

Herbs Make Scents



THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
VOLUME XLIV, NUMBER 5

SOUTH TEXAS UNIT
MAY 2021

Co-Editors Linda Alderman (ewalderman@comcast.net) & Janice Freeman (janicehfreeman@comcast.net)

May 2021 Calendar

All in-person **Evening Meetings** are cancelled until further notice!!!!

May 11, Tue. at 10:00 am

Day Meeting is at the Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion in Hermann Park (1500 Hermann Drive, Houston, TX 77004). The program, "Unusual Herbs to Keep Your Garden Weird" will be presented by **Janice Dana**. Please wear your mask and **bring your lunch**. Drinks will be provided.

May 19, Wed. at 6:30 pm

Annual Meeting – (Members Only) See details on page 2.

May 26, Wed. at 7:00 pm

Full Moon Ramble – (Members Only)

June 2021 Calendar

June 16, Wed. at 7:00 pm

Pearls for the Pandemic: Zoom Meeting - "Josephine: The Empress Gardened" presented by **Lesley Parness**, retired **Superintendent of Horticultural Education**, Morris County (New Jersey) Park Commission, and the author of **The Garden Historian** column for **The Gardener News Magazine**. See details on page 4.

June 10-12

The Herb Society of America (Virtual) Educational Conference (EdCon)

June 24, Thur. at 7:00 pm

Full Moon Ramble – (Members Only)

Newsletter deadline: the 25th of every month is strictly enforced
(June editor Janice Freeman)

May Birth Flower –



Morguefile.com

"**Convallaria majalis**, fragrant perennial herb and only species of the genus *Convallaria* in the asparagus family (Asparagaceae). Native to Eurasia and eastern North America, lily of the valley is cultivated in shaded garden areas in many temperate parts of the world." – *The editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica*

Happy Birthday!

Cynthia Card (5/18)
Carol Cobb (5/15)
Angela Roth (5/5)

Jane Littell (5/13)
Cathy Livingston (5/28)



Herbs Make Scents

Chairman's Corner

May 2021

Greetings!

April was a busy month and May looks like it will be too.

We will have our **Annual Meeting on Wednesday, May 19 @ 6:30 pm via Zoom**. This will be the second Annual Meeting on Zoom. I hope each and every one of you will make arrangements to attend this important meeting. Our agenda includes:

- Election of officers for positions of Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary.
- Proposed budget from our Treasurer for discussion and approval.
- Presentation of Revised Proposals for Guidelines for Reporting Hours and Donations, By-laws, and Membership Guidelines, Rules and Procedures (p. 17-24 in most recent Membership Directory) brought forward by the ad hoc committee.

All members will be sent a detailed agenda, the proposed budget, and the recommendations of the ad hoc committee 2 weeks in advance of the meeting, either by email or USPS.

As far as monthly meetings go, the Board has elected to continue evening Zoom programs for members and the public through July. We hope to meet in August at The Cherie Flores Garden Pavilion in Hermann Park for a member only in-person Evening Meeting. We will re-evaluate this as needed. The Day Group has "broken the ice" by holding an in-person meeting at the home of **Pam Harris**. It was wonderful to get back together!

Take some time to go to the HSA website and check out the offerings for the **2021 Annual Meeting of Members and Educational Conference (Virtual EdCon)**. Our Vice Chair **Karen Cottingham**, sponsored by our own HSA, South Central District, is going to be one of the virtual speakers. Her talk, *Herbs in the Headlines: Notable Women in the Plant Sciences*, sounds wonderful. There are many other fine programs offered and I am very interested in attending *Garden to Glass: Adventures in Cocktail Gardening* by **Amy Stewart!**

That's it for now...Julie

Julie Fordes
Unit Chair





**Join us in Congratulating
HSA - STU Sustaining Member
*JACQUI HIGHTON***



**Jacqui has been a member of
the Herb Society of America for 25 Years
Congratulations, Jacqui, on receiving your Rosemary Award!**

SUPPORT THE SOUTH TEXAS UNIT



You shop. Amazon gives.

An AmazonSmile account has been set up for the South Texas Unit. Be sure to sign up for www.smile.amazon.com and select the South Texas unit as described below. Each quarter the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price of eligible items to our unit.

The shopping experience is the same as shopping through amazon.com with the added benefit the foundation will donate to our organization.

Five Easy Steps to Support the South Texas Unit

1. Go to smile.amazon.com
2. No account? Create one! Have an account? Sign in.
3. Select charitable organization. Found near the top of the smile.amazon.com home page.
4. Type in Herb Society South Texas Unit and click Search. Once the name comes up hit Select.
5. Enjoy shopping!



**Announcing Our May Meeting
and June Program**

**May 19, 2021 Annual Meeting
June 16, 2021, “Josephine: The Empress
Gardened” by Lesley Parness**



**Help your Board of Directors plan our path forward
Please attend the Annual Meeting!**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82842562835>

Dial in Phone No. 346-248-7799 US (Houston)

Member ID: 828-425-628-535



*Slow Down
and...*



*Savor the
Day!*

Photo credit: Catherine O'Brien

Congratulations!!!

