

AUGUST 2023

Herb Letter

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
BATON ROUGE UNIT



Monthly Meeting, August 17, 2023 (Note change of date!)

6:30–8:00 p.m.

LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens, Ione Burden Conference Center
4560 Essen Lane, Baton Rouge, LA

Annual Business Meeting (see p. 2 for details)

Herb of the Month — Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*)

Lemongrass is a fragrant and versatile herb celebrated for its distinct citrusy aroma and a myriad of culinary, medicinal, and aromatic applications. Native to tropical regions of Asia, lemongrass has long, slender green stalks with a bulbous base that imparts a tangy, lemon-like flavor to various dishes and beverages. Its essential oils are often extracted and used in perfumes, soaps, and aromatherapy due to their calming and refreshing qualities. Moreover, lemongrass boasts a history of traditional medicine, with its leaves and stems being brewed into soothing teas known for their potential digestive and anti-inflammatory benefits. Whether enjoyed in savory soups, curries, or as a fragrant element in teas and essential oils, lemongrass continues to captivate senses and offer its unique zestful essence to cultures worldwide. More information on p. 5. 🌿

Message from the Chair

As I type this note the temperature is 98 degrees, but the heat index is 113 degrees! This dry, hot, arid weather has definitely deterred the worker bees from working in the Sensory Garden. In all my young years I've never experienced this hot a summer. Now, I'm not going to talk climate change, but the climate HAS changed. So, we must adapt, right? Members have taken to doing more indoors just to survive this summer like our recent herbal workshop (more on that below). It's been so dry that my water bill increased significantly due to the watering I've had to do. It breaks my heart when a plant succumbs to the heat. DIES, THAT IS, YA HEAR ME?? I am sure all the gardeners out there feel the same.

HSABR has a lot planned for our new year. I don't want to spoil the surprises coming. so you'll just have to read our newsletters and visit our [website](http://HSABR.org) (HSABR.org) and Facebook page ([Baton Rouge Unit of the Herb Society of America](#)).

—Sylvia 🌿

Monthly Meeting, August 17, 2023

(Note change of date! Regular fourth-Thursday schedule resumes in September)

6:30–8:00 p.m.

LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens, Ione Burden Conference Center
4560 Essen Lane, Baton Rouge, LA

Annual Business Meeting. This meeting will focus on plans for the coming year and other unit business. We have no formal program scheduled, but two of our current interns will give brief presentations on herbs.

As always, visitors and guests are welcome. Admission is free for HSABR members, \$5 for all others. Please bring small bills if possible. 🌿

HSA Webinar: Saving Our Seeds: Herbs, Flowers, and Veggies

Herb Society of America Webinar, August 22, 2023, 1:00 p.m. Eastern, noon Central
Free for HSA members, \$7.50 for non-members. [Register here.](#)

Join author and herbalist Bevin Cohen to learn how and why to save seeds from the herbs, flowers, and veggies in your garden! Bevin will cover equipment, timing, and seed processing techniques for a wide selection of edible and medicinal plants.

Bevin Cohen is an author, herbalist, seed saver and owner of Small House Farm in Michigan. He offers workshops and lectures across the country on the benefits of living closer to the land through seeds, herbs, and locally grown food. Bevin is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in numerous publications including *Mother Earth News*, *Hobby Farms Magazine*, and the *Journal of Medicinal Plant Conservation*. He is the author of four books, including *Saving Our Seeds*, *The Artisan Herbalist*, and *The Complete Guide to Seed & Nut Oils*. 🌿



Bevin Cohen, author and webinar presenter

Herbal Workshop Recap

On July 29th, HSABR hosted an Herbal Workshop highlighting nettle and elderberry. The event was a huge success and the room was full of excited gardeners. Julie Walsh, a local herbalist and member of HSABR, presented a wealth of useful information on both herbs. Attendees learned how to make a simple healing infusion/tea using nettle and each received the herbs to make their own tea. Sylvia Lowe, with the help of Claudia Ross, made a huge batch of delicious Spiced Elderberry Syrup to share with everyone. Guests and members also took home the blend of ingredients so they could make their own syrup in preparation for cold and flu season. We have another wonderful program planned in the near future: **making an herbal salve and tincture**. Please keep an eye out for the invitation on Facebook and in our newsletters!

