

**The quarterly newsletter of the
Herbalists and Apothecaries' Guild
of the East Kingdom
Volume 9, Issue 2
Spring, 2008**

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

**How Doth the Little Honeybee
Provoking Women's Courses?
Savory Savory**

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:

My incessant requests for material have borne some fruit: In this issue we have an article by a newcomer and one by our Guildmistress. Welcome, Myfanwy and thank you, Jadwiga!

This is very encouraging; will there be one from YOU in the next issue?

It's time to plan and plant for the new season. What is your summer project? Or what new plant are you trying?

Inquiring minds want to know . . .

YIS
Johanna

To get on our mailing list, e-mail to joanne@jafach.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/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!

How Doth The Little Honeybee

— Or —

Don't Worry, Bee Happy

By Myfanwy Arionrhod
elkaseawoods@yahoo.com

With bees and butterflies mysteriously disappearing, I've been wondering about how to support these pollinators in my own garden. Which has led to finding out about a lot of stuff I didn't know before and also realizing how much more there is to learn out there. So, please, feel free to weigh in with your own contributions!

And, since this is a medieval herb newsletter, I've tried to give this a period focus. Since our gardens are in North America and our native bees are not the ones mentioned in period sources, this has made for some interesting compromises.

So, what is bee heaven? Picture a garden full of flowering herbs. All shades of purple dominate, also blue, white and yellow. Bees in general (and butterflies, too) like to have clusters of brightly colored, scented flowers. They actually can't see the red end of the spectrum that well. Water, wild unmanicuredness and a bit of wood and a bit of bare dirt make for happy bees.¹

Bees, native and honeybee, come in a variety of sizes and shapes. To attract them, the recommendation is to grow flowers also of a variety of size and shape. Within the warm months, when bees are gathering pollen differs according to species, so the longer a gardener has something blooming, the more pollinators will be helped.

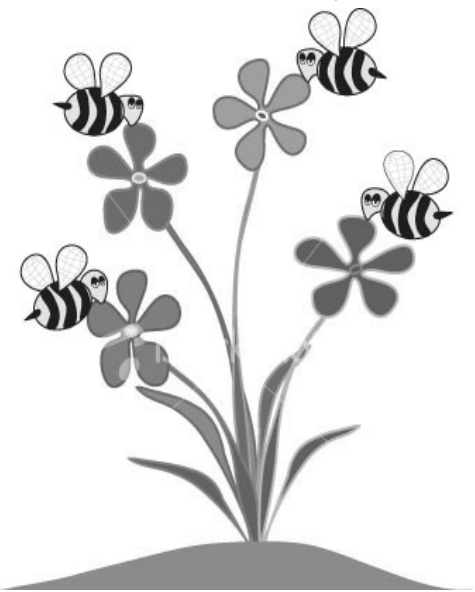
Just for fun, I've planned out an herb garden through the seasons (Spring through Autumn) to attract bees (and butterflies). Originally, I was going to separate the garden according to the different needs of the plants, so there would be a moist area, a shady or wooded area, a sunny, fairly dry area, an area for fruit bushes, and a place for meadow/field plants. Since Culpeper, bless him, had such a liberal definition of herbs, more like useful plants, really, I planned to use this freedom to include trees, fruit bushes and the like and to blur the definition of herb and flower in the garden.

However, this opened up the topic to so many plants that I'm going to start with medieval herbs, only blurring slightly into flowers mentioned in period sources. Materials drawn upon are *Culpeper's Color Herbal*, Marian's Garden medieval garden database at http://www.buttery.org/marian/Garden_Welcome.html, and references to medieval usage in *A Country Herbal* by Lesley Gordon and *Gardening with Herbs for Flavor and Fragrance* by Helen M. Fox.

With those provisos, here goes.

Spring has a few blossoming herbs in the garden. In the sunny, well-drained garden area, rosemary and thyme. One big, one little, both perennial and able to spread. If a garden has a shady area, anemones, "called the Wind-flower" ⁱⁱ may make a contrast of shape and color.

Borage, the only annual in the bunch, if planted in September, comes up in May. The borage I planted last year took over a great deal of space, mostly stem and leaf, so it might be best to



keep it separate. But it was once a traditional bee plant for beekeepers in Britainⁱⁱⁱ.

