

OCTOBER 2021

# Herb Letter

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA  
BATON ROUGE UNIT



## Monthly Meeting, October 28, 2021

6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

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

Ruby Homayssi: Companion Planting and Creating Bucket Gardens (see details on p. 2).

## Herb of the Month—Medlar

Medlar, *Mespilus germanica*

The plant commonly known as medlar, or common medlar, is a large shrub or small tree in the Rosaceae family, which also includes fruits like apples, pears, and strawberries. The white flowers in the spring and the leaf color in the fall make it an attractive landscape plant. Slow growing and hardy in zones 5–8, medlar prefers sunny, dry locations and slightly acidic soil. The fruit of the medlar is a small pome that is eaten fresh when “bletted” or overripe. Medlars were hugely popular in ancient and medieval times, but have slowly faded into obscurity. More info on p. 4.

## Message from the Chair

In 1991, George H.W. Bush was president, the Hubble telescope was launched, the World Wide Web came to life, and the Herb Society of America Baton Rouge Unit was founded! Now, most of us were not around in that October when the unit was founded but we can be there for a short celebration at our meeting on 28 October! Please join us then to honor those folks who founded the unit with a very special mention of Sarah Liberta, one of the few surviving founding members!

This year has been marked by a continuing pandemic, a significant visit from destructive Ida, and a plethora of day-to-day challenges for all of us. As a result, attendance at our meetings has been low, even though we've had some excellent, world-class speakers on our programs. Yet despite a dismal year, we have a bright future ahead! Our garden committees are keeping up with the challenging work of maintaining two outstanding gardens, and we have a third in the offing. But the gardens cannot do it alone!

Keeping up with our commitment to the community requires the dedication and effort of each and every member. Your support is what keeps this unit afloat and without that support, the future is uncertain at best. With that in mind, please set aside a little time for the unit by attending meetings, keeping up with the latest news, and making sure you have a voice in the ongoing business of the unit! Each of you is a VIP contributor; your voice, your time, and your talent are critically important! Be there! 🌿

— Art Scarbrough, HSABR Chair

## Monthly Meeting

October 28, 2021, 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.  
LSU AgCenter Botanic Gardens, Lone Burden Conference Center  
4560 Essen Lane, Baton Rouge, LA

**Companion Planting and Creating Bucket Gardens.** This month's meeting marks HSABR's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a unit of the Herb Society of America and we're dedicating it to one of our most valued founding members, Sarah Liberta. [Yes, I know I announced that the September meeting would be in her honor, but we had a mix-up in communication; it's this month! — Ed.] Sarah wrote HSABR's application to become a unit of the Herb Society of America back in 1991, and in 2017 she received the HSA's prestigious Helen De Conway Little Medal of Honor for her outstanding contributions to The Herb Society of America or to the world of horticulture in general.

In keeping with Sarah's passion for growing and using herbs, Ruby Homyssi will present the program this month on companion planting and raising herbs in bucket gardens. We will learn the benefits of companion gardening and the impact of herbs in the process. A simple bucket planter will be provided.

Because of the ongoing challenges with COVID-19, we ask that our attendees be vaccinated unless they are unable to take the vaccine. Please wear face coverings and practice social distancing while at the meeting.

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

## September Meeting Recap

Judy Hines and Sylvia Lowry, Sensory Garden Co-chairs, presented a program entitled “Using the Herbal Harvest,” highlighting ways to use the bounty of our herb gardens. They illustrated their points by providing some delightful examples—a velvety, golden, turmeric-accented butternut squash soup and some heavenly lemon-lavender short-bread cookies! We haven’t had a meeting that delicious in a long time! 🌿

## Horticulture Scholarship of the Western Reserve Herb Society

From the Herb Society of America:

Application deadline February 28

\$14,000 Award

This horticulture scholarship is open to citizens of the United States who have completed the second/sophomore year of undergraduate study. The applicant must be attending an accredited college or university and have achieved a grade point average of 3.2 or above.

The scholarship award will be made to the student who demonstrates financial need and plans a career in horticulture and allied fields. The award will be sent directly to the financial aid office for payment toward tuition and books.

Preference will be given to applicants who demonstrate exceptional dedication to horticulture and whose career goals may involve work in areas such as teaching/research, the public or nonprofit sector, or sustainable agriculture.

Click [here](#) for more information. 🌿

## What is a Herb, Anyway?

Herbs are plants with savory or aromatic properties that are used for flavoring and garnishing food, medicinal purposes, or for fragrances.

The difference between **herbs** and **spices** is in what part of the plant they come from.

The green leafy parts of plants used for seasoning and flavoring food are considered herbs. “Spice” refers to any dried part of a plant, other than the leaves, used for seasoning and flavoring food, but not used as the main ingredient.

Herbs are distinguished from vegetables in that, like spices, they are used in small amounts and provide flavor rather than substance to food.

