herbnews

HERB FEDERATION OF NEW ZEALAND INC

FOUNDED FEBRUARY 1986

Volume 32 No.1

AUTUMN 2018

2017/19 Herb Federation of New Zealand National Executive Committee

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Cover image: *Mandragora officinalis – Herbier General de l'Amateur, 1827*

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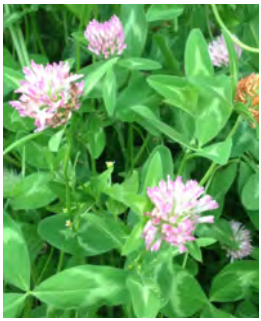
ISSN 1176-970X
Website: www.herbs.org.nz

President's letter

As I write, the rain is gently falling and there is a definite coolness in the air – autumn is here. The marshmallow, valerian and motherwort have finished flowering and their seeds are maturing, and the last bright yellow petals are withering on the sunflowers, as their big plate–like heads turn downwards as the seeds fatten.

I visited the Bay of Plenty last month and saw that everything was so much greener than the Kapiti Coast. We have such a variation in climate in this fair land of ours; each area has its pros and cons for gardening and, for us, how easy or hard is it to grow our favourite herbs.



I've been harvesting red clover (*Trifolium pratense*) flowers over summer for making fresh flower tinctures and drying them for making infusions later in the season. The plants in my garden have now mostly finished, though I am continuing to harvest them from my daughter's, over the hill in Wellington.

This is my stevia (*Stevia rebaudiana*) in flower (below right). It's known as sweet leaf because its leaves are considered to be eight times sweeter than sugar, due to the glycosides. It has good nutritional constituents: Vitamin A, selenium, potassium and magnesium.

This perennial herb originates from South America, so it needs a sheltered spot in winter. Above all, don't let it get too wet while it is dormant, or it will rot. Harvest the leaves during summer and into autumn and dry them for use – either whole or ground up into a powder.

How did your Herb Awareness Week projects go? Please send updates of your activities to the editor.

Karina

NOTICEBOARD

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VISIT www.herbs.org.nz

Collect Seeds for the HFNZ Seed Bank

Now is the perfect time to start collecting seeds for the HFNZ Seed Bank. Any common and not-so-common herbs welcome. Ideally, please send them dehusked and labelled with the botanical name, but if you cannot achieve either of these, just send them anyway (though you will need to identify them). Please include your email and phone number.
Send seeds to: Ella Flack, 11 Gordon St, Jervoistown, Napier, 4112

New Herbal College

The Southern Institute of Medical Herbalism (SIMH), based in Christchurch, is now offering certificates and diplomas in herbal medicine via in-person and distance learning. "With immersive, diverse streams of learning, starting at the certificate level and going throughout our courses, we want to support and stimulate anyone who is ready to study herbal medicine. With the personalised mentoring that then comes in for our diploma students, we want to help those who are ready to dedicate to this work to become safe and effective medical herbalists and natural health practitioners."
For more information, go to: www.simh.co.nz

LOOKING FOR RECIPES, TIPS, NEWS

Have you or your herb group visited a garden of interest? Are you growing any interesting herbs? Have you tried some great herb recipes? Let us know! We invite you to send in your herb recipes, growing tips, news or articles to feature in Herbnews. Send to editor: jane@plainjanemedia.co.nz

DEADLINE FOR WINTER ISSUE: May 20th, 2018.

Mandrake - An Uncommon Herb

By Francis Young

Mandrake *(Mandragora sp.)* is a herb steeped in folklore and superstition. Most of us have heard of it, but few have encountered it, although it is widely distributed throughout the Mediterranean countries. Mandrake does not appear to occur in New Zealand either in the wild or in plant nurseries.

It was a plant known to the very early herbalists, but during the Dark Ages it acquired a mystical reputation, and by the 13th century lurid tales of the mandrake were appearing. The reason for this lies in its taxonomy since the taproot of the mandrake is frequently forked into two main stems, giving it a likeness to the human figure. Male and female forms were identified. When pulled out of the ground, the plants were alleged to shriek in pain and the person pulling them out would fall dead. Thus, it was recommended that the mandrake should be harvested by tying a rope around the plant and to a dog. The dog would then be urged forward, tempted by a piece of meat, pulling the mandrake from the ground. Presumably you would need several dogs to harvest a large number of plants before they all succumbed to the plant's malevolent influence.

19th-century botanical drawing

Mandragora autumnalis

Taxonomy
Mandrake is a widely distributed plant growing in disturbed ground; i.e. it is a weed. It has a long, thick, brown root, resembling a parsnip according to Culpepper. The leaves are borne on a basal rosette at the top of the root and the flowers appear in the axils of the leaves in autumn, although there is a spring–flowering form. The flower stems are variable lengths being up to 45cm. The flowers are followed by globular or ellipsoidal berries resembling a cherry tomato. These were chewed by shepherds to encourage sleep. As it is a member of the Solanaceae family, all parts of the plant are rich in biologically active alkaloids, which make it highly toxic.

