

WESTWOOD COMMUNITY GARDEN HERB BORDER

EDIBLE HERBS

Basil

Most people think of basil as a standard culinary herb, complimenting tomatoes and an essential ingredient in pesto, but this is really just scratching the surface. Basil leaves can be combined with a variety of other herbs including garlic, juniper, marjoram, mustard, oregano, paprika, parsley, pepper, rosemary, sage and thyme and can be used in soups, stews, stuffings and rices as well as with fish, chicken, vegetables and meats. They can also be a key ingredient in cheeses, vinegars, oils, jellies, teas, drinks and liqueurs, and seeds can be used in beverages. Purple basil makes nice colorful vinegars, and lemon and cinnamon basil can be unexpected but flavorful additions to desserts.

Larger leaves can be torn, chopped or minced. Small leaves can be added whole to salads, vegetable dishes, pasta and rice. To prevent blackening of leaves and insure best flavor, add to salads and other cold dishes soon after cutting.

Non-woody stems and branches can be steeped in liquids for poached fruit, beverages, soups and steamed meat, poultry and seafood. Even basil's flowers are edible and can be candied or added to salads and other dishes. For optimum flavor, add basil in the last few minutes of cooking

Preserving and Storing - Most experts agree that there is no comparison between fresh and dried basil in terms of flavor. The fresh leaves have a flavor complexity and intensity that is largely lost in the dried form. If storing for a week or less, basil can be wrapped in several layers of paper towels and placed in an airtight or ziplock bag and stored in the highest section of the refrigerator where it will stay fresh for several days. It can also be stored for a few days in a glass of water placed on a countertop.

Drying - For longer term storage, basil can be dried, but this is not the preferred method for many basil lovers since dried, crumbled basil doesn't have the same robust flavor. Leaves must remain whole when drying since broken leaves are less flavorful due to the loss of essential oils.

One easy method for drying basil is simply hanging it in bundles. Basil can also be dried by placing a thin layer of stripped leaves between two folded sheets of newspaper on a wire rack and turning leaves twice a day. Drying between sheets of paper prevents oxidation and discoloration. Can cause a loss of essential oils and reduced flavor. Dried basil should be stored in closed jars away from heat and light and will keep for about a year

Freezing & Oil Preservation - There are many options for freezing basil, and for many herb enthusiasts, freezing is the preferred storage method. Leaves can be frozen on cookie sheets and then stored in plastic bags or containers labeled with name and date. Basil can blacken with freezing, but chopping, covering with oil and freezing in baggies to keep leaves green. Leaves can also be combined with olive oil in a food processor or mortar/pestle and frozen in ice cube trays. Our coordinator developed a handy way of freezing her basil/pesto in ¼ -½ inch sheets in freezer bags and then just breaking off a piece of the frozen sheet as needed. Frozen basil can then be added to soups, sauces or pesto. Basil can also be made into pesto and frozen. Recommend freezing pesto minus the garlic and adding that fresh. Some prefer oil concentrates to other preservation methods. To make a concentrate, blend 2 cups firmly packed fresh leaves with ½ cup vegetable oil. Do not strain out the leaves. This will produce a thick paste about the consistency of pesto. All herbal oil products, including pesto, should be stored in plastic or glass containers and kept in the freezer to prevent botulism. Concentrates can be stored for up to 2 years.

Bronze Fennel

With the same sweet licorice flavor as Sweet Fennel, Bronze Fennel leaves can be used in place of Green Fennel in any recipe, and the soft wispy leaves with their unique reddish bronze color add a lot of visual interest. Bronze fennel does not form a vegetable bulb like sweet fennel. By the end of the summer it will put up tall spikes that will be endowed with little yellow button flowers. If left on the plant, these will turn brown and make fennel seeds. Spikes are cut back to the ground so the plant will stay looking better longer.

