MeadowSweet Herbs & Flowers

MeadowSweet Herbs & Flowers Monthly Newsletter September 2018

In This Issue

LATEST

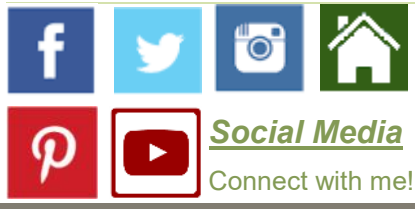
Workshops - Contact me for details on gardening and herbal make-'n-do workshops I'll run in September.

Seeds - I'm now offering seeds for sale saved from MeadowSweet's garden. All home-grown in a spray-free environment and hand-harvested. See THIS LINK for info.

MeadowKids - Starting up again in September 2018, I'll run my popular kids Gardening and Nature Club. See here for details.

Markets - Tomato plants, chillies and a few other select vegetables and herb seedlings available at Orewa Farmers Market from September.

Talks - Book me now to come talk to your group or club about a variety of herb-and garden topics!



Social Media

Connect with me!

North Shore Herb Group

The North Shore Herb Group meeting for September will be about seeds and seed saving. Possible screening of The Seed Movie. Meeting is on 10 September @ 7.30pm at Albany Community Hub with a $5 door fee. First visit free entry. Feel free to e-mail me for more information.

Spring into Action!

The first day of Spring in Auckland was a beautiful day! But the next few days have been cold, and according to MetService we'll see more variability, with **temperature** swings likely across the country. All in all a cooler September than average is expected, so be sure to protect those tender seedlings when needed.

While things are slowly warming up, it is a good time in the garden to continue to build the **soil** in your vegetable and flower beds for the coming season. Add good quality compost, and if you haven't yet—start your own composting system (more about that in this issue).

It's a great time to get started on **berry** gardens—plant out strawberries, blackberries, boysenberries, blueberries, currants, raspberries, and sow some cape gooseberries. You can also plant rhubarb now, a perfect accompaniment to berry tarts later in the season! If you are establishing a fruit area, you can plant new **fruit** trees now—apples, apricots, citrus, nectarines, peach, pear, plum, and even passionfruit (protect from cold and frost). Feed established fruit trees.

If you are still having a cold start to the growing season, sow your summer loving **vegetables** under cover to give them a good head-start—aubergine, tomato, zucchini, beans, tomatillo, capsicum and chillies will all benefit from warmer germination areas. Other vegetables that can be started now include beetroot, silverbeet and chard, brassicas like broccoli, cauliflower, mizuna, cabbage and kale, also onions, carrots, celery, lettuces and mesclun mixes, as well as pumpkins, squashes and sweetcorn.

For your **herb** garden, sow almost all your culinary herbs now—basil, chives, chervil, dill, fennel, thyme, rosemary, coriander, oregano and marjoram. Some winter dormant herbs are springing back to life—look out for tarragon, valerian, horseradish, and lemon balm. Spring is perfect to get growing with your edible **flowers**, companion plants and cottage garden flowers—especially bee friendly ones! Calendula, cleome, cosmos, sunflower, viola, zinnia to name just a few.
Click here for the SEPTEMBER LUNAR CALENDAR

Written and compiled by Minette Tonoli, MeadowSweet Herbs & Flowers, HerbGirlNZ

Plants of the Month: For the Bees

It is National Bee Aware Month, and bee friendly planting, and gardening is all over gardening magazines, websites, facebook pages, personal blogs… and newsletters!

So this month instead of focusing on a herb, a vegetable and a flower, I'll look in general at bee friendly herbs and flowers for the garden, and why it is important to create biodiverse safe-havens full of food for all our pollinators.

Why bees are important

Bees are a major pollinator of food crops, meaning that without bees, many of the fresh fruits and vegetables we have today will no longer be available, at least not to the extent they are now.

Pollination *is the transfer of pollen (male cell) to an ovule (female cell) of a flower to allow* fertilization.

Without fertilization, no seeds or fruit will develop.

Seventy out of the top 100 ***human food crops*** *— which supply about 90 percent of the world's nutrition — are pollinated by bees.*

Bees are also involved with the pollination of good quality pasture (clovers!), which means a possible drop in beef, dairy, lamb and wool too as bee populations dwindle.

