

Herbs Make Scents



THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
VOLUME XLIV, NUMBER 10

SOUTH TEXAS UNIT
OCTOBER 2021

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Oct. 2021 Calendar

- Oct. 7, Thur. at 6:00 pm **Westbury Community Garden Workday** at 12851 Dunlap, Houston, TX 77035
- Oct. 14, Thur. at 10:00 am **Day Meeting** is a members-only Herb Fair workshop at the home of Lois Jean Howard. Phone Lois Jean to RSVP and find out what supplies you need to bring.
Note change of day!
- Oct. 14, Thur. at 6:00 pm **Westbury Community Garden Workday**
- Oct. 16, Sat, at 10:00 am **Tea Workshop** for Herb Fair at the **home of Julie Fordes**
- Oct. 20, Wed. at 7:00 pm **Evening Meeting** "*Branching Out - What's That Herb and Why Should I Plant It?*" will be presented by **Tricia Bradbury, Fort Bend County Master Gardener and Coastal Prairie Texas Master Naturalist**. The program will be presented via **Zoom**. See meeting details and Zoom link on page 3.
- Oct. 21, Thur. at 7:00 pm **Full Moon Ramble** – (Members Only - watch your email for Zoom invitation)

Nov. 2021 Calendar

- Nov 5, Fri. 8:30 am-12:30 pm **Set-up for 48th Annual Herb Fair**, Southside Place Clubhouse, 3743 Garnet Street, Houston, TX 77005
- Nov 6, Sat. 9 am- 3 pm **48th Annual Herb Fair**
- Nov. 17, Wed. at 7:00 pm **Evening Meeting** Details pending confirmation from speaker
- Nov. 19, Fri. at 7:00 pm **Full Moon Ramble** – (Members Only - watch your email for Zoom invitation)

***Newsletter deadline: the 25th of every month is strictly enforced
(November editor is Janice Freeman)***



Marigold/Calendula

Happy Birthday!

10/13 – Catherine O'Brien
10/13 – Benée Curtis
10/21 – Janice Stuff

10/22 – Yvette Darnell
10/28 – Ralph De Leon
10/29 – Martha Burg

Calendula officinalis, the pot marigold, common marigold, ruddles, or Scotch marigold, is a flowering plant in the daisy family Asteraceae. It is probably native to southern Europe, though its long history of cultivation makes its precise origin unknown, and it may possibly be of garden origin. It is also widely naturalized farther north in Europe and elsewhere in warm temperate regions of the world.



Chairman's Corner

Greetings,

Recently there have been concerns from members about having Herb Fair during the pandemic, while staying safe at the same time. This is on everyone's mind and I am glad for the opportunity to address concerns about our safety, while trying to keep things going. It is like the 'elephant in the room,' but we can't ignore that pesky elephant this time. *Here are the most recent guidelines from the CDC:*

- If you are not fully vaccinated and aged 2 or older, you should wear a mask in indoor public places.
- If you are fully vaccinated, to maximize protection from the Delta variant and prevent possibly spreading it to others, wear a mask indoors in public if you are in an area of substantial or high transmission.
- Being in crowds like in restaurants, bars, fitness centers, or movie theaters puts you at higher risk for COVID-19.
- Avoid indoor spaces that do not offer fresh air from the outdoors as much as possible.
- If indoors, bring in fresh air by opening windows and doors, if possible.

The STU board recently met to discuss fall programming and event planning. The board decided to put the following precautions in place during Herb Fair in order to maximize the safety of our members and guests.

These are the precautions we decided will best meet the CDC guidelines for Herb Fair!

- **Require masks for all Herb Fair workers and guests.**
- **Keep doors and windows open (weather permitting).**
- **Locate as many of our Herb Fair shopping tables and activities outside as possible and appropriate (weather permitting).**
- **Structure the layout of the event space to avoid bottlenecks and promote social distancing.**
- **Limit the number of shoppers at one time.**

Even with precautions, some people will still find it too risky to attend. Even with precautions, things may change enough that it would be impossible to have any kind of in-person event. Until that day comes, I hope we can continue to implement our plans for Herb Fair in a way that makes everyone comfortable.

**Julie Fordes
Unit Chair**





**Announcing Our
October HSA-STU Program**

***“Branching Out - What’s That Herb
and Why Should I Plant It?”***



**Presented by Tricia Bradbury,
Fort Bend County Master Gardener
and Coastal Prairie Texas Master Naturalist**

***This Year Try Something New
Along with Your Old Favorites!***

October 20, 2021 at 7 pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82842562835>

Please join the meeting at 6:45 to ensure a timely start.



