

JUNE 2022

# Herb Letter

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA  
BATON ROUGE UNIT



## Monthly Meeting, June 23, 2022

6:30–8:00 p.m.

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

Jennifer Blanchard, Plant Taxonomy (see details on p. 2)

## Herb of the Month — Sweet Basil, *Ocimum basilicum*

Basil is a tender herb used in cuisines worldwide, and it's the culinary herb most often used in this country. A member of the mint family, the genus *Ocimum* is native to India and other tropical regions stretching from Africa to Southeast Asia but has now become globalized due to human cultivation.

According to Wikipedia, there are many varieties of basil including sweet basil, Thai basil (*O. basilicum* var. *thyrsoiflora*), and Mrs. Burns' Lemon (*O. basilicum* var. *citriodora*). *O. basilicum* can cross-pollinate with other species of the *Ocimum* genus, producing hybrids such as lemon basil (*O. × citriodorum*) and African blue basil (*O. × kilimandscharicum*). More info on p. 8.

## Message from the Chair

While the official date is not quite here yet, summer has arrived complete with oppressive heat and humidity. Not only is it uncomfortable to be working outside in this weather, but it can also be dangerous as well. Planned hydration for you as well as your plants, frequent rest periods, and a mindset toward safety are the watchwords of the day. Be safe out there!

Taxonomy is the delightful study of how organisms are organized and named. It is the key to placing plants in the appropriate family! This month our own Jenifer Blanchard will be talking to us about plant naming and classification systems. This should be both an interesting and valuable topic for all of us who dabble with herbs. Be there and learn more than you ever wanted to know...after all, what's in a name?

If you haven't visited our public gardens in a while, you're missing the last blush of spring and the splendor of summer! As always, we need volunteers to work in both the Sensory Garden at Independence Park, and our Heritage Garden at Burden! Plan to get a little dirt under your fingernails early in the morning before the sun brings on the mid-day inferno! Every minute spent helping at the gardens is a valuable volunteer effort for our Unit!

We've seen several new faces at recent meetings and would like to see many more! The fact is, the more folks we have on board and engaged, the more we can accomplish in terms of furthering the goals of HSABR and serving the community. The sky is the limit, so snag that friend who's interested in promoting the knowledge, use, and delight of herbs through educational programs, research, and working toward a greener and more sustainable future and bring them to one of our meetings!

Don't forget that our August meeting will be our annual meeting and will include the election of officers for the upcoming year. If you're interested in holding an office, please contact the chair of our nominations committee, Julie Walsh, and make your desires known. Working with this group is more fun than a barrel of possums!

Remember, you can and do make a difference through your contributions of time, talent, and treasure. Be careful out there in the heat and have a green and wonderful summer! 🌿

—Art Scarbrough, HSABR Chair

## Monthly Meeting

June 23, 2022, 6:30–8:00 p.m.

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

**Plant Taxonomy.** Jen Blanchard, one of HSABR's interns, will speak on the names and classification of plants.

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

## May Meeting Recap

Over twenty people came out to hear Kevin Langley, local beekeeper and bee-rescuer extraordinaire, speak to us about bees and their importance in the ecosystem. For Kevin, honey is a by-product of beekeeping—a welcome one, but it's not the whole reason he keeps and rescues bees. Kevin talked about bees as pollinators. For instance, did you know that Louisiana bees pollinate some of California's almond orchards? The hives are put on trucks and driven cross-country to where the orchards are, then the bees are released to do what they do best—spreading pollen from one flower to another! Then when the almond blossoms fall off and the bees have returned to their hives the beehives are loaded up and driven home again! (If you're interested in learning more about this, NPR did a program on it a while back; you can listen [here](#).) Kevin also brought several kinds of honey for us to taste as well as some honey-based beverages he's made. The pale gold tupelo honey was a real treat, as was his ginger-honey sparkling water—so refreshing! 🍃



Kevin Langley (L) is presented with a thank-you turmeric plant by HSABR Chair Art Scarbrough

— KH

## Fuzzy Butts Observation Day

Saturday, June 18, 2022

2:00–3:00 p.m. (in your time zone)

### Bee a Citizen Scientist!

Spend one hour in your garden observing and recording your bee helpers. Herb Society of America's Native Herb Conservation Committee invites all members to help assess the conservation status of some of our primary pollinators. Learn more about who is working in your herb garden and how to keep them and the environment healthier.

