

Herbs Make Scents



THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
VOLUME XLIII, NUMBER 1

SOUTH TEXAS UNIT
FEBRUARY 2020

Co-Editors Linda Alderman (ewalderman@comcast.net) & Janice Freeman (jkfreemanHouStu@outlook.com)

February 2020 Calendar

- Feb 5, Wed. at 6:30 p.m.** **Planning meeting for Herb Day** is at the home of Julie Fordes.
- Feb 11, Tues. at 10 a.m.** **Day Meeting** is at the home of **Tamara Gruber**. The program, "My New Passion-Begonias" will be presented by **Gloria Hunter**. Call Tamara to **RSVP** at 713-665-0675. **Please bring a dish to share.**
- Feb 19, Wed. at 6:30 p.m.** **Evening Meeting** is at the Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004). **Hosts** are **Robert Jucker** and Elizabeth Grandich. The program, "Old World Secrets of Skin Care" will be presented by **Vlada Z. Mitchell**, owner of Enchanted Formulae, Apothecary Grade Skin Care. **Bring your plate, cutlery, napkin and a dish to share.**

March 2020 Calendar

- Mar 10, Tues. at 10 a.m.** **Day Meeting** is at the home of **Julie Fordes**. The program, "My Favorite Things from HSA Meetings" will be presented by **Janice Stuff**. Email Julie to **RSVP** at Fordes.julie@gmail.com. **Please bring a dish to share.**
- Mar 11, Wed. at 6:30 p.m.** **Evening Meeting** is at the Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004). **Hosts** are **Jenna Wallis and Mike Jensvold**. The program, "The Seven Seens of Health, a Norooz Tradition" will be presented by **Asal Shokati**, Ayurvedic Practitioner and Educator. **Bring your plate, cutlery, napkin and a dish to share.**

Newsletter deadline: the 25th of every month
(March editor Janice Freeman)



- 2/08 Terry Snook
2/13 Maria Treviño
2/14 Elizabeth Grandich

Member Concerns



Thelma Rowe – illness
Janis Teas – recent death in the family



Chairman's Corner



"In the tapestry of life, we're all connected. Each one of us is a gift to those around us helping each other be who we are, weaving a perfect picture together." ~ **Anita Moorjani**

Wanting to belong to something larger than yourself seems to be part of the human condition. I know that I am happier when I find myself in the midst of life, instead of looking on from the outside. The Herb Society is one place where I can share myself, warts and all, with others and also learn more about who I am in relationship with those same people.

Making connections, weaving yourself into the tapestry of life is the way to become "part of" instead of sitting on the sidelines. Connecting with others by sharing our gifts and receiving gifts from others is how we can become part of the larger picture. The Herb Society offers so many ways for us to share ourselves.

Coming to meetings and working on events are two obvious ways to reach out. I would like to challenge each of you to reach out and share in a slightly less conventional way.

- Send Jenna Wallis pictures of your garden or something you are working on so they can be shared at the meetings.
- Suggest a book that you love for others to enjoy in the new Book Corner column of the newsletter.
- Bring herbal and floral bouquets from your garden to meetings for all to enjoy and for newer members to learn about herbs.
- Invite another "herbie" to come over and work on your garden with you. I know that I am more willing to pull other people's weeds!
- Join in on Herbal Marketplace workshops. The same stalwart group has provided herbal items to sell for many years. I treasure the connections I have made with this group.

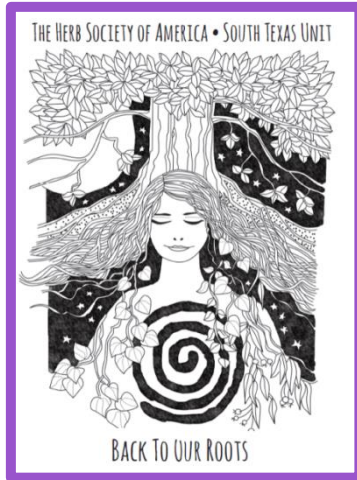
Weaving these small, informal opportunities to share part of ourselves into the fabric of our herbal community will truly make the "perfect picture".

Julie Fordes, Unit Chair



BACK TO OUR ROOTS

Julie Fordes



**If it's green, pick it and dry it!!!
If it sounds simple, it is!!!
Grow, harvest, dry, and repeat!!!**

Since we do not have our own unit garden, we rely on our individual members to contribute what they are growing.

If we all do this to the best of our ability, and combine what we have, we should have a nice bounty of locally grown herbs to share at Herb Day and Herb Fair.

Herb Day is the next opportunity to share our dried herbs with people. These herbs should be growing now in the winter garden. Please help us by growing, gathering and drying whatever is in your garden:

- Calendula
- Orange rind
- Lemon balm
- Lemon verbena
- Mint
- Oregano
- Whatever is green and needs a trim!



New Member Orientation Session

Any organization has lots of facets to it, some obvious and some not so obvious. The Herb Society is no exception. Of course, we all were given lots of information in our directories, but if you are like me, it may not have stuck with you.

New Member Orientation is a critical part of making members comfortable and effective. All of us need to be informed of the benefits and obligations that go along with membership.

We will offer a brief **New Member Orientation session prior to the evening meeting beginning in February.** We will offer orientations every other month. Anyone who has joined since 2017 probably has not had the opportunity and should make plans to attend one of these training sessions.

Just come to the February meeting a bit early (between 6 and 6:15) and let me know you need to take the training. Easy, right?



Herb Day 2020

Catherine O'Brien

Our 37th annual Herb Day committees kicked off at the January meetings. There is a planning meeting scheduled for **Friday, February 5, 6:30-8:30 p.m.**, at Julie Fordes' home. A shout-out goes to **Karen Cottingham** for developing the program, "**Slow Down and Savor Each Day**," and securing three speakers. Karen needs help assembling the program folders on the workday.

- **Dena Yanowski** and her sidekick, **Elayne Kouzounis**, will be handling refreshments, and they need helping hands to make the refreshments.
- Duo **Julie Fordes** and **Catherine O'Brien** are handling publicity.
- **Shirley Mills** and **Rose Wherry** have volunteered to work on decorations, but there is always a need for more woman-power on that committee.
- **Lois Jean Howard** and **Nita Rowe** will work with HSA-member crafters and artisans to design and create merchandise to sell in the Herbal Marketplace, and **Maria Treviño** and **Janice Stuff** will serve as cashiers.
- Our woman with the green thumbs, **Donna Faye Hilliard**, is once again taking care of the plants for sale on Herb Day. She will need woman-power (and whatever man-power we can draft) to set up the day before.
- **Mary Sacilowski** enthusiastically agreed to work a craft & education table on the day of the event. She will need lots of flowers and herbs to make tussie mussie bouquets.

