

Herbs Make Scents



THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
VOLUME XLIII, NUMBER 3

SOUTH TEXAS UNIT
MARCH 2020

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

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.
(Note Date Change) **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 Practioner and Educator. **Bring your plate, cutlery, napkin and a dish to share.**
- Mar 18**, Wed. at 6:30 p.m. **Board Meeting** is at the house of **Julie Fordes**. **Members only.**

April 2020 Calendar

- Apr 14**, Tues. at 10 a.m. **Day Meeting** (Spring Road Trip) is at Arbor Gate (15635 FM 2920, Tomball, TX. 77377). **Cathy Livingston**, coordinator.
- Apr 15**, 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 **Fatma Ozel and Rose Wherry**. The program, "*Hildegard of Bingen – The Holy Healer*" will be presented by **Adrian Melissinos, RN, PhD**. **Bring your plate, cutlery, napkin and a dish to share.**
- Apr 16-17** **National Annual Meeting (HSA)** in Charleston, SC
- Apr 24**, Fri. **Set Up for Herb Day** is at St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Fondren Hall (5501 Main Street, Houston, TX 77004).
- Apr 25**, Sat. **37th Annual Herb Day Luncheon and Symposium - "Slow Down and Savor Each Day"** is at St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Fondren Hall (5501 Main Street, Houston, TX 77004). Members arrive by 8 am or as assigned. **Pre- registration is required.** Payment must be received on or before Monday, April 20, 2020.

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



Linda Alderman
Lois Jean Howard
Joan Jordan

Beth Murphy
Susan Wood
Dena Yanowski



Chairman's Corner



**Happy
St. Patrick's Day**

I am really excited about HERB DAY! We have three awesome speakers, a great activity, delicious food and great shopping opportunities!

I have sent a digital version of our promotional flyer to members through Mail Chimp. I would also like to get the printed flyers into the hands of members to distribute as soon as possible.

We were able to distribute just a few of our printed flyers at the last meeting. At the next evening meeting, we will take care of that before we enjoy our potluck and speaker.

If you take a flyer or two or three at our next meeting on March 11, please get them out right away, as that will be about 6 weeks before the event.

We have had to postpone the New Member Orientation. I will let you know when it is up and running. We will have a board meeting March 18th and I will distribute the agenda prior to the meeting. If you have an agenda item, please contact me.

That's all from me... make sure you are contributing to Herb Day... we want to make this event both fun and profitable, and we can't do it without YOU!

Julie Fordes, Unit Chair

Membership Update

As of this month, The Herb Society STU's Membership co-chairs report we have 53 active members. This number excludes inactive, sustaining or affiliate members. In 2019, 6 new members: **Mary Wood, Pam Uschak, Yvette Darnell, Cynthia Card, Terry Snook, and Susan Fairfield King** were approved for membership. Many of these women volunteered to host an evening program or attended Herb Day 2020 preparations. We are grateful they found our group and welcome them to The South Texas Unit!

Visitors are invited to sign in at meetings and their emails will be added to our email list that week. After a few meetings, visitors are given the opportunity to apply for membership. There has already been new interest in membership from visitors this year! I will update STU on the status of those applications.

Dena Yanowski, Membership



In Memory of Thelma Rowe

Thelma Rowe, a dedicated member of the South Texas Herb Society since 1993, passed away on Feb. 5, 2020. Thelma was a very active member and made many contributions to the Herb Society during her membership. A tribute will appear in the Unit's next newsletter.



*Rosemary for
Remembrance*

Update: Herb Day 2020

Catherine O'Brien

37th Annual Herb Day and Symposium *Slow Down and Savor Each Day*

This year, the Herb Society of America-South Texas Unit is celebrating slowing down and savoring each day on **Saturday, April 25, 8:45 am-3 pm**, at St. Paul's United Methodist Church, Fondren Hall (5501 Main Street, Houston, TX 77004).

