

MeadowSweet

Herbs & Flowers

MeadowSweet Herbs & Flowers Monthly Newsletter

Feb 2018

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Event Dates

- ⇒ **18 Feb**, Orewa Farmer's Market
- ⇒ **24 Feb**, Seed Saving Basics Workshop

Social Media

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



News

Expansion

With the nursery business well set-up and growing, I am looking once again to expand my herbal offerings with some product ranges—not only will I help you **GROW** your herbs, but I'll **SHOW YOU** how to use them in workshops, and provide you with some great home-made herbal **PRODUCTS** too.

If you missed my previous posts about the beginnings of my herb business venture as “The Little Herb Cottage” long, long ago (2005) and far, far away (South Africa)—that’s more or less where I’m aiming to get to again, a place where you can find herb plants, fresh herbs, dried herbs, and a variety of culinary, medicinal and cosmetic herb related goodies. And good herb grow and use advice as always. Photos of what my shop and nursery looked like then, on the right —>>

I’m not sure exactly when these new ranges will be available as I’m sourcing suppliers, and researching legalities specific to NZ. But I hope it will be soon!

Talks & Workshops

This month I’m speaking at the Epsom Herb Group (8 February) on Scented Pelargoniums, and the Glen Eden Group (13 February) on Chillies and Peppers, and will have a hands-on workshop on seed saving basics at MeadowSweet (24 February). Check the [website](#) for more information.

North Shore Herb Group

I’m convening [The North Shore Herb Group](#), and our meeting for February is all about Herbal Flowers.

Meeting is on 12 Feb @ 7.30pm at Albany Community Hub with a \$5 door fee. Feel free to [e-mail](#) me for more information.



Late Summer Garden

Officially February is the last month of summer, and a busy and productive time in the garden. And while January was dry and hot, February is starting wet! Auckland truly has variable weather!

Harvesting the abundance of summer produce and dealing with the glut is probably taking up most of your time in the garden this month.

It is a good time to start thinking toward the next lot of plantings, especially where annuals beds are becoming empty.

Start your late summer to late autumn plants now from seed, and get your brassicas in the ground so that they can make the most of the warm temperature to get well established before winter sets in.

Heat and humidity as well as the proliferation of fruit, flowers and leaves, make pest insects and fungal diseases problematic in the garden in late summer. Be vigilant and deal to these as soon as they crop up.

Try some old wives' tales before resorting to harsh chemicals. Diluted milk or some bicarbonate of soda is said to work on plants with powdery mildew, while I read that old brown onion skins around roses ward off black spot. Sprinkling seedlings with cinnamon may prevent damping off and other fungal infections, and cayenne is said to keep cats and dogs from the garden beds.

According to the Moon Calendar, it is good time to propagate aboveground crops from around 18 Feb to 28 Feb.

February Moon Calendar

Herb of the Month: Top 10 Herbal Flowers

Most of our common culinary and medicinal herbs belong to the angiosperm classification in the plant kingdom [Angiosperm = flowering plants with pollen and ovules; as opposed to spore or cone producing plants).

It is often these flowers that we adore as pretty and colourful additions to our gardens, and perhaps grow specifically to attract pollinators and other beneficial insects to our garden, or to add fragrance to our homes.

Some flowers actually contain the healing powers that we associate with the herb, and it is to these that we give our attention this month. Here then follows a short description of my Top 10 Herbal Flowers for Culinary, Medicinal and Cosmetic Use:

1. Chamomile



Chamomile remains my favourite herb, and is first on my list of herbal flowers. When using chamomile as a tea, I find the annual German chamomile (*Matricaria recutita*) much more palatable than Roman (*Anthemis nobilis*).

Chamomile flowers can be infused to create a facial cleanser, or added to a reviving bath, especially for those who suffer from eczema or sunburn. Helpful to soothe and reduce dark circles when used as eye (tea)bags, and the flowers

lighten, condition, and refresh fair hair.