To HSA - STU MEMBERS

JENNA WALLIS and MIKE JENSVOLD

Malcolm Blake Wallis Jensvold,
born April 15, 2021

WELCOME THE LITTLE SPROUT!



Every Garden Needs a Protector
Who's Keeping Watch in Yours?



Photo credit: Susan Wood

An Indigo Bunting visiting
Susan Wood's Garden



Dena Yanowski
Houston, TX

Member since 2016
Board Member 2017
Current Position Membership Chair

I became a HSA-STU member in 2016 along with my Mom, **Donna Yanowski**. We quickly fell in love with the group and their mission and within one year I was co-chairing the Spring Herb Day event.

I have since chaired multiple Herb Day events and have served on the Board for 4 years.

Before Covid, I enjoyed welcoming guests at meetings and getting new members signed up and involved in our group under the title of *Membership Chair*.

I've lived inside the 610 Loop my whole life, and have lived in a small apartment for the last few years; therefore, all my personal plants live on windowsills and side tables. That said, I do work at a nature-based preschool, *Blossom Heights Child Development Center*, where I share a garden with one of our classes for 3-year olds.



We love growing herbs together, in particular anything that attracts butterflies, and sharing them with parents at pick-up time. Aside from planting and harvesting, the children and I also like looking for worms and grubs to feed our school box turtles. In the picture above I'm helping plant fruit trees at the permaculture farm of one of the students from my school. There is so much to learn within the dirt and I enjoy sharing that passion with children.

Most of my herbal use happens in the kitchen. I love fermenting, and often use herbs such as mint, basil, and lemongrass to flavor my kombucha. If anyone would like to explore making kombucha themselves, reach out to me and I'd be happy to share a SCOBY with you! ■

Photo courtesy of Dena Yanowski



BACK TO OUR ROOTS

Julie Fordes

What a glorious spring we are having! The cool weather seems to have done many plants some good, including our chamomile. I have been harvesting the flowers for about a week now, and I can see that it will take a lot of flowers to make a cup of tea! Many of us are growing chamomile this year, so we should have a nice amount to use for tea this fall. Follow the basic guidelines for harvesting and drying: pick in the late morning, pick flowers at their peak, dry on a screen or paper, and store in an airtight container out of the light.

I have butterfly pea seeds to share. Please consider making a sunny trellis available to grow this plant. We will be able to sell all the Butterfly Pea Flower Tea we have at Herb Fair. Call me to make arrangements to get some seeds.

Several HSA-STU members enjoyed our **Garden Workday at Garden Oaks Montessori School** with member **Lindsey Pollock, Principal**. Spring cleaning was the first order of the day followed by planting. Pictured from left to right (standing) are **Donna Yanowski, Catherine Wampler, Janice Dana, Julie Fordes** and (kneeling) **Debbie Lancaster**. Not pictured, **Dena Yanowski**. ■

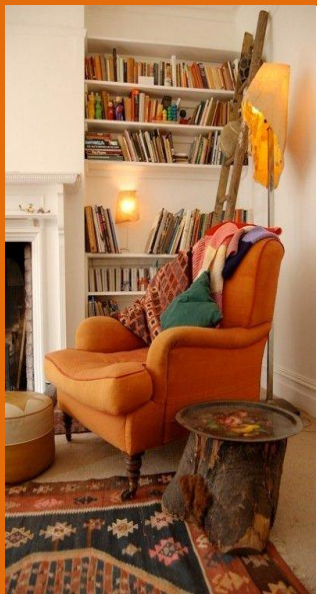


Photos courtesy of Julie Fordes and Dena Yanowski



BOOK C O R N E R

If you have suggestions for books or other media members might like, submit your suggestions to Julie Fordes at fordes.julie@gmail.com



Julie Fordes

The Herb Society of America has launched three Herbal Fiction Book Clubs that HSA members can join. Additional information is available by accessing the Welcome Members page on the HSA website. The May schedule and book listings are below.

1st Book Group meets May 12, 2 pm EST - *The Botanist's Daughter* by **Kayte Nunn**

2nd Book Group meets May 19, 3 pm EST - *Chile Death* by **Susan Wittig Albert**

3rd Book Group Meets May 26, 7:30 pm EST - *One Corpse Too Many*, by **Ellis Peters**



For more information visit: [The Herb Society of America](https://www.herbsociety.org/grow/)
www. <https://www.herbsociety.org/grow/>



TEA BLENDS
Dry and Save these herbs
We will make our special tea blends to sell at
our fundraising events

Orange Peel
Roselle (Hibiscus)
Rosemary
Lemon Balm Lemongrass Lemon Verbena
Mexican Mint Marigold
Oregano
Holy Basil
Spearmint and Peppermint
Red-Stemmed Apple Mint
Rose and Calendula Petals
Chamomile Flowers

Need Instructions on How to Harvest and Dry Herbs?
Read: [For Harvesting, Drying and Storing Herbs by Susan Gail Wood](#)
Located on The South Texas Unit website



Chamomile
Photo credit: Julie Fordes



Herb of the Month: Pineapple Mint



Donna Wheeler

Latin name: *Mentha suaveolens 'Variegata'*

The herb for the month of May is the Pineapple Mint plant (*Mentha suaveolens 'Variegata'*). Pineapple mint is well worth growing. It is a lovely plant and quite versatile. It can be used in beverages, as a garnish, in potpourris and in any dish that calls for mint. Like other mints, it is best grown in containers and hanging baskets to keep it under control. It has the ability to spread vigorously which can be seen as a positive if you want to use it as a ground cover to fill an area, but it will eventually find its way into the rest of the garden unless you install a deep edging around it. Even if grown in a pot you will still need to take some

precautions. The plant has been known to escape through the drainage holes in the bottoms of pots and even jump from pot to pot in container groupings.

