

MeadowSweet

Herbs & Flowers

MeadowSweet Herbs & Flowers Monthly Newsletter

Jan 2018

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Event Dates

- ⇒ **15 Jan**, MeadowSweet re-opens
- ⇒ **21 Jan**, Orewa Farmer's Market

Social Media

Find out more on how to grow and use your herbs (and other useful plants) on my Social Media accounts:



News

With a new year, there comes an undeniable sense of hope, a kind of freshness, anticipation of something better - new ideas, new beginnings, and new plans abound.

So too, it is with me and my business! Here's a peek at what I'm thinking and feeling for the coming year.

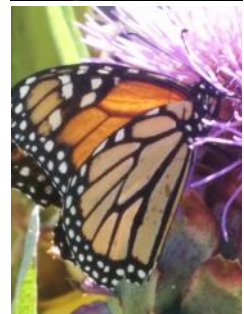
Re-focus in the NURSERY

2017 was a good year, and definitely an interesting year, but I feel that I lost track of what I was about at the core of MeadowSweet, and in 2018 I'd like to reign in, and come back to being true to my herbs first and foremost.

Vegetables: While I grow vegetables for myself in my quest toward urban self-sufficiency, and will continue to give grow and use advise on them through newsletter and social media, I won't be offering "common" veggies at my nursery or market stalls in 2018 - there's half a dozen places around every corner where you can find good quality punnets of silverbeet, spring onions, carrots, lettuces, green beans, etc... I will make an exception though on heirloom, or super interesting vegetables - and will have available seasonally, plants like Rampicante zucchini, Snake beans, Strawberry Popping Corn, Purple Vienna Kohlrabi etc.

Fruit: The same goes with fruit and berries - some interesting ones will remain in my nursery, like Pepino, Alpine Strawberry, Goji Berry, NZ cranberry, and Vanilla Passionfruit. And while I have a beautiful Albany Surprise grapevine of which pruning I can make great new plants, that will be available too. But for the moment I'm leaving big fruit trees to the fruit tree specialist growers (I am always happy to source unusual fruit on request as I have quite a few lovely contacts in the industry).

Flowers: While my cottage garden flower collection is growing, and while I find them interesting and unusual enough, and as many of them are either edible or me-



dicinal in any case (therefore considered a herb in my books), there'll always be a good selection (again of the more uncommon ones) in my nursery. They quite good for the beneficial insect populations anyway, and I'm all about ecology and biodiversity at MeadowSweet.

Tomatoes: As a self-confessed heirloom tomato collector, I am besotted with the variety of shapes, colours, tastes, growth habits and sizes of heirloom tomatoes available, and will in 2018 expand my current offering of over 70 varieties to 100 chosen varieties! So look out for the new tomato season!



Chillies: Perhaps just slightly greater than tomatoes, is my love for chillies and peppers in all their forms and heat-levels, and MeadowSweet will continue to offer a large variety of common and uncommon chillies this year.

Scented Pelargoniums: I'm always on the look-out for scented pelargoniums, and am proud to offer quite a variety of them already. These will remain a focus point for me in MeadowSweet through this coming season.

Edible Flowers: Another area of ex-



pertise, and interest for me, is edible flowers, and I will continue to offer a great selection of these.

Herbs: The crux of it all will be my selection of herbs - including all the common ones, and as many of the unusual ones that I can find. In all areas of herbal use - culinary, medicinal, household, craft, spiritual and cosmetic... My first love and main focus will remain on plants that fall in the realm of herbs.

What is a herb?

“The term “herb” [...] refers to a far wider range of plants, In addition to herbaceous perennials, herbs include trees, shrubs, annuals, vines, and more primitive plants, such as ferns, mosses, algae, lichens and fungi. They are valued for their flavour, fragrance, medicinal and healthful qualities, economic and industrial uses, pesticidal properties and colouring materials (dyes).”

~ RHS Encyclopedias of Herbs, Deni Brown, DK, 2008.

More Talks & Workshops

Talks: With my talks on how to grow and use herbs, vegetables, chillies, edible flowers, etc. becoming increasingly popular, and sought after, I'll be focusing on promoting my Speaking Engagements quite a bit in 2018.

Note to all garden clubs, interest groups, horticulture societies, meet-ups, or businesses across New Zealand (and internationally)- my presentations are now available via

Skype or other Conference Call facilities.