Leaves are a nice addition to salads, cole slaws, and dressings. The leaves are great with fish and can be used to stuff the cavity of a whole fish, or wrap fillets or add to traditional bread or rice stuffing. A tasty quick salad dressing can be made by adding a couple fennel leaves into a blender with some oil, vinegar, parsley, and garlic chives.

Fennel tea can be made from the leaves of both fennels and the seeds of Bronze Fennel. Milk steeped with Bronze Fennel can be used to make ice cream or added into baked goods.

If you want to collect the seeds (a prize ingredient in Italian sausage), just leave that flowering stalk. You can still harvest the outer leaves; just don't cut the center stalk, which will bear the flowers. Watch as the seeds start to turn from green to brown, and then cut the whole head and allow it to finish the ripening process in a brown paper bag. When the seeds are ripe, they will easily shake loose from the main head. Store in a dry airtight jar out of light.

Cardamom

Cardamom is an indigenous south Asian plant, growing in southern India and the island of Sri Lanka. The seed of the cardamom is the main method of propagation for this herb in commercial plantations. Cardamom plants require shaded sites to grow well; such sites must have rich and moist soils that must also be well drained without the risk of water logging. Cardamom spice is actually the seedpods of the cardamom plant; these seedpods are harvested just before they begin to open in the dry weather during the fall. Collected seedpods are then dried by spreading them out in full sunlight for several days.

Cardamom was one of the most valued spices of the ancient world and it was one of the principal items of trade. The ancient Greeks around the 4th century B.C highly valued the cardamom as a culinary spice and as a base for herbal medicines. Cardamom is available at most grocery stores as a warming spice.

Our cardamom plant has not grown well and is not expected to produce seeds this year. Another attempt may be made in future years.

Chives

This perennial herb sports linear round leaves which add a mild onion flavor to other foods. The leaves are snipped and used primarily fresh, stirred into uncooked foods, such as soft cheeses or salads; or added to cooked foods during the last few minutes of cooking, or as a garnish. The pretty blue flowers bloom in early summer and are an attractive tasty addition to salads. Overheating will destroy the flavor.

Snipped chive leaves can be kept for about a week in the refrigerator. They can be used to flavor butter, oil, cream cheese. Chopping chives and freezing them in bags make them available for year round use.

Epazote (eh-pa-zo-tay)

Native to Central America, especially Mexico and Guatemala, epazote is common to those cuisines. It is most often used fresh in these regions to flavor beans, corn and fish. The strongly scented herb is said to help avoid the gastric discomfort [gas] that sometimes occurs after eating beans. Ancient Aztecs

used epazote both medicinally and as a culinary herb. Only a small amount should be used.

The taste is strong, slightly bitter with hints of lemon. It is often compared to cilantro as both are acquired tastes. Epazote has no comparable flavor substitute.

The shrubby plant is an annual that grows about three or four feet high. Leaves are large and pointed with serrated edges while the flowers are tiny clusters of green balls. The crushed leaves are said to send ants scattering if placed in their path.

Epazote leaves are used fresh or air-dried. One teaspoon of dried epazote leaves is equivalent to about one branch, or 7 fresh leaves. Fresh epazote leaves can be placed in a plastic bag and stored for up to 1 week. You can air-dry the fresh leaves and store in a jar with a tight-fitting lid.

Try epazote in soups, with shellfish and eggs or as an ingredient in quesadillas. It is especially popular for flavoring beans of any kind. Epazote combines well with other Mexican seasonings like oregano, cumin and chilies.

** You should be aware that this pungent herb is poisonous in large quantities so just use a pinch or two.

Garlic Chives

Garlic chives are a perennial herb whose flat stalks add a mild zing to soups, meats, and other dishes. The herb tastes a bit more like garlic than chives or onions, making it a versatile ingredient in the kitchen. You can also cook with the clusters of white flowers that appear in late summer or fall.

