The Herbarian

OF SHAMROCKS AND SHILLELAGHS

May your blessings outnumber the Shamrocks that grow. And may trouble avoid you wherever you go.
- An Irish blessing

March brings with it the first glimpses of spring and a return to fresh shades of green – a welcome change from the ruddy brown bare branches of a winter landscape. Green certainly sets the tone for the month: the first Girl Scout troop was formed in March of 1912, and, of course, there's St. Patrick's Day. Shamrocks abound, spotted everywhere from store shelves and home decor to cookies and clothing.

While it is not the national symbol of Ireland (that honor goes to the harp), the shamrock is probably its most well-known symbol. The shamrock (Irish: *seamróg)* translates loosely as 'little clover'. Tradition holds that St. Patrick (who famously drove all snakes out of Ireland) used the plant to describe the Trinity as he Christianized the land in the sixth century. No historical record remains whether or not this was actually the case, but through this and other legends the Shamrock has firmly been associated with the Emerald Isle for centuries.

Clover is abundant in Ireland, especially *Trifolium repens*, the white clover, a member of the pea family used as a pasture crop almost worldwide. It is a perennial, low growing plant which bears leaves grouped into threes (*trifoilolate)* and white flowers atop long stems.

The native people of Ireland certainly knew of the plant's traditional uses; Gerard's Herbal (1597) records its use as a poultice to reduce swelling and inflammation. Culpeper (1652) recommended it as a good remedy for snakebite, either topically or by drinking a decoction of the leaf.

Perhaps Culpeper had a point. Irish folklore holds that snakes are never found in fields in which clover grows. And, of course, there are no snakes to be found today in Ireland. Whether this is due to St. Patrick or the humble shamrock, I leave to the gentle reader to decide.

Walking Softly While Carrying a Big Stick

Another common symbol associated with St. Patrick's Day, especially Irish-American celebrations, is the walking stick known as the *shillelagh*.

This walking stick was typically fashioned from either blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*, 'sloe') or oak (*Quercus)*, which was first coated with lard or butter and then placed up a chimney to cure and age. This process gives the *shillelagh* its blackened appearance.

Trifolium dubium, the lesser hop trefoil, generally acknowledged as the traditional Irish Shamrock.

HERB OF THE MONTH: ROSEMARY

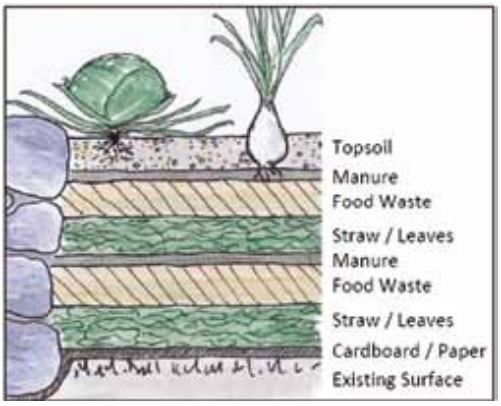
Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is a popular herb with a long, rich history. Rightly considered one of the top herbs to grow in a garden, its uses are numerous and go well beyond everyday culinary use.

In its native region, the Mediterranean, it is a shrub-like perennial plant; in Ohio's climate, it is considered a tender perennial, but usually treated as an annual and replanted every year outdoors, or kept in a pot for year-round use.

Rosemary has a strongly aromatic, warm and peppery scent that is slightly bitter or piney. It's an herb to use sparingly in recipes as different varieties of rosemary will have different taste strengths. Overall, its flavor is versatile and works well with poultry, red meat or fish, in breads or paired with citrus flavors.

Rosemary is essential to *herbes de Provence*, a blend of French culinary herbs otherwise laced with savory and lavender.

MONTHLY MEETING TOPIC: LASAGNA GARDENING



Lasagna gardening is a method by which a garden plot is created that is organic, earth-friendly and requires very little effort. By taking advantage of nature's way of creating good growing soil, one can easily duplicate the process and outcome.