48th Annual Herb Fair - 2021

Saturday, November 6th from 9-3 pm
Southside Place Clubhouse
3743 Garnet Street, Houston, TX 77005

Guests:

More and more people are gardening now. We have Information for using herbs, including harvesting, drying, and growing tips. Here's what you will find at this year's fair!

- Make-and-take herb activities.
- Handcrafted holiday gifts for you, your friends, and family!
 - Culinary mixes and edibles
 - Jelly, tea and herb blends
 - Herb drying racks
 - Fragrance products including homemade candles, soap, soap bombs and something for your cats and dogs.

Join our members for a fun-filled day. We ask for your safety and ours that you **wear your masks**; we will have them available if you forget.

Members:

- Please save your plant trays (we use small, medium or large trays, either plastic or card board)
- Please bring paper grocery bags for checkout
- Please set aside one item from each craft project to use in one or more raffle baskets.
- If anyone has any fairy garden or gnome items, they don't want please save them for me♥

Scenes from previous Herb Fairs; don't miss the fun!



Herbal-themed Products



Jellies



Plants

Donna Wheeler
Herb Fair Chairman

See next page for flyer



48TH ANNUAL
HERB
FAIR

Saturday Nov. 6, 2021
9am - 3pm

Huge variety of HERB PLANTS
Herbal Gifts, Jellies, Teas,
and Culinary Blends

Presented by
The Herb Society of America, South Texas Unit
www.herbsociety-stu.org
www.facebook.com/HerbSociety.SouthTexasUnit/

Southside Place Clubhouse
3743 Garnet Street, Houston, TX 77005



Favorite Garden Photos & Memories

Susan Wood



Do you have favorite garden photos? I'm sure you do. Attached is one of mine—from fall 2014 when my *Thunbergia grandiflora*, also known as sky vine or blue trumpet vine, was in full bloom. Looking at this photo instantly transports me to a serene place where butterflies roam and dreams bloom. No, it doesn't look like that now; that is why it is a favorite memory photo for me. Yes, the sky vine is still there but I moved Athena (the Greek goddess of the hunt, the wilderness, wild animals, the moon, and chastity) as she was getting crowded out by my avocado tree. You may call her Diana if preferring the Roman version.

Recently Kathe Forrest, Pioneer Unit Chair, emailed members (and affiliates like me) a vintage video of Festival Hill gardens featuring an interview with **Madalene Hill** and daughter **Gwen Barclay**. Festival Institute founder, James Dick, and Henry Flowers are also featured. The video of the McAshan Gardens that Madalene lovingly created starting in 1994 in Round Top is from 2004. She passed March 5, 2009, at the age of 94. If you've never visited these gardens that South Texas Unit pledged to support in 2018, here is your chance to see them in all their glory. We voted to support their maintenance with \$1,000 per year for five years. I'm hoping our Unit will continue to support the gardens for many years to come.

Keeping up a beautiful, large garden is no easy task. Money, maintenance, and cooperation from Mother Nature are involved. You can support the gardens individually and find out more about Festival Institute by visiting www.festivalhill.org Click "Support Us" and indicate your donation is in memory of Madalene Hill for the gardens. Now click on the link below (you can skip the ad within a few seconds) to relax and enjoy the garden tour at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltBpziCjH6Y>



Members-

We are looking for a member or a small group of members to **volunteer to run our AV equipment** at Evening Meetings and other times it is needed.

You would need a laptop to run any Powerpoint presentations for our speakers and handle the sound for the meeting (we have a great new microphone and speaker). An important requirement to do this job is being able to come to meetings.

If any of you think you could provide some technical help during meetings, contact Julie Fordes.



Membership Tips: Earning Your Hours - Major Events

Carolyn Kosclskey
Membership Chair

Membership Guidelines, Rules and Procedures (in the Membership Directory and on the website under Member Information, Unit Operating Manual tab), read an active member will support the organization during the fiscal year by **participating in the preparation of one major event** (Herb fair, Herb day) and **participate on-site in one major event** (Herb fair, Herb day).

The upcoming 48th Annual Herb Fair on Saturday, November 6 provides multiple opportunities to meet these obligations!

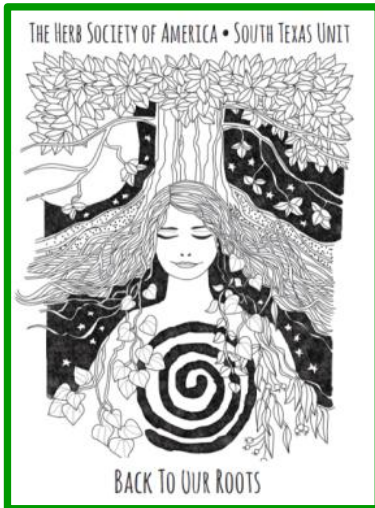
Contact **Donna Wheeler**, Herb Fair chairman (ddwheeler16@hotmail.com), for information on how to become involved. Be sure to **record your hours in whole and half hour increments (1½ hour = 1.5 hour)** on the inside back cover of the Directory.