Pineapple mint is a variegated cultivar of apple mint (*Mentha suaveolens*). It has attractive, variegated leaves, usually with white margins, and can grow up to a foot tall. The leaves are bumpy and hairy and the white edging can make them look as though they have a ruffle. During summer months you might notice white or light pink flowers that bloom on small spikes at the top of the plant. The flowers attract a wide variety of pollinating insects, including bees and butterflies.

Grow pineapple mint in full sun or partial shade in rich, moist soil. Plants grown in sun tend to stand upright, while those that get afternoon shade sprawl near the ground. Keep the soil evenly moist until the plants are well-established. Once they are growing well, you'll only need to water them during dry spells. The plants don't need regular fertilization when planted in good garden soil. Older plants become woody and unattractive. Pull them up and let younger plants fill in the empty space. Pinch out the growing tips of pineapple mint plants regularly to keep them compact and bushy. You may occasionally find solid green sprigs of mint mixed in with your pineapple mint. These are sprigs of apple mint, the parent plant of the pineapple mint cultivar. You should pinch them out as you find them because, like most variegated plants, pineapple mint isn't as vigorous as its non-variegated parent plant, and the apple mint will soon take over.

Pineapple mint pairs well with tropical fruits such as mango. Chop up a variety of fruits and add whole or chopped pineapple mint leaves. Allow the mixture to set in a refrigerator for an hour before serving so the flavors have time to infuse. You can also use as a beverage garnish or infusion. I just had to try and recommend a marvelous May Pineapple Mint Mojito recipe. Delicious with or without the rum.

Photos courtesy of Donna Wheeler



Pineapple Mint Mojito

2-3 oz. pineapple rum

1 oz. pineapple juice

4 lime wedges

12 pineapple mint leaves

1/4 oz simple sugar

Lightly muddle lime and mint leaves in a sugar rimmed glass, then fill with ice.

In a cocktail shaker briefly shake rum and pineapple juice with ice.

Strain into glass and top with a dash of club soda.

It is the policy of The Herb Society of America not to advise or recommend herbs for medicinal or health use. This information is intended for educational purposes only and should not be considered as a recommendation or an endorsement of any particular medical or health treatment.

STAY-AT-HOME RECIPES

STAY-AT-HOME RECIPES

May 2021

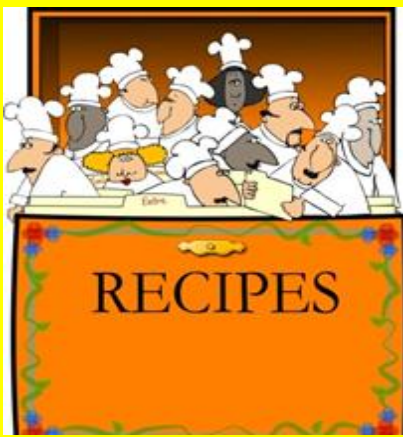
Carolyn Kosclskey

On April 27th the president of the United States made an announcement regarding the mask-wearing recommendations for fully-vaccinated persons from the CDC. That information may be found here: www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html.

The month of May has many opportunities for celebrations beginning with the Kentucky Derby on the 2nd followed by Cinco de Mayo the next Wednesday. More popularly celebrated in the United States than in

Mexico, the date commemorates the Mexican Army's unlikely victory, under the leadership of General Ignacio Zaragoza, over the French Empire's Napoleon III at the Battle of Puebla in 1862, on their march from Veracruz to Mexico City. These celebrations began in California where they have been observed annually since 1863 and gained nationwide popularity in the 1980s as a nod to Mexican American culture.

Herbs Make Scents May 2021





CLASSIC FRITO SALAD

www.homesicktexan.com/2020/05/classic-frito-salad.html

Serves 6

Ingredients

For the dressing:

- 1 cup grapeseed or other neutral salad oil
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup tomato ketchup
- 2 teaspoons prepared mustard
- 1/4 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 1/2 teaspoons chili powder
- 1 teaspoon onion powder
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper

For the salad:

- 1 head iceberg, chopped
- 2 cups grape tomatoes, sliced
- 2 jalapeños, seeded and diced
- 1/4 cup sliced black olives
- 1/4 cup red onion, cut into thin slivers
- 2 cups Ranch Style Beans or other cooked pinto beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 cup (4 ounces) shredded Colby Jack cheese
- 1 avocado, peeled, pitted, and cubed
- 2 cups Fritos or other thick corn tortilla chips

Instructions

1. To make the dressing, add the oil, vinegar, ketchup, mustard, Worcestershire, chili powder, onion powder, garlic powder, salt, and pepper to a jar, put on the lid then shake until the dressing is well blended. Alternatively, you can simply whisk the ingredients together.
2. To make the salad, toss the iceberg, tomatoes, jalapeños, olives, red onion, beans, cheese, avocado, and chips together until well combined.
3. Serve the salad with the dressing on the side. If you're taking this to a potluck, add the avocados and Fritos just before serving so they remain fresh.

