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Newsletter



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Next Meet

Monday, 14 Dec,
7.30pm
Milford Primary
30 Shakespeare Rd
Milford

**Christmas party-
please bring a
plate.**

Last meet

Basil is a quintessential culinary herb—even those who have no space for a herb garden, or who doesn't grow much else, will often have a basil on the windowsill to enhance their favourite dishes.

In our last meet we were astounded by the long list of different basil available, and enjoyed listening to the virtues and fables of this plant that goes beyond its love affair with tomatoes in the kitchen.



STILY (TALK) Wikimedia

In the Garden

December is summer, and the start of the most productive time in the garden. Vegetables are forming, and ripening, herbs are flowering and growing bigger and producing plentiful in the warmer temperatures, and fruit are starting to set too.

Now that most plants have grown in, it is a good time to review your garden plan—to see what worked well and what didn't, and make notes so that you can change things next time. Perhaps you planted a tall herb too close to the front edge, obscuring smaller

plants behind it, or maybe your sun loving plants are not getting enough light... Or you could've stumbled upon a winning combination in your garden—please let us know!

With the plants proliferating, so do the insects and pests, so keep a vigilant eye on bad bugs and fungi that can quickly get out of control. Use organic precautions and treatments where you can.

Besides watering wisely in the summer heat, weeding and pest control, there is still lots of planting that can be done—start thinking about fall flowering herbs, or planting herbs that will grow through winter.

A few ideas on natural pest and disease control

Healthy Plants

Starting off with healthy seeds, seedlings, or plants is just the beginning, but it is a good one—plants that are stronger are just better in withstanding attacks by insects, and are less prone to be infected by bacteria or fungi.

Healthy Environment

There is an intricate ecological web between the soil and the plants that grow in it, and the animals that live in it. Ensuring a pathogen free, healthy, and nutrient rich soil teeming with as much good life as possible is essential in providing a good environment for your plants.

Feeding the plant and the soil

Depending on the nutrient needs of your plants, it is almost always a good idea to give them a bit of a feed boost during their growing season. Seaweed solutions are often suggested as a com-



Pest and disease control

plete and natural, easily absorbed feed that can be applied often without causing nutrient overload.



Aphids under leaf

Keeping vigilance

Even with our best efforts, disease and pests strike, but being vigilant and dealing to the problem as soon as it arises can stop the issue in its tracks before your whole garden suffers. Remember to discard (not compost!) any diseased plant parts and keep good garden hygiene, e.g. disinfect secateurs and gardening gloves after working with a pest.

Cut your losses

This is a tough one—especially if you nurtured a plant from seedling stage—but, if after many attempts at recovering fails, it is sometimes better to remove an infected plant and start again.

Work with nature

Use natural pest and disease control wherever you can. Be gentle with your environment, some poisons and chemicals can persist in the soil for many years, and remember that good insects share your garden with the insect pests, and are often susceptible to the same poison controls. Think before you act chemically.

Use the principles of crop rotation and companion planting.

Recipes

◆ **Seaweed tea**

Collect seaweed (make sure the beach you collect from is not a protected marine reserve), and wash off excess salt. Fill a barrel or bucket 3/4 with rain water and fit in as much seaweed as you can.

Cover and let it brew for a few weeks to a month. Stir it every few days.

It is very odorous, so make sure you do this away from your (or your neighbour's) daily household. When ready, dilute with 3 parts water to 1 part seaweed tea.

This can be used as a weekly soak feed, or a foliar feed.

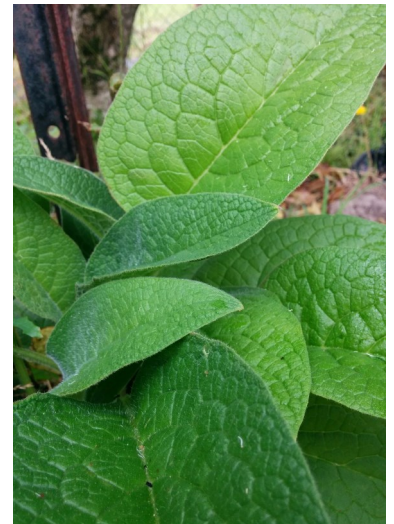


Collecting seaweed for tea

◆ **Comfrey tea**

Similar to seaweed, comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*) makes for a great fertiliser in the garden as it is rich in nitrogen and potassium.

Fill a barrel or bucket up to 3/4 with freshly harvested comfrey leaves, weigh down the leaves with a large stone or brick, and fill the tub with rain water. Let it sit for around 20 days to brew. Strain off the liquid (again it is quite foul smelling) and dilute at least half with fresh rain water before using as a foliar feed or a side dressing.



Comfrey leaves

◆ **Compost and/or manure tea and Bokashi liquid**

Following the same principles as the seaweed and comfrey tea, make a compost tea, or manure tea (or both).

If you use the Bokashi method of composting, the resulting liquid can be diluted (1Tbsp per 3l or water) and used on your plants. It is a soil builder and plant feeder.

◆ **Milk Spray / Baking Soda Spray / Aspirin Spray for Fungus**

At the first sign of fuzzy whiteness on your plants, it is a good idea to treat for powdery mildew—a fungal disease common in hot and humid conditions.

- i) **Milk**—dilute whole milk with water (40% milk; 60% water) and spray on affected parts.
- ii) **Baking Soda**— dissolve 1Tbsp bicarbonate of soda to around 2l of water (plus 1 Tbsp vegetable oil and 1 Tbsp liquid castile soap *optional) and spray affected parts.
- iii) **Aspirin**—dissolve 2 uncoated tablets (325mg aspirin each) in 600ml water and spray on affected parts.

Spray late afternoon, some of these require sunlight to work the best, but in the heat of the day may cause leaf burn. Leaves must be dry by night.

◆ **Aphid spray:**

Sap sucking insects are a real pest, and the aphid a much reviled one by gardeners.

For an effective spray against aphids, chop 1 onion, crush 4-5 garlic cloves and chop up 2 small chillies (or use a pinch of cayenne pepper if you don't have chillies), add to 600ml water and let it steep for a few days on a warm sunny win-

dowsill. Strain and dilute 1:1 with water, add a dash of washing up liquid (natural and biodegradable) and spray on the pests. Spray at evening time when beneficial insects are less likely to be affected.



**This is a stinky and burny brew—do not sniff the liquid, and do not get it on your exposed skin or in your eyes.

Holiday Herbs

Herbs lend themselves beautifully to any event, or life celebration, and the December festive season is no exception.

Oranges, Apples, Cloves, Cinnamon, Pine, Star Anise, and Ginger are typical of a northern hemisphere Christmas scent.



There are also many red and green herbs (and fresh berries!) in season in our warmer climate during the festive season. What about an edible “wreath” made with fresh basil

leaves and red tomatoes stuffed with mozzarella—a perfect platter for the holiday table.



Or a sweet version with a pavlova with berries and mint ...yum!



Using herbs for cooking that special family feast shouldn't be too difficult—think of a herb crusted lamb rack, honey-mustard glazed ham, venison medallions with juniper berries, sage and onion stuffed chicken... Even if you are vegetarian—cumin roasted sweet potatoes, wild mushroom and thyme tart, sage and butternut ravioli, brie and cranberry phyllo parcels, fennel salad...

Not forgetting homemade herb-themed gifts—to name just a few—a peppermint foot rub, ginseng and black pepper moustache oil, lavender bath salts, hops dream pillows, or rosehip jelly, tarragon vinegar, chilli sauce, speciality herb tea blends or spice rubs...



Happy Holidays!