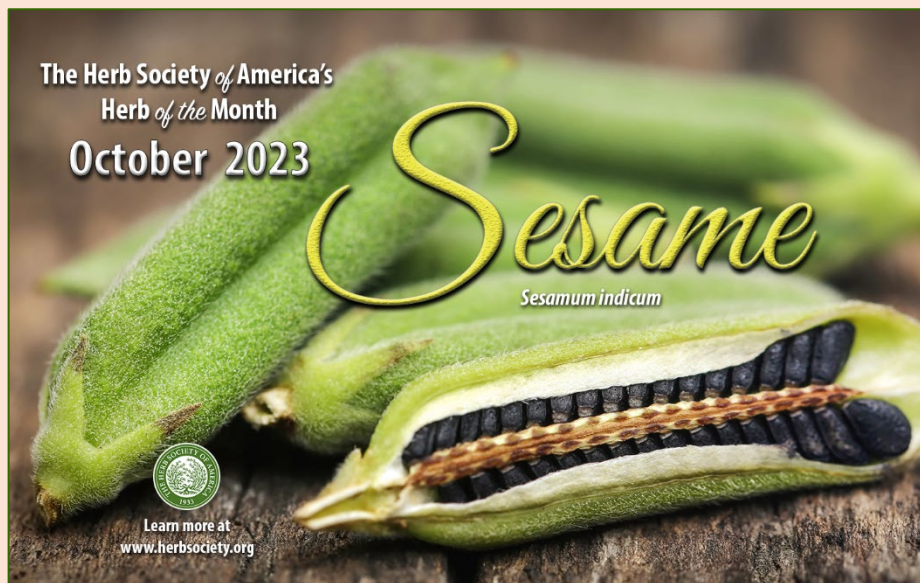


OCTOBER 2023

Herb Letter

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
BATON ROUGE UNIT



Monthly Meeting, October 26, 2023

6:30–8:00 p.m.

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

Art Scarbrough: The Herbs and Lore of Halloween (see p. 3 for details)

Herb of the Month — Sesame (*Sesamum indicum*)

Sesame, a flowering plant cultivated for its seeds, is renowned for its rich culinary and nutritional value. With a history stretching back to ancient times, sesame has made an indelible mark on global cuisines, lending its distinctive nutty flavor and delicate crunch to various dishes. From the aromatic sesame oil widely used in Asian cooking to the delectable sesame seed toppings adorning bread and pastries, this versatile herb has entrenched itself in culinary traditions across the world. Beyond its culinary appeal, sesame is cherished for its high content of beneficial nutrients, including protein, fiber, and essential minerals like copper, manganese, and calcium. Its potential health benefits, such as supporting heart health and promoting bone strength, make it a prized ingredient in both traditional and modern kitchens, exemplifying the enduring significance of this humble yet extraordinary herb. More information on p. 6. 🌿

Message from the Chair

Happy Fall, y'all!! Finally!! Now that the heat has abated you can almost hear the plants sigh with relief. The Sensory Garden and Heritage Garden herbs are standing tall and growing again. October is historically our driest month (I think the scientists need to adjust that statistic) so we still have to water our gardens, but thankfully, not quite as much. There is still plenty to do in the garden during the fall and in preparation for the winter. LSU Ag Center has loads of information online to help with these tasks. It seems everyone has come out of the woodwork since we have some fall weather to spruce up our own gardens. There are fairs and festivals, plant sales and swaps, and seed swaps. The bees, butterflies, and moths are out in the gardens. Did you know that they don't start their day until around 10:00 a.m.? The Monarchs have resurfaced and are devouring the milkweed plants. It's like watching live television out in the gardens.

The Herb Society has been busy these past three months with more in the works. Please follow us on Facebook for upcoming programs. We are working on another herbal workshop on November 11th for members only as the New Orleans Herb Unit is visiting and we will be touring our Herb Gardens. The location and time will be emailed to members soon.

We are ramping up Herb Day planning so be ready to jump on board!

HSABR will also be represented at the Magnolia Mound Creole Christmas fair on December 10th. We will have a tabling event and maybe even have some items for sale. More information will be provided at the October meeting on the 26th.

We are also preparing to invite students from local universities to apply for the 2024 garden internship program and will be reaching out for volunteers to interview and select our next awardees.

Several members of HSABR attended the Southeast District Gathering in Mobile in September, so please read on for some herbal infobytes and Herbal Mixology.