Many of the bee friendly herbs are large and like to spread. For the bees, this is good. Bees prefer clumps of the same species, four feet in diameter, if possible.^{iv} No wonder all the mint family – Hyssop, Catnip, Sage, Lemon Balm and their American cousins, Bee Balm and Anise Hyssop, are popular. OK, I cheated about those two American herbs. It's a fair cop.

Less aggressive plants also flower over the course of the summer. By June, rosemary has returned to its evergreen state, but roses, stonecrop, and fennel are now blooming and the thyme continues to flower. Eyebright can be cultivated either in the garden or as a meadow plant. Midsummer brings flowers of lavender, chamomile, dill, marjoram, basil, savory, parsley and foxglove. All these dates are, of course, dependent on individual climate conditions.

The caterpillar of the blue butterfly likes lupines, and the caterpillar of the mourning cloak butterfly likes roses. OK, munch, munch, but I don't think they do much damage. The adult butterflies get nectar from bee balm, lavender and stonecrop.^v

By autumn, if you still want flowering period herbs, there are only seven left that I could find. They are: catnip, dill, chamomile, hyssop, marjoram, savory and thyme.

It was with a certain amount of apprehensive irony that I read the SCA Herbalist online thread about bee stings remedies as I was writing this. Again, please feel free to add your knowledge to one who's just dipping her (hopefully unstung) toe into the bee garden world.

SOURCES

¹ www.xeres.org and "What's the Buzz on...Planting a Bee Garden" by Stephen Buchmann

¹ *Culpeper's Color Herbal* edited by David Potterton

¹ *Sweetness and Light, the mysterious history of the honeybee* by Hattie Ellis

¹ The Xeres Society for Invertebrate Conservation www.xeres.org

¹ *Ibid*



Provoking women's courses?

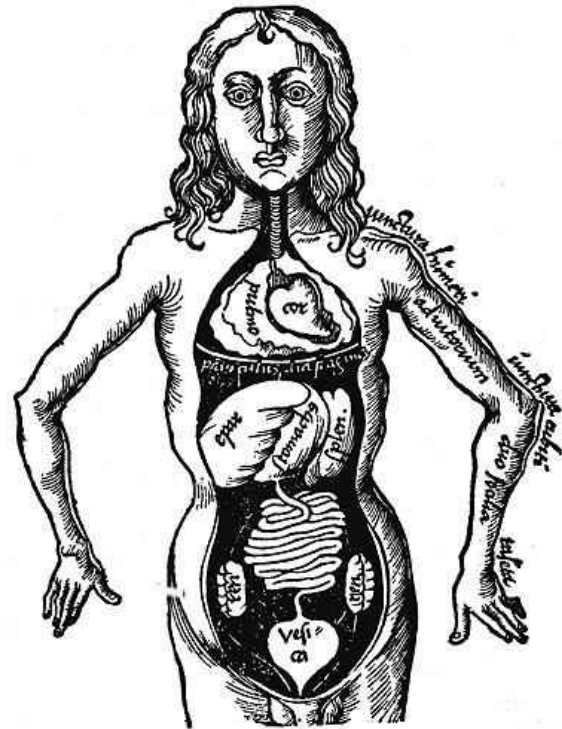
One of the most contentious debates in the study of medieval and renaissance herbalism is over the function and use of 'emmenagogues,' that is, botanicals used to encourage menstruation. This is a separate category from abortifacents, which cause termination of pregnancy. Though most abortifacents are emmenagogues, not all emmenagogues are abortifacents. (As an example, chamomile tea is cited as an emmenagogue by the comparatively modern Mrs. Grieve in her *Modern Herbal*, but modern science has not documented any abortifacient effects.)

Modern writers, such as John Riddle (*Eve's Herbs*), have collected much information about herbs used or described as useful as emmenagogues, or for expelling the dead child and/or assisting in expulsion of the placenta. Riddle, at least, appears to consider these to be documented evidence that safe, reliable contraception and abortion was available to our pre-modern foremothers, but was 'disguised'. I'm not so sure.

