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Herbal Pieces Newsletter: Ed. 2; April 30th

Healan Herbs

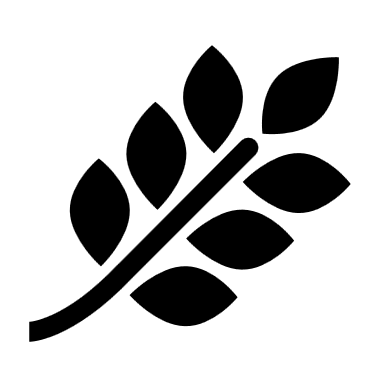
By Helen White, B.Sc, AHG

Newsletter

Welcome to the second edition of the newsletter. I hope everyone is coping well at this time. We have had such lovely weather and the spring plants are abundant. I have been harvesting nettle greens and wild garlic, for several weeks now. Some nettle I have dried and some has been eaten in soups and other dishes.

I have just found a reminder that nettles are quite rich in carotenes (precursor of Vitamin A) and some Vitamin D. It is advantageous to take these two Vitamins together, and both build a healthy immune system, so nettles are very useful here too.

There is a range of choice for focus in our collecting, and medicine making now. I will focus on several plants in this newsletter; however there are lots more which you can investigate further.



Herb Of The Day- Dandelion



A wonderful food and beneficial medicine. Dandelion supports overall health by, in particular, gently improving functioning of the liver and urinary system1. Love our dandelions; they are not lawn weeds but nourishing food for salads, cakes, wine, tea, coffee substitute, medicine and more.

Use the leaves as a cut and come again salad crop. Rejoice in the slight bitterness they provide, it will stimulate digestive juices and benefit digestion. If you need/want to dig up some dandelions, get as much of the root as you can, give it a quick scrub and make dandelion root vinegar. Chop up the root, about ¾ filling a jar and cover with apple cider vinegar. Use parchment paper under the lid, as vinegar will corrode the metal lid, and leave for several weeks (although you can try it sooner). You will have liver loving vinegar, which tastes delicious with a little water, maybe add honey, used in a salad dressing or added to cooking foods to improve the flavor and help make the nutrients more available to the body.

Dandelions flower all year round, but at this time the abundance of flowers lend themselves to making fritters or even a cake.



Sunshine Polenta Cake. *Easily adapted*

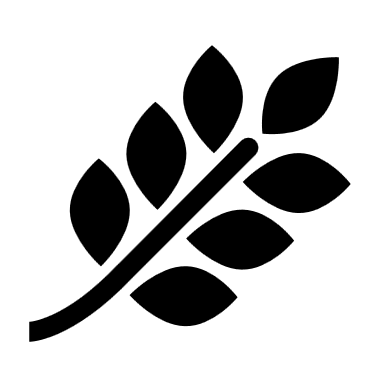
Beat 50 to 60g of butter with 95gm castor sugar until creamy add 2 beaten eggs, slowly and beat. Add the juice of 1 orange and the whole rind, chopped finely, of half a lemon (save the juice for later). Add a handful of dandelion petals (pull the petals away from the green sepals), 85gms of polenta (corn meal); may take a little more polenta, add a heaped tsp baking powder and fold in. Pour into a loaf tin and bake for about 30mins. When removed from oven, pour on the lemon juice and sprinkle with castor sugar. Allow to cool.

*I have made this recipe with 40mls light olive oil instead of butter, Both ways are delicious!*

A word on fermented vegetables: Sauerkraut

Fermenting vegetables is an ancient preservation technique that greatly increases the vitamins and ensures the minerals are more bio-available. Sauerkraut, made from cabbage, is probably the most familiar lacto-fermented food, however it is only one of many; Amy, my eldest daughter is nearly addicted to kimchi, a spicy version using a range of vegetables!. The process involves preserving without vinegar, sugar, canning or pasteurizing, and the resulting kraut becomes a super food, bursting with enzymes and beneficial bacteria. Note it is packed full of vitamin C!

The key to making successful sauerkraut is to pound or massage the cabbage well during preparation (with a bit of salt). You want it to produce lots of liquid, and then really press it well into the jar or vessel you are using. Experiment with different vegetables, carrots are good, slice in fresh turmeric or powder, add fennel or caraway seeds and when it is made, keep in the fridge and eat around a tablespoonful a day, for beneficial digestive and immune health!



Part of the Elder Story

Almost all parts of the Elder tree have in the past been used in some way, flowers, berries, bark, twig and leaves have all had there uses. Perhaps this is why it is considered unlucky to cut an Elder branch, it was acknowledged as simply too valuable a plant to damage.

Elder is steeped in myth and magic. If you were in its presence on midsummer eve you would see the Faery King ride by. Its name may have derived from ‘Hylde Moer, the elder or earth mother; if it chose to grow in your garden it was considered a sign of protection. The church however vilified Elder; A rhyme by Robert Chambers (1847) is an example of such ‘sanctioned hostility.

‘Bour-tree, bour-tree, cookit rung,/

Never straight and never strong,/

Ever bush and never tree/ Since our Lord was nailed t’ye’.2

For identification of Elder or any plant, use a reputable field guide or you may find [www.woodlandtrust.org.uk](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk) useful.



Shortly the elder will be blossoming. Elderflowers are one of the best herbs to encourage sweating to break a fever. Also elderflowers ‘cut congestion and inflammations of the upper respiratory tract’3. It is best drunk as a hot tea for this purpose and can be combined with yarrow and peppermint in equal amounts. This is a tried and tested traditional remedy. In a recent copy of our National Institute (NIMH) Newsletter, a member had sent in an old letter which was in her possession. It stated

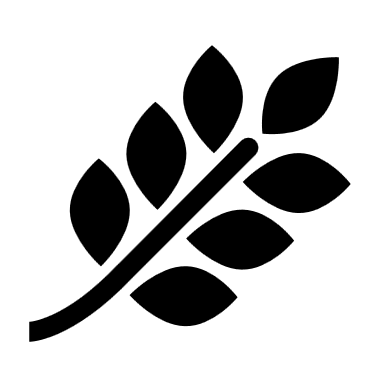
*Influenza is raging again.. factories and mills are being severely handicapped by so many operatives down with it…People are being bowled over and kept from work for weeks. The pity of it…when the remedy is at hand. Aye and the ‘’preventative’….dried elderflower and dried peppermint. With these two simple remedies you can snap your fingers at the flu.*

*Thankyou to, A. Wright for this lovely anecdote. It was written post the 1918 flu epidemic, but I could not decipher the date.*

NB. Dried elderflowers combined with dried nettle tops, taken as a tea, can reduce the symptoms of hay fever’4.To make the tea, follow the directions below and drink regularly.

Pick elderflowers on a dry sunny day, choosing those that smell lemony and fresh. Pick the whole heads and spread on a clean sheet or brown paper to dry. You can use a fork to strip the dry blossoms from the stems5. (Always harvest sustainably!)

Use up to a tablespoon to make the tea, leave to steep, lidded for at least 10 mins and drink hot, and frequently in the early stages of a fever.



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