Herbs Make Scents

THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
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SOUTH TEXAS UNIT
JUNE 2019

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June 2019 Calendar

June 11	**NO DAY MEETING OR FIELD TRIP.**
June 13-15	**National Annual Meeting (The Herb Society of America)** in Madison, WI**.**
June 19, Wed. at 6:30 pm	**Evening Meeting** is at the Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004). The program, "Shrubs, Switchels, and Oxymels" will be presented by **Karen Cottingham**. Hosts: **Dena and Donna Yanowski. Bring your plate, cutlery, napkin and a dish to share.**

July 2019 Calendar

July 17, Wed. at 6:30 pm	**Evening Meeting** is at the Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004). The program, "Herbal Chocolates and Chocolate as a Herb" will be presented by **Annie Rupani**, chocolatier and owner of Cacao and Cardamom. Hosts: **Linda and Steven van Heeckeren. Bring your plate, cutlery, napkin and a dish to share.**
August	**No meetings scheduled for August. See you in September.**

Newsletter deadline: the 25th of every month

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

Greetings and Happy Summer,

I am composing and writing this last column as Unit Chair – although I had better check the term limits before making that statement!

Julie Fordes was elected the new Unit Chair at the Annual Members Meeting last month and I'm looking forward to mentoring her, as others have guided me.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the South Texas Unit for the past two years and continue the success of a strong & vibrant Herb Society of America affiliate. I wanted to make a few changes and certainly made a few mistakes along the way.

The friendships and acquaintances I have made were a bonus as well. Although the work and production of our two fundraisers, Herb Fair and Herb Day, was both exhausting and exhilarating, it was invaluable for me in gaining knowledge, personal satisfaction and wonderful contacts.

I am looking forward to the new ideas and possible trends that our Unit is exploring – and I'm not leaving, just changing hats.

Donna Yanowski
Past Unit Chair

"Adopt the pace of nature:
her secret is patience."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Congratulations to
Julie Fordes

Julie (active member since 2016) was elected the new South Texas Unit Chair for 2019-2021.

She has participated with Herb Day, various workgroups, as well as chaired Herb Fair.

She initiated a new column titled, "Back to our Roots" for the STU newsletter.

Julie has a passion for exploring and generating fun ideas with the goal to share the gift of growing, harvesting and using herbs…for "use and delight" with members and many others in the Houston community.

WELCOME JULIE FORDES, CHAIR OF THE STU !

What's Happening in our Unit!

Day Meeting Report for May – Mexican Salvias

During this past year, the plant study for the day meetings has featured the Salvias, the largest genus of plants in the mint family. On May 14, the group met at the Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion. Member **Linda van Heeckeren** decorated the tables in a colorful spring floral style, including centerpieces of her own cut flowers, books, and essential oils (photos).

Member **Beth Murphy** presented a program on the Mexican Salvias. Beth had cuttings for members and guests of selected Mexican salvias (see photo of her plant bouquet). Beth discussed the background, habitat, and properties of nine Mexican Salvias, including *Salvia chiapensis, Salvia coccinea, Salvia coulteri and Salvia longispicata.* ■

Sara Diaz

Tamara Gruber

Happy Birthday!