Visit the [HSA Event Calendar](#) and sign up to participate! 🍃



## Garden Visitor



Sylvia Lowe shares this photo from her garden where a butterfly (my best guess is a Giant Swallowtail [*Papilio cresphontes*])—anyone know for sure?) is visiting her *Monarda*. 🍃 — K.H.

## Garden Tour for Charity

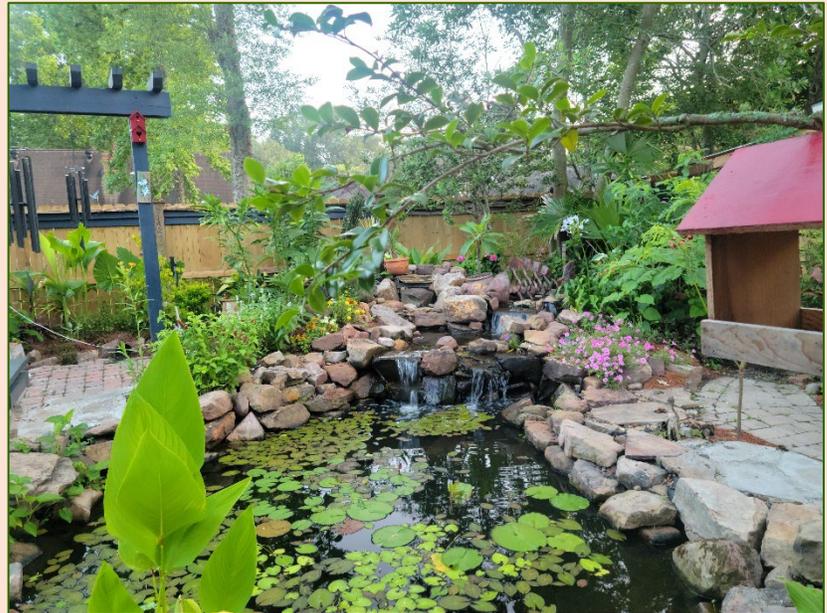
### Announcing the 17th Annual Spring Garden and Pond Tour

Charbel and Ruth Harb's home in Oak Hills on Sunday, June 26th, 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. to benefit Mighty Moms Full Tummy Project.

- The home garden of Charbel and Ruth Harb, which boasts over 320 varieties of blooming tropical plants, a large water feature, and unique outdoor entertainment area, will be opened to the public
- Mighty Moms is a community of ordinary people on an extraordinary mission to end childhood hunger in Livingston Parish

The beautiful, private gardens at the home of Charbel and Ruth Harb will be open for public viewing on Sunday, June 26th from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at **841 Pastureview Drive** in the Oak Hills area of Baton Rouge.

Admission is FREE with the donation of specific food items to benefit the charity work of Mighty Moms, a 501(c)3 organization seeking to eradicate childhood hunger "one full tummy at a time." Visit [www.MightyMomsGo.org](http://www.MightyMomsGo.org) to learn more! This rare opportunity appeals to all plant lovers and gardeners!



**Donation items accepted for FREE ADMISSION:**

**Peanut butter, jelly, tuna, ravioli/SpaghettiOs, and/or Vienna sausage**

**Monetary donations also gladly accepted.**

Charbel Harb, an LSU graduate in Landscape Architecture who's well-known for his 35+ years as the owner of Harb's Oasis in Baton Rouge and his free-spirited garden and water feature designs, has used his home property as a laboratory for experimenting with perennial tropical and other flowering plants.

