

=====
RAMBLINGS ON WINTER HERB GARDENING
=====

As aromatic plants bestow
No spicy fragrance while they grow,
But crushed or trodden on the ground
Diffuse their balmy sweets around.
--Oliver Goldsmith

I've done a bit'o searchin' since the last message and come up with the following suggestions. Let me know specifically which herbs you intend to winter over.

Repot in Aug-Sept. using a liquid manure (generic term for homeade fertilizer) of Bloodmeal-bonemeal-and crushed horn in the new soil. Herbs (with a very few exceptions) prefer neutral or slightly alkaline soil. Never use fast release fertilizer since it causes lush growth. The suggested liquid is all in slow-release form. In the cultivation of herbs, lush growth is undesirable since new lush growth is scant in essential oil. Sandy, medium-dry soil, with plenty of sun provides the best flavor. To winter over, dormancy is maintained best with good insulation and a 35-45 degree temperature.

Containers should have a diameter 1/3 to 1/2 the height of the plant. Small pots will hinder good growth since they dry out too quickly.

Until I know more about what plants you have, here are some thoughts on herbs I like;.

Basil - Bring in this annual from the garden and do not allow to set seed. In warm climates it may be considered a perennial but rarely is the climate good enough. It is native to India, having grown in the Mediterranean for thousands of years. Spray once a week with soapy water to ward off mites. Likes humusy well-drained soil. Will start well from seed, but is a difficult

Winter_Herb_Gardening_1994.txt

grower. Do not disturb seedlings.

"Madonna, wherefore hast thou sent to me

Sweet basil and mignonette?

Embleming love and health, which never yet

In the same wreath might be.

--Shelly

Bay (Sweet) - Perennial tree. Frost tender, difficult to propagate, best done from suckers and root cuts. Two to five years until plant is well-established. Needs rich soil.

And when from Daphne's tree he plucks more Baies

His shepard pipe may chant more heavenly lays.

--William Browne

Borage - Start seedlings for winter, since it's an annual that once gone to seed will die. Easy grower that will thrive in your soil.

"I, Borage always bring courage."

-Pliny (in repeating an ancient verse)

Catnip - Can root from cuttings or transfer plant. Likes cool, sunny spot and moist soil. Treat as any mint.

If you set it, the cats will eat it,

If you sow it, the cats won't know it.

--Old Rhyme

Chives - Wonderfully hardy perennial allow to freeze outside and then bring in where it will produce excellent new leaves. They especially like a top dressing of compost. Cut leaves steadily to 2 inches.

Dill - Annual easily grown from seed. Sow seeds and use the foliage throughout winter. Full sun.

Therewith her Vervain and her Dill

That hindereth witches of their will.

-- Michael Drayton

Winter_Herb_Gardening_1994.txt

Feverfew - Take care to only divide out the strongest plants for replant in the spring. Will not grow well in the house without extremely careful care. Best to winter it over.

There's many feet on the moor tonight,
And they fall so light as they turn and pass,
So light and true that they shake no dew,
From the featherfew and the hungry grass.
--Nora Hopper

Lemon Balm -Bring this perennial in from the Garden and cut freely. Treat as any mint. Do not allow to flower. Grows well from seed, too. The several chairs of order look you scour
With the juice of balm and every precious flower.
--Shakespere

Mints - Grow from division, and in a seperate pot from other herbs. Do not allow to flower and give it plenty of drainage. The more sun, the more flavorful the mint.
"In Greek mythology, this fragrant herb was once the nymph Mentha. Like most male dieties, Pluto, ruler of the underworld, had a roving eye, and carried Mentha off to the underworld to be his lover. Pluto's wife, Persephone, who herself had been abducted by Pluto, did not enjoy the competition and began stomping Mentha into the ground. Pluto, in order to protect the maiden, transformed her into the herb we know as mint."
--Herbs for all seasons, Sally Freeman

Oregano - Best to winter this over and come again from root divisions in the spring. Another Mediterraneanian plant.
"Where the bee can suck no honey, she leaves her sting behind; and where the bear cannot find origanum to heal his grief, he blasteth all other leaves with his breath."
-- Fletcher

Winter_Herb_Gardening_1994.txt

Parsley -(omen of death and bringer of babies!) Sow seeds for this biennial, since the leaves of the second year plant are not as good, give it a cool, sunny spot and a moist soil. Harvest is slow from seed. If brought in from the garden bring in small divisions.