—Sylvia 🌿

September Meeting Recap

Our September meeting was great, thanks to Kathleen Harrington who presented a program on ginger, the HSA's Herb of the Year for 2023. We enjoyed hot ginger tea¹ and candied ginger,² and members were able to purchase herbal tea blends featuring ginger. Ruth Crawford made a ginger and apple dessert as well as a Mediterranean dip, Muhammara, featuring September's Herb of the Month, Aleppo pepper...which was devoured by everyone! The dish was wiped clean. I found the recipe on *The Mediterranean Dish* and *Bon Appétit* online. Guess what I'm making??

—Sylvia 🌿

¹ Yogi tea recipe: <https://www.coffeytalk.com/way-ayurvedic-herbs/>

² Candied ginger: [Alton Brown](#)

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

The Herbs and Lore of Halloween. Join us for an enchanting journey into the mystical world of Halloween herbs and lore, presented by Art Scarbrough, HSABR program chair and practicing Druid! In this captivating talk, Art will delve into the ancient traditions and folk wisdom surrounding the spookiest season of the year. Discover the secrets of herbs like sage, rosemary, and thyme, and how they have been used for centuries to ward off evil spirits, protect homes, and create magical potions. Uncover the fascinating stories and superstitions that have shaped our Halloween celebrations, from the origins of jack-o'-lanterns to the eerie tales of witches' brews. Whether you're a seasoned witch or simply curious about the enchanting world of Halloween, this talk promises to be a bewitching adventure into the herbal and mystical side of the season. Don't miss out on this opportunity to deepen your knowledge of Halloween's rich history and traditions!



This is our last meeting of the year, so be sure to come get your herbal fix before the holidays!

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

Southeast District Gathering

The Southeast District Gathering was held in Mobile, Alabama, on the weekend of September 22nd and 23rd, with Ruby Homayssi, Sharon Kleinpeter, Sharon Murphy, Claudia Ross, Julie Walsh, and me representing HSABR! This was my first such event and it was fun, educational, and informative. It was a mini education networking conference. We met many other herb enthusiasts from the Southeast and made new friends. Attendees were treated to diverse speakers, a boat tour of the Five River Delta, and the Mobile Botanical Gardens. Please access the [agenda on the HSA website](#) to find out more. I urge members to participate in these events in the future—you won't regret it! Please enjoy the **Herbal Mixology** recipes from the gathering on p 4.

— Sylvia 🌿

Herbal Mixology:



How to make herb-forward liberations

Presentation by Aerriell Cashin

Herb Infused Syrup:

1. Combine 1 cup sugar, 1 cup water, and a handful of the herb(s) of your choosing into a medium sauce pan
2. Bring the mixture to a soft boil until all the sugar has melted (this happens quickly!)
3. Once the sugar has melted, remove from the heat and allow the mixture to cool and infuse for 25 minutes or longer (you can even leave this overnight)
4. Strain the mixture through a mesh strainer so you just have the infused liquid left.
5. Store the liquid in an airtight jar - that's it!
The mixture will last 3 weeks when stored airtight in the refrigerator.

"Easy as 1 - 2 - 3!"

When you build your cocktail, follow the 1 - 2 - 3 rule:

1. **Choose your spirit**
 2. **Choose your sweetener** (*herb infused syrups*)
 3. **Choose your mixer** (*You can't go wrong with choosing a citrus juice but try other fruit juices as well!!*)
- Then have a little fun and add a garnish if you wish!*



Amounts:

Once you have chosen your spirit, sweetener and mixer, it's time to mix! Follow the 2:1:1 ratio for this:

- 2 oz of spirit
- 1 oz of sweetener
- 1 oz of mixer

Variations:

Mocktail: Don't wish to use a liquor? Follow the 2:1:1 ratio above but substitute the spirit for a carbonated water or soda of your choice!

Add Fresh Fruit: Before combining your spirit, sweetener and mixer, add a small handful of berries or other fruit to the bottom of your glass and muddle them gently.

"A world of herb-infused beverages goes far beyond the mint in a mojito.."

Mixology thrives on creativity:

You can't really go wrong when it comes to mixing with herbs. Certain liquors don't require certain herbs.. get creative!

For beginners, here are some "tried and true" combinations:

- **Rosemary:** works great in citrusy cocktails with dark or light liquor
- **Basil:** these tender leaves work wonderfully in bubbly cocktails and pair great with summer berries (*strawberries, blueberries, etc.*)
- **Mint:** is a universal herb when it comes to cocktails.. throw it into anything!