Small quantities were prescribed by early herbalists, while larger quantities would induce a state of unconsciousness, which made it useful as an anaesthetic. Overdoses would lead to death and, because the concentrations of toxins vary widely from plant to plant, taking the herb internally was dicing with death if you didn't know what you were doing. Bartholomaeus Anglicus summed up its properties in his *De proprietatibus rerum* (13th century) in these words: "Mandragora sodden in wine cause sleep and abate all manner of soreness and so that time a man feeleth unneth though he be cut, and yet mandragora must be warily used: for it slayeth if men take too much thereof…"

Nomenclature
The botanical names for the plant are surrounded by confusion. It was originally named *Mandragora officinarum* by Linnaeus (*M. officinalis* by some), but others say that this species is only native to a few limited areas. In the eastern Mediterranean, *Mandragora autumnalis*, which flowers in autumn, is the dominant species, but others say this is a different species and that in all other areas *Mandragora officinarum* reigns. Let the botanists squabble over these distinctions; for most of us it is of little concern.

History and Use
In the 1st century both Pliny the Elder and Dioscorides thought there were male and female forms of mandrake. They were described thus: the male has a white root and leaves like a beet and larger fruit, while the female has leaves more like a lettuce, a root with a black skin which is white inside, soft and fleshy. Dioscorides used it as a pain–killer and to induce sleep, as an anaesthetic during operations, as a powerful emetic and purgative, and as an abortifacient. In 12th century herbals it seems to have been used to treat mental disorders, particularly epilepsy, and the legend described above was in full sway. But by the 16th century the herbals were pouring scorn on these beliefs and the humanoid characteristics.

A page from a 7th-century manuscript - an illuminated version of Dioscorides' *De materia medica*

From a 12th-century manuscript

Aphrodisiac

There are references to the aphrodisiacal properties of mandrake in the Old Testament and its name in Hebrew was "love plant". The Arabs called it "Satan's Apple". It was thought to increase lust due to its behaviour as a stimulant when used in small quantities. Genesis 30:14–16 tells the story of sisters Leah and Rebecca who were both married to Jacob. Leah had had four sons but was now barren. Jacob spent his nights with the younger Rebecca trying to get her pregnant, with no success. When Leah's son Reuben brought home mandrake from the fields, Rebecca offered to buy it from Leah by giving her nights with Jacob. It worked, sort of; Leah became pregnant again, but Rebecca remained childless. Solomon also sings its praises in Song of Songs [7:13].

Sources:
Wikipedia
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A Close-up Look at Hawthorn
Crataegus monogyna

By Margaret Nicoll, Southland Herb Society

Family: *Rosaceae*
Common Name: Haw, maythorn, hedgethorn

Description
A tough, thorny, deciduous shrub or tree that can grow up to 9m. It is very densely branched and spiny, with dark green, lobbed, toothed leaves. In the spring, scented flowers grow in small white, pink or red clusters, and these are followed by small berries, called haws, which, when ripe, are usually red but may also be black.

Cultivation
Once established Hawthorn will grow very rapidly. It is happiest in an open sunny position but will tolerate hot or cold temperatures and damp to dry conditions. Hawthorn can be propagated by seed gathered when ripe. Birds are good at spreading the seeds. Hawthorn grows freely in Europe and China, often in hedgerows.

History
Tradition links the tree with Christianity. Christ wore a crown of thorns and, according to legend, in 60AD Joseph of Arimathea (uncle of Virgin Mary) came to Britain to bring the Holy Grail. He struck his staff into the ground at Glastonbury where it took root and grew into a hawthorn tree.

Over the centuries offspring from the original tree were said to survive and it can still be found at Glastonbury today where this particular hawthorn blooms twice a year, once in May and again at Christmas. Each Christmas a sprig of one of these thorns from outside St John's Church is traditionally sent to the Queen, who is said to decorate her breakfast table with it.

Many historical practices are associated with hawthorn, e.g. maying and choosing a May Queen. Stories of people being waylaid into hawthorn bushes by the fairy folk to places where time passes differently are common in Celtic mythology.

Medicinal
Hawthorn has been used to treat heart disease as far back as the 1st century. By the early 1800s doctors were using it to treat circulatory disorders and respiratory illnesses. Traditionally, the berries were used to treat heart problems ranging from irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, chest pain, hardening of the arteries and heart failure. Today the leaves, flowering tops and fruit are used medicinally in modern herbal medicine.

Hawthorn has been shown to improve blood flow and lower blood lipid levels. It also has an anti-inflammatory action. Research has shown it is particularly useful in the treatment of congestive heart failure and its antiviral action against herpes (cold sore) virus.

Hawthorn Berry Tonic

Hawthorn is a great heart tonic, and this recipe will help you to incorporate it into your diet to maintain a healthy heart.

Ingredients:
- Dried seedless hawthorn berries
- Apple juice
- Honey
- Ginger, grated or powdered
- Cinnamon

Method:
Place the hawthorn berries in a pan with just enough apple juice to cover them. Simmer over low heat for 15 minutes. Cover and let sit overnight.

Sweeten with honey, ginger and cinnamon to taste.

Store in the refrigerator. Keeps for 2–3 weeks.

Hawthorn Jelly

Ingredients:

- 1.1kg hawthorn berries
- 1.2L water
- Sugar (see method for quantity)
- Juice of 1 lemon

Method:

Wash berries well and remove stalks. Put berries in pan and cover with water. Bring to the boil and simmer for 1 hour or until the berries absorb most of the water. Pour berries and liquid through a strainer or muslin bag – do not squeeze. Allow to drain for 8 hours or until the mixture stops dripping. Drain off the liquid from the berries and discard the berries.

Place the liquid in a pan, adding 400g sugar per 500ml of liquid. Heat mixture gently, add lemon juice and continue heating until sugar is dissolved. Bring mixture to a rapid boil and continue cooking until it begins to set. When the mixture (now a jelly) is sufficiently set, allow to cool then pour into sterilised jars.

