

Tisane



ti·sane ti-'zan, -'zän, n.
Etymology: Middle English, from Middle French, from Latin *ptisanana*, from Greek *ptisanē*, literally, crushed barley, from *ptissein* to crush – Date: 14th century : an infusion (as of dried herbs) used as a beverage or for medicinal effects

To get on our mailing list, e-mail to newbrg@aol.com or drop an old-fashioned note to the return address on page four. Once our mailing list is set up, sample issues will be available for a stamp or S.A.S.E. (Yes, that is subject to change, too!)

If you are on line, join us on the sca-herbalist mailing list on onelist (go to www.egroups.com/subscribe/sca-herbalist to sign up).

Do you have a favorite herb, gardening tip, historical tidbit, or recipe? Maybe a book you think the world should share? That's perfect for this newsletter — send it to the Chronicler!



The quarterly newsletter of the Herbalists and Apothecaries' Guild of the East Kingdom

Volume I, Issue 4

December, 2000

Mission Statement: (proposed)

The goal of the Eastern Kingdom Herbalists and Apothecaries' Guild is to encourage study, teaching and practice of medieval herb uses, as well as study of medieval apothecary and pharmacy practice, in the East Kingdom. The Guild should serve as a conduit for herbalists and apothecaries in the kingdom to communicate with and learn from each other, and to disseminate knowledge about medieval herbalism and pharmacy to others.

A Growing Time:

In September, the Shire of Silver Rylle sponsored "A Walk in the Garden," at which we had an Official Meeting. It was only nine people, but it was enough to make some necessary decisions.

1. The official name of the Guild is "East Kingdom Herbalists and Apothecaries Guild." The purpose of this wording is to include those interested in mineral forms (crystals and gems) and their medieval uses other than in jewelry.

2. It is our intent to have two "herb events" and two business meetings a year. The meetings may or may not be held at the events.

3. The charter (as published previously in this newsletter and on the mailing list) was approved.

4. A committee (Mistress Rhianwen, Lady Annys Wolf, and Lady Carowyn) was charged with devising and proposing a **Guild Ranking System**. They are to address the purpose of such a system as well as the mechanism.

5. It was agreed to solicit **donations for underwriting the cost of producing this newsletter**. (Several immediately put this into practice, for which the Chronicler gives them thanks!) There has been a small fundraiser for this purpose already held, and others should be planned. The mailing list is hovering around 50 now, which increases the cost of copying as well as postage.

In other segments of that eventful day, a number of classes were held, a great deal of information exchanged, and our very first A&S competition held. The highest points went to Lady Elizabeth Spynner for her "straw" hat from sea-grass, with copious documentation. Juanita Robles entered a rose-petal bead rosary, winning the Agitator's Choice Award. She also entered soaps and a culinary dish. Johanna le Mercer entered a herbarium (which gave the judges some difficulty as it didn't fit in any of the categories.) and Elsa de Lyon presented a marvelous collection of naturally-dyed yarn samples.

Then in October, the Canton of Northpass sponsored an EKU at which some herb-related classes were included (and the mailing list augmented). The Agitator and the Chronicler took the opportunity to approach Her Majesty about the charter, a request which was graciously received; the charter has now been forwarded to Their Majesties. It looks as if we may indeed have the Charter presented at Twelfth Night, which will be held at Nordenhal on January 13th.

After that, the next item currently on our calendar is the Herb Faire to be held in Coill Tuar early next June. Suggestions, not to mention volunteers, will be cheerfully accepted by the Autocrat, aka the Chronicler. Some details are available on the web at <http://members.aol.com/newbrg/fair.htm> and there will be more in the next issue of *Tisane*.

Wildcrafting Tips and Pointers

— Lady Carowyn Silveroak

Now that the fall season is well and truly upon most of the country, our herb beds should be resting snug for the winter. And, as always, our thoughts jump ahead to the spring months, and what goodies we can add to the garden.

