

# Tisane

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

Volume 3, Issue 2

June, 2002

## Mission Statement:

The goal of the Eastern Kingdom Herbalists' and Apothecaries' is to encourage study, teaching and practice of medieval herb uses 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.

**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](mailto: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 SASE (Yes, that is subject to change, too!)

If you are on line, join us on the sca-herbalist mailing list (go to [www.yahogroups.com/subscribe/sca-herbalist](http://www.yahogroups.com/subscribe/sca-herbalist) to sign up).

While you're on line, take a look at our website at

[www.tulgey.browser.net/~EKHag.html](http://www.tulgey.browser.net/~EKHag.html)

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!

## Greetings!

We had an EK Herbalists & Apothecaries' Guild meeting at Southern Region Spring War Camp, with 5 to 7 attendees. Between gossip and heraldry (!) and silliness, a couple of things came up.

*The Agitator would like the Guild to Do More Stuff.*

*The Agitator would like the Guild to Teach More Classes.*

*The Agitator would like the Guild to Write More Articles for Tisane.*

*The Agitator would like the Guild to Make More Cool Herbal Stuff.*

## To that end:

- Everyone is invited to write articles for *Tisane*.
- Montevale's Schola for the Lost (this fall) would like to have an Herb track.
- There will be a Sekanjabin and Mustard tasting (you will *not* be required to mix the Sekajabin with the Mustard) at Landsknecht Vereidig... Veried... Oh, heck, King's and Queen's Champions of Hitting Each Other With Sticks event, June 14-16 in the Shire of Eisental.
- There will be a meeting at Pennsic. I'm waiting to hear back from Dame Caitriona when it will be.
- There will be a meeting at the War Camp in Eisental.
- We should do a bibliography and have more cool stuff on our website

- We should put recipes up (with permission from the authors) on the Guild website
- We should put the website address in *Tisane*!
- we should be collecting herb related handouts and putting them on the web.
- We should sponsor a garden 'poster session' with people bringing posters with pictures and diagrams of their gardens to share, look at and discuss.
- We need to poll people about the heraldry/badge question. I will put up an online survey form , and also we can put something about it in the June *Tisane*, gather votes, and have final discussion on it at the Pennsic Meeting
- We need to raise more money for *Tisane*.
- Many people didn't know about the Tithe to the crown, and felt that they generally didn't make it to 12th night. Is there another time we could do it? I'm not sure Pennsic is a good choice for a lot of reasons. We'd like to do the presentation in court and that isn't easy at Pennsic. There was some discussion of doing it at the Southern Regional War Camp in Eisental but I think that's a bit far for the Northern folks, yes?
- We'd like to make more presentations to the Crown. Remember, if your group is having an event and the locals in the Guild want to gather stuff for a presentation, do it! It can be at court, feast, or sitting-in-state. Aim for stuff that is either useful or can be distributed as largesse. Did I miss anything?

— *Jadwiga, agitatrix.*

## BOOK REVIEW

*Mints: A Family of Herbs and Ornamentals*

By Barbara Perry Lawton. Timber Press, 2002

It started innocently enough: I had been looking for information on hyssop (see page 3), and got in the habit of checking the index of every herb, gardening, or cookbook for it. So when I noticed a book about mint on the “new books” shelf in the library, I automatically looked in the back. Wow! There was quite a lot about hyssop, for a book about something else entirely!

So then, belatedly, I turned to the front of the book and found out what the author had actually written about. This book defines “mint” very, very broadly — as a family of 221 genera, of which “true mints” are only one. “True mints” are the *mentha*, a subset of the large (dare I say “sprawling”?) *Lamiaceae* or *Labiatae*.

To be considered a mint, a plant should have equal and opposite leaves, square stems, and lipped flowers. Those in the habit of verifying statements like that will discover that individuals as apparently diverse as coleus, Swedish ivy, and sage all fall into this category.

The first section of the book traces the *Lamiaceae* in history, through myth and text. Tiglath-pileser’s herb garden, the botanical interests of Alexander the Great, and the letters of Pliny the Younger all come into the narrative. After progressing through medicinal uses, the history of printed herbals, gardening pointers, and the idiosyncrasies of the Linnaean system (and including a section of color photos), the book arrives at “A Catalog of Mints.” This is organized by genera (useful to those of us still reeling from discovering how large an assortment of plants are considered mints) and then by species. On the other hand, it only covers 65 of the genera, on the grounds that many of the others grow only in tropical or desert areas. (The line illustrations in this section, interestingly, are from a 1998 book, *Flora of China*, published by the Missouri Botanical Garden Press.) We conclude with a zone map, a bibliography, a glossary, and an index. An unexpectedly comprehensive reference book!

— *Johanna le Mercer*



# Hyssop

*Hyssopus officinalis*

Every year, I try to plan an unfamiliar herb. Last year my “gardening experiment” was with hyssop, which was sold to me as an annual, and about which I knew only the Biblical phrase, “Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.”

