add chicken and corn, and mix well. Cook for an additional 3 to 5 minutes until soup is heated throughout.

Add a dash or more of hot sauce. (Or not. It's your soup!) Serve and, if you like, top with shredded cheese and/or crushed chips. This is a go-to recipe at our house. We have several vegetarians so I usually prepare chicken on the side and let the meat eaters add to theirs. I add additional cumin and coriander even though the green enchilada sauce is usually seasoned well.

From the files of Benee Curtis

Using the Instant Pot electric pressure cooker introduced in 2010, many home meals may be prepared and then cooked in a shorter time than on the stove top or in a traditional slow cooker, and without loss of nutritional value. What better recipe to fortify yourself and family during the coldest of months with a plant-based dish of New Orleans style red beans and rice (recipe below) seasoned with the following spice rub recipe. When making your rice to “make every bite count,” consider using brown rice and including other grains such as quinoa and farro to make the 1 cup needed for the two cups liquid (which could be broth or half water and half apple juice). Your choice of chopped herbs may also be stirred into the cooked rice before serving. [HEB is one of our local grocery stores that carry most of the seasoning ingredients in bulk at some of their stores. They also carry packages of generous spiral-cut “ham pieces” that may be used in place of hocks.]



SPICE RUB

1 cup brown sugar
¼ cup chili powder
¼ cup tablespoon cracked black pepper
2 ½ tablespoons cinnamon
2 ½ tablespoons garlic powder
2 ½ tablespoons onion powder
3 tablespoons kosher salt
2 teaspoons cayenne pepper

Good for seasoning pork, beef and chicken. Stir together in a glass bowl, takes about 2 cups, recipe may be decreased proportionately. Make this your own recipe by adjusting seasoning amounts. Store in a (recycled) glass jar. Makes a great gift!

How We Will Eat in 2021: www.nytimes.com/2020/12/22/dining/food-trends-predictions-2021.html

Dietary Guidelines for Americans: www.dietaryguidelines.gov/

Instant Pot Red Beans and Rice: www.camelliabrand.com/recipes/easy-instant-pot-red-beans-rice.

Instant Pot Pulled Pork Recipe: www.slickhousewives.com/easy-pulled-pork-recipe-using-instant-pot/

The February Stay-At-Home Recipe section will feature recipes that include strawberries and/or chocolate. Please submit your recipe (in a form convenient for you) to Carolyn Kosclskey at therecipeladycollection@gmail.com





Hill Country Fireside Fire Cider

Karen Cottingham

One of my favorite Christmas-time traditions is sitting by the fireside, enjoying the warmth of the flickering flames and watching the occasional shifting and settling of the embers. My husband and I spent this Christmas in the Hill Country of Texas, but the crackling fire took me straight back to the wood stove in my grandmother's kitchen and the huge granite fireplace in my childhood home. A dear friend, two drowsy cats, and a Newfoundland puppy as big as a bear cub completed our cozy fireside circle.

Here and there bright Christmas colors decorated the winter landscape of subdued tans and grays. Maybe not as traditional as the old holly tree in my childhood front yard, but Christmas red and green made its appearance nonetheless - in the prickly pear fruits that escaped being eaten by the deer and in the fiery chili peppers gathered just before the first freeze. And while I was accustomed to the forests of Douglas fir "back home", the prolific cedars provided the evergreen promise of continued life throughout the winter season. Clusters of mistletoe added a splash of green to the highest branches of the leafless old oaks, and festoons of "old man's beard" decorated the gnarled limbs like the tinsel on my childhood Christmas trees.



These pictures convey some of the vibrant Hill Country Christmas colors



When I wasn't sitting by the fire, I was out on long rambles through the cedars and oaks, stopping along the way to admire a water-worn rock, to pluck some "juniper berries" (actually cones, but that's being picky), or to throw a stick for the exuberant tag-along puppy to chase.

The pictures above were selected to try to capture some of the sights, smells, and flavors of our Hill Country Christmas. You probably recognize the striking crimson calyces of *Hibiscus sabdariffa*, the aromatic needles and berries of the ubiquitous *Juniperus ashei*, the vibrant yet treacherous fruits of a prickly *Opuntia* species, and a colorful collection of festive chili peppers. But what is a jar of rosy-red fruits and vegetables doing in my Christmas collage?

It's a ruby-red version of the powerfully pungent wellness tonic known as Fire Cider! What else should a person make from foraged juniper berries and needles, prickly pear tunas, the last of the chili peppers from the garden, and dried roselle from the fall harvest? Hill Country Fireside Fire Cider is my own version of the spicy, deliciously sweet vinegar tonic that just might help keep me healthy!

I had never made Fire Cider before, but, with flu season upon us and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic to contend with, it seemed the perfect time to make a batch. Many believe that the regular consumption of this vinegar-based herbal elixir enhances immune function and either prevents, or reduces the severity and duration of respiratory infections. And while this claim has never been subjected to a scientific examination, Fire Cider does contain ingredients such as ginger, garlic, onions, turmeric, and horseradish that are known to fight infection, reduce inflammation, and relieve congestion.



Start with the basic Fire Cider ingredients and then add your own special touches!



Fire Cider is a winter wellness herbal infusion popularized in the 1980s by **Rosemary Gladstar**. This is how the renowned herbalist describes her popular creation:

Fire Cider is pleasantly delicious, and also, a wonderful blend of medicinal herbs. The original formula contained garlic, onions, horseradish root, ginger root, hot peppers, sometimes turmeric, and often echinacea; all powerful immune enhancers that help ward off infections, colds, flus, and bronchial congestion. We found we could use Fire Cider during the winter, a tablespoon or two a day, to help keep the immune system healthy and to ward off infections. All this, and it tasted good too!