The theme is designed to awaken and engage the senses through mindful perspectives on herb gardening, herbal floral design, herbal teatime, and to share time with friends. **Pre-registration for the symposium is required.** Member tickets are \$25. Tickets for non-members are \$60, but garden groups and other herb units can request to be seated together at their own table for six guests near the front.

Guest speakers include **Felder Rushing**, the inspiration behind Slow Gardening, **Teresa Sabankaya**, author of *The Posy Book*, and **Kim McHugh** local Tea-Master and owner of McHugh Tea Room and Gifts in Bellaire, Texas. Attendees will be invited to create their very own tussie-mussies for a nominal fee.

For further information about Herb Day, visit www.herbsociety-stu.org or email southtexasunit@gmail.com. To help with Herb Day, please look for and bring containers for tussie-mussies to the next meeting. We could use bud vases, milk glass, goblets, tea cups or little tea pots.

If you would like to grow some plants to donate to the Herb Marketplace, let us know what you have available. You can contact **Catherine O'Brien** via email (Vibrio13@gmail.com) or call 281-467-1139. To read more about *Passalong Plants*, read Catherine's article on page 8.

*SLOW DOWN and
SAVOR EACH DAY*



BACK TO OUR ROOTS



Time to Garden Ladies!!!

With the sun coming back to us and the temperatures rising - but not too hot yet - it's the perfect time to get outside and garden! At the last **Evening Meeting** we distributed pots of **lemon balm and seed for butterfly pea**. Lemon balm is an integral part of our Texas Herb Tea and dried butterfly pea flowers literally flew off the shelves at Herb Fair. **Let me know if you would like to grow either of these plants.** We can make arrangements to get them to you. I will have them at the next evening meeting as well.

We also still have copies of **Susan Wood's handout on how to harvest, dry and store herbs.**

Let's talk a moment about oranges, lemons, and other citrus. Orange peel is another essential ingredient for our Texas Herb Tea. It would be great if we could dry lemon as well, possibly for another tea or spice blend.

I admit I have been a bit of a snob - I haven't been using peels from non-organic citrus for our blends and teas. Most of us, though, do not purchase oranges that are unsprayed and organic. If we only use organic oranges, we will simply not have an adequate supply. Several of the wise women in our group have advised that if non-organic fruit from regular supermarkets is washed thoroughly, it is just fine to use.

Learn how to dry citrus peel

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=peiKl_F6GJO What I like about this video is that it shows a peeling process that gets all the zest but none of the pith. However, the woman in the video uses a dehydrator which is fine if you have one. Leaving the peel to dry on a plate or paper toweling until it is crisp and crunchy (about 5 days give or take) is fine too. You may not think that you have enough citrus to bother with, but if we add all our little bits together, it will truly amount to something!



This is the dried peel of three oranges

Job completed in one setting!

Please continue to harvest and dry whatever is growing. You probably have mint, lemon balm, lemon verbena and hopefully calendula in the garden. If it's green - harvest and dry it! We can all follow the simple suggestion to...

“Grow what we need and Use what we grow!”

Julie Fordes



Remember:

250 days until HERB FAIR - November 7, 2020

Donna Wheeler, Chair of Herb Fair

The committee is almost complete. 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: ddwheeler16@hotmail.com

The committee will receive descriptions of their "chair" positions and suggestions from the 2019 Herb Fair surveys in March via email. Our first meeting is at my house, Sunday, May 3.



I am trying a new herb-related art project this year, note cards. The cards will be created from the pictures of our Herb members gardens.

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 a photo.

