

JANUARY 2022

Herb Letter

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
BATON ROUGE UNIT



Monthly Meeting, January 27, 2022

6:30–8:00 p.m.

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

Dr. Charlie Johnson: Growing Fruit Trees in Baton Rouge (see details on p. 2)

Herb of the Month—*Viola* spp.

Violets, *Viola* spp.

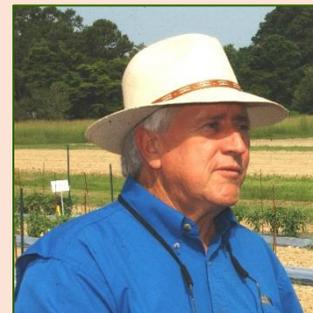
Violets do double-duty this month as both the Herb of the Month for HSA and the Herb of the Year for the International Herb Association. The genus *Viola* includes between 500 and 600 species in the Violaceae, or violet family, including violets, pansies, heartsease or Johnny jump-ups, and many other species and hybrids within the family. Their ability to easily hybridize makes identification challenging, but although the flowers across the species vary in color, they generally have four unlike petals arranged in pairs and a fifth lower-lobed petal with a spur, on top of an individual stem. More info on p. 4.

Monthly Meeting

January 27, 2022, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

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

Growing Fruit Trees in Baton Rouge. Dr. Charlie Johnson, LSU AgCenter Professor Emeritus and an expert on fruit trees, will speak on how to grow fruit trees successfully in our gardens in Baton Rouge.



His notable career has focused on developing fruit varieties, including peaches, figs, and even watermelons. He is primarily responsible for the resurrection of the LSU AgCenter fig program, including LSU Gold, LSU Purple, and many other varieties. He has also researched and developed ornamental plants, but most of his work has been with fruit varieties.

Dr. Johnson will talk about successfully growing fruit in our own yards, how to plant and nurture the trees, how to protect them, enjoy them, and harvest their fruits.

Because of the ongoing challenges with COVID-19, we ask that our attendees be vaccinated unless they are medically unable to take the vaccine. Because of LSU regulations, face coverings are required; social distancing while at the meeting is just good sense.

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

Herbal Petting Zoo at Three Roll Estates

On December 11, 2021, Kevin Folivi, HSABR intern, put together a herbal petting zoo and demonstration of a still for extracting essential oils at Three Roll Estate, a local distiller.

In addition to the herbs, depicted in the photo is Kevin's glass steam distillation set. It consists of a hot plate, a 2,000 ml flask for water, and another 2000 ml flask to hold the plant matter. The steam and oil run through a Graham condenser and are cooled and condensed into hydrosol; the essential oils float on top of the hydrosol.



If you'd like to learn more about steam distillation and aromatic compounds in herbs, be sure to attend our meeting on March 24 when Kevin will present a tutorial demonstration of the technique. He also promises plenty of herbal recipes! 🍃

Herb of the Month: Violets, *Viola* spp. From the Herb Society of America:

Facts:

- Pansy is generally the common name reserved for the hybrid *Viola* × *wittrockiana*, whose complex origin includes at least three species.
- Violet, *Viola odorata*, has been used in the perfume industry as a fragrance source.
- The fragrance of violets is said to be “flirty” since it seems to come and go. The presence of ionone causes humans to not be able to detect the fragrance for moments at a time.
- Violet, *Viola odorata*, and heartsease, *Viola tricolor*, are two species with a history in herbal medicine for respiratory issues and many other issues including liver disorders and bad tempers, according to Hippocrates.
- The flowers of violets, heartsease, and pansies can be candied and added fresh to salads, desserts, and other dishes. The leaves are also edible and can be added to fresh greens or soups. *V. odorata* has a sweeter flavor and is the most popular to be added to sweets and teas. The mild pea flavor of *V. tricolor* pairs well with either sweet or savory foods.
- *Viola* flowers flavor violet liqueurs such as Crème Yvette, Crème de Violette, Parfait Amour, and The Bitter Truth Violet Liqueur. The Aviation, Blue Moon, and Violet Fizz are classic cocktails made with violet liqueur.



