

# The Herbarian

## *The Queen of May*



The hawthorn (*Crataegus*) is a genus of trees and shrubs which belong to the *Rosaceae* family of plants. Its prolific blooms in early spring, when most other trees are still budding, gave rise to its title as the 'Queen of May'.

Ritual and superstition surround the hawthorn; its branches were thought of as an emblem of hope, and carried by brides in ancient Greek weddings. It was held sacred to the Roman goddess Cardea, patroness of the door hinge (her powers were to prevent evil spirits from passing through doorways). In the Middle Ages, it was considered unlucky to cut the tree at any time except when in bloom. To some, it marked the gateway to the land of the faerie while to others, notably eastern Europeans, the wood of the hawthorn was said to be especially deadly to vampires and other such unnatural beasts.

The most famous story surrounding the hawthorn arises from Arthurian legend. The wizard Merlin was betrayed by his apprentice, Nimue, who entrapped him in that tree.

Hawthorn bears a red fruit after flowering, some species of which are edible and can be jammed or eaten out of hand like an apple. These were once referred to as 'pixie pears'. The wood of the hawthorn is rot-resistant; its hard wood was commonly used for tool handles and fence posts.

### HERB DAY 2012

May 12, 9a-4p

This year is not only the 40th anniversary of the Herb Capital title, but also the twentieth year in which there's been an herb festival in Gahanna.

Over 100 varieties of herbs and heirloom plants (from Circa Plants) will be for sale that day, and dozens of vendors with garden- and herb-themed items are ready to take their spots at Creekside.

**Volunteers** are welcome to participate in the sale, either in the center or assisting with herb sales. Currently, the center is looking for those with **afternoon** availabilities to help out. Additionally, the center could do with some **herbal goodies** to have on hand for sampling. Speak with Karan Wester at the center for additional information.

### Workshop Schedule for Herb Day

- 11a – Botany of the Rose  
Suzanne Lucas
- 12p – Herbs and the Media  
Dawn Combs
- 1p – Herbs in Folklore & Myth  
Wendy Winkler
- 2p – Dogs, Cats & Herbs  
Brooke Sackenheim

HERB OF THE MONTH: TARRAGON



*There are certain people  
Whom certain herbs  
The good digestion  
disturbs,  
Henry VIII  
Divorced Catherine of  
Aragon  
Because of her reckless  
use of tarragon.  
—Ogden Nash*

Tarragon (the French variety, *Artemisia dracunculus*) is a perennial culinary favorite which thrives in full sun and well-drained soil. While native to Eastern Europe and central Asia, it is traditionally

associated with French cuisine. It is an essential herbal component of the *fines herbes* of Mediterranean cooking, and is a standout ingredient in a Béarnaise sauce. Its distinctive licorice or anise flavor goes a long way; its potency ensures that only a small amount of tarragon is needed to impart its flavor.

Tarragon makes a fine flavoring for vinegars, fresh herb butters and mustards. When using it in cooking, add tarragon at the last moments as so it is heated only briefly.

Tarragon's name evolved from the French *esdrago*, further derived from the Latin for "little dragon". Ancient physicians using the Doctrine of Signatures believed that the plant's snakelike roots indicated that it would cure snakebite and would be useful as a dragon repellent.

MONTHLY MEETING TOPIC: HERBAL WEDDING FOLKLORE

Herbs have played an important part of large gatherings for centuries. They were strewn upon the floor and crushed underfoot to release their pleasing fragrance. Wreaths of bay, rosemary and myrtle adorned the heads of the victorious, and later, those to be wed. They symbolized virtues of the gods, or represented varied aspects of mundane life.

Medieval European brides carried chives and garlic to ward away evil spirits; Elizabethans carried bundles of rosemary, lest their prospective husbands forget they were to be married, and to ensure faithfulness. Gilded rosemary stems were handed to guests to remind them of the friendship which brought them together for the occasion. Pomanders of rose and rosemary – “kissing knots” – were suspended above the bridal table at the reception to bring love and good luck to all present.

Herbs encompass all aspects of life; they are the sustenance for the body and a cure for ailments. In incorporating herbal aspects into weddings and other life rituals, one takes advantage of the enduring traditions of their use throughout history.