Well, THAT was wrong! It’s a perennial, and it’s generally held that the biblical plant was actually a local variety of marjoram. In case you are as ignorant as I was, here is what else I have discovered since I bought that plant.

First of all, it’s a member of the mint family. And you know about mints — that single plant, in one season, expanded to fill the entire half-barrel planter. It likes a well-drained soil, and full or half sun. By sheer luck, I put it in exactly the right place. It grows about — Umm, well, who shall we believe? One book says five feet! Grieve’s *Modern Herbal*, however, gives a more reasonable “1 to 2 feet,” and mine is about fifteen inches high.



The books list it as an evergreen (which appears to be true) blooming in August through the fall. At my house, where everything has to be shade-tolerant, it started blooming in September and went well into last year’s rather mild winter. The flowers are a blue-violet spikelet, and there are white, pink, and reddish varieties as well.

## **Cultivation:**

Sow seeds in April or divide the plant in spring or fall, or take cuttings in the spring.

## **Harvest:**

The flowers should be picked when they first open. The leaves and stems should be cut just before the flowers open.

## **Uses:**

The flowers can be tinctured and used to make cough syrup. Here’s a recipe from Martha Washington’s Cook Book, which contains information that far pre-dates Madame Washington.

### TO MAKE SIRRUP OF HYSSOPE

Take of hysop one handfull; figg, raysons, & dates, of each on ounce; callemint, half A handfull; french barley, an ounce. Boyle these in 3 pintes of water to a quart, then strayn it & clarifye it with 2 whites of eggs & 2 pounds of sugar, then boyle it to a sirup and keep it for your use.

The leaves can be used in a tea, supposed to be good for “a feeble stomach,” Hyssop tea is also a folk remedy for rheumatism.

Infuse a quarter of an ounce of dried hyssop flowers in a pint of boiling water for ten minutes; sweeten with honey, and take a wineglassful three times a day, for debility of the chest. It is also considered a powerful vermifuge. (quoted in *A Modern Herbal* from “an Old Cookery Book”).

Modern culinary uses are to use it sparingly in salads, garnish fruit with it, or add to strong-flavored game meats, soups, and sausages. It is said to aid the digestion of fatty meats.

Hyssop was used as a strewing herb and, like many herbs so used, has a natural antiseptic quality. Compresses of hyssop have been recommended for bruises, cold sores (the essential oil is sometimes used for topical treatment of herpes and cold sores). A mold that produces penicillin grows on the leaves. It is sometimes listed as a treatment for a black eye — wrap fresh hyssop leaves in a handkerchief, dip the bundle in hot/boiling water, and apply as a compress. The tea can be used as a gargle for sore throats, and the leaves can be rubbed on insect bites.

### ***History:***

The name of the plant comes from the Greek *azob* = “holy herb.” Hippocrates recommended hyssop as a treatment for pleurisy; Dioscorides prescribed it, with rice, for asthma. Hyssop was made into a wine by the Romans, and still is the main flavoring in the liqueur Chartreuse.

According to the Readers Digest book, hyssop branches were used as psalm-book bookmarks so the strong scent would keep parishioners awake in church. But other sources say that the dried herb has little smell. Someone might want to field test this.

The only cautionary statement I found was in Ody; she notes that the essential oil contains a ketone which can, in quantity, cause convulsions.

Hyssop is very attractive to bees and butterflies (hyssop honey is a delicacy) so it is used in companion planting, on the principle of luring white cabbage butterflies away from food crops. (Other writers advise against planting hyssop near the garden *because* it will attract those same butterflies.) The modern versions of strewing — potpourri and laundry rinses — lend a camphor-like / minty / lemony scent, according to different writers.

### **Bibliography**

Grieve, Mrs. M., *A Modern Herbal* online at [www.botanical.com](http://www.botanical.com)

Ody, Penelope, *The Complete Medicinal Herbal*, New York, DK Publishing, 1993.

Reader's Digest, *Magic and Medicine of Plants*, Pleasantville, Readers Digest, 1986.

Hess, Karen, *Martha Washington's Cookery Book*, New York, Columbia University, 1995.

Tao Herb Farm website: [www.taoherbfarm.com/herbs/hyssop.htm](http://www.taoherbfarm.com/herbs/hyssop.htm)

— *Johanna le Mercer*



The Barony of An Dubhaigeainn, proposed Canton of the Western Gate boasts a chapter of EKHAG, seen at left.



An Dubhaigeainn's Baron Jean Xavier Boullier and Baroness Gianetta Lucia Alegrette, receiving a gift basket from Western Gate's own Herb Guild.



His Royal Majesty Lucan receives a gift from the local Guild.

(Hey, if they could send pictures to Tisane, why couldn't you?)

### **Notes from the EKHAG meeting at Alles Faire.**

We started with our unofficial motto! "We must make things taste, and smell, and look more like other things!" (Yes, we are blatantly ripping off Monty Python, but when it works, use it! ;-)

There followed a discussion on various books that are newly published. Pollington's *Leechcraft* was the foremost of those books, Good stuff! There was a copy on hand, so we got to look at it.