Use garlic chives just as you would traditional chives. Harvest the leaves with scissors or kitchen shears, cutting down to the soil line. Fresh garlic chives have the strongest flavor, but you can preserve them by chopping them up to dry. If you wish to use the flowers, crumble them and add them to egg dishes or soups. Store the leaves in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for up to a week or chop and freeze.

This plant can self-sow vigorously in the garden, so we will cut off all the flower stalks as they fade.

Lavender

Many people appreciate lavender for its fragrance, used in soaps, shampoos, and sachets for scenting clothes. Research has confirmed that lavender fragrance produces slight calming, soothing, and sedative effects when its scent is inhaled.

Cooking with Lavender:

In cooking, use 1/3 the quantity of dried lavender flowers to fresh lavender flowers.

The key to cooking with lavender is to experiment; start out with a small amount of flowers, and add more as you go. Adding too much lavender to your recipe can be like eating perfume and will make your dish bitter. Because of the strong flavor of lavender, the secret is that a little goes a long way.

The lavender flowers add a beautiful color to salads. Lavender can also be substituted for rosemary in many bread recipes. The flowers can be put in sugar and sealed tightly for a couple of weeks then the sugar can be substituted for ordinary sugar for a cake, buns or custards. Grind the lavender in a herb or coffee grinder or mash it with mortar and pestle.

The spikes and leaves of lavender can be used in most dishes in place of rosemary. Use the spikes or stems for making fruit or shrimp kabobs. Just place your favorite fruit on the stems and grill.

Flowers look beautiful and taste good too in a glass of champagne, with chocolate cake, or as a garnish for sorbets or ice creams. Lavender lends itself to savory dishes also, from hearty stews to wine-reduced sauces. Diminutive blooms add a mysterious scent to custards, flans or sorbets. Dried lavender blossoms used in perfumes and potpourri.

Harvesting Fresh Lavender - Harvest flowers as you would fruit, selecting those that look most perfectly ready, with the fullest color, and passing over any that seem wilted or less ripe. The fresher the flower, the more flavorful its taste, so pick your flowers as close as possible to food preparation time. Cutting the lavender flowers is best done in the morning when the dew has evaporated and before the heat of the day.

Stem flowers may be put in a glass of water in a cool place until you are ready to use them. All blooms should be thoroughly rinsed. Immerse them in water to remove any insects or soil. Then lay the flowers gently on paper or cloth towels and dab dry, or gently spin dry in a salad spinner. If necessary, layer blooms carefully between moist paper towels in the refrigerator until meal time.

Drying Lavender Flowers - When drying lavender, lavender stems are bunched together with a rubber band or tie that will allow for shrinkage of the stems as they dry. Group about a dozen lavender stems together in each bunch. Rubber bands on the stem can be attached to hooks hanging from the ceiling easily. The lavender bunches are hung upside down (flowers on the bottom). Lavender needs to be dried in a dark, dust-free place with good ventilation to allow for quick and complete drying.

To retain the flavor and fragrance of dried lavender, store them in glass or pottery containers with tight fitting lids so the oils will not escape from the flowers.

Lemon balm

Lemon balm is a lemon scented and flavored member of the mint family. Although lemon balm dries quickly and easily it will not be as fragrant dried as fresh. Be careful not to bruise the leaves during the harvest and drying operations. It can be dried outside in partial shade but will brown quickly if there is any night moisture. Plants may also be hung in bunches and air dried in a shed or barn or oven dried on screens. When dry, store in tightly closed containers. If hung to dry in bunches, lemon balm can be rapidly processed by rubbing each bundle across a half-inch mesh screen to crumble the leaves.

Fresh sprigs are used to top drinks and as garnishes on salads and main dishes. Fresh or dried leaves make a refreshing tea, either iced or hot.

Dried leaves are used as an ingredient in many potpourri.

Lemon Grass

With its lemony scent and hint of rose aroma, lemon grass is an essential ingredient in Thai and Indonesian cooking. Lemon grass is commonly used in teas, soups, and curries. It is also suitable for poultry, fish, beef, and seafood. It is often used as a tea in African countries such as Togo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Latin American countries such as Mexico. The lower portion of the stalk is the part used.