Sweet Bay
Laurus nobilis

By Rona McNeill, Canterbury Herb Society

Near our herb house is a huge bay tree, planted by Mrs Hill's aunts over 100 years ago. It seems a male and a female tree were planted together. The trunk is now surrounded by many huge suckers that have become part of the tree. For years the trunk was kept straight.

Years ago when asked by the Botanic Gardens, our herb society grew many small bay tree seedlings from this tree. They became a neatly trimmed hedge in front of the Botanic Gardens' herb garden. After the earthquake, the hedge and herb garden were removed and use of the area changed. The herb garden is now over by the café.

About the same time we planted one of our seedlings each side at the back of our own herb garden behind the Herb Library. These are now large trees.
We found that bay trees may be male or female, and that seedlings do not transplant easily unless taken when very small and potted up for about a year. The creamy white flowers on the female tree are in small clusters. Rooting small suckers is very difficult.

Bay leaves dry well and retain their distinctive taste, smell and use for a very long time. Take care you take leaves from the true sweet bay, *Laurus nobilis*, as there are some trees that quite closely resemble sweet bay and some are poisonous.
Always pick a leaf, break it and smell it to make sure you have the correct tree. Common laurel, also known as cherry laurel and English laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*) is an example. Although it looks similar to sweet bay, it is poisonous and not even in the same family.

California bay, *Umbellularia californica*, is not poisonous and has the same aromatic leaves and a similar flavour but is no match for sweet bay – and it does not retain its flavour for long when dried.

So watch out if buying a tree simply labelled "bay tree". Break and smell a leaf. Look/ask for the botanical name.

Uses For Sweet Bay Leaves

1. Boil leaves in water then cool and use water as an antiseptic.

2. For keeping insects out of flour.

3. For keeping moths out of clothing. A lovely, clean smell.

4. For keeping ants from around the drain, etc.

5. Tie together young supple branches to form a circle for a Christmas wreath or use the leafy circle for a wreath base.

6. For cooking: in pies, soups, sauces, stews, pickles, marinades. Remove before eating.

7. For flavouring homemade ice cream.

Beginner's Guide to Foraging for Food

By Maggie Elford

This article is a summary of the workshop that I took at our November conference in Invercargill. I am passionate about making the best use of our environment. There is much out there that we can make good use of to enhance our diets. It is a matter of having the confidence to get started.

Why do I forage? Over the years I have tried to see where I got this strong desire to be self–sufficient – not just in food but in many aspects of my life. I like to garden, sew my clothes and cook. Over the years I have attended workshops like cheese–making and bread–baking. I think it all goes back to two TV series in the '70s – *The Good Life* with Felicity Kendal and Richard Briers, and *Survivors* (no, not the reality show – it started with a pandemic in London and spreading around the world; small pockets of survivors were left to fend for themselves). Both had a strong ethos on being self–sufficient.

Why forage?
There are many reasons to add wild foods to your diet. Firstly, it is a way to gain survival knowledge to increasing your health and wellbeing. It's about being aware of your surroundings and environment. Our ancestors had all the necessary knowledge and skill to identify and prepare wild plants for food, medicine and other uses. We have lost this and most of us would be hard pressed to identify and use even a few edible wild plants. It is empowering – an enjoyable challenge. Some cultures, over the years, have had to survive on "wild greens", e.g. the Greeks during WW2.

Wild foods have health benefits
Wild plants have to defend themselves against pests and diseases and develop phytocompounds, like antioxidants and bioflavonoids, that help them to survive (these phytocompounds are beneficial to humans too). Commercial crops have been developed for their looks, sweetness and ability to be transported – at the expense of their goodness.

One of nature's best sources of fatty acid omega–3s (essential for optimal brain, heart and immune function) is plants, and especially leafy greens. Wild plants typically have more omega–3s than cultivated ones. Purslane, for example, commonly considered a weed, contains more omega–3s than any other leafy

green. Omega–3s are essential to our diet because our bodies cannot make them.

When industrial agriculture was invented, focus switched to the production of seeds and we saw the beginning of the decline of leafy greens. Since then, seeds have dominated our diets, as they are turned into vegetable oils and, as Michael Pollan says, other "food–like substances". They provide omega–6 fatty acids.

Omega–6 fatty acids are the darling of the food industry as they have a very long shelf–life. But we are eating too many; health researchers and scientists believe they are not good for us in these amounts. The ratio of Omega 3 to Omega 6 that we now eat has reversed. At the turn of the 20th century the ratio was 3 to 1 Omega 6 to Omega 3s. It is now 10 to 1. We need a much higher intake of Omega 3s and we get them from leaves.

Diverse diet
This information forms my philosophy and reason behind why I think it is so important to forage and add diversity to our diets.

Weeds used to be called food and medicine.

- People used to graze on 3000 to 5000 plants.
- Now we rely on around 150, with only 20 providing 90 per cent of our intake.
- American stats show that just FOUR crops account for two–thirds of their calories. These are soy, corn, wheat and rice.

Food groups
We tend not to eat enough from each of the food groups. We should include foods from each group every day. Much of our food comes into the sweet category and many of the foraged weeds can provide food from the other groups, especially the bitter tastes. Bitter stimulates the appetite and increases digestion through bile secretions.

Wild plants can help add to the diversity of our food, especially the bitter tastes. Good sources of bitter include dandelion greens (awesome to juice with), kale, chard, spinach, salad greens like radicchio and rocket, coriander, broccoli, citrus.

