

**The quarterly newsletter of the
Herbalists and Apothecaries' Guild
of the East Kingdom
Volume 10, Issue 1
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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

Elderberries
More About Dying

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:

Postage will be going up again this Spring. It's time to consider whether this newsletter should go to on-line only publication. I want to continue producing *Tisane* (just as long as I can get contributions — hint, hint!) but the cost of production keeps going up.

Anyone reading this who absolutely DOES NOT have an Internet connection available — and I know people like that exist, because I work with two of them! — please let me know so I can factor you into my planning.

One possible compromise would be to send hardcopy only to those people who send me the stamps to do so.

One advantage would be that we could use color illustrations ... just to mention.

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!

ELDER BERRIES

Lady Aelfwyn Marie von Augsburg

This article is based on documentation developed by Lady Aelfwyn for entry in a Northern Lights A&S competition.

The elder is an ancient plant. References to its various uses can be found throughout history. The name comes from the Saxon Aeld or fire; possibly because the elder stems are easily hollowed and used to blow up a fire. Its generic name; *Sambucus*, is thought to come from the musical instrument of Roman times, the sackbut, possibly made from the wood of the elder.

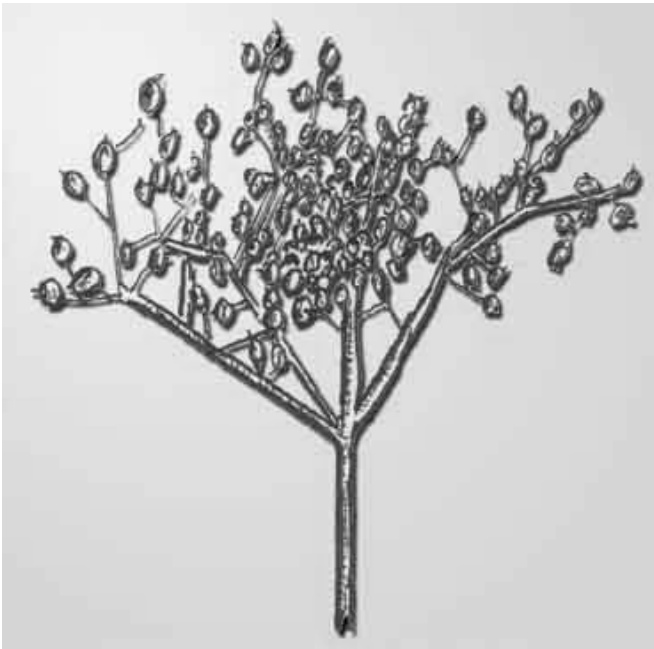
There are references to the elder berry in Pliny. Hippocrates used a form of elder in his practice in 400 BC, Apicius gives a recipe for using the berries in a custard or pie, and Claudius Galen of Pergamum listed the elder berry as hot and dry and useful against cold and damp conditions like excessive phlegm and mucus (sounds like a cold to me). Gerard in 1597 quotes Galen as saying that the elder “is of a drying quality, gluing and moderately digesting; and that it hath not only these faculties, but others also for the barks, the first buds, flowers and fruit of the elder, do not only dry, but also heat, and have withal a purging quality.” He discusses the elder and its uses on his *Herball or General History of Plantes* of 1633.

Nicholas Culpepper includes a notation in his *The English Physitian* to boil elderberry juice with some honey and put it into the ears to stop ear pain. In 1644 a book entirely devoted to the elderberry and its medicinal uses was published; “*The Anatomie of the Elder*”, translated from the Latin of Doctor Martin Blockwich by C. de Iryngio.

Aubrey (1626-97) says that. “The apothecaries well know the use of the berries, and so do the vintners, who buy vast quantities of them in London, and some make no inconsiderable profit by the sale of them.” The popularity of medicinal uses of elderberry in Shakespeare’s day is shown in his line in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Act II, scene 3; “What says my Aesculapius? My Galen? My heart of Elder?”