See also: <https://lilluna.com/cinco-de-mayo-recipes>

Since 1914, when President Woodrow Wilson officialized Mother's Day as a holiday to be celebrated on the second Sunday of May, children have enjoyed treating their mothers and grandmothers to lunch. In more recent pre-pandemic times going out to lunch became popular, making this the busiest day for restaurants in America. This year Mother's Day falls on May 9th and many will choose to celebrate at home with their family group.



OMELET IN A BAG

This is an easy recipe for preparing omelets for more than one person that allows everyone to “customize” their own omelet and then to dine together. Other menu items might include coffee and hot tea, fresh fruit, and toast, croissants or toasted English muffins. You will need . . .

Large pot (size will depend on number of eggs being cooked) for boiling water
Sharpie for writing names on bags
Quart size resealable freezer bags, such as Ziplock brand
Eggs

Bowls of ingredients with spoons to mix with omelets may include

- Bacon or ham pieces
- Diced green bell pepper
- Diced red onion
- Diced mushrooms
- Chopped tomatoes
- Shredded cheese of choice
- Salsa
- Chopped chives, dill, cilantro and/or parsley

Bring pot of water to a boil on the stovetop. Have everyone write their name on a bag and then break 1 to 3 eggs into it. To “scramble” the eggs use a fork to stir the egg in the bag, or press all of the air out and shake and squeeze the eggs. Open the bag if sealed and add desired ingredients plus salt and pepper, then squeeze out as much of the air as possible, re-seal the bag and place with others in a large bowl. Place up to 8 bags at a time into the boiling water. If preparing more than 4 bags secure in groups with a clothespin or clip to keep the tops up. Cook for exactly 13 minutes and using tongs remove bags to a large bowl and unclip. Let everyone grab their own bag, open it and let the omelet roll onto their plate.

www.allrecipes.com/recipe/85107/omelet-in-a-bag

Memorial Day is a very popular American holiday and marks the unofficial beginning of summer. Traditionally, families, relatives, friends and neighbors get together at a home or in a park for a casual and fun celebratory meal cooked outdoors along with planned outdoor activities. A typical menu might include hot dogs, links, hamburgers or steaks grilled outside, a cooler with ice and iced drinks, and sides and desserts generally brought by the guests.

POTLUCK BAKED BEANS

A family recipe since the seventies

This is a *no-recipe recipe* that is very flexible and user friendly, and as written serves 12 to 15. Ingredients may be adjusted or omitted to taste, and number of servings may be determined by the number of cups of beans you start with. Canned beans such as “baked beans” or pinto may be used, or you may choose to make your own. This dish may be cooked in a Crock Pot, an Instant Pot or in a casserole dish in the oven. By leaving out the meat it becomes a vegan recipe.

3 cups canned* pork and beans, or beans of your choice
1 cob yellow corn, sliced to ½" disc (optional)



Green onions to taste, chopped
1 cup parsley, chopped
1 - 3 large onions, chopped
1 - 3 bell peppers, chopped
1 cup celery including leaves, chopped
1 jalapeño or to taste, diced
1 clove garlic or to taste, diced or garlic powder (not salt)
1 - 3 tablespoons prepared mustard, or to taste
1 - 3 large apples peeled, cored and chopped
1 can Rotel tomatoes or medium can crushed tomatoes
¾ cup tomato juice or apple juice
3 tablespoons maple syrup, molasses or brown sugar for flavoring
Salt and pepper to taste
Ham cubes sautéed, optional
Bacon strips sautéed and crumbled, optional

Empty your cans of baked beans into a Crock Pot, Instant Pot or large bowl if using a casserole dish. If using bacon and ham, sauté in a skillet on the stovetop and drain on paper towels. Onions, peppers, celery, jalapeño and garlic may be added raw, or sautéed in the bacon fat until caramelized. Stir in remaining ingredients and season to taste. Estimates for cooking: If using a Crock Pot cook on LOW for 5 hours or on HIGH for 3.5 hours. If using an Instant Pot set timer for 35 minutes using high pressure then use natural-release method for 20 minutes. If using an oven bake for 4 hours at 300° F. Serves 12 to 15. *A No. 2 ½ can contains 3 cups, or 27 to 29 ounces. A No. 2 can contains 2 ½ cups, or 20 ounces.

As we move into early summer and warmer weather with more fresh vegetables and fruits coming to market, don't miss opportunities to enjoy healthy eating by selection of foods prepared with emphasis on plant based foods. Dietary Guidelines for Americans reminds us of portion control and selecting nutrient-dense foods and beverages with a variety from each food group. Make every bite count!