"At sparta's palace twenty beautiful mayds,
The pride of Greece, fresh garlands crowned their heads
With hyacinths and twining parsley drest,
Graced joyful Menelaus' marriage feast.
--Theocritus

Rosemary -(meaning "dew of the sea") This evergreen shrub must be wintered carefully as frost will kill it. It is a woody plant so do not cut it hard back for the winter. Sap runs in the woody sections. Take cuttings in June. Young men and maids do ready stand
With sweet Rosemary in their hands-
A perfect token of your virgin's life.
--Old Ballad

Sage - Divide old plants for indoor winter growth. Do NOT overwater. This plant despises wet feet. Sage is perennial but 4-5 year plants grow leggy and lose some of their value.
Sage is singularly good for the head and the brain; it quickeneth the senses and the memory; strengtheneth the sinews; restoreth the health to those that hath the palsey; and takes away shaky trembling of the members.
--Gerard

Having thusly blown myself quite out of wind, I shall retire this message with the following ballad.

THE SPRIG OF THYME
Come all ye pretty maidens all
And young men in your prime
I would have you keep your gardens clean

And let no one steal your thyme.

My garden was planted full
Of flowers everywhere;
But for myself I would not choose
The flower I held so dear.

The primrose I did refuse
Because it came too soon;
The lily and pink I overlooked
and vowed I would wait till June.

In June came to roses so red
And that's the flower for me
But when I gathered the rose so dear
I gained but the willow tree.

My garden is now run wild
When shall I plant it new?
My bed that once was filled with thyme
Is all overrun with rue.

Green willow it will twist
Green willow it will twine
And I wish I was in that young mans arms
That once had that heart of mine.
--Folk Song

=====
This Article COPYRIGHT Jan. 1988. Nicholas Morcinek. First
published in Toronto Dimensions magazine Feb. 1988.

If you would like more info please write:

Botanic Medicine Society.

P.O. Box 82. Stn. A.

Willowdale, Ont. CANADA.

M2N 5S7.

Well here we are again, February already and before too long the Spring and Summer and a whole new crop of fresh herbs to waken up those flat and jaded Winter taste buds! Can't you just feel the taste of Spring in the air? Yes I do realise that its not too easy, particularly if you're driving through a white-out on the Don Valley Car Park, but one month from now will see the first stirrings of the new Season. (O.k. so I'm an incurable optimist!). However, just in case you're not feeling so good here's a tip to help you through 'til March.

If you really do feel down and grumpy there's no better pick me up than a walk in the garden and if you live in Toronto you can do exactly that! Just pop down to the Allen Gardens at Carlton Street and Sherbourne, and spend an afternoon surrounded by exotic and fragrant plants. The Gardens have many varieties that were originally collected from every Continent and it is easy to imagine yourself luxuriating in a tropical paradise in no time at all.

You can see and smell the aromatic Jasmine, a plant that has a long history of medicinal use. You will find the flowers in China tea, and in all sorts of Asian herbal potions, where their fragrance is used as a "pick-me-up" or tonic. Just a few drops of Oil of Jasmine rubbed into the skin or dropped into the bath can work wonders, lifting away that tired and run-down feeling! You may find Pomegranates from the Middle East, (still used today to destroy intestinal parasites), and Carob, grown for its' food value and delectable chocolate-like flavour. If you travel deeper

into this contained jungle you can find Orchids and Date Palms, Papyrus and Eucalyptus and dozens of varieties of Peppers and Spice. If you are lucky you may spot the Piper Methyisticum, or "intoxicating pepper". It's a pity this fellow doesn't grow here in Canada as it makes an interesting anti-depressant when correctly prepared. The whole root is collected and mashed well together with Coconut milk to form a thin paste. This is then placed in clean sealed containers and left in a cool place to ferment for about a month, whereupon the mixture is ready to drink. The effect is quite unusual, for the active ingredients in this mixture seem to directly affect the feeling centres of the brain, producing a warm and gently serene sensation of well-being. Just what we all need in the middle of a long Canadian winter eh!

