

Herbs Make Scents



THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
VOLUME XLII, NUMBER 3

SOUTH TEXAS UNIT
MARCH 2019

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March 2019 Calendar

- Mar. 12, Tues.** at 10 a.m. **Day Meeting** is at the home of **Janice Stuff**. The program “*Blue Blooming Salvias*”, is presented by **Janice Dana**. **Members should bring a dish to share.** Guests should RSVP to Janice Stuff at jestuff@pdq.net.
- Mar. 19, Tues.** at 7:00 p.m. **Board Meeting** at the home of **Donna Yanowski**.
- Mar. 20, Wed.** at 6:30 p.m.
Note: Change in location. **Evening Meeting** is at the Clubhouse in Hermann Park (6201 Hermann Park Drive, Houston, TX 77030.) Hosts are **Mary Sacilowski & Palma Sales**. The program, “*Healing Teas from the Wild Side*”, is presented by **Mark “Merriwether” Vorderbuggen**, PhD, author of [Foraging](#) and creator of “[Foraging Texas](#)”. **Bring your plate, fork, napkin and a dish to share.**

April 2019 Calendar

- Apr. 9, Tues.** at 10:00 am **Day Meeting** will be a **Herb Day Workshop** at the home of **Lois Jean Howard**.
- Apr. 17, 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 **Fatma Ozel & Rose Wherry**. The program will be announced later. **Bring your plate, fork, napkin and a dish to share.**
- Apr. 26, Fri.** **Set-up for Herb Symposium**
- Apr. 27, Sat.** **Herb Day Symposium**

Newsletter deadline: the 25th of every month

3/1 Susan Wood

3/10 Vivian Scallon

3/11 Joan Jordan

3/21 Dena Yanowski

3/23 Lois Jean Howard

3/28 Linda Alderman

Happy
Birthday!

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

Spring greetings,

Although spring is not officially here, it makes a good salutation. The sun is finally out today, the temperate is warm and the azaleas are blooming; unfortunately, the weather forecaster announced that another arctic blast is on it's way so then again maybe I should hold off on the Spring greeting.

I want to share with you a website I was recently introduced to via one of my HUG (Houston Urban Gardner's) members: The Herbal Country Doctor, herbalcountrydoc.com. The author is **Stephan Christensen M.D.** a board certified Family Physician and ER doctor who began researching herbalism to further education himself on the effects of supplements that his patients ingested and the pharmaceuticals that he prescribed. His website is full of biochemistry, immunology, and disease prevention facts and tips. There are so many sources out there teeming with information I feel empowered with the ability to learn new in things about plants I've had in my backyard for years.

The planning committee for this year's Herb Day Symposium has met and we are busy brainstorming, planning and researching for the big event. Please know that your hands are needed to help this event run smoothly. Please call or email with any offerings to help. You will be getting an email and call from **Dena Yanowski** in the coming weeks asking for your commitment in regards to refreshments.



Happy
St. Patrick's Day

Lastly, our National Organization is hosting another webinar on Wednesday March 20 at 12noon. **Susanna Reppert-Brill** will present the topic "Making Herbal Medicine". Please visit the website for more information herbsociety.org. Coincidentally, this is the same day as our March evening meeting.

Remember our March evening meeting will be at the Historic Clubhouse 6201 Hermann Park Dr. ■

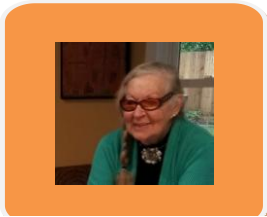
From the garden,
Donna Yanowski



2019 Herb Symposium Preparations!



Lavender Eye Pillows



Fragrant Room Sprays



Gardener's Hand Scrub

Upcoming Craft Workshops

Date	Home of	RSVP Number
Thurs. March 7	Donna Wheeler	713-203-0249
Thurs. March 21	Pam Harris	832-582-6207
Tues. April 9	Lois Jean Howard	713-771-0172
Saturday, April 13	Julie Fordes	832-969-8349