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



Photo courtesy of Janice Freeman

Honey Bee, *Apis mellifera* Linnaeus, enjoying the blooms of a Holy Basil stem



BACK TO OUR ROOTS

Julie Fordes

It's time to make tea for Herb Fair! We will have an official tea workday (see calendar) Saturday, October 16, where we will make and package our tea blends. So much depends on having the dried herbs that we have been growing, harvesting and storing.

Starting now, if you have dried herbs for tea you may drop them off at the homes of Julie Fordes or Donna Yanowski. If that isn't going to work, please call, text or email Julie or Donna and make arrangements for them to come pick up your herbs. All this needs to happen **before** the October 16 workday. So, set aside a bit of time to get your wonderful harvest where it needs to go. Your contributions are sorely needed and will enable us to make great products to offer to the public at Herb Fair.

**Continue harvesting and drying herbs!
We will make our special tea blends to sell
at our fundraising events**

Orange Peel
Roselle (Hibiscus)
Rosemary
Lemon Balm Lemongrass Lemon Verbena
Mexican Mint Marigold
Oregano
Holy Basil
Spearmint and Peppermint
Red-Stemmed Apple Mint
Rose and Calendula Petals
Chamomile Flowers
Stevia

<http://www.herbsociety-stu.org/harvesting--drying-and-storing-herbs.html>





Herb of the Month: Medlar

Faith Struck



Photos from <https://www.beeulture.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/2Krochmal.png>

Botanical name	<i>Mespilus germanica</i>
Common name	Medlar
Zone hardiness cold / warm	4 / 9
Height	12-25' / 4-8 m
Spread	20-30' / 6- 9 m
Plant type	Tree / shrub
Exposure	Full Sun
Growth	Slow
Soil PH	Acidic, Neutral, Alkaline
Soil type	Loam, Sand
Water requirements	Average water needs
Leaf / Flower color	Dark Green / White

Medlar is an uncommon (at least in the U.S.) old-fashioned fruit tree. It has been cultivated since Greek and Roman times. “The plant was first described by Theophrastus (about 371-287 B.C.), a Greek naturalist and philosopher. Ancient Greeks ate the fruits fresh and dried and used them for medicinal purposes just as the Europeans did later” (Krochmal, n.d.) The plants were introduced into Europe and later became naturalized, growing wild in woods and hedgerows. They were introduced into North America by European colonists in the 1800s. They aren’t fussy, can tolerate most soils, don’t require much pruning and aren’t sensitive to pests and diseases.

Medlar is commonly planted in gardens for pollinators. They can survive for several centuries. Medlar can grow to 25 feet high; although some sources stated they were fairly small trees or shrubs. They mature slowly and can take two decades to reach their ultimate height. They begin producing fruit annually at



about 3 years. They can be grown from seed, but grafted trees tend to bear larger fruits. They require a winter chill in order to fruit, yet are considered well suited to the Gulf and South Atlantic regions. There are about a dozen medlar varieties available worldwide; 3 commonly in America: Breda Giant, Marron, and Royal. Medlar flowers in the late spring and early summer for about 10 days. The flower is a ruffled, solitary, stalkless bloom that resembles apple blossoms. Bees are particularly fond of medlar flowers. The fruit looks not unlike a rosehip, which is fitting, as the plants are a member of the rose family. The fruit is ready to pick in late October to early November, ideally after a hard frost, but they aren't ready to eat. To be edible, the fruit needs to be "bled"; stored somewhere cool for a few weeks to allow the fruit's starches to convert into sugars and the acids and tannins decrease. A traditional way to store them is in sawdust or straw, or placed on a wooden shelf (no plastic.) This process is necessary for the medlar to become a soft, sweet fruit. The only unfortunate part is that they look rotted when ready to eat. They can be eaten raw, with cream and sugar, as the Victorians did. They also go well with wine. Ripe medlar is commonly turned into jelly, confit, cider, and medlar cheese. They can be served roasted with butter and cloves. I've never tasted a medlar, but they reportedly taste a little like custard, with hints of apricot, lemon and vanilla. French folklore attributed magical powers to medlar trees, which protected their homes from witchcraft and sorcery. Nutritionally, medlar is rich in potassium, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, iron, multiple B vitamins, and vitamin C. They contain 88 calories/cup of ripe fruit. Health benefits attributed to medlar include increasing immunity to coughs and colds, protection against respiratory illnesses and gastrointestinal benefits such as relief of constipation and other digestive illnesses. The fruit, leaves and bark of the tree were also used in medicines for stomach complaints. The seeds are poisonous.

