

PLANTS FROM A MEDIEVAL GARDEN
An Exhibit of Traditional Herbs and
Early Illustrations
arranged by
BERT HANSEN

TO THE READER

Forty-five years after producing this catalogue on 8.5 x 14-inch paper, I made this slightly reduced reprint for free circulation on the internet. OCLC Worldcat shows copies of the original in about 13 libraries here and abroad.

The original booklet was printed by an inky mimeograph duplicator from soft waxed-paper stencils cut by a machine that worked off masters, the layout of which was cut and pasted by hand from typed text (IBM Selectric in which one could switch to a ball with Italic font in mid sentence) and photocopied images.

The display of about two-dozen living plants, the catalogue, and this reprint were all created with the simplest and cheapest technologies of each era. I had no horticultural budget and grew all the plants in my apartment, either from seed or as plants collected in the wild.

My motivation was simple: to add a little material-culture reality to a conference on Nature in the Middle Ages at a time when medieval studies was dominated by study of literary texts and there would be much talk about "the idea of nature."

Bert Hansen
New York City
www.BertHansen.com
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State University of New York at Binghamton
Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies
and the
Department of History
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AN INVITATION

In this Exhibit you are invited to make your own comparisons of the plants on display with various early illustrations of them and with some of the properties ascribed to them. In particular, you are encouraged to (gently) handle the plants, notice their texture, their general habit, and especially their smells. (Please do not taste any as there might be chemical residues.) But as their distinctive odors were central to people's experience and to the lore of the herbs in the Middle Ages, do smell them.

Some of the plants like *Ocimum Basilicum*, *Datura Stramonium*, *Melissa officinalis*, and *Ruta graveolens* are quite fragrant as they are. For others you may wish to gently break off a leaf and crush it to discover its fragrance.

After taking in the fragrances of rosemary and of rue you might think about whether Ophelia's gift of the former to Laertes and of the latter to Gertrude meant more than just Remembrance and Grace. (The passage is quoted below under *Rosmarinus*.)

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In addition to the many people whose generous assistance is acknowledged on the back cover, a special word of thanks is due Dover Publications for the loan of their new facsimile reprint of Gerard's Herbal, as enlarged and corrected by Johnson, 1633.

The woodcut on the front cover, reproduced from Arber, originally appeared in Leonhart Fuchs, *De historia stirpium*, 1542.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Because domestic plants were much more directly familiar to medieval people than to moderns, an invitation to meet face-to-face the drugs, poisons, seasonings, and decorations of an earlier age may not be unwelcome. It is hoped that this exhibit will enable us to experience familiar things in new associations. We all know, or know of, catnip, chamomile, absinthe, and horehound, not to speak of parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme. Here you are invited to meet them in a new way--as living herbs, the gardener's care, the botanist's concern, the illustrator's subject.

Though by no means comprehensive, this small collection attempts to offer new juxtapositions of the familiar with the unfamiliar. On the one hand it makes accessible physical referents of the literary and cultural experiences of a past age. On the other, since many of these plants are now common weeds in the eastern United States, familiar weeds may take on new significance in the company of their historical peers and with traditional uses and associations pointed out. Many of the plants which the early European settlers brought with them have now become naturalized in the New World. Among the "wild" plants that you are likely to have encountered are *Artemisia vulgaris*, *Datura Stramonium*, *Dipsacus sylvestris*, *Nepeta cataria*, *Physalis Alkekengi*, *Rumex Acetosella*, *Saponaria officinalis*, *Tanacetum vulgare*, and *Thymus Serpyllum*.