In her *Modern Herbal*, Mrs. M. Grieve tells us that “Both syrup of elderberries and the rob were once official in this country (as they are still in Holland), the rob being the older of the two, and the one that retained its place longer in our Pharmacopoeia.” She says there were six or seven robs in the old London Pharmacopoeia, to most of which sugar was added. They were thicker than syrups, but did not differ materially from them, among them was a rob of elderberries and both Quincy and Bates had a syrup of elderberries. An old prescription for sciatica (called the Duke of Monmouth’s recipe) was made of ripe haws and fennel roots, distilled in white wine and taken with syrup of elderberry. Many sources mention that the medicinal uses of the elder berry are “ancient” or “go back to the Middle Ages”. However they don’t include copies of period recipes for the proper use of the berry.

Modern medicine is again turning to the elderberry. It has shown in clinical studies to have excellent flu fighting qualities. These may be partly based on the flavonoids contained in the juice. It is also shown to be a fine anti-viral in that some of the compounds in the elderberry prevent the spiky parts of the virus from being able to attach to cells to do their damage. At least two of the popular modern anti-flu OTC remedies are made from extracts of the elderberry. One study has also shown that the elderberry is useful in preventing or reducing the severity of the avian flu! If you need another reason to try some elderberry, it has more vitamin C than oranges



Since I was not able to find a period recipe for elderberry syrup or elderberry rob, I found many modern (and even traditional American Indian) recipes for both. I selected the common elements which seemed to be to pick the ripe berries, remove them from their stems (a tedious process) and boil them with enough water to barely cover. Once boiled, the mixture should be strained through a bag or cloth as you would for making jelly. Plastic gloves are your friend in this process as the juice will stain anything it touches (one Roman use for the juice was as a black hair dye). Sweetening with sugar can be done in the boiling phase or after the juice is strained. The sweetened product should be boiled to reduce to a syrupy state. Ginger, cloves or cinnamon are often added to the syrup

which can be bottled/canned or refrigerated. It is then taken as a spoonful or two diluted in a glass of water. The syrup can also be served on pancakes or ice cream. Many modern organic health food companies sell bottled elderberry syrup as a supplement.

method

I grew the elderberries and shared my harvest with the birds. I stripped the berries from their stalks and froze the berries to get the cells to rupture so that I might extract more of their qualities (a cordial maker's trick). I boiled the thawed berries with just enough water to cover and then strained the mixture through several layers of cheesecloth as you would for jelly. I made a simple syrup of equal parts water and white sugar, boiled until the sugar dissolved, then mixed this syrup with my extracted elderberry juice. I boiled the result on a low flame to reduce and thicken it. During the boiling, I added a couple of whole cloves and a cinnamon stick as many recipes suggested. These were removed when the thickened syrup had cooled. I then bottled the cooled syrup.

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More About Dying

Want an interesting summer project? Scour your yard (or the roadsides) for weeds and see whether they will yield a dye. Here is the outcome of one such summer (roughly one weed per weekend). Bear in mind that the season, water, and even soil can make a difference, and include it in your notes.

Plant	method	mordant	month	color	notes
Ground elder	(1)	alum	early July	soft yellow	unfading
Ground elder	(1)	none	early July	pale greenish yellow	fades slightly
Greater ragweed	simmer	alum	mid July	brass yellow	unfading
Greater ragweed	simmer	none	mid July	pale green	
Woody nightshade	simmer	alum	mid July	greenish yellow	
Woody nightshade	simmer	none	mid July	pale brass yellow	
Motherwort	simmer	alum	late July	pale yellow-brown	
Motherwort	simmer	none	late July	pale yellow	
Smartweed	simmer	alum	early August	pale yellow	
Smartweed	simmer	none	early August	pale greenish	
Dandelion root	simmer	alum	mid August	pale tan	
Dandelion root	simmer	none	mid August	tan	
Sweet woodruff	(2)	alum	early September	light red	root
Sweet woodruff	(2)	none	early September	warm tan	root
Dock seeds	steeped	alum	August-September	pale beige	(3)
Dock seeds	steeped	none	August-September	off white	(3)
Box	steeped	alum	August-September	pale yellow	(3)
Box	steeped	none	August-September	light beige	(3)

- (1) simmer leaves and stems overnight; strain and add wool.
- (2) (Grae) 8 oz wool, 3 ½ oz roots, chopped and soaked; stir in 1/6 oz ground chalk (probably my water is hard enough that this was unnecessary) heat to 120°, add wool, heat slowly to 176°; hold at temperature for an hour.
- (3) Steeped for a month, strained and wool steeped in tea two weeks.

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