Back to Our Roots in March

By Julie Fordes

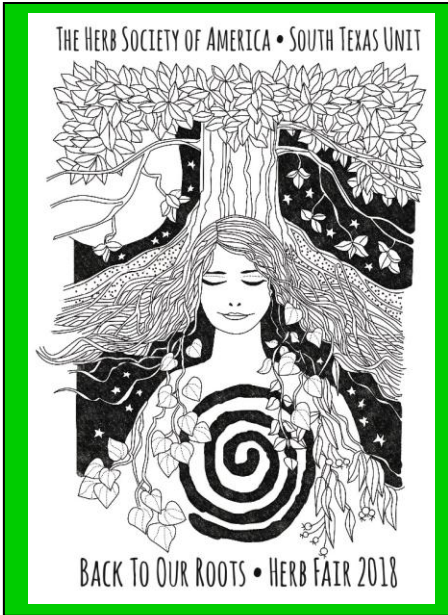
My goal is to help us grow, harvest and **use our own herbs** whenever possible when we make and sell herbal products.

Planting

Now is a fantastic time in the garden to plant some of the herbs we have traditionally used for our tea blends. Here is a list of herbs that are used that would be good to have in your gardens now.

- Red-stem Apple Mint (Madalene Hill mentha x gracilis) I passed on 4 small pots to new growers at the last meeting.
- Lemon Balm
- Lemon Verbena
- Rosemary
- Mexican Mint Marigold

Many of these herbs are readily available in nurseries and other places around town. You can find these and other great herbs at the Herbal Forum in Round Top. The plant sale sponsored by the Pioneer Unit will be open Friday, March 15 & Saturday, March 16.



Harvesting, Drying and Storing

Winter has been pretty kind to us this year and many of us have herbs that could be harvested now. In the past I have used a dehydrator to dry herbs. Now, I know better. I am so glad to have Lois Jean Howard to set me straight! She and other wise women dry herbs on newspaper! We processed leftover rosemary from making the hand scrub Thursday and I am drying it the 'old-fashioned' way, on newspaper! It will be ready in about 2 weeks.

Of course there is a scientific reason that backs up the use of this process. Mark 'Merriweather' Vorderbruggen, speaker for our evening meeting in March, says:

"Remember, plants have a cell wall that keeps all the wonderful molecules inside the cell. But when a plant dies its last action is to activate enzymes designed to chew through the cell walls, releasing everything back into the soil for its children to use. Using heat to dry the plant screws up those enzymes, rendering them unable to breakdown the cell walls so the vitamins, flavors, and everything else will remain trapped in the cells when you try to make a tea from the plant."

So there you have it, 'old school' really is the best!

Here are just a few basic tips for making the best of this process:

- Use newspaper to dry the herbs.
- Let them dry for 2 weeks or so.
- Store in an airtight container out of direct sunlight.
- Don't forget to label the herbs with the date and what they are.



Continued next page.



We are just scratching the surface regarding best practices for drying herbs, there are many other ways and some ways are better for particular herbs. If you have a way that you dry and process herbs, please let me know, by phone or email. I will put all our combined knowledge together and let others know.



Use and Delight

Here is harvested calendula about to be made into an oil infusion and then processed with beeswax to make a salve for Herb Day. ■



Chairpersons for Herb Day Symposium 2019 Preparations

Please know that your hands are needed to help this event run smoothly. To participate contact one or more of the Chairs by e-mail or phone. Thank you.

[Donna Yanowski](#), Head Chairperson

[Karen Cottingham](#), Program Chair

[Dena Yanowski](#), Food & Beverage Chair

[Maria Treviño](#) & [Catherine O'Brien](#), Co-Chairs Communications/PR

[Donna Wheeler](#), Chair Decoration/Door Prize

Lois Jean Howard (713-771-0172) & [Julie Fordes](#), Co-Chairs Herbal Marketplace/Ways and Means

[Donna Fay Hilliard](#), Plant Chair

[Janet Ruffin](#), Program Printing



What's Coming Up Next?