Preservation: Cut lemon grass stalks at the base once they are 1/2 inch in diameter at the base. Lemon grass stalks grow up to 3 feet long, so you may have to dig through the dense growth of the plant to access the base of the plant.

Lemon grass leaves can be dried in the sun or in an oven/dehydrator. Dry out lemon grass stalks by placing them in a 120 degree F oven for 2 or 3 hours. Keep the oven door cracked slightly to let moisture out, and check the lemon grass frequently to make sure it is not getting singed. Store in an airtight zip top bag or a glass bottle or airtight herb container. Soak dried whole lemon grass for two hours in warm water before using in cooking. Lemon grass leaves can be used to season soups, tea and meat.

Lemon grass can also be frozen for future use. Cut off the outer leaves and top of the stalk. Remove the inner leaves and place in an airtight zip top bag and put in the freezer. Or mince or puree the bottom 3 inches of the stalk until it is liquid. Pour the liquid into small ice cube trays and place in an airtight zip top bag and freeze. Use one or two cubes at a time.

Take care to store lemon grass away from other foods and spices, as they may pick up its aroma.

Lemon Verbena

The most common home use of the herb is in potpourri or lemon sachet. The dried leaves can retain their scent for years. It is the strongest of the lemon scented herbs. Tea made from the dried leaves is a lemony beverage, thought by some to be the best of the lemon-herb teas. In cooking, however, lemon verbena is deceptive; insofar as smell and taste can be separated, the smell is lemony but the taste is bitter and hot, more like citrus zest than like the fruit.

Lovage

Its flavor and smell is very similar to celery. The leafstalks and stem bases were formerly blanched like celery, but as a vegetable it has fallen into disuse. A fragrant herbal tea is made of the dried leaves and is believed to stimulate digestion. The fresh leaves can be used in salads, or to make soup, when a celery flavor is desired.

Mint

Our garden features spearmint, citrus mint [orange], and sweet mint. It is a strong, actually invasive, grower so feel free to harvest!!

Use the leaves fresh for teas or in salads. Hang stems upside down and let dry before stripping leaves and storing in airtight container.

Uses

Spearmint and peppermint aid digestion - brew fresh or dried for a refreshing hot or cold tea

Mint jelly and sauces

Peppermint oil used as a flavoring in drinks, confectionary, medicine, soaps and toothpaste Tonic, cough mixtures, bronchial trouble, asthma

Cleaning wounds

Gargles and mouth washes

Vermin deterrent – rats and mice dislike mint

Oregano and marjoram

Oregano and marjoram are closely related and are essential ingredients in Greek, Italian and French cuisine.

Our border has both standard Turkish oregano and a 'hot n spicy' oregano. Fresh and dried leaves of oregano can be added to soups, casseroles, sauces, stew, stuffing, eggs, olives, teas, tomato-based dishes, chili and pizza.

To dry leaves hang stems to dry and then strip leaves - store in airtight jars. Flowers have a flavor similar to the leaves and can be a flavorful and decorative addition to vegetables, salads and other foods.

Sweet marjoram has a mild, sweet flavor that compliments mushrooms, carrots, cauliflower, spinach, squash, peas, and asparagus, and leaves, flowers and tender stems can be added to stews, poultry, stuffing, syrups, dressings, cheese mixtures, seafood, omelets, pizza, salad, sausages, ice cream, custards, pies and fruit desserts. Golden marjoram can be used in the same manner.

Pineapple sage

Pineapple is grown as an annual here. It is known for leaves that have a mild pineapple scent and flavor. Red late summer and fall flower spikes attract hummingbirds. Use the leaves fresh or dried, but most of the fruity flavor is lost when dried. Fruit salads are enhanced by the piquant flavor of the fresh flowers and leaves. This flavor is very different from that of garden sage; although there is a sagey element, it's very subtle, and pineapple sage doesn't substitute for other culinary sages. The flowers add visual sparkle as well. Even without flowers, a fresh leafy stem of pineapple sage is the perfect garnish for tall summer drinks.