Seriously though a walk through the Gardens can be an uplifting experience particularly at this time of year. If you take along a good herb book, (e.g. A Modern Herbal- Mrs. M. Grieve), you can check out some of the uses for the plants that you see, and it becomes very easy to spend the entire day there. (You could take your camera). Oh and unlike so many of Toronto's expositions there's no charge to get in!

"Where can I find a good herb class?" If I had a dollar for every time I've been asked this question..... There are many "so-called" herb classes that offer only dry text, with no emphasis placed on plant recognition, or harvesting from the wild and so students inevitably feel disappointed and cheated. Finally though, I can feel confident in recommending a new series of classes being provided here in Toronto by members of the Botanic Medicine Society. These classes are given by full-time professional herbalists and cover all aspects of practical herbalism, from plant recognition to clinical assessment. Classes start the first week in March. For more details regarding

syllabus and enrolment please call (416) 221-1662, or (416) 534-0622.

Next issue looks at readers letters so if you have any questions about herbs and herbalism please write to me here at T.D. See you in the Spring!

WINTER HERBS

by ???

(Southern Living Magazine)

As the growing season comes to an end, cooks turn to the grocer, the pantry, and the freezer rather than the garden. However, fresh herbs can still season your winter fare. Here are a few that endure.

WINTER SAVORY (*Satureja montana*) is an evergreen perennial throughout the South, except in South Florida where it may die during the warm, wet summers. Although some cooks prefer the flavor of summer savory (*S. hortensis*), others like the carefree nature of the perennial herb. It is a low, spreading shrub with dark-green, glossy leaves. frequent, light pruning helps maintain a constant supply of tender new growth. Plant seeds or young plants in spring or fall. Choose a location with full sun and well-drained soil, and allow 10 to 12 inches between plants.

THYME (*Thymus* sp.) offers a large variety of forms, flavors, and flower color. For culinary use, most people prefer one of the shrubby, upright thymes because the leaves are easier to strip from the stems. However, if you prefer the ornamental quality of the creeping types, you'll find the flavor to be excellent. Although thyme can be grown from seeds, you need

to start with a division or rooted cutting for selections such as lemon, caraway, silver, or creeping red-flowered thyme. Plant in a well-drained location. Traditionally, thyme has been grown in full sun, but many gardeners in the South are finding that by midsummer the plants that receive a little afternoon shade look better. When your plant becomes leafless in the center, cut it back to encourage new growth.

ROSEMARY (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) is only dependably hardy in the Lower and Coastal South. In other regions grow it in a container that can be moved to a sheltered location.

This woody shrub has two forms. The upright form is the more cold hardy and will grow into a globe 3 to 4 feet in diameter and sometimes larger. Jeannette Frandsen of Village Arbors, an herb nursery in Auburn, Alabama, has found that it is hardy to about 15°F. Prostrate rosemary may reach 2 feet in height and will trail over the edge of its pot or a wall, but it is definitely more tender. If you are in a marginal area, plant your rosemary in a container or at the base of a south-facing wall. You can also cover plants when unusually cold temperatures are forecast. Rosemary grows best in partial shade to full sun. If plants are allowed to wilt, they will probably not recover. Ideally the soil should be moist but well drained.

BAY (*Laurus nobilis*) is actually a tree, but few will ever grow that large in the South. This herb has about the same hardiness as rosemary. It needs at least partial sun and well-drained soil.

SALAD BURNET (*Poterium sanguisorba*) is a perennial that offers the delicate flavor of cucumbers to a salad. It is so hardy that, according to Frandsen, "On the coldest January day, you can use it."

Neither CHERVIL (*Anthriscus cerefolium*) nor CORIANDER (*Coriandrum sativum*), also called cilantro, is a perennial, but both can be planted in early fall, grown and harvested through winter, and then allowed to flower in the spring. The foliage may die down in the Upper South, but

Winter_Herb_Gardening_1994.txt

plants will flower, set seeds, and then volunteer in the garden for years to come.

+++++