Not to mention the products we get from bees themselves—honey, propolis, and beeswax...

The problem

Bee colonies are collapsing (Colony Collapse Disorder) at a faster rate than ever in recorded history, and varroa mites bring disease which are killing off whole hives too. Viable food sources for bees are becoming scarcer with increased urban development and deforestation. And the flowers and fields that do exist are often contaminated with broad spectrum pesticides which kill off bees and pest bugs indiscriminately.

All of this means that the bee population is steadily declining—a statistic by Greenpeace states that "*in the U.S. — among crops that require bee pollination — the number of bee colonies per hectare has declined by 90 percent since 1962.*"

The solution

Don't be discouraged, even though it seems to be a difficult global problem, people are stepping up—there's many bee initiatives and save-the-bee programs worldwide. From kindergartens to large corporates, non-profits and government alike are taking up the challenge to ensure happy bee populations for the future.

You can help too!

Plant bee friendly flowers

Nothing beats a biodiverse garden full of pretty pollinator friendly flowers - and a lot of the flowers have dual purposes—being flowers of culinary herbs, vegetables, or companion plants in the first place!

Be careful with sprays

Try to lay off, and go organic as much as you can, but if you simply have to use insecticides, herbicides, even fungicides or fertilizers, make sure you apply them sparingly. Check that you mix the right dosages, and apply them at the right time of the day (bees are less active at dusk). Try to find the most eco-friendly option on the shelves, or concoct your own, e.g. an effective aphid spray uses only garlic, onion, cayenne and a dash of biodegradable dish liquid.

Be informed, and teach others

Spread the word, and get people excited about flower and food gardening, and share the importance of creating a pollinator friendly

environment.

Water

Bees need water too, and are sometimes out of luck, having to fly kilometers to find their patch of flowers. A good way to help them is to create a little bee watering dish—remember the stones or pebbles to give them a safe place to land, to get to the water.

Flowers for bee gardens

Here's just a few herbs and flowers that are known to be bee friendly:.

Early season (spring to early summer)

Ajuga, Borage, Broad bean, Calendula, Chives, Comfrey, Cosmos, Dianthus, Forget-me-not, Foxglove, Lavender, Mustard, Penstemon, Poppy, Scented pelargoniums, Snapdragons, Sweetpea, Radish, Rose (rugosa), Rosemary.




Mid season (summer to autumn)

Agastache, Angelica, Artichoke (and cardoon), Basil, Catmint & Catnip, Cornflower, Dahlia, English Lavender, Gaillardia, Goldenrod, Hollyhock, Nigella (Love-in-a-mist), Oregano, Phacelia (Lacy Tansy), Salvia, Scabiosa, Sunflower, Thyme, Zinnia.

Gallery

For more ideas on flowers for bees, follow this link to an online gallery I am keeping of bees on flowers in my garden.

www.meadowsweet.co.nz/beeflowers/

Composting

Composting is a great way to reduce garden and kitchen waste that ends up in the landfill, never to break down properly, and releasing masses of greenhouse gas into the environment. Composting keeps the nutrient cycle in a closed loop too—from garden to table to compost to garden and back again to food crops.

Approximately half of what goes to the landfill from households in Auckland is ***compostable*** - roughly 90,000 tonnes a

Different compost systems

There's a composting solution ideally suited to your lifestyle, no matter if you are on a big farm block, or a small inner city apartment.

Composting is the ***aerobic process*** of breaking down once-living matter into a rich humus. We generally break these once-living materials into greens and browns in composting terms.

Greens are rich in nitrogen (N) and include things like grass clippings, vegetable scraps, seaweed, coffee grounds, and manure.

Browns are rich in carbon (C) and include things like cardboard, mulch, leaves, straw, wood ash and newspaper.

Hot Compost


deepgreenpermaculture.com

These piles are built "all at once", have a brown:green ratio of 25-30:1, are 1.5m high, and can be seen as steaming piles of fallen leaves and mulch. Temperatures inside reach as high as 60°C and materials compost down in about 18 days. Pathogens and weed seeds are all killed by these high temperatures.