THE WILD AND WEEDY MONTH OF MARCH

by Karen Cottingham

What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, *Inversnaid* (1918)

Everyone needs a special day, and here's one I can whole-heartedly embrace: **National Weed Appreciation Day**, observed each year on March 28. "*Long live the weeds!*"

This special day for weeds is perfect timing for lollygagging gardeners! My own yard is bursting forth with the beautiful "weeds" of Spring - lush beds of tender chickweed, ever-cheerful oxalis with its star-shaped flowers and heart-shaped leaves, splashes of dandelion yellow here and there, and bright green tangled mats of cleavers climbing up the fence and sticking to my shoes. They'll be replaced in the heat of the summer by succulent purslane and lovely sky-blue chicory - more weeds!

And they are all welcome - in my garden as well as in my kitchen!

After all, "weeds" were our first vitamin pills, vegetables, and medicines. While admittedly not very well-disciplined, they have other, more important, attributes. They still retain, for example, the vitamins and minerals, anti-oxidants, phytonutrients, and other health-giving properties that have virtually disappeared from commercially produced crops. Produce from the grocery store may have been selected for less bitterness, greater yield, ease of transport, and bigger size, but definitely *not* for more nutrition.

That's one of the reasons why foraging has grown in popularity, even in urban areas. And especially in Houston, under the enthusiastic leadership of **Dr. Mark "Merriwether" Vorderbruggen**, people are learning to respect - and even embrace - the weeds.





Merriwether Vorderbruggen has foraged all his life, first while growing up in rural Minnesota, and now in his own backyard, along the sidewalks of his Houston neighborhood, and throughout the grasslands and forests of Texas. Budding foragers can learn the basics of gathering wild food through Mark's comprehensive website, *Foraging Texas*; his book, *Idiot's Guide: Foraging*; and on his guided walks through the Houston Arboretum and several state parks in Texas.

Merriwether is a popular and engaging public speaker. And on March 20, 2019, he will join the HSA-STU to discuss *Herbal Teas from the Wild Side*. Anyone interested in botany, nature, foraging, herbal teas, or tasty and nutritious "weeds" will want to attend this special program.

To add to the fun, South Texas Unit member **Julie Fordes** is harvesting her own bumper crop of weeds. Come sample her "Wild and Weedy Cleavers Tea". Cleavers tea is supposed to be a tasty spring tonic, full of vitamins and minerals. It is even recommended by the eminent botanist James A. **Duke, PhD**, the "world's foremost authority on healing herbs". Bring your cups, and we shall see.



The opportunity to taste and learn first-hand about cleavers, (*Galium aparine*), is a great example of what Weed Appreciation Day is all about. For most gardeners, this sticky, clingy plant - and it is actually an herb in addition to being a weed - has a reputation for extremely bad behavior. It lords it over the rest of the garden like a grade-school bully. It sticks to everything and breaks off when you try to pull it up, and it smothers other plants in its aggressive positioning for sunlight. Cleavers is a bonafide botanical thug!

But "weed appreciators" suggest you try to change your attitude and look for the positive, even in the most defiant and out-of-control weeds. "Get out there", they say, "and really look at your yard, and find out if perhaps what you once thought of as a weed is actually a wonderful new surprise living in your lawn."

In other words, "weeds are flowers too, once you get to know them." I think **A. A. Milne** was speaking metaphorically when he penned these words for a book of his essays, but I love the idea of getting to know, and value, the weeds in our lives.

So here is the challenge: What can we learn to love about this much-maligned plant?



Well, to start, cleavers was not always an unpopular bully.

Greek shepherds of antiquity actually appreciated the “clinginess” that we despise today. They wove the barbed stems and leaves into a dense nest, or “rough sieve”, which was indispensable for straining milk. Another member of the genus, *Galium verum*, was used to curdle milk for cheese-making, and then to separate the curds from the whey. The ancient Greeks so valued the usefulness of cleavers in milk and cheese production that they called the plant “*Galium*”, from “*gala*”, their word for milk.

