

# Herbs Make Scents

THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA  
VOLUME XXXVII, NUMBER 7



SOUTH TEXAS UNIT  
JULY 2014

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## July 2014 Calendar

**July 8** - Tues. – 10 a.m.

**NEW Venue!!**

**July 16** - Wed. - 7 p.m.

**NEW Venue!!**

**July 24** - Thurs. – 10 a.m.

**Day Meeting** at the home of Elayne Kouzounis. *Summer Picnic in a Garden*. Bring a side picnic dish to share. Due to limited space, this meeting is only open to members.

**Evening Meeting** at the the **West Gray Multi-Service Center (1475 West Gray)** hosted by Nutti Doodeheefver and Beth Murphy. *Ginseng* presented by Karen Cottingham. Bring your plate and napkin and a potluck dish to share. Meeting open to the public.

**Craft Workshop** at the home of Lois Jean Howard. RSVP 713-771-0172.

## August 2014 Calendar – No Unit meetings in August

**August 7** - Thurs. – 10 a.m.

**Craft Workshop** at the home of Pam Harris. RSVP 713-661-1109.

**August 28** - Thurs. – 10 a.m.

**Craft Workshop** at the home of Jacqui Highton. RSVP 713-636-2382.

## Annual Dues Deadline

It is time for your annual membership renewal in The Herb Society of America and the South Texas Unit. Dues are now overdue.

Please make your check payable to: HSA, South Texas Unit

Mail your payment to:

Lois Sutton  
702 E 8 ½ St  
Houston TX 77007-1716

**If there are any changes in demographic information (name, mailing address, email address, phone number, etc.), please let me know at the time you remit your dues.**

Thank you!  
Lois Sutton, Ph.D.  
Unit Treasurer

## Happy Birthday!

7/1 Nita Rowe  
7/7 Suzanne Wessels  
7/10 Gloria Hunter  
7/15 Sally Luna  
7/17 Joyce P. Taylor  
7/28 Jeanie Dunnihoo

8/28 Denny Graves



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## Chairman's Corner

Hello Everyone,

Here we are again starting a new herbal year! Our next day meeting will be at the home of Elaine and Demo Kouzounis. This will be a summer picnic. Lois Jean and I will be the speakers at the day meeting. We have a lot to say about the educational conference.

The trip to California for the educational conference was a wonderful experience. The weather was cool, sunny and warm during the day. When you walked thru the hotel lobby at night people were sitting by a fire outside. The hills were golden and the trees were a dark green. Sitting at the table and chairs in St Helena and Long Meadow Ranch was so peaceful with the wind blowing and you were looking over part of the vineyard. Besides wine, everyone is growing olives for olive oil. It really looks like a beautiful place to live.



Ed Con was filled with excitement, seeing your friends and learning so many new facts on wine and olive oil. The key note speaker was Amy Stewart, author of The Drunken Botanist, who was sponsored by our unit in the memory of Mary Versfelt. She gave a great talk about her book and then signed autographs and chatted with those that attended.

For July, we will have an evening meeting on the 16<sup>th</sup> with Karen Cottingham presenting "Ginseng." I hope to see all of you there.

Martha Burg  
Unit Chairman

## Thinking of You

### Member Concerns

**Janice Dana** fell and broke her leg at the end of June. She had surgery on July 2 that went well. She will have a six week recovery period, flat on her back with her leg elevated 90 degrees. During her recovery period, please remember her and husband Bill. Emails, cards and prayers would be a welcome diversion.

Pam Harris or Janice Stuff will take occasional meals to Janice and Bill, and if you want to participate and schedule a meal, please contact Pam (713-661-1109) or Janice (713-529-9482).

Please keep **Chloe and Pat Rowles** and **Joyce Taylor** in your thoughts.

### Herb Festival Craft Workshops

The craft group has been hard at work planning for the Herb Festival in the fall. We have decided which crafts will be made and now we need your willing hands to put them together.