If we would like to have door prizes (which is always fun) and a silent auction, a chairperson or co-chairs are needed. On **April 24th** (work day), it will be all-hands-on-deck to set up in Fondren Hall, St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Houston. Thank you, **Cynthia Card**, for already volunteering for the work day. If you want to volunteer, email Catherine O'Brien at Vibrio13@gmail.com or call 281-467-1139.

Audio/Visual Team...Jenna and Mike



Every month at our Wed. night meetings, two loyal members can be counted on to show up, bring the Unit's Audio/Visual equipment, and complete the setup for sound amplification and projection of the speaker's slide show. **Jenna Wallis and Mike Jensvold** comprise the team handling these complex technical tasks that help the speaker's presentation run smoothly. Often there is a special request regarding the presentation, but Jenna or Mike skillfully identifies the solution. Recently, Jenna completed research for an improved sound and speaker system. The South Texas Unit purchased her recommendation and the sound quality has greatly improved as a result. Thanks Jenna and Mike!

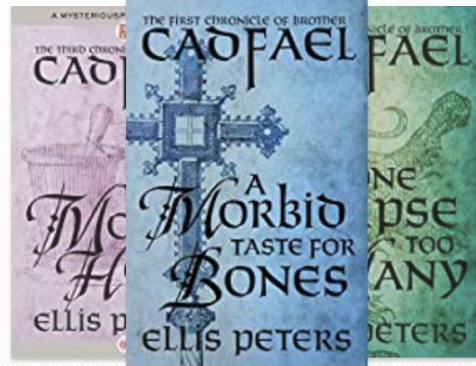


BOOK C O R N E R

If you have suggestions for books others might like, submit your suggestions to Julie Fordes at fordes.julie@gmail.com. She will be sure to send them to the appropriate person for submission in a following newsletter(s).



Brother Cadfael Mysteries (21 books in the series)



Recommended by Joan Jordan

“Full of medieval gardening and herbs.” – JJ

Before *CSI* and *Law & Order*, there was Brother Cadfael, “wily veteran of the Crusades” (*Los Angeles Times*). His knowledge of herbalism picked up in the Holy Land, and his skillful observance of human nature are blessings in dire situations and earned Ellis Peters a Crime Writers’ Association Silver Dagger Award. *A Morbid Taste for Bones* kicks off a long-running and much-loved series that went on to be adapted for stage, radio, and television.

Herb Fair 2020 Update Donna Wheeler

Announcing Yvette Darnell as Fragrance Chair!

I've started making preliminary plans for Herb Fair 2020, (bought my husband a router for Christmas = herb drying racks). If anyone has additional ideas for herb-related woodworking projects send them my way. I also plan on creating a new project using photos from our members’ gardens to make note cards. If you have something in bloom or an herb you think looks amazing and is photo ready please email me and I'll come out to your garden and take the picture. We would like to include seasonal photos.

Donna Wheeler

ddwheeler16@hotmail.com

Call for Volunteers!!!!!!

1) On Saturday, March 28 the **Westbury Community Garden** will celebrate its 10th birthday! They have invited us to participate in the festivities by hosting an herbal education table/activity at the event. I plan to participate and would love more of our members to come. Call **Julie Fordes** at **832-969-8349** if you can help.

2) We are still in need of an Event Marketing/Social Media Chair for Herb Fair. If you would like to apply your talents to this project please don't hesitate to let Donna Wheeler know.



ASK AN EXPERT



...Beth Murphy

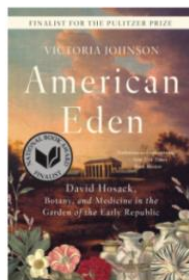
The question: After having no luck with growing cilantro from seed, are there any suggestions on how to prepare the seeds?

Cilantro seeds are found inside the small round light brown fruit that most people assume is the seed itself. In order to increase the germination rate, the husk of the fruit should be gently crushed to expose the two seeds inside. You can soak the seeds for 24-48 hours and then allow them to dry. Cilantro does not transplant because of its taproot, so it should be planted in the garden or a large container. You could try starting seeds in peat pots which could be planted after plants are up and growing. Plant 1/4 inch deep and grow until 2 inches tall, and then thin to 3-4 inches apart. It is better to grow a little crowded so leaves can shade the roots and keep from bolting in hot weather. Best growing conditions are cool and sunny (early A.M. sun) and shade during hottest part of the day. Some sources say that seeds germinate in 7-10 days and others up to 3 weeks.

On our website <http://www.herbsociety-stu.org/> we feature South Texas member **Beth Murphy's** "Monthly To-Do List"

THE GARDEN CLUB OF HOUSTON
PRESENTS
THE 2020 NANCY STALLWORTH THOMAS
HORTICULTURE LECTURE

featuring
VICTORIA JOHNSON



Author of National Book Award
Finalist and Finalist for the Pulitzer
Prize
**AMERICAN EDEN: David Hosack,
Botany, and Medicine in the
Garden of the Early Republic**



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 19, 2020
10:00 A.M., BOOK SIGNING TO
FOLLOW

ST. LUKE'S METHODIST CHURCH, FELLOWSHIP HALL
3471 WESTHEIMER ROAD, HOUSTON, TX 77027

Free Admission and open to the public





Day Group February Meeting



Our special program on Begonias will be presented by Gloria Hunter.

Tamara Gruber is hosting the meeting at her home. Bring dish to share for our **Valentine's lunch!!!**

All members are welcome.

A Special Thought

Submitted by Cathy Livingston

A BASKET OF HERBS

I never wanted to be a bug
Until I found one safe and snug
In the velvet heart of a pale pink rose
With petals tucked about his toes.

—MARION LEE,
“Lap of Luxury”

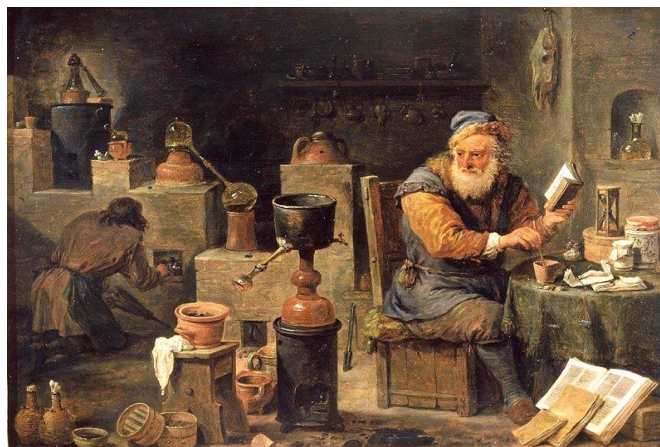
What's Coming Up!

