

MeadowSweet

Herbs & Flowers

MeadowSweet Herbs & Flowers Monthly Newsletter

March 2018

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Minette's Event Dates

- ⇒ **4 Mar**, Orewa
Farmer's Market
- ⇒ **17 Mar**, Presenting a Herbal
Workshop at the Auckland Herb
Society 2018 AGM
- ⇒ **18 Mar**, Orewa
Farmer's Market
NEW PRODUCTS
- ⇒ **25 Mar**, Body Lotion Bar
Workshop

News

New Products

It's always been the aim to encompass the whole of herbs in my business, as I used to in my previous ventures, and I've finally started adding to my MeadowSweet product line—expanding beyond the plant nursery. First up some handmade, organic, good-for-you (and the environment) herbal body care products - luxurious and skin nourishing body lotion bars, herbal bath teas, and floral bath salts, and some lovely soaps.



Talks & Workshops

This month I'm presenting a herb workshop and demonstration at the Auckland Herb Society's 2018 AGM. The focus will be on herbs good for the skin.

I will also have a hands-on workshop on making your own herbal body care products on 25 March.

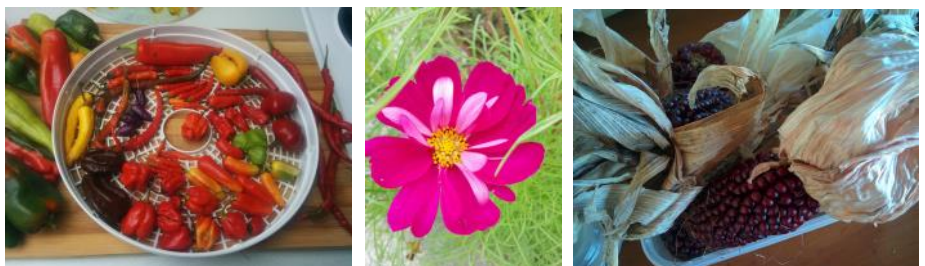
See the [website](#) for more information.

North Shore Herb Group

I'm convening [The North Shore Herb Group](#), and our meeting for March will discuss the four herbs set out by the Herb Federation of New Zealand for Herb Awareness Week. We will also be making herb lotion bars.

Meeting is on 12 March @ 7.30pm at Albany Community Hub with a \$5 door fee, and gold coin donation for the workshop materials.

Feel free to [e-mail](#) me for more information.



Autumn

And just like that, it is still dark when I wake up at 6am! Where I used to be able to get a bit of gardening done before the rest of the family wakes up, I now find myself catching up on admin rather.

Seasons are definitely moving on, and although it is still warm, the last few nights have definitely been a tinge cooler than before.

March is still a very productive time in the garden—a lot of herbs and vegetables are still producing abundantly, and harvests of pumpkins, eggplant, beans and all sorts excite.

Remember to [save your seeds!](#)

It is a perfect time to get going on sowing and planting some of those late autumn or winter crops, and clearing out beds of spent annual plants, cutting back herbaceous perennials, and contemplating next summer's growing.

Wild foraging for rosehips, berries, fruit from forgotten trees, and free growing herbs can be a whole family adventure! Remember to not gather from roadsides, which may be sprayed, and to ask permission before frolicking over private pastures.



Click to download:

[March Moon Calendar](#)

Herb of the Month: Hibiscus

A recent discussion around hibiscus came up in my herb circle, and I thought it would be a great topic for the newsletter. It also helps that so many hibiscus are now flowering beautifully (in Auckland) too!

There are quite a few different hibiscus species in New Zealand, each with some specifics around growing and using it—here follows a quick discussion of some commonly available hibiscus with herbal use:

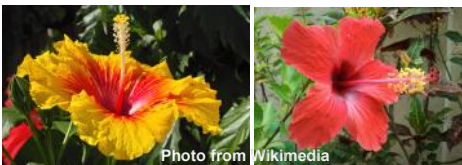
1. Chinese Hibiscus *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*



Widely grown as an ornamental plant in the tropics and sub-tropics, Chinese Hibiscus is also known as Tropical Hibiscus, Hawaiian Hibiscus or China Rose.

It is a bushy evergreen shrub growing from 2m to 5m, and can reach a spread of over 3m.

Many named varieties and cultivars exist with flower colours ranging from pure white, through yellows, oranges, and pinks to dark reds. Single and double blooming types can be found in show gardens and garden centres, and the solitary flowers can be really large—over 10cm in diameter!



