

MeadowSweet

Herbs & Flowers

MeadowSweet Herbs & Flowers Monthly Newsletter

May 2018

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North Shore Herb Group

I'm convening [The North Shore Herb Group](#), and during our meeting for May we'll speak on Rongoa (Traditional Maori Medicines) and we'll be making a Fire Cider Tonic.

Meeting is on 14 May @ 7.30pm at Albany Community Hub with a \$5 door fee. Feel free to [e-mail](#) me for more information.

Late Autumn Garden

It is time to tidy up after the summer's growth—harvest seeds, remove spent annuals, and cut back perennials.

Harvest and dry leaves and flowers from the remaining herbs such as rosemary, thyme, oregano, calendula, marjoram, and tarragon. Dig up some older roots of Echinacea, chicory, marshmallow, liquorice, and horseradish for foods or medicines. You can divide these roots now too—ready for the plants to emerge in the springtime in their new spots. You can also do root divisions of lesser calamint, oregano, creeping carpet chamomile, sweet cicely, valerian, and comfrey. Harvest Jerusalem artichokes!

Divide clumps of chives and garlic chives. Take hardwood cuttings of lemon verbena, hyssop, rosemary, and lavender. Try layering winter savory, sage and prostrate rosemary.

It's a good time to plant out strawberries.

Sow seeds of angelica, anise, anise hyssop, caraway, coriander, cress, dill, fennel, mustard and sweet cicely. For vegetables, sow broad beans, Chinese cabbage, peas, lettuce, turnip, spinach, onions and radish. Plant out cauliflower, cabbage and broccoli. It is the time to do green manure crops now, if you are planning to do this in your vegetable beds over winter.

Order your garlic and get ready to plant in June (you can plant early any time from now too!)

Is it time to rework the garden plans? Late Autumn and Winter is an ideal time to reflect on what worked, what you would like to try next.

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

Event Dates

- ⇒ **6/5** Orewa Farmers Market
- ⇒ **7/5** Herbal Mother's Day Gifts with Whangaparaoa Brownies
- ⇒ **14/5** North Shore Herb Group
- ⇒ **15/5** Talk at Glen Eden Gardens
- ⇒ **20/5** Orewa Farmers Market
- ⇒ **21/5** Talk at Hibiscus Gardeners
- ⇒ **26/5** [Workshop: Lotion Bars](#)
- ⇒ **27/5** [Workshop: Herbal Cold Remedies](#)

Social Media

Social Media accounts:



Herb of the Month: Bountiful Balms

A number of plants are known as “Balm”, or have “Balm” in their name. I thought I’d use this month to distinguish between a few of these:

- 1) Lemon Balm
- 2) Bee Balm
- 3) Balm of Gilead
- 4) Field Balm
- 5) Even more balms!

Lemon Balm

Often referred to simply as balm or sweet balm, lemon balm, *Melissa officinalis*, is an aromatic perennial in the mint family.



Well known as a fragrant herb, its strong and distinctive lemon scent and taste, makes it a wonderful culinary herb—the leaves can be added to salads, or cooked foods, and it brews a delightful tea.

Besides its use in the kitchen, it makes for a good traditional home herbal remedy for various ailments—including its tonic effects in lifting the mood and gladdening the heart. It is listed as antiviral, antibacterial, digestive, febrifuge, and sedative. Great results have been noted with using it as a treatment for cold sores (fever blisters), and as a calming and sedative tea for over-excitement and

nervous tension.

Easy to grow, and with its tendency to self seed, it may even become a nuisance to some (not me!). Lemon balm prefers a light and moist soil, but once established is capable of thriving in dry places.

Cut back well in autumn to produce a fresh new flush of leaves in spring.

It is a good plant to attract bees—the *Melissa* in the Latin name referencing the mellifera of the honeybee’s (*Apis mellifera mellifera*). It is also said to be a good companion plant, especially for brassicas.

2. Bee Balm

Named bee balm, because of the fondness bees have for the flowers of this plant, Bee Balm is also known as Monarda, or Bergamot (because its leaves have a similar fragrance to that of the bergamot orange which is used to flavour Earl Gray tea).

Monarda comes in a few well known species—

Scarlet Bee Balm, or Oswego Tea, (*Monarda didyma*) is perennial and spreads rapidly with creeping roots from which new stems grow. It has striking “mop-heads” of red flowers in late summer through autumn.



Leaves and flowers are edible, and it is a traditional remedy for digestive disorders, coughs and to ease cold symptoms.

Named cultivars in different flower colour cultivars are favourite garden plants.

Wild bee balm, often just sold as bee balm, *Monarda fistulosa*, has lavender-pink flowers and can be used similarly to the Scarlet species.

Monarda citriodora is an annual (some say perennial, but I’ve never had one last more than one season) bee balm with a distinctive lemony scent to its leaves, and multiple flower head whorls on the flowering stem.



Mainly used as an aromatic herb.

All the bee balms are easy to start from seed, although the *didyma* species may sometimes only flower after being established in the garden for two years after seeds were sown. Easily divided (perennial species) by divisions in autumn or spring. Thrives in almost any good garden soil as long as it is not too dry or too boggy.

3. Balm of Gilead

I’m growing Balm of Gilead, or Canary Island Balm, *Cedronella canariensis* syn. *Cedronella triphylla*, mainly for its fragrant leaves, and to make a tea - known as *thi de Canaries*.

While Balm of Gilead is a very fragrant herb, it has almost no common therapeutic uses. It can be added to pot-pourri, herb sleep sachets, insect repellents and as a perfume to bath teas etc.

The cedar-like scent of the leaves gives

it the name “Cedronella”, or “little cedar”.