QUEEN OF HUNGARY WATER - THE HISTORY AND THE HOAX

Karen Cottingham

For centuries, the most celebrated makers of luxury skin care products and perfumes have found inspiration in the precious elixirs of the past - or so they say. Sometimes their claims are fact, sometimes fiction, and sometimes even fraud!

Our February 19, 2020 Herb Society program, **Old World Secrets of Skin Care**, has inspired me to look into the convoluted tale of one of the most famous herbal elixirs of all time, *Queen of Hungary Water* - better known as *L'eau de la Reine de Hongrie*. And what a story it is - packed with gypsies and saints, alchemists and aristocrats, miracles and magic, and even a little subterfuge!



“The Alchemist” by David Teniers the Younger (circa 1645)

Herbs Make Scents February 2020



But before I get started on *that* wild story, the HSA-STU February guest speaker who inspired this topic is **Vlada Z. Mitchell**, owner of *Enchanted Formulae, Apothecary Grade Skin Care*. Ms. Mitchell is from Ukraine and is continuing her family tradition of creating high-quality, completely natural skin care products. Now living in Houston, Ms. Mitchell infuses the accumulated wisdom and experience of five generations of talented women into each product she sells. All her materials are carefully sourced and handled, and her floral and herbal hydrosols are distilled on site. So if you are interested in the history of cosmetics or are looking for synthetic-free skin care products, circle February 19 on your calendar now.

And if you're interested in the mysterious Queen of Hungary and her legendary "water", read on. It's almost like a fairytale.

Long, long ago, a very aged and crippled Queen Elizabeth of Hungary... Well, actually her name might have been Izabella. Wait a minute - she might have been *Saint Elizabeth* of Hungary. Anyway, she received a wonderful herbal elixir from the hands of an angel. It might have come from a hermit, though, or a monk - or maybe even a magician or an alchemist; and some say it was from a band of roaming gypsies. However it was that the Queen came to possess the magic elixir, she began using it every day. After a year of drinking and bathing in it, she not only cured her gout and paralysis, but regained her considerable beauty. The Queen became so lovely and spirited that, at age 73, she received a marriage proposal from the 24-year-old King of Poland (or perhaps it was really the 25-year-old Grand-Duke of Lithuania). Details, details! In another version of the story, the King of Poland was so enamored of just her scent that he asked for her hand in marriage. Alas for the King, though, the saintly Queen had already devoted herself to Christ, and lived the remainder of her life alone in a beautiful castle.

Sadly, the true identity of this miraculously revitalized Queen remains lost in time, her personal legacy being completely overshadowed by the legend of the magic elixir. Other legends relate that the powerful *L'eau de la Reine de Hongrie* also made its way to the Court of King Charles the Wise (King of France from 1364 to 1380), where it was used both as a fragrance and to protect the King from disease. If there is any truth to this story, it suggests that Hungary Water would have originated in the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

Queen Elizabeth of Hungary (1305-1380), depicted below, is usually invoked as the most likely namesake queen. She was a contemporary of Charles the Wise, and as a member of the Polish royal family, her marriage to the King of Hungary brought about an alliance between Poland and Hungary. However, since her son would have been the King of Poland who supposedly proposed to her rejuvenated self, there is an obvious problem with this narrative.



Queen Elizabeth of Hungary (1305-1380) surrounded by her less significant sons, left, and Saint Elizabeth of Hungary (1207-1231)



The Elizabeth of the legend is sometimes said to be Saint Elizabeth of the Árpád House of Hungary (1207-1231). This unlikely suggestion comes from a later document in which the Queen Elizabeth of Hungary Water fame is erroneously referred to as "*Sancta Elisabetha, Hungariae olim Regina*". Perhaps the writer was merely trying to emphasize her saintly nature, or as one researcher suggests, might have strayed from the truth hoping to elevate the prestige of the House of Árpád.

A final, somewhat more realistic candidate for the legendary queen is Elizabeth of Sicily, Queen Consort of Hungary, (1261-1304 or 1264-1304), who was also known as Izabella of Anjou. When she became the wife of King László IV, her original name Izabella would have been replaced in the Hungarian court by the more Hungarian Erzsébet (Elizabeth). And, most significantly, Izabella, rather than Elizabeth, is the name of the Queen of Hungary in some of the later versions of the legend.

To compound the confusion, these legends were not recorded for several hundred years. By that time, the mid- to late-17th century, whatever certainty that once might have existed had long been lost. We will have to dispense with historical fidelity and simply conclude that the Queen of Hungary of legend is probably a composite of more than one woman and might even have been at least partially fabricated.

It's understandable that the identity of the Queen of Hungary remains uncertain, but surely we should be able to describe the famous Hungary Water. It turns out that even this is not so easy. Here's what we can say with confidence: At it's simplest, Hungary Water was an alcohol-based medicinal preparation of fresh rosemary. It differed from the rosemary tinctures and infusions that had been used for centuries in that its therapeutic properties were concentrated by the newly-introduced process of distillation.



Series of woodcuts of chemical and distilling apparatus from *The Works of Geber, the Most Famous Arabian Prince and Philosopher*, by Richard Russel (London, 1678)

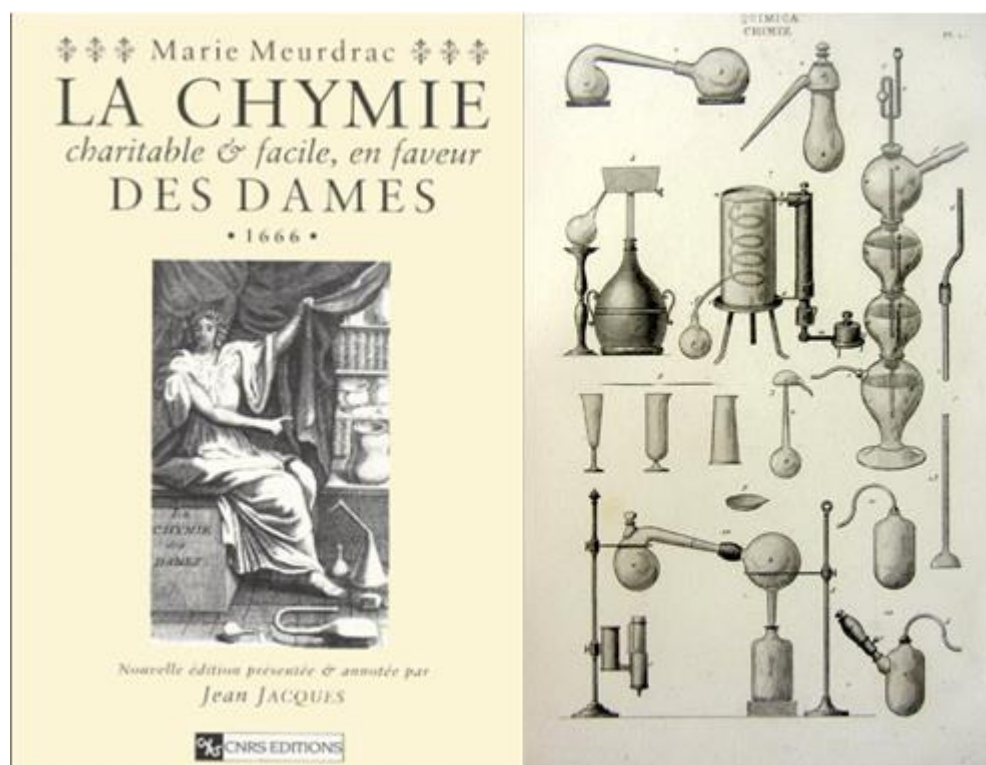
Distillation is a highly refined technique of processing botanical material into useful substances. This great advance in technology was developed by Islamic perfumers and only became known in Europe during the Crusades, between about 1150 and 1250.