Medlar Jelly

A recipe from David Lebovitz.com

About 2 cups (500ml)

Medlars must be "bled", which involves storing them in a single layer in a rather cool place, not the refrigerator, until they are soft and brown inside. They're ready when they are very soft and squishy to the touch.

3 pounds (1.4kg) medlars (bled)

1 green apple

1/2 lemon

3 cups (600g) sugar

1. Rinse and quarter the medlars, and put them in a large pot – skins, seeds, and all. Chop up the apple and add, with the seeds and core, as well. Then add the lemon half to the pot, and pour in enough water so that the medlars are floating in liquid, about 2 quarts (2l).
2. Cook the mixture until it begins to boil, then reduce the heat and let it cook at a low boil for 45 minutes.
3. Line a colander with several layers of cheesecloth or gauze, set it over a deep bowl, and ladle the cooked medlars and the liquid into the colander. Let it strain overnight undisturbed. Do not press down on the cooked fruit to extract more juice from it or your jelly will be cloudy. (It's very tempting, but resist.)
4. The next day pour the liquid into a large pot—you should have about 1 quart (1l). Put a small plate in the freezer. Add the sugar to the juice in the pot and cook the jelly until it reaches 220°F (104°C) or until it jells, which may happen a little before or after that temperature. To test the jelly, put a spoonful on the plate in the freezer and let chill a few minutes. If, once cold, it wrinkles when you push it with your finger, it's done. If not, continue to cook the jelly until it jells. When ready, if you wish, you can offset sweetness with a few drops of fresh lemon juice.
5. Ladle the jelly into clean jars.



The jelly will keep for up to one year in the refrigerator.

He got 2 ½ jars from 3 lbs of fruit. He added an apple because of the pectin. On his website, he linked multiple other recipes for Medlar jelly.

Krochmal, C. (n.d.) A medley of fruity plants for bees—medlar and quince. Bee Culture: The Magazine of American Beekeeping. <https://www.beeculture.com/medley-fruit-plants-bees-medlar-quince/>

Lebovitz, D. (2012) Medlar jelly recipe. Retrieved from: <https://www.davidlebovitz.com/medlar-jelly-recipe/>

Peto, J., Cserni, I. & Huvely, A. (2016). Some beneficial nutrient and mineral content of medlar fruits.

Gradus 3(1). 258-262. http://gradus.kefo.hu/archive/2016-1/2016_1_AGR_011_Peto.pdf

Royal Horticultural Society. (2021). Fascinating facts: medlars. <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/features/fascinating-facts-medlars>

Peto, J., Cserni, I., & Huvely, A. (2016). Some beneficial nutrient and mineral content of medlar fruits. Gradus (3)1, 258-262.

It is the policy of The Herb Society of America not to advise or recommend herbs for medicinal or health use. This information is intended for educational purposes only and should not be considered as a recommendation or an endorsement of any particular medical or health treatment.

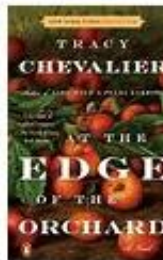
BOOK

C O R N E R

If you have suggestions for books or other media members might like, submit your suggestions to Linda Alderman at ewalderman@comcast.net



The HERB SOCIETY of AMERICA
Booklist Recommendation



At the Edge of the Orchard by Tracy Chevalier is a story of the Goodenough family, Connecticut transplants to Ohio's Black Swamp. The husband and wife argue over their apple trees. He wants to graft them to increase the production of edible fruit, while she wants to keep what they have to make more Apple Jack for her own consumption.



At-Home Recipes



AT-HOME RECIPES

October 2021

Carolyn Kosclskey

Welcome Fall and welcome October, both popularly known as “everything pumpkin” season! But there are other celebrations which occur during this time of year including National Hispanic Heritage month ending on the 15th. October is also Breast Cancer Awareness Month (think pink), National Eat Better, Eat Together Month; World Vegetarian Day (10/1), Columbus Day (10/11) and Halloween (10/31). Let’s get started by bringing fall into our homes....

INSTANT POT NATURAL FALL POTPOURRI

For the home and for holiday gifts

If you would like to make a simmering *natural* potpourri recipe gift or pre-make your own, then you will need to use dried fruits and spices. For home use store the dry mixture in a large Mason type glass jar, or put in a bowl or open container to infuse the air. If using fresh fruit add directly to the Instant Pot or store in the frig in a zip bag until used. You will need:

- 1 fresh apple or dried apples
- 1 fresh orange or dried orange slices
- 1 tablespoon whole cloves
- 1 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 4 cinnamon sticks
- 2 cups water
- 2 tablespoons vanilla extract

Add the mixture to your Instant Pot and add 2 cups of water and 2 tablespoons of vanilla extract. Without the lid, turn it on to sauté and bring to a boil. Then set the Instant Pot to warm and enjoy the homemade fall potpourri. Don’t let it run dry adding more water as needed preventing the potpourri from burning or scorching. Store in the frig when not in use, fragrance will last about 4 days. Recipe may be doubled.

