

Tisane



ti·sane ti-'zan, -'zän, *n.*
Etymology: Middle English, from Middle French, from Latin *ptisana*, 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 the mailer. 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 (go to www.yahoo.com/groups/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 2, Issue 4

December, 2001

Mission Statement:

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.

The Chronicler Writes:

GUILD MEETINGS

You may notice there are no notes about Guild meetings in this issue. That's not because we didn't get together in the last three months, it's because no one sent in any reports. If you meet with other EKHAG members at an event, send in a note! It can be as brief as "Four of us had lunch together" or it can go into more detail. If you had a class, or if you have pictures, great! Inquiring minds want to know.

TWELFTH NIGHT

When we received our charter from Their Majesties, a year ago, and presented our first "tithe," only two Guild members were present. If you're going to Twelfth Night this year, let the Agitator know, so we can be a little more organized this time than we were then.

EVENTS

So far the 2002 calendar is pretty bare of herb-related events. Besides offering classes at more general events, it's one of our goals to have at least one herb-and-apothecary-themed event a year. Maybe you could get together with local cooks to hold a special feast? Maybe you could set up that all-day hands-on opportunity we talked about last year? Maybe you have a great event idea and no place or time to hold it, but someone else is looking for an idea?

ANNIVERSARY

As we finish up our second year of publication, I'd like to recognize all those who have donated postage money, all those who contributed articles or information, and "she" who is doing the mailing! Thanks, everyone.

Heads up!

We are in the process of creating a membership list for our Guild. Hopefully, we will be able to use this information to help members contact other Guild members in their local area as well as gentles throughout the

Kingdom who share their interest.

We began the membership list using the mailing list for the *Tisane*. If you receive the *Tisane* by mail, you are on the membership list. If you wish to be added to the membership rolls, or know someone who wishes to be included there, please send me the following information:

Mundane name

SCA name

Address

Phone #

Email address

Areas of interest

You can mail me the information at:

Lady Annys Wolf of Wharram Percy

c/o HopeAllyson Dwiggins

1223 Suzann Drive

Warrington, Pa. 18976

Or e-mail the information to me at annys@ot.com.

In service to the dream and the Guild,

Annys



A Device for the Guild



A



B



C



D

Here are some suggestions that have been tossed around recently on the sca-herbalist mailing list. What do you think?

- A. fieldless, a mortar and pestle or bearing a branch proper.
- B. purpure, a mortar and pestle argent bearing a branch proper.
- C. fieldless, a mortar and pestle argent above two branches proper in saltire.
- D. fieldless, a mortar and pestle or holding a branch proper.

(The heraldese may not be completely accurate. Corrections invited.)

Scented Handwaters For Feasts and Dayboards

Most of us are familiar with the idea of handwashing at medieval and renaissance feasts. This custom survived into the twentieth century as ‘finger bowls’. Providing scented handwaters can add a touch of period graciousness to your dayboard or feast, and it’s relatively easy.

The purpose of the handwashing was primarily to re-assure one’s dining partners (with whom one might share a trencher or plate) that one’s hands were clean, though the medieval manners books suggest that you have your hands and nails clean before coming to the hall: “Loke thyne hondis be wasshe clene, That no fylthe on thy nayles be sene.” (The *Little Children’s Little Book*, circa 1480) Then, and now in the SCA, it’s advisable to start out with hands cleansed of surface grime and germiness!

Period handwashing

Handwashing could be done at the beginning or end of a meal (the *Little Children’s Little Book* describes handwashing at the end of the meal, after end-of-meal grace has been said: “And sit thou styлле, what so be-falle, Tylle grace be said vnto the ende, And tylle thou haue wasshen with thi frend.”). Edward Mead, in *The English Medieval Feast*, says: “This washing of hands before and after meat was by no means a perfunctory matter ...” and goes on to say:

“Sometimes guests were formally conducted to an adjoining lavatory accompanied by the music of a minstrel, but ordinarily they remained in the hall and received from the ewer the warm water, often perfumed with rose-leaves, thyme, lavender, sage, chamomile, marjoram or orange peel, one or all. The water and the towels were, of course, presented in the order of social standing of the guest, and it was esteemed a signal honor thus to serve a king or a great noble. In accord with the dignity of the ceremony the water-jug and the basin in great houses were often of gold or silver curiously wrought and enameled.” (p. 152)

