

# Herbs Make Scents

THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA  
VOLUME XLI, NUMBER 1



SOUTH TEXAS UNIT  
JANUARY 2018

Editor – Linda Alderman (ewalderman@comcast.net)

## January 2018 Calendar

- Jan 9**, Tues. at 10 a.m. **Day meeting** is at the home of Lois Jean Howard. The program, “*Crafting with Rosemary*,” is presented by **Lois Jean Howard**. **Bring a dish to share.** Guests should RSVP by calling Lois Jean at 713-771-0172.
- Jan 17**, Wed. at 6:30 p.m. **Evening Meeting** is at the Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004). **Hosts are Jenna Wallis and Mike Jensvold.** The program is “*Hops – The Fruit of the Bine*”, presented by member **Jacqui Highton**. **Bring your plate and napkin and a dish to share.**

## February 2018 Calendar

- Feb 13**, Tues. at 10 a.m. **Day meeting** is at the home of Tamara Gruber. The program, “*Liqueurs*,” is presented by **Jacqui Highton**. **Bring a dish to share.** Guests should RSVP by calling Tamara Gruber at 713-665-0675.
- Feb 21**, Wed. at 6:30 p.m. **Evening Meeting** is at the Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004). **Hosts are Lois Jean Howard and Kathy Ballanfant.** The program is “*In Pursuit of Hoppiness*”, presented by **Kathryn Holler**, Brewer and Owner, Holler Brewing Co. **Bring your plate and napkin and a dish to share.**

**Newsletter deadline: the 25<sup>th</sup> of every month**



# Happy New Year!

Members – If you would like to have your birthday remembered, and haven't seen it announced, send me an email.  
ewalderman@comcast.net



## Chairman's Corner

Welcome New Year 2018,

As I write these few lines, there are still 11 days left in old 2017, and by the time you read this, we will be into our new year. There has been such sorrow and devastation these past months – both personal and community wide. More than a few of our own members have been touched by loss, which gave many of us the opportunity to help. Our Society at it's finest.

There was a brief agenda for the December Board meeting, hosted by Sally Luna. Our 2018 rental agreement with the Hermann Park Conservancy was signed and payment remitted to secure the space for our evening and several day meetings. We will continue to meet in the beautiful Cherie Flores building. *Just a reminder*, our start time is 6:30 pm and we must be cleaned up and out by 9:30pm. Also, we have been asked not to leave our cars in the back-enclosed parking lot after we unload. Several members will conduct an inventory of the Society's storage unit by the end of the month. A suggestion was made that a portion of the Herb Blends that were left over from the Fair be donated to NuWaters Co-op in the Third Ward, 2320 Elgin. I met Carmen at the storefront one afternoon and she was extremely delighted to receive the gift. She explained that in addition to a larger garden on the near northside, they have a neglected plot behind the Co-op store. She hopes that a collaboration can be made between the Herb Society members and NuWaters volunteers to develop the garden again and perhaps an on-going maintenance schedule. This would align with our Membership Guidelines and the five hour gardening requirement, provided the Unit approves the space. Perhaps one of the members would like to spearhead this project? I would love to take you to meet with Carmen and the other members to see what they have accomplished in the last four years in this food desert area. A few minor changes were made,

and approved, to the application for Active Membership and they will be available in the new year.

Lastly, many thanks go to Elayne and Demo Kouzounis for hosting the Holiday Party the first week of December. It was a stormy evening, but the rain held off until we were inside their beautiful home, which was decorated floor to ceiling! It was a beautiful beginning to the holiday season.

**Donna Yanowski**  
Unit Chair





## What's Coming Up?

### HOP TO IT!

Karen Cottingham

All herb enthusiasts are cordially invited to **HOP TO IT** with The Herb Society of America - South Texas Unit. Hops are the twining and climbing plants most known for their use in brewing. Their pungent little cones are just too darn interesting to fit into one program, so we are devoting both the January and February 2018 Evening HSA-STU meetings to these fascinating bitter herbs.

On January 17, 2018, HSA-STU Member **Jacqui Highton** will draw upon her British heritage to highlight the history of hops in her native land. I don't want to give away too much of her program, ***The Fruit of the Bine***, but if you're interested in history and vernacular architecture, you won't want to miss it.

One of Jacqui's friends back in England actually lives in a converted *oast* house. An *oast* is a handsome structure designed to kiln (dry) the freshly harvested hops in preparation for their use in brewing. Special features include perforated floors to transmit heated air through the "stowage", and conical roofs topped with wind-blown "cows" to increase the draft. The prevalence of these agricultural structures in its hops-growing regions is a striking reminder of the importance of hops in England's storied history.

