



The Herb Age



DECEMBER 2020

NO 424



"Lurking in Melbourne gardens is a plethora of herbs that are good for you"
Jan Illingworth

THE HERB SOCIETY OF VICTORIA INC

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www.herbsocietyvic.org.au

www.facebook.com/herbsocietyvic/

Meetup group: www.meetup.com/Herb-Society-of-Victoria/

AIMS OF THE SOCIETY

- ☼ To act as a forum for all persons interested in herbs for their mutual benefit and fellowship.
- ☼ To further the education of the public in the use, value and growing of herbs.
- ☼ To promote and encourage the organic growing of herbal plants.

Patron: Penny Woodward

HSOV COMMITTEE

| | |
|--|---------------------|
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HSOV MEETINGS

General meeting

is on the first Thursday of every month, from February to December, open 7.00pm for 7.30pm start.

At: Room MB10 Main Building. Burnley Horticultural College campus, 500 Yarra Blvd Richmond MelRef: 45 A12

Next Meetings: See Page 4

The Hills Branch

meets on the third Wednesday of the month from February to November at 7.45pm at various locations.

Volunteers Welcome for Tussie Mussie Making

Tussie Mussie posies are made by HSOV members at a market stall to support the Collingwood Children's farm.

On the mornings of the Second Saturday of the month at the Collingwood Children's Farm Market, St Heliers Street, Abbotsford. MelRef 44 G5.

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|--------------------------|--------------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|---------|
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THE HERB AGE

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Herb Society of Victoria*

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- ✿ April/May
- ✿ June/July
- ✿ August/September
- ✿ October/November
- ✿ December

Members' original
contributions are warmly
welcomed.

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THE HERB AGE

DECEMBER 2020

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Cover Pic and Quote.

Common Sage, *Salvia officinalis* is all its blooming glory. Photos and quote are from our very own committee member, Naturopath and fountain of knowledge, Jan Illingworth from her talk on 'Antivirals in the Garden'. For those who missed the talk on zoom in our November meeting, her article is on page 8. And below is another hint with Lemon Balm, *Melissa officinalis*, also from her garden.





Our December Picnic Meeting

Thursday 3rd December, 2020

WELCOME BACK PICNIC AND GARDEN VISIT

When: From 6pm

Where: Fritsch Holzer Park, Rose St, East Hawthorn.

Come in from the Rose St entrance near the carpark and meet at the seats and tables, near the toilets.

Parking: There is limited car parking on Rose Street near the facilities.

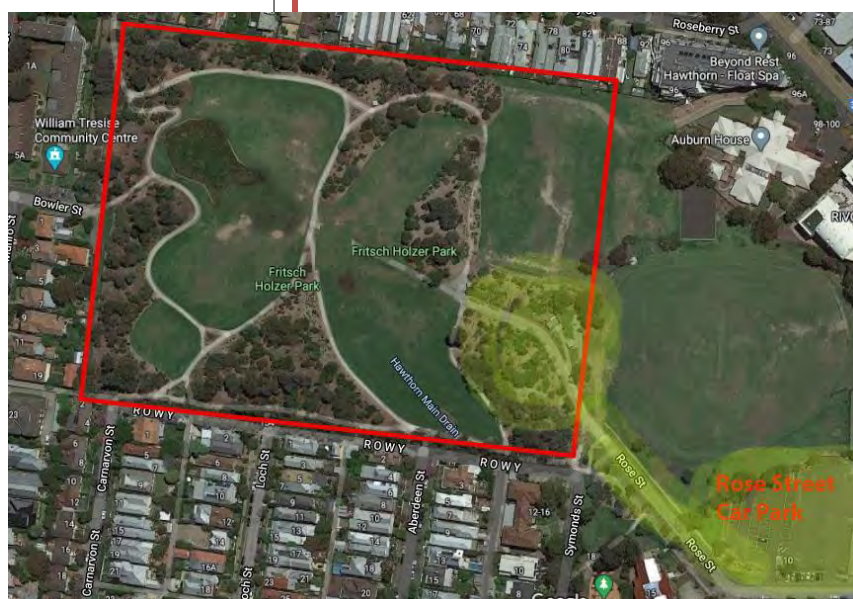
What to bring: Your own food and drink (no sharing please).

