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January 2016 Newsletter



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Last meet

Our end of year get together in December was



great—filled with good food, friends and interesting chats.

We trust everyone had a lovely break and we can't wait to see everyone again at our regular monthly meet-ups.

Please note that we're having a **special event in January** and will not meet at the Milfrod school, but at Dee Pigneguy's house.

In the Garden

Ah! The midsummer garden... If all went well with your planning and planting, you will be reaping the rewards continually now. Here's what you can do next:

Herbs—Sow culinary herbs such as basil, chives, chervil, oregano, rocket and parsley for an autumn harvest. Plant perennials such as sage and thyme to settle in before winter slows their growth.

Veg— Sow lettuce (including mustard greens and mesclun) and radish every few weeks for a continuous supply. Silverbeet, beetroot and spinach can be direct sown. Start winter veg such as kohlrabi, cabbage, leeks, parsnip, celery, salsify, carrots and broccoli. Plant more summer crops from seedlings—eggplant, courgettes, capsicums. A new crop of seed potatoes can be grown now for an autumn harvest.

Flowers—sow violas, poppies, primulas, sunflowers, and dianthus. Plant coneflower (Echinacea), alyssum, bergamot, calendula and dahlia from seedlings.

Harvest timely to encourage more flowering and fruit. Feed all plants fortnightly and deadhead flowers for a second flush. Save seed! Water and mulch well to protect from the hot dry summer.

Next Meet

Monday, 11 Jan, 7pm
Garden Tour with
Dee Pigneguy. Contact us for info.

**Garden Tour @
Dee Pigneguy's**

How hot is hot? Scoville heat units.

Scoville Heat Unit (SHU)

This empirical measurement of the pungency of chillies was devised by American pharmacist, Wilbur Scoville, in 1912. Based on the capsaicin* sensitivity of testers, it is an imprecise method of determining the actual capsaicinoid concentration in chilli peppers.

Not only is SHU dependant on human sensitivity, but the water content of the fruit as well as the growing conditions including soil, sunshine hours, stress, and humidity all have an effect on the pungency of the fruit, and may differ by factors of 10 between plants. Nevertheless, the Scoville scale continues to be a widely used and referred to method of determining just how hot a chilli pepper is.

Currently the Carolina Reaper is the world's hottest chilli with a measurement of over 2.2 million SHU. Just above sweet bell peppers with a SHU of 0 is paprika at 100 SHU. The ever popular jalapeno pepper is around 4000 SHU and a habanero between 100 000 SHU and 350 000 SHU.

* **Capsaicin** is the active component in capsicums that give them their characteristic "bite". The compound is irritant to mammals and causes a sensation of burning.

International Herb of the Year: Capsicums

The heat is on!

Traditionally starting each year's newsletters with the International Herb of the Year, I was super excited to read that the honour has fallen on capsicums for 2016!

I love chillies. I find them not only tasty and daring, but with such a wide variety of shapes, colours and pungency levels, I find them an absolute delight to grow and use!

They are easy to grow, pretty, delicious, and good for you—what more could you want in a herb?

Here's a bit on chillies to get you inspired if you are not already a "Chilli Head"...

Description

Belonging to the *Capsicum* genus, chillies are bushy plants 60-90cm high, with some reaching up to 1.5m. The densely branched stems bear glossy, lance-shaped to ovate leaves, and the small single off-white (sometimes purple) flowers develop a many seeded fruit pod that is conical or spherical and normally ripen from green to red.



Propagation and Cultivation

Easy to grow, with very few problems or special requirements, chillies are a very rewarding crop to cultivate.



Best propagated from seed sown when soil can be constantly kept quite warm (between 17°C and 21°C) for around 4 weeks for germination to take place. Pot on when seedlings are 5cm tall.



The frost tender chilli plant should be grown in a warm, sunny and sheltered position and prefers a well-drained, fertile and moisture-retentive loam. Water freely and feed with a seaweed solution fortnightly.