The twenty-seven species in the Exhibit were selected with several concerns in mind. Plants of medieval daily life were given precedence over rare and exotic types. Ones that are now New World weeds are interesting because of their familiarity. The accessibility of early illustrations in modern reprints conditioned the choice to some extent. Multi-purpose herbs that played a part in magic, medicine, poetry, and social ritual had priority. Species and specimens that might look good in late October had an advantage too. In each case a rigorous attempt was made to confirm that the species on display are precisely those grown and used in medieval Europe. This is not a simple, or always very conclusive, exercise. (3)

A NOTE ON PLANT ILLUSTRATIONS

Sometimes northern Europeans wrongly identified local plants with those Mediterranean species described and figured in the texts of Dioscorides and Apuleius. Quite different plants can thus carry the same name. Another difficulty for attempts to identify the species involved arises from the discrepancy one can often find between a description and its accompanying figure. Before the 16th century, and not even regularly then, there was little coordination between an herbal's draftsman and the author, translator, or copyist. And authors seldom got to check "page proof" to see if the printer got the woodcuts in the right places. A "mistake" that was an improvement in accuracy is described below under *Calendula*.

Herbals gradually evolved from professional reference books to popular self-help manuals. The latter function is emphasized by the remarks of Laurence Andrew, the translator of Brunschwig's *Distillation*, himself "moved [to translate] with natural love unto my country". His counsel: "Spare not favorable reader to peruse and revolve to thy singular health, comfort, and learning, this book of distillation. Learn the high and marvelous virtue of herbs, know how inestimable a preservative to the health of man God has provided growing every day at our hands, use the effects with reverence, and give thanks to thy Maker celestial." If still devout, this is considerably more optimistic advice than that of Cassiodorus a millenium earlier: "Learn to know the properties of herbs and blending of drugs, but set all your hopes upon the Lord."

In the early modern period scientific examination of the natural world was justified by the argument that God inscribed Truth in two books, of which it was no less worthy to read the Book of Nature than the Book of Scripture. Medievalists, like late scholastics, ply their trade for the most part in the library and the study. This exhibit has been arranged with the thought that we, too, might increase our understanding of the Middle Ages by sharing in a few sights and smells from a medieval garden.



The figures collected in this exhibit are chosen to reveal some themes and developments in the history of plant-drawing to the 17th century. Unlike the fine arts *per se* in which naturalism is not the only value, or even the major one, appreciation of scientific illustration often suffers from two erroneous assumptions: first, that a "photographic" realism is the highest desideratum, and second, that the history of plant illustration progresses in a simple line from crude or stylized portrayals to ever more accurate copies of the natural object. As to the first assumption, it must only be said that modern scientific practice demands that the artist, though working from nature, emphasize the general and typical characters of the species while minimizing the features individual to the specimens at hand. As to the second, the drawings collected here offer some counter evidence. (See in particular the versions of the *Dipsacus*.) Often the drawings in the 6th-century Dioscorides manuscript have a naturalism that captures well the plant's features, in a fashion not frequently repeated until the Renaissance. But this is not true of all the figures in the manuscripts of Dioscorides or of other manuscript herbals, in which many plants seem unidentifiable. During the Middle Ages drawings were seldom made from life. Starkly realistic are the figures of Hans Weiditz for Otto Brunfels' *Herbarum vivae eicones* of 1530, the first major printed book in which the plants are consistently drawn from nature. (See *Dipsacus* below, and *Borago* and *Symphytum*, on display.) Close observation shows that Weiditz copied the specimen on hand so literally that the individual--after all it was the Renaissance!--triumphed over the type. Any dried leaves, any break in the stem became part of the permanent record. (The cut of *Dipsacus* from Brunfels is quite revealing of the technique. If the resemblance to some of the dried specimens here on display is remarkable, we have nonetheless lost both the multiple-stalked "candelabra" effect and, more importantly, the joining of the lower leaves around the stem such that they collect rainwater.) Strangely in contrast are some earlier woodcuts, usually appreciated for their naive charm, which yet sometimes capture features of the plant that make for instant recognition. (Consider in this regard the simple figures found in the English Brunsch-

wig, ca. 1530, given below under Borago, Ocimum, and Physalis.) The renderings in Leonhart Fuchs, *De historia stirpium*, 1542, found a scientifically successful compromise. (Cf. Dipsacus, and *Mentha Pulegium*, below, and Nepeta, Salvia, and Symphytum, on display.)