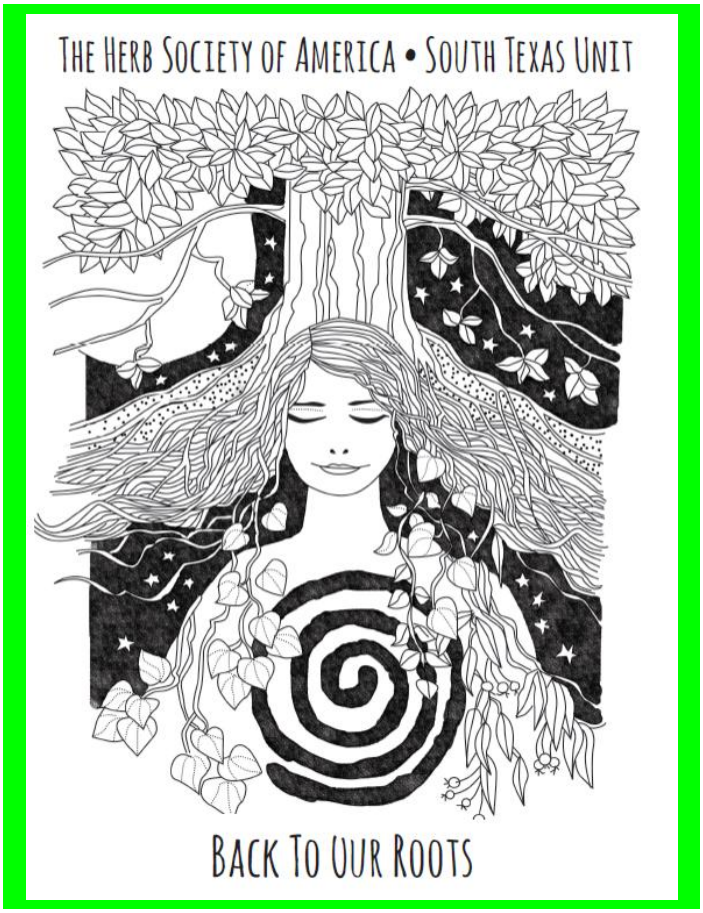
Sally Luna

Mary Sacilowski

Back to Our Roots

Julie Fordes

Thanks to all of you who took holy basil (tulsi) and butterfly pea seeds home to grow from our last meeting! The National Herb Society sells an herbal tea blend called Lemon Tulsi Teazer. I would like to try a tulsi blend to add to our other herbal teas we sell at Herb Fair in November. The dried flowers of the butterfly pea will color foods and drinks blue! I think this could be a great item for the Herbal Marketplace in the future.



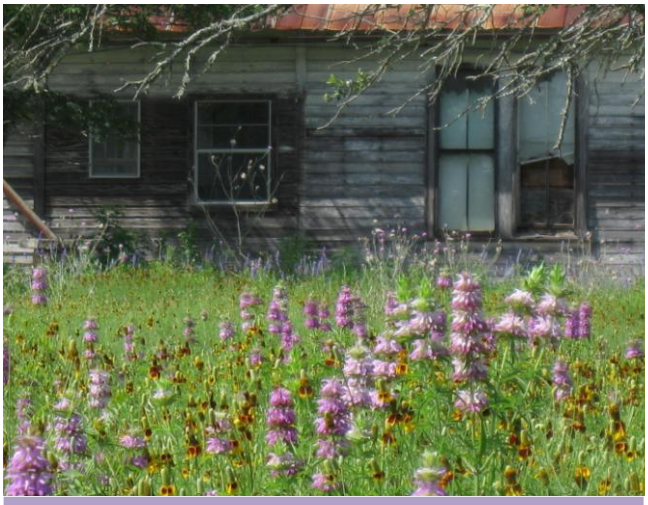
Also, a special shout out to Janice Dana who wrote very informative articles for both the April and May newsletters spotlighting a couple of herbs that go into our Texas Herb Tea.

Even though the heat is here, I'm still getting consistent harvests of mints, oreganos, lemon and lime balm, and Mexican Mint Marigold. I am drying them on newspaper. When they are nice and crisp, I take the leaves off the stem and store them in a labeled plastic bag. I squeeze out as much air as possible and keep it in a cupboard. The freezer is a great place for long-term storage.

Back To Our Roots is a work in progress. There has been a very positive response so far and I would like to continue building on what we have gotten going. Two major pieces that I haven't gotten to yet are spreading the wisdom of our long-time members, and getting clear and concise instructions for gardeners who need it. I would also like to develop more interactive educational demonstrations for our general membership.

The program could use a few more passionate members to help develop and plan the way forward; to help me be more consistent in getting people to grow herbs we can use in our products and developing products we can make with what grows here. I could really use help making the program meaningful to everyone. If you have a bit of time to meet maybe once a month or so and help me figure this out, call me. I will be busier with other Herb Society duties soon and don't want to drop the ball on this. As always… "For Use and Delight". ■

Announcements



Thank you
Donna Yanowski

For your service, love of herbs
&
grace under pressure
as you led
The South Texas Unit
2017-2019

Are you LOOKING for a "cool off" place in H-TOWN?

If so, consider visiting the Houston Museum of Natural Science.