A fold up chair would also be a good idea. Maybe your four legged friend as this is a dog friendly park, where dogs are allowed off the lead.

Herbs for Sale: A limited number of well-established herbs from March meeting will be available for sale, so be ready to snap them up.

Afterwards: Visit Camberwell Community Garden

After dinner, Carmen Hollway has offered to take members to the Camberwell Community Garden where she has a plot. It is just a short walk away in Riversdale Road.



At long last, we can meet in person, within safe guidelines. Of course, please wear masks when not eating or drinking and practice social distancing. At the time of going to print, Victoria's re-opening road map is in step 3, which limits outdoor gatherings in a public place to up to 10 people. With numbers staying low, we are hoping that more will be able to meet together by early December, but we may need to split into sub-groups. We will provide hand sanitiser and will need to record all attendees' names and contact.

The Fritsch Holzer Park, features Australian native plants, was chosen as it is easily accessible with adequate parking in Rose Street and some picnic tables, as well as toilet facilities.

President's Annual Report

I cannot believe I am writing the last report for this year. I hope you have all been able to stay safe and well during this incredible year. 2020 has been so strange and difficult; a year that has both dragged and flown and like most people, I will be glad to see the end of it.

Of course, there's no denying the elephant in the room, the main influence of this year has been COVID 19, where the health and safety of the community has been the highest priority. As we faced lockdown and physical isolation to reduce the impacts of the virus, it also severely impacted the ability of groups like HSOV to hold meetings.

We started 2020 with our picnic meeting in February in Burnley Gardens, as usual. But unusually, the Sugar Gum table and chairs had just been oiled. While it had dried sufficiently and they were usable, it presented an ethical dilemma as it had been cordoned off not for use. Some chose not to use it, while others went ahead. And I showed my true Libran traits by vacillating between the two. Still, it was a lovely summer evening and for those who stayed on, we had an interesting talk from Robin Calabrese (in full flight, right) as the sun set over the trees. Who would have thought that Mount Macedon's ancient volcanic flow had reached to Burnley?



Walks and lunches, organised by Graham Ellis (left with Jill Bryant at the picnic) in February and March went ahead as planned, although by March, the news of the virus was concerning. At our March meeting, June Valentine (pictured below and AKA Chili Spice on the night) enthralled us with an entertaining tour of the world of Spices. We also had a fresh stock of herbs for sale, expecting to be able to sell the remainder at the April meeting, but things changed very quickly.

As the first lockdown hit Melbourne, we had to cancel April and May meetings. The Herb Conference, which was to be held in October this year, was postponed for 12 months. The University of Melbourne, Burnley campus where our meetings are held, closed its doors. As the virus and lockdown continued, the cancellation of June, July and August meetings followed. A temporary reprieve to Stage 3 in the middle of that gave us hopes for an outdoor meeting in September, which were quickly dashed.

Our committee still held meetings, connecting from home, using various ways and after much trial and error, found Zoom to be the most successful. And so, October and November general meetings were held via Zoom. It has been a rather big learning curve for the committee, but worth it, as we've been able to see some of our members via laptop, iPad or smart phone.



For those who were not able to make it, we had mini talks and maxi-mini talks (a bit more than a mini ☺) followed by a 'show and tell' style catch up. One of the benefits of zoom meetings from home is that you can grab work you are doing in the next room or a pot from out in the garden and show it quite easily. It allowed more interaction, with some people joining in 'show and tell' on the spur of the moment.

Usually, by this time of the year, our AGM has been run and a new President would have normally taken the reigns by now. Regulatory requirements for an incorporated organisation like ours, are to have the Annual General Meeting completed and lodged by the end of December. However, we can and will request a 3 month extension and are now planning to have the AGM in March 2021, where we hope we can meet person with more numbers.

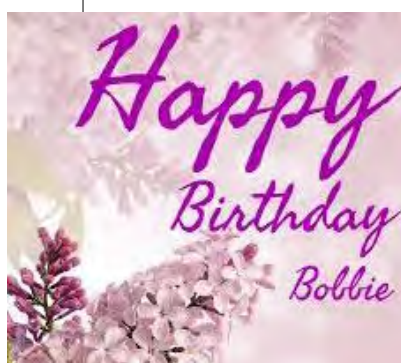
It looks hopeful that we are over the worst here and life can start to settle back to normal. Once again, a very big thankyou to members who are health care workers, carers and volunteers to help the community during this year. And thank you to those who made the effort to stay in contact with other members and contributed at our Zoom meetings or to the Herb Age. Many thanks too, to our committee for your support and working together to overcome unexpected challenges this year has thrown up.