Reconnecting with nature
Wild food is green! Get out in the fresh air and become more observant. It offers exercise and a healthy connection with nature. It means eating with the seasons. Get out with your family and share the common spaces.

And it comes with its own packaging – no plastic! Good foragers are always scanning for possible food. Foraging means eating free food that grows wild in your backyard, your local parks, fields, riverbanks and the sea. Each area has its own special selection of foods, e.g. fruit trees especially in Central Otago.

Being thrifty
Wild food is free and you can save money. It is very easy to create a great salad, especially when salad greens are a premium in the supermarket. But for me, it is mostly about the challenge of finding some of my own food.

It does take longer to collect and prepare your own food. We are all in such a rush these days. Many of us spend less than half an hour a day on food preparation, whereas once upon a time much of the day was dedicated to such tasks.

Guidelines

The first and most important guideline is to **identify your plant**! If in doubt, leave it out. There is no room for confusion. This particularly applies to fungi. Flowers are often the easiest way to identify a plant. There are lots of resources out there to help you.

My two resources, both New Zealand publications, are *A Forager's Treasury* by Johanna Knox and *Find it Eat it* by Michael Daly. Johanna Knox did an extensive series with This Way Up on Radio NZ and this can still be accessed on their website.

Take only what you need; the general rule is to take no more than one–third of a plant and try not to disturb the environment. Only pick what you can comfortably use without waste or harm to the plant. Leave some for others. Stay off private land or ask if you can walk on farmland to collect those autumn mushrooms.

Safe foraging

- Have plants been sprayed? Look for yellowing leaves. You can check with your local council about areas that may have been sprayed.
- Runoffs (watercress).
- Exhaust fumes along main roads.
- Wash all foraged food well.
- Introduce new foods slowly and one at a time, and listen to your body.

How to Get Started

Start small. Your backyard is often a good place to start. When venturing further out, the edges of environments are best – overgrown alleyways, empty building sites, waste ground, parks, hedges, riverbanks or lake verges. Even along fence lines, but do make sure they haven't been sprayed. Look for where plants are growing lushly.

Collecting some food, like berries, hips and apples, takes time. Preparation does too. Make it social.

There are different plants for different seasons: spring for the young salad greens, elderflowers, other flowers, asparagus; summer/autumn is often a bonanza for berries, fruits, nuts and dandelion roots.

Plants to start with

This depends where you live. Most 'weeds' grow throughout the country, though some parts of the country have access to different plants, so get to know your own areas. There are plenty of resources, including the two books mentioned above, as well as lots of sites on the internet. Some even include local forager maps. I personally would start with berries and wild greens such as chickweed, miner's lettuce, dandelion and plantain. Sweet chestnuts and elders are another good, widely available resource.

Ways to use your foraged plants

Refer to my two resources. Michael Daly has his book divided into four sections. Edible weeds, From the fields, From the Tree and From the Seashore. Within these sections he has plant id, where to gather it and how to use it followed by some recipes.

Johanna Knox has a good section on identification of plants and within this section are also some ways to use the plant. The second half of the book is divided into several sections – Preserving the Harvest, Cuisine, and Wild Ways, which is about ways of using the plants other than for food.

Salads – These are easy to make, with merely a walk around your garden.

Pestos and dips – Many different ones to make, with nasturtium flowers, nettles and chickweed, for example. Yoghurt–based is one good way to go.

Soups – Add a few foraged leaves to your stock or soup.

Fritters – A very easy way to add some extra leaves to your diet.

Drinks – Try elderflower and elderberry beverages.

Jams – Blackberry, elderberry, apples.

Teas and smoothies – The world is your oyster.

Wild Herb Pesto

Pesto can be made from anything, really – chickweed or nettles are good wild, green ingredients. If using nettles, blanch them in boiling water for 1–2 minutes first. Bitter greens, like dandelion, also benefit from pre–boiling to remove some of the bitter juices. Lemon juice helps neutralise some of this.

Ingredients:
- 1 clove garlic
- ¼ to ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups foraged greens, roughly torn
- About ¼ cup olive oil
- ½ cup walnuts, chopped
- 1/3 cup parmesan cheese or breadcrumbs

Method:
Pound the garlic with the salt with a pestle and mortar. Gradually add the greens, continuing to pound. Gradually add the oil and nuts until you have a smooth paste. Stir in the breadcrumbs or cheese. Alternatively, add ingredients, except the cheese or breadcrumbs, to a blender and process (be careful not to over–process. Stir in the cheese or breadcrumbs by hand.

Poisonous Plants and their Uses

By Shonagh Hopkirk

The Stratford Herb Group recently had the opportunity to visit a garden of toxic plants, following on from a discussion about poisonous plants at one of our meetings earlier in the year. On a recent outing to Paloma Gardens in Whanganui, we explored the garden area known as "GoD" (Garden of Death). This garden is still under development but already contains examples of many poisonous plants, as well as colourful skulls and other deathly decorations. The owners intend to provide details on each plant describing the poisonous component as well as the history and stories associated with each. We'll have to pay another visit once it is completed.

Note: Paloma Gardens are well worth a visit if anyone is travelling near Whanganui. A Garden of National Significance, it comprises several exotic garden zones landscaped with plants from throughout the world, including two arboretums, a desert house, palm garden, bamboo forest, and a Mediterranean garden.