"Artist and naturalist Christopher Marley arranges insects, birds, crustaceans, fish, plants, and reptiles in precise, 3D displays that make viewers feel as if they have stepped into a bejeweled natural kaleidoscope."as reported by Britini R. McAshan, author of CURATED: The Intersection of ARTS and MEDICINE from TMC Pulse Vol.6 No. 4 May 2019.

Visit the TMC Pulse link above to see a sampling of Mr. Marley's exhibit, and then go to the Houston Museum of Natural Science to chill and enjoy.

Biophilia: A Dialogue with Art and Science
www. hms.org

Membership Dues For 2019-2020

Deadline is August 1, 2019

Please pay your membership dues to the treasurer or mail to:

STU
PO Box 6515
Houston Tx 77265

Regular $67.50
Sustaining $80.00
Joint $98.75
Affiliate $12.50

Congratulations to
Dr. Amanda Jones Knobloch

Amanda is a former member of the South Texas Unit and daughter of member Janis Teas.

She was recently awarded her doctorate degree from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science

My Name is Mexican Oregano

by: Karen Cottingham

Back in the days of black and white television, I used to love watching an old-fashioned game show called "To Tell the Truth". For our younger members who don't remember The Golden Age of Television, the show featured three contestants who all claimed to be the same person. One was the actual individual and two were imposters fabricating their stories. Celebrity Hollywood panelists - glamorous women in their elegant evening gowns and handsome men with mellifluous voices - tried to detect which one of the three contestants was telling the truth. The panel had only a few minutes to solve the mystery before the bow-tied announcer called time to extol the benefits of Geritol, the show's long-time sponsor.

I hadn't thought about this iconic show for decades, but all of a sudden, I couldn't get it out of my head. I was actually trying to untangle what seemed to be a random assortment of plants that were all mysteriously called "Mexican oregano". The more I looked for clarification, the more Mexican oregano plants there seemed to be. I kept wondering which one was the "Real Mexican Oregano".

This oregano investigation started when I noticed that "oregano" showed up rather frequently in traditional Hispanic cooking and folk medicine. A friend's mother recommended her Mexican grandmother's special herbal remedy for cough - oregano tea. Not exactly tasty, but it *was* surprisingly effective and I have used it many times since. At the time, I didn't seriously question how this post-World War II pizza herb had made its way back through time into traditional Mexican folk medicine.

Then I started reading about “The Chili Queens” of San Antonio and learned that oregano was one of the original ingredients in “Tampico Dust” chili powder. In 1894 William Gebhardt, a German immigrant living in New Braunfels, concocted this soon-to-be famous blend to season the Tejano-style dishes served at his popular cafe.

Gebhardt started peddling bottles of his popular concoction and soon established a factory to meet the demand. By 1915, he was selling 18,000 bottles of "Gebdardt's Eagle Brand Chili Powder" every day!

The Phoenix Cafe, New Braunfels, Texas

The Phoenix Saloon adjacent to Gebhadt's cafe was famous for being the first bar in Texas to offer service to women. To protect their reputations, a private "beer garden" area was created for the exclusive use of the female customers. When they wanted to order another round, they simply rang a bell in the tree!

Does oregano seem out of place in the “Wild West” to anyone else? On the other hand, the “exotic” herbs coriander and cumin had already arrived in San Antonio back in the 18th century along with the Canary Islands immigrants. Could they have brought oregano with them too? Possibly.

But according to culinary historians, Mediterranean oregano was virtually unheard of in the United States until the late 1880’s, and then only in certain New York City neighborhoods where the first Italian immigrants settled.

The first time a large and diverse group of Americans came into contact with oregano was during the Italian campaign of World War II. The returning GIs brought home a craving for the pungent, fragrant herb they had encountered overseas and the “peet-za pie” that it adorned.

So, we're back to my original questions - what is "Mexican oregano", and why are there so many of them? A fanciful adaptation of "To Tell the Truth" starts running through my mind - a botanical version of the show in which the mystery guests are plants rather than people, and all claim to be Mexican oregano. From off-stage, the booming baritone calls out the famous question - "What is your name, please?"

Contestant Number One:

"My name is Mexican oregano"

Contestant Number Two:

"*My* name is Mexican oregano"

And, finally, Contestant Number Three:

"My *name* is Mexican oregano"

Fifteen minutes later, the *real* Mexican oregano will stand up. Will *you* solve the mystery before the celebrity contestants do?