Memorial Day is on May 31st this year and is the first of four patriotic holidays ending with Labor Day on September 6. "Remembered family recipes" from these holidays will be featured for each holiday. Different members will be invited each month to submit a recipe they remember from years past, along with memories of how the holiday was celebrated.



Wood Sorrel - Fairy Bells, Heart-shaped Leaflets, and Faithful Harbinger of Spring (and Maybe, Just Maybe, the True Shamrock!)

Karen Cottingham



Large Flowered Pink Sorrel (*Oxalis debilis*), photo credit: [iNaturalist.ca](https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/100000000)

If you've been out walking this spring, you've probably admired this delicate clover-like plant punctuating your path with bursts of color. I see the bell-shaped flowers peeking through Asiatic Jasmine ground cover everywhere; and in my own yard, they prefer the shaded bed below the ginkgo tree and the back corner with the maidenhair ferns. They're cheerful but not really flashy; dainty but resilient.

I didn't plant them, but they have faithfully returned every spring for the forty years I have lived in this house. It was long past time for me to learn more about wood sorrel.

The first question was obvious - why are there so many plants called sorrel? In my garden alone, I have a big clump of English, or Common sorrel (*Rumex acetosa*), and the smaller but more attractive Red-veined sorrel (*Rumex sanguineus*). I've seen Sheep's sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*) growing wild in meadows. The only leafy sorrel I'm missing is the more "refined" French sorrel (*Rumex scutatus*). All of these sorrels are members of the buckwheat family, along with rhubarb and the knotweeds, and are noted for their sharp, sour taste.

Roselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*), valued for the gorgeous crimson calyces used to make a tart beverage, is also easy to grow in my Houston garden. The plant as well as the drink are also called sorrel, especially in Jamaica and some of the other islands of the English-speaking Caribbean.

And then... there's my wood sorrel.



Wood sorrels account for all 570 species of the genus *Oxalis*. Recognizable by their small heart-shaped leaves, these sorrels grow in moist grasslands and forests throughout the world. The most beloved is the common wood sorrel of Britain's ancient forests, *Oxalis acetosella*.

Besides their names, what do these diverse plants - *Rumex*, *Hibiscus*, and *Oxalis* - have in common? They are all most emphatically sour on the tongue, as tart as lemons! And "sorrel", coming from both the French word "surele" and the Germanic word "sur", means - you guessed it - "sour"! Through different linguistic channels, these plants of unrelated families have all come to have the same name.

According to **Pliny the Elder**, Roman soldiers on long hot marches sucked the leaves of sorrel to take the edge off their thirst. This may have given the culinary sorrel its name *Rumex*, from "rumo", meaning "to suck". The additional epithets *acetosa* and *acetosella* refer to its sour taste.

Similarly, *Oxalis* is derived from the Greek word for sour, sharp, or acidic, "oxys". The extreme sourness of the native wood sorrel of Britain is emphasized by adding the descriptor *acetosella*. **John Gerard** explains it this way in his 1597 *Great Herball, or Historie of Plantes* - "...the word oxys in Greek doth not only signify the leaf, but the savour and tartness, which by a figure drawn from the sharpness of knives' edges is therefore called sharp: for oxys xymes signifieth a sharp or sour juice which pierceth the tongue like a sharp knife."

I'm guessing, based on its appearance, that the pink wood sorrel growing in my yard is *Oxalis debilis*, a non-native brought from tropical America as an ornamental plant and now "naturalized" throughout the southeastern United States. While all the pink wood sorrel I've seen in the Houston area seems well-behaved and certainly not the least bit aggressive, others report that it has taken over their planting beds and lawns and is difficult to eradicate.

To me, the spontaneous appearance of the gorgeous pink/violet flowers is a confirmation of the generosity of nature, of the reality of grace. If it gets too rambunctious, I'll just pick some and eat it! That's what I do with most of my weeds.



Yellow Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis stricta*), left, photo credit [Ansel Oommen, Bugwood.org](https://www.bugwood.org/)
O. stricta fruit capsule, right, photo credit André De Kesel



There's another oxalis in my yard that's not so popular, though - *O. stricta* may be native, but it's a real problem in gardens, agricultural fields, greenhouses, and lawns. I selected the photo above, from invasive.org, because with the ID Number, it looks like the mugshot it is!

Yellow wood sorrel is a menace to horticulturists due to its prolific seed production, as a single plant may produce up to 5,000 seeds in a year. Pressure within the ripening seed pod builds up to the point of "explosion". When the capsule finally splits open, the seeds can be catapulted up to 16 feet from the parent plant!

On the bright side, though, these seeds pods are delicious - tangy, lemony, and refreshing (I know - I tried some!). The leaves are also much tastier than those of the pink sorrel. I did clean up a little patch where the "weedy" sorrel had taken over, and for the sake of "research", made a "wild tea" from the stems, leaves, and flowers. It wasn't as flavorful as lemonade, but not too bad for a weed!

The wood sorrel with the most charm is *Oxalis acetosella*, a luminous jewel of the springtime forest floor in Britain. The dainty flowers are called "fairy bells", as they were thought to summon the fairies to their moonlight revels. The fairies' favorite woodland plant is also known as "sleeping beauty".