Several of the toxic plants were ones we were already familiar with (calla lillies, hemlock, etc), but there were some that, although common garden plants, we weren't sure why they were included – more research was required.

Beware: All parts of some plants may be poisonous to humans and/or stock; other plants may only have one component that is poisonous, such as the seeds. Some can be highly toxic (such as hemlock) and can kill or cause serious side–effects. Others, such as parsley, only cause problems for a specific group (in this case, pregnant women) or if eaten in very high doses.

It is very important that we know what plants we are picking and be able to identify it properly before eating it. For example, hemlock can be mistaken for parsnip or wild carrot. We also need to know how to use the herb correctly and in the right dosage. Herbs are very beneficial if used correctly. As usual, knowledge and plant identification are key!

One plant with an interesting history is deadly nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*). A member of the *Solanaceae* family of flowering plants, it looks innocent yet is deadly if ingested. It has a long history of cosmetic and poisonous uses; only in more recent times have the medicinal uses surpassed its previous uses – now it is more likely to heal than kill.

***Atropa belladonna*, or deadly nightshade**

Prior to the Middle Ages, a beauty tonic was made from the leaves and berries. This was used by the Venetian ladies as a blush (it reddens the pigment of the skin), as well as to dilute their pupils to make their eyes look more seductive – a fashionable look at the time.

In fact, the formal name for deadly nightshade, *Atropa belladonna*, means "beautiful lady" in Italian. It wasn't long, however ,before a more sinister use was found, and the plant became more commonly known for its use as a poison. It is said to have been a popular weapon used by assassins and other criminals, and probably also used in potions prepared by sorcerers for the occult. It was supposedly used to kill Macbeth as well as assorted Roman emperors, the King of Scotland, and many more...

All parts of the plant contain the toxic alkaloids atropine and scopolamine. Even a tiny amount of either compound, when ingested, can cause paralysis, hallucinations, convulsions and death in humans. A paste made from the plant was used by Roman archers on the tip of their arrows – if the victim didn't die from the wound, they surely would from the poison. Despite its lethal action on people, many animals are immune to it. It is said that a horse was seen to eat 8lb of the herb without effect. Birds eat the seeds. Rabbits, sheep, goats and pigs are also immune, yet cats and dogs are not.

In more recent times, *Atropa belladonna* has become more recognised as a medicinal plant with many beneficial uses if used correctly. Its medical applications include use as a pain reliever, anti–inflammatory, muscle relaxant, to aid menstrual problems, as a treatment for whooping cough and hay fever, and many more uses.

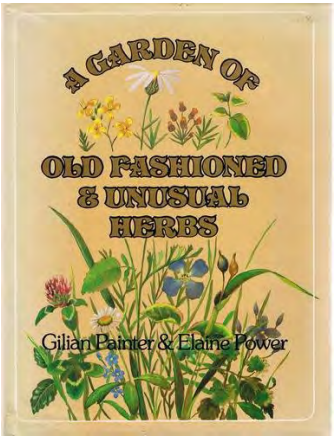
The Importance of Provenance – The Name Game

By Marilyn Wightman

> "I have been growing and using herbs since the early 1960s and have read many books on the subject. I discovered that many copy from each other without proving for themselves that the information is correct and thus errors are perpetuated and advice given which is sometimes contradictory."
> *– Gilian Painter, The Herb Garden Displayed*

Herbs have lots of folklore around them. Stories hark back to the times when many did not read or write, so oral history about which plants were beneficial, nutritious or harmful relied on passed on, spoken knowledge. Messages probably got heard and relayed incorrectly at times. (Especially if the recipient was as deaf as I am.) Perhaps that is why the need to tie an agitated, barking dog to a nearby fence or tree while mandrake roots were dug up, making such a noise as to drown out the screams of the herb as it was pulled from the ground, evolved. Pretty far fetched, you may be thinking? How many remember back in the 1990s when empty plastic bottles were filled with water and left out on the front garden edge to prevent dogs from doing their business on the lawn? Hearsay can be a powerful tool.

Modern photography and technology can replicate a close–up image of a plant for good identification. One of the first herb books I had was Gilian Painter's *The Herb Garden Displayed* and it was the means of being able to positively ID herbs and give them their correct nomenclature. Like many of the older publications, this one has line drawings. Her second book, *A garden of Old Fashioned and Unusual Herbs*, now well worn, is extra special, as Gilian signed it for me when we first met in 1987 at the inaugural conference after the Herb Federation was formed.



Gilian's information is from first-hand experience and she writes with knowledge that gives good provenance for growing these herbs in New Zealand's temperate climate. Not many overseas herbal publications will tell you that French tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculus*) rarely flowers and never sets seed in this climate. (An indicator: if you buy a tarragon seedling, it will be the coarser, more vigorous growing Russian tarragon (*Artemisia dracunculoides*) and just not the best-flavoured tarragon.)

Gilian's sequel book was a real eye opener as it paved the way to extending my own herbal knowledge and realising that many garden favourites were in fact herbs – roses, marigolds, poppies, carnations, violets, to name a few. Gilian's knowledge expanded and her final book, *Materia Medica of Western Herbs for the Southern Hemisphere*, expanded out the practical 'how to grow' facts to include medicinal and pharmaceutical detail.

Thanks to Carl Linnaeus, the decision to give everything a Latin name evolved into the science of botanical names that are still used today. Our task as responsible herbal people is to ensure the system is accurately applied when obtaining a new herb to grow and use. That Latin name is very useful. When talking with folk from different cultures there will be a variety of common names. The one decisive identifying way is find commonality with the scientific Latin name. This worldwide use of the one system of nomenclature proves accurate.