As we approach the end of 2020, we seem to have come full circle and we are finishing with a picnic for our December meeting. One of the unexpected joys of this year has been rediscovering the local park and the rise of picnics. This will be the first chance to see other in person (within a safe way of course) for many months and before the Christmas break.

In the last couple of weeks, as stores have opened up, hubby and I went to Garden World to grab a bit of colour for the garden. Gardeners have clearly been looking forward to getting out to the nursery and revamping the garden. I am not exaggerating, when I say the shelves were nearly stripped bare! Many of the plant stands were empty or close to it! But there may be no need to head to the nursery. June has done an amazing job of nursing the herbs from the March meeting over winter, and repotting a few into terra cotta. This means we will have Herbs for sale and ready to be snapped at the December meeting. And you definitely know they are very hardy!

Hopefully, I will see you at the December picnic, but if not, Seasons Greeting to everyone to enjoy time together with your friends and family. And most of all, very best wishes for a brighter and better 2021.

Meridith Hutchinson, President



Happy Birthdays

They say never ask a lady her age, but a little bird has told me that we have a have two member s who have celebrated birthdays in November with rather large numbers.

Bobby Rhine was 96 years and Constance Tucker turned 99 years young. Happy birthday Constance and Bobby and many happy returns from all your friends at the Herb Society.



Monthly Outings News

With regret I have chosen to stop organising the monthly outings for the Herb Society. Before that virus stopped nearly everything I had organised about 50 different trips around Melbourne over four years. We also managed a visit to the Marilyn Munroe exhibition at Bendigo and to the new Geelong Library. By doing the research I have learnt much more about points of interest within our great city. However it has been getting harder to provide the appropriate variety and maintain some sort of herbal connection.

It would be wonderful if someone were prepared to take on this role. He or she will come with different thoughts and priorities for visits.

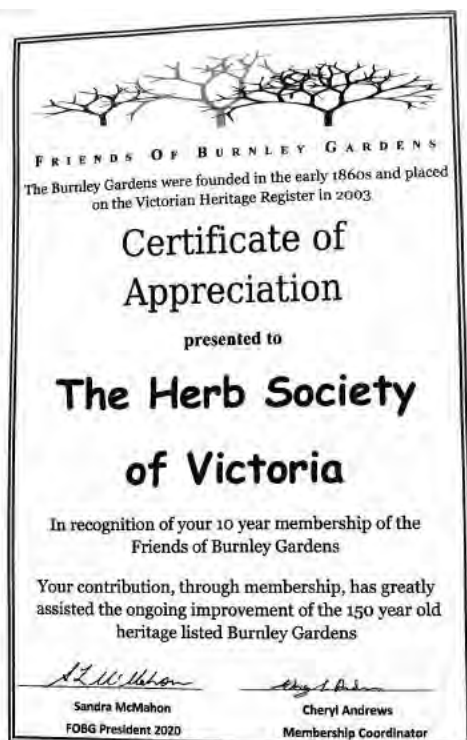
Graham Ellis

President's Note.

On behalf of all members and friends, I'd like to express our gratitude to Graham for the work he has put into researching, booking and writing up these days out. They have been a source of great enjoyment for everyone who attended, like those pictured at the Herb Garden tour late last year. I hope that someone else does take on organising a day or two or more out, so Graham can have the chance to simply attend and enjoy! A very BIG THANK YOU Graham.



FOBG Friends



This certificate of Appreciation has been received from the Friends of Burnley Gardens since our last newsletter.

The Herb Society of Victoria has had a long relationship with the Friends of Burnley Gardens. Just a reminder that we do have a reciprocal membership with FOBG which entitles, HSOV members to FOBG member discounts at meetings, talks and workshops.