De Nola, a period source, gives a description of how to do handwashing:

“On the Mode and Manner in Which One Must Offer Water for Washing the Hands

The servitor must give the hand-washing to his lord in this manner. Put a pitcher full of water upon a font or a large silver platter, and some very well folded towels upon the said pitcher which extend to the edges or brim of the font. And the steward goes before with a towel on his shoulder. Arriving in front of the lord’s table, and making his reverence, the steward takes the towel which is upon the font, and spreads it upon the table in front of the lord, and sets the font from above upon the towels, and with the font from below, where the water comes, he gives hand-washing to his lord. And when he has washed, he then lifts the fonts, putting one upon the other, and the steward spreads upon the lord’s hands the towel which hangs from his shoulder, and removes the others which were spread upon the table for the fonts.

And similarly the cupbearer can give the hand-washing, holding up a font or a wide-brimmed plate in his right hand, and the towel over the edge of the font or plate and upon the right shoulder, and the pitcher of water in the left hand. And the steward and the cupbearer, arriving at the table and making their reverences, do as is said above; this is understood to be for persons who are not of very high rank.”

Normally, we expect to see handwashing done, as above, when persons are seated at the feast. But Mead suggests that it can be done at a separate station with ewers and pitchers set up for the purpose. Wynkyn de Worde’s *Book of Kervyng* directs the household officer to “Also se thyne ewery be arayed with basyns & ewers & water hote and colde.” In fact, many interior scenes, especially from the Italian Renaissance, show a bowl-bottomed niche built into the wall. Surviving period architecture reveals that they were fitted a shelf for the pitcher and a drain in the bottom, for washing the hands, rinsing cups and drawing water. Such a niche was called a ‘lavatory,’ ‘lavabo,’ or ‘lavar’ from the Latin, ‘to wash.’

The *Book of Nuture*, by Hugh Rhodes, 1577, commands the officer:

“marke if your Mayster vse to wash at the table, or standing: if he be at the table, cast a clean Towell on your table cloth, and set downe your bason and Ewer before your soueraigne, and take the ewer in your hand, and gyue them water. Then voyd your Basen and Ewer, and fold the bord cloth together with your towell therin, and so take them of the boord. And when your soueraygne shall wash, set your towell on the lefte hand of him, and the water before your soueraygne at dinner or supper.”

Period scented waters

Several methods may have been used for creating scented hand washing waters. Rosewater is often mentioned in the texts: rosewater would have been made either by soaking fresh rose petals in water, or, more

commonly, soaking the petals in water, wine or beer and distilling the infusion. Thomas Tusser suggests woodruff be distilled for sweet waters (for washing?), and Parkinson (1629), says: “The ordinary Basill is in a manner wholly spent to make sweet, or washing waters, among other sweet herbes, yet sometimes it is put into nosegays.” Hugh Plat’s *Delightes for Ladies* gives “An Excellent Washing Water Very Cheap” distilled as follows:

“Take a gallon of faire water, one handfull of Lavender flowers, a few Cloves and some Orace powder, and foure ounces of Benjamin: distill the water in an ordinarie leaden Still. You may distill a second water by a new infusion of water upon the secas: a little of this will sweeten a bason of faire water for your table. “

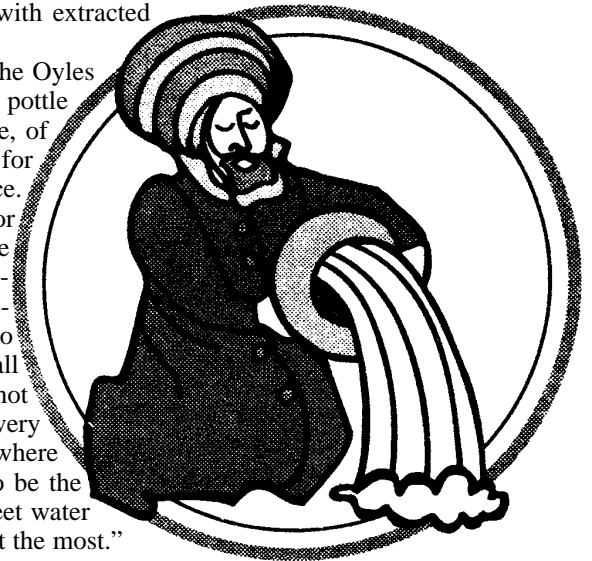
Another technique would involve making an infusion (tea), as suggested by the Goodman of Paris:

“To make water for washing hands at table: Boil sage, then strain the water and cool it until it is a little more than lukewarm. Or use chamomile, marjoram, or rosemary boiled with orange peel. Bay leaves are also good.” — Le Menagier de Paris (translated by Tania Bayard and published as *A Medieval Home Companion*)”

Hugh Plat’s *Delightes for Ladies* suggests making scented handwashing waters with essential (extracted) oils:

“Diverse sorts of sweet handwaters made suddenly or extempore with extracted oyles of spices.

First you shall understand, that whensoever you shall draw any of the Oyles of Cinnamon, Cloves, Mace, Nutmegs or such like, that you shall have also a pottle or a gallon more or lesse, according to the quantity which you draw at once, of excellent sweet washing water for your table; yea some doe keepe the same for their broths, wherein otherwise they should use some of the same kinds of spice. But if you take three or foure drops only of the oyle of Cloves, Mace, or Nutmegs (for Cinamon oyle is too costly to spend this way) and mingle the same with a pinte of faire water, making agitation of them a pretty while together in a glasse having a narrow mouth, till they have in some measure incorporated themselves together, you shall find a very pleasing and delightful water to wash with and so you may alwaies furnish yourself of sweet water of severall kinds, before such time as your guests shall be ready to sit downe. I speake not of the oyle of Spike (which will extend very far this way) both because every Gentlewoman doth not like so strong a scent and for that the same is elsewhere already commended by another Author. Yet I must needs acknowledge it to be the cheaper way, for that I assure myself there may be five or six gallons of sweet water made with one ounce of the oyle, which you may buy ordinarily for a groat at the most.”



Modern concerns

Modern SCAdians tend to be concerned with germ transmission. Some people will be more comfortable with having water poured onto the hands from an ewer (pitcher) into a ‘slop bowl’ which is periodically emptied. Others will be comfortable with using finger-bowl type arrangement. Some SCAdians also request individual towels or disposable towels; others seem comfortable sharing a towel as long as there are enough dry towels!

Allergies are another concern. We have successfully used rosewater added to plain water at several events, but there are some people with strong reactions to rose oil who might go into anaphylactic shock if they got too big a whiff. SOME common potential airborne allergens (by no means an exhaustive list) include lavender, pine, rose, chamomile and frankincense; there are a few people who have a reaction to citrus peel oil, mint oil and aniseed. (Some non-period oils such as eucalyptus will also cause problems.)

Check with the cook and autocrat to see if anyone has reported inhalation allergies, and consider posting signs, *i.e.*: “Nutmeg oil in use”.

Definitely offer plain water as an alternative, especially for those who have ingestion allergies.

ALWAYS clearly label the vessels so that someone who has a contact allergy will know not to touch one with the allergenic substance in it.

Many essential oils such as clove are skin irritants when used undiluted, so be sure that if you are using EO’s to use only a few drops per gallon and agitate the solution well before using.

Be sure you are using an essential oil extracted from the plant, and not a synthetic ‘fragrance’ oil; many, many people have a reaction to synthetic fragrances in general.

Obviously, herbs such as tansy and rue, and others not generally recognized as safe for internal consumption, should not be used for handwashing waters!

Ways to incorporate handwashing at your event

The simplest way to have handwashing at your event is to put out several labeled finger bowls at your day-board and refresh them as necessary.

Offering ewers (pitchers) of water and basins to pour into (emptied as necessary) is an additional, more period refinement. People can pour for one another or themselves. Place a cloth under the basins and pitchers and have a stack of towels handy. Someone should be nearby to empty basins and fill ewers.

Having someone standing behind the tables to pour water over the hands of the feasters is even better, especially if you are using nice basins and pitchers or reproduction aquamaniles. Offering handwashing at table to those at head table is appropriate — you'll need three people for this, though: one to carry the basin, one to carry the ewer (and pour) and one to carry and offer towels.