Tips:

- Place flowers in bowl of cool water, swish around and remove with a strainer, let dry on a clean towel to remove dust, etc. before use.
- Sweet violets are used in salads, sweets, jellies, and syrups.
- Candy *Viola* spp. flowers by dipping in whipped egg whites followed by sugar. Arrange petals with a toothpick and dry in a 200° oven for 30–40 minutes.
- Use flowers fresh to garnish cakes, salads, and beverages.
- Freeze fresh flowers in ice cube trays to add to beverages. 🌿



Candied violets



Spring salad with violets

Recipes

Violet Vinegar

Fill a jar $\frac{3}{4}$ full with violet flowers, green parts removed. Add white wine vinegar, covering the violets, to within an inch of the top of the jar. Place plastic wrap over the jar if the lid is metal. Add lid. Let sit for 3–4 weeks, shaking occasionally.

Strain vinegar and use to make salad dressing, on spring vegetables or on fish.



Violet Syrup

1 cup water
1 cup white sugar
1 cup violet flowers

Separate the violet flowers from the stems and calyxes (green part at the base of the flower) and place flowers in a heatproof, non-reactive container such as a glass canning jar. Set aside. Compost the greens.

In a small saucepan, bring 1 cup of boiling water to a boil. Turn off the heat and pour water over the flower petals. Cover and let sit at room temperature for 24 hours. The liquid will turn a gorgeous clear blue with a slight lavender hue.



Early Spring Salad

2 green onions (scallions)
2 ripe avocados
2 tablespoons lemon juice

5 ounces mild goat cheese
Small handful of violets

Dressing:

6 tablespoons light olive oil
2 tablespoons white wine vinegar or violet vinegar
1 teaspoon dry mustard

1 teaspoon super fine sugar
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Cut onions lengthwise into thin shreds, then across into 2 inch lengths. Place in a bowl of cold water for one hour so that the shreds curl. Halve and pit the avocados. Skin and slice thinly. Toss the avocados in a bowl with lemon juice to prevent discoloration. Cut the cheese into small pieces. Remove all of the green parts from the flowers.

Whisk all dressing ingredients together in a small bowl.

To serve, place the avocado and cheese on a salad plates. Top with drained onions and violet flowers. Spoon dressing over the salad.

— Adapted from: *Edible Flowers: 25 recipes and an A-Z pictorial directory of culinary flora*, Kathy Brown, Anness Publishing Limited, 2008 🌿

Tree Lore

I like trees, pretty much all of them, and have known many in my lifetime. And the more I learn about them and their value to our community and to the whole world, the more I like them. They make oxygen for us, they make shade for us, they anchor soil and help sustain other plant species. And many of them provide us with food. They are necessary for our lives and for our health.

At my house in Milwaukee where I spend summers, I have four heirloom apple trees in my front yard, the oldest of which, Cort Pendu Plat, is a semi-dwarf tree (which is BIG) and goes all the way back to when the Romans were in Britain 2,000 years ago. The “newest” of my apples is Ashmead’s Kernel, a russet apple which was one of Thomas Jefferson’s favorite apple trees and has been known since the 1600s. The other two are White Winter Pearmain and Calville Blanc de Vere, which have medieval origins. The last three are dwarf trees, which don’t take up much room and are pretty easy to reach and prune.



Mary's trees: three apples and an oak (center)

Why do I know how old they are? Because the only way to get a specific apple is to get a twig from the apple you want and graft it on to a rootstock of another apple. If you just plant the seeds of an apple you like the looks or the taste of, you’ll not get a copy of that apple because those seeds are the product of pollination and you have no idea where the pollen came from, whether windborne or brought by a bee harvesting from the blossoms on the apple tree. So the only way to get a true copy of a tree you want, you must get it by grafting, and that’s why—since it takes some skill and time to do this—we have records of ancient, medieval and just plain historic apples.