And, of course, herbs have been used as medicine for thousands of years, but we’ll talk about that the next time I have another small block of space to fill! 🌿

## Herb of the Month: Medlar, *Mespilus germanica*

From the Herb Society of America:

- The fruit of the medlar is a small pome that is eaten fresh when “bled” or overripe. Bletting is a process of harvesting the fruit and allowing them to overripen in a controlled environment such as a cool cellar. It also happens naturally to fruit left on the tree until frost.
- The bletting process allows the starch to convert to fructose and reduces the acid and tannin levels, making the fruit soft and sweet.
- The bletted and cut-open fruit are often described as having the consistency of applesauce and are eaten with a spoon.
- Medlars were popular in Roman and medieval times, widely grown in England and likely were in cultivation as long as 3,000 years ago.
- Medlar leaves, fruit, bark, and wood have been used medicinally for a wide variety of ailments for centuries.
- The fruit is used to make jams and preserves and is added to desserts and cheese.
- There are many references in literature to the medlar fruit. It was used as a symbol of prostitution or poverty in reference to the shape of the fruit.
- There are mentions in William Shakespeare’s plays *Romeo and Juliet*, *As You Like It*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Timon of Athens*. 🍃



From the [Herb Society of America Blog](#):

“Medlar is most famous for its fruit, which, in all honesty, can be a quandary to the uninitiated. The brown pome ripens in the fall, but if one were to try eating it right away, they would be faced with a hard, bitter thing about the size of a large gumball (but not nearly so fun to eat). Medlar fruit is similar to native persimmons in that they must go through a prep-stage before consumption. Persimmons need a frost before becoming edible, while medlars need a go-sit-by-yourself-in-the-corner-for-a-few-weeks regimen before the fruit becomes palatable. This process is called “bletting,” and it isn’t until after the fruits have been fully bletted that the interiors become soft and edible with no trace of their bitter tannins remaining.”

For unknown reasons, medlar never became popular in the United States...even most botanists and horticulturists have probably never heard of it, according to [Baird and Thieret](#) who reviewed the species in 1989. Among those who have heard of it, only a few have actually seen the plant—“probably not one...among one hundred”; fewer yet have seen the fruit—“not one in five hundred”—and almost none has eaten the fruit.

Check out the HSA’s blog post on medlar (link above) for more on this fascinating and unusual herb, and the BBC’s light-hearted article, “[The forgotten medieval fruit with a vulgar name](#).” 🍃

## Recipes

I'm going to deviate from the norm and omit medlar recipes this month; unless you live in Europe you probably can't get any, and even then, they're apparently not all that easy to find. If you do happen to have a source for these elusive fruits, recipes for jellies, medlar "cheese," chutneys, and even liqueurs are as close as your nearest Google search! 🍃

## Did you know...

...that the Herb Society of America not only designates a Notable Native™ Herb each year and publishes a fact sheet on it, but they do the same for a Notable Native™ Tree!

The Notable Native™ Tree for 2021 is the honeylocust, *Gleditsia triacanthos*. Honeylocust is a long-lived (100 years) deciduous tree native to North America, especially the eastern regions, and grows in a variety of soils. The Latin species epithet of honeylocust, *triacanthos*, is from the Greek word *acantha*, meaning thorn or prickle, and *tri*, meaning three, in reference to the large three-branched thorns or spines found growing on the trunk or base of the tree's branches. The description



*Honeylocust spines and pods*

“honey” describes the sweet, honey-like substance found in its pods.

Honeylocust is a popular street tree in cities. It generally grows to 80 feet tall, but can exceed that. It blooms in late spring with showy, drooping racemes of greenish-yellow flowers. The flowers are followed by long (10–18 inches) twisting reddish-brown pods that mature in late summer. Some pods persist through winter. Though not all trees are armed with thorns, many are, making them a formidable barrier in home or park landscapes.

Honeylocust is found growing in most of the United States except in Washington and Oregon. It is native to central United States and has naturalized east of the Appalachians from South Carolina to New England. It prefers moist, fertile, and deep soils and is often found in floodplain areas. It tolerates drought as well as long periods of wetness. It prefers full sun but will grow in some shade. It is tolerant of both acidic and alkaline soils.

The flowers are a favorite of pollinating insects, especially small bees and flies. It is a host for the silver-spotted skipper and is a source of pollen and nectar for bees.

The downloadable Notable Native™ Tree Fact Sheets are another of the benefits of membership in the Herb Society of America! See our [website](#) for more information. 🍃

## Worker Bees on the Job!

Claudia Ross, Membership Chair, and one of our Sensory Garden Worker Bees who work so faithfully to maintain our garden, sent this:

“This past Saturday [September 25], some garden Bees were busy taking care of the Sensory Gardens. The day was marvelous, perfect and just plain delightful as we had a chance to not only remove weeds and spent herbs but clean out our pores!”



*From left, Kay Martin, Ruby Homayssi, Judy Hines, and Sylvia Lowe. Claudia Ross is behind the camera so we can't see her smiling face!*

## 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.*

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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). Items must be received by the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month for inclusion in the next issue of HerbLetter.

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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.:

November 4  
November 11  
November 15

### SATURDAY SENSORY GARDEN MAINTENANCE SESSIONS, 8:00–10:00 A.M.

October 30

### NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER

No monthly meetings because of the holidays

### JANUARY 27, 2022

### MONTHLY MEETING, 6:30–8:00 P.M.

TBA