Most of us plan to do so by gathering the seed catalogs and poring over those lovely tomes, but there are always niggling thoughts intruding...the neighbor's old roses, the fall asters waving by the roadside, that cute flower in the woods you saw a few months ago. So, where's the harm in adding them to your garden collection? There are pitfalls in the idea of wildcrafting, and you need to know what you're about to do before you collect.

Many people have asked me what wildcrafting actually means, and there are two definitions: 1) removing plants from the wild / its natural habitat and planting it in your own garden; 2) Harvesting plant parts (seeds, leaves, flowers) from a portion of a large patch of wild-growing plants. In both definitions, it is implied that you only take what will not be missed — in other words, you harvest in such a way that the overall population is not destroyed, or you remove plants only when you are certain that removing *This Particular One* will not harm the ones that are left behind. So, with that said, here are some other bits to keep in mind:

1) Know What Plant You're Harvesting. Okay, I know this is a “duh” thing, but you'd be surprised by how many gardeners don't have a guide book! One of the ways that plants escape predators is mimicry, so please learn to identify before you think about removal. Some are even poisonous — compare borage flowers and nightshade flowers sometime.

2) Is It Endangered? As with all things, the Federal Government takes a dim view to those who mess with endangered species. Please know which plants are endangered, and leave them be! (The only exception to this rule is if you know the place is about to be developed. That's not wildcrafting, that's wholesale population relocation!) And, once you've relocated and endangered species, you're stuck with it! You can't move it without breaking the law all over again, even if it's your own garden.

3) The More Exotic The Plant, The More You Should Know. Again, a “duh” thing, but this is important. The main reason that lady-slipper orchids are so rare nowadays is because people just yank the plants without knowing what the plant needs — and most don't survive transport. The soil around a lady-slipper has a certain pH, and there are mycorrhizae (special fungi) that live with the orchid, and all are needed to keep the bulb alive. Are you willing to transport 5 cubic feet of soil for one bulb? Are you willing to wait 7 years for it to bloom again after transport? Or is it easier to take a picture?

4) Where Are You? Keep in mind that your local DOT usually sprays roadsides. If you are harvesting from the wild, DON'T harvest from verges! It's not safe at all. If there's a local field, watch it for a year or two so that you know if it gets sprayed or not. For example, many people want to try chicory, but guess where it likes to grow? I've transplanted a few wild stalks into my own “wild” sections of the garden so I have a safe supply.

5) But I Just Need a Bit! Okay, there are some times when you only need a bit of a plant — do you go into a protected area to get it? Only if you're willing to face the consequences if you get caught! Yes, I do admit that I've harvested in illegal areas before, but I **ALWAYS** make sure I know what bits I'm taking. I've harvested spicebush leaves in the fall from an arboretum, when the spicebush swallowtail no longer wants of needs the leaves. I've harvested bog myrtle from a national seashore, but only from a branch that was broken two hours before. And, always, I was willing to pay the fine if I was caught. It's much better to ask, but if you know the answer is “no”, then you takes your chances.

6) Good Old Microhabitats. I grew up in an area where dog-tooth violets were everywhere in the spring, and I do mean **everywhere**! They take over the garden, then they take over the lawn! It wasn't till I was 15 that I learned they were an endangered plant, and that all that picking and weed-

ing I did through the years was quite illegal! Just keep in mind that it may be common to you, or common for your area, but it could be gone everywhere else.

7) What's Wrong With My Garden? Like I mentioned before, certain plants are very fussy about where they live. When you transplant, please take into consideration as many factors as possible in the new home: pH, soil type, shade or sun, soil dampness, etc. etc. If you found it under a pine tree, chances are it wants to be planted under another one.

8) Who Ate My Whatsit? Sometimes you have to protect your newest garden addition, because if you've harvested it for its medicinal properties, chances are the critters already know it's a good nosh. Good luck.....

9) Seeds Versus Roots. Is the plant you're looking to relocate an annual or a perennial? Plants with roots can be much tougher to move than one that seeds itself. Consult your guidebook, and try to harvest seeds when you can. (The aforementioned fall asters are a good example — grabbing a good handful of seeds in the fall has much less of an impact than digging it out by the roots in summer.)