Despite two masterly historical accounts of botanical illustration (Arber and Blunt), much remains to be done both for data and analysis. A recurrent problem in establishing any chronology of figures is that so many were copied from other books, both in the age of manuscripts, when artists seldom worked from nature and stylization could be extreme, and in the age of printing, when the same cuts--sold, borrowed, or stolen--appeared in several books. In this exhibit the identifications represent only the edition from which the figure was definitely known to be taken, not necessarily the original printing of that figure. (The plates of Fuchs, Mattioli, and Dodoens were reprinted with high frequency.)

A WORD ON PLANT NAMES

In this exhibit the primary label is the "official" Latin binomial designation. This identification is followed in the Catalogue by modern common names; although not consistent, their familiarity gives them some informal value. Then are listed a sampling of the medieval Latin and early vernacular names for this plant. (Note that in some cases the same term was used for more than one botanical species.) The medieval synonyms are taken, for the most part, from Hermann Fischer's *Mittelalterliche Pflanzenkunde*. These lists, although not exhaustive, have several functions: to exhibit the wide variation of usage, to aid readers of the literary texts of the period to recognize those plants with quite different modern names, and to suggest the fertile field open for research.

The name Saponaria, for example, calls attention to the traditional use of this plant which, when bruised, in water makes a clearing lather. "Melissa" (from the Greek word for bee) and "cataria" (the species name for catnip) signal animals that are attracted to the plants in question. Derivation of "rue" and "fig" from "ruta" and "ficus" are obvious; "parsley" from "petroselinum" is perhaps more interesting. And even the modern nomenclature can reveal both the history and the character of certain plants. "Graveolens" indicates "strong-smelling"; "nobilis", "well-known"; "hortensis", "vulgaris", and "sylvestris" hardly require definition. "Officinalis", which translates as "of the shops", reminds us that a species so named was the particular kind stocked and sold by apothecaries.

CATALOGUE

For each plant we give its "official" name, some of its contemporary common names, and relatively full (though by no means exhaustive or even systematic) lists of names under which the plant was known up to the 16th century. At least one figure for each plant is printed here to aid in recognition and to show a wide range of quality, style, accuracy, and artistry. For comparative purposes one must examine the additional illustrations on display with the plants. Various odd pieces of lore or facts of description and utility are also included. As consistency and completeness were out of the question (each plant would demand a monograph), the attempt was simply to find facts or legends or literary allusions that would now and then strike a resonant chord with people's own knowledge of other documents of medieval life and culture. A subordinate goal was to exhibit the range of roles that about two dozen plants played in the lives of medieval people, from the prosaica of flea-repellents and potherbs to the exotica of witches' salves and psychedelics, leavened as often as possible with Shakespeare's wit and wisdom.

Since the original text of Dioscorides' *De materia medica* (1st century A.D.) was not illustrated and since the descriptions of the plants are brief compared to preparations and uses, certain identification of his plants is not always possible. Although many identifications are thus in dispute, virtually all of our plants are in his collection, only the following apparently absent: *Anthemis nobilis*, *Calendula officinalis* (but compare a drawing of "Doruknion" on display among the *Calendula* figures), *Chrysanthemum Parthenium*, *Satureja hortensis*, and *Tanacetum vulgare*.

It is worthwhile to compare the list of herbs in this Exhibit with early documentary evidence for the content of medieval gardens. In Chapter 70 of the *Capitulare de villis imperialis*, once thought to be the official plans of Charlemagne, it was directed that about ninety plants be grown in estate gardens; ten of those are included in this exhibit, namely *Dipsacus* ("Cardones"), *Melissa officinalis*, *Mentha Pulegium*, *Nepeta cataria*, *Petroselinum crispum*, *Rosmarinus officinalis*,

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Ruta graveolens, *Salvia officinalis*, *Satureja hortensis*, and *Tanacetum vulgare*.

