

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

HEADLINES

Fennel

Vinegar of the Four Thieves

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.

From the Chronicler:

Well, it is still winter, and this is the “winter” issue, so we must be on schedule. At risk of being repetitive, I need material — this issue would have been out much sooner if someone had sent me a story, a picture, a book review, or almost anything I could use.

So, how does your garden grow? What are you planting this spring for the first time? Which of last year's plantings were total failures? Which were successes? And what are you doing with the results?

Inquiring minds want to know . . .

YIS
Johanna

To get on our mailing list, e-mail to joanne@jafath.com or drop an old-fashioned note to the return address on the mailer.

If you are on line, join us on the *sca-herbalist* mailing list (go to www.yahoo.com/groups/subscribe/sca-herbalist to sign up) or the East-specific *EK-Herb* (sign up from our website at www.eastkingdom.org/guilds/herb).

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



Fennel

Foeniculum vulgare

Common Fennel, Florence Fennel, Large Fennel, Sweet Fennel, Wild Fennel, Large Cumin, Sweet Cumin, Fenkel

Fennel is both an herb and a spice; the spice is the seed, while the herb is everything else. Fennel was a common plant in ancient Greece and spread with the Roman Empire. Pliny ascribed 22 remedies to it, noting that serpents ate it to sharpen their sight after casting a skin.

The Romans used the young shoots as a vegetable, and it is frequently mentioned in Anglo-Saxon cookery and medical recipes. It is mentioned in a Spanish agriculture record that has been dated to 961 AD.

According to Gerard,

'The leaves, seede and rootes are both for meate and medicine; the Italians especially doe much delight in the use thereof, and therefore transplant and whiten it, to make it more tender to please the taste, which being sweete and somewhat hot helpeth to digest the crude qualitie of fish and other viscous meats. We use it to lay upon fish or to boyle it therewith and with divers other things, as also the seeds in bread and other things.'

According to Mrs. Grieve, 8½ pounds of fennel supplied the household of Edward I for a single month. It is still used as a seasoning with fish, and the tea is used as a carminative.

Modern chemistry finds

The major constituents of Fennel, which include the terpenoid anethole, are found in the volatile oil. Anethole and other terpenoids inhibit spasms in smooth muscles, such as those in the intestinal tract, and this is thought to contribute to fennel's use as a carminative (gas-relieving and gastrointestinal tract cramp-relieving agent). Related compounds to anethole may have mild estrogenic actions, although this has not been proven in humans.

SOURCES

www.botanical.com, (*A Modern Herbal* online)

www.thespicecentre.com/Spices

www.uni-graz.at/~katzer.engl (*Gernot Katzer's Spice Pages*)
PDR for Herbal Medicine

Vinegar of the Four Thieves

Nostradamus, 1503-1566, owned a perfume manufacturing enterprise, which in his time meant distillation of plants to make essential oils. People who worked in these facilities did not succumb to the plague. Aromatherapy proponents claim him as one of the earliest practitioners of their art.

The subject of scents warding off contagion came in in a recent discussion on scatherbalist, about the traditional formulation of "Four Thieves Vinegar."

A quick Google search turns up several variations on the story:

During the height of the plague in France in 1721, it was discovered that the homes of disease victims were being ransacked. At first, no effort was made to find the criminals, since all knew they were fools, soon to die of the plague. As time went on, it became apparent that the thieves were continuing in their raids... and quite inexplicably, avoiding falling victim to the disease. Soon, they became highly sought -- not due to their crimes, but in an effort to learn their secret.

When they were finally captured, they refused to speak until a bargain was offered: remain silent and hang. Divulge the secret to their resistance to the deadly plague and walk away.

It seems that the mother of several of the boys was a midwife and had a recipe which used plants which were easily wildcrafted... yet, she knew that this would change immediately if anyone learned the formula, so she swore her children to secrecy. Her sons saved their necks and shared the recipe for the disinfectant, which is still used in France to this day.

Some versions skip the part about the midwife; and the city — not to mention the year — varies widely from story to story. The famous French aromatherapy doctor, Jean Valnet, claims the original recipe was revealed by corpse robbers who were caught red-handed in the area around Toulouse in 1628-1631. His story is one of the more credible of the many. Given the virulence and deadliness of the plague, the judges were astonished by the indifference of the thieves to contagion. Valnet quotes the archives of the Parliament of Toulouse:

During the Great Plague, four robbers were convicted of going to the houses of plague victims, strangling them in their beds and then looting their dwellings. For this, they were condemned to be burned at the stake, and in order to have their sentence mitigated, they revealed their secret preservative, after which they were hanged.

Here is the recipe Valnet believed to be the original:

3 pints white wine vinegar	handful wild marjoram	2 oz. angelica
handful wormwood	handful sage	2 oz. rosemary
handful meadowsweet	50 cloves	2 oz. horehound
handful juniper berries	2 oz. elecampane root	3 g camphor

Dr. Valnet has a variation of his own described as an antiseptic vinegar:

Marseilles Vinegar or Four Thieves Vinegar

40 g. greater wormwood, <i>Artemesia absinthum</i>	40 g. rue	10 g. camphor (do not use synthetic camphor)
40 g. lesser wormwood, <i>Artemesia pontica</i>	40 g. lavender	40 g. crystallized acetic acid
40 g. rosemary	5 g. calamus	2500 g. white vinegar
40 g. sage	5 g. cinnamon	
40 g. mint	5 g. clove	
	5 g. nutmeg	
	5 g. garlic	

Instructions: steep the plants in the vinegar for 10 days. Force through a sieve. Add the camphor dissolved in the acetic acid, filter.

From <http://onespiritx.tripod.com/craft09.htm> comes a version of the Vinegar that is used as a hexing agent. (This is advertised as a santeria recipe on other sites.) The name of the person

you wish to curse is written on a piece of paper. The paper is soaked in the vinegar, allowed to dry, and then is burned. It is the ashes of this paper you use in the ritual. Four Thieves Vinegar can be sprinkled on an enemy's door step to break up their home.

To a gallon of strong cider vinegar add a handful each of the following:

Rosemary	Lavender	Sage
Wormwood	Rue	Mint

Add one ounce of powdered camphor gum. Tightly close the container with the cider vinegar and herbs in it. Place this container in a pan of water and heat until the water begins to boil. Always shake this mixture before heating. Heat daily for four days. Strain the herbs from the liquid, bottle and keep tightly closed.

If we haven't slaked your curiosity yet, here's a website:

http://www.kitchendoctor.com/articles/four_thieves.html