I once uplifted a few seedlings from my mother-in-law's garden and was told, "That's a miniature pansy I got it from Aunt Nell." It was a pretty wee thing and much admired, so it got carted round several gardens as we moved house, with it being remembered as 'Aunt Nell's pansy'. It was pleasing to at last identify it as a variety of heartsease (*Viola tricolor*). All those years and I had a REAL herb right under my nose!

As well as these names there sometimes are the country names. Heartsease has many such country names – Johnny-jump-up, herb trinity and love-in-idleness. Some country names can lead to speculation as to how they were derived while others are self-explanatory. Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*) was used to heal cuts and bruises so was called 'the carpenter's herb'. The leaves of yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) staunch the flow of blood, so it was known as 'the soldier's herb', and lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) is called pilewort.

When growing herbs to use, it is important to check the herb held in the hand is in fact the needed type. There seems to be many examples prevalent today that were herbs have been misnamed. This is especially true of stalls at markets and

fundraising events. Just because a plant was given or bought does not always indicate that it is correctly labelled. It is not too many years back when chamomile lawns were very popular. Everyone was told the preferred type was lawn chamomile 'Treneague'. Unfortunately, the seedling growers were either ignorant or possibly scurrilous as they provided the retail plant shops with punnets of seedling chamomile and labelled this 'Treneague'. However, the virtue of this chamomile cultivar was it did not produce any flowers so stayed low and best for a mown lawn. (Think about that – a seedling–grown plant produced from seeds when the named variety was infertile.)

Another error made by growers is *Aloe vera* plants. The aloe family is a large one with about 500 different varieties. Most plants offered for sale in New Zealand are not the true variety. Have a read about the flower colour and growth habit of *Aloe vera*. It differs considerably from the red flowering, quick growing variety that is on plant stalls and garden shops and erroneously labelled as being the preferred medicinal type.

One is reminded of that saying "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing" as nowadays, with the help of Mr Google, it is easy to find a photo of a herb to assist good identification. HOWEVER, there is not always a guarantee that the information found is accurate. Just type in the search field for and view the many plants that are supposedly given the same name. Such knowledge can be erroneous, as the writer lives in say America and grows the same herb quite differently to how it performs here in this country.

So, if you are a herb grower, be a responsible herb grower and ensure that what is in the garden plot is correctly identified and is being used in the appropriate manner.

Society News

Auckland Herb Society

As most of you know, we operate quite differently from other societies in that we have eight groups in the greater Auckland area. Each group has a coordinator and they follow their own plan for their meetings. The Auckland Herb Society runs three seminars a year, which every group can attend. Also, groups can attend any other meetings in the Auckland area.

This year we had the AGM in March followed by a demonstration on Easter herb–themed flower arrangements by Lynn Brown, who did an excellent job, as always, and we came away with a lot of good ideas.

Our next seminar was in June and called "Teas and Tonics" by Naturopath Autumn Falk, from Herbal Potential. Autumn is a medical herbalist, trained in Germany and New Zealand. Within Autumn's naturopathic clinic, she works with individually prepared herbal teas for her clients and has always wanted to reach more people with basic herbal blends to treat common ailments and to support good health and wellbeing – naturally and simply. Autumn also talked about general tonics and gave out some recipes.

Our October seminar started with Nick Holmes, who talked about natural beekeeping, and I want to stress the word natural as opposed to commercial beekeeping. Nick is very opposed to commercial beekeeping. He did a most absorbing talk illustrated with slides.

Next was Bo Hendgen, who is the owner of Absolute Essential oils. She talked about how to look after your skin with essential oils and take 10 years off your age. This was a totally different way of addressing essential oils and we were able to sniff all the oils recommended. This was a very informative learning experience.

We have a membership of about 80 members. We are finding it is increasingly difficult to find members to participate on the committee. All of us have been on the committee for far too many years, and as we are getting older there are more resignations, so our future looks quite bleak at present unless we can get a big injection of members to help.

Jane Carden

Herb Cup

The Auckland Horticultural Council's Annual Sweet Pea and Flower Show, which is held each year in November, is now including more herb classes, and with this in mind the Auckland Herb Society donated a beautiful silver cup for the overall winner in the herb section in 2017.

We were delighted when Lynn Brown won this, as she has been a member of both the Herb Federation of New Zealand and Auckland Herb Society for many, many years, where she is Treasurer. Lynn works hard for the clubs she belongs to and this was a well–deserved accolade.

Diane Griffin

From left: Rosa Tyson, Show Manager; Lynn Brown; Julie Lloyd, AHC President

Canterbury Herb Society

At one of our meetings, Heather demonstrated the making and use of **herbal creams and lotions**. We were interested to learn of the properties of a variety of oils. To make the creams, the herbs were heated in oil, the oil strained, beeswax pieces added, then all simmered to melt the wax and all beaten to a cream. Everyone went home with three sample pottles– dandelion ointment, calendula cream and one of aloe. The uses of each were discussed.

CARRIER OIL PROPERTIES:

Coconut oil - natural anti-fungal and anti-bacterial.
Almond oil - moisturizing for your skin. High in vitamin A & E to nourish skin.
Caster Oil - anti-viral, anti-bacterial and anti-fungal.
Olive Oil - good fats for skin and hair but not quickly absorbed by skin.
Sunflower - often used to treat psoriasis, eczema, dry and damaged skin.