Did you know pumpkin is considered a “superfood” offering a myriad of health benefits? The orange color of pumpkins comes from beta-carotene which your body converts into vitamin A, important for eye health. One cup of pumpkin (49 calories) makes up over 200% of the RDI (recommended daily intake) of vitamin A. Although a mild diuretic, it provides 7 grams of fiber, is an important source of vitamin C, making up 19% of the recommended daily allowance; 14% of magnesium and 500 milligrams of potassium. Butternut squash (technically a fruit) is low in calories (82), higher in vitamin A offering 457% RDI and vitamin C (52% RDI) and also has 7 grams of fiber. <https://www.mashed.com/198424/the-reason-pumpkin-is-considered-a-superfood/>



QUINOA WITH BUTTERNUT SQUASH AND PUMPKIN SEEDS

Ingredients

1 cup quinoa
2 tablespoons olive oil
½ red onion, finely diced
¾ teaspoon chili powder
1 2-pound butternut squash, cut into ¾ -inch cubes
1 ¾ cups water or vegetable stock
1 teaspoon salt
½ cup pumpkin seeds
2 large handfuls baby spinach
½ cup dried cranberries

Directions

Put the quinoa in a bowl and cover it with cool water. Rub it between your hands and pour off most of the water. Add fresh water and repeat two or three times, until the water runs clear. Drain thoroughly in a fine-meshed strainer. Set the strainer over a bowl until you are ready to cook the quinoa.

Heat the olive oil in a large (4 to 5-quart) pot. Add the onion and cook over medium heat for about 3 minutes, until it begins to soften. Stir in the chili powder and the squash and cook, stirring every so often, for 3 more minutes. Add the drained quinoa, water or stock and salt. Bring the liquid to a boil, adjust the heat to a simmer, and cook, covered, for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, set a small plate next to the stove. Pour a few drops (about 1/2 teaspoon) of olive oil into a small skillet. Heat the oil over medium heat and add the pumpkin seeds. Stir and shake the pan until the pumpkin seeds turn from green to olive to slightly golden brown. Sprinkle with a pinch of salt and immediately scrape them onto the awaiting plate.

Remove the pot from the heat and add the spinach and cranberries. Cover the pot and let rest in a warm place for 10 minutes. Mix and fluff up the grains with a fork. Serve sprinkled with toasted pumpkin seeds.

Note: Rinsing the quinoa gets rid of the bitter taste from the seed coating and the steaming (resting) at the end of cooking makes it fluffy. You could roast the squash separately or cook it in the pot, both are good.

AIR FRYER PUMPKIN SEEDS

Roasting up a batch of pumpkin seeds is one of the many delights of autumn.

Ingredients

1 (10- to 15-pound) large pumpkin
1 teaspoon olive oil
¼ teaspoon ground chipotle pepper
¼ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more as needed
1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper



Instructions

Cut the top off a large pumpkin and scoop out the seeds. Rinse in a colander under running water to separate from the pulp. Lay the seeds out on paper towels and pat dry. Let sit for 30 minutes to remove any excess moisture. You should have about 1 cup pumpkin seeds.

Heat the air fryer to 350°F. Transfer the dried pumpkin seeds to a medium bowl. Add 1 teaspoon olive oil, ¼ teaspoon ground chipotle pepper, ¼ teaspoon kosher salt, and 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper. Toss to combine.

Spread the seeds evenly in the basket of the air fryer. Cook, shaking the basket halfway through cooking, until the seeds are golden and crispy, 10 to 15 minutes total. Transfer to a bowl and let cool. Taste and season with more salt as needed. Makes 1 cup.

Note: If your pumpkin yields more than 1 cup seeds, adjust the oil and seasonings as necessary. If you are making a larger quantity of pumpkin seeds, they will likely need to be cooked in batches for even roasting.

KETO FRIENDLY PUMPKIN SPICE SYRUP

Ingredients

2/3 cup water
½ cup Swerve brown sugar substitute or brown sugar
¼ cup pumpkin purée
1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/8 teaspoon sea salt

Instructions

To begin, heat the water and sweetener in a small saucepan over medium heat. Continuously stir the mixture until the sweetener/sugar dissolves. Add the pumpkin purée, pumpkin pie spice, vanilla extract and salt to the pan and continue to stir the mixture until all the ingredients are combined. Once the mixture reaches a slow simmer, remove it from the heat and set aside. When the syrup has slightly cooled, you can filter it through a fine mesh strainer or cheesecloth to remove any grit from the spices (preferred but optional).

