



# CHAMOMILE August 2014

## Notice Board

### August

**Tuesday 19th** 1.30 p.m. Senior Citizens Hall, Carterton.

### September

**Tuesday 16th** 1.30 p.m. Senior Citizens Hall, Carterton.

**Saturday 6th** Botanic Gardens and Home of Compassion, Wellington. A full day trip. Visiting a herb garden, Maori medicinal garden, lunch at Botanic Gardens Cafe. Afternoon at Home of Compassion gardens at Island Bay.

## Weeding on Mana Island



At our Tuesday meeting in June, Di Batchelor talked to us about weeding on Mana Island. Di has spent four months a year there (September - December 2011 - 2013). The photo, left, shows Di with a sea bird chick on Mana.

Di Walks the whole Island looking for weeds (250 ha), including these main ones: Boxthorn (a bit like Giant Barberry), Purple Ragwort (Senecio), Tree Mallow, Tree Lucerne, Gorse, Broom, Greater Bind Weed, Onion Weed, Bone Seed, Ivy, Barberry, Elderberry, Wandering Jew, Tangea Pea, Blackberry, Karo (native).

Di works 10 days on, 4 days off, and stays in comfortable workers quarters similar to Holdsworth Lodge. She has a good vegetable garden there. Something of the terrain and vegetation is shown in the photo bottom left.



Work is carried out with one other weedy for safety. GPS lines are used to do a grid search 5 - 25m apart. Di has had husband Chris as her weeding partner for short periods.

Di has also done casual Ranger work on Mana and Somes Island.

Di's favourite pasture weeds and herbs are: Fennel, Yarrow, Sheep Sorrel, Plantain, Sea lettuce, Water Cress, Parsley and Puha. Work highlights for her are when she discovers a new weed!

Di recommended a beautifully illustrated book on wild plants: *NZ Wildflower Portraits* by Sheila H Cunningham. She has copies and can provide them for \$20 each.

## What's a Weed?

At our June meeting, Diane gave us a definition of weeds. This was to introduce Di Batchelor's talk, but also because herbs are often, to the uninitiated, seen as weeds. Diane found the definition in her Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (which was published in 1956) quite fascinating – also the language used.

1. A herbaceous plant not valued for use or beauty, growing wild and rank, and regarded as cumbering the ground or hindering the growth of superior vegetation.
2. (a) Any herb or small plant. (Old English)  
(b) Applied to a shrub or tree, especially a large tree, on account of its abundance in a district. (1697)

## Herb of the Month (June: Diane Grant) Borage (*Borago officinalis*)



Also known as Starflower and Bee Bread, Borage is an old herb, known at least since Roman times.

Although the leaves are slightly prickly and, because of its height of 60-90 cm, it can be very 'floppy' and hard to keep tidy, it adds colour and interest to the garden and has value in the kitchen as well.

The star-shaped flowers (which attract bees) can be blue or white, depending on the cultivar, and droop from the tops of the main stems. This makes them very attractive, especially if they are planted in the middle of a border with smaller plants in front to conceal the lower stems which can be somewhat bare. It is said that pinching the terminal buds may reduce the height of the plant and increase its compactness.

A hardy annual, Borage is one of the easiest plants to grow as it readily self-seeds, producing 'babies' galore in even average soil – although it must be well-draining. Seeds can be grown outside in the early spring or even in autumn and overwintered in the ground, ready to come up at the first signs of spring.

It is a very good companion plant and enhances the growth of tomatoes, brassicas, strawberries, cucumbers, beans, grapes, zucchini, squash and peas. In fact it is not known to be antagonistic to any plant!

It is also valuable in the compost heap as its leaves and stems contain calcium, potassium and silica.

In the kitchen the small, young leaves can be used in salads or chopped and added to soups or sautéed dishes, and in sandwich spreads. They also go well in lemonade or other similar drinks. A refreshing tea is made by pouring a cup of boiling water over a quarter cup of bruised borage leaves; steep for 5 minutes, strain and serve.

Freezing the flowers in newly made ice cubes is a fun addition to summer drinks. The flowers are also popular with those clever people who decorate cakes and produce candied flowers. (A good beginner's guide is apparently *Edible Flowers: Desserts and Drinks* by C. Barash.)

Finally, Borage may help heal insect bites and inflamed or infected cuts. Either use finely chopped leaves, or make a tea by pouring 4 cups of boiling water over a large amount of leaves; steep, strain and pour into a spray bottle. Spray on skin for cooling and healing. It seems the silica may cause irritation to those with sensitive skin so should be used cautiously to make sure.