If there's one crop that symbolizes "The Garden of England", that would be hops. Mark your calendars right now for Jacqui's program. Come and learn much more about these pungent clusters of golden cones and the people who grew, picked, and brewed with them.



Oast House

Far from the countryside of Kent, Houston is also making a name for itself in beer history. The Bayou City is fast becoming a leader in the contemporary craft beer revival. Our February 21, 2018 guest speaker, **Kathryn Holler**, and her husband, John, retired from their former professional lives in education and energy and set off "***In Search of Hoppiness***".

In 2015, after considerable study and preparation, they built their dream brewery in the Sawyer Yards neighborhood near the Houston Heights. Now that **Holler Brewing Co.** is operational, Kathryn is studying to become a *cicerone* - an elite, highly trained and professional expert in beer similar to a wine *sommelier*.

Sorry, I know what you must be thinking; but no, we will not be having a beer tasting during Kathryn's program! Not even a hops tasting, unless someone really wants to show off their tolerance for extremely bitter tastes. Kathryn is planning, however, to bring a selection of hops to demonstrate the range of hop aromas: spicy, citrus, resinous, tropical fruit, stone fruit, and floral, just to name a few of the aroma categories.

And you can always swing by the Holler Brewing Tap Room to do your own hops research. Looking for a brew with an initial piney aroma followed by a "big chocolatey fruity body"? Black Sunshine IPA is the beer for you! Or, how about Hype PA, made with "loads of Galaxy and Citra hops" and "bursting with tropical fruit flavor". If a fruity beer is not your thing, the tap list also features beers hinting of sweetened espresso, toffee, clove, or pink peppercorn. Hops truly are the fruit of the bine!

Naturally, when most people think of hops, they think of beer; but hops also have a rich history of medicinal and culinary uses. Some recently developed hops applications are rather unexpected - beekeepers put hops in their beehives, and Tom's of Maine puts hops in their personal care products.

The "action" is all in the *lupulin*, the yellowish, resinous exudate secreted by glands hiding under the hop "petals". *Lupulin* contains biologically active acids and oils that are as beneficial outside a bottle of beer as they are inside. For instance, mitocidal extracts from certain varieties of hops can be placed within beehives to protect bees from the devastating mite infestations of recent years.

The antibacterial properties of hops account for centuries of its usefulness as a preservative in beer; and for the same reason, hops are now being added to "natural" deodorants and toothpastes. If you follow the latest trends in food, you probably



already know about hops-flavored ice cream, pickled hop shoots, and deep-fried stuffed hop leaves.

Medicinally, the idea of using hops as a mild sedative came from the common observation of excessive sleepiness in hops workers. This was apparently due to the absorption of lupulin through their skin during hops harvesting or processing.

Here is an interesting historical description of how an early American pharmacist might have prepared a sleeping draught or tonic using hops:

According to The Farmer's Museum near Cooperstown, New York, local pharmacists making "nerve tonics" frequently purchased hops that were left over from previous seasons. Left-over hops were classified into three categories: "yearlings", "olds", and "old olds". Referring to *The Cyclopaedia of Six Thousand Practical Receipts*, published in 1845, pharmacists would find that hops "yearlings" had about 2/3 the potency of freshly harvested hops, "olds" were about half as strong, and "old olds" were very weak. They could then dose their patients according to their individual needs! Sort of an early version of "personalized medicine".

If you're not yet completely intrigued, here is one last hops story:

Does *Good King Wenceslas* ring a bell? The Good King, memorialized in a beloved Christmas carol, was a tenth-century Christian martyr who became the patron saint of Bohemia. Known and admired for protecting his local hops growers - he ordered the death penalty to anyone who attempted to steal cuttings of this valuable commodity - Wenceslas also became the patron saint of Czech brewers. Control of hops (and therefore control of beer) was as important in the Middle Ages as control of oil is today.

A later Bohemian King, Wenceslas IV, also lived in interesting times. One of his most notable "executive orders" was to grant the brewers guild the right to use an image of the hops flower in their coat of arms. At first glance, this doesn't seem to be particularly newsworthy - everyone knew that hops were an essential ingredient of beer - but Wenceslas had something else up his

embroidered sleeve. Rather than rewarding brewing excellence, the crafty King was promoting the so-called "rejuvenating" benefits from bathing in cold brewery sludge! Brewery sludge would presumably consist of a reeking slurry of wet grain, soggy hops, and yeast, all in an advanced state of fermentation. What the "rejuvenating" benefits of a sludge-dunk were exactly was not disclosed, but brewery-sludge-bathing must have been beneficial enough that people actually brought themselves to do it. It's difficult, but not actually impossible, to imagine why.