Her original recipe, which includes equal parts horseradish, ginger, onion, and garlic with small amount of dried cayenne pepper, has been endlessly adapted by adding exotic as well as commonplace herbs and spices. Rosemary herself describes how she makes Fire Cider in this charming video recorded in her “treehouse” kitchen:



Click on the link to hear Rosmary describe her recipe for Fire Cider

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JU8U0bDmXks>

The recipe that I more-or-less followed is a Hibiscus-Pomegranate Fire Cider developed by **Juliet Blankespoor**, the director and primary instructor at the Chestnut School of Herbal Medicine. You can see her article and recipe here: <https://chestnutherbs.com/roselle-hibiscus-pomegranate-fire-cider-and-the-medicine-and-cultivation-of-hibiscus/>

Although the instructions are for a quick stovetop version, I opted for the traditional six-week infusion and modified accordingly. That’s the beauty of Fire Cider - you can adjust the basic recipe according to available ingredients as well as your taste and tolerance for spiciness. With my large



stash of dried roselle and my foraged prickly pear tunas, I went all out for the deepest ruby-crimson I could create.

Besides, I had the pleasure of singeing the tunas over a flame to remove the nasty little “prickles” that lie in wait on the surface of the fruits. (After removing a few from my hands with duct tape and tweezers, that is!). The prickles, technically called *glochids*, are barely visible until they spark, ignite, and glow like tiny filaments only to disappear an instant later. If you look for recipes for Fire Cider that include prickly pear tunas, I guarantee you won't find any, but they seemed like just the thing for my Hill Country-inspired Fire Cider!



It's the tiny, almost invisible, spines that are most irritating. They can be removed by duct tape (always keep some in your in your emergency kit!) or by laser ablation in the food industry

More traditionally, the final chili pepper harvest also made its way into the jar. We shall see how that turns out - there were jalapeños and serrano and habanero peppers for sure, but a Ghost pepper or two may have sneaked in as well!

Then there were the foraged juniper berries to consider. I had actually collected them to use in some woody cookies (<https://gather victoria.com/2017/12/04/festive-conifer-cookies-aromatic-juniper-berry-sugar-stars/>) but had more than enough to add a handful of the resinous berries to my evolving concoction. “Why not,” I thought, as I threw in some leaf tips for good measure. The berries that I sampled had a nice floral piney sweetness; and since both the leaves and the berries have been used by Native Americans to prevent or treat respiratory problems, I thought they deserved a place in my Hill Country tonic.

I wish this was my original idea, but I have to confess that I learned about juniper-infused vinegar from my go-to foraging authority, Mark “Merriwether” Vorderbruggen's *Foraging Texas*:

My favorite thing to do with *J. ashei* is to infuse apple cider vinegar with it to make a "forager balsamic vinegar. To do this take a fresh, 16oz bottle of apple cider vinegar and pour off 1/2 cup. Now take a bunch of fresh *J. ashei* leaf-tips and start twisting and smashing them...not too much as you don't want lots of little pieces. Just enough so that their oils can steep into the vinegar. Now start adding these abused cedar leaf-tips into the bottle until the vinegar is just



about to overflow. Cap it and set it somewhere dark for 6-8 weeks, shaking it at least once a day. After the required time has passed strain out the leaf bits through a coarse wire mesh. Don't use filter paper as you'll want the original vinegar solids to remain in the liquid. I add a sprig of cedar into the strained bottle just to mark it as infused.
<https://www.foragingtexas.com/2012/09/cedarjuniper.html>

And by the way, the soft gray bloom on juniper berries is actually a wild yeast that you can use to make a sourdough starter!

Finally, to add all the flavor and beneficial phytonutrients I could think of, I added some tulsi, Mexican oregano, and sage from the herb garden and then filled the jar with apple cider vinegar. Now I just have to stir the crimson brew when I think of it and wait six weeks for the alchemy to occur.

And when this special Christmas rollout of Fire Cider is ready to taste, I'll add some delicious honey, converting the pungent infusion to a more palatable herbal oxymel. Just like they did in ancient Greece!

While Fire Cider is a folk-medicine without official scientific verification of effectiveness, there are many common herbs that have been actually proven to support our immune systems. Maybe even some that are growing in your own backyard!

For our next **Pearls for the Pandemic** program, we reached out to one of our favorite speakers, **Mark Vorderbruggen, PhD**, who, in addition to educating the public about foraging through his Foraging Texas book, website, and YouTube Channel, is a research chemist with expertise in the medicinal properties of plants. You may know him by his moniker "Merriwether", but he also answers to "Dad", "Dr. Vorderbruggen", and, most recently, to "The Medicine Man" of The Medicine Man Plant Company.

Dr. Vorderbruggen will join us January 20, 2021 to discuss "**Good Nature vs Nature Bad - Scientifically Proven Herbal Immune Support**". Watch your email reminders and our Facebook page for more information. The Zoom meeting ID is 882 5478 6131.

Based on his experience as a research scientist, author, dedicated educator, and life-long forager of wild medicinal plants, Dr. Vorderbruggen will discuss the beneficial effects of garlic, Japanese honeysuckle, elderberry, calendula, oregano, echinacea, and ginger on our immune function.

The South Texas Unit is a non-profit educational organization incorporated under the State of Texas. The South Texas Unit has no paid employees. Our activities are accomplished through the efforts of our volunteers.

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The Herb Society of America is dedicated to promoting the knowledge, use and delight of herbs through educational programs, research and sharing the knowledge of its members with the community.