Try mixing the minced leaves and flowers in cream cheese for a delightfully fruity spread, or knead a handful or two of chopped leaves into raisin bread dough. Steeping the leaves in hot apple juice and using the juice to make jelly is an easy way to preserve the pineapple sage

Roman Chamomile

Roman Chamomile is three or four inch high perennial. It is used primarily for the famous cup of relaxing Chamomile tea. It has bright, sunny, daisy-like flowers with yellow centers and white petals with delicate

foliage that is pleasingly scented. It is mainly the flower that is dried for tea. The fresh flowers can be used as a garnish, just be sure to remove the green bitter leaves under the flowers.

Some folks can be allergic or sensitive to Roman Chamomile. Those most susceptible are those who are allergic to members of the ragweed family.

Rosemary

This strongly flavored herb should be used sparingly for cooking. Poultry, fish, lamb and beef are all enhanced by its pungent flavor. In addition, try it with tomatoes, cheese, eggs, potatoes, squash, soups and salad dressings. Well-developed woody stems can be used as skewers for shish kebobs. In the landscape, rosemary is often used to make topiaries and hedges. The herb can be planted along stone walls or pathways and it grows well in containers. Crafters use rosemary to make wreaths, garland, and bath products. The plant also produces a yellow-green colored dye and is used in aromatherapy

Dry rosemary quickly to help retain its green color and essential oils. Longer stems can be hung upside down in a dark area with good air circulation. Smaller stems can be placed on screens. Rosemary can be frozen, although some loss of color may occur. To freeze, place the sprigs on a cookie sheet that has been covered with waxed paper or place in a freezer bag. Strip off the leaves when they are frozen and store in an airtight container. Leaves can also be placed in ice cube trays with some olive oil and stored in ziploc bags after they are frozen.

Sage

Common sage is a woody perennial plant with blue flower stalks in early summer. Sage leaves are a popular poultry and meat seasoning. They can be used both fresh and dried. Sage also makes a nice tea.

Sage is used in sausage, poultry, stuffing, pork, lamb, seafood, vegetables, breads and is used as a spice rub for pork chops or pork tenderloin. It is also frequently used in salads. Harvest individual leaves as needed. Leaves can also be dried and stored for future use.

.Savory, summer

Summer savory boasts a warming, peppery scent and taste. One of the essential ingredients in Herbs de Provence (along with rosemary, thyme, and oregano), summer savory is also wonderful alone to season beans, meats and stuffings. The plant forms single stems 4-15 inches tall that are lined with linear dark green leaves up to 4 inches long. Whorls of lilac-purple flowers appear in summer. Plant spreads 7-30 inches. Sow in a well-drained, neutral to alkaline soil in full sun. Pick both leaves and flowers all summer to use fresh or dried.

Savory, winter

Winter savory, fresh or dried, imparts a spicy, peppery flavor to dishes in which it is used. Winter savory has a stronger, sharper flavor than its summer savory, but it still blends well with thyme, sage and rosemary as well as most mints. It a favorite flavoring for pork, beef and poultry, and a popular addition to soups and salads. Dry by hanging or flat on a screen.

Sorrel

Garden Sorrel (*R. acetosa*), a perennial with long, arrow-shaped leaves, is a hardy herb belonging to the buckwheat family that is cultivated as a garden herb or leaf vegetable. Sorrel has grown wild for centuries in Asia, Europe and North America. The presence of oxalic acid produces acidic and tart or sour notes, that are not so prominent in young leaves, which are preferred for harvesting. Sorrel leaves are shaped like spinach leaves and range from 2 to 12 inches in length. Sorrel is mildest in spring. It is high in vitamin A and contains some calcium, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium and vitamin C. Garden sorrel can be distinguished from a milder-flavored, round-leaved variety (*R. scutatus*), now known as French sorrel.