The delicate bell-shaped blossoms of wood sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) appear during April and May.

Photo from <https://www.thevalleycornwall.co.uk/news/9-spring-flowers-to-see-in-cornwall/>

The crimson veins on the flowers were said to be the marks of Christ's blood.

Another particularly lovely name given to wood sorrel is "Alleluya". These joyful and innocent-appearing blossoms carpet the woodlands between Easter and Whitsun, a time when psalms ending with "Alleluia" were sung in churches.

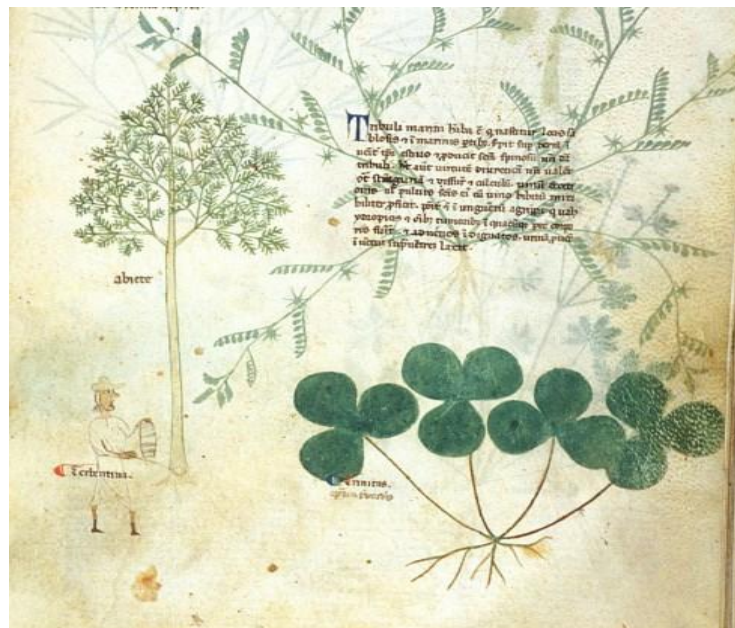
Many believe it was the beloved little wood sorrel, rather than the similarly trifoliate clover, that was the model for St. Patrick's inspired explanation of the Divine Trinity to the ancient Irish. Certainly the plant was well-known and well-loved by the monastic community.



A wood sorrel plant referenced as “Alleluia” in this detail from an Italian herbal, *Tractatus de Herbis* c. 1280–1310, BL MS. Egerton 747

However, as Donna Seger, along with many others, has pointed out, legends are not necessarily based on fact (<https://streetsofsalem.com/2014/03/17/stumped-by-shamrocks/>). The story of St. Patrick plucking a three-leaved sprig of a nearby plant to illustrate the Holy Trinity may be just that - a beautiful, edifying story that continues to have meaning today. The identity of the “True Shamrock” - St. Patrick’s symbolic plant - is similarly open to interpretation.

Here is how clover, the official “True Shamrock”, is depicted in the early Italian herbal, *Tractatus De Herbis*.



Tractatus de Herbis c. 1280–1310, BL MS. Egerton 747

The tiny label identifies the trifoliate plant as “Trinitas”. A scholar of Medieval theology could tell us whether or not “Trinitas” refers to the Holy Trinity, but I suspect that it does.



A slightly later Italian herbal, the *Compendium Salernitanum*, c.1350-1375, illustrates the tendency of confusion between clover and wood sorrel. Three of the plants illustrated below are identified by [The Morgan Library & Museum](#) as “clover”, but the scribe identified two as “trifolium” and one as “trinitas”. Is this significant? I don’t know. The trifoliums appear to have leaf and flower shapes characteristic of clovers, but the leaflets of the plant labelled “trinitas” are distinctly heart-shaped. And heart-shaped leaves are said to be characteristic of wood sorrel but not clover.



Compendium Salernitanum, Italy, possibly Venice, 1350-1375 M.873 fol. 89r

Clover plant inscribed TRINITAS.

Clover plant inscribed TRIFOLIUM.

Clover plant inscribed TRIFOLIUM ACUTUM.

Caltrops plant inscribed TRIBULI MARINI.

To add to the confusion, these similar appearing plants have nearly identical names - *seamróg* for young clover, and *seamsóg* for wood sorrel. A monk or a bard substituting an “r” for an “s” could have forevermore changed sorrel to clover in the sacred story. It could, of course, have been changed in the opposite direction, or even back and forth a few times.

Is the lovely wood sorrel the “True Shamrock”? It’s not for me to say. Besides, an enigmatic plant is sometimes more inspiring than a taxonomically correct one!

Not so, says **Lady Caroline Catharine Wilkinson** (1822-1881), the Welsh botanist and author of [Weeds And Wild Flowers: Their Uses, Legends, And Literature](#) (1858). “There is little ground for asserting that the ancient shamrock of Ireland was any other plant than the wood sorrel”, she writes, and she doesn’t seem the type to argue with. Furthermore,

Wood Sorrel is the original ‘Clover’ that is now known as the Shamrock and used as a kind of universal symbol for Ireland, the name comes from ‘seamróg’ and it was a sacred plant of the Druids long before Saint Patrick came to Ireland. Saint Patrick picked one at Tara, where



he started his Irish mission and held it up as a symbol of the three Divine Persons or holy ghosts and how they came together to make a whole identity, this explaining the new religion of Christianity to the druids who were already so familiar with the plant.