—Sylvia Lowe 🌿



Sylvia Lowe (top left) demonstrates making a nettle infusion for tea as Julie Walsh (top right) goes over the ingredients

Photos from Our Gardens

Claudia Ross has shared with us some photos and information about what's growing in her garden:

“Lemon grass has survived in my garden and came back from last year’s freezing days, but it’s struggling with this heat, although I water it. God’s water is the best for this plant to thrive.

“Asparagus is growing without a hitch; next spring should bring some delicious spouts for our dinner plates. Can’t wait, we are wrapping up the second year of growth as directed for a new crop.

“Recently I planted Coldasil basil (*Ocimum basilicum*), a cold-tolerant variety, from LA Nursery. They are growing beautifully next to my sweet basil transplants. They are planted in an area with limited sunlight and soil rich in worm-casting compost.”



Lemongrass



Basil and asparagus

...and speaking of lemongrass...

Herb of the Month: Lemongrass (*Cymbopogon citratus*)

From the Herb Society of America:

Facts:

- Lemongrass is a very fragrant member of the grass family, Poaceae, which generally grows to about 3' but can grow up to 6' tall.
- *C. citratus* is the most often used for culinary purposes of the more than 50 species in the genus. The related species *C. flexuosus* is used as a fragrance in cosmetics and soaps. *C. nardus* and *C. winterianus* are used to produce citronella oil for aromatherapy and the insect repellent used in insect-repellent sprays and candles.
- Grow lemongrass in a large pot, a raised bed, or in the ground, preferably in full sun, well-drained soil. It is only hardy in zones 8 and warmer.
- This aromatic grass is used in Asian and Thai cooking. It can also be steeped in water to make a flavorful hot or iced tea.
- The paler green bulbous base of the stem is the most flavorful part of the plant. The leaves are also good for infusing lemon flavor into teas, soups, marinades, and sauces.
- Harvest as needed when stems are at least ½" thick by cutting the stalks at ground level. The leafy portion can be washed in cool water, bundled, and hung to dry or used fresh. Reserve the base section to use fresh or freeze.
- The leaves are a bit tough to chew, so treat them like bay leaves and remove before serving or mince finely.
- To use the bulbous stem base, smash with the flat side of a knife and peel the outer fibrous layer of the base. The inner portion is soft and slices easily.
- Commercially, lemongrass is grown for its essential oil.
- Since lemongrass essential oil resembles the bee-attraction pheromone, beekeepers can use the oil to lure bees that have swarmed away from the hive.
- Firm, 3–4" pieces of lemongrass stem will root when the base is placed in a pot of moist potting mix and covered with a plastic bag. Set the pot in bright light but not direct sun. After roots appear, gradually remove the bag.
- Medicinal uses for lemongrass have included treating digestive issues and stomach pain, coughs, colds, and sore throats, headaches, and muscle pain.
- A Malaysian adage says that one can find treasure beneath a lemongrass plant if one can find a lemongrass blossom. (Caveat: they rarely bloom!) 🌿



Lemongrass stems
photo from Shutterstock

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 endorsement of any particular medical or health treatment. Please consult a health care provider before pursuing any herbal treatments.

