

JUNE 2024

Herb Letter

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
BATON ROUGE UNIT



No Monthly Meetings in June or July

Herb of the Month — Thyme (*Thymus* spp.)

Thyme (*Thymus* spp.) is a versatile herb belonging to the mint family, Lamiaceae, and is widely appreciated for its culinary, medicinal, and ornamental uses. Native to the Mediterranean region, thyme features small, aromatic leaves and clusters of pink, white, or purple flowers. Its robust flavor, often described as earthy and slightly minty, makes it a staple in various cuisines, particularly in Mediterranean, French, and Italian dishes. Beyond the kitchen, thyme is valued for its essential oil, which has antiseptic and antibacterial properties, making it a common ingredient in natural remedies and skin care products. The plant's hardiness and low-maintenance nature also make it a popular choice for gardens and landscaping. More information on p. 4. 🌿

Southeast District News Roundup

In lieu of a Message from the Chair this month, Sylvia forwarded the latest Southeast District newsletter to share some excerpts with our group:

- **Mobile Unit is for the Bees**
The Mobile Unit recently worked with local students to promote the Fuzzy Butts initiative, where HSA members gather data on bees visiting local native plants and herbs. They had a lot of fun and it was educational for the students.
- **May Wine Party in the Nashville Unit**
The Nashville Unit hosted a May Wine party for new members and their board. May Wine is made by infusing brandy with Sweet Woodruff (*Galium odoratum*), then adding the infused brandy to white wine along with sprigs of Sweet Woodruff and strawberries.
- **Herb Day in Jemeson, AL**
Petals from the Past, a garden center specializing in antique roses and heirloom shrubs, hosted their first Herb Day in May. Many HSA members attended and presented programs on spring tonics, how to grow, harvest, cook, and preserve herbs, and aromatherapy with herbs. 🌿

HSABR Foraging Expedition

By Sylvia Lowe

On May 18th a group of HSABR members were treated to a foraging expedition at Burden led by John Nettles. John is an experienced forager and naturalist from Baton Rouge. In his spare time, he runs Slowhike Company, through which he conducts foraging walks throughout rural south Louisiana. John's interest in cooking led him to learn about wild foods that grow in Louisiana forests. We came upon many plants along the Burden trails that are edible and very accessible. Wood sorrel, a plant that looks like a tall clover, was the first plant located at the base some trees just near the parking lot. Wood sorrel has a tart, lemony flavor and the leaves and flowers are good in salads.

We came across a yaupon holly. "This shrub was the only caffeine-producing plant Native Americans had," John said, picking a few of the plant's small oval leaves. "Don't eat the berries, they're poisonous. But you can dry the leaves and make a tea. It'll have as much caffeine as green tea."

Other wild edibles we saw included wild lettuce and turkey tail mushrooms. [Photos on p. 3]



Our walk ended with John cautioning that any consumable plant harvested from the wild must not have been sprayed with chemicals and should always be properly identified. He'll be happy to help anyone determine if their bounty is edible. He'll also be glad to take you on a tour where wild and delicious things grow. Just text him at 225-205-5515 or email him at johnpaulnettlles@gmail.com. 🌿

Pictures from the Expedition



Wood Sorrel



Yaupon Holly



Wild lettuce



Turkey Tail Mushrooms

Herb of the Month: Thyme (*Thymus* spp.)

From the Herb Society of America:

Facts:

