

**The quarterly newsletter of the
Herbalists and Apothecaries' Guild
of the East Kingdom
Volume 11, Issue 1
Winter 2010**

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

Winter Food
Cool 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:

Do you realize that this newsletter is now ten years old? Doesn't time fly . . .

Unfortunately, after ten years, I am running out of material. Many, many thanks to everyone who has contributed, and not only articles. Money for postage, mailing help, artwork, and photographs have also gone into the production of *Tisane*.

Is there anyone interested in taking over the editor's job? I will try to keep it going through 2010, but no longer. It's been great, but I'm tired <g>.

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!

Take a moderate quantity of food in the springtime
 Summer's heat is also harmful to those who eat immoderately.
 In Autumn beware that fruits do not become cause for mourning.
 Eat as much as you like in winter.
Regimen Sanitis Salernitanum
A Salernitan Regimen of Health
 from www.godecookery.com/regimen/regimn03.htm
 A Boke of Gode Cookery website by James L. Matterer

WINTER FOOD

by Myfanwy Arionrhod

Food in medieval times in general has been researched quite a bit in the last 20 years, but there is still a lot more to be learned. Apparently, quite a few things written about the medieval diet before then (not counting period sources) were proved to be based on errors. (Wikipedia article on Medieval Cuisine, referencing article by Constance B. Hiette, "Making Sense of Medieval Culinary Records: Much Done, but Much More to Do" from *Food and Eating in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Martha Carilin and Joel Thomas Rosenthal; also referencing Terence Scully, *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages*).

Resources that have been used to research what and how much people were eating are things like financial records of what was bought, portions issued to harvest workers, monastic refectory records and cookbooks. Other people have used archaeological records. (*Medieval Scandinavia: an encyclopedia* by Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf, *Food in Medieval England: diet and nutrition* by C.M. Woolgar, Dale Serjeantson, Tony Waldron, "Changes in Diet in the Late Middle Age: the case of Harvest Workers" by Christopher Dyer).

There is an interesting paper in which height is used to show that the medieval diet was more reasonable than has been stereotypically thought of. (Old Age, Height and Nutrition: Common Misconceptions About Medieval England. Research paper Caidan Pentathlon March 2003 Felinah memo Hazara Khan-ad Din)

The medieval diet was quite varied, although this depended on how much money a person had. In winter, those who could afford to keep and fodder animals ate them "on the hoof" as it were, but most food, and meat for those with less facilities was preserved, although some foods that kept well, such as apples, were eaten fresh. There seems to be a great emphasis on pigs and bacon!

One example of "standard winter European diet" comes from Germany. (From *Medieval Germany: An Encyclopedia*). In medieval Germany, during the winter, kraut, preserved by marinating, salted fish, smoked meat, dried fruit and fresh apples, dried confections, were all eaten. Dried herbs were used to spice food. Mint, sage, rue, leeks, onions, parsley, fennel, dill, caraway, lovage, mustard, watercress, juniper berries, celery and horseradish.

There was seasonal variation in availability of food. Peasants and wage earners were especially affected. Grain was plentiful after harvest, but scarcer during spring and summer. (depending on harvest) Meat was available to those who could afford it year round, but the poor ate bacon during the winter. Vintage wine was imported from Gascony to England in the winter. (From "A Consumer Economy" by Maryanne Kowaleski from *A Social History of England 1200-1500*, ed. by Rosemary Horrox & W. Mark Ormrod, 2006, also from "Dietary Requirements of a Medieval Peasant", webpage from the course Food, Culture & History, taught by Cynthia Williams Resor, PhD. referencing *Daily Life in Medieval Europe* by Jeffrey L Singman 1999 and *Daily Life in Chaucer's England* by Jeffrey L. Singman and Will McLean).



Cool Dying

“Natural dying” brings up mental images of huge kettles steaming over open fires, and with reason. But there are dying techniques that rely on other methods than boiling/simmering/cooking either the dyestuff or the fiber. Some cursory experiments with several of them, described here, may trigger off your impulse to do some experimental “unboiled” dying yourself. If this happens, please let the author know!

All dying, of course, is subject to the variables of water, growing period, and mordant. You can control water by, for instance, using distilled water from a dehumidifier. If you grow your own dyestuff you have a certain amount of control over the soil but very little over the amount of rain, heat, or sun the plants got. If you buy your dyestuff, you have none at all. Mordant, however, you can control, and it works for these techniques exactly the way it works for more traditional approaches. All of the examples below were done with alum-mordanted wool.

Steeping

Have you made “solar tea” to serve as iced tea? Then you have some idea how this works. The classic “vinegar and copper” method of dying blue relies on the glass container sitting in the sun — just heat doesn’t do it, it takes light as well.