Offering a variety of scents is good, such as sage tea and orangeflower water, as well as plain water, in case someone doesn't care for a scent or has a contact or ingestion reaction.

Use the nicest basins and pitchers that are appropriate for the setting — for an outdoor dayboard at a fighting event, that may be large plastic pitchers and plastic bowls; for serving high table, glass or ceramic pitchers can be used. Because you are not going to drink the water, enamel or aluminum pitchers and bowls can also be used.

One way to alleviate germ concerns is to provide antibacterial 'hand sanitizer', preferably in a pump bottle, with the handwashing setup. That way people can antibacterialize their hands, then wash away the bitter taste with scented water.

You can either provide a pile of fabric handtowels (and a basket for damp ones), or use individual sturdy paper towels. Or no towels at all, if you prefer. I've seen high-quality paper napkins used but they just don't work; if you must have individual 'towels' you could run up a large quantity of handkerchief size muslin squares, serged at the edges so they can be washed. Most 'Dollar Stores' carry packages of multiple washcloths and/or towels. Plain, non-terry kitchen towels can often be found that pass the 10-foot authentic-look rule.

Recipes

If using Le Menagier's recipes, mix up a strong infusion of the herbs in water :

Take 1 to 1½ tablespoons of herbs per cup of water for the infusion.
Bring the water to a boil and pour it over the herbs in a non-reactive bowl
Steep the infusion for at least half an hour
Strain into bottles and refrigerate if keeping more than overnight.
To use: Mix 4 to 8 parts warm water with one part of the infusion.

To use Digby's suggestions, start with a pitcher full of warm water (NOT hot) and add 1-2 drops of essential oil per quart using a large dropper. Agitate the water so the oil is thoroughly mixed.

Using commercially prepared rosewaters, orangeflower waters or lavender waters, you can put several tablespoons of the commercial water in a quart of warm water.

References:

- Bayard, Tania, tr. and ed.. *A Medieval Home Companion: Housekeeping in the fourteenth century*. (From *Le Menagier de Paris*). (NY: HarperCollins, 1991).
- de Worde, Wynkyn. *Book of Kervyng*. Published as part of the *Babee's Book*. Also portions online at: <http://milkma-ma.tripod.com/kervynge2.html>
- The Little Children's Little Book, excerpt webbed on the Geoffrey Chaucer web page:
<http://icg.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/special/lifemann/manners/childbk.html> (viewed 11/14/01)
- Mead, William Edward. *The English Medieval Feast*. (NY: Barnes & Noble, 1967). Originally published in the 1930s. Do not use this for a food reference — it's full of misinformed generalities which drive SCA cooks mad.
- Plat, Hugh. *Delightes for Ladies*. 1609. portions online at: <http://infotrope.net/sca/texts/delights-for-ladies/>
- Rhodes, Hugh. *The Book of Nuture*, 1577, Published as part of the *Babee's Book*. Portions online at:
<http://www.saradouglass.com/primdocs/serv.html>
- Stefan's Florilegium page on Aquamaniles: <http://www.florilegium.org/files/FOOD-UTENSILS/aquamaniles-msg>.

The Demo, The Child, and the Herb

with thanks to Brigitte Flamin,
Alayne Alexandra Nyvern Nightwatcher,
and Jadwiga Zajaczkowa

Running a demo for children is very different from running one for adults, and yet frequently the adults get into the children's demos far more deeply than they do into the "regular" demo.

At a recent day in the Shire of Nordenhal, the making of "sweet bagges" kept adults and children happily involved most of the afternoon.

The sweet bagge idea came from assorted origins. It's a habit of the shire stitchers to put fragrant spices (wrapped in scraps of fabric) in the bag of favors they make for Pennsic. One shire member stayed up until the wee small hours and made bags in four different fabrics (the florentine blue turned out to be most popular) for the kids at the demo to fill.

On the cookery table, there was a breakdown of ingredients for the foods there: fresh herbs, dried herbs, ground cinnamon, cinnamon sticks, whole nutmeg, ground nutmeg and the ever popular cloves in whole and ground forms. Then we brought along a formidable marble mortar and pestle. Grinding the spices by hand has always been a popular part of our demos, and this time we said, "hey, let them take the grindings and stuff a sweet bagge!" A volunteer helped stitch the bags closed.