Belonging to the Malvaceae family, it is mucilaginous and can be medicinally used similarly to mallows (marshmallow) for digestive complaints, as well as respiratory problems. As a folk remedy it is listed for a variety of ailments including fevers, coughs, sores, etc. It is often included in skin healing pastes, and as a hair care product.

Young leaves may be cooked as a spinach substitute, and the flowers are edible, often used in salads, or in pickles.

It requires a warm and sheltered position, is not tolerant of cold winds or frost, and prefers full sun and moderately rich, free-draining soil.

2. Rose of Sharon *Hibiscus syriacus*



Known as a hardy hibiscus, this hibiscus is tolerant of high humidity, heat, pollution and even drought. Although they may survive freezing conditions, they do best grown in milder climates, with moist soil and full sun positions giving best flowering results.



It is a deciduous shrub, and has a vase-shape, reaching 4m in height. The flowers are smaller than Tropical hibiscus, and lasts only a day or so, but the plant has numerous buds and repeat flowers prolifically throughout the summer.

As with the common hibiscus, many cultivars with different flower colours exist, from white, pink, purple to blue. Some are bi-coloured

and you can find them in single- or double-flowering varieties.

The young leaves and flowers are often brewed into a tea, and the flowers are edible, eaten raw in salads, or made into tea, jam, syrup, or stuffed as fritters.

3. Roselle

Hibiscus sabdariffa



This is the hibiscus that is commonly sold as hibiscus tea, or hibiscus flavouring in commercial teas.

Hibiscus sabdariffa is also known as Roselle or Jamaican Hibiscus, or Queensland Jam Plant.

A woody annual, or perennial sub-shrub, growing to about a meter, it is not tolerant of frost, and prefers warm tropical and sub-tropical climates in a full sun position.

It is the calyxes, the bright red sheaths from which the flowers open, that is prized as a food. Harvested while still tender, they are refreshingly tart, almost like cranberries, and can be eaten fresh in salads, made into a refreshing drink (called "sorrel"), and be made into jams, jellies, sauces, pickles, puddings, and pie fillings. The young leaves are also eaten fresh in salads, or cooked like a tart rhubarb-like spinach, as a potherb in stews and soups, and as a flavouring in curries.

Roselle's is used as a traditional herbal medicine, especially as a diuretic and mild laxative. It is also mentioned as an antiseptic, astringent, digestive and antiscorbutic. The mucilaginous leaves are good as a soothing cough remedy, while the leaves and flowers are used in a digestive tonic tea. It reduces blood pressure and stimulates peristalsis.

4. Puarangi

Hibiscus trionum

(also *H. richardsonii* and *H. diversifolius*)

Puarangi is the local name for hibiscus, and can refer to any of the following three hibiscus, considered native, or long-established in New Zealand.

Hibiscus trionum, also known as flower-of-an-hour or bladder hibiscus is an annual, or short-lived perennial that grows to 50cm. Tolerant of most soils, it prefers a full sun position in free-draining loam.

The flowers are white or yellow and has a very dark maroon center. Flowers are considered helpful with itchiness and painful skin disease when used fresh, and as a diuretic and stomachic when dried. The young leaves and shoots have been mentioned as edible.



Known as swamp hibiscus, or prickly hibiscus, is *H. diversifolium*, which looks similar to flower-of-the-hour, except that the leaves are not as deeply divided or serrated, the stems bear prickles, and it prefers a wetland or streamside habitat.



Another puarangi hibiscus, *H. richardsonii* lacks the dark maroon center of *H. trionum* and *H. diversifolium*, and is a strictly coastal plant. Also occurring in New South Wales, Australia, this is considered to be the true indigenous New Zealand hibiscus.



As always, remember that all the information provided is for educational purposes only and not intended to diagnose or prescribe herbs. See my [disclaimer](#).

Vegetable in focus: Eggplant

This vegetable in the nightshade family (Solanaceae), goes by a few names—eggplant (because of its shape and colour), aubergine (from its Arabic name *al-badinjan*), and brinjal. It comes in many shapes and colour variations too — small green ones, long pink ones, big fat purple ones and yes, white egg-shaped ones!



Grown best in the warmer summer months, aubergine should all be coming to fruition about now. A perfect eggplant still has firm glossy skin with only a few immature seeds when cut.

Eaten stewed, baked, grilled, fried, and processed into a variety of condiments, it is a very versatile vegetable.

