



"At Tizer Gardens"

Herbs ...The Mini Series!

1st Installment..."A Little History and How to Grow"

By Vicky Barbieri, MFGC Herb Chairman

Herbs have a very long history that is worldwide and goes back to the beginning of man. In this country Native Americans are recorded to have used wild growing herbs as early as 300BC. With their wide versatility is it any wonder that most of the early herbs are still being grown and used today?

Knowing that herbs have been around for such a long time one could guess that they are easy to propagate, cultivate, harvest and preserve. The main consideration for growing herbs is to remember that they do not like to be too wet, and to develop more fragrance and concentrate oils keep plants compact by not having the soil too fertile.

Most herbs are perennial but some of today's favorites are annuals, such as: dill, basil and parsley. Some of these will reseed perhaps too prolifically, bordering on invasive. To avoid this problem remove flowers before they release the seeds. Very rarely are insects a bother, most don't care for the smell of herbs!

Herbs are easily started from seed either directly sown or started inside. Most nurseries and garden centers have a large selection of plants available for an instant garden. Or hit on your friends for starts when they divide their plants. Perennials will require mulching once the ground is frozen to protect them from the thawing and refreezing which causes the ground to heave through the winter months.

Now that we have all these lovely herbs, what to do with them? This question will be covered in the next installments of this mini series...read on!!

Herbs ...The Mini Series!

2nd Installment...*"Using Fresh and Dried Herbs"*

By Vicky Barbieri, MFGC Herb Chairman

Herbs, fresh or dried have a multitude of uses. Some are used for culinary flavorings, some for medicinal purposes and others for fragrance. There are many methods for drying herbs; hanging small bunches in a cool dry place, microwave (the timing can be tricky...I have burned up several herbs) or a dehydrator. When using dried herbs you need less because the flavor is more concentrated.

A favorite dish in my home is pasta with pesto sauce, which is a very simple recipe and considered a peasant dish a few generations back in Italy. Today in most Italian restaurants it is a gourmet meal! In a saucepan combine good imported olive oil, 3Tbs. and 3Tbs. of butter; add 4 cloves of chopped garlic and 2 average-size shallots chopped (a small onion may be substituted), simmer but do not brown the garlic because that makes it bitter. Pine nuts may be added now and lightly toasted. Now go out to your herb garden and harvest some basil and Italian (flat leaf) parsley (approx. 1/2 cup of each after the leaves are chopped). Wash and remove the leaves from the stems, chop the leaves fine and add to the pot just long enough to heat, not cook! Cook 8oz. of your favorite pasta to desired doneness, drain and toss with the pesto sauce! Top all with imported Italian Parmesan cheese, which is much more flavorful than the domestic type. Yummy!!! Give it a try! This same pesto sauce is great for making garlic bread or just dipping nice crusty bread in.

Dill is wonderful with salmon; tarragon goes great with chicken and fish. Sage is delicious with pork and poultry! Rub your leg of lamb with rosemary! Is your mouth watering yet? Next time I will try to stimulate another of your senses...smell! See the next page.

Herbs...The Mini Series!

3rd Installment..."The Scent Of It All"!

By Vicky Barbieri, MFGC Herb Chairman

Working in the herb garden is one job I love and it's all because of the fragrance! Just brushing against a plant releases its scent! Mint, so refreshing, dill, makes you think of a nice sour pickle, lavender, calming and rosemary, a pine forest! It's a party for the olfactory nerve.

Many herbs such as anise, mint and rosemary leaves were chewed as a breath freshener. Most herbs that are used for their fragrance are used in the form of essential oils. You can produce your own oils but it is a long process. Collected plant material is placed in olive oil and heated in a slow cooker (crock pot) for at least 4 to 8 hours on low heat or set in full sun in a closed jar for two weeks. The mixture is then strained through cheesecloth and placed in a clean mason jar and labeled and dated. Keep in a dry, cool and dark spot. This oil has about a six-month shelf life. There are many good websites to purchase essential oils and they are also available in craft stores and I have seen them in pharmacies, too.

All of our favorite perfumes are made using essential oils, perfume contains 22%, eau de parfum is between 8 and 15% and cologne has only 4%, which explains the difference in price. The perfume industry has a \$10 billion dollar annual market share so you can see we all love fragrance.