Lemongrass Tips

- Add leaves in soups, stews, salads, and chicken dishes, but chop finely or remove after flavor is infused.
- Use the base of the stalk as a flavorful drink stirrer.
- Infuse the flavor into simple syrups, vinegars, or oils alone or blend with other herbs.
- Rather than chopping the stalk, use it for flavor as you would a bay leaf, then remove before serving.
- Or smash the base with the flat side of a knife and peel the outer fibrous layer of the base. The inner portion is soft and slices easily.
- Blends well with other lemon flavors as well as sweet, spicy, and savory dishes including marinades, spice rubs, curry dishes, and beverages.
- Steep in black tea for lemon flavor without the lemon fruit, especially if milk is also desired (won't curdle).
- Store cut lemongrass, wrapped in plastic, in the refrigerator or freeze up to 6 months. 🌿

Lemongrass Recipes

Lemongrass Syrup

2 cups water

1 cup sugar

2 cups lemongrass, cut into 1-inch pieces (may substitute 2 cups lemon verbena or orange mint, chopped)

Using the bottom portions of lemongrass stalks, cut into 1-inch pieces. (Use the part that just gets up into the green; depending on your plant, that may be 6–8 inches up the stalk. Use a sharp knife and take care not to cut your hands on the sharp edges of the leaves.)

Combine water and sugar in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, add lemongrass, and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to steep for 30 minutes to 1 hour. The syrup should be thickened and a pale golden-yellow color. Strain out the lemongrass. Pour syrup into a sterilized glass bottle and store in the refrigerator.

This is very nice served over fruit, drizzled over ice cream or cake, or stirred into tea, lemonade, or a glass of dry white wine.

— Katherine K. Schlosser, North Carolina Unit
The Herb Society of America's Essential Guide to Growing and Cooking with Herbs
edited by Katherine K. Schlosser 🌿

Spring Salad with Lemongrass Vinaigrette

4 oz. tender-stem broccoli or broccoli crowns
¼ cup pepitas or pumpkin seeds
1 large head of romaine lettuce
1 cup of pea shoots, about a small handful
7 to 8 radishes, sliced thinly
1 large carrot

Lemongrass Vinaigrette

2 tablespoons stalks of lemongrass
1 large clove of garlic fresh ginger
3 to 4 tablespoons seasoned rice vinegar, depending on your taste
½ tablespoon low-sodium tamari (you can use soy sauce if gluten-free is not required)
½ teaspoon sesame oil

6 to 8 stalks of asparagus
¼ cup sliced almonds
1 tablespoon chopped fresh mint, optional

1 tablespoon sunflower oil; olive oil works also
1 ½ tablespoon lime juice
½ to 1 tablespoon maple syrup, depending on your taste



Chop tender-stem broccoli into smaller pieces. Steam them for about 2 minutes, then place them in a bowl of ice water. This helps keep the broccoli crisp while you prepare the other ingredients.

Lightly toast pepitas on a pan. Stir pepitas often to prevent them from burning. When they're done, plate seeds.

Combine herbs in a food processor and blend until a smooth paste forms. In a bowl, combine mayonnaise with crème fraîche and vinegar. Add the paste to the mayonnaise mixture and stir to combine; season with salt and pepper. Makes ⅓ cup.

Rinse romaine leaves and chop them to smaller pieces. Place in a large bowl. Add pea shoots and sliced radishes.

Peel carrot and use your peeler to create carrot shavings. Shave asparagus with your vegetable peeler. Note that you'll probably only be able to get about 4 or 5 shavings on a stalk. Just save the rest for roasting or a stir-fry.

Add shaved vegetables to the bowl. Add tender-stem broccoli, pumpkin seeds, sliced almonds, and chopped mint, if using.

Prepare lemongrass vinaigrette. Remove the tough outer 2 layers of a stalk of lemongrass. Grate the larger end on a microplane, until you get about 2 to 2 ½ tablespoons of lemongrass shavings. Place in small bowl. Grate garlic and add to the bowl. Grate ginger until you get about 1 to 2 teaspoons of it. If you want a spicier vinaigrette, use 2 teaspoons. Add to bowl with other spices.

Mix in rice vinegar, tamari, sesame oil, sunflower oil, lime juice, and maple syrup. Toss salad and drizzle with lemongrass vinaigrette.

— Lisa Lin, [Healthy Nibbles](#) 🌿

Comfrey Tea—for Plants, not People: Part II!