Well, I'm bending the rules a little, because at the end of the show, *all three* of our contestants, *Lippia graveolens*, *Poliomintha longiflora*, and *Monarda citriodora* var. *austromontana* (Epling) B.L.Turner stand up to be revealed as the "Real Mexican Oregano"!

How can this be? Three completely different plants from different parts of Mexico, and all are correctly called Mexican oregano? None of these "oreganos" even slightly resemble the oregano that we love to put on our pizza! Well, friends, that's because they're *not even slightly* related! *But they do have the same name!*

If you were thinking, like I was, that Mexican oregano was in the genus Origanum along with Cretan, Greek, Italian, Lebanese, Sicilian, Syrian, Turkish, and even Kyrgyzstani and Nepalese oreganos, welcome to the wacky world of oreganos, where "nothing is as it seems".

It turns out that food scientists as well as botanists now use the word "oregano" to describe a particular *flavor* rather than a particular *genus* or *species.* So regardless of its "family of origin", a plant is considered to be an "oregano" if it has a distinctive "oregano flavor" - sharp, savory, and pungent, with a warming and almost numbing sensation on the tongue. This signature oregano flavor is due to the presence of a creosote-scented phenol called carvacrol.

Scott D. Apell, the garden writer, horticultural taxonomist, and ethnobotanist who calls himself the "Green Man", put it this way:

> After a lifetime of growing edible plants, I've come to the conclusion that "oregano" should be a botanical category of aroma and taste rather than the common name for any one herb. After all, there are so *many* plants with the requisite essential oils that provide oregano's heady, easily recognizable fragrance and piquant flavor. ("Mexican Oregano - A Tasty Twist on a Age-Old Flavor")

Ironically, some plants with "*Origanum"* in their official names don't produce much carvacrol at all, but many other unrelated species do so in abundance.

Carvacrol is an anti-bacterial, anti-fungicidal, and insecticidal chemical that protects a plant that is stressed by environment, insects, or pathogens. In conditions of prolonged drought, plants produce even more carvacrol, and, according to culinary naturalist Gary Paul Nabhan, this allows the water-stressed leaves to disperse excess heat.

Carvacrol also gives the leaves a taste that is attractive to human herbivores! The relative concentrations of carvacrol and other essential oils such as thymol, p-cymene, and linalool determine the flavor profile as well as the medicinal properties of the various oreganos.

So it's not its taxonomic lineage that makes an "oregano" an "oregano". Instead, it's a particular chemical signature. At last count, at least 61 species in 17 genera belonging to six different botanical families are known as oregano. And Mexico is home to over forty of these oregano species! No wonder it's confusing!

Furthermore, about forty percent of the world's oregano supply now comes from Mexico. And it all comes from native New World plants scattered all over the taxonomic tree. All over, that is, except on the branch called "Origanum"!

Women harvesting their local variety of oregano (*Lippia graveolens*)
Photo: Andrea Egan/UNDP Mexico

The three best known Mexican oreganos, the mystery guests in my imaginary "To Tell the (Botanical) Truth", are *Lippia graveolens, Poliomintha longiflora,* and *Monarda citriodora* var. *austromontana* (Epling) B.L.Turner. All of these plants produce carvacrol in abundance, but I think it's fascinating that all were known as oreganos long before scientists had isolated or even named this chemical substance.

When the flora of the New World was being named and categorized, the Spanish men doing the recording did not have the experience, the knowledge, or the language to describe the many distinctions between these plants. The best they could do was to label as "orégano" all plants that had a taste reminiscent of the oregano back home. It was only much later that the chemical "signature" of these plants was identified.

In this convoluted story of mistaken identities, it shouldn't be surprising that the plant in Spain called "Spanish oregano" was actually a thyme – *Thymus capitatus* to be precise! We would be correct in calling it an oregano, though, because of its high concentration of carvacrol.

Lippia graveolens (our Mexican Oregano #1) is one of the most important oregano species worldwide due to the quality of its leaves, the high yield of extracted essential oil, and the favorable proportions of the various chemical components.

This aromatic New World shrub, also called Desert Oregano, is native to the Southwestern United States and extends through Mexico into Central America. As a member of the verbena family (Verbenaceae), and therefore a close relative of lemon verbena, it's not surprising that a citrus flavor is discernible in both the leaves and flowers.