Request some [old favourites](#), or keep an eye out for engaging new topics I'm currently working on!

Workshops: This is the year that I'm going to really try very hard to do at least one workshop at month - so keep an eye out on [social media](#) and the [Meadow-Sweet website](#) for upcoming workshops. From gardening know-how like my Propagation Party, or how to home compost, to homemade herbal salves, an herb and edible flower High Tea, or making your own household cleaning products with herbs and essential oils... and much more!

Socialize!

Social Media Suite: It's the world we live in, and it's the way things go - engaging with your audience on social media has moved from being a side-dish to being the main meal in many small businesses.

MeadowSweet has had an online presence on many of the popular social media sites since it's inception, and I will continue to post on a very regular basis to all of these in 2018. So for quick updates, of interesting tidbits, or just a “what's up” with MeadowSweet - be sure to link up with me on:



Facebook: Meadow-SweetHerbsNZ



Instagram: MinetteTonoli



Twitter: MeadowSweetNZ



YouTube



Pinterest: Meadow-SweetHerbsFlowers



Website: MeadowSweet

Markets & Open Days

Farmer's Market: regular stall days at Orewa Farmer's Market will be as follow:

- ⇒ Summer and Autumn (starting 3rd Sunday in Jan - 3rd Sunday in May) - 1st and 3rd Sundays from 8am-12pm.
- ⇒ Winter (June, July, August) - 1st Sunday only from 8am-12pm.
- ⇒ Almost Spring (Sept) 1st and 3rd Sunday from 8am-12pm.
- ⇒ Spring (Oct, Nov) every Sunday from 8am-12pm.
- ⇒ Early Summer (Dec) 1st and 3rd Sunday from 8am - 12pm.

As always, this is weather dependent. Please check on the [website](#), or [Facebook](#) for up-to-date information on market attendance.



Occasional markets: MeadowSweet is often invited to special event days or school gala days, for more information on these, keep in touch through the [Markets & Events page on MeadowSweet's website](#).

Open days: With each workshop offered, the nursery and my garden will also have an open day. This will hopefully be once a month, either on the 1st or 3rd Saturday.

By appointment: As most of you know, I homeschool (unschool) my

two daughters, and as such am home quite often in any case, and can accommodate visits to the nursery and garden by appointment throughout most of the week - just [contact me](#) to set it up.

Online, and mail-order: The online shop will open again soon with plants available for order to ship (courier) or for collection by appointment.

I'm going to rework how this all works a bit, so updates on that coming soon. What I can say is that shipping is changing in that I will have standard box sizes to accommodate up to a specific number of plants (Medium or Large) with set courier prices per island. All plants will be shipped bare-rooted.

North Shore Herb Group

It warrants mentioning that I'll be running the North Shore Herb Group from February 2018. This is in my personal capacity as a herb lover, although MeadowSweet Herbs will sometimes have plants for sale at meet-ups at the Open Trading Table. I'm still in the process of securing a venue, but am hoping to have it run in Albany on the 2nd Monday evening of each month from 7.30pm—9.30pm. Please [contact me](#) if you want more information on this.



Summer Garden

It is really dry up here in Auckland! Even when there is a sprinkle (not often and very far between), it barely wets the first few millimeters of soil... We're on tank water, and because of the nursery, and my own extended garden, we are almost at the point of get a tanker to fill us up for a second time this summer! I've only been in NZ for 5 years, but even those who have lived here forever complain about the very dry, and very hot December we've had. Strange that this follows on us all complaining about the really wet spring we "suffered" through!

For the most part, this first week of 2018 is promising some respite with rain—let's hope the weather people got it right!

Even so, the gardens, especially our heat-loving vegetables and flowers seem to be enjoying the high temperatures. But even some of my hardy drought-resistant plants are showing distress at the lack of water.

Being water savvy in the garden is important, and a necessity in a self-sufficient system - here's a few tips:

1. Water when there's not much chance of evaporation. Early morning or early evening is best, and rather not when it's windy.
2. Water deeply and less often, rather than regular sprinkles. This helps the roots go deep and not be exposed to the heat and dryness of the surface soil.
3. Mulch helps to keep water and temperatures even on the soil level and minimizes evaporation.
4. Use grey water, especially on your ornamentals. Only use grey

water if you use environmentally safe cleaning products.

5. Use rinse and cooking water - get in the habit of catching the cold water before the water turns hot while waiting for a shower or dishes, and cool down cooking water (not salty though) for use on your plants.