Borage may also affect lactation in pregnant and breastfeeding mothers so should be avoided then.

If consumed in large amounts, it apparently may have a diuretic effect!

## Book Review (June: Diane Grant) - *The Living Kitchen – a New Zealand Companion to Herbs, Wholefoods, Health and Happiness* by Gillian Polson

Although this book was first published in 1983, and my copy is from a 1986 reprint (still a long time ago), like many books on herbs and other plants it is timeless.

As most readers will know, Gillian Polson was the founder of the well-known Herb Farm at Akaroa on Bank's Peninsula and the writer of a number of books on herbs. Like others of hers I've read, this is not a reference book, but one for dipping into. Have it beside the bed.

As well as an early chapter about her early life in England and how she came to live in New Zealand, there is another on wholefoods philosophy, including what should be in the larder and why, and another on bread-making, including how to produce 'flower-pot bread' which she apparently introduced to this country.

However, most of the book can be described as a Journal of the Year with a chapter for each month providing a guide to what could be done in the herb garden in that month and as well as recipes, very interesting snippets about herbs, their history and uses, and favourite quotations and references reflecting the writer's philosophy of life. One shouldn't forget the beautiful illustrations throughout the book either.

I have donated this book to the library – although after rereading it for this review I nearly didn't! It really is a delightful book and I do recommend it to both herb beginners as well as 'oldies'.

## Saturday Meetings in June and July - Secretary's Report



### Soapmaking Workshop 5 July

On the day of our Soapmaking Workshop at the home of Marnie Rutherford, we were lucky to have a mild day in the midst of a very cold spell.

We gathered for a welcoming morning tea which Marnie provided and afterwards went to her shed where all the equipment was laid out and ready to go.

We were divided into two groups – soapmakers and soap millers. After lunch we swapped over. Marnie gave us a very instructive talk on soap making, with dire warnings to be very careful of the lye (or carbolic acid) which can splash about and be a danger, but is a most essential ingredient in the art of making soap.

We made two types of soap – lard and olive oil. Marnie said that the olive oil doesn't have to be the expensive type and the lard can be obtained cheaply from butchers shops.

Then began a session of boiling and weighing out the ingredients. In soapmaking the weight is most important and must be exact, so there was always a waiting time for the scales. For the soap making, you could choose the colour, the herbal oils and herbs (which must be dried) of your choice. When the soaps were ready, Marnie wrapped them in blankets. The soap takes a while to be hardened and set. A couple of weeks later it was divided up and we all now have a lovely bag of soap. Val's soaps are shown in the photo above.

For the milling, olive oil or lard is brought to the boil. The lye is boiled separately. These ingredients then have to be cooled down to an exact temperature and mixed together. This takes a lot of elbow grease so a cake mixing machine was used to help us along. The mixture was then placed in cake shapes (hearts, etc). The finished soaps were then laid out and divided up between us all to be taken home., This meant we had variety. Marnie told us that these soaps should be left in the airing cupboard for two weeks.

It was a most enjoyable day where we learned a lot. Above all, with everyone moving around boiling and weighing, we all socialised, talked and laughed. Marnie was always on hand to give us help when needed.

For our mid-Winter celebration a good number of our members had lunch at a country pub. We all had a good time there.

### Herb of the Month (July: Glynis de Castro) Rue (Ruta graveolens Herb of Grace)



Rue is a native of the Balkans. It enjoys hot, dry soil conditions.

Rue has bluish leaves and a little yellow flower.

It can be grown as a hedge or used as a herb. Mediterranean countries use it to flavour cooking and grappa.

Rue can cause blisters on the skin, abortions, and gastric discomfort. Cats dislike its smell.

It is used to treat soft tissue injuries, tennis elbow, eye strain and carpal tunnel syndrome.

Pliny the Elder knew and wrote about Rue. Soranus, a gynaecologist, used it to induce abortions.

### Carterton School Town & Country Garden Trail

This will be held on Sunday, 16 November. There will be 10 gardens, with a mixture of large country, small town and special interest, all within the Carterton Borough. Ticket prices are \$25 (purchased before Friday 14 November or \$30 (purchased on the day). Tickets are available from Clareville Nursery, Take Note, and Carterton School (Holloway Street).

## In Memoriam

In memory of Heather Tarrant who died peacefully July 6th 2014 after a long illness. We remember her and husband Gordon for their gracious hospitality and warm welcome shown to the Wairarapa Herb Society members over very many years. Rawhitirua is a living tribute to their great interest in all things growing.