The sweet bagge appealed to all children from about five up, even teens! It provided a view of the difficulties of physical labor involved in cooking, (ever hand crush nutmeg? Yikes! It bounces and resists to the end.) We could point out how spoiled we are to have readily available spices which are uniformly powdered. Most children (and lots of adults) do not realize that cinnamon is the bark from a tree. Having herbs and spices in all their varied forms intrigues everyone.

The best thing is watching the children taste and enjoy. They expect to dislike things, but most end up saying that they really like medieval food. We have the recipes available of course, and also have the cookbooks there for a peek.

The people get to take a bit of the middle ages away with them, and at the sewing table we have our Shire fliers, chat up the SCA, and answer questions.

Some further tips for using herbs at demos:

~ baby-food jars make good sturdy containers for a 'scratch-n-sniff' type of hands-on display. Assure kids they can pick up and smell the herbs. Bring fresh herbs if you can. (Because of high allergy potential, keeping chamomile, lavender and orris lidded between sniffers may be wise.) Be sure to label all samples.

~ bring a nutmeg grater and nutmegs and let kids grate nutmeg - bring a mortar & pestle and mustard seed and let kids grind mustard. when enough has been ground, mix it with water, vinegar and honey to make hot sweet mustard sauce: this will mellow over a few weeks to be less biting.

~ taste and try samples: candied ginger, real (Ceylon) cinnamon, aniseeds...

~ another demo activity is making pomanders of oranges studded with cloves (roll them in spice powder and let them dry for several weeks when you are done)

~ this year in Eisenthal, we're going to try to make some spicy period sauces such as green sauce and cameline for people try on bread squares. We'll let you know how it goes.

Seeds Slips Cuttings

Plants grow from some small part of themselves into something usable. The same is true of our Guild. Here is another "small part" of those proposed Guild projects — a list of websites and other sources of interest to herbalists. Please add your own bits of information (by mail, listserv, or e-mail), and we'll share it, here and on sca-herbalist.

Leechcraft: Early English Charms, Plantlore and Healing by Stephen Pollington. 2000 Anglo-Saxon Books, England. ISBN 1-898281-23-8 Contains the Old English and translation of The Lacnunga Manuscript, The Old English Herbarium Manuscript 5 and Bald's Leechbook-Book 3.

Medieval Herbals: The Illustrative Traditions by Minta Collins. The British Library Studies in Medieval Culture. 2000 The British Library and University of Toronto Press. ISBN 0-7123-4638-4 (cloth) 0-7123-4641-4 (paper) Contains chapters on The Greek Herbals, The Illustrated Arabic Herbals, The Latin Herbals, and The *Tractatus de herbis* and the Fifteenth-century Herbals.

UNCLASSIFIED AD

In the aftermath of an herbal project, I have far more calendula than I can think of a use for. Need some? Got anything to offer as a swap? See me.

— The Chronicler

Are you a teacher with a killer handout you think deserves a wider audience?

Do you shudder to think of facing a class, but love to look things up and/or try them out?



Do you think the proposed "guild ranking" scheme sounds like fun, but teaching a class to fulfill the "sharing your knowledge" component isn't practical in your current life?



Have you found some specialized niche of herb lore that no one else seems to appreciate?



Are you a compulsive writer or artist who would love to write for a publication that is 90% certain to publish your work?

We can solve all those problems!

Write for Tisane!

For information on schedules and formats, or for suggestions (given or taken), get in touch with the Chronicler. Send e-mail to newbrg@aol.com or use the post office to communicate with Jo Anne Fatherly, 249R Powell Avenue, Newburgh, NY 12550.

2002 Guild Calendar

- | | | | |
|--------------------|--|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| January 14 | Kingdom Twelfth Night
Handwashing table at feast, A&S display | Trollhaven | Kingston, Rhode Island |
| March 23 | Northern Lights
A&S competition | Panther Vale | Worcester, Vermont |
| August 5-12 | Pennsic
Classes, Guild meeting | Debatable Lands | Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania |

Gee, rather bare, isn't it? Time to talk your shire/barony/canton into running an herb-themed event!

Tisane

c/o Jo Anne Fatherly
249 Powell Avenue
Newburgh, NH 12550

