



# The HERB SOCIETY of AMERICA



Spring 2024

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*Would you be interested in submitting an article? Articles can be submitted for consideration to*

[GreenBridges.News@herbsociety.org](mailto:GreenBridges.News@herbsociety.org)

*The next newsletter submission date is July 25<sup>th</sup>*

The GreenBridges™ program helps to create opportunities for the safe passage of plants and pollinators and to avoid habitat fragmentation. Each GreenBridges™ garden is a link in the chain across the nation, providing safe movement for the plants and pollinators that help maintain healthy ecosystems.

*“There are many things I’d like to change in the world but feel powerless to do so. By planting native plants in my garden, I can make an immediate impact.”*

*– John Janick*



Hi all,

I just returned from a trip to Little Rock, Arkansas, where I was a speaker at the Arkansas Unit’s Herb Education Day. The theme was all about native herbs, pollinators, and sustainable gardening for the protection of our native plants and pollinators. I also introduced the GreenBridges™ program to the attendees. So much enthusiasm for the topics, and I won’t be a bit surprised if we get some new gardens certified in the program!

I was also able to visit two GreenBridges™ gardens while I was there. One garden, at the Arkansas School for the Blind, is maintained by the Arkansas Unit. What a lovely sensory garden they have created. And the best part was the fact that there were numerous native bees and butterflies enjoying the feast!

The second garden was a GreenBridges™ member garden. Thank you, Mary Wohlleb, for sharing your garden with me and proudly displaying your certification sign. Mary’s garden is cultivated with a beautiful selection of native plants sharing space with her beloved herbs. Her garden is located in a wonderful downtown neighborhood where residents enjoy being outside and walking throughout the area. I’m sure Mary’s GreenBridges™ sign has started many conversations about the importance of native plants and pollinators.

Visiting other certified gardens is one of my greatest pleasures when I get to travel. We ARE making a difference!

Until next time.....

Debbie Boutelier

Past President, HSA, and GreenBridges™ Chair

*The Herb Society of America is dedicated to promoting the knowledge, use and delight of herbs through educational programs, research, and sharing the experience of its members with the community.*

It is the policy of The Herb Society of America, Inc. not to advise or recommend herbs for medicinal or health use. This information is intended for educational purposes only and should not be considered as a recommendation or an endorsement of any particular medical or health treatment. Please consult a health care provider before pursuing any herbal treatments.

*The Herb Society of America, Inc., 9019 Kirtland Chardon Road, Kirtland, OH 44094 (440) 256-0514*

*Welcome New GreenBridges™ Members*

*Beatrice Bomba, Houston, TX  
Susan Carlile, Williamsburg, VA  
Dargan Landscape Architects, Cashiers, NC  
William and Kimberly Kelly, Mundelein, IL  
Jacquelyn Moses, Columbia, TN  
Janet Roach, Lyme, CT  
Susan Irwin Simmons, Middletown, IN*

*Julia Cañas, Apple Springs, TX  
Mary Jane Conn, Sellersburg, IN  
Jeff Hanks, Little Rock, AK  
Kayce Cathon McCarty, Columbia, TN  
Antoinette Palmieri, Pittsburgh, PA  
Doris Robb, Lancaster, PA  
Cindy Zinner, Pearland, TX*

*Permission to Poison – the Alnwick Garden*

*Caroline Holmes*

In the 1990's, the 12th Duke and Duchess of Northumberland moved into ancient Alnwick Castle. She was a keen gardener and wanted to create a garden for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The castle's eighteenth-century walled gardens were neglected and overgrown. Belgian garden designers Jacques and Peter Wirtz were asked to redesign the space as The Alnwick Garden. By special request one area was to be enclosed as a Poison Garden. Who should design the planting, create guide notes and advice to the gardeners? Short answer me. I wanted a message of respect not fear, plants as symbols of evil, and poisoners of mind and body. For the narrative, I looked to legend, the Bible, Shakespeare, and herbals. At the official opening in February 2005, I asked the Chief of Police for his reaction. He answered that knowledge was a better weapon against harm and addiction than ignorance.



Small groups are taken around by a guide and are forbidden to touch any of the plants. The great gate is unlocked for entry under an ivy (*Hedera* spp) covered tunnel. Ivy contains an amoebicidal alkaloid, emetine. All parts, especially the young leaves and berries, are harmful if eaten. It can also be a severe skin and chest irritant. Folk tales are full of dangerous plants - Sleeping Beauty pricked her finger on a spindle and slept for one hundred years. The bark, leaves, and fruit of the spindle, *Euonymus europaeus*, are violently emetic and purgative. Mandrake, *Mandragora officinalis*, features in the Bible, Shakespeare, and Harry Potter amongst others. The vinegar-soaked sponge offered to the crucified Christ was cheap wine laced with mandrake to ease his distress; Shakespeare uses the word 'mandrake'

when he is referring to poisoning, but *Mandragora* when his characters needed sleeping potions. Hermione summed up its powers for Harry. *It is used to return people who have been transfigured or cursed, to their original state. It's also quite dangerous. The Mandrake's cry is fatal to anyone who hears it.*

Just a tiny selection, as safety is of paramount importance I advised guides to avoid using the word 'don't' with school groups as it tends to have the opposite effect. I warned that in hot weather a poisonous effluvium is released from hemlock, *Conium maculatum*, also known as Devil's Blossom. On a hot summer's day, a guide asked the teenagers to stand back and not to breathe in near the plant, two boys raced forward and sniffed enthusiastically ... they both passed out. Cannabis, opium poppies, and much more grow safely out of reach.