Some Ways to Incorporate Your Herbs:

- **Muddling:** this is the most common technique when incorporating herbs into your drinks. Just remember - muddle gently! Simply tap the leaves a few times with a muddler. This allows the herbs to release their oils without damaging them too much.
- **Garnish:** it's not there just to look pretty! We know our sense of taste is directly linked to our ability to smell. Getting a whiff of a fresh herb garnish when you go to take a sip will enhance the flavor profile of the drink.
- **Herb Infused Syrups:** This is the best way to make herbs the star of your cocktail! This quick and easy method adds sweetness to your drink and tons of flavor. The process allows all the flavor from the herb(s) to be completely incorporated into your mixture. You can even make unique flavor combinations by incorporating two or more herbs or even by adding fresh berries and whole spices.



Try These Great Combinations:



With Sage Syrup:

- Lemon juice + muddled raspberries
- Orange juice + a squeeze of lime juice
- Grapefruit juice + muddled blackberries

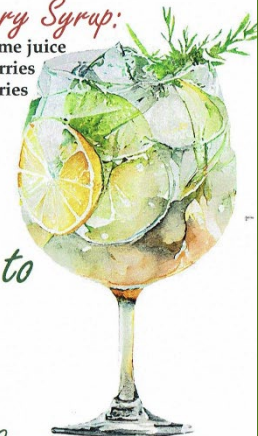
With Thyme Syrup:

- Lemon juice + muddled blueberries
- Cranberry juice + squeeze of lemon juice
- Lemon juice + muddled strawberries

(Add mint for a fresh twist!)

With Rosemary Syrup:

- Grapefruit juice + squeeze of lime juice
- Lemon juice + muddled blueberries
- Lime juice + muddled blackberries

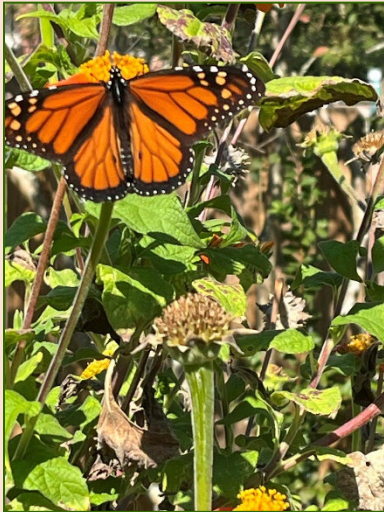


Don't Forget to Garnish!

Green Tea Creations:

- Green Tea + muddled raspberries + Thyme sprig
- Green Tea + squeeze of lime + mint
- Green Tea + muddled strawberries + squeeze of lemon juice

What's Happening in the Garden



Sylvia Lowe shares with us this beautiful Monarch enjoying her Mexican sunflowers! 🌿

HSA Webinar: Exploring Ancient Herbs in Dioscorides's *De Materia Medica*

Herb Society of America Webinar, October 26, 2023, 1:00 p.m. Eastern, noon Central
Free for HSA members, \$7.50 for non-members. [Register here.](#)

Pedanius Dioscorides (c. 40–90 CE) was an ancient Greek medical botanist and physician who was considered “the father of pharmacognosy.” His five-volume encyclopedia, *De Materia Medica* (originally titled Περὶ ὕλης ἰατρικῆς in ancient Greek) was hand-copied and referenced extensively for an impressive 1,500 years after it was written. This influential herbal reference, describing approximately 600 plants for more than 1,000 traditional medicines, would help create the basis of European and Western pharmacopeia. Join Maria Christodoulou, The Greek Herbalist, in exploring how herbs were crafted into ancient herbal remedies in this fantastic resource that provides a glimpse into the vast knowledge of the ancient Mediterranean world.

