

Herbs Make Scents

THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
VOLUME XL, NUMBER 2



SOUTH TEXAS UNIT
FEBRUARY 2017

Editor –Linda Alderman ewalderman@comcast.net

February 2017 Calendar

Feb 14 - Tues. - 10 a.m.
Note Change of Location!

Day Meeting at Brookdale Community Room, (5151 Buffalo Speedway, Houston, TX 77005). **Hosted by Thelma Rowe.** Program: “*Goldy Goldenrod;*” presented by **Martha Burg.** **Bring your plate, napkin and a dish to share.**

Feb 15 - Wed. - 6:30 p.m.

Evening Meeting at the Cherie Flores Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004), **Hosted by: Donna Fay Hilliard and Martha Burg.** Program: “*To Comfort Always . . . Aromatherapy in Mainstream Medicine,*” presented by **Annie Wilson, RN.** **Bring your plate, napkin and a dish to share.**

March 2017 Calendar

Mar 14 - Tues. - **9:00 a.m.**
Note Change of TIME!

Day Meeting at the Cherie Flores Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004), **Hosted by: Beth Murphy.** Program: “*Silky Milkweed*”, presented by **Pam Harris.** **Bring your plate, napkin and a dish to share.**

Mar 15 - Wed. - 7 p.m.
Note Change of DATE!

Board Meeting – location to be determined

Mar 22 - Wed. – 6:30 p.m.
Note Change of DATE!

Evening Meeting at the Cherie Flores Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004), **Hosts needed.** Program: “*Herbal Micro-Greens for Macro-Taste and Macro-Nutrition*”, presented by **Jacob Martin.** **Bring your plate, napkin and a dish to share.**

Newsletter deadline: 25th of every month

Submissions should be at most 1 page in Times New Roman 12

**Happy
Birthday!**



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2/20 **Melba Moses**



**GULF COAST HERB FAIR
AND LUNCHEON**

Wednesday, March 1, 2017

At Moody Gardens, Galveston, TX
Look for details in the newsletter!



Chairman's Corner

I recently had the privilege of taking a seminar on professional development. The concepts presented were thought provoking to say the least if not life changing. I would like to share some ideas. The main message was that to be successful one has to be genuinely caring for and about others, achieve mastery- another word for excellence-and have a positive psyche.

I was introduced to an alarming observation by one author who maintained that in the 21st century society abounds in mediocrity with constant reminders that average is acceptable. Stop and give that some consideration. I found this an absolutely alarming thought. Does the norm rule my life? Do I suffer from terminal normalcy? Does this promote my being average? Food for thought! If I am honest with myself I have to admit that societal normalcy does play a big part in my psyche and that I do not achieve excellence in any part of my life. And, yes, I have to admit that I am comfortable with being average and maintaining the status quo, a most disconcerting admission. Mediocrity is the subliminal message that I encounter everywhere. Even when I visit the doctor all my test results are measured in terms of the norm! What is worse the doctor is satisfied if I am within normal range and I receive little approval if I am better than normal. Is it any wonder that I am satisfied with being average?

I learned that I can overcome my satisfaction with mediocrity by removing all that is limiting and to surround myself with people who ask more of me. Another step is to remove resentment of those who have risen above mediocrity and are committed to excellence.

I got to thinking about the South Texas Unit. I decided that none of us is average. That is the reason that I am a member even though I am content with normalcy in my own life.

It occurred to me that the Unit needs to remain open and receptive to new ideas. Should we let the experience of those committed to excellence plant a seed so that with nourishment the unit and all its members can achieve mastery?

I learned that a master will embrace the ordinary and use it as a foundation for building excellence

rather than using it as an excuse for inactivity and maintaining the status quo. I will need to use this vehicle for correcting my normalcy. It is essential in the process of attaining mastery. I need to be able to correct without invalidating or condemning and be willing to accept results and improve. . . I need to correct by accepting new Ideas and not protecting what has been my comfort zone.

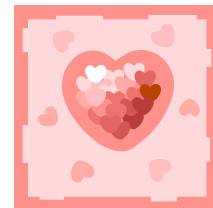
I learned that correction is essential to achieving excellence and mastery. Will each of you join me striving to becoming masters and achieving excellence?