Lady Wilkinson goes on to say that

even among the Druids it was an emblem of the mysterious Three in One, which they claimed as their own peculiar secret, and endeavored to illustrate in every possible particular of their worship. And their reverence for the plant was doubtless increased by the fact that each leaflet of the trifid leaf, is marked by a pale crescent, the emblem of the moon, and another of their sacred symbols.



Symbols of the mysterious Three-in-One - the triple spiral Newgrange triskele and the trefoil wood sorrel (Photo credit Otto Danby II)

Beyond its role in spiritual practice, wood sorrel has also been utilized for the health and benefit of the body. Various preparations of oxalis were prescribed to relieve nausea and diarrhea, reduce inflammation of the urinary tract, and for fevers. Many sources also describe the benefits of wood sorrel poultices and compresses to stanch bleeding, heal wounds, treat abscesses, and reduce swelling.

A conserve of wood sorrel, made by beating up the fresh leaves with three times their weight of sugar and orange peel, along with wood sorrel syrup and sorrel seeds, were ingredients in a London remedy for plague (<https://history.rcplondon.ac.uk/blog/cure-plague>):

Take Conserve of Red-Roses, Conserve of Wood-Sorrel, of each two ounces, Conserves of Borage, of Sage-flowers, of each six drams, Bole-Armoniack, shavings of Harts-horn, Sorrel-seeds, of each two drams, yellow or white Saunders half a dram, Saffron one scruple, Syrupe of Wood-Sorrel, enough to make it a moist Electuary; mix them well, take so much as a Chestnut at a time, once or twice a day, as you shall find cause. [From: "Certaine necessary directions, as well for the cure of the plague, as for preventing the infection: with many easie medicines of small charge, very profitable to his Majesties subjects", published May, 1665.]

Sadly, despite the best efforts of the London College of Physicians, their plague remedy did little to control the disastrous epidemic.



Notice that the Apothecary Jar is labelled C:LVIVA, a version of “Alleyula”, one of the common early names for oxalis.



An English tin-glazed earthenware wet drug jar for conserve of wood sorrel, 1655. Labelled C:LVIVA as the wood sorrel it contained was also called Luiula (Alleyula)

Since wood sorrel is rich in Vitamin C, it would have been useful to treat scurvy, but some of the other therapeutic recommendations are rather suspect. The reliability of medical claims is also diminished since many of the early herbalists confused the sorrel of the *Rumex* genus with the sorrel of the *Oxalis* genus.

We can be confident, though, when **Dr. James Duke**, in his 1992 *Handbook of Edible Weeds*, notes that the Native American Kiowa people chewed their native wood sorrel to alleviate thirst on long trips. Wood sorrel was also eaten by the Cherokee to alleviate mouth sores and a sore throat, by the Algonquin as an aphrodisiac, and by the Iroquois to minimize cramps, fever and nausea.

Dr. Duke also relates that the Potawatomi cooked it with sugar to make a dessert. Actually, all parts of wood sorrel, including its leaves, flowers, seed pods, and tubers, are edible.



Oxalis leaves, flowers, seed pods, and tubers - all edible!
Photo credits Jennifer May, Beppe Di Gregorio and BT Wursten



In Henry VIII's time this plant was held in great repute as a pot-herb, but after the introduction of French Sorrel, with its large succulent leaves, it lost favor among the elite. I was also interested to read that the leaves of wood sorrel can be used as a curdling agent in cheese-making.

With my large backyard supply, I have been experimenting with sorrel as an ingredient - the steeped infusion, as I mentioned, as a handy snack while gardening, added as an accent into mixed green salads, in green drinks, and as a beautiful garnish.

Note: Wood sorrel is high in oxalic acid, which can be considered toxic if consumed in large quantities. To put it into perspective, though, many domesticated vegetables, including spinach, Swiss chard, and broccoli, and herbs such as purslane, parsley, and chives, also contain oxalic acid. Oxalic acid is not a problem when consumed moderately, but people with gout, rheumatism, arthritis, and kidney stones should avoid it.

If you don't fall into any of those categories, I have collected a few ideas for how to use sorrel in your kitchen.

Starting with Cocktails...

Here's one called "O'Banion's Obligation", created by bartender **Gabriella Mlynarczyk** in honor of the "cad" by the same name in *Auntie Mame*. Hint: don't skimp on the festoons if you want to add a little drama into your own life!



O'Banion's Obligation

- 1 1/2 oz Irish whiskey
- 3/4 oz elderflower liqueur
- 3/4 oz wood sorrel cocchi americano (1 cup of wood sorrel leaves blended into 1 bottle of cocchi americano)
- 1/2 oz simple syrup
- 1/2 oz Meyer lemon juice
- 2 drops lime bitters
- 1 oz aguafaba (chickpea water, used instead of egg whites)

Add everything to your shaker and whip shake for 5 seconds with 1 small ice cube, this will aerate your aguafaba, add 4 more ice cubes and shake hard for a further 5-6 seconds, strain into a vessel of choice, a coupe or goblet works best, garnish with a single wood sorrel leaf or a garland depending on your desire for dramatic effect.