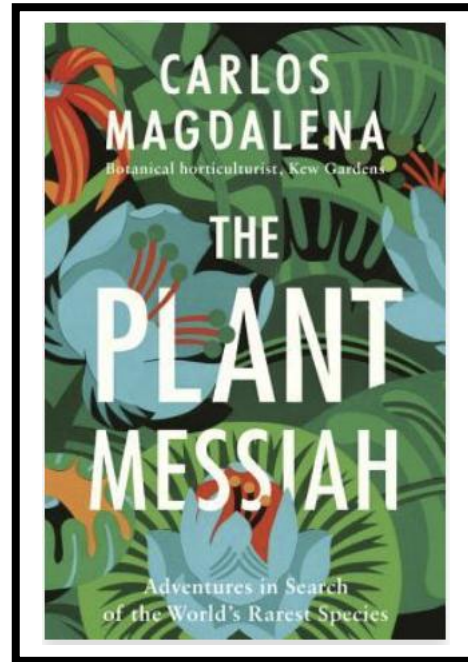
Happy spring planting!
Donna Wheeler





**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).



The Plant Messiah is the inspirational story of a man who has devoted - and risked - his life to save incredible species, all in the name of making this Earth a greener and happier place. Amen to that. (from GoodReads)

Thank you, **Joan Jordan**, for this recommendation! I look forward to reading it!

**TEA MAKING
FOR**



HERB DAY

...Julie Fordes

Please start bringing your dried herbs to the next meeting or arrange to get them to Julie Fordes.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!! SAVE THE DATE!!!

We will make our tea blends on the Saturday before the event.

We will meet at 10 am on Saturday, April 18 at the home of **Julie Fordes**. Please let Julie know if you are coming.



Day Group March Meeting March 10th



Janice Stuff presents

My Favorite Things from HSA Meetings

Julie Fordes is hosting the meeting at her home. Kindly RSVP to Julie to let her know you are coming. Ph. 832-969-8349.

Bring a dish to share.
All members are welcome.



Free and open to the Public

Silver Street Studios
2000 Edwards Street, Houston, Tx 77007

Thursday, April 23, 12:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Friday, April 24, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

For more information visit
<https://www.gchouston.org/graffiti/>



Saturday, March 28
10:30 am–2 pm

Come celebrate with us—it will be fun for the whole family!
Learn about bees, butterflies, bugs, worms, and more.
Lots of free activities and an organic honey fundraiser!

- live music
- art activities
- food trucks
- photo booth
- bounce house
- special guests

Westbury Community Garden
12581 Dunlap Street • Houston, TX 77035



WestburyCommunityGarden.org
WCG educates adults and children about good nutrition and ecology, strengthens community spirit, provides organically-grown food, and serves as a gathering place for the community.

Westbury Community Garden invites STU members

We have been asked to host a demonstration table for the Westbury Community Garden 10th Anniversary Celebration event.

They asked us to help celebrants make an herbal vinegar infusion. They just dropped off 3 boxes of jars for us to use!

I will go (I have a garden plot there) and I am looking for a couple more members to assist me.

If you are interested, please contact **Julie Fordes**. It should be a fantastic event.



What's New?

Passalong Plants

Catherine O'Brien

"Hey, neighbor, I'm separating daylilies this weekend. Would you like some?"

What are passalong plants? Passalong is a strong Southern tradition of trading or swapping plants. Prolific herbs - like anything in the mint family - can be shared with a friendly caution to "keep them in a pot or they will spread." Plants that produce bulbs, corms, or rhizomes make great passalong plants—for example, daylilies, bearded irises, cannas, and other plants that need to be divided occasionally. I still have some of the yellow daylilies that my mother-in-law gave me over thirty years and three houses ago. I cherish them and remember her each time they bloom.

Most gardeners love to share the beauty of their yards with friends and neighbors. The best part about sharing plants is that if it's growing well in your neighbor's yard, it will probably grow well in yours. How many times have we purchased plants at a nursery on the other side of town only to have them die a slow, miserable death in our garden?

Seeds can be collected and saved in the spring, and cuttings that are not winter-hardy can be gathered up and stored indoors or in a greenhouse to set out again next spring.

The real beauty of passalong plants comes with the time you take to slow down and talk to your neighbor. And remember, you should never thank someone for a passalong plant or it will not survive. How often do we get to ignore Mother's orders to always say "please" and "thank you?"