And, above all, be safe!

-Carowyn

If you have any questions, comments, or stories about wildcrafting, please contact me at <Silveroak@juno.com>



Notes from the Agitator:

We have done so much lately, and advanced so much, that it hardly seems possible that it was only about two years ago that the idea of the guild began to take shape. We had our first herb-related event, "A Walk in the Garden," in Silver Rylle, and it was a resounding success. I have met with Their Majesties and shared with them the suggested charter draft, and they were receptive. There were even classes on herbs taught at the recent East Kingdom University.

But the work goes on. It's increasingly clear that we cannot finance the newsletter out of pocket, so please send donations to Johanna! In the matter of donations, we'd also like to present our tithe to Their Majesties when we get our charter, so start working on period projects now!

It turns out that there will be no guild meetings at 12th night, so the projected meeting will have to wait. (I can't be at 12th night anyway.) However, there will be an herb-related track at the famous Hrim Schola event on March 10, and of course the "Come to the (Herb) Faire" event in Coill Tuar on June 9.

I have a project request for the summer of 2001: I would like to see our guild provide non-alcoholic drink syrups (sekanjabin, syrup of lemons, ginger syrup, etc.) in mass quantities as a donation to the 'War Effort'. If we could make a donation that rivals that of De Londres' in quantity, that would be quite a showing!

I'm also trying to start a local chapter of the guild in Eisental. If others are working on local chapters, please write in and share your ideas and what you are doing.

— Pani Jadwiga Zajackowa

Here is a period (well almost) recipe & redaction, which would make an excellent presentation piece:

A Sleep Pillow from a recipe in Ram's *Little Dodoen*, 1606 (cited in Rosetta Clarkson, *Magic Gardens*)

"Take drie rose leaves keep them in a glasse which will keep them sweet and then take powder of mynte, powder of cloves in a grosse powder, and putte the same to the Rose leves thanne putte all these together in a bagge and Take that to bedded with you and it wyll cause you to sleepe and it is goode to smelle unto at other tymes". — Ram's Little Dodoen, 1606

Redaction:

1/2 c. dried red rose petals

1/4 c. dried spearmint, peppermint, or chocolate mint leaves, or slightly less orange bergamot mint (Mentha Citrata)*, ground in a mortar and pestle to powder

1/8 c. powdered cloves

Grind powdered cloves into mint in mortar, then add to rose petals and mix thoroughly.

From an approximately 6" by 12" piece of muslin or linen, sew a 'bagge', using doubled thickness of the fabric and leaving one side open.

Turn inside out and 'french seam' the seams of the 'bagge' down. Fill with rose petal mixture. Sew up open end, indent and french seam the end. (This is to keep the seams from leaking.)

Parterres and the Jardins Potager in the Current Middle Ages

by Akim Yaroslavich

Nearly thirty-five years after the beginning of the Current Middle Ages, many noble Lords and Ladies who survived years in student cells at universities or in crowded city housing have moved to country cottages, majestic manors or even comfortable castles. Finally, the gentle Lady can grow her own garden so her next Tudor feast will have everything seasoned just perfectly with her own herbs. Maybe, if she entertains her Lord to engage a few of his squires to goode effort, the back gardens will be transformed into a stunning period “parterre” with knotted beds and all period plants. Perfect. Right? Welllll...

As one of these comfortably landed Lords, perhaps I can offer some helpful insights into the “Parterre” or pattern garden and its larger relative, the “Jardins Potager” or the kitchen pattern garden. First, and foremost, decide how much time and effort you are willing to invest in your garden. This venture is not quite as simple as making an embroidered corset or hammering out a barrel helm. A garden requires constant upkeep. Don’t forget that while you are at the Pennsic Wars for the week, your poor garden is withering because you aren’t there to water it! Once you have decided how much effort you will budget, then the concept has to be scaled to the physical size of the garden you will actually plant. For example, my Tudor herb garden in the back forty of my erstwhile residence was 70 feet wide and 145 feet long. This required (during the main planting season of March through June) my laboring an average of five hours every day and at least a 14-hour day every weekend. Initial construction, mainly digging and leveling, was executed under construction flood lights until almost midnight every day after work. This phase took over four months and I lost over fifty pounds! Of course, I used period methods (a shovel and wheelbarrow) and no power equipment whatsoever. Obviously, this scale of endeavor cuts into prime SCA event season very badly. Next, you must decide what you want to plant.

