



The Garden Master News



Newsletter of the Atlantic Master Gardeners Association

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Leaves

How silently they tumble down
 And come to rest upon the ground
 To lay a carpet, rich and rare,
 Beneath the trees without a care,
 Content to sleep, their work well done,
 Colors gleaming in the sun.
 At other times, they wildly fly
 Until they nearly reach the sky.
 Twisting, turning through the air
 Till all the trees
 Stand stark and bare
 Exhausted, drop to earth below
 To wait, like children, for the snow.

-by Elsie N. Brady



AMGA Notes

- Please submit articles for the Winter Newsletter by January 22, 2016 to:

suestuart@bellaliat.net

Don't forget- writing an article for the Newsletter can contribute to Volunteer hours for AMGA members

- Following is the schedule for upcoming AMGA Executive Meetings :

- December 9/15
- February 7/16
- April 10/16
- June 5/16

If you have topics you would like to have discussed at the next meeting, please contact an Executive member (see page 8) to have it added to the Agenda.

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Meanwhile have a **Merry Christmas** and **Best Wishes** for a Happy, Healthy **2016**

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Notes from the Treehouse

- by Lynn Brooks, AMGA President



Fall 2014-the new bridge over Muddy Paw Creek

Often during the terrible storms of last winter, I thought perhaps it is time to give up the garden and consider the advantages of winters south and apartment living. By August and into late October, all that became just a bad memory. What glorious falls we have here on the coast, it is truly my favourite time of the year. Sadly it is over far too quickly, and with the dropping leaves goes the wonderful privacy of my big trees, and I once again rejoin the 'hood'.

We are all so busy over the summer, so I hope everyone found some time to devote to a community activity. The Halifax group is slowly building a relationship with the IWK Children's Hospital. We did the play garden planters in early summer, and just finished replacing the plants with bulbs for next spring. The feedback from the staff and families has all been very positive which is nice to hear. It always amazes me how people respond to even the tiniest effort made to brighten up some neglected area with plants.

We gardeners tend to see only the imperfections of our work, but others just appreciate that we took the time to do it.

In early October your executive held its first meeting since the AGM in Truro. Unfortunately at this time we accepted the resignations of our two new members. The board will continue as is until next spring, when a new nomination committee will be formed. Plans are already underway for next year's convention, and all suggestions for topics and/or speakers will be greatly appreciated.

For me this is planning time, I wander around making notes on what needs tweaking, what has got too big, or is not performing and either needs relocation or total removal. I am lucky to be able to donate plants to a good cause, always being very careful that I do not include a garden thug as part of the gift.

This is also the time to start planning Master Gardener activities for the winter. For me if I can't garden, then I want to spend time with anyone who cares to listen, talking about gardens. Master gardeners bring a unique perspective to any local discussions because we live where we garden. No book or TV show can do that.

As always all of us on the executive are only a mouse click away.....

- Lynn

The Healing Herb Garden

PART TWO

- by **Diana Smith**

*“An herb is as an herb does
– utility is of the essence” (Lima, 1986).*



Creating A Healing Herb Garden

For some reason the idea of a “themed” herb garden has always held a special appeal for me, perhaps because of the gardener’s ability to curate and organize exactly what is contained within it – a Biblical garden featuring herbs of the gospel, a tea garden whose leaves can be used in refreshing tisanes, or an apothecary garden with herbs used strictly for medicinal purposes. The Chelsea Physic Garden in London, England is a fine example of the latter - founded in 1673 by the Worshipful Society of Apothecaries it contains over 5000 useful and historical plants and is used for the purpose of training apprentices in botany. Using this model one can create a healing garden in which the herbs grown have primarily medicinal properties but also contribute to the aesthetic value of the garden. This is in keeping with the cloisters of medieval times in which the monks, who usually lived next to the physician’s

quarters, would grow medicinal herbs also known for their beauty and aroma so as to give those ailing in the infirmary a therapeutic view.

The Structure

The ideal healing garden should be situated in a secluded, sunny area of the property to maximize plant health, privacy, and noise reduction. Building it as a two-tiered, raised bed structure can maximize use of space and the potential of the gardener to access all areas with relative ease.

Boards should be chemically untreated and made from cedar for best durability, and hardware should be rustproof. The beds should be filled with a mixture of topsoil and compost, and be made tall enough to accommodate long plant roots such as those seen with roses. To prevent soil compaction, prevent water loss, modulate soil temperature and generally keep plants “clean”, a straw mulch can be used between plants; this is chosen instead of bark mulch which can be too acidic for most herbs. Topsoil, compost and mulch would have to be topped up as necessary based on weather conditions and the number and size of plants grown.

For weed suppression, the paths between raised beds could either be covered with bark mulch or gravel, depending on preference; multi-coloured gravel tends to give the area a more “finished” appearance and will pack down with use so it’s easy to walk on. Wooden barrels, rocks, and additional small terracotta planters can be used to add both functionality (e.g. wooden planters to contain herbs such as lemon balm) and aesthetic value.