To quote a dye-loving blogger:

Wool Dyeing: Copper Penny Blue

This dye substance is not a plant, but it would have been available in one form or other to many colonial home dyers. Known as “Copper Penny Blue”, this is a dye that does not need a separate mordant or even heat. The recipe is simple but it does take from 2-4 weeks for the process to complete itself. Fill a gallon jar to about three inches from the top with non-sudsing ammonia and put in: either 2 cups of pennies, OR a length of copper pipe OR a coil of copper wire. Screw the lid on tightly. Let this mixture sit for a week and watch it become a beautiful blue. At this point remove the copper, with rubber gloves, and put in the pre-wetted fleece to soak; varying the time gives different color effects. It is also possible to do this with white vinegar instead of ammonia. Some recipes say to add a few teaspoons of salt to fix the color.

I’ve used this method several times with different results. One was a pale aqua, and the others various shades of icy green. I think it might be more reliable to use wire or pipe as the amount of copper in pennies these days is so small. Dyeing times, once the dye is made, have ranged from 1 day to 3 weeks of soaking the wool fiber. If you leave the jar in the sun it speeds the process somewhat. I would NOT try heating the mixture on a stove or fire, however.

<http://danceswithwool.wordpress.com/2008/06/02/wool-dying-copper-penny-blue/>

In general, for this dying method you need a big glass pickle jar, enough water to fill it, and sunny weather. Pack the jar with your chosen plant material, fill it with water, and put it in the sun for several days. When the “tea” suits you, strain out the rather smelly herbage and replace it with your fiber. Put it back in the sun until you like the color.

Unfortunately our weather, the week I tried it with madder, was cool and rainy, so I barely got a pinkish shade. On a sunnier week, I also tried it with ground elder, with which in the past I’ve gotten a brassy yellow by conventional methods. I used four quart jars, filling them respectively with water, vinegar, water and copper pieces, and rubbing alcohol. It seemed to me that the copper would work as a mordant, the way modern dyers use copper sulphate. I realized later I should have used vinegar or ammonia instead of water — the result was wool the same color it had been to start with. Using plain water yielded a very pale yellow; vinegar and ammonia alone gave no noticeable result. Next summer I will hope for hotter weather!

Madder, for instance, is very temperature-sensitive. Boiling it yields a different color from simmering it, which is different from barely heating it. And “barely heating it” is more or less what this method does.

This method also works excellently with black walnut or butternut hulls. In this case, you might want to use a plastic garbage can rather than a glass jar, since the hulls/nuts themselves take up so much room.

The use of solvents other than water brings us to:

Tinctures

One set of directions I found for working with logwood specified soaking it in alcohol instead of simmering it in water. This worked very well. As the violet coloring began to be exhausted, I diluted the remainder with water for a silver-grey color. I tried this with ground elder with no result. It seems to work better on woody substances such as woods and dried roots.

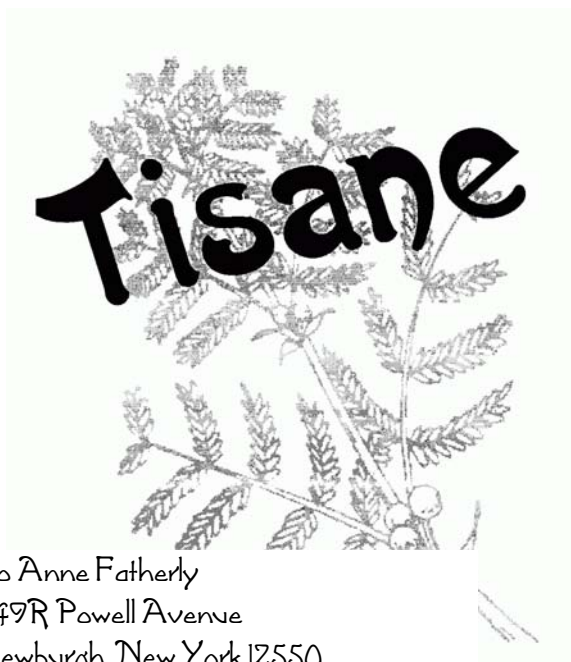
If you shop for rosemary extract or tincture of lavender (“tincture” and “extract” both mean using alcohol to extract and preserve the color/taste/smell of the herb) you will find it rather expensive. But for the price of a half-ounce bottle bought on line, you can make nearly a quart of your own — simply steep your chosen herb in vodka (for culinary uses) or rubbing alcohol (for external uses, including dyes and soaps). The tincture can be used as a dye solution.

Suggestions

According to *Natural Dying* (Jackie Crook, Lark 2007), “cool dying” should always be used for silk fibers. The procedure is to steep the dye material, strain it and simmer it, then turn off the heat, add the yarn and let it cool.

Another recipe from this book calls for red cabbage. With alum-treated yarn and washing soda added to the brew, the result should be a blue green. With vinegar instead of soda, a purple red. Someone needs to try this and report back!

— *Johanna Lemercer*



Jo Anne Fotherly
249R Powell Avenue
Newburgh, New York 12550