My hope is that the unit and all its members find stimulation and joy as we strive to help each other overcome normalcy and achieve mastery. May we be an oasis of excellence in the world of normalcy!

The South Texas Unit of the Herb Society of America has the responsibility of being an authentic source of herbal knowledge and knowhow. Does not this come with the responsibility to produce results out of the ordinary and a commitment to mastery?

-Taken from Stewart Emery.

Sally Luna
Unit Chair





Gulf Coast Herb Fair and Luncheon

The Friends of Moody Gardens will host the 5th annual Gulf Coast Herb Fair and Luncheon on Wednesday March 1st, 2017 in the Visitors Pyramid at Moody Gardens, 1 Hope Blvd, Galveston, TX.

Our featured speaker during the luncheon will be Alicia Cahill, owner of The Kitchen Chick.

Activities being planned include, exciting vendors in the Visitors Pyramid, a Garden Blessing accompanied by music and the story of the Tussey Mussey, plus a lovely luncheon for \$35/pp.

Checks can be sent to Ellen Perry, 2903 Dominique Drive, Galveston, TX 77551
Phone 409-740-6842, email e.l.perry@att.net

We will again have several tasty demonstrations with:

Moody Gardens' Donita Brannon: head Gardener
Bethany Boedicker: Pastry Chef
James Graves: from Texas City

Chef Jimmy has started an exciting Kids Cooking club and works with The Galveston County Food Bank, United Faith Alliance

<https://files.acrobat.com/a/preview/f706afb5-3856-4a07-8ce2-9223dd12981b>



The HERB SOCIETY of AMERICA

Check out the Herb Society of America website...so much great information!
www.herbsociety.org

GreenBridges™ Initiative

The GreenBridges™ program helps to create opportunities for the safe passage of plants and pollinators and to avoid habitat fragmentation. Each GreenBridges™ garden is a link in the chain across the nation, providing safe movement for the plants and pollinators that help maintain healthy ecosystems.

Get involved in creating GreenBridges™ and you will...

- Learn best practices from a network of GreenBridges™ gardeners
- Grow the native herbs unique to your own region
- Share information with other GreenBridges™ gardeners
- Work toward a more sustainable gardening style

GUIDELINES FOR SAFE GARDENING (a link to the Public Gardening Code)

From GreenBridges and safe gardens look what is available! Just a sample of a few discounts:

- 10% Discount** on Richters Herbs purchases
- 15% Discount** on Growers Exchange purchases
- 10% Discount** on The Science and Art of Herbalism home study course.
- 10% Discount** on Essential Herbal Magazine purchases
- 10% Discount** on Mountain Rose Herbs purchases
- 10% Discount** on Shop HSA purchases
- 1 Year Subscription Discount** to Mother Earth Living
- Reduced or FREE admission to public gardens**



About Our Meetings

By Albert Ramos

In many cultures, a New Year brings new luck, and the first meeting of the New Year was certainly lucky for the South Texas Unit of The Herb Society of America. Despite early morning flooding, the evening skies were clear, and twenty-two members were able to warmly welcome 28 guests. Our lucky streak continued as two of the guests took advantage of their eligibility to apply for membership in the STU. So let's ring in the New Year by welcoming **Jenna Wallis** and **Mike Jensvold**.

Jenna and Mike are a wonderful addition to our group - they're both kind, helpful, smart, and talented. Jenna and Mike have not only attended the requisite number of meetings, but they both helped **Mary Sacilowski** with the vermiculture portion of the October 2016 evening meeting, *Down & Dirty in Your Garden*. Thank you, Jenna and Mike!

And despite the weather worries that beset many earlier in the day, we set a new record for guests: 28. So what drew in so many? It was the intriguing topic of the evening program, *Henna Artistry - Ephemeral Yet Enduring; Enduring Yet Ephemeral*. The program was a huge undertaking *ab ovo usque ad mala* (*Latin*: from the egg to the apple; modern interpretation: from beginning to end).