- There are 300–400 species of plants whose common name is thyme and that are cultivated all over the world. *Thymus vulgaris*, known as common or English thyme, is the most common culinary variety.
- Lemon, orange, lime, nutmeg, oregano, lavender, and rose are fragrances and flavors of other culinary species and cultivars. There are also non-culinary varieties grown primarily for ornamental use.
- Grow thyme species in full sun and well-drained soil. Regular pruning helps decrease the woody stems on the plant by promoting new growth.
- Thyme is hardy and can be grown in perennial borders, containers, hanging baskets and of course, herb gardens.
- The use of thyme has a lot of folklore, associations, and traditions:
 - It is used as a symbol of bravery and courage in the language of flowers.
 - The fragrance was thought to promote courage, bravery, and strength. Soldiers would soak in thyme-steeped bath water and may have had sprigs of thyme sewn into their scarves before going off to battle.
 - The exchange of thyme sprigs between Roman soldiers was a sign of respect.
 - Thyme is used in charms to enable you to see fairies.
 - Today it is used to sweeten linens in Europe and stuffed in pillows.
 - Thyme was planted at gravesites, used to adorn the dead, and in Egyptian mummification processes.
 - Through the ages, ancient Greeks, Romans, and others burned bundles of thyme both for courage and to rid their homes, temples and other spaces of insects and other venomous creatures.
 - Thyme was considered a preventative to poison if consumed before or during a meal and an antidote to snake and sea creature venoms.
- Thyme essential oil contains antioxidant, antifungal, and antibacterial properties. Thymol is the primary chemical constituent of thyme.
- Historically, thyme has a long history of medicinal use, with applications ranging from breathing difficulties, digestive disorders, immune support, nervous system restoration, and mood imbalances, among others. It also has had a role in food preservation.
- Today, thymol is used commercially in hand sanitizers, mouthwashes, and acne medications. It is the subject of research and is used by modern day herbalists. 🌿



Tips for Using Thyme:

- Harvest thyme before flowering for the best flavor.
- Wash in cool water while still on the stems, either in a bowl or under running water.
- Thyme compliments potatoes, vegetables, chicken, fish, and other meats, soups, and vinegars. It also pairs well with fruit, especially lemons.
- Young soft stems can be chopped with the leaves and added to recipes. Woody stems should be removed before chopping or eating. Remove intact from soups and stews.
- De-stem fresh leaves by running fingers from the tip of the stem to the bottom.
- Dry thyme by hanging stems in small bunches or on screens.
- De-stem dried leaves by rubbing the stems between your hands.
- Add freshly chopped thyme or lemon thyme to softened butter, blend, and form into a log or place in a container. Refrigerate or freeze. Use on steaks, poultry, vegetables, sauces, or on bread. 🌿

Thyme Recipe

We use our grill for most summer dinners, so we thought, “why not grill the lemonade?” The flavor is surprisingly smooth, with just the right amount of honey and herbs. We call it Thyme for Lemonade. —Susan Jordan, Denver, Colorado

Grilled Lemon & Thyme Lemonade (“Thyme for Lemonade”)

15 fresh thyme sprigs	¼ cup honey
2 cups water, divided	¼ teaspoon almond extract
1 cup sugar, divided	5 cups cold water
9 medium lemons, halved	

In a small bowl, soak thyme sprigs in 1 cup water while preparing lemons. Place ¼ cup sugar on a plate; dip cut sides of lemons in sugar.

Cover and grill lemons, cut side down, over medium-high heat for 1–2 minutes or until golden brown. Cool slightly. Drain thyme; grill for 1–2 minutes or until lightly browned turning once.

In a small saucepan, combine 1 cup water, honey, and remaining sugar; bring to a boil stirring constantly to dissolve sugar. Remove from the heat. Add grilled thyme sprigs and extract; let stand for 1 hour to steep. Discard thyme.

Meanwhile, squeeze lemons to obtain 1½ cups juice; strain. In a large pitcher, combine 5 cups cold water, thyme syrup, and lemon juice. Serve over ice.

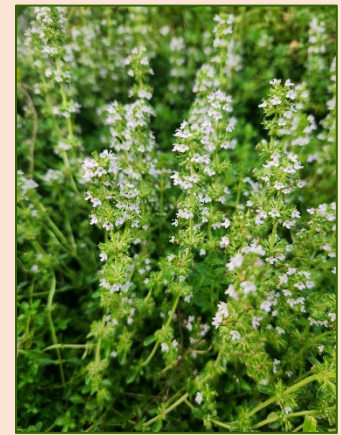
— Susan Jordan, Denver CO

[Taste of Home](#) 🌿

Blooming Thyme: A Pollinator Landing Field

By Julie Walsh

The Thyme in my garden is in full bloom, with little white flowers that send a signal for all the pollinators to come calling. These powerful culinary/medicinal plants are a continuous source of nourishment for bees, butterflies and wasps. The pollinators' bustling activity is amazing to watch as they respectfully and harmoniously go about their business in flight patterns that would impress the tower at the Hartsfield-Atlanta airport! With so many positive attributes, if you haven't started growing Thyme, now is the time!