Once the syrup is completely cooled, serve in your favorite coffee drinks. Store syrup in a jar with lid in the frig, shake before using. Makes 1 cup, will keep for about 2 weeks.





Hildegard Cookies of Joy

Eat them often. They will calm all bitterness of the heart and mind, open your heart and impaired senses, and make your mind cheerful (Hildegard of Bingen, Physica, c.1153)

Karen Cottingham



My own version of Hildegard Cookies - "Filled with Joy"

Who could resist a prescription for a cookie? Especially when that cookie was formulated by one of the most brilliant and powerful women in history, the sainted Abbess **Hildegard of Bingen** (1098 - 1179). In a slightly different translation of the above passage, the "Holy Healer" advises us to "Eat them often, and they will calm every bitterness of heart and mind - and your hearing and senses will open. Your mind will be joyous, and your senses purified, and harmful humours will diminish...."

A cookie can do all that? Why not! Having been inspired by **Adrian Melissinos'** outstanding HSA-STU program, "**Hildegard of Bingen - The Holy Healer**", I've been busy transforming Hildegard's original instructions into my own version of Hildegard's cookies, "Filled with Joy".

It's been a pleasant and relaxing experience that quietly engages all the senses - enticing aromas of fragrant spices and cookies in the oven, the tactile satisfaction of handling dough, carefully rolling, cutting, and embellishing the shapes, and then biting into a crisp and flavorful cookie - sweet, butter-rich, and fragrant with spices. And listening to one of Hildegard's many exquisite musical compositions while baking not only creates the proper atmosphere for creativity, but serves as another path towards calmness and joy.

The book Hildegard's recipe comes from is called "Physica" after the title it was given in 1533 in the first printed edition. However, I much prefer St. Hildegard's original title, "Subtleties of the Diverse Qualities of



Created Things”. Her own title captures her unique ability to appreciate and express subtleties of thought, of nature, and of spirituality.

The actual recipe is remarkably succinct - **“Take some nutmeg and an equal weight of cinnamon and a bit of cloves, and pulverize them. Then make small cakes with this and fine whole wheat flour and water.”** It’s generally assumed that this mixture was then baked, which would have resulted in something akin to a heavily spiced cracker.

Would it have been delicious? Probably not, even considering the medieval taste for highly spiced food. Hildegard’s recipe would have been meant as a medicine - not a treat - designed to lift a depressed mood by adjusting the imbalanced humors responsible. Her target would have been an overabundance of black bile, widely believed to be the cause of melancholy. And in the Rhineland of the twelfth century, some of the best weapons to combat excess black bile would have been spelt, a robust type of wheat, and exotic spices from faraway lands. Though we no longer think of nutmeg, cinnamon, and cloves as medicines, all of these spices are, in fact, surprisingly powerful drugs.



A medieval cinnamon merchant from the **Tractatus de herbis** (1440), a spice seller from **Die Hausbuch der Mendelschen Zwölfbrüderstiftung** (1426-1549) and a “Monkey using mortar and pestle” from “**Hours of Charlotte of Savoy**” (1420-1425).

Hildegard would have been familiar with the therapeutic use of spices through her study of earlier herbals, medical texts, and histories. One particularly desirable spice was cinnamon, made from the inner bark of various trees in the genus *Cinnamomum*. The typical cinnamon in most of our spice racks is *cassia*, originally from China, but the more expensive, and desirable, “true” cinnamon is from Sri Lanka. *Ceylon* cinnamon (Ceylon is the older name for Sri Lanka) has antibiotic, antimicrobial, antiviral, and anti-fungal



properties. It is thought to help boost immunity, to lower blood sugar levels for diabetics, and has been used as a treatment for a wide variety of ailments.

Throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, the precious cinnamon that flavored the wine and food of the wealthy demonstrated their importance, power and prestige. The fragrant spice was also believed to have sacred properties, and was particularly associated with death and funerary rites. Ancient Egyptians prized cinnamon as the "... goodly fragrant woods of The Divine Land...", and it was mentioned in the Old Testament as an ingredient in anointing oil, as medicine for indigestion, and perfume for clothing and linens. The scent of cinnamon permeated the temples of Rome as well as the embalming chambers of ancient Egypt. The Roman Emperor Nero was famous for having burned all of Rome's cinnamon supply at his wife's funeral - after having killed her in a fit of rage!

Following the disintegration of the Roman Empire, Arab merchants continued to deliver cinnamon and other precious spices to trading posts in the Levant and around the Black Sea. Then, in European monasteries, these expensive and exotic spices were carefully combined with other botanicals, minerals, and animal products to create a vast array of medications.