Here is a typical description, written in 1656, of the preparation of a simple distillation of rosemary and brandy:

Put your Alembic in a Bain-Marie; and having covered his Marquee with a Container, fight exactly the joints & give a digestion fire under it for three days, after which you will dilute, & pour what can be distilled in the Cucurbite: Mend your Alembic, & increase the heat strong enough to distill the liquor, so that one drop soon follows the other; & when you have removed about two thirds of it, & dare the fire, leave the vessels to cool & drop them, you will find in the Container a very good Queen of Hungary Water, which you will keep in a well-sealed Phiole ...

Of the many similar recorded recipes available I chose the words of **Marie Meurdrac** (1610-1680) to call attention to this accomplished French chemist and alchemist. She is best known for writing *La Chymie Charitable et Facile, en Faveur des Dames* ("Useful and Easy Chemistry for the Benefit of Ladies"), a treatise on chemistry written for use by common women.



"*Useful and Easy Chemistry, for the Benefit of Ladies*" (1656). Meurdrac wrote in her introduction that "I have been very careful not to go beyond my knowledge, and I can assure that everything I teach is true and that all my remedies have been tested; for which I praise and glorify God." (translation Bishop and DeLoach, 1970). On the right is vintage French laboratory equipment.

In addition to the importance of her work in terms of female scientific endeavors, she has been seen by some as a proto-feminist. In her introduction Meurdrac outlines her "inner struggle" against the contemporary female ideal, to be "silent, listen and learn, without displaying ... knowledge". She decides, however, to share her knowledge, since "it would be a sin against Charity to hide the knowledge that God has given me, which may be of benefit to the world."

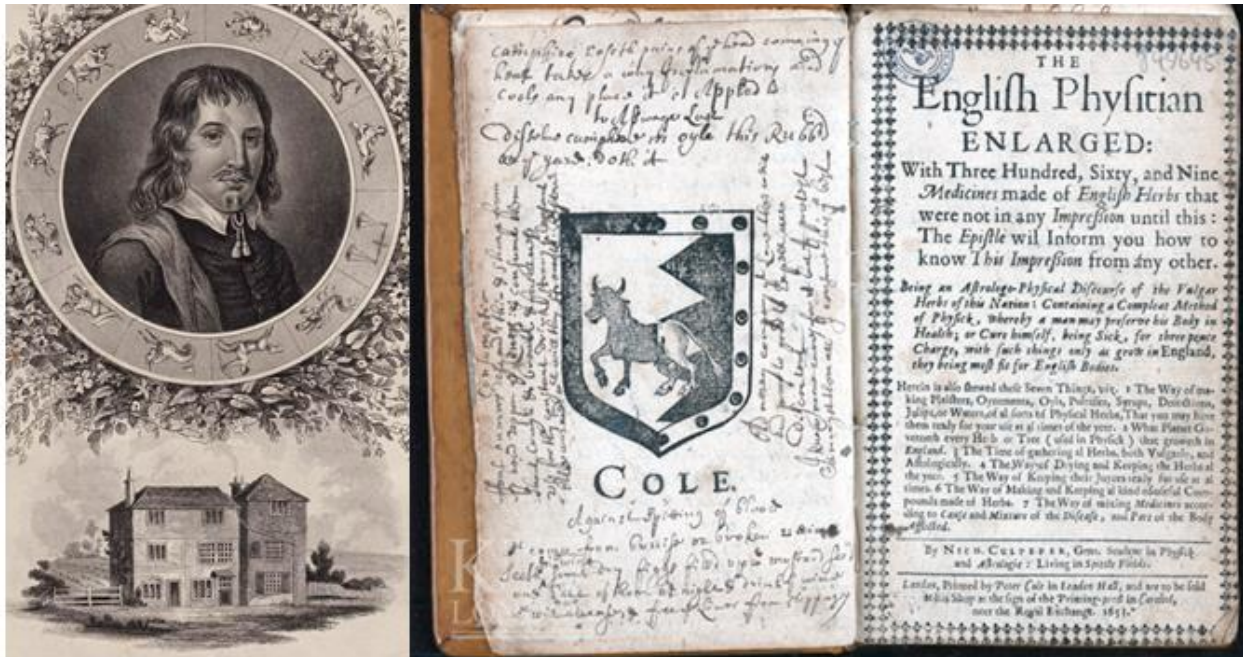
The oldest surviving recipes are similar to Meurdrac's, calling for the distillation of fresh rosemary and perhaps thyme with brandy. The formula evolved rapidly, however, as many more herbaceous and floral elements were added to the basic recipe.



I like what an obviously frustrated Mrs. Margaret Grieve said about the many versions of Queen of Hungary Water:

Many wrote texts about it and tried to record recipes for it seems that, again, no one can agree what ingredients for Hungary water should be. One recipe calls for “aqua vitae” (concentrated aqueous solution of ethanol) to be distilled four times. 3 parts of this should be mixed with 2 parts of tops and flowers of rosemary, warmed for 50 hours and distilled. This mixture was taken once a week with food and limbs were washed with it. Other text says that this perfume was made of rosemary, orange, mint, and orange flower water. Some other added lavender. There are recipes that use lemon balm, lemon peel, chamomile, rosemary, calendula, roses, sage, vinegar and witch hazel extract. Other variants called for grape spirit and “esprit de rose”. It was applied to the handkerchief and used for refreshment but also as a face wash or as an addition to bath water. (A Modern Herbal 1931)

Despite this remarkable degree of improvisation regarding the ingredients of Hungary Water, there was a general enthusiastic consensus about its virtues.