Flower in focus: Gaillardia

Commonly named Blanketflower, Gaillardias are family of the sunflower. They prefer a full sun position in moist, moderate soils, but can tolerate heat and drought to some extent when established. They are short-lived perennials with a long blooming time—from midsummer through to the end of fall.

Nowadays grown simply for their aesthetics, and for attracting pollinators to the garden. Gaillardia are well suited to a mixed flower or wildflower border.



FAQ

Q: What can I do about whitefly on my kale without resorting to pesticides?

A: Try growing the bulk of your kale and other brassicas that are prone to attack by whitefly and white butterfly (larvae) during cooler months. Pests proliferate in the heat of summer.

Besides manual control (squashing or spraying the bugs off), yellow sticky traps help to control populations of whitefly, and the introduction of predator species such as aphids and lacewings can be beneficial. Spraying infested plants with soapy water may control the number of live adults as well. Companion plant with *Tagetes* (marigolds, not calendula) and nasturtium to help PREVENT an infestation.

Kids Corner

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

Treasure hunts are favourites for kids of all ages, and are easy to set up. Besides the traditional quick game of “find a rock, a feather, a leaf, a flower”, etc, try expanding the game to include an **idea** in nature, such as “find me 10 round things”, or “find 10 things in the garden that starts with an A”, “something from each colour of the rainbow”, etc. Adjust the quest to their level of knowledge—you can ask older kids to find you an example each of the different ways in which seeds disperse, and so on.

Challenge: Create a nature treasure hunt in the garden, by the beach, in the park, or even a walk through the neighbourhood. Why not share your findings by [e-mailing me?](#)

Recipe Share

Cool Hibiscus Tea

[Living Herbal Tea](#)

- 1/2 Cup Whole-Dried Organic Hibiscus Flowers
- 1 Cinnamon Stick
- 1/2 Lime
- 1/2 Tangerine
- 1" Peeled Ginger Root
- 4 Cups Cool Water
- Optional Additions: Cardamom, Clove, Nutmeg



Photo from Wikimedia

Add all ingredients except sweetener to a large wide-necked jar and top off with cool water. Refrigerate for 6 to 12 hours and strain into glasses over ice cubes. Add optional sweeteners to taste.

Hibiscus Melon Gelato

[Yumly](#)

- 4 cups cantaloupe (cubed, seeded, or 2 1/2 cups cubed, seeded watermelon)

- 2 teaspoons orange peel (finely shredded)
- 1 cup sugar
- 6 egg yolks
- 1/4 cup hibiscus flowers (dried)
- 2 1/4 cups whole milk
- 1 cup unsweetened coconut milk
- 3/4 cup whipping cream
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

In a blender or food processor combine cantaloupe and orange peel. Blend or process until smooth. Strain through a fine-mesh sieve; discard pulp and peel. Measure 1-1/2 cups of the melon liquid; set aside.

In a medium bowl combine sugar and egg yolks; beat with an electric mixer on high speed for 4 minutes. Set aside.

Place hibiscus flowers, if using, in a large tea ball or place on a 6-inch square of double-thick cheesecloth, bring up sides, and tie closed with 100 percent cotton kitchen string.

In a large saucepan combine hibiscus, milk, coconut milk, cream, and salt; heat just until simmering. Remove from heat; let stand for 2 minutes. Discard hibiscus.

Slowly stir 1 cup of the hot milk mixture into the egg yolk mixture. Return all of the egg yolk mixture to the saucepan. Heat and stir for 5 to 6 minutes or until mixture thickens and coats the back of a metal spoon (185 degrees F on an instant-read thermometer). Be careful not to let mixture boil. Place saucepan in a bowl of ice water; stir constantly for 2 to 3 minutes or until cool.

In a large bowl combine melon liquid* and egg yolk-milk mixture, stirring until well mixed. Cover surface of the mixture with plastic wrap. Chill about 4 hours or until well chilled.

Freeze mixture in a 2- to 4-quart ice cream freezer according to the manufacturers directions. If desired, ripen gelato mixture for 4 hours before serving.**

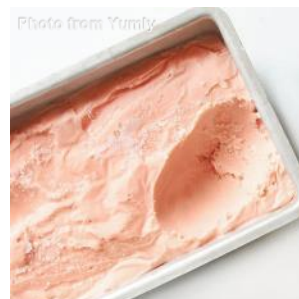


Photo from Yumly