Maria Christodoulou is a clinical herbalist exploring the wisdom and whimsy of ancient Greek herbal medicine. She is the author of *The Greek Herbalist's Guide to the National Garden, Athens* and *The Greek Herbalist's Guide to the Mountain*. Maria offers herbal medicine tours throughout Greece and teaches virtual courses on botanical mythology and plants of Mediterranean antiquity. She also leads the Herbalists Without Borders, Athens, Greece chapter. For more adventures through antiquity, visit www.thegreekherbalist.com. 🌿



Maria Christodoulou, the Greek Herbalist

Herb of the Month: Sesame (*Sesamum indicum*)

From the Herb Society of America:

Facts:

- The plant that produces the sesame seed is an annual broadleaf plant that grows 5–6 feet tall with bell shaped tubular flowers resembling foxglove flowers, that form pods at the leaf axil (where the stem and leaf meet).
- The plant is cultivated for its edible seeds and is one of the oldest oilseed crops.
- It is grown for nutritional purposes, medicinal properties, and industrial uses.
- It has been cultivated for thousands of years all over the world, including Africa, East Indies, China, and India. It was cultivated for oil in 3000 BCE.
- The seeds were used by Egyptian physicians for medicine, Babylonian women to preserve youth and beauty, and Roman soldiers for strength and energy.
- Baskets of sesame found in King Tutankhamen’s tomb indicate its presence in Egypt by 1350 BCE. Other archaeological remains date sesame to about 3500 to 3050 BCE.
- Sesame was brought to the United States by enslaved Africans, who called them benné seeds. Eating sesame seeds was thought to bring good luck. Middle Easterners also referred to sesame as benne.
- Sesame was reportedly grown by Thomas Jefferson in test plots at Monticello.
- The seeds are used to top baked goods, milled into flour, crushed into a paste (tahini), pressed to produce oil, and used in sweet and savory dishes all over the world.
- The saying “Open Sesame!” from *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, likely comes from the fact that with the slightest touch, the sesame seed pods burst open and scatter the seeds.
- The writers of the children’s show Sesame Street selected the word “sesame” from the fabled command “Open Sesame!” in *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* to suggest excitement and adventure for the title of the show.
- Various sesame seed varieties produce seed colors that are black, gray, red, and off-white to tan. The lighter-colored seeds tend to be more commonly produced in Europe, the Americas, West Asia, and the Indian subcontinent, while China and Southeast Asia more commonly produce the darker ones.
- Plant seeds when soil has warmed to approximately 80°F in areas that receive 90–150 frost-free days.
- Harvest as seeds ripen, dry and store out of direct light or in the freezer.
- In the US, commercial production ramped up in the 1950s following the development of modern cultivars with seed pods that don’t open when ripe, enabling mechanical harvest.
- Sesame seeds are approximately 50% oil and 25% protein.



Images from Shutterstock

- Sesame seeds are high in Vitamin A, Thiamine, Riboflavin, Niacin, iron, other minerals, and fiber. In addition, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and other studied effects have shown human health benefits.
- Sesamin and sesamolin, which belong to a special beneficial fiber group called lignans, are found in the seeds. These are known to have cholesterol-lowering effects, help to prevent high blood pressure, and may even protect the liver from free-radical damage. 🌱

Tips:

- The nutty and slightly sweet taste is enhanced by toasting raw seeds at 375–400°F for a few minutes. They are done when edges are lightly browned. Or, toast in a dry skillet until just golden and have a nutty fragrance.
- Add sesame seeds to steamed broccoli or other vegetables with a sprinkle of lemon juice.
- Top roasted and crushed sesame seeds over salads.
- For a quick stir-fry, combine sesame seeds, garlic, ginger, and soy sauce with vegetables and chicken or shrimp.
- Tahini or sesame seed paste is a main ingredient in hummus, which is easily made in a blender with chickpeas, tahini, and olive oil. Roasted garlic, lemon juice, and salt are also often added.
- Toasted sesame oil ranges from a golden to a brown color, has a strong nutty flavor, and is used as a seasoning rather than for cooking. The light (in color only) is made with untoasted seeds and has a mild flavor.
- Store sesame seeds in an airtight container in a cool, dry location for up to three months, refrigerate for up to 6 months, or freeze for up to one year. 🌱

Sesame Recipes

Ginger, Carrot, and Sesame Green Beans

1 tablespoon vegetable oil
 1 tablespoon peeled and grated ginger
 1 medium carrot, peeled and sliced into thin rounds
 12 ounces haricots vert or standard green beans, trimmed

1 tablespoon light soy sauce
 1 teaspoon rice vinegar
 Toasted sesame oil, for drizzling
 Toasted black sesame seeds, for garnish

Heat wok over high heat, and then add the vegetable oil. Add the ginger and cook for 30 seconds. Add the carrots and green beans and stir-fry for 2 minutes (adding a splash of water if necessary to facilitate cooking). Season the vegetables with the light soy sauce, rice vinegar, and a drizzle of toasted sesame oil. Garnish with a sprinkling of the toasted white and black sesame seeds.