The friends are holding some zoom events as well and will have events as things open up. It is well worth considering attending one of their events. Take a look under their website: www.fobg.org.au

Antivirals in your Garden



Lurking in Melbourne gardens is a plethora of herbs that are good for you. In these times we are after antivirals and the Labiatae family are some of the easiest and best, which includes; basil, lemon balm, marjoram, mint, oregano, thyme (pictured below), rosemary, sage & the savouries. All easily grown in ground or pots to be picked as needed, either fresh or dried for cooking and medicine.

Full of antioxidants, flavonoids and essential oils that are antimicrobial, make them the perfect herb for any infection and reduced immunity. They are able to dissolve the lipid the pathogen to cause the internal structures to leak out. All labiatae herbs are antiviral to some extent, with the Holy Basil or Tulsi (pictured left) having much research on it to show it to be very powerful against many bacteria and viruses.

Summer Savoury & Sweet Basil is the only two labiatae that are annuals and very good with tomato and in pesto, while the more potent Holy Basil is a perennial in tropical conditions and its strong flavour make it a better tea. Grows in Melbourne, if it is not subjected to the winter colds and frost.

Mints are really good for cooling on those hot days or taken in cases of fever. Research has shown that essential oil of Peppermint (pictured next page) hinders the herpes and HIV virus from entering the cells, which is where the virus causes havoc.

Collect the aerial parts to either dry or use fresh by adding a dried tablespoon or handful of fresh to a teapot. To make mixed herbs; combine in equal parts any/all of the dried labiatae herbs with lesser quantities of Tulsi, Rosemary & Sage (too strong a taste), mix in the same amount of dried Parsley. Cook in a tablespoon to any savoury dish.



Calendula (pictured left) is an easy to grow and cheerful garden filler, it is also an antipathogen including herpes. Collect the open flowers after the dew has dried. Let dry on calico in an airy, dark place before throwing 6 or so flowers into a cup of boiling water. Best combined with a handful of Peppermint and Lemon Balm made into a cup which one should drink at the first sign of cold sore or shingles and dab a soaked cotton ball on the pustules. Do this up to 4 times in a day.

Cumquat peel has had good research on its antiviral action, including COVID. In fact most citrus peel and grapefruit seed (GSE) appear in research to be very potent antimicrobials. Stew the peel for 10 minutes to extract constituents to drink as a tea.

Honeysuckle is a robust climber that does well in Melbourne. Pick the flower buds before bursting for a nice cup of tea or buy from Asian Grocers in the tea section; the package is shown on the next page. An affinity in Chinese Medicine for lungs and any colds or flu, Honeysuckle has shown research to reduce all corona viruses including COVID by dissolving the outside lipid layer to cause the cytoplasm to pour out. It reduced the infection from 17 days to 3.8 days to show negative virus results.

Antiviral tea; simmer 2 chopped Cumquats for 10 minutes, turn off, add a tablespoon each of Honeysuckle and Calendula flowers and Mint and/or Lemon Balm. Steep for 10 minutes. Can be sweetened with Manuka honey. Have a cup as soon as cold/flu signs occur. Drink a cup every 4 hours until symptoms reduce.

Back in the kitchen, there is a list of culinary spices that have been shown to be antiviral including allspice, clove, cinnamon and mace, which can be all made into chai: boil in a litre of water; 5 cardamoms & cloves with a stick of cinnamon for 10 minutes add a tablespoon of ginger and or turmeric and strong black tea, turn off to steep for 5 minutes before adding honey as desired and milk/ghee or soy. Drink when wanting a warming tonic.



Both garlic and ginger are powerful antivirals, as well as antioxidants that should be eaten daily. Why not make a nice curry with the addition of the immune packed turmeric. Nice Curry: heat up vegetable or peanut oil (high heat level), fry all the C spices; tablespoon each of coriander, cumin seeds, 6 cardamom, 6 cloves & stick cinnamon until popping. Add a big chopped onion and preferred meat, any vegetables, soaked overnight beans or chickpeas, lentils or fish if using, totalling 3 cups. Add in 2 chopped tomatoes, a couple of chopped garlic cloves and knob of ginger. Combine to taste; pepper, mixed herbs, salt, a tablespoon of turmeric and chili if using. Mix in a tin of coconut cream until simmering or instead, one could add a cup of plain yoghurt after the vegetables cooked. Serve with rice, preferable brown.