Nicholas Culpeper (1616-1654) and his treatise *The English Physician* (1652)

Seventeenth-century herbalist, astrologist, and physician **Nicholas Culpeper's** enthusiasm for Hungary Water is typical, calling it an

admirable cure-all remedy of all kinds of cold and humidity-induced head ailments, apoplexies, epilepsies, dizziness, lethargy, crippleness, nerves diseases, rheumatism, flaws, spasms, loss of memory, coma, drowsiness, deafness, ear buzzing, derangement of vision, blood coagulation, mood-induced headaches. Relieves toothache, useful for stomach cramps, pleuritis, lack of appetite, indigestion, obstruction of the liver, obstruction of the spleen, intestinal obstruction and contraction of the uterus. It receives and preserves natural heat, restores body functions and capabilities even at late age (saying has it). There are not many remedies producing that many good effects. Use internally in wine or vodka, rinse temples, breath in with your nose. (*The English Physician* 1652)

Culpeper's high esteem for the beneficial effects of the famous elixir was shared by most of his contemporaries: the other herbalists, alchemists, and apothecaries, and of course the citizens who were enthusiastically consuming all the Hungary Water the apothecaries could produce.



Particularly in France, the demand for Hungary Water was never-ending. By the mid-17th century, *L'eau de la Reine de Hongrie* was used not only medicinally, but also - and perhaps even more importantly - fashionably, as a luxury fragrance. Health and beauty were the complementary specialties of druggists, especially in Montpellier, which was already famous for the *Univeratas Medicorum* established by professors of medicine in 1220.



Wolf Helmhardt von Hohberg, *Women at an Apothecary*, 1695, copperplate engraving on paper

"The apothecaries' shops," according to Montpellier resident M. Leblanc in 1669, were "completely beautiful and fragrant, filled with syrups, particularly those of Capillaire, of Reyne dongrie waters [...], Cyprus powder, liquors and perfumes of all kinds. toiletries, sachets and a thousand other things."

The production of scented waters and powders supported vast numbers of distillers, druggists, glove makers, soft drink producers, liquorists, barbers and wig makers, launderers, haberdashers, and sellers of fabrics and ribbons.

During the second half of the 17th century, apothecaries moved away from the preparation of perfumes to concentrate fully on producing medicines. Freed from control by the apothecaries, perfumery became a very lucrative discipline in its own right, and the great perfume dynasties such as the Fargeon family were established. We will hear more about the family's most illustrious member, **Jean-Louis Fargeon**, the official *perfumeur* of Queen Marie-Antoinette and Empress Josephine, later in this article.

According to a contemporary source, the goods offered by the Montpellier perfumers were very diverse:

"Eau de la Maréchale, rose, coriander, tuberose, clove, orange blossom, walnut, lavender, bergamot, jasmine ... citron, aspic, clove, anise ... Spirit of mint, stone, lemon, angelica, orange, maraschino, raspberry, juniper ... Essence of thyme, lemon, lavender ... Infusion of lemon, vanilla, Florence iris ... Toilet vinegar, frangipane ointment, ambrette seeds ... Millefleur, angel, Cyprus powder violet, frangipane ... Cream of rose, citron, cinnamon, "strong herbs", mint ... "

The *Eau de la Maréchale* mentioned above consisted of coriander, sweet flag (iris) and nut grass and was created by Fargeon for **La Maréchale d'Aumont** (?-1691), a member of the French court of Louis XIV. Her name is also attached to a powdery concoction for hair and wigs called "Poudre à la Maréchale". Conspicuously wearing the scent



associated with the elite was one way for members of the Court to enhance their own image and status. Ambitious aristocrats copiously adorned their heads with the famous powder, hoping to be noticed.



Caricature of a barber powdering a man's wig. Note the protective mask!

The extravagant "Sun King", **Louis XIV**, (1638-1715) was so fond of fragrance that he was widely known as "**The Sweet Flowery One**" (*le doux fleurant*). Visitors to his court at Versailles were even soaked in perfume before they were allowed to enter into the King's presence!

This mandatory ablution might have protected the King's delicate sensibilities; but more importantly, it was meant to protect his health. Perfumes were believed to have potent medicinal properties, and a thorough soaking in heavily perfumed elixirs was believed to prevent the transmission of disease.

King Louis, along with everyone else at the time, also believed that illness was spread through contact with water. The idea of bathing was terrifying; but perfumed creams, powders, and sprays were not only considered safe, they were believed to be beneficial. Perfumes were combed through the hair, applied to the skin (later to be scraped off, along with any dirt), and were part of almost every aspect of grooming.

The King's fascination with fragrance started in childhood. As a boy, he wore an exclusive, very expensive, royal perfume that was inspired by the scent of chocolate. As an adult, he insisted on having his shirts perfumed with *Aqua Angeli*, a fragrance composed of aloes-wood, nutmeg, storax, cloves, and benzoin, all of which were boiled in rosewater "of a quantity as may cover four finger". The mixture was then simmered for a day and night before adding jasmine, orange flower water, and a few grains of musk.

And when he was struck with sharp pains in his leg in 1675 and rheumatism in 1678, King Louis's treatment included the venerable elixir *L'eau de La Reine de Hongrie*. Despite the abundance of products available and the popularity of *Eau de la Maréchale* and other fragranced waters, the Water of the Queen of Hungary remained one of the most trusted perfume "waters" used for medicinal purposes.



A portrait of Louis XIV by Hyacinthe Rigaud, dated 1701, flanked by portraits of Madame de Maintenon, left, and Madame de Sévigné, right (artists unknown)

Perfume was also expensive and a sign of luxury; like clothing, wigs, and jewelry, it silently but emphatically conveyed one's wealth, power, and status

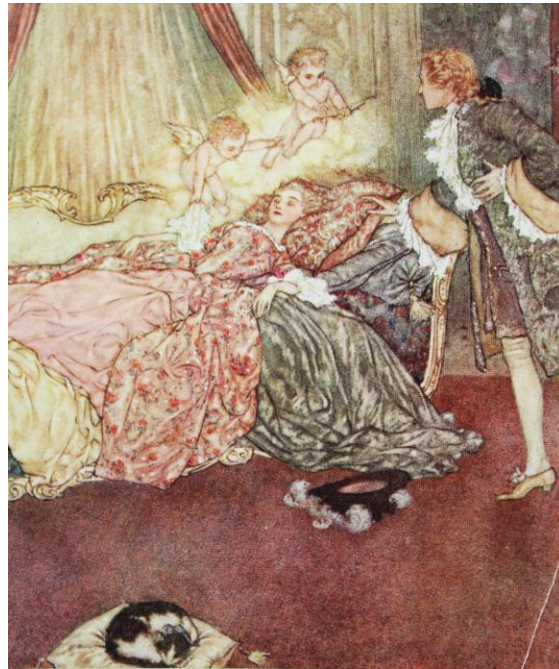
For the elite women of the Sun King's circle, many different perfumes were popular, but Hungary Water was indispensable. It was the favorite product of **Madame de Maintenon** (1635-1719), the governess of the children of Louis XIV who later became his secret wife. She strongly advised its use for protection from epidemics.

