

Herbs Make Scents

THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
VOLUME XLI, NUMBER 11



SOUTH TEXAS UNIT
DECEMBER 2018

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December 2018 Calendar

- Dec 3, Mon. at 7:00 pm** **Board meeting** at the home of **Donna Yanowski**
- Dec 9, Sun. at 5 – 8 pm** **Holiday party** for members and spouse or significant other is at the home of **Maria Treviño**. Her address is in the directory. Parking is limited, car pool if possible. See details on page 3 of this issue.

January 2019 Calendar

- Jan 8, Tues. at 10:00 am** **Day Meeting** is at the home of **Janice Dana**. The program, “Melissodora – Grape-scented Sage,” is presented by **Lois Jean Howard**. Members should bring **a dish to share**. Guests should RSVP to Janice at danas4086@sbcglobal.net
- Jan 16, Wed. at 6:30 pm** **Evening Meeting** is at the Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004). **Hosts** are **Julie Fordes** and **Andi Leger**. The program, “*Moringa – A Nutritional Powerhouse in Your Backyard*,” is presented by **Tommy Garcia-Prats**, founder and general manager of Small Places, LLC. **Bring your plate and napkin and a dish to share.**

Newsletter deadline: the 25th of every month



12/26 – Donna Fay Hilliard



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



Chairman's Corner

Happy Holidays!

Ready or not – December is here and we are fast approaching the end of the year. I hope the season will be more joyful than stressful and you'll find the time to get everything done, or not.

In the backyard, my gardens are looking verdant and youthful i.e.: bright green and tender. Most of the new herb plants I purchased at the Fair a month ago are settled in and thriving. They have become the “canopy” plants. The rain and cool weather are to their liking, as well as the compost we use to top dress. I've also continued to sow the cilantro, arugula and collard green seeds that I saved from last spring and summer. Tiny zinnias with blooms of pink and coral, which apparently can't wait for spring, are blooming now. Too bad the mosquitos are such pests!

I'll make one more trip tomorrow to the storage facility, to take the last of the materials from the Herb Fair and I want to again thank our Fair chairs, **Julie Fordes and Janice Freeman** for an event well done.

Thinking about the next year, we have a confirmation for the date and location of Herb Day. It will again be held at St. Paul's Methodist Church in the Museum District on Saturday, April 27. I am encouraging all members to brainstorm and bring any theme or ideas forward – this is all of our responsibility.

Enjoy the season and embrace the changing face of your green space. I hope to keep a better garden journal this year – we'll see about that.

Donna Yanowski
Unit Chair

The color of springtime is in the flowers; the color of winter is in the imagination.

Terri Guillemets





What's Happening in our Unit!

Bench Funded by South Texas Unit...Placed in McGovern Gardens

South Texas Unit approved a donation in May 2018 for a bench bearing the Unit's name in perpetuity located in the McGovern Centennial Gardens. Good news...the plaque is completed, and mounted on the bench. The bench has been placed along the Sculpture Walk near the large Mount. Talk a walk in the gardens and enjoy a rest on the bench.



New 2018-19 Directories Distributed

All members who paid dues should have received their new 2018-19 Directory. The directories and HSA Membership cards were distributed, delivered or mailed to each member.



**South Texas Unit
Holiday Party
December 9**

Date: Sunday Dec. 9
Time: 5:00PM to 8:00PM
Place: Home of **Maria Treviño**
Parking limited, car pool if possible
Potluck: Bring a large potluck side dish or dessert; some members may also want to bring wine (optional)
Members: Members and spouse or significant other are welcome
RSVP: Please RSVP by Dec.7 to Donna Yanowski
donnayanowski@gmail.com
Herbal Gift Exchange: Herbal Gift under \$25 (optional)



New Member
Welcome new member, **Virginia Camerlo**. She joined the unit in September. Her contact information is in the new STU Directory. She enjoyed working and shopping at the 2018 Herb Fair!



Herb Fair 2018

On Nov. 3, thanks to the awesome leadership of **Julie Fordes and Janice Freeman**, the HSA-STU produced another successful and enjoyable Herb Fair. New aspects were launched which included online-ordering by credit card, interactive educational exhibits, and some new cosmetic products. The financial summary will be sent to members in the near future.



A selection of tasty goodies in the Fair Cafe



Herbal Vinegars



Crafts

A heartfelt "thank you" to all of our members and their friends who helped make Herb Fair a success. All of your efforts, large and small, added up to make a very enjoyable and worthwhile event.