Thyme in Julie's Garden

Container Garden Presentation

By Bryce Cason, HSABR Garden Intern

On June 11, the West Feliciana Master Gardener Society invited Ms. Ruby Homyssi to give a lecture on the practice of container gardening and the use of companion plants to increase the productivity of the desired species. Ruby, who retired from the Navy as a Lt. Commander and served as a marine, has been all over the US and has experience growing many herbs in changing climates. These experiences have helped her, through trial and error, become an excellent gardener. She discussed how bucket lids or other similarly shaped objects, with drainage holes drilled in, can be placed in a container to avoid plants getting wet feet and how this is a very cost-effective way of making sure one's plants are given a better chance to thrive, especially in our extremely warm and wet environment. For tomato



Ruby Homyssi at the West Feliciana Master Gardener Society



Ruby Homyssi and Bryce Cason

growers, using marigolds and basil as companion plants was encouraged as they both are beneficial for the tomato plant. Marigolds have chemical compounds that many insects find unappealing and thus stay away, restricting the need for chemical insecticides and making organic gardening much more feasible. Basil also has a fragrance that deters insects, while also increasing the flavor of the tomato. The lecture lasted roughly 45 minutes and was packed full of beneficial information. 🌿

Green Bridges™

It's been a while since we've touted the Herb Society of America's Green Bridges™ initiative, so let's remedy that now!

Urban sprawl, industrial parks with chemically treated lawns, freeway and hardscape—all are human interventions that contribute to habitat fragmentation. Habitat fragmentation happens when large swaths of the natural habitat are bisected by development. Slicing the area into smaller, disconnected pieces stresses the native plants, pollinators, and animals that call it home.

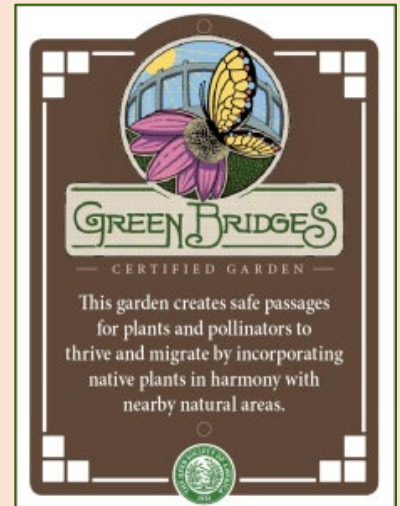
HSA's GreenBridges™ initiative encourages home and community gardeners to help support these fragile natural areas by creating safe passage to native plants and pollinators. Each GreenBridges™ garden is a link in the chain across the nation, providing safe movement for the plants and pollinators that help maintain healthy ecosystems.

You can get involved by creating GreenBridges™ in your backyard and throughout your community. Join the GreenBridges™ network, register your garden, and stay informed about:

- Best practices from a network of GreenBridges™ gardeners
- Growing native herbs unique to your own region
- Working toward a more sustainable gardening style.

Click here to learn more: [GreenBridges™](#)

GreenBridges™ also puts out a quarterly newsletter; the latest issue is online on our website at [Newsletter and Links](#). 🌿



Helping Hands at the Heritage Garden

Julie Walsh sends this great photo of swallowtail butterfly caterpillars going to town on a parsley plant in our Heritage Garden at Burden!

Swallowtail butterfly caterpillars on parsley

Help Make Our Newsletter Better!

Our newsletter is only as good as what I receive to put into it! I 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 all appreciate it greatly!

—Kathleen Harrington
HSABR Newsletter Editor 🌿

Upcoming Events

NO MEETINGS IN JUNE OR JULY

Garden Maintenance

Maintenance sessions for the Sensory Garden at the Independence Botanical Garden, 7950 Independence Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA 70806, are 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 June and August through October, at the LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens, Ione 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.

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