The Irish name for cleavers, *sop an tséaláin*, meaning “wispy strainer”, suggests that bundles of cleavers were similarly used as filters as far afield as the British Isles. And if you go on a plant walk with Merriwether, he could teach you how to make a “backpacker colander” - a leafy strainer made of clingy cleavers - as practical and eco-friendly as ever.

Clinginess is not only the signature feature of *Galium aparine*, it is even part of its formal name. The species name “*aparine*” is derived from the Greek word for “clinging” or “seizing” (*apairo*); and the popular name “cleavers” refers to the plant’s easy adherence to adjacent plants, animals, and even itself. Stick-a-back, stickywilly, hedge burrs, stickybud, catchweed, and stickyweed are just a few of its eighty-odd folk names that refer to its stickiness.

But none of its colloquial names suggest that *Galium aparine* was considered a nuisance. It seems that the bane of the modern tidy gardener was held in much higher regard in the past than it is today.

Another of the interesting Greek names for cleavers is *philanthropon*, which is translated as “man-loving”. This probably refers to its habit of clinging to men working in the fields, but at least it suggests an amicable rather than adversarial relationship. A later English interpretation of *philanthropon* is “loveman”; and some rural folks went a little further and called the plant “everlasting friendship”, “kisses”, or “sweethearts”. These are hardly names for offensive or detested weeds.

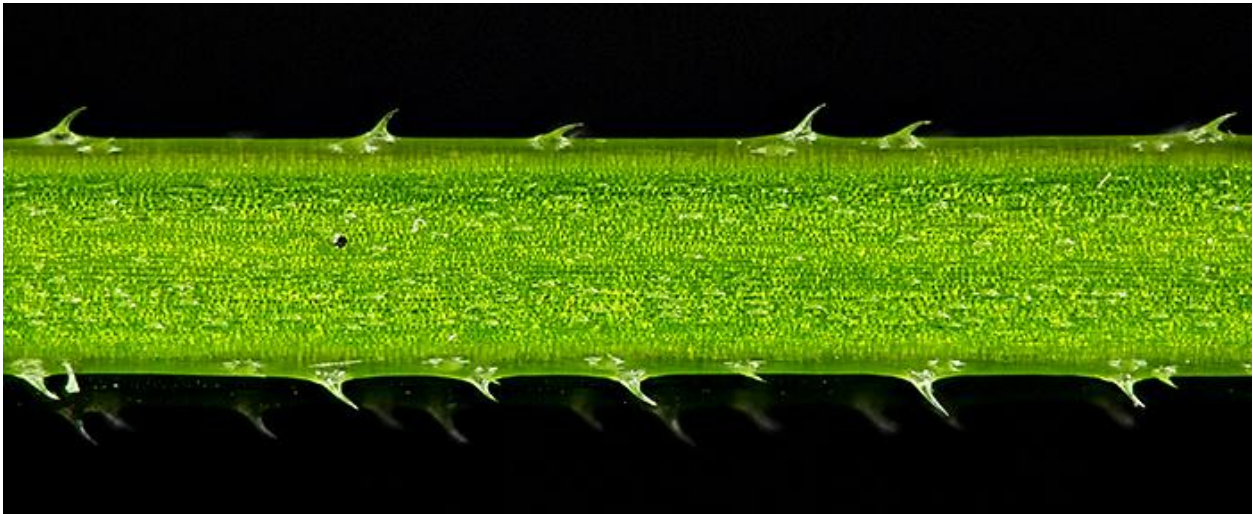


“Goosegrass” is another common name, as *Galium aparine* is a favorite food of fowl, both wild and domesticated. Its prolific growth was one of its best features as far as forage was concerned, and the plant was encouraged rather than eradicated.