We will be having workshops starting in July. All workshops will begin at **10 a.m. and continue until approximately 2 p.m. Please RSVP** for each that you want to attend. Please bring a sack lunch, drinks will be provided.

**July 24** at Lois Jean Howard's, 713-771-0172

**August 7** at Pam Harris', 713-661-1109

**August 28** at Jacqui Highton's, 713-636-2382.

These workshops are always fun and a great learning experience! Please contribute to the effort by pitching in at at least one.

Pam Harris



## Herbs Between the Covers

### The Ginseng Hunter by Jeff Talarigo

Review by Karen Cottingham

As “the old century's final spring” unfolds in the land once known as Manchuria, the timeless ginseng hunter of Jeff Talarigo's 2008 novel sets out on his annual search for the rare and elusive root believed to possess supernatural powers. The seasons of the year begin to unfold as they always do; but for the ginseng hunter, this is a year like no other. This is the year he encounters and succumbs to evil, the year he finds and loses love, and the year of his fall and redemption.



Ginseng, like its hunter in this story, embodies multiple paradoxes. Called by the Chinese the “root of heaven” and the “divine root”, it is also known in many

cultures as the “man-root”. In traditional medicine, it is both *yin* and *yang*. Pharmacologically, it is a well-known stimulant, but it also reduces emotional and mental stress. The Koreans consider ginseng to be a blessing from the mountain gods; and many, to this day, begin ginseng hunts with prayers and ritual offerings. Yet, shamelessly in search of profit, they have also hunted ginseng to near extinction.

Ginseng, according to folklore, is said to champion the weak and downtrodden; yet, thousands of Chinese peasants have been forced into a miserable existence digging ginseng for the Emperor's personal use. The ginseng root is equally prized by rulers in search of power and wealth and hermits in search of spiritual elevation. In Chinese medicine, ginseng is used to stimulate the flow of *chi*, or life energy; yet countless lives have been lost in wars fought for control of ginseng-producing regions. Is there any other plant in history or folklore with such complex affinities with the full spectrum of human behavior, from the sublime to the most terribly degraded?

We begin to learn more about the power of ginseng as the virtuous ginseng hunter enters the ancient forest. He reverently acknowledges the thousand-year-old redwoods along with the juniper, fir, and cedar growing together at their massive feet. He knows that to be successful, a hunter must be pure and moral and adhere to ancient spiritual principles, since ginseng is known to hide from all but the worthy. He must also master receptivity if he wishes to be given the “gift from the gods”. In his own words, “If I concentrate too hard on looking for the root, I may miss its presence one step away; however if I allow my thoughts to disperse, like seeds of a dandelion in a soft breeze, the root will call out to me.”

Gently stepping through the bloodroot and jewelweed, the galax and hepatica, and the ginger and wild yam, he begins the delicate process of loosening the root. It must be dug with a spade made of bone because “according to superstition, ginseng is afraid of metal” and might disappear or morph into another plant, an animal, or even another human. It must be extracted from the earth with care and reverence so that no part of the root is damaged – not even the beard, the “long hairy rootlets at the ends of the legs”. Once the digging of a root is accomplished, there is no more hunting for that day: “My father taught me not to be greedy with nature, never to take more than a single root in a day.” Then, after the long trek home, “[he] walk[s] outside to give ... thanks to nature”.

We eventually learn that the ginseng hunter's ancestral family in Korea had been *shimmani*, or wild ginseng diggers, for generations, until the Japanese Army occupied Korea and invaded China. Along with millions of other Koreans, they were forced into China to support Japan's expansionist aspirations. During World War II, when Koreans were conscripted into the Japanese Army, our ginseng hunter's father and uncle escaped into the mountains and slept under leaves and branches until the end of the war. Here they found plentiful ginseng and were eventually able to resume the family tradition. Years later, as a result of Chairman Mao's disastrous agricultural policies, the ginseng hunter's parents died of starvation and he was left to a solitary, primitive existence. We realize that the century mark referred to earlier is actually the year 2000, and the ginseng hunter



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lives on the Tumen River, the tense border between rural China and devastated North Korea.