Most avid Texas gardeners are familiar with the Texas Rose Rustlers, a group of dedicated folks armed with pruning shears and a dedication to save heirloom roses from extinction. And who can forget the old Southern rose, "Peggy Martin," a rose that survived two weeks of saltwater after Hurricane Katrina. These roses have been passed along to friends, neighbors and have also become a profitable business for the Antique Rose Emporium. Many of the heritage plants we remember from our childhood days can't be found in local nurseries, and as we've discovered, the plants that we'd like to have are not always the plants that are available for sale.

So what does this have to do with the South Texas Unit? We are asking our members to share plants from their own gardens to supplement the plants that we will be selling on Herb Day. If you have some special plants, seeds, or heritage or heirloom plants that can be propagated, we'd love to receive your donations. Let Catherine know what you can provide via email (Vibrio13@gmail.com) or phone (281-467-1139).



What's Coming Up!

THANK YOU, LORD, FOR A NEW DAY DAWNING

WELCOME SPRING WITH THE PERSIAN “NEW DAY” FESTIVAL OF NOROOZ

KAREN COTTINGHAM

*“Spring and all its flowers now joyously break their vow of silence.
It is time for celebration, not for lying low;
You too – weed out those roots of sadness from your heart.”*

*Hafiz, 14th century Persian poet
English translation by Homayun Taba & Marguerite Theophil*

Each year the arrival of Spring is a miraculous symphony of awakening and rebirth. The whole world seems to come alive, filled with vibrant color, come-hither scents, and heart-lifting birdsong. Plants and animals alike fulfill their promise of fertility and new life. Buds burst forth, bees dance in the blossoms, and new roots join hands as the glorious cycle of life continues.



Iranian women enjoy the first evidence of nature's awakening after a long winter - the same exuberant display of deep pink redbud flowers that we appreciate here. *C. siliquastrum* is the *cercis* species native to Western Asia. The flowers are not only beautiful, but edible, too, and are a good source of Vitamin C! The leaves will appear shortly after the precocious flowers emerge from the bare branches.



And as the incomparable Persian poet and mystic Hafiz points out, Springtime is also a time for reflection, reappraisal, and renewal in our own lives. (See above)

Even the holidays we celebrate during the Spring season emphasize renewal and rebirth, both within and without. Hundreds of festivals occur in the spring, but five in particular are widely observed - Easter and the Feast of the Annunciation by Christians, the Hindu and Sikh festival of Holi, the Jewish observance of Passover, and Norooz, the ancient celebration of the Persian New Year. All occur on or about the vernal equinox.

Within their own religious and cultural contexts, these Springtime festivals all celebrate the same underlying themes - the promise of new life, the triumph of light over darkness, and the ending of a time of deprivation or discord. In most of the world Spring festivals also coordinate the beginning of the agricultural cycle of cultivating, planting, and harvesting.



Norooz is widely celebrated throughout the areas of Central and Western Asia which were part of the ancient Persian Empire. Here, an Uzbek woman explains the significance of sprouted grain as a symbol of the cyclical renewal of life.

To help you welcome Spring with exuberance and thoughtfulness The South Texas Unit of The Herb Society of America invites you to learn about Norooz, the New Year festival of renewal celebrated by over 300 million people all over the world.

Norooz is a combination of two Farsi words *now*—meaning "new"—and *ruz*—meaning "day" or "light". The New Day of Norooz is the first day of the Persian New Year. The festival of Norooz always commences at the vernal equinox; this year, on March 19. In some countries the 13 days following the equinox are holidays as well, spent celebrating the advent of Spring and the retreat of Winter.



Our **March 11, 2020** program, ***The Seven Seens of Health, a Norooz Tradition***, will introduce you to the history and some of the practices and traditional foods associated with this joyful celebration. **Asal Shokati**, born in Iran, has celebrated Norooz all her life and will be our guide. While some of the traditions will seem like relics of an unfathomable past, most of the practices of Norooz actually reflect universal concerns that transcend time and place, culture, religion, and ethnicity.