The Healing Herb Garden

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The Nine Herbs

I have always had a preference for perennial herbs and can appreciate plants that can survive the winter without much help and return in the spring like old friends. Most of the herbs chosen are hardy, herbaceous perennials, with some favourite annuals thrown in for good measure. Here, in alphabetical order, are my “necessary nine”.

1. Artemesias (*Artemesia spp.*) – named for the Greek goddess of the moon, this silver-grey coloured perennial reflects the lunar glow on summer nights. There are many cultivars to choose from but perhaps the most famous is the common wormwood or *Artemisia absinthium* that was used to make Absinthe, the bitter, highly alcoholic green spirit of the 18th century. Later, an ointment called “Absorbine” was made from wormwood oil (absinthol) and after that a “Junior” version was produced which people may still use topically today to ease joint pain. Due to the potentially toxic nature of this herb if taken internally, it would only be grown for ornamental purposes in this garden. However, it gives off a lovely silvery light, serving as a backdrop and foil for other plants. Cultivars that tend to do well are “Silver King” and “Silver Queen”.

2. Anise Hyssop (*Agastache foeniculum*) – this tall, square-stemmed, lavender-flowered bee-magnet is a self-seeding annual that never seems to require any human help with propagation; if self-sown early it will produce mature plants by August. As Patrick Lima notes, “It is good company for [bee] balm in both the garden and the teapot”. When rubbed, its leaves and flowers smell of licorice and it’s great for potpourri, dried arrangements, and cooking. Medicinally, anise

hyssop is considered to be an “aromatic digestant” and can be taken as a tea for respiratory problems (e.g. coughs) or to prevent gas and bloating when sipped with a meal.

3. Bergamot (*Monarda didyma*) – this herb



Bee on Anise Hyssop

is also known by its other names, “bee balm” and “Oswego tea”. Ontario plantsman Patrick Lima notes that, “The whole plant, flowers and leaves, smells deliciously of oranges and spice; the leaves add a special bouquet to any tea blend, similar to the flowery essence that pervades Earl Grey tea”. Interestingly, this herb is also a North American native – it is said that in 1744 Virginia farmer John Bartram collected seed from wild bergamot growing near Oswego, New York (thus the name) and then sent the seeds back to England where plants were growing well by 1760. A tall, attractive perennial with red flowers, aboriginal peoples once used this herb as a medicinal tea for mild fevers, headaches, colds and sore throats; the Blackfoot specifically used it in poultices for skin infections and minor wounds. Herbalists today state that bergamot is the

The Healing Herb Garden

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natural source of the antiseptic thymol, the main active ingredient in modern commercial mouthwash formulas.

4. Calendula (*Calendula officianalis*) – this hardy annual comes in cheery hues of oranges and yellows and is easily grown from seed. Plant pharmacological studies suggest that *Calendula* extracts *in-vitro* have anti-viral, anti-genotoxic and anti-inflammatory properties. In herbalism it is used in suspension or in tincture to treat various skin disorders (acne, stasis ulcers, bruises, boils, rashes, chapped skin), and can also be taken internally to promote digestion, treat gastric disorders, or heal oral and pharyngeal mucosa.

5. Chamomile (*Matricaria chamomilla*, *Matricaria recutita*) – this yellow and white annual herb has an apple-like scent when touched and is best grown near the edge of the bed due to its propensity to self-seed. It has long been popular for its sedative effects and in the past was used to soothe stomachs or to calm feverish children. Today it is used to treat insomnia and anxiety, help heal wounds, plus relieve digestive and inflammatory conditions.

6. Garlic (*Allium sativum*) – the hard-necked variety of garlic seems to do best in our maritime climate; it also grows better when started in the fall. Besides being a proven antiseptic, garlic is said to have both preventative and curative medicinal properties. According to *Mosby's Handbook of Herbs and Natural Supplements*, garlic can be used as an antilipidemic, antimicrobial, anti-inflammatory, and possible antihypertensive.

7. Lavender (*Lavendula spp.*) – as this flowering shrub is from the Mediterranean, the key to growing this most beautiful and fragrant of herbs is to choose a cultivar bred for one's particular climate. According to Patrick Lima, the old herbals speak fondly of its use in all kinds of remedial syrups, sweet waters, potions and pills. It has traditionally been used as a sedative, anxiolytic, and sleep-enhancer; when used in aromatherapy it may increase appetite, and when applied externally can also be used to treat cuts and abrasions.

8. Lemon Balm (*Melissa officianalis*) – Lima states that this freely seeding perennial herb is, "the perfect tea herb...Few leaves are as sweetly cordial, the scent is citrus but not sharp". Plants in bloom attract lots of pollinators that feed on the tiny white flowers and the genus name, "Melissa", is derived from the Greek word for "bee". Pure lemon balm essential oil is used in skin care as an anti-inflammatory and is highly prized for its aromatherapy properties where it is considered to be uplifting and calming. This herb is definitely one that moves, especially in rich soil, so if not confined to a barrel or planter its edges will need to be controlled with a hand trowel.