Harb's Oasis was closed as a garden center a few years ago, but the property, located at 13827 Coursey Blvd. in Baton Rouge now hosts The Market at the Oasis, the fastest-growing farmer's market in the area. It features over 40 food and fine arts and crafts vendors, PLUS Mr. Harb's tropical plants, waterlilies, and fish for sale in a fun and family-friendly environment with live music every Saturday 9:00 am–2:30 pm. 🌿

## Heart of Louisiana: Botanic Garden

In case you missed it, WAFB ran a nice article with video this past weekend about the Botanic Gardens at Independence Park. For those who aren't long-time residents of Baton Rouge, you may not know that the area between Goodwood Blvd. and Independence Blvd. was once an airport—the first one in Baton Rouge! After the airport closed in 1976, the property was renamed Independence Park and was gradually transformed into the impressive gardens we have today. Check out the [article and video](#), then go check out the gardens—HSABR's Sensory Garden is part of this community oasis! 🌿



## Sweet Basil in the Garden

Sweet Basil is a versatile herb in my yard. Don't let it bolt? I *do* let some of my Sweet Basil bolt—instant pollinator plant! Yes, Sweet Basil will get woody and bitter-tasting, but the flowers are sweet for the pollinators, and don't forget to harvest the seeds! Keep Sweet Basil pinched back to promote full-flavored leaves for use in your favorite recipes or enjoy right off the plant! I use Sweet Basil as lovely greenery in floral arrangements. **BONUS:** leave the cuttings in the vase to propagate another plant. 🌿

— Julie Walsh



## Sensory Garden Update

Phew, it's hot! We have been weeding in the Sensory Garden like fiends. This week we dumped and spread 65 bags of mulch and still have more to do next week. That will definitely cut back on the weeding. We've also added some unique herbs...plantain, ashwagandha, and three rosella hibiscus plants, and we've planted borage seeds. Blooms are everywhere! The native flower bed is beautiful and full of colorful flowers. The anise hyssop is showing off their blue spikes and the bees love it! The cutting celery is huge and covered with flowers, as is the parsley and dill. So many of the plants have reseeded and we've collected seeds to share! One of our regular guests to the gardens planted some sunflowers and they are blooming beautifully.

Our little fig tree is covered with figs and there are tomatoes beginning to ripen.

The gardens are a wonderful treasure for us! 🌿

—Sylvia Lowe



Sensory Garden mint photos courtesy  
Cathy Scarbrough



## Sensory Garden Worker Bees Keeping Busy!

So many pictures of our worker bees at the Sensory Garden! Who can count the bees?

In addition to our regulars, member Pallavi Rao brought her parents, who are visiting from Udupi, India. They were amazed at the gardens and collected some turmeric leaves to use in making their traditional dish *era dye*, which is a coconut-jaggery-filled rice dumpling wrapped in turmeric leaves! I was honored to be invited to taste them a few days later. Very good and pleasing to the palate—the turmeric leaves added another layer of flavor to the dish. 🌿

—Claudia Ross



*Sylvia Lowe works among the anise hyssop (r) and Texas star hibiscus (l)*



*Angela Dunn tackles the tarragon!*



*Jen Blanchard (L) and Judy Hines do battle with the mint*



*From left, Pallavi Rao's mother and father, Angela Dunn, Judy Hines, and Pallavi*

## Herb of the Month: Sweet Basil, *Ocimum basilicum*

From the Herb Society of America:

### Facts:

- Basil is in the Lamiaceae or mint family. There are about sixty-four species in the genus *Ocimum*. Sweet Basil, *Ocimum basilicum* is the most common culinary form used in the United States.
- *O. basilicum* varieties have a diverse range of fragrance, flavor, size, growth habit, and even color. Favorite culinary varieties include sweet, specialty fragrant (cinnamon, lemon, lime, and Thai/anise). There are large-, medium-, and small-leaved varieties, including columnar, miniature, globe, or bush types. Some varieties are variegated, purple, or speckled, and have green, red, or purple flowers. Culinary uses are just as diverse, as they include sweet and savory dishes from around the world.
- Basil seeds form visible seed coats when exposed to moisture. Place a drop or two of warm water on a basil seed and watch the gelatinous seed coat form.
- The essential oils derived from *Ocimum basilicum* (sweet basil) and *O. gratissimum* (tree basil) are used in commercial insect repellents. Sweet basil oil is also used in perfumes and colognes.
- The different fragrances of basil come from the presence of essential oils produced in epidermal gland cells on the leaves. The variation in flavor and fragrance among the different basil species is due to the different percentages present of up to 100 different chemical constituents and compounds.
- The name basil comes from the Greek word *basileus* or “king.” It is also attributed to the word “basilisk,” a legendary dragon who could slay a person with just one glance.
- Romans on the other hand, believed the fragrance of basil stimulated love. Women seeking true love merely had to hand a sprig of it to their intended and he would be forever hers. Italian men used basil in courtship as well, signaling matrimonial intent by wearing a sprig in their hair.
- In the Middle Ages, basil was thought to create scorpions!
- Historical medicinal uses vary across cultures. Uses have included remedies for colds, warts, melancholy, and scorpion and bee stings—though Dioscorides, the Greek physician, pharmacologist, and botanist, warned that too much basil “dulleth the sight” and is hard on digestion.
- In the Victorian language of flowers, it symbolizes both hatred (common basil) and best wishes (sweet basil). In short, basil has such varied associations including opposites like love and hate, danger and protection, and life and death. 🌿



## Basil Tips and Recipes

- Harvest basil before flowers develop for best flavor.
- Prune plants often, cutting 2–4-inch sprigs or as much as  $\frac{2}{3}$  growth at a time. Cuttings should be just above a leaf node.
- Store cut basil in water on the countertop, avoiding the cold of the refrigerator.
- Add basil towards the end of cooking time or use fresh.
- Stack basil leaves on top of each other, roll and slice lengthwise to create julienned ribbons.
- Basil pairs well with strawberries, lemons, and peaches. Try a combination in fresh water or add to lemonade or cocktails.
- To preserve flavor and color, add chopped basil to ice cube trays or other small containers, top with olive oil, and freeze. 🌿

### Creamy Basil Vinaigrette

1 ounce olive oil	2 teaspoons maple syrup
2 ounces cider vinegar	$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon black pepper
4 ounces plain nonfat yogurt	1 teaspoon fresh basil, chopped
$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon Dijon mustard	$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon fresh tarragon, chopped

Mix all ingredients thoroughly. Store in the refrigerator.

### Basil Lime Ice

1 cup sugar  
2 teaspoons freshly grated lime zest  
 $\frac{1}{3}$  cup fresh lime juice  
2½ cups boiling water  
1 cup low-fat plain yogurt  
7 basil leaves

Combine sugar, lime zest and lime juice in a heatproof bowl. Add 4 whole basil leaves. Using the back of a large spoon, gently bruise the basil leaves against the bottom or side of the bowl. Add boiling water and stir until the sugar has dissolved. Cover and let steep for 15 minutes.

Discard basil leaves. Cover and refrigerate until chilled, about 1 hour or overnight. Slice remaining basil leaves in very thin strips. Add basil and yogurt to the lime mixture and whisk until smooth. Pour into an ice cream maker and freeze according to manufacturer's directions. (Alternatively, freeze mixture in a shallow metal pan until solid, about 6 hours. Break into chunks and process in a food processor until smooth.) Serve immediately or transfer to a storage container and let harden in the freezer for 1 to 1½ hours. Serve in chilled dishes. 8 servings,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup each.