Another simple remedy for anything that is wrong with you, is Tea, especially Green Tea. Full of antioxidants and has had some positive testing against viruses, taking just 4 cups a day. It didn't seem to matter if it was a teabag, but I would suggest that loose is better. Why not throw in some labiataes while you're at it.

Immunity is very important in any health situation. One would not take any treatments without first assisting the immune system. Immune stimulating herbs include Astragalus, Androgaphis and of course Echinacea which is easy enough taken as a supplement. Products high in antioxidant such as fish oils, vitamins especially C, and minerals including Zinc.

To summarise; at the first sign of flu symptoms, have a cup of virus tea, take Echinacea, Vitamin C (maximum dose), fish oils & multi minerals. Rest, take in fresh air and sunshine and eat wholesome foods. Good Health.

Jan Illingworth

Ed note: Thanks so much Jan. This is Jan's maxi talk from our November meeting. Jan is a qualified Naturopath and our committee member. It was a great talk; very relevant and informative and she has kindly shared it above. Jan suggested teas are the easiest and therefore the best way to use the herbs. Although, interesting to see cumquat peel is beneficial, as I got a supply of cumquats from a neighbour, which I have brandied; just to preserve them and for medicinal purposes of course! All jokes aside, it was great to see herbs I have in the garden and love to use as tea have research behind them to show that are really helping.

We're Zooming!

We had our first e-meeting in October using Zoom and a follow up in November. Many of you will have received an email invitation to it. While it has been a bit strange and has taken some getting used to, it has been a great way for us to keep connected and continue to learn about the world of herbs.



About The Herb Society Of Victoria

The Herb Society of Victoria is an enjoyable, non-competitive group with passionate members who love sharing their vast knowledge of all things herbal and keep non-learning from the varied guest speakers of our meetings.



In both meetings, we had around 20 participants and used a format similar to our in person meetings. We started with a welcome, guidelines and HSOV news. Then we had our featured talks; ranging from mini talks of a few minutes to maxi talks of about 20 minutes. This was followed by a chance for a social catch up, through the means of a 'show and tell', to introduce others to a herb or spice from the garden, ask a herbie question or show a herb related item.

October meeting had 3 mini talks, starting off with June's talk on Angelica. June was the birthday girl on the night and provided her talk before rushing off to a zoom meeting with her family. One benefit of at home meetings is flexibility and an easy commute! Angelica, one of the umble herbs, has Anise flavoured stems which can be stewed with sour fruit to add sweetness without using sugar.

Next I showed the progress of the new website, to be launched shortly. This will keep the same URL as the existing one ie: <http://herbsocietyvic.org.au/>. It has sections for Events, resources and a members only section which will use your email address to login, for member only items, like The Herb Age. Here are a few screenshots to give you an idea of the look and feel.

Then Jill provided a talk on one of the many unusual herbs in her garden, Rock Samphire, *Crithmum maritimum* (pictured right). If you have been keeping up with the cooking shows, Samphire is one of the latest fashion ingredients with Heston Blumenthal being among its fan base. Of course it has been used for millennia and has a salty taste.

It often goes well with egg or seafood dishes or can be pickled or steamed briefly to be used in salads. It is high in nutrients and is good as a tea to relief the sensation after overeating. Jill bought hers at a Herb Society meeting and it has self seeded easily.



In our October 'show and tell' included Marie Revill showing us her amazing dying on paper that she has been developing during lockdown. The technique is called 'echo dying' and she has used gum leaves with different fixatives, like vinegar, rust and copper to great effect.

Beverley showed us one of her favourite herbs 'Chickweed'. We could see the detail on the screen of the hairs on the stem. With chickweed, the hairs grows one side of the stem to a leaf joint, then swaps over the other side of the stem to the next leaf joint. Nature really does diversity well, even in the simplest of plants. Of course it is packed with vitamins and nutrients too.

November meeting had two maxi- talks. Jan Illingworth provided a packed power point presentation on 'Antivirals in your garden'. Beverly Narandja provided an equally comprehensive talk on Elder flower, which appear as separate articles in this Herb Age.