SUB ROSA

*During the month of May (the 10th and 31st), Roman legions celebrated their fallen comrades with remembrance and tributes through a festival called the Rosalia. Each Roman military camp included a shrine (the saculum) in which the standards of the legion were kept, including its eagle or other flags and honors. An altar was placed before this building and, during the Rosalia, the standards and flags within were brought forth and laid across it. The standards were crowned with wreaths of red roses, and a supplication was made before them to give thanks to those who had died.*

*The act of laying the rose wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day echoes this ancient tradition.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Looking Forward to June:**

Everything's coming up roses for June as we continue our year-long study of the Rose. We'll be tasting rose-flavored foods and sharing recipes to try at home.

**Field Trip Opportunities**

*Field trips are open to both Herb Society members and to the general public. Additional fees and a minimum participation enrollment may be required.*

**June 9 (10a-2p)**

Mockingbird Meadows Herb and Honey Farm. Enjoy a tour of the gardens and grounds, recently designated a United Plant Savers Botanical Sanctuary and sample infused honeys. Lunch is included. *Fee: \$20 herb society member, \$30 resident, \$40 non-resident.*

**July 21 (9a-11a)**

Jorgensen Farms. Included is a tour of the farm (which has been certified organic since 2002), and lunch. *Fee: \$20 herb society member, \$30 resident, \$40 non-resident.*

**August 4 (10a-2p)**

Chadwick Arboretum & Learning Gardens. Located on the campus of the Ohio State University, the gardens serve as an educational environment for residents of central Ohio. A guided tour is included. *Fee: \$10 herb society member, \$15 resident, \$20 non-resident.*

**The Gahanna Herb Society now has a virtual home!**

<http://rosemary.iasis.net>

**Submissions Accepted!**

Would you like to write an article for an upcoming newsletter on your favorite herbal topic, or an experience you've recently had in the garden? E-mail it to [dionyza@gmail.com](mailto:dionyza@gmail.com).

GARDEN NOTES

**Hanging Baskets:**

Herbs will grow successfully in hanging baskets, so there's no need to be limited by space. While they need greater attention (thorough watering and fertilization – compost tea works well), the decorative aspects of hanging herb baskets, full of colors and scents and ready for kitchen use, make the extra effort worthwhile.

Herbs suitable for hanging baskets include: parsley, salad burnet, chives, marjoram, thymes, basil, and small specimens of tarragon. Edible flowers, such as nasturtiums or staked borage plants add even more impact and color.

Herbs which grow shrubby or top heavy (joe pye weed), or those that are climbers (hops) will not work well in baskets for obvious reasons.

**Theme Gardens:**

If a hanging garden isn't what you're looking for, consider creating a themed garden in a section of your yard. Some ideas to consider include:

- Everlasting Garden: include varieties that dry well and have long-lasting blooms such as lavender, artemisia, yarrow, rue and amaranth
- Tea Garden: include mints (potted, please!), and lemon-scented herbs (verbena, thyme, balm), basil, chamomile, fennel and stevia
- Dyers Garden: for those into fabric crafts, include queen of the meadow, golden marguerite, weld, goldenrod, madder, woad, tansy and soapwort
- Shakespearian Garden: English primrose, lavender, spearmint, rue, sweet violet, English daisy, common wormwood and hyssop

For more information and inspiration, visit the site for the National Herb Garden, which is sponsored by the Herb Society of America:

<http://www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/collections/herb.html>

Calendar

*All meetings begin at 6:30*

**May 12 -**

HERB DAY / Plant Sale

**June 12-**

How to Eat a Rose!

Herb of the Month: Mint

**June 15-17 -**

Creekside Blues & Jazz Festival

**July 4 -**

Freedom Festival,  
Gahanna Municipal Golf Course

**July 10 -**

George Washington's Table  
Herb of the Month: Basil

**August 14 -**

Herb of the Month: Dill

**Making Scents**

*Information from Judith Fitzimmon's Aromatherapy through the Seasons*

**Geranium**

*Pelargonium graveolens*

Geranium essential oil has a strong floral fragrance which blends well. It imparts a fresh and calming effect, revitalizing the spirit and mind. Its antiseptic and astringent properties are beneficial to the skin and hair.

Warning: geranium should not be used in any form during pregnancy. It should never be taken internally.

**Razor Burn Relief**

- 3 drops chamomile
- 5 drops geranium
- 5 drops lavender
- 3 drops lemon

Mix all the oils together. Put half of the blend into a quart of water and spritz the area to be shaved. Combine the other half with 2 tablespoons of a carrier oil to use to massage the area.