In practice, universal concerns are most effectively expressed symbolically - the bitter herbs of Passover, for example, represent the bitterness of slavery, and fertility and rebirth are signified by eggs in many traditions. The symbols of Norooz are likewise deeply ingrained in the shared history of entire cultures.

The centerpiece of the Norooz celebration is the *Haft-Seen*, pictured below. *Haft-Seen*, or the Seven-S's (*Haft* is "Seven" in Farsi and *Seen* is the letter "S") is a grouping of symbolic items all beginning with the letter "s" in Farsi, the Persian language. These symbols originated in the ancient Zoroastrian religion and are said to embody the seven "angelic heralds" of happiness, life/birth, joy, health, prosperity, patience, and beauty.



Iranian women in traditional dress celebrating Norooz. They are surrounded by special objects as well as herbs, spices, foods and plants with symbolic or sacred significance

We will hear much more about the *Haft-Seen* spread in Asal's presentation, but here are some of the key elements:

Seven plant-derived items whose Persian names begin with the letter "S" are carefully arranged on a special antique hand-woven silk cloth: *sabzeh*- wheat or lentil sprouts indicate life itself and the rebirth that occurs in Spring; *senjed* - the dried fruit of the oleaster tree is for love and affection; *seer* - garlic represents medicine; *seeb* - apples are for beauty and health; *somaqh* - sumac berries represent the sunrise and the



spice of life; *samanu* - a sweet pudding made from germinated wheat symbolizes the sweetness of life as well as affluence; and *serkeh* - vinegar indicates wisdom, longevity, and perseverance.

Together, these *seens* are a visual reminder of what is necessary for successful renewal. Additional symbolic items vary by region and may also depend on family tradition. For instance, in Irani households, a volume of poetry by Hafiz, the fourteenth-century lyrical poet, is frequently added to honor their Persian heritage and to inspire learning. A holy book from the household's particular religion might also be given a prominent position on the *Haft-Seen* table.



Candles and mirrors reflect the new light and new life of the season

Many families choose to include a mirror to signify truth and to reflect the new light of the season. Mirrors are also reminders of the importance of honest reflection upon the past year. Lit candles might represent the holy fire, a righteous life, or truth, clarity, and enlightenment, depending on one's religious heritage. Decorated eggs are universal emblems of fertility, and I particularly like the inclusion of a sour orange in a crystal bowl of water to represent the earth floating in space.

Other items might include a ticking clock to signify the passage of time and a saucer of coins to represent prosperity. A fishbowl with goldfish is meant to reflect a happy life full of activity and companionship while adding seven branches from gnarled trees would serve as a reminder that the passage through life is not always smooth.

Another Norooz custom - preparing a bowl of rainwater containing a sprig of thyme or a pomegranate leaf - is an ancient Zoroastrian ritual that reflects the importance of water in this arid region. Sprinkling rose-scented water on loved ones calls to mind the blessing of a cleansing, refreshing, and revitalizing rainfall.



Culture, companionship, earth, and fertility are all represented on the *Haft-Seen* table. Ancient legends tell that the goldfish changes its swimming direction at the time of Equinox and the orange moves spontaneously in response to the shift of the earth

While the symbolism of the various items on the Haft-Seen table is generally accepted as consistent and reasonable, the associations described above are by no means certain. Written records mentioning Norooz are only available for the past 1,800 years of the celebration's much longer existence, and those that we have are subject to various interpretations. Many of the original meanings have certainly been lost, forgotten, or modified to remain relevant in changing circumstances. The different religious groups also follow rituals specific to their scripture. The Zoroastrians, for example, grow seven seeds symbolizing resurrection rather than following the *Haft-Seen* tradition.

Given all these complexities, the traditions of Norooz may best be understood as having arisen within the hopes and fears of our ancient ancestors. Whatever the initial celebrations of spring's return may have been, the *idea* of Norooz has survived and flourished. Evolving concepts, flexible interpretations of ancient rituals, and fresh input have insured its continued relevance in modern times.