— Ching-He Huang
Cookingchanneltv.com

Benne Wafers

These ethereally light, snapping-brown sesame cookies, both sweet and nutty, have a unique texture: solid and crisp on the bottom, crunchy-light on top. With their centuries-old recipe, they're a longstanding tradition in the American South.

8 tablespoons unsalted butter, room temperature
1 cup light brown sugar, firmly packed
¼ teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 large egg
1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour
1 cup sesame seeds, toasted

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Line two baking sheets with parchment. In a large bowl, cream together the butter, sugar, salt, vanilla, baking soda, and egg. Add the flour and mix until smooth. Drop the dough by tablespoonfuls onto the baking sheets. Bake the wafers for 8 to 9 minutes, or until golden brown. Remove them from the oven, allow them to cool for 1 minute on the pan, then transfer the wafers to a wire rack to cool completely. Store in a closed container for up to a week. Freeze for up to a month.



—King Arthur Test Kitchen
Kingarthurbaking.com

Soy-Sesame Dipping Sauce

This soy sauce-and-sesame-flavored dip is great for egg rolls, fresh or fried spring rolls, grilled meats, or poultry. Chill or heat before serving. This is also a great dressing for coleslaw—just toss the slaw with the dressing and chill for up to 3 days. Add some shelled sunflower seeds and some crunchy chow mein noodles right before serving.

1 cup distilled white vinegar
1 cup soy sauce
½ cup vegetable oil
1 tablespoon sesame oil

1 tablespoon toasted sesame seeds
½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
½ teaspoon garlic powder
1 pinch ground cayenne pepper

Whisk together distilled white vinegar, soy sauce, vegetable oil, sesame oil, toasted sesame seeds, crushed red pepper flakes, garlic powder, and cayenne in a bowl. Allow the mixture to stand at room temperature for 1 hour before serving.



— Rayna Jordan
Allrecipes.com 

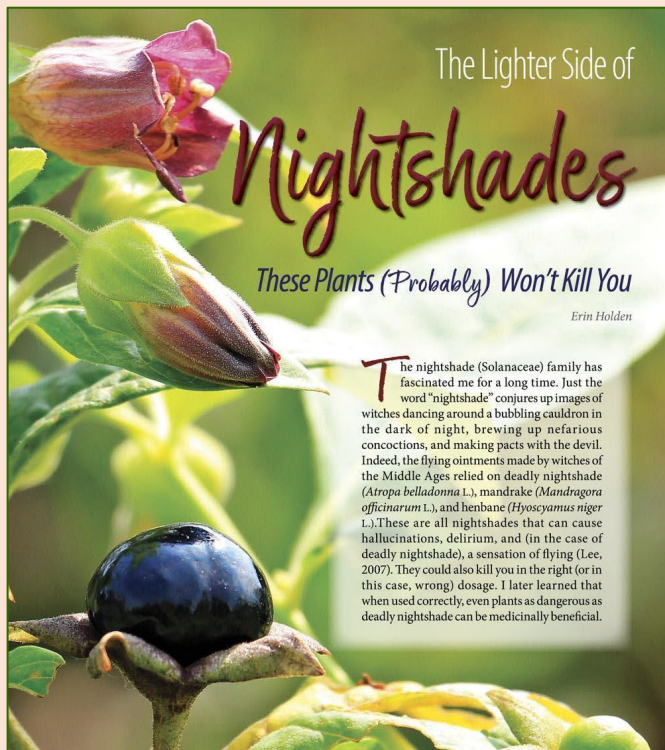
Don't Forget: HSA/HSABR Dues Are Due!

If you haven't already renewed your membership in HSABR, please do so as soon as possible! Our membership year runs from September to August and we have to get the money to the national organization by October 31. And if you're not yet a member, now is a great time to remedy that situation!

Please use the online renewal form ("[Current Members Renew Here](#)") button at the bottom of the HSABR website home page) and you can use PayPal or (preferred) by check, payable to HSABR. Mail checks to Treasurer Claudia Ross, P.O.B. 77210, Baton Rouge LA 70879 or give it to her or Sharon Kleinpeter, membership chair, at the October meeting. Please also let Sharon know if we can share your contact information in an upcoming yearbook for members. For anyone who'd like to join HSABR, there's also a button for new members.