While the forest is beautiful and the nature spirits seem content, there are hints that all is not well in the ginseng hunter's world: "What is seen on top may be serene, but beneath there is a battle for survival going on among the roots and the weeds." From his home on the Chinese side of the river, the ginseng hunter slowly becomes aware of the massive human calamity taking place all around him.

He watches as the lush vegetation steadily disappears from "all forty-five hundred feet" of Mount Kosong across the river. The trees, he is told, are needed for firewood, and one could prepare a thin, bitter broth from the treebark. Starving North Koreans risk death crossing the frozen river border to steal vegetables from his garden. And starving North Korean soldiers, in the foxholes across the river, promise not to shoot them if they share a portion of the stolen food. Some people in his village have learned to "help" desperate North Korean escapees and then turn them over to the soldiers to their certain death for a bounty fee.

Women are particularly valuable because they can be sold into prostitution. It is in a brothel that the ginseng hunter meets such a woman and realizes that "the price for her, ounce for ounce, is so much less than what I hunt and sell." He becomes a regular visitor, and since they share the Korean language, he gradually learns more about the brutal regime across the river.

He learns that old corncobs are ground for flour, that only one meal of rice with corncobs is allowed daily. Being caught eating an additional meal results in public execution. He also learns that Kim Jong Il – Dear Leader – requires his face to be on a badge on every chest and a framed picture of his father – Great Leader – to be clean and straight in every house. Failure results in forced labor at re-education camps with endless propaganda droning, "cicada-like", from loudspeakers.

From the prostitute he also learns of the dehumanizing effects of starvation. She confides that hunger once compelled her to eat a few grains of rice from the cold hands of a dead man: "The animal in you presses your face down, and you eat the last of the rice directly from

the hands. Now it is over, it is done, and you are again a person."

The ginseng hunter's own moral strength is also tested. While digging a generations-old root, the "kind of root that can buy a hunter a house, that can provide for him for five or six years", his spade slips disastrously when he is suddenly distracted by a North Korean refugee on the forest path. The delicate beard is severed and the root becomes worthless in a careless instant. A mutilated root has no supernatural powers and therefore no value. Conflicted between honor and greed, the ginseng hunter begins to think of the dishonest ginseng artists, "those who take a root and manipulate it, adding knobs and growth rings so that they may deceive the buyer into thinking it is an older, more valuable root."

He studies the severed rootlets for days and finally understands how to fuse them together so he can sell the adulterated root in the market. He has turned onto the path of those who lose their souls. He refuses to help the desperate prostitute, and she is left to her fate with the North Korean soldiers. He betrays other human beings for money.

Living in his own darkness, the ginseng hunter begins to despise himself. Now seeing another nameless prostitute, he laments, "I pinch my eyes tight and imagine that the room isn't dank, that the walls aren't flecked with chips of paint, that the woman beside me isn't who she is, and most of all that I am not who I have become." In his despair, he finds a way to confront and overcome his own "shadow side" and hold on to his humanity. In the first few days of the new millennium, the repentant ginseng hunter plants a garden as an offering to anyone in need.

As one reviewer stated, "this book is about what makes us human and how we survive our own darkness." The Ginseng Hunter is a rare opportunity to peer into the devastation that is modern North Korea, and to peer into our own souls. I highly recommend that you take this opportunity. Like me, you will never again respond to news about North Korea without referring to this book in your mind as a guide.



## Wanted: Jelly Jars

Lois Sutton reminds folks to save empty jelly jars. She can reuse jars. If you have any jars, contact Lois at doctorlo@comcast.net or 713-862-8857



## Fertilizer Recommendation

Mercedes Hitchcock wanted to share a garden “find” with members. Mercedes tried this product and has had a lot of success with it. The product is called Dynamite Vigor.