Another folk name, “bedstraw”, came from the use of cleavers as a superior mattress stuffing. Because the adhesive stems and leaves could be shaped into a stable mat, a bedstraw mattress filling remained evenly distributed and of a comfortable uniform thickness. Imagine the “luxury” of a bed stuffed with cleavers in a harsh world with few comforts. Cleavers were so special that people liked to say that the Virgin Mary used them to prepare a soft bed for her newborn child.

While the clinginess of cleavers makes them a nuisance for gardeners who like the “weed-free” look, this feature is actually a fantastic survival strategy for the plant. It is also very interesting from a mechanical and design point of view.

A plant like cleavers that has weak and floppy stems cannot support itself in the usual way to achieve any height. It has to develop another strategy or remain at the bottom of the plant heap forever. In the words of ecologist **John Feehan**, cleavers solves this problem by sprouting an “armoury of Velcro-like hooks and barbs by which it hoists itself up over other plants”.



In another great description, the plant uses “little hooked bristles” to fasten itself “in a ladder-like manner to adjacent shrubs, so as to push its way upwards through the dense vegetation of the hedgerows into daylight”. Despite having weak stems themselves, cleavers have no trouble remaining upright because of their brilliant adaptation - the shape and orientation of their diabolical hooks prevent them from sliding downwards into the shade. And after being covered by the rapidly growing cleavers, the neighboring plants are deprived of light for their own growth and are soon smothered.

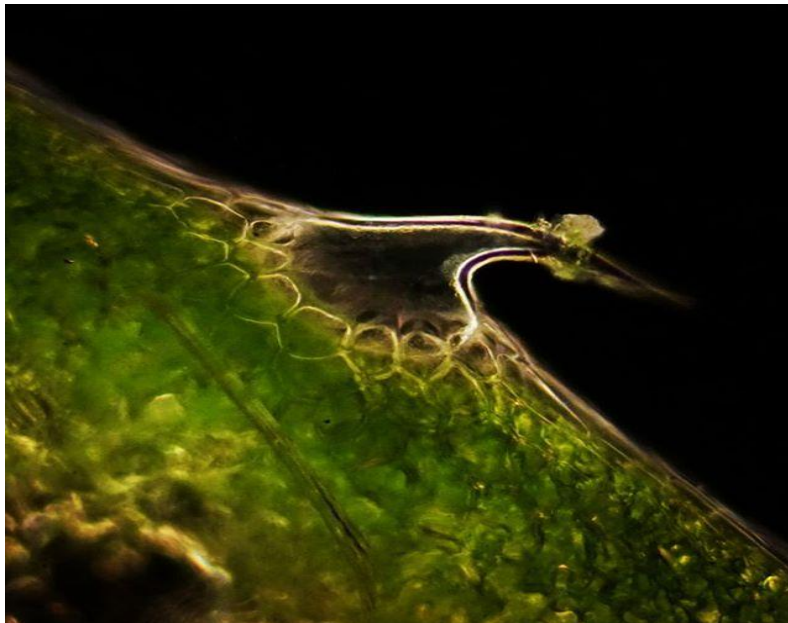
What exactly are these amazing “little hooked bristles”?



The photograph below shows the specialized attachment appendages of cleavers as they march along the angles of the quadrangular stalks and dot the surfaces of leaves. Known scientifically as trichomes, they are distinct from thorns, spines, and prickles (all technical terms!), but they all serve the same purpose - to ensure the survival of the plant. They protect the plant from predators and allow it to scramble up walls and over other plants toward light.



Here is a close-up of the impressive hook that allows cleavers to cling so tenaciously:





Ouch! It looks brutal; but if you touch a mat of cleavers, it will merely feel raspy.

The seeds of the plant are also covered with small hooks that aid in their dispersal. This ingenious design allows the mature seeds to become entangled in the fur of animals, the feathers of birds, or the tiny loops of thread in fabric and thereby hitch a ride to a new location for germination. The survival of the next generation of plants is far more likely away from the competition of their parents.