Sorrel is often found in cream soups, fish stuffings, omelets, breads, salads, sauces and cole slaw. Younger sorrel is often cooked and served like spinach, or eaten raw in salads. Older, more acidic sorrel is good in cream soups where the addition of sour cream is said to reduce the tart overtones. Clean sorrel like spinach, folding each leaf in half lengthwise and stripping the tough central stem away from the soft leaves. Asparagus, sorrel, fresh peas and apples go well together.

Choose fresh-looking, bright green, crisp leaves. Sorrel with woody stems or yellow or wilted leaves should be avoided. Refrigerate fresh sorrel in a plastic zip-top bag filled with air for up to three days. If leaves do become wilted, plunge them into an ice-water bath to revive them. Sorrel leaves should be thoroughly washed and dried before using, NOT before storing.

Stevia

Native to Paraguay and other tropical areas of the Americas, the stevia plant produces leaves packed with super-sweet compounds that remain stable even after the leaves have been dried. It is 300 times sweeter than sugar. Stevia leaves have been used to sweeten teas and beverages throughout South America for centuries. More recently, diabetics and dieters alike have turned to stevia to reduce their sugar intake because, unlike honey, maple syrup, agave or molasses, this natural sweetener has zero calories and is not metabolized by the body. Stevia is especially well-suited to sweetening drinks, fruits, salad dressings, yogurt and most creamy desserts. Stevia can substitute for some, but not all, of the sugar used when baking, because it does not provide all of the multiple functions that sugar does.

Use fresh leaves for tea or eat a few right off the plant. They taste great with mint leaves. Sweetness (Stevioside content) is greatest just before flowering, which is triggered by short day lengths. Plants should be harvested before the first frost or as soon as blossoming begins, whichever comes first. Cut entire plants just above ground level. When growing Stevia as a perennial or for early harvests, clip the plants 6 inches from the ground so they will survive and re-grow. Harvest in the morning, after dew has evaporated.

Stevia stems are easily dried by hanging upside down in a dry, warm, drafty location. Bunch a few together and bind at the stem end with a rubber band, and then slip a paper clip bent into an "S" shape under the rubber band. Hang by the other end of the paperclip. After a few days, rake leaves from the stems with your fingers and gather for storage in a clean container such as a glass jar. They keep well for years. Stems are less sweet, so toss them on the compost pile.

An alternative method is to strip fresh leaves from stems and spread on elevated screens in the sunshine, on a day with low relative humidity (less than 60%). If drying takes 8 hours or less, very little Stevioside will be lost. A food dehydrator on low heat (100 F to 110 F) will do an excellent job as well.

Leaves are crisp, crumbly, and bright green when fully dry.

While whole leaves are great for making tea, it's easy to turn them into Green Stevia Powder with a kitchen blender, food processor, or coffee grinder with metal blades. With the blender bowl half full, process dry leaves at high speed for a few seconds. Collect the fine powder for use in recipes calling for Green Stevia Powder. Use a clean glass jar for long-term storage.

Thyme

Thyme is used frequently in Mediterranean, Italian and Provençal French cuisines. It pairs well with lamb, poultry and tomatoes, and is often used in soups, stews, stocks and sauces. Thyme is used in chicken broth and stuffing, marinades for meat or fish, lamb, veal, sauces, soups or egg dishes, often used in partnership with tomatoes, works well in oils and butters. Lemon thyme can be used with fish, in tea and in salad dressings. Other herbs with which thyme can be successfully combined include rosemary, marjoram, parsley, oregano and bay leaf. Thyme is a main component of Herbes de Provence, a blend that also includes marjoram, rosemary, summer savory, lavender flowers and other dried herbs. Thyme is also typically included in the traditional bouquet garni, a bundle of herbs and aromatics used in making stocks and sauces.