To Make a Basic Cream

Herb of your choice, oil, beeswax.

In a jar pack the herb of your choice, then cover with oil. Choice of oil is yours. Put the jar containing herb and oil into a saucepan of water, bring to the boil and simmer for about one hour. Strain, then return oil to jar, add beeswax then put jar back into pan and simmer until wax has melted. Cool slightly then pour into containers. Label.

Calendula, chickweed, catnip, dandelion and comfrey are herbs you can use.

ALOE OINTMENT

You can apply fresh aloe gel, frequently, to eczema with good effect, but it spares the plant and is more practical to make an ointment.

115g cold-pressed soy oil
42g cocoa butter
28g comfrey-root water
28g aloe gel taken from plant

Make comfrey root water by simmering scrubbed, chopped comfrey roots until they are soft. Strain off the liquid. Melt the cocoa butter and soy oil together at a low temperature. Put the comfrey water and aloe gel in a blender and add the oils in a thin stream. Pour into small jars and label.

WARMING RUB.

2 Tbs cayenne pepper
2 Tbs mustard powder
1 Tbs ground ginger
2 tsp ground black pepper
300mls of olive or sunflower oil

Mix all together in a stainless steel bowl. Place bowl inside a pot with a small amount of water and simmer for 10 minutes. Cool, strain and pour into a bottle, label and date.

Rub a little oil over the affected joints three or four times a day. A warm wheat bag can be used to enhance the heat.

Stratford Herb Society

On a sunny January day we, the ladies from the Stratford Herb Society, went to visit the permaculture garden of one of our members, Sue Rine. After a lovely drive along windy, hilly, country roads east of Stratford, we eventually arrived at Makuri Rd. The drive itself wound another 1km up a steep hill past hillsides of different types of timber trees, eventually arriving at a beautiful homestead. Sue

welcomed us into the cool interior with glasses of a homemade lemon drink before we ventured out into the gardens.

The property is off the grid, with a well-designed passive solar house where the tile-over-concrete floors are warmed by the sun in winter yet remain cool in summer, attractive wood and stone walls help with temperature control, and plenty of doors and windows are used to control the air currents. Water is heated through solar panels as well as a wetback. Cooking is done on the wood stove that is kept burning all year. Even the composting toilet was efficient and aesthetically pleasing. The view from the front of the house is magnificent, looking over beautiful hills and valleys and crowned by our beloved Mt Taranaki.

We began our tour with the culinary herb garden situated close to the kitchen door, sunny, well sheltered by stone walls, and containing a wide variety of herbs. We then followed a track to the food forest and gardens situated in a bowl-shaped valley below the house. This area has been divided into five sections with movable wire-netting fencing; this is moved as needed depending on where they want the poultry and guinea pigs to be, or not to be. The main food forest area is then surrounded by 2m wire fencing with an electric wire on top to keep the possums out. As this valley is a natural water-catchment area they have built Hugelkultur swales on the hillside using logs and turf to slow and

hold the rainwater rather than letting it race to the lowest point. The base of the garden area has also been built up with a lot of compost.

Poultry and small animals are used to advantage; young turkeys were grazing the native section, a rooster was making himself heard elsewhere along with his ladies, guinea pigs roam among the plants, and ducks are used in the food forest area. The food forest itself was well established with a variety of nitrogen–fixing plants and comfrey, as well as a wide range of fruit and nut trees and other edible plants. These included cardoons and globe artichokes, Jerusalem artichokes, tomatillos, Siberian pea, currants, arrowroot, sea buckthorn, mashua, yacon, chokos, lambs quarter, chestnuts, persimmon, walnuts, elderberry, etc, as well as the usual vegetables and fruit trees. All flowering plants also had to be edible, including cacti, dahlias, gladioli, hollyhocks and abutilons, as well as viburnum for the berries. Hedges of raspberries lined a hillside full of chestnut trees (these plants are not as susceptible to possums). What a feast of edible foods!

Sue grows many of her plants from seed, cuttings or root division. In one concrete tub were many chestnut seedlings waiting to be planted out; one of the shade houses was full of assorted seedlings. Water chestnuts grow in a tub. Various other shade houses and glasshouses were full of more edible plants. There was so much to see it was hard to take it all in. There has obviously been a lot of planning and hard work gone into creating this Garden of Eden.

We had a really great day out, thanks to our hostess. It was a great way to enjoy the company of each other in an informal gathering while learning new things.

Written by Eila Hopkirk and Linda Howson, edited by Shonagh Hopkirk

Otago Herb Society

Julie's Elderberry and Honey Syrup

(adapted from a recipe by Norma Erickson, ehow.com)

1 cup fresh/frozen or ½ cup dried elderberries
¼ cup dried elderflowers (optional)
A small piece fresh ginger, sliced (optional)
1 cinnamon stick (optional)
3 cups water
1 cup honey (thyme honey or raw, local honey, if possible)

Add berries and any optional ingredients to cold water and slowly bring to the boil. Simmer gently for 45 minutes. Remove from the heat and allow to cool slightly.

Mash the berries and strain through a sieve. Do not use cheesecloth as you want to retain some of the berry pulp. Add the honey and mix well.

Store in sterilised bottles in the refrigerator for 3–4 months.

Take one tablespoon a day to help strengthen the immune system. Can be diluted in warm water. Increase the amount in times of illness.

OBITUARY

Jeanne Margaret Samuel (1930–2017)

Jeanne's involvement in Kapiti Herb Society was far more than a contribution. As a founder member, she has been a pillar of the Society since its inception almost 40 years ago.