In the eighth century, for example, Saint Benedict Crispus, bishop of Milan, described a recipe of cloves, pepper and cinnamon which "long serves against the plague." Hildegard seemed to have thought of cinnamon in much the same way that we think of adaptogens. Cinnamon, she wrote, "diminishes the bad humours, and brings good humours to whoever eats it often."



Fanciful stories about the source of cinnamon flourished in antiquity. Depicted here, in a **Bestiary in a manuscript from Western France**, c. 1450 is the enormous mythical bird of Arabia, the **Cinnamalogus**. This gigantic bird was said to build its nest of cinnamon twigs "high up on fragile branches so men cannot climb up to reach them. Since merchants favor this cinnamon more than any other kind and pay high prices for it, men knock down the nests with leaded arrows." (**Isidore of Seville**, 7th century)

Cloves are the dried flower buds of an evergreen tree (*Syzygium aromaticum*) native to the Moluccan Islands of Indonesia. The hot, pungent spice found its earliest medicinal uses in India and China in the fourth-century BCE, travelled throughout the Mediterranean, and was introduced to Europe in the 4th century.

Named "*clou de girofle*" in French, for the resemblance of the clove bud to nails, clove was used as a food spice, aroma infuser and medical remedy. It was one of the fragrant ingredients placed in a *pomander*, a perforated box, meant to ward off illness such as plague.

Known as one of the "lesser spices", clove is useful today for its antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties, especially in dental care. Hildegard would have prescribed clove for headache, to relieve mental exhaustion, to clear "stuffiness in the head", and to elevate the senses.



The clove in the initial G of "Girofle" in the "Régime du Corps" is by **Aldabrandino da Siena**. New York, Morgan Library c. 1445. The nutmeg tree (*Myristica fragrans*) is from the **Tractatus de herbis** (1440)



Spices such as nutmeg would have a similar effect, opening up the heart, freeing the mind and senses, and encouraging an overall joyful disposition.

Muslim sailors are believed to be the first foreigners to travel to the Spice Islands and begin trading nutmeg to Venetian merchants. By the 12th century, the Venetian spice traders were the main nutmeg suppliers to rest of Europe. Nutmeg was highly valued not only as a food ingredient with a pleasant aroma and taste, but also as a mood enhancer. As Hildegard wrote, its "warmth gives it great strength, it can open up the heart of whoever takes it, purify the soul and convey increased powers of understanding."

Hildegard's recognition of the anti-depressant effect of nutmeg has been confirmed by modern scientific techniques. *Myristicin*, one of the essential oils of nutmeg, seems to be responsible for this mildly euphoric effect by its interaction with the adrenergic, dopaminergic, and serotonergic systems. It is also known to be a weak inhibitor of monoamine oxidase (MAO), another class of anti-depressant drugs affecting neurotransmitters.

If nutmeg is consumed in excess, though, hallucinations may result. This is not surprising, as *myristicin* is chemically related to mescaline and amphetamine, substances known to produce hallucinogenic effects in large doses. **Consuming as few as two nutmegs has been known to be fatal.**



These mind-altering effects were valued by the Arab traders, who also touted nutmeg as a powerful aphrodisiac. In moderate doses, myristicin serves as a mood enhancer; in large quantities it acts as a psychoactive drug.

This 15th century illustration of a gigantic nutmeg, from *Tractatus de herbis* edition of *De Materia Medica* of Dioscorides, might be a reference to either its psychoactive powers or its reputed value as an aphrodisiac.



And, finally, spelt, Hildegard's preferred ingredient to achieve a harmonious balance. As nutmeg brightens the mood, spelt soothes the mind. In Hildegard's words, spelt is a "hot, rich, and powerful" grain that "creates a happy mind and a joyful disposition."

Also known as dinkel, spelt is richer in protein, healthy fats and dietary fiber than wheat. For Hildegard, dinkel was an essential food, one that she surely consumed daily. Even for hopeless cases, "where one is very weak from an illness, unable to get up and nothing helps, make him eat dinkel and he will recover."

So, when I made my Joy-Filled Cookies, I made sure to use spelt flour for health, a happy mind, and joy in the human disposition.

And although not part of the original recipe, I felt that Hildegard wouldn't mind if I added a little sugar. Today we hardly think of sugar as a medicine, but in medieval Arabia and Europe, sugar was considered the most completely balanced medicine. Obtained from the sugar cane cultivated in the Middle East, sugar is found in many early recipes "for the sick". Near the end of her life, Hildegard had discovered sugar as a precious new medicine and had started incorporating it into her remedies.

I hope you try these cookies, along with a cup of herbal tea. I suggest lemon balm, which according to Hildegard, can cause someone to "[laugh] aloud since its heat goes straight to the spleen and rejoices the heart." Another good choice would be fennel, which "in whatever way it is eaten, it makes a person happy".