Like creating a real lasagna, layers of material are placed atop one another and stacked. What happens, is that the layers of organic materials used will compost themselves over time, creating a rich humus for plants to grow in, and an abundance of garden-friendly earthworms to aerate the soil.

As if creating a compost heap, brown (carbon-rich; leaves, peat, shredded newspapers) and green (nitrogen-rich; vegetable scraps, garden trimmings, grass clippings, coffee grounds) layers are alternated and can be augmented with manure. The end result is a garden bed that has very few weeds, is water efficient, needs less fertilizer (you're planting in compost), and is easily worked. No digging!

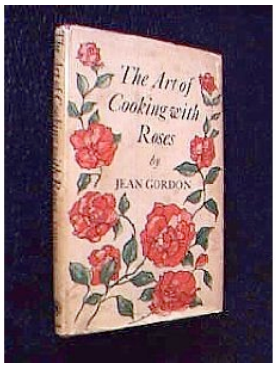
For more information, see:

Lasagna Gardening with Herbs, by Patricia Lanza

SUB ROSA

No one did more to popularize the rose in the early 1800s than the Empress Joséphine, wife of Napoleon Bonaparte. She attempted to grow every variety available in her garden at Malmaison, outside Paris. Between 1798 and 1814, Joséphine collected 250 rose specimens. Her collection was so highly acclaimed that even the Napoleonic Wars did not interfere; the British would allow plants destined for her gardens to pass through their blockades, and her head gardener was allowed unimpeded passage across the English Channel between the two warring nations.

LENDING LIBRARY REVIEW



The Art of Cooking with Roses

Jean Gordon

(c)1968, Walker Publishing Co.

This is an unusually detailed book of recipes and anecdotes about roses, collected from sources all over the world. Before writing this volume on the culinary uses of the rose, Ms. Gordon had penned Immortal Roses and The Pageant of the Rose. Drawing from her expertise in the field – she founded the Rose Museum in St. Augustine, Florida in 1956, as well as organized numerous rose exhibitions around the U.S. – she pairs anecdotes and stories regarding the rose as food with easy to follow recipes from around the world.

She continues her in-depth look at rose-flavored foods with applications of rose extract and syrups. Finally, Gordon recommends how to eat the petals themselves (either sugared or preserved as a jam), and the nutritious rose hips as well.

Overall, The Art of Cooking with Roses is a book with easy-to-follow recipes worth looking through, especially this year as we celebrate all aspects of the rose.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Gahanna Herb Society now has a virtual home!

http://www.iasis.net/rosemary

The website will serve as a resource by providing access to past and current newsletters and copies of handouts produced for meetings, as well as a searchable online database of OHEC's lending library. In lieu of the quirky Google mailing list, forums will soon be added for society members. Feedback is welcome!

Looking Forward to April:

Our study on the *Rose* will continue with Rose Propagation and Gardening Tips, by Doug Askew. The *Culinary Herb of the Month* is Parsley, and will be presented by Debi Balog.

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<at>gmail.com.

Calendar

All meetings begin at 6:30

March 24 -

Spring Walk at Gahanna Woods; free (registration required)

April 10 -

Spring Cleaning w/ Essential Oils

Herb of the Month: Parsley

April 21 -

Fairy Gardens & Leprechauns

2-3p (Sat.) $15/$20

May 8 -

Herb of the Month: Tarragon

Making Scents

Information from Judith Fitzimmon's Aromatherapy through the Seasons

Cedar

Cedar has a warm, musky balsamic fragrance that is long-lasting and quite effective in holding blends together. This earthy scent makes you feel solidly grounded and supported. [...] It has a calming, balancing effect on your mental and emotional state.

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

Quiet-time Spray

One drop each of: Cedar, Lavender, Lemon and Orange essential oils into a cup of water. Mix and shake well.

Use as a room spray to help calm and quiet an overactive child.