Julie and Janice

There were many requests for the recipe for the brownies sold at the Café! See right.

Orange Basil Brownies

Adapted from Internet recipe for 2017 Herb Fair

- 1 1/2 cups chopped raw walnuts
- 1 cup fresh chopped basil, tightly packed (I didn't have quite enough and **supplemented** with dried basil. It turned out fine!)
- 8 ounces unsweetened chocolate; coarsely chopped
- 1 1/2 cups unsalted butter (3 sticks)
- 3 cups white sugar
- 6 eggs
- 2 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 12 drops orange oil, or to taste (I used 2 tsp. of orange **extract**)
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 cups all-purpose flour

Instructions

- 1 Preheat oven to 350*. Grease a 9x12 pan.
- 2 Chop nuts. Stem and chop basil. Pretty small pieces. Supplementing with dried is OK.
- 3 In a medium glass bowl, microwave the butter and chocolate at 50% power for 3 to 4 minutes, or until butter has melted.
- 4 Whisk until chocolate has melted. Stir in sugar, eggs, vanilla, orange oil, salt, walnuts and basil. Gradually add flour and stir until just combined.
- 5 Spread the batter into the prepared brownie pan. Bake for 50 minutes or until done. Do not over bake.



At the Day Meeting...

Linda Alderman



On Nov. 3, the day group met at the Cherie Flores Pavilion in Hermann Park, where **Pam Harris** presented the program “Sage –

Beyond Turkey and Dressing.”

Pam delighted us with the historical, household, medicinal, and religious uses of *Salvia officinalis* (the sage most of us are familiar with in the Thanksgiving meal). She told us of its use through the ages in King’s castles, monasteries, and family households.

Another sage, *Salvia apiana*, was also included in Pam’s herbal talk. This sage has many uses in the American Indian household and religious traditions.



Salvia apiana

Chief among Pam’s resources were two websites she consulted and shared with us. Plants for the Future <https://pfaf.org> and Herbal Academy <https://theherbalacademy.com>

Janice Stuff shared with us a handout of recipes in which sage was included.

Herb of the Month – see November for Sage <https://herbsocietyorg.presencehost.net/hsa-learn/herb-of-the-month.html>

History and Fun Facts

https://herbsocietyorg.presencehost.net/file_download/inline/47b64d05-7bde-451f-a0a4-11c2ea13948b

Recipes

https://herbsocietyorg.presencehost.net/file_download/inline/fe820974-eaac-490d-9a7e-7ab493540897



The HERB SOCIETY of AMERICA

Sage - *Salvia* spp.

Tips for Use*:

- Salvia Offiinalis* is the type of sage with culinary significance
- Dried sage is powerfully strong and should be used sparingly
- Fresh sage can be added alone to sandwiches such as grilled cheese or combined with other strong fresh or dried herbs such as bay, thyme, oregano, rosemary, summer and winter savory in soups and stews
- Flash fry large leaves, such as the large-leaved ‘Berggarten’ variety for about 30 seconds, cool and crumble for a garnish.
- Pour boiling water over 1 tablespoon of fresh or 1 teaspoon of dried sage and steep for 5 minutes for sage tea. Add honey to taste and serve warm or cold.
- Use sage as a base for herb tea, combining with dried fruit or other herbs such as chamomile, fennel, lemon verbena, pineapple sage and spearmint or fruit mints.
- Enhance roast turkey, chicken or pork by placing fresh sage leaves under loosened skin.

*taken from the HSA website



Educational Outreach in our Community

SWITCHEL – THE ELIXIR OF EARLY AMERICAN LIFE

Karen Cottingham

It's great belonging to The Herb Society of America. Because of my membership, I was recently invited to present at Poe Elementary School's Annual Williamsburg Day celebration. Fifth grade students studying American history spent the day learning about early American skills, crafts, and foods and then enjoyed a traditional Thanksgiving meal. This year, they observed demonstrations of Native American culture as well as Early American crafts such as quilting, calligraphy, basket making, weaving, and beverage-making.

With the help of STU members Donna Yanowski, Janice Stuff, and Virginia Camerlo, I led a discussion about the early American vinegar-based beverage known as switchel and invited the students to taste it. The results were noisily mixed, with some students making classic "Mr. Yuck" faces, but others enthusiastically clamoring for seconds and thirds. Regardless of a thumbs up or thumbs down verdict, I think the experience was memorable and educational for all.

Why did switchel make such a good topic for a history lesson?