Hints of camphor, grass, and mint can also be detected, along with a sweet spiciness reminiscent of anise or licorice. And of course, there's the intense, tongue-numbing pungency of carvacrol.

This Mexican oregano is much more robustly flavored than its Mediterranean counterpart, and is best paired with other strongly-flavored ingredients such as chile peppers. It's outstanding flavor enhances so many dishes that they can hardly all be listed - beans, burritos, egg dishes, enchiladas, fish, pork, salsas, soups, stews, tacos, and tomato based sauces - just to mention a few. In seasoning blends, it partners well with cumin, chili powder, dried Mexican chiles, garlic, and pepper.

The plant's sturdy branches can be used as skewers in seafood or shish kebobs, and putting whole branches over the charcoals adds intriguing flavor dimensions to grilled food.

And the dried leaves are frequently brewed into a medicinal herbal tea called *té de pais* ("country tea") that is widely used by female shamans in Mexico and the Southwestern United States.

Leaves of *Lippia graveolens* are easy to distinguish from those of Mediterranean oregano if one knows to look for their serrated edges and rough texture. The Mexican oregano also looks heartier and its fragrance is more "wild", while the leaves of the Greek variety are smaller, more delicate, and smell much sweeter.

Greek oregano (*Origanum vulgare*)

Mexican oregano (*Lippia graveolens)*

And, of course, the flowers of these two oreganos are completely different. Notice how the leaves and flowers of *Lippia graveolens* resemble Lantana, another member of the Verbenaceae family.

Greek oregano (*Origanum vulgare*)

Mexican oregano (*Lippia graveolens)*

The Seri Indians have been gathering this wild Mexican oregano for centuries to use as medicine and to flavor their food. Called "*Xomcahiift*" in their native tongue, Desert Oregano in common English vernacular, and *Lippia graveolens* subspecies *palmeri* in official botanical nomenclature, this oregano is still playing a key role in their survival.

Now numbering about 750 individuals, the Seri are among the last groups in North America who have managed to subsist by hunting, fishing, and gathering rather than by agriculture. In recent years, they have begun wild-harvesting edible plants from the Sonoran and Chihuahua deserts, including Desert Oregano, to sell, using their traditional ecological knowledge to harvest plants sustainably and at peak essential oil content.

Their method of harvesting is described in an article from Slow Food USA: Ark of Taste:

> Luckily, the sweet, herbal flavor of Desert Oregano is preserved for the market by the Seri Indians, who handpick this wild herb as part of their hunter-gather tradition. Working with the land, the Seri move cautiously through the desert scrub as to not damage the plants; instead of breaking off the branches they rake the leaves with their fingers ensuring the plants' ability to reproduce more foliage. The harvest is virtually a pruning process making Desert Oregano a truly sustainable crop.

Foraging for Sonoran Desert Oregano has not always returned a livable wage to those who harvest it commercially, but this is changing with the help of The Center for Sustainable Environments in Northern Arizona.

The Seri's oregano is now direct-marketed to chefs and natural food consumers who are willing to pay for a quality product harvested sustainably from a wild habitat free from contaminants. By purchasing oregano from the Seri, consumers are also helping an "endangered people" who have few economic opportunities in their remote, harsh homeland.

For more information about Mexican oregano and the Seri Oregano Project see Gary Paul Nabhan's essay "Stalking Oregano in the Wilds of Mexico" and "The Verve in the Herb", a chapter in Nabhan's recent book, *Desert Terroir - Exploring the Unique Flavors and Sundry Places of the Borderlands*.

Doña Ramona, a Seri healer

The second Mexican oregano featured in the botanical version of "To Tell the Truth" is *Poliomintha longiflora.* In contrast to *Lippia, Poliomintha* belongs to the family Lamiaceae, which at least places it in the same family as the Mediterranean oreganos. And to illustrate just how confusing the vernacular nomenclature of Mexican oreganos is, this plant is also called Mexican sage and rosemary mint!

The native habitat of *Poliomintha longiflora* is the state of Coahuila in Northern Mexico where it grows wild in thickets. It's particular signature of essential oils is very different from the other Mexican oreganos, resulting in unique flavors, culinary applications, and medicinal uses. It is also a very attractive and aromatic ornamental commonly seen in arid Texas landscapes.