Madame de Sévigné (1626-1696), another court favorite, praised the virtues of Hungary Water in letters to her daughter. In October 1675, de Sévigné wrote, "She is divine, I thank you again; I get drunk every day. I have it in my pocket. It's madness like tobacco: when you get used to it, you can't do without it. I find it good against sadness"

A different translator expressed her effusiveness this way: "I'm crazy about it, it's the relief of all my sorrows." I'm starting to wonder how much alcohol was in her Hungary Water! No wonder it was so popular!

And sometimes it's the most unlikely historical sources that contribute the most interesting information. In this case, a fairy tale called *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* confirms the widespread use of Hungary Water in the Court of Louis XIV. In 1695 author **Charles Perrault** (1628-1703) describes the fateful scene where the Princess Aurora pricks her finger on the spindle:

She had not taken up the spindle sooner, than as she was very lively, a little dizzy, and that, moreover, the arrest of the fairies ordered it so, she pierced her hand, and fell unconscious. The good old woman, very embarrassed, shouts for help: we come from all sides, we throw water in the face of the princess, we unlace her, we hit her in the hands, we rub her temples with *Water of the Queen of Hungary*, but nothing kept her coming back.



Edmund Dulac's *Sleeping Beauty*, from *The Sleeping Beauty and Other Tales*, 1910. Notice that the famous characters are dressed in the styles worn in the Sun King's court.

If the spell cast by the evil fairy could not be reversed by the miraculous *L'eau de la Reine de Hongrie*, it was a powerful spell indeed!

And Perrault was definitely in a position to understand the exalted reputation of Hungary Water - he was an upper-class intellectual who served the Sun King in several administrative positions. He also wrote the classic Mother Goose stories *Cinderella*, *Tom Thumb*, *Bluebeard*, *The Master Cat* (*Puss in Boots*), and *Little Red Riding Hood*.



Charles Perrault and some of his most famous stories

Tales such as *The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood* were popular entertainments at the Sun King's court, where the teller always embellished them and added a moral twist that favored the aristocracy. A little ingratiation went a long way with the imperious King!



Authors and courtiers were not the only ones vying for the favors of the royal court. Perfumers all over France competed ferociously for the lucrative honor of keeping the elite fragrant, healthy, and fashionable. Huge fortunes were amassed by the lucky ones who rose to prominence.

This brings us back to the sketchy pedigree of *L'eau de la Reine de Hongrie*, the most famous and prestigious of all the perfumed waters. Despite its supposed lineage back to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, the first written descriptions of the Hungary Water legend "coincidentally" appear in the middle of the seventeenth century - just about the same time that ambitious perfumers were competing for acceptance into the fragranced inner circle of the court.

Coincidence or not? There are more disturbing details. Somehow, there seem to be two versions of how the "recipe" of the "Hungarian Queen" was discovered.

In 1656, **Joannes Praevotius**, a professor of medicine from Padua, relates the following testimony in *Selectiora Remedia multiplici usu comprobata*.

For the gout in the hands and feet. As a wonderful virtue of remedy given below, I have been confirmed to me by the many, I shall relate to what good fortune I have happened to meet with it. In the year 1606 I saw among the books of Francis Podacather, of the noble Cyprian family, ..., a very old breviary, which ... he was told ... had been presented by St. Elizabeth, queen of Hungary, to some of his ancestors. In the beginning of the book they showed me a remedy for the gout written in the queen's own hand, in the following words, which I copied:

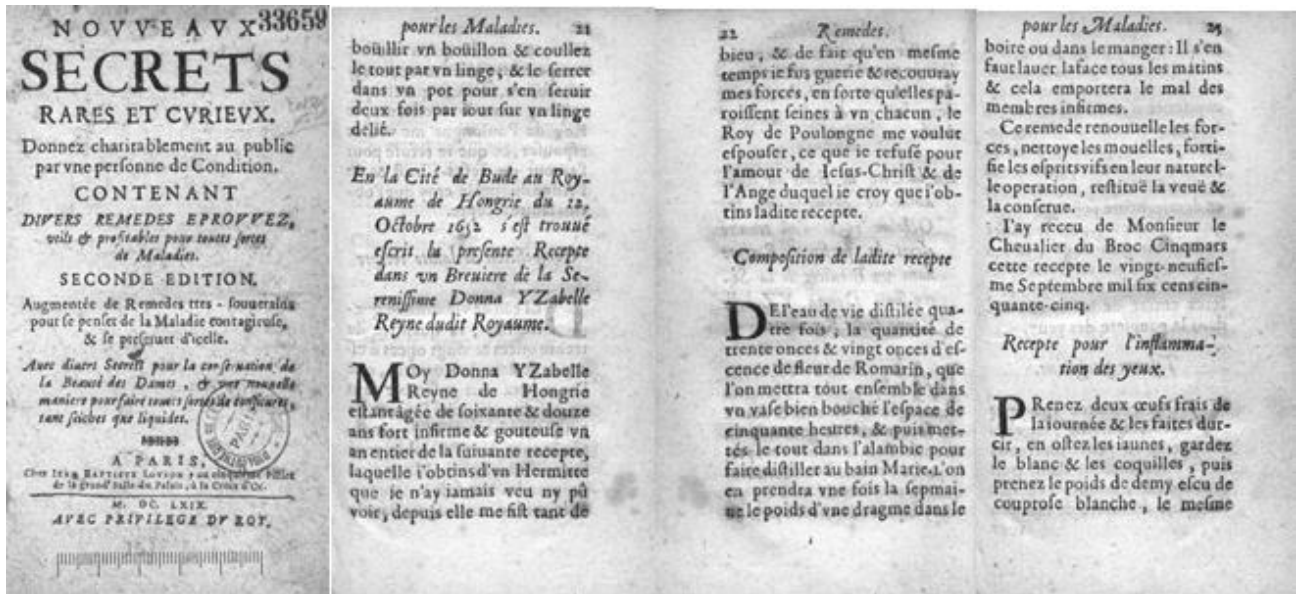
I Elizabeth, Queen of Hungary, being very infirm and much troubled with the gout in the seventy-second year of my age, used for a year this receipt given to me by an ancient hermit who I never saw before nor since; and was not only cured, but recovered my strength, and appeared to be all so remarkably beautiful, that King of Poland asked me in marriage, he being a widower and I a widow. I however refused him for the love of my Lord Jesus Christ, from one of whose angels I believe I received the remedy. The receipt is as follows:

Take of aqua vitae, four times distilled, three parts, and of tops and flowers of rosemary two parts; put these together in a close vessel, let them stand in a gentle heat fifty hours, and then distill them. Take one dram of this in the morning once every week, either in your food or drink, and let your face and diseased limb be washed with it every morning.