The program began with an overview of henna by **Karen Cottingham**. Most of us had never seen a henna plant before, but Karen found one in Rosenberg and brought it to the meeting. She discussed the botany and geographic distribution of henna and then addressed the scholarly opinions of how henna came into use. In case you missed it, it had to do with the cooling and antiperspirant effect of henna applied to the hands and feet in hot, arid climates. People working in fields also benefited from henna because of its antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties. Henna applied to the hands and feet helped protect workers from infections that might have arisen from cuts they suffered while laboring.

In the West, henna's most famous use has been to color hair. Karen gave three interesting and amusing examples of this. First, paintings by Great Britain's Pre-Raphaelite artists often depicted women with either natural or hennaed red hair. Henna became an acceptable statement for "respectable" Victorian women yearning for just enough of the freedom represented by the bohemian Pre-Raphaelite models - but without all the scandalous notoriety associated with their lifestyle. Second, the first "It" girl of the silver screen (the "It" was

a euphemism for sex appeal), the provocative and sensuous silent movie star Clara Bow, also used henna to color her hair red. When a movie fan magazine revealed that the black-and-white film star's hair was henna-red, the sales of henna rinse exploded. Finally, Lucille Ball, whose famous red hair would have been brown without henna dye, once confided to an Arab sheikh she met at a casino that she constantly worried about the availability and uniformity of the henna she depended upon for her signature red hair color. Charmed by her beauty and candor, the accommodating sheikh sent Lucille a lifetime supply of the valuable herbal colorant, which she kept locked up in a safe. There was still a large stockpile of henna in Lucille's safe upon her death.

Neelam Singh, PhD spoke next about her three favorite Indian traditions in which henna plays an integral part. First was the elaborate Hindu wedding celebration. We learned that henna is one of 16 adornments for Indian brides in traditional weddings and enjoyed seeing wonderful photos of Neelam's own henna application and wedding in India. Neelam said it can take up to 8 hours to decorate an Indian bride with henna.

Next Neelam spoke about henna applied to the body as part of *Karva Chauth*, an October "full moon" celebration for a good harvest and the safety and long life of husbands. Finally, she told us about *Teej*, a celebration of the return of the monsoon season in which women adorn themselves with henna, wear festive and colorful outfits, and play on decorated swings to express their joy for the bounty the rains will bring.

In addition to the beautiful and colorful slides of these three henna-related celebrations, Neelam also discussed the economics of henna. She noted that applying henna is a profession for both men and women in India. Sometimes entire families work in the business of henna application. By the way, in the Hindu culture, henna is called *mehndi*.

Douniazed Wong, who grew up in Morocco, discussed the historical and contemporary use of henna in her native country. Henna was used extensively by the native pre-islamic Berbers for protection against "the evil eye" and malevolent *djinns* thought to bring misfortune and illness. Douniazed also introduced us to the ceremonial application of henna to a pregnant woman's abdomen during the seventh month of pregnancy. The purpose of this tradition is to welcome the new life and ensure a safe delivery. It illustrates henna's importance in marking and celebrating the major transitions in life. Douniazed's slide show was a visual feast featuring the intricate, geometric Moroccan henna designs created for ceremonial and decorative purposes for both men and women.



Following this, **Rose Proler** talked about the little-known Jewish tradition of a “night of henna” celebration, which occurs the night before a traditional Sephardic wedding. The henna applied during a *night of henna* is not a highly decorative application, but is more of a “smudge” on the palm of the hand that is then protected with a red cloth. Sephardic Jews acquired the henna custom from Spain and North Africa, and henna also became popular in the many Jewish communities that were scattered about in the Middle East. The *night of henna* is being revived today, particularly in Israel. Rose’s daughter was married in Jerusalem a few years ago, and photos of her *night of henna* pre-wedding celebration called to mind the sumptuous and luxurious wedding festivities of the Old Testament.

Macy Ulbricht is a professional henna artist, and she literally illustrated and made personal all we learned from the prior speakers. Both before and after the presentations, she applied lovely henna designs to the hands and arms of the enthusiastic members and guests who lined up for this special treat. In her presentation, Macy told us how she acquires and then processes the henna to make it ready for artistic application. She also introduced us to the different methods she uses to apply henna in various circumstances. Henna artistry not only takes patience, but it’s also hard work! Thank you, Macy, for decorating our members and guests with your lovely and graceful henna designs!