Poliomintha longiflora cascading over a wall

There are distinct morphological differences between the leaves and stems of *Lippia* and *Poliomintha* oregano which make it easy to distinguish the two in both fresh and dried form. The leaves of *Lippia* species, as we have seen, have "sawtooth" edges, whereas the leaves of *P. longiflora* are smooth. If you come across a Mexican oregano called "smooth oregano", it is probably *Poliomintha.*

Top: Dried leaves of *Lippia graveolens;* bottom: *Poliomintha longifolium*

This unique wild Mexican oregano is available for purchase through Rancho Gordo, an agricultural "network" based in California that supports the production of indigenous crops and heirloom varieties of Southwestern plants.

Steve Sando, the proprietor of Rancho Gordo, became interested in the more "earthy" flavor profiles of the Mexican oreganos when he tried to replicate traditional Mexican dishes. His company now imports hand-harvested indigenous *Poliomintha longiflora A. Gray* directly from the Huasteca region of the Yucatan Peninsula. This Mexican oregano is called Oregano Indio in everyday parlance and is also known rurally as *Oreja de Ratón,* or Mouse's Ear.

Oregano Indio is said to be less "citrussy" and more "earthy"than other Mexican oreganos. It can be rubbed into any meat or fish or added to salsas, *guisados*, marinades, soups and stews, eggs, and beans.

Mexican oregano, *Poliomintha longiflora A. Gray*

The Huasteca people of Hidalgo, Mexico, gathered wild Oreja de Ratón for centuries, but started cultivating it when they realized that their foraging was adversely affecting the land. Recognizing the worldwide demand for quality oregano, they established oregano farms to produce enough oregano for exportation and eventually formed a collective which eliminated the "middlemen". Now able to earn a livable wage, the oregano farmers of Hidalgo are not tempted to leave their homeland for economic reasons.

Oregano Indio is grown by the Oregano Caxtle Cooperative in Tlahuitelpa as part of the Rancho Gordo-Xoxoc Project that helps small farmers in Mexico continue to grow their indigenous foods.

For more information on the oregano farmers of Hildago, I recommend the short video produced by The Perennial Plate https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=66ADn7dLvg4

Oregano farm in Hidalgo, Mexico

And as more and more uses for oregano essential oil become apparent, the existence of these, and other, Mexican oreganos becomes of great practical importance. Several of the Poliominthas and Lippias are being assayed for carvacrol and other essential oil content, and are being tested for new applications as varied as reducing antibiotics in the livestock industry to perfumery to food preservation.

Returning to the Botanical version of "To Tell the Truth", our third example of a Mexican oregano is *Monarda citriodora* var. *austromontana* (Epling) B.L.Turner.

This flowering plant, also called Oregano Grande, is a member of the mint family (Lamiaceae), and is native throughout much of the United States and the states of Chihuahua and Sonora in Mexico. When crushed, the leaves emit a lemony fragrance along with the characteristic fragrance of oregano. It is used as a condiment to flavor food, particularly beans, and as an herbal tea, but I was unable to find any more information about use. A general comment, though, is that unlike many of the other monardas, this herb produces carvacrol and thymol and is therefore pungent rather than sweet.

Another closely related monarda, *Monarda fistulosa* var. *menthifolia*, is sold as oregano in the American Southwest. While I don't think it is called Mexican oregano, it is called Oregano de la Sierra. It is also called wild bergamot or bee balm and belongs to the family Lamiaceae. *Monarda fistula var. menthifolia* is marketed as a fragrance, for flavoring foods and beverages, and as a meat additive. It is also well-known as an excellent nectar source for honeybees.

A bee lands on a blossom of a *Monarda fistulosa var. menthifolium*
(NMSU photo by Jane Moorman)

This oregano is also extremely interesting because it demonstrates yet another potential use of plants rich in carvacrol - to improve the health of honeybees.

An oregano farmer, a beekeeper and a researcher with New Mexico State University are looking at just this possibility. Together, they are investigating potential medicinal benefits of oregano for bees and whether these benefits are transferred to humans through honey. ["Bee" Healthy: NMSU Researchers Study Medicinal Benefits of Oregano for Bees]

Todd Bates is a hops and oregano farmer in rural New Mexico who cultivates the Monarda fistulosa growing wild in the nearby arid mountains. Melanie Kirby, beekeeper and owner of Zia Queen Bees, placed her bees in Bates' oregano fields for three years and noticed that they seemed more vigorous.