It renovates strength, brightens spirits, purifies marrow and nerves, restores and preserves sight, and prolongs life.

The formula and legend of "Hungary Water" was also "revealed" a few years later in a different book, one printed by **Jean-Baptiste Loyson**, a book dealer in Paris. The tome has a most impressive title: *The new secrets, rare and mysterious, shared with the public by a respectable person, in which there are many tried, useful and profitable remedies for diseases of all kinds, secrets for the ladies who want to preserve their beauty, as well as a new one, method of making sweets and pelts* (1660). Such a long title, but strangely there is no author!

A similar story of the Queen and her miraculous rejuvenation unfolds, and without repeating the details, I will only mention the differences. In this version, the precious manuscript was found on October 12, 1652 rather than in 1606, and the Queen's breviary was in the fortress of Buda, in the Kingdom of Hungary, rather than in Cyprus.



The "discovery" of the legend of *L'eau de la Reine de Hongrie*, as revealed by the anonymous author of *The new secrets, rare and mysterious...* (1660 and 1669)

The Queen in "The New Secrets" version of the miraculous cure is now called Serenissimei Patroness Donna Yzabelle, Queen of Hungary, and the author claimed to have been given the manuscript by Mr. Cavalier du Broc Cinqmars (Ulciur CinciMartie) on September 29, 1655. (There are obviously some limitations to Google Translate!)

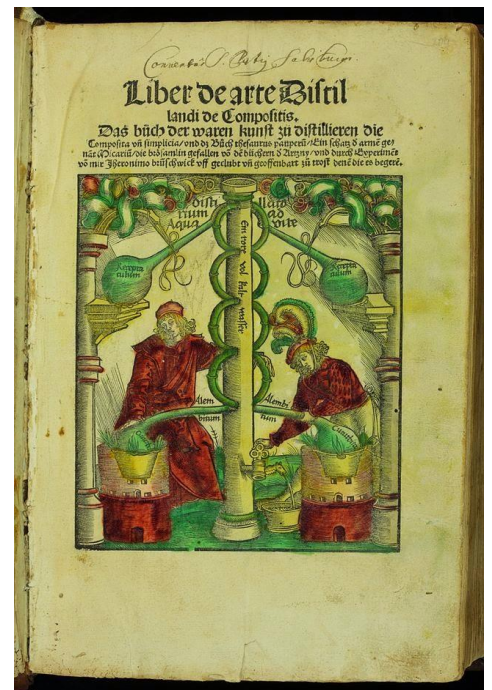
The testimony and "receipt" were said to have been written in gold in the hand of the Queen herself. Subsequent legends have placed her gilded words in a drawer in the Imperial Library in Vienna, but the particular drawer seems to have gone astray.

What is going on here?

It appears that the entire legend of *L'eau de la Reine de Hongrie* was an elaborate hoax, a fabricated story designed to empty the pocketbooks of the royal court. What became known as Hungary Water seems to have been nothing more than a commonly used alcoholic infusion of rosemary and other herbs dressed up as a magic elixir of perpetual health and beauty.

The technique of producing the high-proof alcohol known as *aqua vitae*, or the water of life, had already been known in France since the thirteenth century. Through a series of distillations, alcohol becomes sufficiently concentrated that the therapeutic and fragrant essential oils of plants can be extracted. The apothecaries and perfumers of Montpellier, as discussed above, had become especially proficient in this process.

The problem was not how to make "Hungary Water" but how to promote it - and if you were lucky, to secure your fame and fortune.



From a 1512 treatise on distillation by Hieronymus Brunschwig



How would a savvy seventeenth century perfumer go about this? Easy....

Begin by promising miraculous beauty and health - an excellent strategy! Always capitalize on vanity and fear.

Establish the credibility of your product by tracing it to a "historical" document. Never mind that no one know where the document is now.

Introduce magic and romance into the narrative. An aged woman restored to the beauty of her youth - perfect.

Appeal to the royal circle by featuring a saintly queen of antiquity. Better yet, situate her in a foreign, exotic land - that way, no one can verify or dispute what you claim.

It's beginning to sound like one of Perrault's fairy tales! One with an ulterior motive, that is.

No wonder the identity of the revitalized queen remains obscure - she was based on vague fragments of history stitched together and embellished by charlatans!

The Queen of Hungary ruse was one of the first great marketing coups of history. I wish I knew the identity of the marketing genius who came up with this scheme, but I'm afraid his name was lost to history long ago.

It may be just a coincidence, but soon thereafter **Jean Fargeon** of Montpellier began advertising himself as "Fargeon, Apoticaire et Parfumeur ordina de SAR Mademoiselle d'Orléans" (SAR means "son altesse royale" and is equivalent to "Her Royal Highness"). I wonder if this prestigious royal appointment had anything to do with the recently revealed legend that enhanced the prestige of Hungary Water. Montpellier's Hungary Water was said to be superior to all others because of the quality of the rosemary grown there.

Ironically, scent was temporarily banished from Versailles, as the Sun King developed an intolerance of fragrance that may have been related to his previous over-indulgence. As the duc de Saint-Simon reported, "Never had a man loved odors so much yet feared them more, due to having used them to the point of excess." It was said that the only scent the King could physically tolerate by the end of his life was orange blossom.

At the death of King Louis XIV, his great-grandson, **Louis XV** (1715-1774), ascended to the throne and the royal court was once again redolent with perfume. The Royal Court of **King Louis XV** became known as '*la cour parfumée*' - 'The Perfumed Court' – with his royal personage apparently demanding a different scent for his apartments every single day. There were different perfumes for different occasions and for different articles of clothing, and streams of aromatic scents flowed from the royal fountain.



Portraits of Louis XV from the atelier de Louis-Michel van Loo and Madame de Pompadour by Boucher (1756)
She was the official chief mistress of Louis XV from 1745 to 1751



Louis XV's most famous mistress, the fabulously wealthy **Marquise de Pompadour**, was equally lavish in her love of perfume. It is said that the distinctive scent of musk could still be found in her chamber's curtains 20 years after her departure.

Scent was the main item in her yearly household budget, alone accounting for 500 *livres* (approximately \$63,500 USD in today's currency). And she was by no means alone in her spending habits. Stories of excess abounded in the perfumed court - the comtesse de Saint-Hermine spent a fortune on perfumed garters, and the powerful abbé d'Osmond was brought to financial ruin by his love of violet powder.

The enthusiastic use of perfumes for both esthetic and medicinal purposes was by no means limited to the royal court. Perfume stalls lined the streets of major cities. And when the stalls failed to meet the demand, perfumers engaged peddlers to sell their wares even more widely. They even loaded horse-drawn carts with perfumed elixirs, pomades, creams, and waxes to satisfy the residents of smaller towns.