Neelam, Douniazed, Rose, and Macy also brought to life another aspect of henna by the lovely, cultural outfits they wore. Neelam looked resplendent in a rich golden-orange *sari* and with jeweled adornments on her hands and face. Douniazed wore a lovely and intriguing white silk *caftan* embroidered with colorful designs. The gorgeous garment was a gift from her mother-in-law. Rose wore an elegant green velvet robe embroidered with golden thread that she had once worn at a *night of henna* celebration before her own wedding. Macy’s exotic and airy outfit lent an air of authenticity and tradition to her henna artistry. All the women were as picture-perfect as the slides in their presentations.

In any program as large as this one, there’s always someone behind the scenes who helps make it all come together. For the HSA-STU, this unsung hero was **Kerry Madole**. Without Kerry’s technical prowess and artistic sensibility, tonight’s presentation would not have been possible. Kerry devoted hours and hours of her time helping Karen curate pictures for the slide show. She also devoted substantial time to arranging and decorating the other speakers’ slides for their powerpoint presentations. Thank you, Kerry. Your selfless dedication and artistic skill brought the beauty of henna artistry to life for our audience.

Hostesses **Martha Burg** and **Lois Jean Howard** covered the tables with colorful cloths, brought refreshing beverages, and welcomed our evening’s guests. And we owe special thanks to **Lucia Bettler** and **Andi Leger**. The Middle Eastern textiles and lanterns they brought lent an air of *The Arabian Nights* to the evening.

The theme for the night’s potluck meal was lucky foods for the New Year. Participants honored lucky traditions from the USA, Latin America, Europe, and the Far East. The meal was a veritable gastronomic world tour! All the foods were delicious, but I especially enjoyed **Sarah Ballanfant’s** cinnamon-sugar pig-shaped cookies. Pig-shaped foods symbolize abundance in many European countries. Also striking a sweet note was the beautiful five-layer cake that **Bobby Jucker** brought from his bakery, **Three Brothers Bakery**. The round, pineapple-filled cake was specially decorated with an intricate henna-inspired icing design. Disc-shaped or round foods represent wealth and good fortune in the coming year in some cultures, and everyone who ate a slice of the henna cake felt fortunate for having done so. Thank you, Bobby. It was delicious!

If you’ve not attended an evening meeting lately, please make plans now to join us for next month’s meeting on February 15, 2017. **Annie Wilson**, an RN from MD Anderson Cancer Center, will present *To Comfort Always: Aromatherapy in Mainstream Medicine*.



From clipart – a sample of henna art



What's Coming Up Next?

NATURE'S AROMATHERAPY: THE PERFUME OF THE EARTH

BY KAREN COTTINGHAM

My olfactory adventure at *Farm Dirt* started with a simple phone call: "I have a friend who loves herbs but can't garden right now, so I am helping her. We need some compost..." **Jeff Hilson**, who answered my call at this community-oriented composting operation didn't wait for me to finish my sentence. "We would be glad to donate the compost. How much do you need?"

A few days later Albert, **Bobby Jucker**, and I met Jeff and *Farm Dirt* owner and creative force **Danny Wilson** on what may be the highest elevation in Houston's otherwise flat terrain - a small mountain of incredibly fertile, microbial-rich, life-giving "black gold" in the heart of the Fifth Ward! Those who attended the October HSA-STU Evening Meeting, *Notes From the Underground*, will remember Danny, the "social entrepreneur" who transforms wood chips and food waste from The Houston Food Bank, HISD, Whole Foods, and large-scale produce distributors into top-quality compost.