9. Scented Geranium (*Pelagonium spp.*) – this odd but wonderful annual, originally from Africa, is able to accurately copy the scent of the fruit, flowers, leaves and seeds of unrelated species and is included here for its decorative and fragrant attributes; there are currently over 100 cultivars, each categorized by aroma. They look excellent grouped in attributes; there are currently over 100 cultivars, each

The Healing Herb Garden

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containers and their leaves can be used for baking, flavouring iced tea, or to scent sugar; leaves and flowers can also work well in potpourris, sachets and wreaths.

The Herbal Harvest

The concentration of essential oils in herbs is highest in the morning, so they should be harvested after the dew has dried but before daytime temperatures get too warm. Herbs should only have one-third of their growth removed so that there is enough foliage left for photosynthesis and re-generation. If choosing to dry the herbs, the plants should be cut just above the first tender joint prior to bloom - this practice not only ensures the best concentration of essential oils but also helps the plant revitalize more quickly as woody growth has not been disturbed. In addition, the plants should be hosed down the day before cutting so that the leaves are clean. After the dead stems and leaves are removed, one should make small bunches of the herbs, tie them together, and hang them in a dark, temperate, well-ventilated room with little dust. It goes without saying that each bunch should be labeled - herbs can appear quite different when dried so recognition of species and/or cultivar may become more difficult. If leaves crumble into powder when rubbed between the hands then the herbs are considered "dry". Drying may also be accomplished in an oven set to 110 °F or less although some essential oils are lost with this practice. To ensure good flavour and colour of one's herbal products, storage of entire leaves is best done in dark or opaque glass containers in a cool, temperate place away from direct sunlight. In order to conserve essential oils, do not crush the leaves

until right before usage in products or in cooking. Some herbs (e.g. basil, chives, cilantro) will retain their essential oils best when frozen – when harvesting these, the clean herbs can be wrapped in plastic, labeled, and placed in the freezer. Herbs can also be cleaned, chopped, and frozen with water or olive oil in an ice cube tray; the cubes can later be popped out and placed into containers for easy storage and access. Goodwin emphasizes that large harvests of perennial herbs should be avoided in late summer and fall as new growth needs time to harden off and the herbs should be storing up carbohydrates for winter survival. To ensure a good germination rate, any leftover seed heads should be harvested when their colour changes from green to brown to grey; they should also be dried thoroughly.

Conclusion

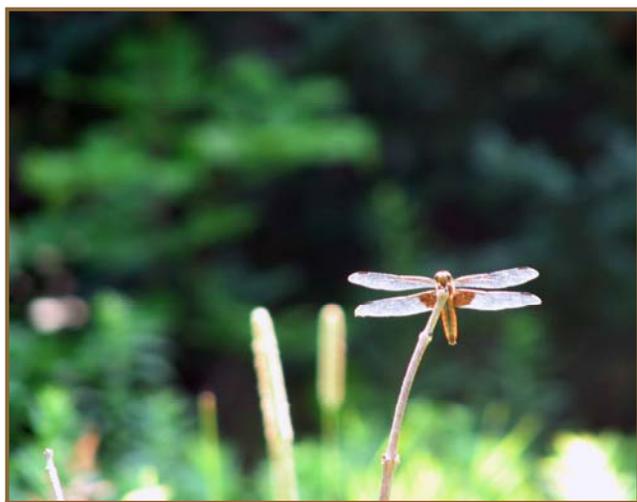
Irrespective of their medicinal properties, a healing environment exists in the presence of herbs simply by experiencing the richness of their scent, colour, texture, touch, and taste, all of which provides the gardener or visitor with a special experience beyond the ornamental. In some cases the addition of art or artifacts in the herb garden can enhance its appeal as the designer makes use of various soundscapes and visual accompaniments that serve to augment yet not overwhelm its beauty. From a phenomenological perspective, Bhatti et al. postulate that most people have a memory of a real or imagined "secret garden" that persists throughout life. The authors state that, "Memories of gardens relate not only to what is remembered, but the senses greatly influence how the past can be revisited; the garden mediates memories of

The Healing Herb Garden

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categorized by aroma. They look excellent grouped in childhood, escape and innocence, as well as recollections of family members and key events". This statement holds out great hope for anyone creating or being in a garden for its healing attributes as it has the ability to become a place of practical magic.

My current herb garden, once a sunny spot of horticultural delight, is now cool and shaded due to the neighbours' ever-encroaching saplings...which means that once more my herbs lack optimal growing conditions. So I will need to make some changes. But then again, in the garden as in life, reinvention can be part of the healing process.



Dragonfly

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NAME THAT PLANT



Anita's Mystery Plant remains a Mystery!
Put your MG Thinking caps on and send us your suggestions.

This amazing tree from Asia has an interesting history. Fossil records show it once grew in Europe as well as North America but vanished 1.8 million years ago during the Pleistocene epoch of glaciation. The good news is we can grow it again as an ornamental in our gardens.

The tree is fast growing when immature and suited for moist soil in full sun or part sun. It does well in acid to neutral soil. It takes a long time to reach its full height of 45 feet.

My favorite is the Japanese variety. The leaves are multi-hued with heavy veins and tones of pink and green. In fall the heart-shaped leaves take on autumnal tones of gold, orange and red before they fall from the tree. It is hardy in zones 4b to 8.

Send your guess to:

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