First of all, switchel was the "drink of choice" for our Founding Fathers. Arthur Staples, in his fascinating article A History of Switchel, describes the drama of the early House and Senate, where resounding oration was fueled by the contents of the immense punchbowl within the chambers:

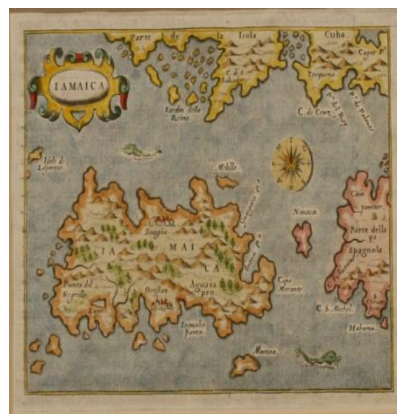
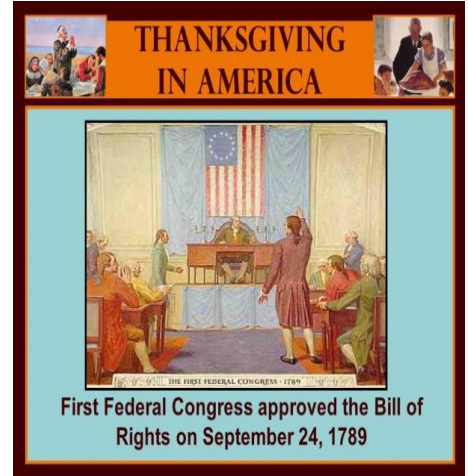
Members paused in their great speeches—those that yet ring through the ages perhaps—and going up to the great bowl, dipped deep. Sometimes they paused glass in hand, to emphasize a telling sentence; sometimes they orated glass in hand and then drank deep and again stalked back majestically to their place with switchel under their belts.

Staples elaborates further: "[M]embers were continuously leaving their seats and silently approaching the tank of coolness..." which was

replenished as often as needed by watchful attendants. The funding for Congressional switchel was even guaranteed in the appropriations of our infant nation!

What was it about this Congressional punch that so inspired the historic speeches of the Founding Fathers?

Well, in addition to the traditional ingredients for switchel - water, vinegar, ginger, a sweetener, and sometimes a splash of citrus - the Congressional switchel was liberally fortified with Jamaica Rum! The politicians drank punch with a punch!



The early history of switchel is so murky that even the etymology of the word is unknown. Many scholars, including Frederick Smith, an anthropologist at the College

of William and Mary, believe that switchel evolved from a sour Caribbean punch. The Caribbean planters created a variety of fruit



and spice punches not only as refreshing beverages, but also in the perpetual search of the “elixir of life”.

Along with the steady transport of goods from the Caribbean to the American colonies, it is reasonable to assume that a taste for Caribbean punch was imported as well.

Switchel, however, is decidedly an American invention. While it resembles Caribbean beverages, the Caribbean ingredients in American switchel are combined in a unique way. According to Smith, “Molasses and ginger are both from the Caribbean, but from different parts — molasses from sugar islands like Barbados and Martinique, and ginger from the spice Islands like Grenada. For the most part, they only come together as exports on the shores of America.”

“The addition of vinegar is probably a New England adaptation of what had been a Caribbean drink” Smith adds, making switchel what he calls a “creolized” drink.

Why vinegar? Vinegar-based drinks, to our modern palates, might take some adjusting to - as evidenced by the shocked expressions on the faces of the fifth-graders - but they were actually very common in early America. Among the many excellent reasons for this, the most important was the anti-bacterial effect of vinegar on contaminated water. People added vinegar to water for the same reason they added alcohol - to avoid infection.



And since most alcoholic drinks probably had at least some vinegar in them anyway, people had developed a taste for vinegar flavored beverages. They were also accustomed to the taste of vinegar in food, as pickling was a cheap way to preserve fruits and vegetables for the winter.

Acidic beverages strongly stimulate salivation, making vinegar-based drinks especially effective at quenching thirst. Switchel, without the rum, of course, was prepared by the gallons and brought to laborers in fields in stoneware crocks and jugs. This “Haymaker’s Punch” was essential to keep farmers hydrated, healthy, and energized during harvests.

As many have pointed out, switchel was the original “energy drink”. And as I discussed with the students, if the farmers couldn’t get the hay and crops in because of exhaustion, illness, or even drunkenness, there was a good chance they would not survive the winter.