Medieval and renaissance male physicians were excessively, even morbidly, concerned with regulating menstruation. Delayed menstruation, they believed, could cause serious illness to women, as well as being a barrier to fertility. The womb could come loose and wander about the body, even settling in the upper chest and causing "suffocation" so that women fainted and even died from lack of air. Both misogynistic texts like *Women's Secrets* and the more sympathetic Trotula texts, as well as the Old English *Seeknesse of Women* consider regular menstrual periods a must, and include many remedies for delayed menstruation. Curiously, those manuscripts, mostly from Jewish physicians, that outright mention contraception and abortion, do not recommend the same emmenagogues, preferring instead semi-magical concoctions of exotic animal ingredients, toxins, and/or barrier methods.

Some of those remedies are, in fact, abortifacient but also considered highly toxic in general. Some can be hazardous to an at-risk pregnancy but helpful in menstruation due to stimulating uterine contractions. Others appear to be relatively harmless, such as dill or mustard taken internally.

As a result, we need to look closely at modern medical knowledge of any herb before deciding whether it was primarily used and/or successful to promote or ease menstruation, to control fertility, or to terminate pregnancy.



SOURCES

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- Hallaert, M. The "Sekenesse of wymmen" : a Middle English treatise on diseases in women (Yale Medical Library, Ms. 47 fols. 60r-71v).
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- Riddle, John. *Eve's Herbs: A history of contraception and abortion in the West*. Cambridge, Mass : Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Riddle, John M. "Oral Contraceptives and Early-Term Abortifacients during Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *Past and Present* 132 (Aug., 1991), pp. 3-32.
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Savory Savory



Satureia montana (winter savory)

Satureia hortensis; garden savory, bean herb (summer savory)

“Savory” is a perfect example of why it can be tricky to identify herbs from historical sources. Winter savory is a perennial. Summer savory, which is sharper in scent and flavor, is an annual. And in many parts of the world, including much of the eastern Mediterranean, “savory” can also mean thyme, marjoram, or other similarly “hot” herbs. Furthermore, there are, according to Mrs. Grieve, “about fourteen” species of savory in the genus *Satureia*. The website [pfaf.org](http://www.pfaf.org) lists six of them.

Satureia, incidentally, is the name used by Pliny. Virgil recommended growing savory near beehives, and the Romans used it to flavor vinegar for a salad dressing. It’s mentioned by Shakespeare, and Culpepper says:

Both these are so well known (being entertained as constant Inhabitants in our Gardens) that they need no Description and

Mercury claims the Dominion over this Herb, neither is there a better Remedy against the Chollick and Illiack passions than this Herb, keep it dry by you all the yeer if you love your selves Although Summer Savory is a culinary herb (primarily in pickles, sausages, and stuffings) in modern times, it once had medical applications, viz:

The Juyce heated with a little Oyl of Roses, and dropped into the Ears easeth them of the noise and singing in them, and of deafness also: Outwardly applied with white flower in manner of a Pultis, it giveth ease to the Sciatica, and Palsey'd Members, heating and warming them, and taketh away their pains: It also taketh away the pain that comes of stinging by Bees, Wasps, &c.

The *PDR for Herbal Medicine* notes that summer savory has an astringent quality and a mild antiseptic effect. An aqueous extract has been shown to be antiviral. No health hazards or side effects are known.

It is much harder to find information on Winter Savory. The Plants for a Future website offers:

Taken internally, it is said to be a sovereign remedy for colic and a cure for flatulence, whilst it is also used to treat gastro-enteritis, cystitis, nausea, diarrhoea, bronchial congestion, sore throat and menstrual disorders. It should not be prescribed for pregnant women. A sprig of the plant, rubbed onto bee or wasp stings, brings instant relief ... The essential oil forms an ingredient in lotions for the scalp in cases of incipient baldness. An ointment made from the plant is used externally to relieve arthritic joints.

(It’s worth noting that the medical applications from www.pfaf.org are much the same as those offered by Culpeper.) Wikipedia adds that it is a “known aphrodisiac” but cites no source.

SOURCES

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

<http://info.med.yale.edu/library/historical/culpeper/culpeper.htm> (Culpeper on Line)

www.uni-graz.at/~katzer.engl (*Gernot Katzer’s Spice Pages*)

PDR for Herbal Medicine

www.pfaf.org (Plants For a Future)



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