The photograph below shows the mature seed bodies of cleavers ready to attach themselves to a passing animal:



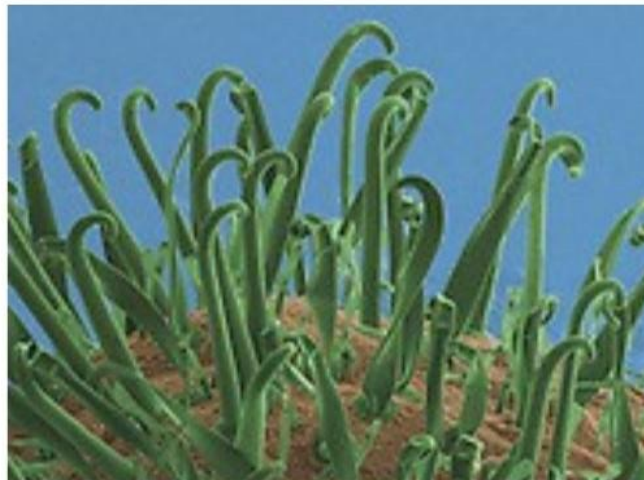
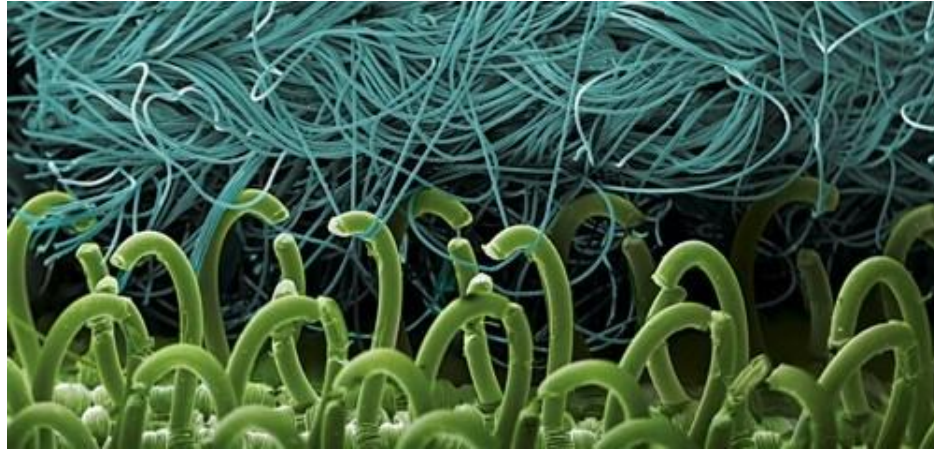
And this close-up reveals the graceful, orderly design:





Weed Appreciators will recognize that cleavers has developed an elegant, practical, and highly successful strategy for its own survival; and we can all marvel at the beauty of this achievement.

We can also learn from it. It was a plant like this that inspired the Swiss electrical engineer George de Mestral to develop the hook and loop fastener that we know as Velcro (based on the French velour = velvet, and crochet = hook). Look at the following pair of remarkable scanning electron micrographs comparing Velcro to cleavers and you will appreciate a textbook example of Biomimicry:



Biomimicry, of course, is the imitation of natural biological designs or processes in engineering or invention. As they say, nature has already solved most of our problems. I wonder what useful miracles of biology today's designers, botanists, pharmacologists, and engineers might discover from a dedicated study of weeds.



In addition to being a “weed” that is both useful and inspiring, *Galium aparine* is a medicinal herb, albeit a minor one. The few actual therapeutic applications have been greatly outnumbered by those imagined or exaggerated; and right or wrong, almost all of the luminaries of herbal medicine have weighed in on the health benefits of cleavers.

Here are some of my favorites:

Cleavers may actually improve some skin conditions, and I particularly like the diplomatic language of this delicate suggestion - “For those with the customary wrinkles and sags that come with age, making a wash with this herb might be something to consider.” Thank you - I’ll consider this.