One possibility is that since hops are known to contain antibiotic substances, soaking in hops-rich mud may have had some salutary effect on infection. Hops are also anti-inflammatory and might have soothed aching joints. Or, for those with nervous dispositions, bathing in hops-sludge might have taken the edge off their anxiety.

Interestingly, sludge baths were apparently most valued for gynecologic disorders. It sounds terrible, but actually, some of the other "treatments" for female "hysterical" disorders throughout history have been far worse than a good dunking in the sludge! I wouldn't recommend it, but consider this - hops do contain phytoestrogens! Soaking in a sludge of hops might be another way to treat those pesky menopause symptoms!

Our back-to-back "Hopathon" will take place January 17, 2018, with Jacqui Highton's program, ***The Fruit of the Bine***, and on February 21, 2018 for Kathryn Holler's ***In Search of Hoppiness***. Make plans now to attend. Bring a friend and HOP TO IT!





## TIS THE SEASON...THE FLU SEASON KAREN COTTINGHAM



Whether you celebrate Christmas, Hanukkah, the Winter Solstice, or back-to-back College Bowl games, winter is the Holiday Season and the Season of Light. It's also a time to eat your favorite traditional foods – tamales, latkes, pickled herring, or gingerbread (hopefully not at the same time) – and to visit and laugh with friends and family.

And just when you're really enjoying the Season of Goodwill, uninvited visitors always seem to crash the party. Look at those bright red noses! And what funny names – *Sniffles*, *Sneezles* and *Wheezles*<sup>1</sup>; then - uh-oh - here come *Drowsy*, *Drippy*, *Woozy*, and *Weak-kneed*. I don't think these are Santa's reindeer bringing more gifts. No, Virginia; these party-crashers are even worse than that argumentative uncle at your dinner table. Much worse. The **Dreaded Flu Bugs** have arrived.

Why does the holiday season also have to be flu season?

If influenza has you down, this article is for you. It won't help you get well any faster, but it will help you pass the time and you'll learn something new and interesting.

It starts with a story almost as old as the stars themselves.



Long before microscopes were invented and scientists knew about bacteria and viruses, people believed that illness was sent to earth from the stars. It might sound strange today, but people used to believe that

“streaming ethereal powers” emanated from the stars. These powerful astrological forces were thought to control all earthly matters from weather to wars and crops to childbirth. Stars determined the character, health, and destiny of men and women, for good or for ill. Although long ago abandoned as a philosophy, this archaic concept of celestial cause and effect is preserved in language in our modern word “disaster”. Etymologically speaking, a “disaster” is a calamity due to the evil (“dis”) influence of stars (“astra”).



Strongly held beliefs frequently persist in our language without our awareness, and this notion of the controlling influence of the stars,

foreign to us now, is an excellent example. Who would ever suspect that relics of this arcane astrological understanding of disease are still contained within our modern words? Just to make the point – consider the word “influenza”.

The Italian word *influenza* comes from the Medieval Latin *influentia* which is based on the earlier Latin word, *fluere* (to flow). *Influentia* referred to the “flowing forth” or the “emanation” from the stars that controlled all human affairs. Disease, along with all other “disasters”, resulted from unfavorable astrological influences. Each illness was understood as a “flowing from the stars” and was therefore called “influenza”. Later, as language and thought evolved; the word “influenza” came to be applied more narrowly to any kind of epidemic or plague that was blamed on the stars. It was not until the 1700s that the word influenza came to specifically indicate the flu that we would recognize - and that some of you are suffering from - today.

Interesting, right? But this article is for The Herb Society, not The Journal of Medieval Astrology. If you're with me this far, you're probably wondering what influenza and the stars have to do with herbs. Here's the connection:

Throughout history, humans have used plants to treat all kinds of illnesses. Even today, about 40% of our prescription medicines come from plant extracts or synthesized compounds that were originally found in plants. Of the top 150 prescription drugs in the United States, 118 are based on plant sources.

Tamiflu<sup>®</sup>, for example, is one of the most-prescribed plant-based medications of the winter season. Approved in 1999 for the prevention

<sup>1</sup> The terms “sneezles” and “wheezles” are from the A.A. Milne poem, *Sneezles*, included in Milne's 1927 anthology *Now We Are Six*. If you've ever had a cold, you should read this poem.



and treatment of influenza, Tamiflu® production consumes about 90% of the annual crop of *Illicium verum*, a Chinese evergreen tree.



Its eight-sided star-shaped pod, better known as Chinese star anise, is also an essential ingredient in the delicious Vietnamese soup called *pho*, Peking duck, Malaysian curries, Italian *sambuca*, and Indian *chai* tea. Star anise also “stars” in Chinese five-spice and Indian *garam masala* spice blends. The

botanical name, *Illicium*, comes from the Latin *illicio* for “enticing” or “alluring” and refers to the sweet, slightly spicy fragrance that is the hallmark of these treasured star anise recipes.