Chamomile tea is a well known sedative, helping in times of sleeplessness, anxiety, and over-excitability.

2. Calendula



As an edible flower, Calendula petals, whether they are orange or yellow, add a delightful brightness to salads, soft cheeses, pastas and cakes; and can even be used in cooked food, such as rice, as a "poor man's saffron".

But the greatest value to calendula however, lies in their use as a cosmetic and herbal salve—especially helpful for burned or injured skin. It is cleansing, antiseptic, strongly healing and softening to the skin. It can also be taken, generally with other tea blends, as a digestive tonic.

3. Lavender

Lavender is another beautiful herb flower with amazing healing qualities. It is a calming and relaxing herb, aiding those who suffer from sleeplessness and anxiety, tension headaches and it is also soothing to insect bites, stings and burns.

Use either as a tea (infusion) internally, or the pure essential oil topically and in cosmetics.

It is often included in bath products for its scent, and it is naturally antiseptic and cell rejuvenating too.



While some find that lavender in food is like "licking soap", I enjoy the slightly bitter floral taste in vinegars and syrups. It is an essential part of some Herbes de Provence recipes.

4. Red Clover

Red clover may be a common weed, but so are quite a number of our most health-giving herbs!

Red Clover is often prescribed internally and topically by natural healers. When used in balms and liniments it is good for skin conditions such as eczema and psoriasis, sores and burns. It is used for woman's complaints, in particular menopausal symptoms, and is a good blood tonic. Healthy to the heart and cardiovascular system, it is also used to support immune function, increase bone mineralization, and for coughs and bronchial complaints.



5. Rose

Often very fragrant, roses' scent is a favourite for cosmetics. But it doesn't only smell nice, rosewater is antiseptic and soothes skin. It is especially good for dry, inflamed, mature and sensitive skins. Many Victorian beauty recipes include rose petals and rosewater.

Medicinally, the flower is said to cleanse the blood and help with circulation and soothe tension.

The oil is said to be antidepressant, while a tea acts as a mild laxative, and contains a good deal of vitamin C.



Rose petals, or rosewater, can be used to make delicious jams and syrups. Add fresh petals to salads, and you can even pickle unopened rosebuds!

6. Violets



These delightfully scented flowers bloom in profusion in spring, and are sometimes crystallized to go on cakes and cookies. You can also add the

flowers raw to salads, or infuse into a syrup.

The soft floral fragrance makes it a sought after cosmetic perfume. It is a gentle herb, and can be used as an eye bath for strained eyes, and a mouthwash.

As an infusion, or syrup it is a mild laxative, and can also be given for coughs, to soothe the nerves, treat insomnia, and help to reduce the severity of headaches.

7. Nasturtium

Peppery and bright, nasturtium flowers are great in salads, or in sandwiches, and has become increasingly popular as an edible flower.



But it is so much more than its sharp taste, it is anti-microbial and loaded with vitamins and minerals. It can be used against cold and flu, and has been mentioned for bladder problems.

8. Carnation, Clove Pink, Diantus

A popular little garden flower, but probably not so well known as a culinary or medicinal flower. Carnations, clove pinks and sweet Williams all belong to the Dianthus genus.

The clove-scented varieties are all edible, and the flowers can be added to salads,

fruit pies, used as edible garnishes, or used to flavour sugar, jam and vinegars.

The flower is also said to be a good nerve tonic and can be taken as a tea.

9. Meadowsweet

Salicylic acid was first extracted from Meadowsweet. The old name for Meadowsweet was *Spiraea ulmaria*, giving a *spirin* its name.

Meadowsweet has been used to add a slight almond flavour to jams and stewed fruit and used to be sought after to flavour alcoholic beverages such as beer, mead and wine.

It is astringent and tonic, making it a good natural cosmetic for the complexion.