Then we talked a bit about period gardening, and the various terms used to describe tree cropping techniques.

Then we talked about things we could do for presentations: more sekanjabin syrup, especially during the summer months (period Gatorade! okay, maybe not, but it tastes great in the heat!). Also possibly moving the time we make our tithe presentation, so it's possible for more people to get to the event where it occurs. Nothing was decided - we just talked about the possibility.

Then, we jumped to talking about rice paste resist stenciling (for instance, to put designs about the hems of chemises and sideless surcoats!) This was decided to be a great idea, if we could get together and find a teacher. Herb designs everywhere, especially interspersed with device designs!

Then we got into herb stories. I brought up a waaaay cool spice bowl I saw in NYC, we talked about bruise balm and its wonderful properties.

Then, we got invaded by a bag of alpaca! Which was divvied up, and is \*so\* soft and springy. It's a dream to spin.

Jadwiga then begged us to write or draw or make things & describe what you did & why for the *Tisane*. We need articles! Lots of them! Please! Then the meeting abruptly broke up, because we needed to run to feast. Great feast!

-Carowyn

### **Notes from EKHAG Meeting at Landsknecht**

Let me give you the background: you come to a site filled with people (it is a Royal Progress, after all), and both King's and Queen's Champions are going to occur on the field of battle. Tensions are high, not only for what rewards are at stake, but because of the weather and all those little things that go wrong before a big event. It's cold, wet, drizzling all night and going to drizzle all day, and people are just in that cranky mood...

Add to that the underlying excitement because you just happen to know who's going to be getting awards that night, and many of them are your friends, and you're so filled to bursting with the good news that you keep a clamp on every word you say, hoping against hope that you don't say a peep that will give them a hint....

Along with the urge to giggle insanely, 'cause it's gonna be such a cool surprise! ... That brings us to the afternoon, and the meeting. The Agitator has vanished with her mother and enough cheese to feed the whole Southern Army (and I think it \*did\* feed the whole Southern Army), so you really can't quite start the meeting yet. No biggie, really, just start the unofficial fun! So a bunch of us sat down and started comparing our projects and trading bits and just having a rather good

time! Sarah bas Mordechai (who received her AoA that night - Vivat! as well!) and I got into a few discussions as we spun (hers was a lovely purple-dyed wool, mine was a dark brown and white striped alpaca), and I opened up my herbal first-aid kit to show what I was doing. Others brought their fun stuff over - (here's where I start blanking on names, I am so sorry, forgive me) one lady brought her bead kit over to begin making jewelry again, and another was mentioning the cheese he made (that was my husband, Corwyn Ravenwing). There were all sorts of mentions of cordials and perfumes (there was a mead, cordial, and beer tasting going on across the room, so of course we were talking about the stuff we made versus theirs).

The Agitator was located, and sent off to get the mustard-tasting equipment. When she arrived, we got down to the serious business of tasting mustard! The first one (out of Platina??) was \*weird\* to me - and I'm an almond freak! It was almost bland, if you can believe it! I don't remember much about the second (it had a zip, that's what I remember), but the third! It had alcohol, but a lot of other stuff too, and that had a bang to it! The fourth, made right in front of us, made me think it would taste good on eggs (we were using bread to taste), so I rustled up some eggs at the dayboard to taste with. And cheese. The fifth was okay - also made right in front of us - but I kept going back to the third. Whoo! Good on the cheese too.

Jadwiga entertained us with the Great Brick of Mustard story (I'm not telling it - uh-uh! She's gotta tell it!).

Did I mention we started the official part of the meeting with our Unofficial Motto?? In English, though - I don't have the Latin memorized yet.

We concluded that more people should make mustard! It's \*very\* easy, and much cheaper than buying it from a store!

And make more sekanjabin. We never did get to making sekanjabin, and then we were interrupted for the stewards to set up the hall for Court. Of course, those of us who knew were so excited about the prospect of Court that we scattered rather quickly.

My personal note, and this was not mentioned at the meeting, but I was going to, so I'm mentioning it now, so there! : I will be at Lady Day, my shire's event in two weeks. There won't be an official meeting, but any and all who wish to gather and talk about the projects that they're doing (herb related or otherwise!) are greatly encouraged to bring their cool things to gab about. I will also be at Southern Region War Practice, and I will bring my glass bead kit for people to play with. I charge a dollar a bead for supplies (that's cheap), and I'll teach while we're chatting. Herb Swaps are also greatly encouraged (this one didn't happen 'cause Wren, poor dear, couldn't come. She'll hopefully be at Lady Day.)

Then, there was Court...heh heh heh heh....

- Carowyn Silveroak, reporting

Greetings one and all!

Please join me in congratulating our Agitator, who was made a Companion of the Order of the Silver Crescent! VIVAT to a recognition well deserved!!!!

Tisa