According to the eminent Iranian anthropologist **Mohammad Mirshokraei** the genesis of today's Norooz festival occurred over 18,000 years ago at the end of what we call the the "Ice Age". In the geographical area known as the Iranian Plateau this dramatic change in climate led to the emergence of distinct seasons. As summer became distinguishable from autumn and winter from spring, certain behaviors or rituals developed to mark the beginning of one and the end of another.



As the year completed its annual cycle and settled into darkness, there was a great risk that our ancient ancestors would perish. The advent of spring was therefore particularly momentous - life was assured as the cold, deprivation, and depression of winter was replaced by the warmth of the returning sun, plentiful food, and a general feeling of exuberance.



One of the earliest harbingers of spring, *Galanthus transcaucasicus*, or snowdrops, in the Hyrcanian forest of Azerbaijan near the southern Caspian Sea

Tajikistan has a lovely tradition, in which children and young people pick snowdrops in the mountains and present them to people along with singing. What a charming way to spread the news about the arrival of spring!

It is easy to see that for people living precariously within the cycles of nature the arrival of the life-giving springtime would give rise to joyful celebrations. With the development of social organization, agriculture and religion, additional rituals would have been introduced to ensure that Spring would appear again year after year.

But just as Spring was seen as the rebirth of light and all that was good, winter was associated with darkness and the forces of evil. Some of the Norooz rituals were designed to banish disease, sadness, and malicious spirits.

In ancient Persia, fire was considered a sacred element powerful enough to destroy evil. In some regions where Norooz is celebrated, the *Chaharshamba Suri* traditions of bonfire jumping and torchlight processions symbolize the burning of everything negative, including disease, misfortunes, and sorrows. Even women with babes in arms jumped over bonfires, believing the sacred fire would guard them from evil spirits and bad luck. Jumping over fire was also believed to banish corrupt desires and demonic temptations.



Fire was at the center of the Zoroastrian religion as it was believed to have purifying powers and provided warmth, light, and food. Purification by fire accounts for some of the most dramatic rituals of Norooz. Bonfires on rooftops have thankfully been replaced by candles and fireworks.

Fumigation with “sacred” smoke is another purification ritual performed on the eve of Norooz. In rural areas of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, for example, the smoke from juniper twigs is believed to frighten away any lurking malicious spirits. Syrian or wild rue (*Peganum harmala*) is similarly used to drive out evil and bad luck in Tajikistan.



Syrian rue (*Peganum harmala*) is a hallucinogenic plant used in Tajikistan to drive out the evil spirits of winter



Syrian rue's common English-language name came about because of a resemblance to the completely unrelated plant rue. The Farsi name, transliterated as *espan*, is thought to be derived from the Proto-Iranian word **spanta-*, or "holy". As the plant is hallucinogenic as well as holy, some scholars theorize that this was the magical entheogenic plant mentioned in ancient Persian Zoroastrian texts.

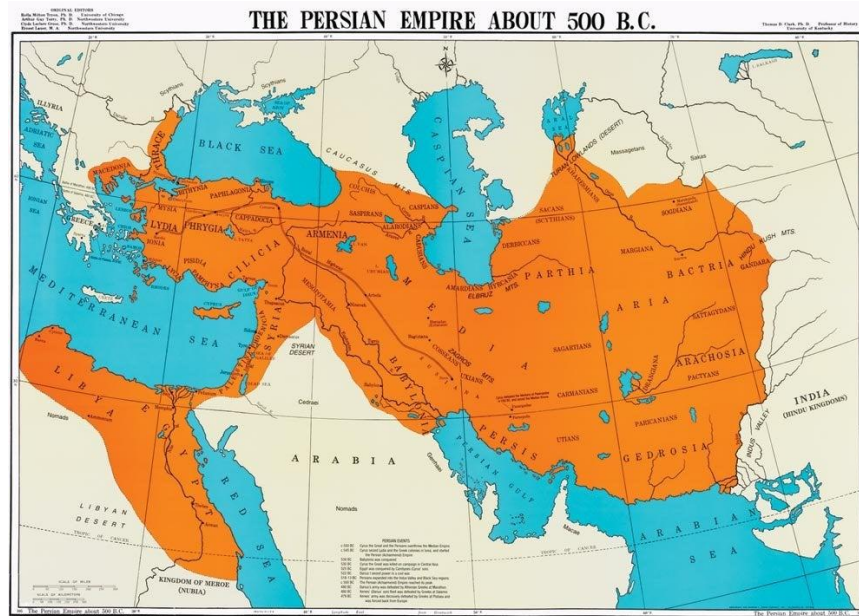
Norooz is clearly a complex pastiche of symbols, rituals, and ceremonies that has managed to maintain its relevance over large geographical areas and from ancient to modern times. Its rituals continue to satisfy a broad spectrum of populations ranging from the most sophisticated to the most pastoral.