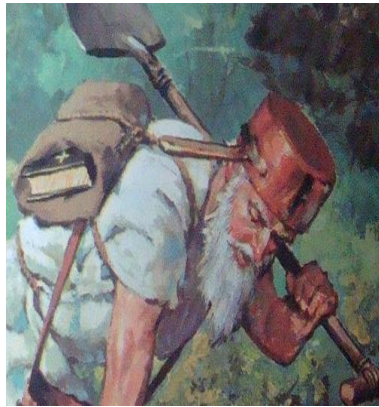
Every recipe I found for switchel or Haymaker’s Punch specified that apple cider vinegar was the only vinegar used. In reading a little more about the history of apple cider vinegar in early America, I was surprised to find out that there were no apple trees in the New World when the earliest colonists arrived. The vast majority of the apple trees now established throughout North America are descendants of the grafted



specimens brought across the Atlantic by the determined earliest settlers. This certainly gives the expression “As American as Apple Pie” a new twist!



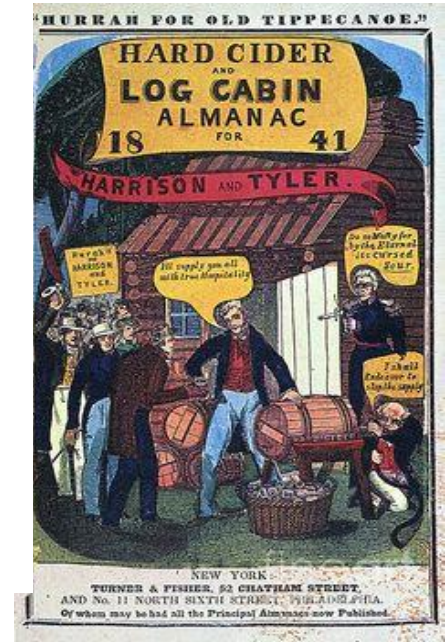
As I discussed this surprising fact with the students, we shifted into an interesting conversation about Johnny Appleseed. They all knew the folklore version of John Chapman - a barefoot eccentric wearing rags and carrying his cooking pot on his head who wandered about scattering apple seeds and befriending wild animals. Allowing for folkloric embellishment, this colorful characterization is essentially true - the only exception being the implausible hat. But we also discussed the fact that Johnny Appleseed was an astute, even brilliant, businessman.



The apple seed planting was as entrepreneurial as it was altruistic. This was his business strategy: to claim land in the new territory of Ohio, a settler had to plant an orchard of fifty apple trees. Johnny Appleseed traveled in advance of the pioneers to establish apple orchards that allowed him to claim many parcels of land. He then sold apple seedlings and even some of his land to the incoming settlers at a significant profit. His wealth was in turn donated to the Church of Swedenborg, which among other things, promoted abstinence, simple living, and a reverence for nature.

Following his religious beliefs to the letter, Appleseed never propagated a single apple tree by grafting, which he believed caused physical harm and suffering to the plant. He relied only upon seed, which he gathered from cider mills, to establish his orchards. Ironically, nearly all apple trees planted from seed produce “spitters” - too sour for eating, but perfect for alcoholic hard cider and Applejack! This unfamiliar part of the Johnny Appleseed story is described in Natasha Geiling’s

Smithsonian article aptly titled “The Real Johnny Appleseed Brought Apples - and Booze - to the American Frontier”. The popularity of alcohol also inspired Benjamin Harrison’s winning Presidential campaign advertisements (see left) which targeted the common man through his love of hard cider.



Even though they didn’t produce edible apples, most of Johnny Appleseed’s trees were healthy and long-lived. These “spitters” were well cared for, since they reliably produced enough sour and bitter fruit to satisfy the nation’s thirst for hard cider. That is, until 1920. In 1920, the government outlawed alcohol. FBI agents were deployed with axes to destroy Appleseed’s orchards - the life work of a man so gentle he wouldn’t make the cut needed to graft a tree.

Only one confirmed Appleseed tree is still alive today.

But getting back to switchel, our next topic was how to add something sweet for energy and to tame the tang of vinegar. Sweeteners in early America varied by region - maple syrup and molasses were plentiful in the North as was sweet sorghum syrup in the South. Honey was favored in inland settlements, and sugar from sugar cane plantations was available to anyone who could afford it.