Could the improved bee health be due to ingestion of oregano's beneficial essential oils as they foraged? They took that question to Rob Heyduck, senior research specialist at NMSU's College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences' Sustainable Agriculture Center at Alcalde, and a collaborative project began.

According the Heyduck, “Our goal as a team of professional farmers and researchers is to examine and promote *Monarda* spp. as a new crop or accessory planting to affect bee health *in situ* and also produce a hive product and field crop that can be processed in a number of ways either as honey; a dried herb (flowers and leaves), or as an extracted product containing the volatile compounds.”

As we all know, bee health is of critical importance to our own existence. “As a beekeeper,” Kirby says, “pollinator productivity is becoming more and more challenging due to weather fluctuation, increase in pest and disease issues, compromising habitats and management practices.”

Bates grows Oregano de la Sierra because of its high essential oil content. He points out that “There are 60 plants that produce the flavor of oregano. The flavor comes from the chemical compounds that also give the plant is medicinal qualities.”

Heyduck expands further on the oregano’s medicinal properties, “These compounds, including carvacrol, thymol, and p-cymene, have shown bactericidal, viricidal and miticidal activity in previous research. We are hoping the analysis will show that these medicinal compounds are in the honey.”

For more information see a short video from the All About Discovery series produced by New Mexico State University and accessed through Las Cruces Sun News. The title of the video is “Oregano Medicinal Benefits for Bees”.

And for those really interested, there is even a local connection to research on bees and monardas. I would like to remind you that last year the members of the South Texas Unit of the Herb Society of America generously voted to direct a charitable donation to the Dogan Elementary School herbal tea demonstration project. With the help of our own STU member and bee-keeper, **Nicole Buergers**, and a group of Auburn University pollination ecologists, the third grade students at Dogan will grow several varieties of *Monarda* and other mints that are used in herbal teas and are known to support honeybees. I wonder if *Monarda fistulosa var. menthifolium* will be one of the monardas studied! This program is described in more detail in a handout in your Herb Day folder.

When I started this essay on Mexican Oreganos, I had no idea that I would end up in our own Houston backyard! I guess this is another example of how all things are so unexpectedly connected.■

What's Coming Up?

Shrubs, Switchels, and Oxymels - Vinegar-Based Beverages throughout the Ages
To be presented by HSA Member Karen Cottingham on June 19, 2019

Looking for a delicious summertime thirst quencher that is actually good for you? Well, look no further! All you have to do is create your own fruit-vinegar infusion - add some crushed fresh raspberries, for example, to the apple cider vinegar "with the Mother" - then add honey from your beekeeper or backyard hive and a splash of sparkling water. Garnish with more fresh raspberries and mint from your garden and you have yourself a beautiful Raspberry Mint Shrub.

Or maybe you would prefer a plumcot-purple basil shrub, a lemony-ginger switchel, or even a bracing spruce-tip oxymel. Strawberry-tarragon sounds good, or how about blackberry-lavender? Apricot-thyme, rhubarb-vanilla, blood orange-star anise - I'm not anywhere close to running out of ideas.

Vinegar-based drinks are not new, but have been re-discovered in recent years along with fermentation and craft beers. Here is a little introduction:

Vinegar shrubs have been prepared by frugal housewives all through the years to preserve the bounty of summer fruits. They are so popular now that you can buy one at the grocery store or order one at a fancy restaurant. Better, though, to make your own at home.

Switchel is a vinegar-ginger-honey concoction that refreshed everyone in Colonial America - from the field-workers to the law-makers - with a liberal dose of rum for the politicians!

And **oxymels** are actually medicines. Medieval monks and nuns used vinegar to extract the therapeutic compounds from herbs, and then added honey to make the bitter medicines palatable. Fire Cider is a popular contemporary oxymel.

Join the HSA-STU June 19 to learn about and sample *Shrubs, Switchels and Oxymels.* Meeting information is in the Calendar Section of the Newsletter. For those who are curious about the history of Switchel, see the December 2018 Newsletter for *Switchel - The Elixir of Early American Life.*■