Our 'Show and Tell' included a new face to the group, Shai, from our Meetup page, who grows micro herbs in his apartment. He had a mini hothouse, about 1.5 metres long setup with dozens of small herbs. He grows them in 'coconut soil', so there is no dirt and therefore no soil disease. The pots are made from sugar cane fibre, so everything is very eco-friendly. He popped some wheat grass from out of the pot to show how well the roots were developed and how clean they were. Unfortunately we lost connection with Shai just as he was able to show the range of micro herbs, but I have been in touch and hoping he will give us a talk on that in the future.

Cumquat peel has had good research on its antiviral action, including COVID. In fact most citrus peel and grapefruit seed (GSE) appear in research to be very potent antimicrobials. Stew the peel for 10 minutes to extract the constituents. Drink with honey.



So they were really interesting meetings and a great way to catch up. Technology is a wonderful thing and there are certainly many benefits, but I am looking forward to seeing you in person. ☺

Meridith Hutchinson

Get Well Soon Colline

Many of you will be aware that our dear friend and long-time HSOV contributor, Colline Muir, had a stroke during a recent operation and is now recovering in a rehabilitation hospital.

Since no-one has been able to visit during lockdown to take a Tussie Mussie, we sent her flowers on behalf of the Herb Society. I know some of you have already reached to say hello, including Jill who advised Colline has recently moved to a different room.



If you would like to send her a card, please send to:
Room 14.3 Ellerslie Ward.
St George's Rehabilitation Hospital
283 Cotham Road, Kew VIC 310

Or call her directly, speaking loudly and slowly as she is near the nurses station. It would be best to call outside visiting hours (at time of sending this to the printers they are limited to 3-7pm), so it doesn't clash with family visits.

As a follow up, we also received a note from Colline to say thank you for the flowers.

Dear everyone,

Thank you for the beautiful flowers and the good wishes came with them. I miss you all and look forward to meetings again before long.

I also look forward to restored writing, walking and other skills I took for granted before the stroke.

*All the best to you all and Season Greetings. Looking forward to many happy meetings in the New Year,
Colline.*

Elderflower

During the November zoom meeting, Beverly Narandja presented a talk on Elderflower. The Elder (*Sambucus*) is a small tree and you can harvest the flower heads to make drinks, tea, sweets, add to jam or cooking.



The common Elderflower head is a cluster of small white flowers. Jill also advised that she has a variety that has purple leaves and pink flowers, which the butterflies are finding extremely attractive, as does she!

The flowers can be used fresh, preferably, or can be dried. She recommends using within a few days at the most of picking them and storing in an air tight container in the fridge. Actually to test the idea, she did have some in her fridge in an air tight container that had been there for 3 weeks. The ones underneath that had got a little wet were no good, but the flower head sitting on top was still fresh and perfectly usable.

Elderflowers become the deep purple Elderberries, also used in drinks etc, but they require a cooler climate than Melbourne to get good fruit. Around the Daylesford area where she once lived, the Elders are more likely to berry. However, you can still enjoy the flowers in Melbourne and the warmer parts of Victoria. Elderflowers do have medicinal properties, which Beverley recommended a number of books to research more, some of which are listed below.

Elderflower Champagne is easy to make with the heads of the flowers, water, sugar, lemon slices and wine vinegar. Mix them together and leave for 2 to 3 days. Strain the mixture and fill in bottles. She has read it is best to leave the lids slightly ajar and then tighten a few days before dinking so they build a little fizz but not too much to explode. Elderflower fitters can be made by dipping the flowers heads into a standard batter and frying.

Beverley showed us how she propagates the plants and she had a few already in a pot that she had propagated a few weeks earlier to show us how the roots had developed. The best time is early spring but it propagates well so you can do it other times. Her tip is to break off the 'cutting' at a heel where on the stalk. Take off most of the leaves and dip the stalk with the heel in honey or propagating compound. Put 6 to 8 pieces in a pot with compost in the bottom and propagating sand.