But what’s so special about star anise that makes it essential for the production of Tamiflu®?

The star-shaped, dried seedpods of star anise happen to be nature’s most concentrated source of shikimic acid,

the starting point of Tamiflu’s® manufacturing process. The conversion of shikimic acid to Tamiflu is a complex ten-step process that actually takes 6 to 8 months to complete. Not only is the commercial production of Tamiflu complicated; it’s also very dangerous. Converting the plant-sourced shikimic acid to the flu-fighting medicine involves several potentially explosive chemical reactions that must be tightly controlled.

Critical shortages of Tamiflu® have sometimes occurred due to poor crop yields at star anise plantations, most of which are in China.



Other natural sources of shikimic acid are being investigated. These include the needles of the white pine, *Ginkgo biloba* leaves, and even the beautiful yet highly invasive water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*) that is destroying many aquatic ecosystems.

Chinese star anise has also been used extensively in Chinese traditional medicine for a variety of respiratory, gastrointestinal, and reproductive ailments. You may also read on dubious websites that since star anise contains high concentrations of shikimic acid, a tea made from this spice is an effective treatment for influenza. What an absurd claim! Remember those ten complex and dangerous chemical reactions required to convert shikimic acid into a drug with anti-influenza properties? I hardly think these reactions are going to be taking place in your teacup!

There’s nothing wrong with a nice cup of spice tea, especially if you’re under the weather; just don’t expect it to cure your flu!



Another interesting and important precaution about star anise tea: while Chinese star anise is delicious and very safe, its close relative, Japanese star anise (*Illicium anisatum*), also known as *shikimi*, is highly neurotoxic and should never be ingested.

“True” star anise has sometimes been adulterated with toxic *shikimi*. Accidental poisonings have also occurred from drinking tea inadvertently made with Japanese star anise. Toxicity is of greatest concern for infants, especially since star anise tea is used in folk medicine and is dangerously and incorrectly recommended on the internet as a “treatment” for colicky babies.



The “star” of the story is clearly the true Chinese star anise. A small measure of the esteem held for this spice in China can be seen in their version of our own Four Leaf Clover legend – finding a whole, intact star with more than the usual eight points is said to bring very good luck.

Very good luck, indeed, for all of us. The delicate flower of the Chinese star anise is transformed at maturity into a fragrant husk full of life-saving potential. This beautiful earthly star holds the power to counteract the “unfavorable influence of the stars” that we still call *influenza*.



According to the American Botanical Council (“the ABC”, September 2003), regulations require herbal tea companies to have quality control mechanisms in place to detect the presence of any Japanese star anise. The ABC concludes that “herbal teas sold by reputable companies in the United States are quite safe.” Poisonings by Japanese star anise may have occurred when that spice, bought in bulk for potpourri, was also used for tea. Japanese star anise is intended for crafts and is *never* safe for consumption.



## Herbally Speaking...

...from the desk of Linda Alderman



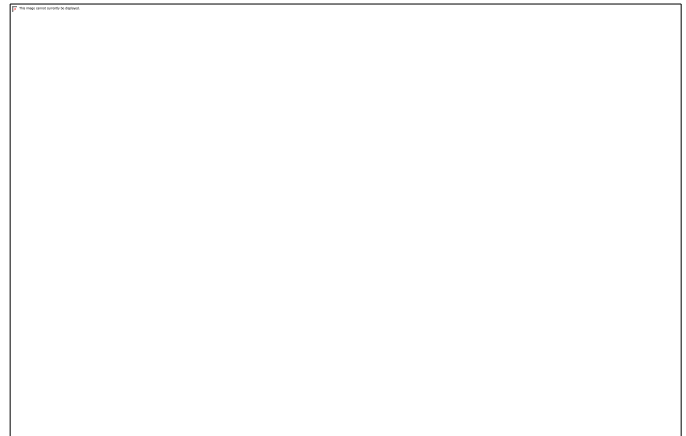
Alas, my culinary herb articles must be suspended for the next several months. As you read this, my husband and I are frantically trying to finish up boat projects, and get only the most

essential items on board for a February 1<sup>st</sup> departure. While I would love to write from a lovely mooring at sunset, I can’t justify space for my herb resources, when I am limited to only the most essential items of clothing. NO extras!

I will miss you, my herbie friends. I’ll be looking for herbal experiences to share when I return. Welcome to **Janice Freeman**, the interim editor. Best wishes to you, Janice!

### Happy New Year!

## South Texas Unit Celebrates 50 years



1968 - 2018

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.



Find our Unit on the web at:  
[www.herbsociety-stu.org](http://www.herbsociety-stu.org)

***Herbs Make Scents – January 2018***