And for the "person who is worn out, and suffering from a "split mind" or "empty thoughts," they should take a hot bath and pour in the warm water that the oats were boiled in. If they do this often, they will "return to themselves and regain sanity."

Joy-Filled Cookies

First, select one of Hildegard's musical compositions to set the mood. This is important.

Preheat oven to 325°F

Gather the Ingredients:

- ½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter at room temperature
- ¾ cup light brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 3 ½ cups flour (a mixture of equal parts all-purpose wheat and spelt flours)
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- generous pinch of salt
- 1 tablespoon Spices that Bring Joy
- 1 tsp vanilla
- pine nuts for decoration
-

Next, make your Spices that Bring Joy:

- 3 parts cinnamon, 3 parts nutmeg and 1 part ground cloves (Vary the proportions according to your own taste, and store the remainder)



Instructions:

1. Cream together the softened butter with the brown sugar, and then beat in the eggs and vanilla.
2. Add half the dry ingredients and mix. Add the other half and mix thoroughly.
3. Divide the dough into two discs and chill at least an hour in the refrigerator. (Optional, but chilling makes it easier to work with.)
4. Form the chilled dough into walnut sized balls. You have several options now for selecting a shape. If you're in a hurry, just place the balls onto parchment paper and flatten with your hand. This makes a good-enough circle. If you feel like being fancy, you can flatten the balls (I used a rolling pin for consistency and placed the ball between two sheets of parchment paper for ease in clean-up) and then create a shape with a cookie cutter. The small amount of excess dough is easy to remove and gets incorporated into the next ball. If you wish, this is the time to decorate the tops, either with incised designs, or by pressing in small nuts. Both are easy and lovely.
5. Bake for 15-20 minutes until golden. The time will vary with the size of the cookie. They should be crisp but not dark. After a few minutes, remove to cooling racks. When completely cool, store in airtight container.

Enjoy daily with a cup of herbal tea, and for best effect, with a friend. Joy multiplies when shared.

If you are interested in trying other recipes for Hildegard's Cookies of Joy, or looking for your own inspiration, here are some of the versions that I considered:

<https://www.bakerspeel.com/st-hildegard-cookies/> This version is closer to the original and resembles a cracker

<https://cookeatshare.com/recipes/saint-hildegard-cookies-of-joy-363138> An interesting version that includes honey, kelp, fenugreek, cardamom, and raisins

<https://www.victoriasweet.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/anti-depressant-cookies-2.pdf> Dr. Victoria Sweet's version, which she calls St. Hildegard's Anti-Depressant Cookies. The recommended sweetener is powdered sugar.

<https://www.mypope.com.ph/st-hildegard/> Jany Fournier-Rosset's version from her book, "From Saint Hildegard's Kitchen: Foods of Health, Foods of Joy"

<https://catholiccuisine.blogspot.com/2012/09/hildegardplatzchen-st-hildegard-spice.html> An adaptation by Ernst Scheugraf from his book [Cooking With the Saints](#)

<https://kitchenlioness.blogspot.com/2020/09/hildegards-cookies-of-joy-for-st.html> This version calls for almond flour in addition to spelt flour, and adds grated lemon peel and a sprinkling of almonds

<https://www.kayleenasbo.com/week-6-time-and-seasons.html> She calls the cookies "Blessing Biscuits"

<https://community.thegrownetwork.com/discussion/845601/calming-cookies-recipe> I like this baker's version because she refers to spelt as "Dinkel". She also offers a version Of "Calming Cookies" with oat flour rather than spelt and with the addition of her own blend of calming herbs - lavender, lemon balm, and rose petals - in addition to Hildegard's spices



Interested in Learning More about Hildegard of Bingen?
These resources are highly recommended:

Videos:

Writing Medieval Women Back Into History. Presented by Janina Ramirez, PhD, cultural historian, broadcaster and author based at the University of Oxford.

<https://vimeo.com/457313897>

Hildegard of Bingen - The Harp of God's Kindness

An Online Retreat led by **Dom Brendan Thomas**, Including

Hildegard of Bingen: Nurture Greenness and

Hildegard of Bingen: The Soul is Symphonic

<https://www.belmontabbey.org.uk/hildegard-of-bingen>

Books:

Mary Sharratt, **Illuminations: A Novel of Hildegard of Bingen** - fictionalized biographical novel

Victoria Sweet, MD, PhD, **God's Hotel**

Janina Ramirez, PhD, **Divina** (Available March 2022)

Podcast:

BBC In Our Time: **Hildegard of Bingen**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b014q00c>

Slow Down and Savor the Day



**“It does not
matter how
slowly you go
as long as you
do not stop.”**

— Confucius

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