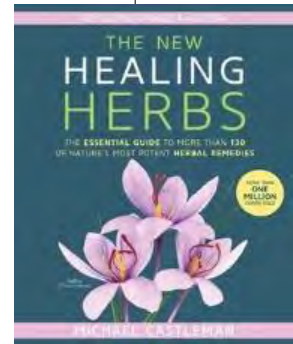
Thanks Beverley for a very informative and interesting talk. Beverley recommends good books on the subject are:

- ☀ 'The organic herb garden' by Graham Clarke
- ☀ 'A country cup: Old and new recipes for drinks of all kinds made from wild plants and herbs' by Wilma Paterson
- ☀ 'An Australian Herbal' by Penny Woodward
- ☀ 'Grow your own Remedies' by Isabel Shippard.

Meridith Hutchinson

Book Review: *The New Healing Herbs*

An extensive compilation of 135 herbs which Michael Castleman considers the cream, after 30 plus years of research, usage and growing. Each herb has a sketch, history, healing properties, preparation, dosage and gardening.



It is mostly written for the basic home healer, but many professionals will find interesting points on each herb and some finer points on how to prepare and dispense the herb. Unfortunately, for the academic, it only has a bibliography and no research references, but it does have a quick guide of the complaint with the herbs to use. Overall, this book was easy to read and understand; it would be helpful in anyone's medical chest.

Jan Wllingworth

The New Healing Herbs by Michael Castleman
Pub: 2010; Rodale, New York.

Ed Note: A quick web search reveals this book is in its 4th edition with over 1 million copies sold. You should be able to easily find it at good book stores.



Some Garden Joys

Just a few items from my garden. Firstly the top picture is a Camelia which I call "How's your father" as this bright red flower appeared on a pink bush.

I'm not sure what the dogwood like flowers are, but it is a mass. If anyone can tell me what it is, that would be wonderful.

Lastly, my worm is bigger than your worm! Any ideas about how this massive fella got to my garden in Northcote! I think it may have been bored with Gippsland and sort the bright lights! ☺

Jan Wllingworth

What Spice am I?

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 5 points | In medieval times, my industry was centered in Tuscany, Italy. |
| 4 points | Harvesting of me is a delicate job, always done by hand. |
| 3 points | In cooking, I offer an intense yellow colour and exquisite flavour. |
| 2 points | Stigmas from <i>Crocus sativus</i> are dried to make me. |
| 1 point | I am the worst most expensive spice. |

I am _ _ _ _ _

Answer page 15



Purslane

Portulaca oleracea L.

Summer is nearly upon us so let's focus on a herb that can withstand the summer heat. While precious plants wilt and expire, vagabonds of unweeded places rejoice in the heat, their long roots tapping deep cool moisture. Many of them are useful herbs, too; dandelions, fat hen, mallow, clovers, flatweed, petty spurge (not for eating), shepherd's purse. Salvias and mints, too, wriggle under fences into lanes to join the wildlings, reminding me of the Lady who ran away from her Lord and Castle to join the Raggle-taggle Gipsys-O. Purslane is one of the wildlings, whose parsnip-like roots and succulent leaves store whatever moisture comes their way and whatever their searching roots find. Nature strips, garden beds, parks, cracks in pavements, anywhere the tiny seeds may lodge, purslane can find, even in drought years, just what it delights in.

Belonging to the family Portulacaceae, purslane is a pan-tropical plant, now almost cosmopolitan, being naturalised in many countries. It has been widely used since ancient times and so it has many names and many variations on its name, including pourcelaine (Old French), purcellaine, procelayne, pigweed, yellow portulaca, portulac, fatweed, little hogweed, mouse's ear, pusley, pussly, purselain, (last five American), verdolaga, glistrida, andrakles, (last two Greek), rigla (Arabic), munyeroo, thukouro (last two Aboriginal).

In Australia, both a native and an introduced form are widely spread, except in Tasmania. An annual plant, it has a stout rootstock, fleshy stems that may grow up to 15cm high or may lie prostrate as a ground cover. The succulent leaves are wider towards the tip, narrowing towards the base. The flowers are yellow, generally with five notched petals. The fruit is a capsule opening by a cap, or operculum, and contains numerous tiny, round, black seeds.

Like any widely distributed plant, purslane shows considerable genetic diversity. It comprises a species complex, on which a number of taxonomists have worked. Apparently they cannot agree on how to split up the species, as the one name still seems to cover all. An introduced form in southern Australia, whose small flowers open for only a short period in the morning, contrasts with the large, mounded plants, covering a metre or so, with buttercup sized, brilliant yellow, all-day flowers, found abundantly on sand hills of the arid interior.