Share your water saving tips with us on [Facebook](#)! Use the tag #mdswatersavingtips so we can easily find your tip!

Harvest: It's a great season for fresh produce from the garden - from the [vegetable garden](#) I've been harvesting artichokes, tomatoes, garlic, potatoes, lettuce, mizuna, bok choy, bulb fennel, beetroot, cucumber, spring onions, NZ spinach, popping corn, chillies, beans, and what feels like a gazillion zucchini!

Fresh [fruits](#) I'm getting now include tomatillos, gooseberries, strawberries, blackcurrants, red currants and blueberries. The grapes are starting to swell up nicely, promising delectable globes of sweetness in autumn, and the lemons and limes have set some quaint little fruit too, so it's going to hopefully be a zesty winter and spring this year.

If you have plums, plumcots, peacharines, you may be able to harvest them now. Also boysenberries, raspberries and passionfruit.

[Herbs](#) should be producing well too - pick and dry some of your extra rosemary, bay, sage, thyme, oregano and marjoram now. They'll continue to



produce new stems and leaves through summer. Flowers of Balm of Gilead, chamomile, calendula, cornflowers, and the flowering tops (including leaves) of yarrow and feverfew can be harvested and dried or macerated. Pick and process excess basil, coriander and parsley into delicious pestos, or make chimichurri.

Bergamot are flowering, and the flowers on anise hyssop and common hyssop are starting to form. All these herbs make excellent herbal teas. Add to these the deliciously fresh lemon flavours of lemon balm and lemon verbena.

Enjoy summer [flowers](#) of cosmos, zinnia, lavender, penstemon, dahlia and roses.

Sowing: See my gardening calendar for ideas on what to sow in January:

January Moon Calendar

Prune: A brief look at the NZ Gardening Calendar says that early-season stone [fruits](#), as well as young apples and pears that grow on semi-dwarf rootstock benefit from summer pruning.

When your main harvest of raspberries, boysenberries and blackberries are complete, old canes can be pruned out, and trim and tie down the new season's growth on grapevines.

Prune out (prick) flowering tops of [herbs](#) such as basil, coriander, rocket, parsley, and celery to encourage leaf production. Remember though to let one or two plants flower (for the bees!) and for seed-harvesting.

Pick flower heads of salad burnet for the vase, and a good prune of all the older leaves will revitalize the plant, allowing for fresh new rosettes to grow.

Herb of the Month: Hops

The International Herb Association chooses a Herb of the Year each year, and for 2018 that herb is Hops, so I'll celebrate that as the Herb of the Month for January too.



Hops are the main flavouring of beers, and an economically important crop because of that, but they also make very attractive climbing perennials, and have a long history as traditional herbal medicines.

Description

Hops (*Humulus lupulus*) is a twining and



Image from: Wikimedia Commons

climbing plant with bristly stems and lobed, toothed leaves. Tiny green male flowers, or larger and more attractive female flowers ("hops" or strobili) are borne on separate plants.

Cultivate

Climate

Native to the northern temperate regions, it prefers a warm and sheltered spot.

Quite drought resistant when established, and hardy to -20°C when dormant, although young spring shoots are very susceptible to even a mild frost.

Site and soil

Hops prefer full sun to part shade in a moist, well-drained and humus-rich soil. It needs to be trained up a trellis, or string.

Water & Feeding

While hops enjoys a rich and moist soil, it does not require much in added fertilizer.

Pruning

Remove previous season's growth when dormant. Thin new shoots, and cut in spring to use as an edible.

Propagate

Sow seed in spring, or make softwood cuttings in spring, basal cuttings in autumn, or propagate through divisions.

Use



Commercial Bitters for Beer Brewing

Hops was first cultivated in 736, but had a tumultuous history through the Middle Ages before it became the principal bitter for brewing beer.

Commercially it is an important crop with

nearly 30 000 hectares of hops in cultivation in the European Union in 2016. Interestingly, New Zealand had just over 400 hectares of hop fields according to the same [statistics](#).

Medicine But long before hops became synonymous with brewing processes, it was used as a folk remedy and by the 17th century it was well established as a herbal medicine.

Most commonly used as a tea for insomnia, stress and tension, anxiety, nervousness or irritability. It is also used for skin infections and for digestive complaints.

There is also traditional indications for hops to treat menopausal symptoms as they are thought to be highly oestrogenic.