Making your own potpourri is a fairly easy process and a good use for those collected, dried herbs, flowers, cones and pods. Once you have selected the plant materials you will use, the next step is to choose an essential oil with a scent that compliments them, such as using lavender oil with lavender flowers. One main ingredient is a fixative of which orris root, calamus root or oakmoss are a few. I have used orrisroot in a powdered form and it is readily available. If you wish to add ground spices combine them with the orris root. You can blend several oils together to achieve a fragrance you like but do it in small quantities keeping track of how many drops of each are added until you reach something pleasing. Store your new scent in a closed jar for 24 hours so the oils can marry.

Now you are ready to create the potpourri, combine the plant materials, fixative and oils and store in closed container in a cool dark place for several weeks. Every few days shake it gently. After 4 to 6 weeks the potpourri is ready to use! To get the most enjoyment from your potpourri stir it occasionally. When the fragrance fades add a few more drops of oil to refresh it.

A simple simmering potpourri, 1oz. broken cinnamon sticks, 1oz. whole cloves, 1oz. whole allspice. Add all to a cup of water and simmer on very low heat! Guests will think you have been baking all day!

Next time...medicinal uses for herbs...tune in!

Herbs...the mini series!

4th installment...“Herbs in Medicine”
By Vicky Barbieri, MFGC Herb Chairman

Herbal medicine is the oldest form of medicine and was the dominant healing therapy throughout all cultures worldwide. Archaeologists have found evidence of the use of herbs by Neanderthal man. The first famous herbalist was Hippocrates, known as “the Father of Medicine”. It was not until the end of the 19th century that orthodox medicine became the dominant form of treatment in the West. Eastern countries still have many herbal medical practitioners.

Most modern medicines were initially extracted and prepared from herbs, in the last 75 years the majority of medicines are synthetically produced chemicals. Many “old home remedies” are still used in households today because they work! The colonists brought seeds of medicinal and culinary herbs to the New World and learned of healing plants available here from Native Americans. Most every home had a kitchen garden containing these useful plants.

Trouble sleeping? Grow some hops and make a pillow to lay your head on. Hops are said to have a sedative effect. Brew some chamomile tea made from the flowers to calm your nerves and aid sleepiness. Catnip tea is said to be a sleep aid as well!

High blood pressure? Have you tried a drink infused with the leaves and flowers from Chervil? Tummy upset? Chew on some Coriander seeds. Echinacea is widely used today to boost the immune system...feel a cold coming on? Rose hips contain vitamin C so is helpful to reduce the symptoms of a cold and the flu.

Just as there are many helpful herbs there are also dangerous ones, some can be deadly if over used or used incorrectly. Aloe liquid is very soothing on a burn but ingested can cause a violent purge. Foxglove (*Digitalis purpurea*) used in heart medicines is very dangerous if an overdose occurs. All over-the-counter herbs are safe if taken as recommended on the label but when making one's own mixtures proceed with caution...everything in moderation!

Herbs...the mini series!

5^h installment...*"Growing Herbs on the Windowsill"*
By Vicky Barbieri, MFGC Herb Chairman

Don't let the winter go by without fresh herbs! Some of our favorite flavors come from very easy-to-grow herbs. Dried herbs are OK but nothing beats the aroma created when handling fresh herbs. Just might make cooking more fun, too!

If you really want to get into this, there is a wonderful new (I think it's new) gadget I just saw in a catalog. AeroGarden is a self-contained hydroponics growing system with full spectrum grow lights that are self-timing to imitate daylight. This mini garden is a bit pricey so it might be a great thing for a gift (husbands never know what to get so drop a hint). Check it out at www.CookingEnthusiast.com.

There is always the tried and true method of putting seeds in soil in a pot and placing them in a well-lighted place and keeping them watered. Follow the growing instructions on the package for the particular herb you are planting. When the plant is large enough, start snipping away. This pruning will encourage branching and more growth! Some fast-germinating herbs are basil, parsley, chives and dill. Rosemary can be grown in a pot but it is slow to germinate so patience is required.

You herb growers out there could dig up a plant from your garden, pot it up and move it inside for the winter — that is, if you plants have not been frozen yet!

Enjoy the cooler months with hearty meals of stews, soups and roasts flavored to gourmet perfection using your fresh herbs!