Whole sprigs of fresh thyme may be used when roasting meats and poultry or vegetables, but because of their tough, woody stems, the sprigs should be removed before serving.

The tiny leaves are easily removed from the stems by pulling the stems through your fingers from top to bottom, against the direction of the stems. Six average sprigs will yield about a tablespoon of leaves. If just the leaves are used, they can be given a quick chop or simply added to the recipe whole. The leaves may also be lightly crushed before adding them, which releases the volatile, flavorful oils.

Fresh thyme should be kept refrigerated, where it will keep for about a week. It can also be frozen on a baking sheet and then stored in zipper baggies in the freezer for up to six months.

Dry by hanging or on a screen. Dried thyme retains much of its flavor when dried & will keep for about six months in an airtight container in a cool, dry place.

When substituting dry for fresh, use one-third as much dried thyme as you would use fresh. So if a recipe calls for 1 tablespoon of fresh thyme leaves, you'd use 1 teaspoon of dried thyme.

OTHER PLANTS

*These herbs are **not** intended for eating or culinary use. Further information should be obtained before considering use of any kind. Caution is advised.*

Calendula

Although Calendula is commonly called "Pot Marigold", they are not in the same genus as the common marigold. This annual plant will bloom throughout the season. Calendula is a bushy, aromatic annual.

The petals have no fragrance. The whole flower or just the petals are used medicinally by many and is found in many commercial preparations.

Calendula has been used for centuries to heal wounds and skin irritations. Calendula has anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, astringent, antifungal, antiviral, and immunostimulant properties making it useful for disinfecting and treating minor wounds, chapped or chafed skin, bruises, burns, athlete's foot, acne, yeast infections, bee stings, rashes, and other minor irritations and infections of the skin. Plus, it stimulates the production of collagen at wound sites to help minimize scarring and assist with stretch marks. Calendula flowers are incorporated into a variety of commercially available baths, creams, compresses, soaps, washes, salves, ointments, massage oils, facial steams, tinctures, and teas.

Calendula repels many common garden pests including aphids, eelworms, asparagus beetles, and tomato hornworms, and is a companion plant for potatoes, beans, and lettuce.

**Gardeners may pick calendula flowers as that will encourage re-blooming.

Echinacea - Purple coneflower

Echinacea, the purple coneflower, is the best known and researched herb for stimulating the immune system. Thousands of Europeans and Americans use echinacea preparations against colds and flu, minor infections, and a host of other major and minor ailments. This native American herb has an impressive record of laboratory and clinical research. Thousands of doctors currently use echinacea for treating infectious diseases.

Echinacea increases the "non-specific" activity of the immune system. In other words, unlike a vaccine which is active only against a specific disease, echinacea stimulates the overall activity of the cells responsible for fighting all kinds of infection. Unlike antibiotics, which are directly lethal to bacteria, echinacea makes our own immune cells more efficient in attacking bacteria, viruses and abnormal cells.

**Echinacea is included in the herb border to showcase a popular medicinal herb and for the beauty of the purple flowers. It is never to be harvested.

Horehound

Horehound is a common medicinal herb. Any person should consult his health care provider before using a medicinal herbal preparation.

Horehound is a perennial herb no longer often seen in home gardens. It is characterized by the possession of a very tough and fiber rich rootstock that sends up many bushy, square shaped and down covered stems. Horehound has distinct shaped leaves, which tend to be wrinkled, have a rough texture on the top and are wooly textured on the underside of the lamina.

Horehound is used by some as a herbal remedy to eliminate severe mucus congestion of the respiratory passages. Drinking just a single cup of warm horehound tea can rapidly loosen the impacted and accumulated phlegm in the lining of the throat, in the lungs and in the sinuses. This remedy is also recommended by herbalists as effective in helping relieve headache induced by infection in the sinuses.

