

# MeadowSweet

## Herbs & Flowers

MeadowSweet Herbs & Flowers Monthly Newsletter

JUNE 2018

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### North Shore Herb Group

I'm convening [The North Shore Herb Group](#), and during our meeting for June we'll have a shared dinner 'Soup and Bread' evening. We'll all get the chance to share what our favourite herb is too.

Meeting is on 11 June @ 7.30pm at Albany Community Hub with a \$5 door fee. First visit free entry. Feel free to [e-mail](#) me for more information.

### Winter

Winter has started wild and wet, and mostly cold, throughout the entire country. I'm up a bit north of Auckland, and although the temperature dropped—enough for hot water bottles at night—we sure didn't get nearly as **cold** as some places—Ranfurly went down to  $-9^{\circ}\text{C}$ !

Living in a warm temperate to subtropical climate has its own challenges though, and a friend and I often chat about our wishes for a good frost or a stint of a few days of icy cold weather—just something to nip all those gardening pests' numbers for the next growing season.

### Workshops

The next workshop is on 8 July and will be about home-made herbal cold and flu remedies. [Contact me](#) for details.

### Press Release

Please ensure you have read through my latest [press-release](#), highlighting some changes and the future plans for myself at MeadowSweet.

### Social Media

Social Media accounts:



Where do you live, and what **season-specific challenges** do you face? Share your thoughts with me by mailing me: [Season Challenges](#)

While winter is slower in the garden, there's **always something to do**. Tend the soil, and cut back woody stems and dead leaves of plants that have died down. If you have a heated greenhouse or propagation area, you can even get a head-start on a few spring sowings.

**Vegetables** such as broad beans, cabbage, kale, lettuce, peas and radish can be sown, and **garlic** and shallots should be going into the prepared beds now. **Strawberries** from seed can be started, or transplants put in the garden (in warmer areas). If you are still blessed with warmer weather, or live sub-tropical, you can also **still sow** carrots, beetroot, silverbeet, spinach, celery, chives, collards and a few more. Garden centers are full of a variety of violas and pansies—these are brilliant fillers, and the flowers are edible too!

You can also get your lists ready for which **bare-rooted** roses and fruit trees you would like to purchase (best planted towards the latter part of the month, and in July). And winter is also a great time to **plan a garden**, so get the paper and pencils, and plant catalogues out for a play.

[June Moon Calendar](#) (click to download PDF)

# Herb of the Month: Lovage

I chose lovage for no other reason than it is still producing prolifically in my garden, and that I'm tending to use it more often now in soups and stews too.

## Lovage

*Levisticum officinale*, or Lovage, is a perennial plant in the Apiaceae family. It can grow up to 2m tall, so it is quite important to know that you have the space for it when you sow the seed, or purchase the small plant start from a garden center.



It's name is said to come from love-*ache* where the ache means parsley, so it is known as love-parsley. In various other languages it is also known as "love herb", perhaps in reference to its old use in love potions.

Another common name for it is Maggikraut or Maggiherb, the "Maggi" referencing a famous brand of soup seasoning, which it is said to smell and taste like.



## Description

Growing from a basal rosette of larger leaves, the erect leafy stems can reach up to 2.5m in length. Flowers borne in late spring are greenish-yellow umbels.

## Propagating and Cultivating

Lovage is easily grown from seed. Best sown in spring or early autumn. You can also divide the mature plants in autumn.

The plant prefers to grow in rich, well-drained soil in a sunny spot, but it does very well in moist soils and semi-shade too.

To ensure another good flush of leaves, cut back to the ground after flowering.

It is quite hardy and needs no special protection in winter.



## Uses

### Culinary

With a strong celery-parsley flavour, it is a valuable culinary herb. The whole of the plant is edible, although it is mostly the leaves that are used as flavouring.

The leaves and stems can be used raw or cooked and are added in to salads (small amounts) and soups or stews. The leaves and stems can be dried for later use.

The root can be eaten cooked and has a strong savoury taste.

A tea made from the leaves tastes like a broth.

### Medicinal

The medicinal actions associated with lovage are listed as antispasmodic; aromatic; carminative; digestive; diuretic; and stimulant.