It’s the rootstock that determines the size of the tree. My oldest tree is also the biggest by far because the only way it was available was grafted on semi-dwarf rootstock. The other three are far more manageable because I could get them grafted on dwarf rootstock.

I also planted an oak tree next to the road in the front yard of my house in Milwaukee. There are oak blights now harming red oak and white oak, but my beautiful young tree is a disease-resistant hybrid burr oak/white oak and is thriving. It took 18 months to get that disease-resistant hybrid, but after 15 years it has grown tall and beautiful. It has been making acorns for several years, and little critters feast on them, as they do on the fallen apples and on the seeds from the many perennials that have replaced what used to be my boring suburban lawn over the years. My yard is a certified Green Bridges garden and is a safe haven for pollinators, native plants, and for little critters and birds. Lots of rabbits, chipmunks, mice, squirrels, hummingbirds, finches, wrens, sparrows, and cardinals live in that yard, and I’m hoping to lure more opossums.

When I moved to Baton Rouge almost 11 years ago, we moved into a house with a swampy jungle instead of a back yard. Water stood 12 inches deep after a big rain, and I of course didn’t recognize any of the plants growing in that mess. We found help clearing out the jungle and found that somebody had once loved the space and had planted an orange tree, and a lovely long-leaf pine, a big Meyer lemon, and a variegated privet. We kept those and added other shrubs, roses, and perennials. The Meyer lemon was in

such a thicket that it hadn't seen sun or air for many years, but now that it is freed, it is very productive and gives us dozens of wonderful lemons every year.

Now I'm interested in adding more productive trees to my Baton Rouge garden, so I have been looking into small trees that could give me fruits I like and perhaps spices, too, as it appears that the clove tree could thrive here. Cloves are the dried flowers of the clove tree. I'd also like to grow pomegranates, but so far all I can find are decorative ones that don't make real fruit. Would those two trees require other trees for pollination, or are they self-pollinating? I do not know that yet. Nutmeg trees may also grow here—I'm researching that. It is exciting to learn that tea plants thrive here!

—Mary Bellis Williams 🌿



Mary's largest apple tree, Cort Pendu Plat

Herb Day is Coming!

Our big annual event, Herb Day, will be Saturday, February 26! We'll have more on this in next month's newsletter, but HSABR members, we need your help! Please plan to attend the meeting on February 24 where we'll be finalizing plans and getting everything ready for the big day! 🌿

Help Make Our Meetings Better!

We're looking for members who will volunteer to do a short talk (no more than 10 minutes) at some of our monthly meetings to introduce our audience to different herbs. This doesn't need to be a big, complicated lecture...just a few tips on growing and harvesting the herb, along with some common uses, will be great. It's not required, but handouts and samples of dishes featuring your herb are very welcome! Please contact [Art Scarbrough](#), unit chair, if you'd like to do one of these presentations, so he can get you on the agenda for the meeting!



Sensory Garden Update

Maintenance sessions for the Sensory Garden at the Independence Botanical Garden, 7950 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806, are on Thursday mornings from 7:00–9:00 a.m., except on the week of the monthly meeting, when we meet on Saturday instead of Thursday. Any and all are welcome, even if you can come only once a month or less. If you can help keep the largest herb garden in this area looking its best, please contact [Judy Hines](#).

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

THURSDAY SENSORY GARDEN MAINTENANCE SESSIONS, 8:00–10:00 A.M., WEATHER PERMITTING:

January 20

January 29

FEBRUARY 24, 2022

MONTHLY MEETING, 6:30–8:00 P.M.

This month will be a pre-Herb Day meeting, so no outside speaker

February 26, 2022

Herb Day!

March 24, 2022

MONTHLY MEETING, 6:30–8:00 P.M.

Kevin Folivi: Distilling Herbal Oils

April 28, 2022

MONTHLY MEETING, 6:30–8:00 P.M.

Amber Ryan: Pickles, Jams, and Jellies