It is easy to prepare horehound tea; it can be prepared by steeping about two and a half tsp. of the fresh

or dried herb in a pint of boiling water. The herb must be allowed to infuse into the water for forty five minutes after it has been removed from the stove. It must then be strain and consumed in a lukewarm state, after flavoring it with a squeeze of lemon juice, it may also be sweetened using a small amount of blackstrap molasses, but not sugar.

The candy prepared from the horehound herb is a remedy for alleviating the pain of a sore throat and is effective in dealing with inflamed lung tissues caused by cold, flu, those that are brought on by allergies or are the effects of smoking.

Butterfly Milkweed - Asclepias tuberosa - Butterfly flower

Butterfly milkweed is a tuberous rooted, native perennial. It is one of several milkweeds native to the United States. It typically grows in a clump to 1-3' tall and features clusters (umbels) of bright orange to yellow-orange flowers atop upright to reclining, hairy stems with narrow, lance-shaped leaves. Unlike many of the other milkweeds, this species does not have milky-sapped stems. Flowers give way to prominent, spindle-shaped seed pods (3-6" long) which split open when ripe releasing numerous silky-tailed seeds for dispersal by the wind. Seed pods are valued in dried flower arrangements. Long bloom period from late spring throughout the summer.

Flowers are a nectar source for many butterflies and leaves are a primary food source for monarch butterfly larvae (caterpillars).

Its tough root was chewed by First Nations People as a cure for pleurisy and other pulmonary ailments explaining its other common name, pleurisy root. However this plant is now described as not edible and is toxic if eaten in large quantities.

**Do not ingest any part of this plant.

Gardeners may harvest the seedpods for decorations as they mature. Dry them in single layer in shaded area. The rest of the plant is to be left undisturbed.

Valerian

Valerian is a plant native to Europe and Asia. It grows to up to four feet high and has trumpet-shaped flowers. The roots are used medicinally. Although the fresh root is relatively odorless, the dried root has a strong odor that many find unpleasant.

Valerian is believed to have been used since at least the time of ancient Greece and Rome. It was used as a folk remedy for a variety of conditions such as sleeping problems, digestive complaints, nervousness, trembling, tension headaches and heart palpitations. Valerian's popularity waned with the introduction of prescription sleep medication.

Valerian can be found in capsule, tea, tablet or liquid extract forms in most health food stores, some drugstores and online.

**The valerian in our border is for display and educational purposes only. It is never to be harvested

Wormwood

Wormwood, also known as absinthe, is a perennial shrub-like herb that has grayish-white colored stems wrapped with delicate and glossy hairs. Wormwood normally grows up to a height between one and three feet. It bears leaves that have a yellowish-green appearance. The wormwood plant produces a fragrant scent and has a highly spiced and very bitter in taste.

The useful parts of the herb include its leaves and the fresh or dried flowering tops that are normally harvested before or during the blossoming season. Wormwood is used in the manufacture of vermouth and the highly alcoholic spirit known as "Absinthe" which is now legal after being banned for about 70 years. Wormwood is also used medicinally for a number of digestive or parasitic disorders.

****Consultation with a health professional and further research should be done before attempting medicinal use by humans.**

Wormwood is sometimes used in a homemade insect repellent. Smash a small quantity of woodworm leaves into a moist mash and then blend it with a little apple cider vinegar. Then place a small quantity of this soaked combination into a six-inch square cloth or gauze, draw up the corners of the gauze and tie the corners at the top. You may wipe the skin with the mixture in the gauze to ward off horseflies, gnats, mosquitoes and other insects while you are in the open. The mixture can be applied externally on pets to keep them from all kinds of pests, insects, and fleas. Discontinue use if any discomfort or rash appears.

Wormwood moth bags can be made by crushing together 1 cup each dried wormwood, spearmint, tansy, and thyme with 4 cinnamon sticks. Divide mixture among small bags [or tie in coffee filters], and place among your natural fabrics like wool or cotton.