It makes for a lovely warming tonic—especially good for the digestive and respiratory systems. Seeds steeped in brandy is an old remedy for upset stomachs and flatulence. Leaves, or seeds sweetens breath.

It may be beneficial as a bath herb for skin ailments as it is detoxifying, antiseptic and soothing.

Leaf tea has been used as an emmenagogue, and in Germany the plant is used by herbalists for infections of the urinary tract, kidney and bladder stones.

\*Because it is such a good diuretic, it is advised not to take lovage therapeutically without medical supervision.

### Garden & Household

As a companion plant in the garden, Lovage is said to improve the vigour and flavour of plants it is grown close to.

The flowers are very attractive to bees and other pollinators, and also bring beneficial predators such as hoverflies to the garden.

Jekka McVicar (Jekka's Complete Book of Herbs, Kyle Cathie Ltd, 1994) mentions that the leaves were lain in shoes of travelers in the Middle Ages to counter foot odour, and revive weary feet.

# Vegetable in focus: Pea

Peas are one of the easiest crops to grow in the home garden, and are often suggested for first time veggie gardeners as success is almost always guaranteed.

While there seem to be innumerable cultivars available to grow in the food garden, they all belong to mainly two species—

- *Pisum sativum* which include **sweet or garden peas** (pods are normally stringy, hard and inedible, but the peas themselves are full, round and sweet), and **snow peas** (flat edible pods with small seeds),
- *Pisum macrocarpon* which are **snap or sugar peas** (edible pods with full sized peas)

Peas are a cool climate crop, and can be sown around 4-6 weeks before the last spring frost, as long as the soil temperature is not much lower than 7°C, or higher than 21°C.



Seeds can be sown by poking the seeds about 2cm into the soil, about 5cm apart. Peas like a well-drained and organic matter rich soil. Don't add too much fertilizer as they are not gross feeders. Water only when needed, they don't like sitting in ground that is too wet, but won't produce pods in drought.

Remember to establish a frame or trellis for climbing varieties at the time of planting.

Generally problem free, but protect young plants from birds, and snails.

# Flower in focus: Abutilon



Known as Chinese Lanterns, Flowering Maple or Indian Mallow, Abutilons come in a wide range of cultivated colours, and are stunning in full flower in the garden. They range from deciduous to evergreen shrubs, mostly growing between 2m and 3m tall.

Leaves are velvety and maple-leaf shaped, and variegated cultivars exist. The flowers are pendulous bell-shaped or bowl-shaped and often have conspicuous stamens.

While the Abutilon isn't too fond of growing in colder climates, it is a plant that can be grown in damp and shady spots in the garden. If you do get frosts, it is suggested to pot up and bring your plant into the conservatory to overwinter.

## Kids Corner

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

Pansies and violas are in full bloom at the moment, and they make for a good, easy and safe introduction to edible flowers. (For more on edible flowers, see <http://meadowsweet.co.nz/edibleflowers/>)

**Challenge:** Why not preserve a few pansies or violas by making candied flowers! These are beautiful on biscuits, cakes, or muffins. A perfect rainy-day project. Click

[here](#) for instructions.

Why not show me your amazing creations by [e-mailing me](#).



## Recipe Share

### Lovage Soup

Jekka's Book of Herbs, KC, 1994

- 25g butter
  - 2 medium onions, chopped
  - 500g potatoes, peeled and diced
  - 4 Tbsp lovage leaves, finely chopped
  - 850 ml stock
  - 300ml milk
  - Grated nutmeg
  - Salt & pepper to taste
1. Melt butter in a heavy pan and gently saute the onions and potatoes for 5 minutes.
  2. Add the lovage leaves and cook for another minute.
  3. Pour in the stock, season, and cover to gently simmer for about 20 minutes, or until the potatoes are soft.
  4. Puree the soup, blend in the milk and sprinkle in a pinch of nutmeg.
  5. Heat through, but do not boil again.

Serve hot or cold, garnished with some freshly chopped lovage leaves.

\*This newsletter is for informational purposes only. Please see my [disclaimer](#).