Here the SCA gardener must make some very realistic decisions in order to avoid some big disappointments. All of those lovely gardens in Europe grow beautifully..... in Europe. If you want to make an absolute period-to-the-hilt garden in an unreasonable climate, I have no pity for you (I bet you wear full Tudor in mid-August in Ansteorra, too!). Assuming there are at least some rational proto-gardeners reading this treatise, for purpose of illustration, assume a moderate size parterre (pattern) garden of 36 feet by 50 feet (I have never claimed that I was a rational gardener.) Research the main plants you wish to grow. If you are fortunate to live in Caid or Meridies, you have an advantage of having a climate that can accept a large variety of period species and further, they will be perennial rather than annual. Research the pattern style that is pleasing to you and adapt it to your needs. In dry climates, sink the garden a few feet below the general level of the surrounding yard and slope it so that precious rainfall pools in it. If you have poor drainage and lots of rainfall, mound the beds up. Good drainage is essential to almost every period herb species. Design your pathways so that any bedding area can be worked comfortably without having to get into the bedded areas. That is one of the main reasons this kind of garden evolved in the first place. Each very special and valuable plant in these gardens got the care it required to bountifully produce its product. One must realize that herbs and spices in period times were wealth, health, and sustenance — not merely for taste. Beds should be double- or even triple-spaded; paths on the other hand should remain fairly dry and serviceable. To outline my large (sunken) potager pathway system required 7,000 bricks: another 20,000 were used to pave it with a herringbone pattern. If you decide to rely on gravel or even grass paths, make sure that your paths are at least 30 inches wide. Three feet is better. Plants will tend to overhang and grass paths should allow access for small power mowers (masochists can ignore this point.) At each turn, there should be some larger area, either radii or squares, to allow equipment (like wheelbarrows) to turn around. My new gardens on my 50 acre homesite will definitely take advantage of all the experience I gained in my previous one. The new gardens will be similar in pattern except that they will be SIX times the size of my previous effort, and will be defined by a 1000 foot long avenue and formal border of trees (Carpathian zelkovas) on both sides. The new theme is late period Italian and will incorporate symmetrically designed vistas one-half mile long (on site). As I am older (and mayhap wiser), I will use major earthmoving equipment and every modern trick of landscape science to make maintenance feasible for such an ambitious project. This will include a new polymer (sprayed on packed earth) for paths; they will look exactly like clay-lined period paths, but will perform like they are asphalt. Authentic appearance can be established with far less effort than just using a shovel and wheelbarrow or being plagued with constant weeding. Determine just how period you are willing to go before you begin. Remember, absolutely period methods will be best utilized in small projects; high tech help is needed to replace the virtual army of gar-

deners that were required to build and maintain large period gardens originally.

Plan to include some focal points and decide whether or not your land is suitable for inclusion of such concepts such as vista and perspective (how deep is your lot and how good is your view?). Good ideas are small water troughs or basins, benches or perhaps a sundial. The use of ancient standing columns, ironwork pot stands or birdbaths are mostly Victorian and Edwardian, so avoid them unless you can specifically document them. Cute elves, toadstools, and unicorn statues (especially horny horses) are modern kitsch; avoid these even more so! An excellent idea for gravel paths is to use colored gravels to make flat designs in the manner of knotwork. This may either be loose raked or set in a concrete bed.