This is the second article in the series; if you missed the first part in last month's newsletter, you can find it in our newsletter archives at <https://www.hsabr.org/newsletters-and-links.html>. — Ed.

In the weeks since my first installment of this project, the water has evaporated a bit but the rich, bold color looks very promising. I mixed it around and sure enough, the leaves had turned to slimy slurry! The tea is ready for use in the garden—not consumption! The smell is potent, too. Ew! Success!



Now what?

- 1.) Scoop or strain the slurry. Slurry makes excellent compost material.
- 2.) DILUTE your tea with water, 1:15 parts tea to water (this can vary; see reference article for more considerations).
- 3.) FEED THE PLANTS!!**

**Note: This tea is not recommended for use on seedlings or young plants.

One article suggested keeping a continuous supply of compost tea by drilling holes in a small bucket and making a “tea strainer” for a larger bucket. This makes straining and discarding slurry more convenient. When your comfrey is drooping or the leaves have reached their full potential, you can break them off and add them to the ongoing mix of smelly, homemade plant food.

(For more information, see <https://gardenerspath.com/how-to/organic/comfrey-tea-fertilizer/>.)

—Julie Walsh 🌿

Help Make Our Newsletter Better!

Our newsletter is only as good as what we receive to put into it! We encourage (read: beg!) our members to contribute stories about what you're doing in your gardens, photos of plants, etc. You don't have to write a long, scholarly article (although if you do want to contribute something like that, we'll be glad to have it!); just give us a few words about your herbs, a recipe you love, or a photo of what's looking good in your garden right now. It'll add a lot!

Please send submissions to hsabrnewsletter@gmail.com. We'll appreciate it greatly! 🌿

—Kathleen Harrington //HSABR Newsletter
Editor

Garden Maintenance

Maintenance sessions for the Sensory Garden at the Independence Botanical Garden, 7950 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806, will be announced as they are scheduled. If you can help keep the largest herb garden in this area looking its best, please contact [Judy Hines](#) or [Sylvia Lowe](#) and they'll get you on the Worker Bees mailing list!

We also need volunteers to help maintain the Heritage Garden at Burden. If you'd like to get in on this, please contact [Julie Walsh](#). 🌿

Unless otherwise specified, monthly meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of the month from January through October, at the LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens, Lone Burden Conference Center, 4560 Essen Lane, Baton Rouge, LA., from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m. Visitors and guests are welcome. Admission is free for HSABR members, \$5 for all others.

HerbLetter is a monthly publication of the Baton Rouge Unit of the Herb Society of America, for and by its members and friends. For questions, comments, corrections, or to submit articles, announcements, or photos, please write hsabrnewsletter@gmail.com. Items must be received by the 10th of each month for inclusion in the next issue of HerbLetter.

Disclaimer: It is the policy of The Herb Society of America, Baton Rouge Unit, not to advise or recommend herbs for medicinal or health use. Information offered in this newsletter is for educational purposes only. Neither the Herb Society of America nor the Baton Rouge Unit (HSABR) makes medical claims or dispenses medical advice. Women who are pregnant or nursing, and persons with known medical conditions, should consult their licensed healthcare provider before taking any herbal product. HSABR neither endorses nor is in any way responsible for the content of links shared here. Readers must do their own research concerning the safety and usage of any herbs or supplement

Upcoming Events

September 21, 2023
MUSIC IN THE GARDENS AT BURDEN,
5:30–7:30 P.M.
Details TBA.

HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
SOUTHEAST DISTRICT GATHERING
SEPTEMBER 22–23, 2023
Information and registration:
<https://www.herbsociety.org/news-events/se-district-gathering.html>

September 28, 2023
MONTHLY MEETING, 6:30–8:00 P.M.
Herb of the Year: Ginger; Kathleen Harrington

October 26, 2023
MONTHLY MEETING, 6:30–8:00 P.M.
Herbs of Halloween; Art Scarborough