—Karen Kennedy, HSA Staff

## EdCon Update

Our plans are solidifying for EdCon 2023, which will be held on April 27–30 of that year. These large Educational Conferences that the Herb Society of America sponsors take place every two years and are indeed very big deals. We get to show off our city and our talents, and our guests from all over the country get to sample South Louisiana cuisine and culture.

On Thursday, April 27, we are offering a preconference tour of Houmas House with its lavish gardens, good food, historic house, and now the wonderful Museum of the Great River Road. It will be an all-day bus trip with lunch included, and guests will have to register separately.

The annual meeting of members takes place on Friday and Saturday, April 28 and 27, with an awards luncheon, district meetings, committee meetings—all the HSA business that must happen at annual meetings. There will be a Marketplace from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. both days, too, with many local vendors of herbal- and garden-related things.

We have secured six speakers for those two days, and our intent is to showcase South Louisiana.

- Anne Milneck of Red Stick Spice will be doing a culinary presentation emphasizing the uniqueness of South Louisiana cuisine.
- John Sykes, Director of Magnolia Mound Plantation and past president of the Southern Garden Association, will be talking about southern gardens and their history and development.
- Mary Perrin of Vermilionville, whose books on Louisiana culture have won awards, and who is a *traiteur* in three different traditions, will speak on the *traiteur* healing tradition that has come through history to the present day.
- Beverly Fusilier of Lafayette, who is co-author with Mary Perrin of a new book on healing plants in Louisiana, will give a presentation on the healing plants and native plants that are spotlighted in the Vermilionville Traiteur Gardens.
- Olivia Stewart, Chief Operating Officer of Three Roll Estate distillery in Baton Rouge, will talk about their rejuvenation of a very old traditional industry that contributed to early economic development in the Baton Rouge area. They own their own sugarcane plantations, harvest and prepare the cane in traditional style, and then make cane syrup, sugar, molasses, and various kinds of rum from the cane.
- And the famous William Bartram will be a speaker and will be with us a whole day to answer questions. What? Did you say you know he's dead? Well, he traveled through this area on his long journey looking for useful plants from 1773 to 1777, and we see Bartram Trail signs all through this part of the world. He has a lot to say and will be very much alive to talk about his notebooks, his books, and what he discovered on his perambulations. (He's really Kirk Brown and is very good at becoming and channeling William.)

We expect to have native and healing plants for sale in our Marketplace as well as other garden-related things.

We're asking for all members and friends of HSABR to help with EdCon—there'll be lots of fun tasks, like hosting receptions, greeting guests, etc., that need volunteers!

Questions? Contact Mary Williams, [druid@wi.rr.com](mailto:druid@wi.rr.com). 🌿

## Help Make Our Newsletter Better!

Like to read stories about what our members are doing in their gardens? Like photos of plants? So does everyone else! Help us keep our newsletter interesting by contributing something! It doesn't have to be a long, scholarly article (although if you do want to contribute something like that, we'd be glad to have it!); just a few words about your herbs, a recipe you love, or a photo of what's looking good in your garden right now will add a lot.

Please send submissions to [hsabrnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:hsabrnewsletter@gmail.com). We'll appreciate it greatly! 🍃

—Kathleen Harrington  
HSABR Newsletter Editor

## 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 8:00–10:00 a.m., except on the week of the monthly meeting, when we meet on Saturday instead of Thursday. Please note that we start an hour earlier when June rolls around! 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](mailto:hsabrnewsletter@gmail.com). <mailto:info@hsabr.org> Items must be received by the 10<sup>th</sup> 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:

7:00–9:00 A.M.:

June 16

July 7

July 14

July 21

### SATURDAY SENSORY GARDEN MAINTENANCE SESSIONS:

7:00–9:00 A.M.:

June 25

July 30

**July 28, 2022**

**MONTHLY MEETING, 6:30–8:00 P.M.**

**Three Roll Estate tour**