Top off at around 30cm to encourage bushier growth and more fruit.

Chillies are well suited to pot culture.

Harvesting and Preserving

Fruits can be harvested at any stage, with riper fruit more pungent. Stagger harvesting to encourage more flowering and fruit throughout the season.

When harvesting chili, always try to pinch off some of the fruit stem with it, not only will this make the chili easier to handle, but they often ripen and dry better too.

Preserve your glut of fruit by any of the following methods:

Drying

Whole chillies can be air dried, oven dried or dried in a dehydrator. Pierce the skin or slice lengthways to dry quicker. Store in an airtight container and crush before use.

Freezing

Easily freeze chopped, pureed, or whole chillies.

Smoking

Smoked chillies are called chipotles, and are a gourmet ingredient. Properly smoked and dried, chipotles can be stored for many years in an airtight container

Pickling

Preserving in vinegar and salt is an age-old preserving method that is great for chilli peppers.



Processing

Other methods of preserving chillies include making chilli sauces, chilli jams and jellies, chilli flavoured oils and vinegars, and even alcohol infused with chillies.

Chilli Uses

Culinary

One would be hard pressed to find a culture or cuisine that has not incorporated the spicy chilli. Added to foods fresh, dried or processed, chilli finds its way into savoury and sweet dishes across the globe - from Thai green curries, Indian masala and Texan chilli con carne to chilli vodka and chilli infused lemongrass ice cream or chocolate-chilli brownies.



Medicinal

Nutritionally, chillies are a superfood, rich in vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.

Hot capsicums are good nerve tonics and are stimulating to both the circulatory and digestive systems. Chilli raises metabolic rate and has a general energising effect. It stabilises blood pressure, is a natural anticoagulant, lowers cholesterol and have inhibited some cancers.

It is also a good pain reliever, especially for arthritis, shingles, gout, sprains and migraines.



Particularly useful for colds and flu, laryngitis and other throat and upper respiratory tract infections, chilli is antibacterial, antiseptic and promotes sweating.

It is most commonly Cayenne (a combination of the dried fruits of *C. annuum* var *annuum* and *C. frutescens*) that is used as a medicine.

Household

Chilli and garlic make an effective infused spray for insect pests such as aphids. Chillies are great companion plants.

Warnings

- * Always handle chilli peppers with gloves, and wash utensils and surfaces well after use.
- * When processing chilli, avoid inhaling the fumes.
- * Always follow dosage instructions, overdose can lead to gastroenteritis and liver damage.
- * Do not take therapeutically when pregnant or breastfeeding
- * Don't leave chilli compresses on for too long.
- * Chillies are toxic to many animals, specifically mammals, so do not feed to your pets.

Recipes

Cayenne Jump-Start

(from *An Herbal Feast*)

*1 cup chamomile tea *1 cup apple cider vinegar *2 tsp. cayenne powder *1 tsp. ginger powder *1 tsp. horseradish

Add vinegar, cayenne, ginger and horseradish to freshly brewed chamomile tea. Cover. Let steep for 10 minutes. Strain. Put 1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon of the tea in tomato or vegetable juice. Take every 2-4 hours as needed for cold or flu. Take a smaller dose to get going in the morning instead of drinking coffee. (*An Herbal Feast*)

Apple & Chilli Jelly

(from <http://www.foodnetwork.co.uk>)

* 2kg Bramley apples, pips, stalks, the lot, chopped *3-4 Habenero chillies, seeds if you want your mind blown, seeds removed if not *1kg preserving sugar *200ml water

Place all the ingredients into a lidded pan and stew for 30 minutes or until the apples have completely broken down and have gone translucent. Remove the lid and cook for another 10 minutes. Drain through a sieve into a clean bowl. Decant into sterilised jam jars and pop film and lids on tightly.

Capsaicin is not water soluble, to counter the burning of chilli, drink milk or eat yoghurt, cheese, sour cream or milk based ice cream. Eating bread, rice or beans also brings relief.