Portulaca is the name by which the Romans knew purslane. It is derived from the words *portare* to carry, and *lac*, milk, referring to the milky sap. The specific name *oleracea*, pertaining to kitchen gardens, refers to its use as a potherb.

Purslane is said to have originated in Persia, where it was in use 2,000 years ago. It has been widely cultivated as a vegetable from earliest times wherever it occurs, especially as an antiscorbutic, valued by sailors. The leaves may be eaten raw or cooked. In Elizabethan England it was an important 'sallet' ingredient, and one of numerous plants that were pickled in salt and vinegar for winter use. Evelyn says that it is 'familiarily eaten alone with Oyl and Vinegar.' It is a traditional ingredient of some French and Middle Eastern dishes dressed with garlic, oil and lemon juice, and is commonly sold in the markets of Mexico. It may be dried for future use, the leaves eaten as a refreshing sandwich filling, or added to soups and stews.

To purslane was attributed anti-magic properties, useful for keeping a sleeper safe if strewn around the bed and as a cure for 'blastings by lightning or planets'. The old herbalists recommend purslane for treating haemorrhage, immoderate thirst, coughs, spongy gums and fastening teeth and, externally, for sores and other general symptoms of vitamin C deficiency.

Australian explorers made good use of the purslane they found in the dry inland. The eminent botanist- explorer Baron von Mueller wrote: 'We had almost daily occasion to praise the value of purslane ... we found it ... so agreeably acidulous as to use it for food without any preparation, and I have reason to attribute the continuance of our good health partly to the constant use of this plant.' The dying explorer W. J. Wills wrote in the final entry of his journal: '... but for the abundance of portulac [purslane] that we obtained on the journey, we should scarcely have returned to Cooper's Creek at all.'

Australian Aborigines used the green leaves and stems ground between stones to form a thick green mush, which was rolled into balls and eaten immediately, or dried and later reconstituted with water. They ground the seeds into flour to make a kind of damper. Maiden says that 'this seed must be highly nutritious for, during the season that it lasts, the natives get in splendid condition on it. The seeds are jet black and look like fine gun powder.' Von Mueller also wrote that: 'A native can gather many pounds weight of the seeds in a day.'

Prospero Alpini recounts that, in ancient Egypt, the poor ate purslane with yoghurt. In Coptic medicine it is still prescribed for inflamed eyes, skin diseases and for expelling worms.

Constituents of purslane include Vitamin C (700mg per 100g fresh plant); mucilage; saponin; potassium salts; oxalic acid; volatile oil; resins; organic acids, small amounts of alkaloids such as noradrenaline and dopamine; calcium oxalate and potassium nitrate in potentially toxic amounts: so the plant should only be eaten in moderation, which is a pity as it is also rich in omega-3 fatty acids.

The action is antiscorbutic, tonic, possibly anthelmintic, vasoconstrictor and diuretic, useful in treating genito-urinary complaints. It is used in Chinese medicine for similar conditions as well as for dysentery, insect and snake bites. It is particularly useful for skin conditions. If eaten by stock in large quantities it can cause oxalate poisoning.

It is a pity that the virtues of a plant so widely esteemed for so long should have been forgotten; perhaps because of its hardiness and ability to flourish without attention, it is now generally regarded only as a weed to be eradicated. However, there is resurgence of interest, as there are 211,000 purslane entries on the web! There is a commercial extract available for use in the manufacture of cosmetics and toiletries.

Propagation is by seed and cuttings. Purslane will readily self-sow, but the seed may also be sown and covered with a thin layer of fine soil. The plants may be harvested 6-8 weeks after sowing, when the branches may be cut to produce another crop. Many cultivars were developed in the past, only some of which survive today. Seeds have germinated after being buried for forty years.

Portulaca oleracea var *sativa* (L.) DC., Green purslane, kitchen-garden purslane, is a taller variety, growing to 45cm with fleshy leaves and stems, and less astringent to the taste. Grown in Europe but possibly developed in the Middle East, it is sold by the bunch in markets in Italy and France. A golden form of *P. sativa* has also survived and has horticultural potential. So don't pull out your purslane, eat it instead.

Colline Muir

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