Canary Island Balm grows best in a well drained soil in a full sun position. Clusters of pretty pink two-lipped flowers are born in the late summer to early autumn.

Do not confuse this Balm of Gilead with true or genuine Balm of Gilead, *Commiphora opobalsamum*, which is a very rare desert shrub.

4. Field Balm

Field Balm is also known as Lesser Calamint, or Nepitella. *Clinopodium nepeta* or *Calamintha nepeta*, is a perennial in the mint family.

The leaves somewhat shiny, and are very similar to oregano leaves. The flowers are white to lavender-pink and are much loved by bees and butterflies.

Strongly fragranced, with a mix between mint and oregano, it is used as a condiment herb, a tea herb, and had traditional medicinal uses but is no longer used in modern medical herbalism.



5. Other Balms

> True Balm of Gilead is *Commiphora opobalsamum* - a very rare desert shrub with lots of mysticism surrounding the "balm" or oil from the juice that spontaneously exudes from the inner bark to sit on the outer bark as resinous drops.

> Balsam poplar tree, *Populus balsamifera*, is also known as Balm Poplar, and Balm of Gilead.

> Bastard balm (*Melittis melissophyllum*)

> Horse balm (*Collinsonia canadensis*)

> Molucca balm, or bells of Ireland (*Moluccella laevis*).

> Balm Fir, commonly known as Balsam Fir (*Abies balsamea*)

> Balm of heaven is more commonly known as the California laurel (*Umbellularia californica*).

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: Kale

Kale, which is simply cultivars of cabbage (*Brassica oleracea*) grown for their non-head-forming edible leaves, is a powerhouse of nutrition. Rich in vitamins, minerals, and important health-giving phytochemicals, it is all the talk in health food circles.

Kale has been cultivated since before the Middle Ages, and there's an impressive array of cultivars available - from frilly leaved varieties, to bumpy leaved ones, and some have dark green, others purple foliage, while midrib and vein colour also differ between cultivars.

Kale prefers growing during the cooler tem-

peratures of early spring and autumn, so it is a good idea to sow some, or transplant some now.

Susceptible to white butterfly larvae feeding, interplant with companions such as dill, nasturtium, marjoram, and lemon balm.



Flower in focus: Heartsease Viola

Heartsease viola is also known as Johnny-jump-up (and-kiss-me-quick) among a myriad of other names. It is historically associated with love potions and heart problems.

The leaves and flowers are edible, and it even has some medicinal uses—including that of a treatment for eczema, an internal cleansing herb, and for bronchial problems.



A short lived perennial (more an annual or biennial that easily self seeds), it succeeds in most garden soils and grows equally well in pots as in garden beds.

FAQ

Q: Are all rosehips edible?

A: Yes! At least according to quite a few sources that I have consulted over the years. *



Roses are in the same family as apples and crabapples, and their fruit, called rosehips, resemble miniature apples too. Rose petals are edible as well.

Don't use hips from roses sprayed with chemicals or pesticides.

While you can harvest the hips from any rose species, *Rosa rugosa* and *Rosa canina* is said to produce the most abundant and sweetest hips of all.

Do take care though when using rosehips as the seeds inside are covered with fine irritant hairs, and it is suggested that these be removed before consuming.



Autumn is a perfect time to gather ripe rosehips. In places where you get frosts, it is said that rosehips are sweeter after the first frost and should only be harvested then.

Use the rosehips to make jams, jellies, syrups and tea.

*www.meadowsweet.co.nz/disclaimer

Kids Corner

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

More and more trees are turning their leaves into beautiful hues of gold, orange and amber... Get creative with some autumn leaves.



Challenge: Make an Autumn inspired nature mandala! In simplest terms, a mandala is circular pattern made up from geometrical figures. It has some deeper spiritual meaning, the ever expanding outwards from a central element indicative of the whole cosmos, but it can just be something "pretty" to create. in Why not show me your amazing creations by [e-mailing me?](#)

Recipe Share

Lemon Balm Lip Balm

Lemon balm is proven as an effective antiviral remedy for the treatment, and prevention of the eruption of fever blisters (cold sores).

- 4 Tbsp Lemon Balm Infused Oil
- 2 Tbsp Coconut Oil
- 2 Tbsp Beeswax
- Optional: Lemon Balm (Melissa) Essential Oil

To make an infused oil, steep dried or semi-dried lemon balm leaves in your

choice of carrier oil (I use olive, but almond or avocado oil will work too) for two weeks or more.

To make the balm, combine the infused oil, coconut oil and beeswax in a double boiler and heat until melted. Cool slightly before adding the essential oils, if using. Stir through and pour into chap stick containers, or lip balm tins to set. Use as needed.

Lemon Balm & Honey Purée

- 20g Fresh Lemon Balm Leaves
- 1/3 cup Honey
- Juice of 1/2 Lemon

Place the leaves in the blender or food processor, add the honey and lemon juice and blend until you have a smooth green purée. Dilute with warm or cold water and drink, or add as a sweetener to other herbal infusions or summer cocktails.

From DK Home Herbal, DK, 2011

Bee Balm Oxymel

An oxymel is an ancient traditional combination of herbs, honey and vinegar, and is a good palatable way to ingest medicinal herbs.

- 1/3 Cup Chopped, Fresh Bee Balm Leaves & Flowers
- 1/3 Cup Honey
- 1/3 Cup Apple Cider Vinegar

Combine everything in a glass jar and stir well. Put a lid on the jar and store in a dark cabinet for 1 month. At the end of the month, strain and store the liquid in another clean labeled jar. To use take a spoonful as needed for relief from sore throats and coughs as well as to support the body as it heals from the common cold.

From <https://homespunseasonalliving.com>