An infusion can be used as a mild sedative and painkiller and it is also said to alleviate heartburn and help with fevers,



water retention and diarrhea.

10. Hops

Last month I wrote in detail about [Hops](#). As a herb, it is mainly the female flowers that are used to flavour, add clarity, and preserve beer. Added to a bath or nighttime pillow, the flowers are relaxing and induces sleep. It also makes a bitter but effective sedative tea. It may be used for digestive complaints.

OTHER

There are a great many more herbs with flowers that have medicinal benefits, especially when we look at different cultures and continents, e.g. chrysanthemums in China and Lotus flowers in India.

As always, remember that all the infor-

mation provided is for educational purposes only and not intended to diagnose or prescribe herbs. See my [disclaimer](#).

Vegetable in focus: Cucumber



Making the most of the warm summer weather, and enjoying much of the rain we've seen recently in Auckland, is the cucumber.

Mostly vining, although there are several bushy varieties suited to pots or small spaces, cucumbers enjoy a warm sheltered position in full sun with good rich soil and plenty of water. Make sure they have something to climb on or sprawl over. One healthy plant can provide anything between 5 and 12 fruit, making it a productive plant to grow. Pickle excess cucumbers.

Flower in focus: Autumn Sage



Commonly named Autumn sage in America, although it freely flowers throughout much of summer and autumn, *Salvia greggii* comes in a multitude of colours.

They are popular landscape plants, especially suited to wildflower meadows, cot-

tage gardens or insectary patches.

It is a herbaceous perennial growing from 30cm to 1.2m tall, and typically has mid-green leaves. Popular flower colours range from white through pinks and reds to purples, and some named hybrids include "Deep Pink", "Dark Dancer", "Cerise Queen", "Snow White", and "Salmon".

FAQ

Q: I'm growing different pumpkins together and have heard they cross pollinate, does this mean I'll get mutant pumpkins?

A: While pumpkins (*Curcubita* family) are known to cross-pollinate, this is only true of varieties in the same species, and it doesn't affect your current crop.

Cross pollination only affects the next generation of plants, i.e. the plants you get if you grow from seed saved from possible crosses from this year's fruit.

If seed saving is important to you, remember that only plants in the same species cross, so you can still grow a variety of pumpkins in the same patch without crossing becoming an issue, as long as they are all from different species. In other words you can grow a Musquee de Provence (*Cucurbita moschata*), Baby Bear (*Cucurbita pepo*) and a Buttercup Squash (*Cucurbita maxima*) without cross pollinating problems.

Kids Corner

Getting kids back in tune with our natural world is important to their development, and our environment.

A fun, and easy care garden option for young ones is a cactus and succulent garden. You can also encourage some imaginative play by including small plastic toys in



the "scenery" you build.

Challenge: Create a small cactus or succulent garden. If you are choosing cacti, be careful of their needles and spines! Wear gloves and ask an adult to help and supervise. Why not show me your amazing creations by [e-mailing me](#)?

Recipe Share

Chamomile and Milk Cleanser

A simple infusion of chamomile flowers in whole milk and cooled makes an excellent gentle facial cleanser.

- 1/2 cup full cream milk
- 30g fresh or dried chamomile flowers

Warm the milk with the chamomile flowers, but do not boil or allow a milk skin to form. Cool and infuse for about 2hrs, strain and bottle. Best kept in the fridge. Use to gently wipe away the day's grime from the face. Splash face with clean water after.

4 Flower Liqueur

- 1l brandy
- 2.5cm cinnamon stick
- 2 cloves
- 225g scented rose petals (white heel removed)
- 225g clove pink petals
- 225g orange blossoms (75g dried)
- 225g sweet violet flowers
- Sugar to taste



Infuse flowers in brandy for a month. Strain, add sugar, stir to dissolve, and bottle.

Both recipes above are from *The Complete Book of Herbs* by Lesley Bremness, Souther Book Publishers, 1995