## Review (July: Val Richardson) - Good Magazine



This review is not of a book, but a magazine. Good Magazine was first published in 2008 on World Environment Day. It is the first New Zealand carbon-neutral magazine: produced from renewable materials; paper from well-managed forests and ink based on ingredients derived from wood resin and vegetable oils (not petroleum based). The advertisers and contributors have the same environmental and renewable ethos. Good is a bi-monthly magazine, and contains articles which highlight issues related to sustainability, the use of renewable resources, eco-friendly, eco-living and the impact of personal choices on local and world communities – reminding the reader how small individual changes may have a cumulative impact. The many 'Features' in the July/August issue include: an article 'Waste Not' about Raglan's journey to be a trash-free town with

reduced land fill; 12 Secrets of Winter Wellness; and Seven Digital Trends to Change Your Life. The regular 'Good Times' is a calendar of events throughout New Zealand – festivals, expos, fairs and markets. I recommend Good Magazine to all those concerned with the effect we have on our planet and wish to know how to minimize negative effects; and to those who are interested in growing herbs and vegetables, cooking nutritious food and living a sustainable, healthy life. Sounds like Herb Society Members!

## Tinctures



At our July Tuesday meeting, Lorraine Erith explained how she makes tinctures. She has provided the following note for the newsletter.

Tinctures are a way of using medicinal herbs. They have the following advantages over water based preparations: they remain potent for many years; small quantities are very effective; they act rapidly; and some herbal alkaloids and resins are extractable only by the use of alcohol.

### Making a tincture from fresh plant material

Choose the plant and parts needed for your tincture.

Do not wash the plant (except for roots) but discard any damaged parts.

Chop the plant coarsely, except flowers or delicate plants.

Fill a jar with the chopped material.

Top the jar with 100 percent Vodka.

Cap and label the jar.

Top up the level next day. Check daily to ensure the plant material stays completely covered with the vodka.

You can use other spirits or vinegar (cider vinegar, wine vinegar, or rice vinegar). I find the vinegar tinctures better for flower tinctures (dandelions, violets, calendula etc.). Check daily that the plant remains covered and top up where necessary.

Leave for about 6 weeks, then strain, label and date. The tincture will be ready for use. Vinegar tincture can be used in salad dressings, cooking or just a refreshing, healing drink with honey. 15mls per 50kg body weight is the recommended dose. Vinegar tinctures do not last as long as alcohol tinctures. 20 drops is the average dose for an alcohol tincture ... but a lot depends on what you are treating. At the first sign of a virus I myself would be taking 2mls of olive leaf or echinacea 3 to 4 times a day. We are all different so we need to dose accordingly..

Vinegar will corrode metal lids so where possible use a plastic lid or place plastic over the jar before fitting the lid.

It's a lot of fun.....and the health giving benefits are very rewarding.

**Working Bee at Rosa & Si Vallance's, Te Kanuka Station, making items for promotion at the 'Aging with Attitude' Expo (Genesis Energy Recreation Centre, 1 October)**



Commented Rosa: "What a fun and productive day! Nine willing workers, our efforts looking like a beautiful flower arrangement. To finish, we experimented with making book marks, Andra having contributed appropriate quotes. Thanks to Val, Andra, May, Agnes, Vicky, Christine, Gail, and Lyn for their enthusiasm.



**The Wairarapa Herb Society (Estab. September 1982 and registered under the Charities Act No. C.C. 29074)**

**P O Box 42 Masterton.**

**Objective:** To promote and share knowledge of herbs, their cultivation and use.

The Society can accept no liability for any ill-effects resulting from information presented in this newsletter.

**Meetings** held on the third Tuesday of the month at the Senior Citizens Hall, High Street North, Carterton (opposite Wild Oats Café). As far as possible, Saturday meetings are held on the 1st Saturday of each month.

**Annual Sub:**

Individual: \$20\*; Families: \$30\*

\*\$5 reduction on subscription if paid up member of Herb Federation

**Quarterly Newsletter**

**Executive Committee:** Lyn Tomlinson, May Brown, Agnes Jones, Gail Edwards, Val Richardson, Andra Bramwell, Christine Paul, Debbie Dittmer, Bill Edginton.

**Officers:** Chairperson: Lyn Tomlinson; Secretary: Agnes Jones; Treasurer: Val Richardson; Publicity: Andra Bramwell; News/Library: Bill Edginton.