The product literature says, “Vigor focuses on soil-building and promotes plant health rather than plant growth. Vigor is made from a proprietary process that starts with a sugar cane molasses base. To that, we add a complete and balanced mineral and trace mineral package in a nutrient cluster that grabs soil particles on a microscopic level becoming part of the soil structure. We also include a highly concentrated compost tea fertilizer designed to duplicate the nutritional analysis of nature’s most perfect fertilizer—earthworm castings—which provides enhanced plant growth and a quick nutritional boost. This custom-manufactured soil amendment is non-leaching meaning it will stay put until your plant needs it, allowing plants to feed when they want.”

The product can be used year-round and is recommended for gardens, house plants, container plants, trees and sick plants.

The product isn’t available through retailers right now, but if you’re interested in trying the product, contact Mercedes (281-499-1367).

## July To-Do List

From Buchanan’s Native Plants  
11 E 11<sup>th</sup> Street Houston, TX 77008

<http://buchanansplants.com/>

- Water deeply, especially trees. Don’t rely on your sprinkler system to water adequately in summer.
- Check irrigation systems for proper function – may need to extend the watering periods to make sure roots are watered.
- Maintain mulch at 2-3” depth – add new mulch if needed – to conserve moisture
- Prepare vegetable gardens for fall planting – pull weeds & add compost
- Plant vegetable plants: tomato, peppers, squash & cucumbers. Plant herbs: basil, oregano, thyme
- Plant pumpkin seeds for October Jack-O-Lanterns. Other seeds to plant: corn, cucumber, okra, black-eyed peas, beans, cantaloupe
- Identify insect and fungal problems and treat with least toxic solution
- Feed the birds. Keep bird baths clean and filled with fresh water
- Eliminate standing water to prevent mosquitoes from breeding
- Deadhead annuals and perennials to encourage a great fall showing
- Stay hydrated and protect yourself from UV rays (sunscreen/hats/sunglasses).



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## Save the Dates...

**South Central District  
Gathering**  
Fredricksburg, Texas  
**September 19 – 20th**



**Urban Harvest Classes**  
<http://urbanharvest.org/>

**Cooking with Kids!, Sunday, July 13**

11:30-12:00 pm & 12:30-1:00 pm  
Eastside Farmer's Market, 3000 Richmond Ave., FREE

**Fall Vegetable Gardening, Saturday, July 26**

9-11:30am, U of H Central, 3601 Cullen Blvd, Houston, TX 77004, \$36

**Propagate Your Own Plants, Thursday, August 7**

6:30-9pm, 2311 Canal Street, Houston, TX 77003, \$36

**Kids Water Watch, Sunday, August 10**

11:30-12:00 pm & 12:30-1:00 pm  
Eastside Farmer's Market, 3000 Richmond Ave., FREE

**Low Volume Irrigation, Saturday, August 23**

9:-11:30am, U of H Central, 3601 Cullen Blvd, Houston, TX 77004

**Buchanan's Native Plants Classes**

611 E 11th Street Houston, TX 77008  
The classes are free, but you need to RSVP at <http://buchanansplants.com>.

**Growing Gingers in Houston, Saturday, July 12**  
10:00 am

Linda Fields is Houston's foremost ginger expert. Learn everything you need to grow fabulous gingers in Houston.

**Edible Container Gardening, Saturday, July 19,**  
10:00 – 11:00 am

"Edible Container Gardening" with Jessi Bautista of Buchanan's Native Plants. Concerned about soil quality or space? Learn how to grow herbs, veggies, and even fruit trees in containers!

**Composting 101, Saturday, July 26,**  
10:00 – 11:00 am

"Composting 101" with John Gardner of Buchanan's Native Plants. Learn all the facts about composting and what you need to do to get started!

**Composting: Advanced Topics, Saturday, Aug. 2,**  
10:00 – 11:00 am

"Composting: Advanced Topics" with John Gardner of Buchanan's Native Plants. How to get the most out of your compost.

**Growing Great Fall Tomatoes, Sat., Aug. 9**  
10:00-11:00

"Growing Great Fall Tomatoes" with Urban Harvest.

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



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.



Find our Unit on the web at:  
[www.herbsociety-stu.org](http://www.herbsociety-stu.org)

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