The New Year festival of Norooz is actually observed today by around 300 million people worldwide, with each ethnic group celebrating in their own unique way. Traditions and rituals are particularly strong in the Balkans, the Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions, the Caucasus, the Crimea, the Middle East, and Central and South Asia, including the western provinces of China and India.

Iraq, India, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan are some of the countries where the festival is hugely popular. And despite geopolitical pressures, Norooz is still celebrated in many of the countries along the Silk Route, from Turkey and Azerbaijan through Iran to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and even in parts of southern Russia.

Considering that so many countries enthusiastically embrace Norooz, it may be puzzling that the festival is called "The Persian New Year". For many, it is considered a quintessentially Iranian holiday.

It helps to realize that many people confuse "Persia" with the modern-day country of "Iran".



Originally, the name *Persis* or *Parsa* was applied to a small region of southern Iran settled by an Indo-European nomadic people about 1000 BC. The much larger Persian Empire, seen above, was



created about 500 years later by Cyrus the Great and included all the land from the Indus Valley in the present-day Subcontinent to the Nile River in Egypt. This entire geographic area, once unified by the Persian language and culture, was collectively known as “Persia”.

The sheer size of the Persian Empire explains the widespread celebration of the Persian New Year in regions extending far beyond the actual borders of what is now called Iran.

But as mentioned before, festivals welcoming Spring had actually been practiced long before the Persian Empire was consolidated.

The Sumerians, for example, who settled in ancient Mesopotamia (present day southern Iraq) from 3,000BC onwards, celebrated their New Year with *The Festival of the Sowing of Barley* in the Spring.

Their successors, the inhabitants of the Old Kingdom of Babylon (2000BC), also celebrated their New Year with the arrival of Spring.



The Babylonian Spring festival was called *Beginning of the Year* and was associated with ritualistic demonstrations of sport for the chief Babylonian god Marduk

It is clear that when Cyrus the Great consolidated all of these lands and cultures into the Persian Empire, he embraced these pre-existing Mesopotamian celebrations of Spring. It has even been suggested that his successor, Darius the Great, built the Zoroastrian Persepolis complex for the specific purpose of celebrating the return of the Spring. The walls of the great royal palace famously depict the scenes of these springtime celebrations.



The rituals finally became uniquely “Persian” by incorporating the creation myths of Zoroastrianism, which was the religion of Ancient Persia until the advent of Islam in the 7th century AD.

Interestingly, while the festival was celebrated throughout the existence of the Persian Empire, it was not actually called Norooz until the second century AD.

While the fusion of Iranian and Mesopotamian beliefs was harmonious and creative, history has not always been as kind to all ethnic groups wishing to celebrate Norooz. The following images focus on ethnic groups whose history has been difficult:



Children of the Tatar-Bashkir diaspora celebrating Norooz. The vast majority of Tatars today reside in post-Soviet countries, primarily in Russia, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. After a long period of persecution, they are once again allowed to celebrate Norooz.