The planning of the Society's inaugural meeting was held in Jeanne and David's sitting room in 1979 and she remained a dedicated member of the committee for 21 years. She served as President from 1984–89 and continued on the editorial committee of the Bay Tree, our newsletter, for several years. When the Herb Federation of New Zealand was formed in 1986, she served on that committee as Vice President for the North Island and remained a strong advocate for the Federation.

During Jeanne's term on the committee, the Society was a hive of activity. They had stalls at markets selling herbs and herbal products, they visited schools and held workshops and demonstrations, publicising the Society and the use of herbs. By 1999, membership had risen to 166 and the dynamic team had accumulated a sizeable nest egg that has stood the Society in good stead ever since.

Jeanne was the culinary inspiration for the Society. Under her leadership the first cookbook, *The Aromatic Kitchen*, was published in 1986. The initial run of 2000 copies sold out quickly and by 1999 four popular cookery books had been published. Their success was explained by a note from Jeanne in one of the old Bay Tree newsletters. She wrote that due to the flooding she and David had to evacuate their house for some months, so she'd been unable to test any new recipes in her kitchen. Jeanne left nothing to chance.

These few comments do not do justice to the debt of gratitude that we, the current membership, owe Jeanne and her initial committee for all their hard work. She remained a loyal attender at meetings until very recently and we valued her support, advice and encouragement.

Thank you, Jeanne. Without your knowledge, energy, enthusiasm and positive attitude, we would not have the vibrant Society we enjoy today. We'll miss you. Rest in peace.

Sheila Jolley

STUDY SCHOLARSHIPS – "HERBS AND THEIR USES"

THE HFNZ CERTIFICATE COURSE

The "Herbs and their Uses" HFNZ Certificate Course was introduced in 2011 and has around 80 students studying at any one time.

The course is made up of 12 modules, each with its own marked assessment.

<u>The modules cover:</u>

1. Our planet, plants, and HFNZ objectives
2. The History of herbs
3. Herbal botany and identification
4. Growing herbs
5. Herb propagation and plant production
6. Harvesting and storing herbs
7. Culinary use of herbs
8. Herbs in personal care
9. Medicinal use of herbs
10. Herbal crafts
11. Growing herbs commercially
12. Herbal products and the law

Varied assessment questions

Each marked assessment contains True/False questions, Fill in the Gaps questions, Write a Paragraph about a Topic, Short Answer questions, and a Write up/Report on Practical exercise.

Students are expected to research answers and provide traceable references.

The modules are downloaded from the HFNZ website, studied by the student and the assessment completed. The completed assessment (hard copy) is then returned to the HFNZ Secretariat who passes this on to the module marker. Once marked, the marker returns the assessment to the student and notifies the HFNZ Secretariat of the mark.

Costs of the course

$30 per module for individual members of HFNZ
$45 per module for those who are not individual members of HFNZ

Two scholarships – opportunity for free study

There are two opportunities for potential students to study free of charge. HFNZ offers two scholarships – one of these is the Heather Young Scholarship. Enquire to HFNZ Secretariat to see when the scholarship is available, i.e. when it has not already been taken up by a student. Scholarships will be awarded on merit upon application to the HFNZ National Executive Committee via the Secretariat.

As at February 2018 both scholarships are currently available.

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Facebook page: www.facebook.com/HerbFederationNZ

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

I/We wish to apply for membership to the **Herb Federation of New Zealand Inc (PLEASE PRINT)**

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss _____

Address: _____

_____

Phone:_____ **Email**:_____

INDIVIDUAL	$35.00
FAMILY (For two members) Add $5.00 for each additional member.	$40.00
OVERSEAS	$40.00
DONATION	$_____
TOTAL ENCLOSED	$_____

Payment by direct credit is available. Our bank is Westpac, Account No. 03-1549-0030463-00. Please make sure you name is identified with the payment.

☐ Please tick if you require a receipt.

☐ Please tick if you want your details kept confidential. (Your name will only appear on any membership list required for official **HFNZ** business.)

Please send your application to: The Treasurer,
Herb Federation of New Zealand Inc., PO Box 546, Feilding, 4740

For office use

DATE: _____

RECEIPT: _____

The Aims and Objectives of the Federation

- To promote greater interest in herbs and an appreciation of the value of herbs and their safe use.
- To increase knowledge through education.
- To assist in maintaining the diversity of herb collections.
- To protect and promote the use of herbs, now and for future generations.
- To encourage accurate identification of plants and the use of botanical names.

Activities we promote include Herb Awareness Week events, establishment and maintenance of herb gardens and plant collections, seed and plant exchange, workshops and booklets on specific topics, visits to interesting gardens, nurseries and garden centres, exchange of newsletters.

Long term aims include the possibilities of a national garden and support for recognized herbal qualifications.

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR WINTER 2018

Herb Society members are invited to submit contributions for the next edition of Herbnews

Deadline for next edition: MAY 20th, 2018

Editor: **Jane Wrigglesworth**

email: jane@plainjanemedia.co.nz

Production: **Fishers, Palmerston North**

Contact the EDITOR for subscriptions, advertising, articles, circulation enquiries and other details.

herbnews

REGISTERED AT GPO WELLINGTON AS A MAGAZINE

RETURN ADDRESS

HERB FEDERATION OF NEW ZEALAND
PO BOX 128077
REMUERA, AUCKLAND 1050