Cold compost

This is an "add it as you have it" system of composting, and the one most commonly used by households. You keep adding to the compost bin as materials become available, aiming for a brown:green ratio of 3:1. This system takes about 6-12 months to produce usable compost.

Worm bins


compostkey.com.au

Keeping a worm farm or worm bin, known as vermiculture, is a great way to compost kitchen scraps, especially if you don't have a big compost bin or garden space. This system uses red or tiger worms and the brown:green ratio is reversed to that of cold composting, as the worms need far more green, so aim to have 30% brown to 70% green added.

Worm castings are harvested from the system when the bottom layer looks like fine dark soil. Liquid worm tea (worm "wee") must always drain off and can be used diluted (1:10) every 2-4 weeks around roots of plants.

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Bokashi

In contrast to the above compost systems, Bokashi is actually a fermentation method, and is an ***anaerobic process*** (does not need air to work).

motherearthnews.com

Bokashi was developed in Japan, and its importance in the composting system is that it can help break down materials much faster than conventional cold composting, and it can take many items that are not generally added to compost, such as onions, citrus peels, small bones, shells, seafood, cheese, eggs, even meat and processed or cooked foods.

It takes 100% greens (all food waste) and produces solids which can be trenched into the garden, or added as a green layer in the compost bin, and liquids which must be drained off every day and can be useful as a diluted (1:100) boost for the garden.

My personal experiences

I have a compost bin (cold composting) and a Bokashi system. Together, these two systems provide me with a perfect compost solution to all my yard and kitchen waste. I attest to the fact that the layer of Bokashi in my compost bin speeds up decomposition, and results in a better quality of humus. I also add the hay/bedding/manure from my bunnies, guinea pigs and quail to my compost bin.

Kids Corner

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

Worm farms are a fantastic way to teach children about the cycle of nutrients, and I've yet to meet a kid who does not squeal in delight (or delighted disgust!) at the wriggly bodies of compost worms!

Challenge: Start a worm farm—there are many commercial options available from all garden centers or even online. You can also make your own—YouTube videos aplenty on the internet to guide you to do this.

At the simplest level, create a little composting worm farm soda bottle:

1. Cut off the top of an empty and washed soda bottle, make holes in the bottom to drain.
2. Layer with sand and then moist soil, sand and then moist soil
3. Add worms (you're bound to find one or two worms in your ogarden!)
4. Add kitchen scraps on top
5. Cover the bottle with a sheath of cardboard (worms are photophobic, meaning they don't like light)
6. Top up with more scraps as needed.

When you lift the sheath of cardboard, you can be a worm-scientist, seeing the tunnels the worms create through the layers of soil and dirt, and see how they incorporate the food scraps into he soil.

Remember, this is just a quick worm compost system so you can see how it works. The worms won't last in this environment indefinitely, so "let them free" in your garden again once you've had a good look.

Why not show me your amazing creations by e-mailing me.

Recipe Share

Herbal Oxymel

HomespunSeasonalLiving

An ***oxymel*** *is an herbal preparation made by combining herbs with both honey and vinegar.*

Dating back to Ancient Greece, Oxymels are particularly good for infections of the respiratory system.

In celebration of bee aware month, this recipe combines bee-friendly and anti-bacterial bee balm, with honey.

INGREDIENTS

- Bee balm (*Monarda spp*), dried or fresh
- Organic apple cider vinegar, with "mother"
- Local raw honey
- Glass preserving jar

DIRECTIONS

If using fresh bee balm, wilt it for a few hours to a day to release most of the water content. Chop up your herbs and add to your jar, filling 3/4 (or if you are using dried herb, fill it 1/2).

Add the honey and vinegar, at a ratio that you prefer—sweeter oxymel has more honey. If unsure, start with 1/2 of each. If your jar has a metal lid, add parchment paper so it does not corrode with the vinegar.

Stir well for a few minutes every day until all the honey/vinegar and herb are well incorporated. Now let it steep for at least another month, regularly stirring/shaking. Strain, refrigerate, and take by the spoonful when you feel under the weather.

*This newsletter is for informational purposes only. Please see my disclaimer.