Quercus alba (White Oak)

Photo Courtesy of Holden Arboretum

The mighty oak has been revered for centuries and is considered sacred by many civilizations. Oak trees symbolize strength, longevity, and endurance. The National Arbor Day Foundation designated the oak as the national tree of the United States. The supporters voted that this long-lived majestic giant tree was representative of the strength of the United States of America.

The average tree life span is approximately 100 years, but not so for the oak – these trees can live up to 1000 years (usually they live roughly 400 years). World-wide there are over 435 existing species and roughly 90 of those are considered native in the US. Our knowledge about the critical role that oaks play in ecosystems has gained much traction thanks to Dr. Douglas Tallamy, Professor in the Department of Entomology and Wildlife Ecology at the University of Delaware.

His recent enlightening book, *The Nature of Oaks – The Rich Ecology of our Most Essential Native Tree*, is a wonderful read and explores the profound impact oaks have on the natural world. Every oak tree supports a whole community of living things that change throughout the year.

These magnificent trees are called a keystone species because they play a vital role in the food web of the ecosystem. Caterpillars that overwinter on oak trees are an essential source of food for overwintering birds. Oaks support the greatest number of Lepidoptera (butterflies & moths) which are a critical food source for birds and other wildlife.

All parts of the oak tree support biodiversity. The flowers are eaten by a host of insects, squirrels, bees, and butterflies. The oak mining bee feeds on the oak flower pollen and the list goes on and on. It's impossible to note all the wildlife that depend on the oak tree since there are 2,300 species of wildlife and 1,178 invertebrates in this group. Oaks are also host to a huge number of lichen and fungi.

Another attribute of the oak tree is their function of soil stabilization. Their roots spread out three times beyond the spread of their crown. This important function helps to prevent erosion while conserving soil, improving soil fertility, and protecting groundwater quality. Fallen leaves (I do not like to refer to it as "leaf litter") can last up to three years, providing essential cover for creatures that live in the soil. As a protective blanket, the leaves hold in moisture and return nutrition into the soil.

Try growing an oak tree from an acorn. It is easy to do and allows the oak tree roots to grow a full-size root system. Planting a large oak tree in the garden is riskier because the tree roots have been pruned and the tree goes into shock when planted. If grown in a pot too long, roots often become pot bound and then grow around in a circular fashion. If the plant can't straighten the twisted roots, it can lead to roots choking themselves. The roots need to grow out from the center. You can also buy small oak trees which will turn into a healthier tree in the long run.

The white oak (*Quercus alba*) is one of the most widespread species in the eastern U.S. They are bountiful producers of acorns, serving as a considerable food source for wildlife such as blue jay, chipmunks, black bear and wild turkey. Throughout history, the acorns have been an important, nutritious food for humans as well. They contain bitter, astringent tannins that need to be leached before eating. Acorns can be made into flour or eaten as a delicious roasted nut – they taste a lot like roasted chestnuts. They should be gathered as soon as they begin

falling from the tree. I enjoyed a native dinner produced by a friend who had created a food forest. The dinner included oak bread made with ground acorns.

White oak bark has a long history of use in medicine. Several North American Indian tribes valued it for its antiseptic and astringent properties. It was often made into a tea which was used to treat diarrhea, respiratory infections, and arthritis. The bark can also be dried and ground into a powder used topically to suppress inflammation and soothe irritated skin. It is thought that the tannins are responsible for the oak bark's healing properties. White oak bark is available over the counter as capsules, liquid extract, tea, or powder. It is on the GRAS list which means that it is generally recognized as safe, but its use should be guided by a medical professional.

Try growing an oak tree from an acorn; it is especially fun for children to experience the process of growing such a significant tree.

### *About the Authors*

#### **Holly Shimizu**

*Holly has loved herbs, gardens, and nature since her childhood. She was the first Curator of the National Herb Garden and worked very closely with Herb Society of America members through the early years of improving the Garden. Most recently, Holly was the Executive Director of the U.S. Botanic Garden in Washington DC. Currently she is leading garden tours, writing, teaching, gardening, and painting.*

#### **Caroline Holmes**

*Caroline Holmes, garden historian and past Chairman of The British Herb Society, author of 12 books, recipient of The Elizabeth Crisp Rea Award 2017 and The Gertrude B. Foster Award for Excellence in Herbal Literature 2011. Consultant designer. Has lectured on every continent except Antarctica.  
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