Your membership in the Herb Society of America, Baton Rouge Unit (HSABR), includes all of the benefits of the national organization as well as our local unit. There are many wonderful benefits to membership, including numerous opportunities to learn and delight in the use of herbs.

One of the best membership perks is *The Herbarist*, HSA's annual journal, which is always packed with informative articles, beautiful images, and fascinating global content. Written and published by The Herb Society of America since 1935, *The Herbarist* is one of the nation's most established horticultural publications and continues to inspire, expand, and disseminate members' knowledge of the latest in herbal information. 🌿



Imagine my surprise when I discovered my beloved potato belonged in this family, as well as other garden favorites, like tomatoes and eggplants. The more I investigated the Solanaceae, the more I saw that humanity's relationship with this family is long and complex. Throughout history people have employed plants in this family not only for food, but as medicine and poison; for magic, ritual/spiritual use, and recreation; and ornamentation in our gardens—even petunias are nightshades!

Often there is no definitive line between these uses. What we might consider as "magical" use today in the West, was, and in some cultures still is, tied to medicine. Medicine and ritual use are likewise closely linked. So, what makes Solanaceae so special?

Many solanaceous plants contain a unique set of alkaloids, naturally occurring compounds that contain at least one nitrogen atom and often taste bitter. Nightshades' main alkaloids are hyoscyamine, scopolamine, and solanine, as well as the familiar nicotine. Some members of this family, like deadly nightshade and jimsonweed (*Datura stramonium* L.), contain dangerous levels of alkaloids, while others, like potato (*Solanum tuberosum* L.), contain lower, safer levels. The important thing to understand about these alkaloids is they can pass the blood-brain barrier and cause dose-dependent hallucinations and psychoactive effects—the higher the dose, the greater the effect. This accounts for many of the uses for which people have employed non-food nightshades for thousands of years.

The Solanaceae family comprises about one hundred genera containing around 2,400 species (Davenport, 2004; Olmstead et al., 2008). The plants are herbaceous, with some vines and a few shrubs and small trees. Leaves are alternate and usually simple, but they can be pinnate. The flowers have five sepals and five petals, which are partially or fully fused into a tubular corolla, five stamens, and a superior ovary with two fused carpels. The fruits can be either a berry (like the tomato) or a capsule (like jimsonweed). They're found worldwide, with about forty genera endemic to tropical Latin America but only fifty species native in the United States and Canada (Morris and Taylor, 2017; The Plant List Database, 2013).

Botanical literature often refers to nightshades as Old World (those native to Europe, Asia, and Africa) and New World (those native to the Americas). Europeans tended to fear Old World plants like deadly nightshade, henbane, and mandrake, as many of them could be deadly if used incorrectly. On the other hand, people in the New World revered and respected their nightshades as many of them were staple foods, such as chili peppers, tomatoes, and potatoes, or were considered sacred, like angel's trumpet (*Brugmansia* spp.). Let's delve a little deeper into some members of this fascinating family.

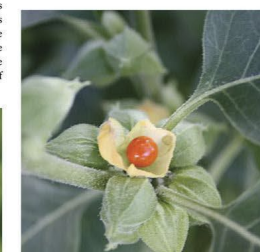
THE LIGHTER SIDE OF NIGHTSHADES

Withania somnifera (L.) Dunal (Ashwagandha)

Ashwagandha is an Old World nightshade that seems to have escaped the veil of superstition and suspicion that surrounds its more notorious cousins. Its native range extends from the Mediterranean to South and East Africa, over to the Middle East, and into India and Sri Lanka. It's a small branching shrub, growing two to three feet tall, and producing small red fruits surrounded by a lantern-like calyx (like a tiny Chinese lantern or tomatillo). The common name translates from Sanskrit to mean "smells like a horse," referring to the strong odor of the root. It could also suggest the effects of taking ashwagandha, which may give one "the power of a horse" (Singh, Bhalla, de Jager, and Gilca, 2011). The specific epithet, *somnifera*, alludes to the herb's sleep-promoting properties. This plant has a long history of use in Ayurvedic medicine, going back 6,000 years. There is evidence dating to at least 1000 BCE of the scholar Punarvasu Atreya teaching medical students how to use it (Singh and Kuma, 1998). A plant that scholars commonly accept as ashwagandha appears in the oldest surviving copy of Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica* from the 6th century, and then again



Potato flowers showing fused petals
Photo credit: Eshuttukari



From *The Herbarist*, October 2023

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'd 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 June and August 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

NO MONTHLY MEETINGS in November and December