Since I prepared my demonstration switchel with honey (thanks to the generosity of **Nicole Buegers of Bee2Bee Honey**), our discussion of sweeteners focussed on the early history of honey and beekeeping in America. To the students' surprise, honeybees, like the apple trees, had to be imported from Europe by the early colonists. Imagine sharing an eight-week trans-Atlantic voyage with honeybees in skeps and wooden boxes! Realizing how important honeybees were for crop pollination, as well as for providing much needed honey and beeswax for candles, English settlers introduced honeybees to America in 1622.



After we passed around a jar of thick honey straight from a local hive, we moved on to examine a fresh ginger root. Ginger was a commonly used spice in early American baking, especially popular in gingerbread; we can still read Martha Washington's famous gingerbread recipe in her personal cookbook. Because ginger was readily available through trade with the Caribbean islands, colonists could easily indulge their fondness for the spice.

But how did ginger find its way into switchel?

Ginger might well have been one of the original stimulating and refreshing ingredients in the island punches that colonial planters and traders enjoyed. As the American versions of Caribbean punches evolved to what we call switchel, travelers returning from the islands may have recalled and requested the addition of ginger. Or ginger may simply have been added as a familiar spice.



Another idea is much more intriguing: the colonists' inclusion of ginger in switchel may actually reflect their limited understanding of the needs of the human body.

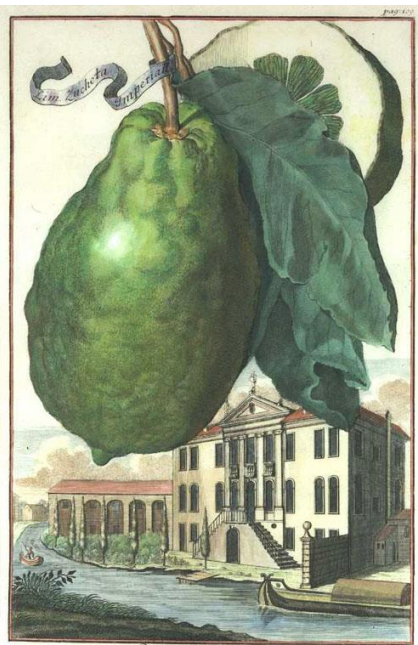
According to 17th century theories of physiology, one's body temperature should be kept in the best balance possible relative to the ambient temperature. In practical terms, this meant that in hot weather the body needed hot beverages to remain balanced. Drinking a cold beverage on a hot day would surely disrupt the body's equilibrium with drastic consequences.

But hot beverages were not always convenient or even possible to provide. A satisfactory solution on a hot day was to drink a beverage associated with a *sensation* of heat. Alcohol, conveniently enough, produced a "healthy" burning sensation that would keep the body safe and in proper equilibrium! And when alcohol was not appropriate or not available, a suitably "hot" alternative was to add some pungent ginger to the cup.

Understandably, the students were skeptical of the "hot weather, hot beverage" theory!

Finally, we discussed lime, the last ingredient in

their switchel. Lime was not actually included in the earliest version of the drink; but since it began to be added shortly thereafter, I decided to include a splash to enhance the flavor. This also gave me an opportunity to discuss the importance of limes in history.



Limes, along with other citrus fruits, were occasionally available to the early colonists, thanks to the Spaniards who brought citrus with them when they settled in Florida. When asked why lime was important to the colonists, the students quickly

responded that it helped prevent and treat scurvy.

Our grand finale, the “Tasting of the Switchel”, was accompanied by noisy shrieks, laughter, excited opinions, and thumbs up or thumbs down! Those who loved it, loved it; and those who hated it, *really* hated it. Some may have

preferred more or less sweetness or more or less tang - and the proportions are endlessly adjustable if they want to make their own - but all the students seemed to enjoy the experience.

Williamsburg Day at Poe Elementary is an excellent preparation for Thanksgiving, the harvest feast of gratitude that goes back to the beginning of our nation. Somehow it seems appropriate that our all-American switchel was made entirely with ingredients brought from Europe and the African-influenced Caribbean. Apples for vinegar came across the Atlantic with the colonists, and our honey was a gift from honeybees originally from England. Spicy ginger grew in the tropical West Indies, and the Florida lime trees were brought on ships from Spain. So what better way to toast America’s melting pot than with a cup of switchel!

HSA-STU members and guests will also have an opportunity to taste switchel when **Julie Fordes** gives her June 19, 2019 program on vinegar-based beverages, “Shrubs, Switchels and Oxymels”. And in the meantime, I hope you recognize how much fun it is to represent The Herb Society in educational outreach programs. Help us by being on the lookout for other opportunities or even creating a program of your own. You’ll be amazed at what you and your audience will learn.