Photo credit: Patrick O'Brien-Smith

Recipe: <http://www.lalovingcup.com/tag/wood-sorrel/>



If you have a lot of sorrel in your garden, or just love botanical cocktails, you won't want to miss the recipe for Wood Sorrel & Apple Gin Smash at <https://www.moodymixologist.com/blog/3-garden-to-glass-botanical-gin-cocktails>. Even if you don't have wood sorrel, check out the website for the gorgeous photos and the inspiring floral and herbal cocktail creations.

On now to the soup course. From <https://mrsbarnes.com/spring-sorrel-soup/>, I recommend a creamy spring sorrel soup beautifully garnished with a delicate pink primrose.



Spring Sorrel Soup

- 1/4 cup wood sorrel leaves
- 2 yellow onions
- 3 potatoes
- 1 tablespoon vegan butter
- 1/2 cup blend of nettle and spinach. If you can't find nettle, use 1/2 cup dandelion greens
- 1.5 cups vegetable stock
- 1/4 cup sour cream
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Add in oat milk if you desire more liquid
- Primroses and fresh wood sorrel, or any other edible flower for garnish

1. Peel potatoes and quarter them. Boil or steam them until you can prick them through with a fork. Set aside.
2. Blanch dandelion greens to remove the bitterness. (To blanch, boil for a few minutes and immediately soak in ice water afterwards.)
3. Chop dandelion greens and add to a sauce pan with onions, butter, and other greens you are using. Sauté until onions turn translucent, about 5-10 minutes.
4. Add in the vegetable stock, sour cream, and potatoes, and simmer on low for 15 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste.
5. Use an immersion blender to purée the soup.
6. Garnish as desired.

There are so many wood sorrel salads, it was hard to choose one, but the one pictured below (<http://blog.jennifermay.com/2015/05/wood-sorrel-chive-flower-salad-recipe>) matches my laissez-faire cooking style.

Use your own imagination, but this is how Jennifer May prepared the salad:

For the salad: torn leaves of fresh young lettuce (I used red leaf), fresh dill, a big bunch of wood sorrel leaves & flowers, and since they were blooming, chive flowers

For the dressing: olive oil, aged white balsamic vinegar, a squeeze of fresh lemon juice, a teaspoon of fig preserves, a teaspoon of stone ground mustard, one pressed clove of garlic, a wee bit of diced red onion, salt.

Garnish: Toasted sunflower seeds and grated aged parmesan.



Fresh from the garden - Wood sorrel, young lettuce & chive flower salad,
photo and recipe by Jennifer May

For this main course of Hokkaido scallop cured with lime sugar, towering white radish, green strawberries, coriander, and wood sorrel, you'll either have to improvise, or travel to the Red Medicine Restaurant in Beverly Hills, CA:



This elegant entrée was photographed and posted
on Pinterest by a very lucky anonymous diner.



According to the diner, “The scallop was subtle and soft, the white radish crunchy and bitter, and my favorite part the ”lime sugar” floating on the vinegar sauce.” Too bad we have to enjoy this spectacular dish vicariously!

And finally, can a dessert “summon the fairies to their moonlight revels”? If any dessert could, it would be this one - fresh-as-the-forest-in-springtime Wood Sorrel Cream Tarts from Gather Victoria <https://gathervictoria.com/2019/06/04/wood-sorrel-mini-cream-tarts-wild-food-treats/>):



Don't forget to invite the fairies and wood sprites!
Photo and recipe by [Danielle Prohom Olson](#)

Wood Sorrel Cream Tarts

Ingredients

- 2 cups wood sorrel
- 1 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup full-fat Greek yogurt
- 1 cup graham cracker crumbs
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1/2 tsp. ground cardamom
- 1/2 tsp. salt



Directions

- Remove stems from your wood sorrel leaves. Place in a food processor with sugar, then blend thoroughly.
- Remove sugar and place in a bowl with sour cream & yogurt. (Save about 2 tablespoons of sugar for garnish.)
- Line a sieve with cheesecloth and put in your mixture.
- Place the sieve in the fridge overnight, with a bowl underneath, to drain.

Crust

- Preheat oven to 350 F.
- Melt butter on low heat. Mix melted butter, ground cardamom into graham cracker crumbs. Blend well.
- Press *firmly* into mini-cupcakes tins to form tarts. Bake for 20 minutes. Cool.

Tart Assembly

- Remove your drained wood sorrel cream from the sieve. Dollop about a tablespoon in each tart shell. Sprinkle with wood sorrel sugar.
- Ready to serve!

Whether you call wood sorrel “Alleluya”, the “True Shamrock”, or “Fairy Bells”, please welcome this legendary plant into your garden. Share its rich and varied folklore and historic medicinal uses with your friends, and then, for fun, set off an explosive seedpod and offer them a leaf for a snack! ■

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.