Kazakh villagers celebrating Norooz in the Uighur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang Province, China. During World War I and again during Soviet rule, these nomadic Asiatic Turkic-speaking people were persecuted. Many fled with their herds to Xinkiang Province in China where their freedoms are now being threatened again.



Many followers of the Zoroastrian religion fled from Persia to India following the Arab conquests - their descendants are *Parsi*, which means "Persian". This woman is praying at The Fire Temple in Mumbai, a pilgrimage performed by the Parsi community every Norooz.



For those who have suffered such persecution and displacement the promise of new life in Spring must be particularly meaningful.

In addition to the many New Year rituals that welcome Spring and banish misfortune, the traditional foods of Norooz are also thought to bring good luck and prosperity.

One of these “lucky” dishes is a noodle soup called *ash-e reshteh*. Eating *reshteh* on the first day of Norooz symbolizes the unraveling of any difficulties in the year to come.



Ash-e reshteh is a delicious Iranian soup made of onion, chickpeas, pinto beans, lentils, herbs and noodles. It is served with *kashk* (yogurt whey), piles of fried onion and a drizzle of mint oil.

The loops and knots of noodles in *ash-e reshteh* symbolize the many possible paths, both good and bad, that life offers. Untangling the noodles is a way of taking control of one’s life and selecting the best path forward.

According to **Najmieh Batmanglij**, a well-known author of Persian cooking, Iranians always eat noodles at the start of anything new. Noodles, she says, should definitely be eaten on the third day after friends or relatives leave on a trip - this helps them find their way!

Samanu, a sweet pudding made from germinated wheat, is another Norooz food of great symbolic significance. About two weeks before the holiday, wheat is soaked and then germinated. Every day, as the seeds are watered, special blessings are offered. Following the ritual exactly is very important - for the longer the grain sprouts are, the better the crop will be in the new year. The sprouted grains are then carefully pounded in a mortar and placed into a gigantic pot with water and a little flour.

The process of preparing *samanu* continues for one full day and night of constant stirring performed entirely by women.



Since the person who welcomes the new year joyfully will be happy the whole year long, these Afghanistani women have an good excuse to enjoy music, dancing, story-telling, and socializing while waiting their turn to stir the pot!

Wishes made while stirring the *samanu* will come true, and the woman who finds the little stone put into the pot to keep the *samanu* from burning will have especially good luck. Another ritual for divination involves the examination of an image that comes out on the surface of the pudding at the end.

The finished *samanu*, now symbolizing affluence, is shared with the entire community.

Incidentally, this is an ideal time for mothers to find brides for their sons!

Kuku Sabzi is another enormously popular Norooz dish believed to bring prosperity and happiness in the coming year. The eggs and herbs in this frittata-like dish represent fertility and rebirth respectively. In fact, *Sabzi* is the Farsi word for fresh herbs, which, as the symbol for life, serve as the base for many of the dishes served at Norooz.

I love the idea of fresh green herbs representing new life and abundance! In the recipe for *Kuku*, dill, parsley, chives, cilantro, and fenugreek are traditionally used. Depending on a family's tradition, dates or dried rose petals could also be added, and dried barberries, caramelized with grape molasses or sugar, make a beautiful sweet-tart garnish.



Kuku is a traditional herbal egg dish similar to a frittata. This version by the Iranian food writer **Najmieh Batmanglij** was served at the White House for the 2016 Norooz celebration

And of course platters of sweets are the ultimate way of invoking sweetness for the coming year:



Baklava is a sweet, flaky pastry filled with chopped almonds and pistachios soaked in honey-flavored rose water. Delicious!



Herbs Make Scents

March 2020



And what could be sweeter than Persian pastries and cardamom tea?

For the sweetest and most joyful celebration of Spring, make plans now to attend **Asal Shokati's** March 11, 2020 Herb Society Program, ***The Seven Seens of Health, a Norooz Tradition***. And if you're interested in Persian cooking, this is a great time to experiment with rose water, cardamom, and saffron; barberries, pomegranate molasses and fenugreek!

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.

Herbs Make Scents March 2020

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.

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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.