As a former farm girl from northwest Washington State, scrambling up and down huge mounds of sweet-smelling compost transported me immediately to my childhood on the farm. Yes, you read that last sentence correctly - *Farm Dirt* compost *truly is* "sweet-smelling", much like the scent that rises from our gardens after a gentle Spring rain. The innovative *Farm Dirt* composting process, utilizing constant aeration and frequent Bobcat-assisted churning of the developing compost, releases a fresh, pleasant scent that is indicative of healthy soil - a scent that makes us want to take a long, deep breath; a scent that makes us appreciate, seek out and spend time in nature. It is literally the *Perfume of the Earth*.

To me, it is the evocative smell of my childhood - of pulling up big bunches of stubborn carrots and beets, of trips to the basement for the potatoes still wearing their protective coats of garden dirt, and of hours watching my father patiently plowing the fields in the springtime.

To others, it is the refreshing and reassuring scent promising survival that is released when the parched soil is finally soaked by rain after a long drought.

To scientists, the technical term for the smell of rain-soaked or freshly turned soil is *petrichor*. The Greek words *petros* ("stone") and *ichor* ("the fluid flowing in the veins of the Greek gods") are well-chosen to evoke the intense, complex fragrance released from rocky terrain when a rainstorm follows a dry spell. *Geosmin* (literally "earth smell") is the Greek name for the particular molecular compound that is most responsible for the essential smell of dirt and is the main constituent of *petrichor*. Produced by healthy soil bacteria, *geosmin* is the chemical basis for the sweet smell of the compost produced at *Farm Dirt*, the refreshing scent of the humus-rich soil of old-growth forests, and the uplifting fragrance of the well-cultivated soil of our own backyard herb gardens.

If you don't believe me about the pleasant scent of healthy dirt, consider this: elite perfumers turn to *geosmin* when they wish to add an inviting earthy note to their creations. In the Indian tradition of *attar*-making, a highly desirable natural perfume is created by distilling sun-baked earth with sandalwood. The resulting fragrance is said to resemble the smell of the first monsoon rain striking the parched soil, the scent of life itself.

Geosmin is naturally produced by the bacteria in healthy soil. Several members of the family of mycelial soil bacteria known as *Actinomycetes* produce *geosmin* along with the spores which secure their own reproduction and the continued existence of the species.

Actinomycetes are best known as prolific producers of life-saving antibiotics, but are also crucial in maintaining soil health, fertility and agricultural productivity. Sweet-smelling soil is almost always exceptionally fertile due to the presence of *Actinomycetes*.

Why would bacteria of the *Actinomycetes* family expend precious energy producing the fragrant

molecular compound *geosmin*? And why would many animals, including humans, be exquisitely sensitive to minute levels of *geosmin* in the air? To understand the importance of *geosmin*, consider the desert camel. Its olfactory system is remarkably sensitive to vanishingly low levels of *geosmin*. Since *geosmin* is released into the air after contact with water, it is a reliable indicator of





this life-sustaining resource. Scientists believe that camels sniff out a distant oasis by detecting minute traces of this fragrant molecule. As they later walk across the soil of the oasis, bacterial spores likely cling to their hooves and bodies and are then carried to other locations where they might be able to thrive. This is a win-win situation for both bacteria and camels.

Olfaction studies have shown that the human nose is also exceptionally sensitive to *geosmin*. Perhaps our nomadic desert-dwelling ancestors also depended on microbial signals to locate resource-rich ecosystems. Sensitivity to minute concentrations of a molecule that is reliably associated with both water and fertile soil might well have enhanced the survival of our early ancestors.

Today, humans remain exquisitely responsive to chemicals produced by the microbial world, but we are infrequently aware of their existence or their effect on us. An exception to this generality is the powerful fragrance of *geosmin*, the bacterial chemical indicator of fertility and water so abundant in nature. The ancient smell of the soil at the *Farm Dirt* composting site unexpectedly and powerfully connected me to the lovely farms, forests and gardens of my childhood. I am grateful to *Farm Dirt* not only for their generous contribution for a much-needed herbal healing garden in progress, but also for the gift of a delightful, nostalgic experience mediated by the *Perfume of the Earth*.



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.

The Herb Society of America
South Texas Unit
P.O. Box 6515
Houston, TX 77265-6515



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.



Find our Unit on the web at:
www.herbsociety-stu.org

Herbs Make Scents – February 2017