It is often touted for increasing the flow of breastmilk in nursing mothers.

Culinary

The young shoots are eaten raw in spring or cooked like an asparagus. Young leaves can be added to salads, or brewed into a tea with flowers.

Other

Hops yield a brown dye, can be used to make fiber for textiles, and paper, and in cosmetics to soften skin.

Notes

Skin contact may cause dermatitis, and dislodged plant hairs may irritate eyes. Not to be taken as a sedative when depression is suspected, and not to be taken medicinally when pregnant.



Vegetable in focus: Zucchini



Zucchini is a summer squash that is best sown in spring for harvest in summer. Just one plant can fruit prolifically under the right growing conditions, and often leads to a glut of courgettes (also known as baby marrows or zucchini), or left to mature, will form marrows nearly a meter in size.

Zucchini can be eaten steamed, boiled, grilled, stuffed and baked, barbecued, fried or added to cakes and breads.

Flower in focus: Scabiosa



Scabiosa are also known as pincushion flowers, and come in annual and perennial forms, as well as tall and dwarf varieties. They make a beautiful border flower with a soft fragrance and striking colours ranging from white through pinks and purples to near black. Very attractive to bees, bumblebees and butterflies, they are a must in a wildflower or cottage garden.

FAQ



Q: Why do my chillies drop their flowers?

A: Most commonly flower drop in chillies and peppers is due to a lack of pollination. Although capsicum are self-fertile, when pollination doesn't occur, flowers are aborted. To ensure pollination, plant insect attracting flowers nearby, or shake the pepper bushes gently every now and then, or "tickle" your flowers with your fingertips or a paintbrush- distributing pollen between flowers.

Another reason why flowers may drop is if there is a sudden change in temperature –especially going from hot to cold.

Kids Corner

New to my newsletter, and website, is a Kids Corner. It has always been a passion of mine to encourage children to reconnect with nature, to explore gardens and plants, know where their food (and medicine) come from, and be just a bit *wild*. These will also feature on [Nature-All Kids NZ](#).

I encourage you as an adult reading my newsletter to find a young person and complete these challenges with them.

Bees and other insects require fresh water just like other living things. In the heat of summer, and especially when it is dry



like it has been over December, natural places for insects to find water dry up quickly, and it's up to us to ensure there's safe havens where they can quench their thirst!

Challenge: For the budding little gardeners amongst us—this month's challenge is to make a bee waterer or two (or three) from something that you've reclaimed or repurposed. If it is big enough it will even be used by birds in your garden! Show us the results by taking a picture and [e-mailing me](#) so it can be featured in our next newsletter!



Recipe Share

Rose Petal Jam

If you are lucky enough to have masses of fragrant summer roses, why not make them into a delightful rose petal jam?

- 4 cups fragrant rose petals
- 3 cups sugar
- 3 cups water
- 1 Tablespoon lemon juice

Rinse your roses and snip off the bitter white base on each petal. Layer your rose petals with two tablespoons of the sugar inbetween each layer and leave overnight.

Bring remaining sugar and water to a oil and boil for 5 minutes and cool to luke-warm before adding the juice, rose petals and sugar. Bring slowly back to a boil and cook until thickened. Pour into sterilized jars.

Hops and Lavender Sachets



Both hops and lavender are said to gently calm and induce sleepiness, allowing you to slip into a relaxed and restful sleep.

Simply take a large drawstring bag (or sew your own pouch) and fill with about two handfuls of each lavender flowers and dried hops flowers (can be obtained in brewery stores if you don't have your own). Have this as close to you as you can on the bed while sleeping, squeeze gently release the aromas. Goodnight!

Italian Zucchini Salad

One of my favourite ways to serve zucchini!

- 1 or 2 zucchini, sliced (0.5cm rounds)
- Olive oil
- 2 cloves Garlic (or more to taste)
- 1/4 cup Balsamic vinegar
- A few sprigs of Thyme
- Chilli (optional)

Sprinkle sliced zucchini with salt and allow to drain. Pat dry and fry in a pan with the olive oil until browned on both sides, drain on kitchen towel and reserve.

Pour off all but 2 Tbsp of the olive oil and reheat. Add chopped garlic, thyme and chillies. Add the balsamic vinegar when the garlic is cooked, and reduce the heat to make a thickened balsamic reduction. Pour over cooled zucchini and stand in the fridge for 24 hours to infuse before serving.