Etching and engraving of a Perfume Seller with fans and bottles of perfume, attributed to **Nicolas II de Larmessin**, 1695. On his head is a *cassolette*, an invention of the physician for King Louis XIV. The *cassolette* is a perforated box or urn that dispersed the smoke of a smoldering odiferous pellet, theoretically to purify unhealthy “bad air.”

In the above picture, notice that *L'Eau de la Reine d'Hongrie* is prominently advertised for sale on the front of the peddler's box of wares.

Years later, during the reign of **King Louis XVI** (1754-1793), Hungary Water was still highly regarded. Its popularity among French elites, however, was eclipsed by the new fashion of commissioning individualized perfumes made especially for them.

With the publication of Antoine Dejean's *Traité des odeurs* in 1777, perfumery's separation from medicine was complete, and perfume became exclusively a form of artistic expression. Excessive artistic expression, to be sure - the “art of perfumery” in the royal court reached outrageous heights of extravagance. The young queen **Marie Antoinette** (1755-1793) had a boundless passion for perfume and a lavish budget to match. Her beloved group of friends and courtiers were so prodigiously scented that her alleged lover, the Swede Axel von Fersen, was moved to say: “What a debauchery of jewelry and of perfume. And the bizarre odor of the salons of this country!”



As the Paris of Marie Antoinette became the undisputed capital of luxury, taste, and elegance, Grasse, rather than Montpellier, was becoming the center of perfumery art.

As a result, the formerly successful **Fargeon** family business in Montpellier languished. Determined to save the business, the talented young **Jean-Louis Fargeon** began experimenting and innovating. Family recipes were enhanced with rare and expensive ingredients. New products were developed - special powders to whiten the complexion of the skin and blush and lipsticks to add some color; pastes for the teeth and sprays for oral hygiene. He also mastered the Montpellier speciality of making luxurious perfumed gloves.

Intent on gaining access to the Royal Court, he left for Paris at the beginning of 1773 with a selection of his new products and a brilliant strategy. He had decided to appeal to the young queen through her fondness for gloves. It is said that she wore a new pair of perfumed gloves every day!



A pair of Marie Antoinette's perfumed gloves from the Palace at Versailles, and *Portrait of Marie Antoinette, Queen of France* by **Jean-Baptiste Andre Gautier-Dagoty**

And no one could create more exquisite gloves than the young Fargeon. He constructed the most sumptuous pair of soft white goatskin gloves and scented them with violets, hyacinths, red carnations, musk and jonquils. He even treated them with a mixture of almond oil, white wax and rose water so the queen's hands would remain soft and smooth despite her long horse rides. These splendid gloves were then delivered to the queen on a bed of red roses, and the royal doors were opened to the clever perfumer.

Jean-Louis Fargeon was a meteoric success, very soon becoming the owner of the most elegant and prosperous boutique in Paris. He became the premiere supplier of quality powders, ointments, scented waters, brushes, combs and accessories for hairstyles, moles, products for oral hygiene such as toothbrushes and tongue brushes, sponges, soaps, scented sachets, fans, gloves, and even fine porcelain jars, incense and *pot-pourris* to perfume the rooms.

For fourteen years Fargeon served as the personal perfumer of the Queen, designing an endless array of scents to match her personality and her quixotic moods. His ever-more-lavish (and expensive!) creations were kept in sumptuous locked furniture. During Marie Antoinette's pregnancies, he composed relaxing fragrances for her, and even devised special treatments to counteract the hair loss that she experienced. He was still supplying her with soothing creams when the French Revolution came and she was imprisoned in the Temple.

The last meeting between Fargeon and the Queen was on the eve of the royal family's attempted escape, when she requested that her perfume flacons be refilled. Among the essentials packed in her traveling bag were Fargeon powder, Trianon perfume, and lavender and orange blossom waters.



There is even speculation that the royal family was caught precisely because Marie-Antoinette was so conspicuously well-fragranced, a detail that would have “outed” her disguise. A variation on this conjecture is that a servant caught a whiff of the perfumes in Marie-Antoinette's luggage. Realizing that the queen had stocked-piled toiletries, the servant guessed correctly that she was not just leaving for a short trip.

Fargeon, too, was imprisoned and tried. Luckily he escaped the guillotine, and continued his business of supplying the imperial court. Perfumers found a new champion in Napoleon Bonaparte, who had a standing order for 50 bottles of cologne a month. Fargeon served as the personal perfumer of Napoleon's first wife, Joséphine de Bauharnais, and was given the prestigious title of "Perfumer and Patented Distiller Supplying the Empress".

Despite his fame and exalted position in the courts, he never abandoned his appreciation for the much simpler *L'eau de la Reine de Hongrie*. His recipe for Hungary Water was prominently featured in his 1801 book with the very long title: "*The art of the perfumer, or complete treatise on the preparation of perfumes, cosmetics, ointments, pastilles, smells, ancient oils, essences, aromatic baths and perfumed gloves, etc. Containing several new secrets to beautify and preserve the complexion of women, to erase spots and wrinkles on the face and to dye hair. He works by following the chemistry of taste and smell*".

Coming back to the 21st century, the popularity of Hungary Water lives on. Many different interpretations, much simpler than the original formulations, can be found in books and on the internet. One of the most popular renditions comes from herbalist Rosemary Gladstar, who believes that the original recipe came from a gypsy. Maybe it did!

The HSA-STU February guest speaker who inspired this review of Hungary Water is **Vlada Z. Mitchell**, owner of *Enchanted Formulae, Apothecary Grade Skin Care*. Mitchell's luxury skin-care products also have a long tradition, reaching back through five generations of talented Ukrainian women. Perhaps the beginnings of *Enchanted Formulae* have some aspects of a fairy tale too! Come to the February 19, 2020 Evening Meeting for **Old World Secrets of Skin Care** to find out.

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. There is no charge to attend. We meet in the **Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion in Hermann Park, 1500 Hermann Drive**. You may enter the Pavilion's free parking lot where Crawford Street T-intersects with Hermann Drive.

Hostesses and others interested in setting up the tables and displays can start arriving at 6:00 pm. Other members and guests will gather at 6:30 pm; the potluck dinner will start around 7:00 pm, and the program will begin a half-hour later.

The South Texas Unit is a non-profit educational organization incorporated under the State of Texas. The South Texas Unit has no paid employees. Our activities are accomplished through the efforts of our volunteers.

The Herb Society of America
South Texas Unit
P.O. Box 6515
Houston, TX 77265-6515

Find our Unit on the web at:
www.herbsociety-stu.org



The Herb Society of America is dedicated to promoting the knowledge, use and delight of herbs through educational programs, research and sharing the knowledge of its members with the community.