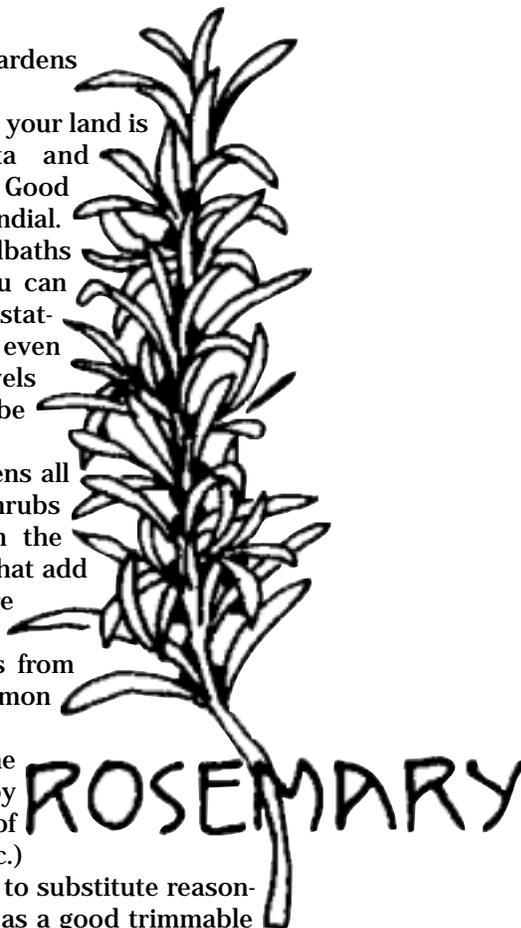
Keep in mind that the late Medieval and Renaissance gardens all the way through Elizabethan times mixed herbs, vegetables, shrubs and flowers in the same garden; this is quite different from the American concept of a formal herb garden. Some period plants that add a great deal of interest and texture that one might not expect are artichokes, hollyhocks, tobacco. Local weeds are also a good source because a large number of common weeds are escapes from colonial gardens or grown as food in Europe (chicory, common teasels, daylilies, dandelions).

In order to be reasonably period in overall concept, some form of enclosure is generally customary. This is accomplished by box and English yew hedges in most of Europe. Regrettably, both of these species are a.) expensive, b.) temperamental to climate, c.) very slow-growing, but usually, d.) all of the above. Be prepared to substitute reasonable replacement species. In central Meridies I have used cedar as a good trimmable tall hedge. It also makes excellent topiary. Many cooler areas will find hemlock to be an adequate species for hedges. In extreme cold or dry areas, junipers may suffice. The short edging box may be replaced by thick groundcovers (like ajuga) or trimmed herbs (like thyme, lavender-cotton, or rosemary). If your climate and budget will support the original species, wonderful; but the rest of us will have to make do. Everything covered so far establishes the framework or the backbone of the pattern garden. What about the main feature, the period planting?

Very fortunately, most of the herbs, vegetables and a large number of the flowers are just as popular today as they were back in period. A little research can uncover enough species to make the entire project worthwhile in SCA terms. If you want exact varieties, they are available with effort. Some of the period varieties are particularly rewarding (fruit trees and roses). Even some of the modern plants are not too far removed if you avoid hybrids. Please remember though, that many period flowers were rather weak by today's standard; but they often have surprising pleasures such as stronger scent to compensate. Some good sources for these plants are other SCA gardeners who can supply seeds and cuttings. Remember when you are planting, you should decide whether you will follow the rigid patterns of symmetry or just plant indiscriminately. Allow enough room for adequate growth. I can not emphasize this enough! Five or six healthy basil plants will produce more and better basil than thirty crowded ones. Plan your perennials to be placed in areas where they will be attractive at their mature size. Plan to divide them regularly to increase your display as the years pass. It is much less costly than buying them in large numbers. Some herbs (yarrow, mint, chives) are invasive and should be placed in their own bedding area. Others re-seed freely and must be controlled by deadheading (no, that isn't a fighting term) or your garden next season will be all one or two species (catnip, dill, thistle). Since it is nearly impossible to duplicate conditions exactly (for various reasons), make reasonable decisions by these criteria: Would this plant contribute to the overall effect of the periodness of the pattern? If this plant had been available then, how would they have used it?

While it is very excellent to grow your own materials for A&S Faire, it is so much more challenging and satisfying to grow your period treasures in the semblance of a period garden. Enjoy the fruits of your labors.

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