Goosegrass (another name for cleavers) was said to be a marvelous remedy for the bites of snakes, spiders, and all venomous creatures. Good to know here in Texas.

Cleavers was popular as a “love medicine” that would enhance one’s attractiveness and allure. It also came in handy to treat the venereal diseases that followed. Probably not very effectively, though.

A modern herbalist “views cleavers to be a beneficial plant especially for fine boned, delicate, nervous type people who are fussy, moody, and bored—displeased with small things.” This would certainly be nice, if true. No one likes to be fussy, moody, and bored.

But most exciting of all - who knew that cleavers could be the newest rediscovered diet fad?

If we believe **Galen**, **John Gerard**, and **Nicholas Culpeper**, we wouldn’t have an Obesity Crisis at all if we just ate cleavers (*but don’t do it - they can stick in your throat and harm you*).

Galen gets right to the brutal point: cleavers “can make fat folk lean.” Culpeper chimes in some 1,500 years later with his version of Galen’s weight-loss advice: “It (cleavers) is familiarly taken in broth, to keep them lean and lank that are apt to grow fat.”

But it was the following colorful commentary offered by a pair of American botanists that really caught my attention. “In these times,” they mused, “when the buxom form is so often looked upon askance Cleavers or Goosegrass might be utilized.” They go on to quote John Gerard, who in the 16th century reported, “Women do vsually make pottage of Clevers with a little mutton and otemeale, to cause lankness, and keepe them from fatness.”

One of this pair of botanists was Merritt Lyndon Fernald, professor at Harvard University. But who was the other sensitive botanist so concerned that those with a “buxom form” were suffering from social disapproval?

Here are some hints. He began his scientific career as an entomologist studying gall wasps, but he was also passionate about plants. He established his reputation by co-authoring the seventh edition of Asa Gray's famous *Manual of Botany*, published in 1908, and later served as director of the Gray Herbarium.



His classic text, *Edible Wild Plants of Eastern North America*, was started in 1919 but was not published until 1943. It is considered “among the best of its kind for the number of species it covers, the accuracy of its descriptions, and the practicality of its recommendations for harvesting and preparing wild foods.” This comprehensive text was used by the U.S. Army in its wilderness-survival training program during the Second World War, as well as by civilians facing food shortages back home.

The author, **Arthur C. Kinsey**, may have become famous as a botanist had he not focused his intellectual energy on another scientific field that he essentially invented - the study of human sexuality. Yes, *that* Arthur C. Kinsey! While we have all heard of the famous “Kinsey Reports”, precious few of us are familiar with his classic botanic manual *Edible Wild Plants*. For a fascinating discussion of Kinsey’s love of nature and intellectual virtuosity, I highly recommend Peter Del Tredici’s excellent article *The Other Kinsey Report*, published in the July-August 2006 issue of *Natural History* magazine.

Kinsey deeply understood a variety of vital relationships, not only between human beings, but between human beings and nature. He could even have been speaking for today’s foragers when he made the following insightful comments:

"Nearly every one has a certain amount of the pagan or gypsy in his nature and occasionally finds satisfaction in living for a time as a primitive man. Among the primitive instincts are the fondness for experimenting with unfamiliar foods, and the desire to be independent of the conventional sources of supply."

If this resonates with you, please join us on March 20 for Mark “Merriwether” Vorderbruggen’s presentation, *Herbal Teas from the Wild Side*. Mark’s program will entertain, inspire, and provide fascinating insights into the foraging spirit.

The South Texas Unit of The Herb Society of America is dedicated to sharing “The Use and Delight of Herbs” and welcomes all interested guests to our meetings. For this month only, we will meet at the Hermann Park Historic Clubhouse, 6201 Hermann Park Drive, Houston, TX 77030. Parking is available in Lot H. Members gather at 6:15 pm, and the public is welcome to join us at 7:15 to enjoy the program. Further information will be in your Meeting Reminder to be sent out a few days prior to the next meeting. ■