Eight of our herbs are among the twenty-three in the famous 9th-century *Hortulus* by Walafrid Strabo, a poem dating perhaps from the time he was Abbot at Reichenau. Though actually garden literature and not an herbal or medicinal compilation, Walafrid's account of his garden reveals many of the connections between folklore and domestic utility associated with these plants in the early Middle Ages. The *Hortulus* includes the following plants of this exhibit: *Artemisia Absinthium*, *Artemisia vulgaris*, *Marrubium vulgare*, *Mentha Pulegium*, *Nepeta cataria*, *Ruta graveolens*, *Salvia officinalis*, and *Tanacetum vulgare*. All the passages of the *Hortulus* quoted below are from the verse translation by Raef Payne included in the facsimile edition (Pittsburgh, 1966) of the 9th-century manuscript.

Anthemis nobilis Roman Chamomile. Common Chamomile. True Chamomile.

Medieval names include Antemis, Camimola herba, Maythen.

In common usage, Chamomile refers also to *Matricaria chamomila*, the German or Wild Chamomile. *Anthemis* has been highly reputed as a medicinal herb for thousands of years. The fresh plant is usually quite fragrant; and, dried for tea, chamomile is still popular.

In the garden it was recommended as the good plant for growing on the paths by Francis Bacon, among others. And Shakespeare agreed: "For though the chamomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears" (Falstaff to Prince Hal, *King Henry IV*, Part One, II, iv).



Anthemis nobilis
Brunschwig, ca. 1530

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Artemisia Absinthium
Absinthe. Wormwood.

Medieval names include
Absinthium, Herba fortis,
Absinthium ponticum, Agon,
Centonica, Absinthium ro-
manum, Wormâta, Wermuda,
Wermôt, Wermute, Besmolt,
Wermut, Absinthion.

Known for its bit-
ter taste, this
Artemisia is, next
to rue, the most
bitter of all herbs. The
account in Walahfrid Strabo's
Hortulus follows.

The next bed grows bushes
of bitter wormwood. Its
supple stem

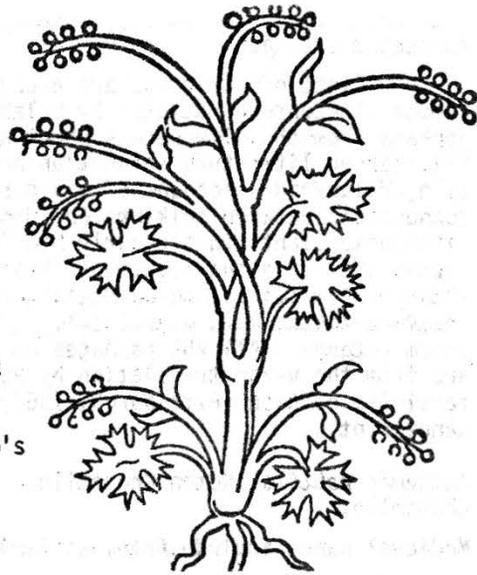
Resembles the Mother of
Herbs, but the leaves
have a different color.

The smell of its downy
branches is different too, and the brew

It makes has a bitterer taste by far. Its powers are famous.
Its effectiveness proven. It tames a raging thirst; fever
it banishes. If, besides, your head should suddenly start to
throb and throb with pain, if fits of fainting worry you,
Seek its help; Boil the bitter stem of a plant
in leaf, tip the brew into an ample basin

And pour it over the top of your head. Then having bathed
Your soft hair with the liquid make a garland of leaves
(Do not forget this) and put it on, so that the bandage
Gently binds your hair and holds the warmth in it.

A few hours later--not many--you will be marvelling
At this yet further proof of the healing powers of wormwood.

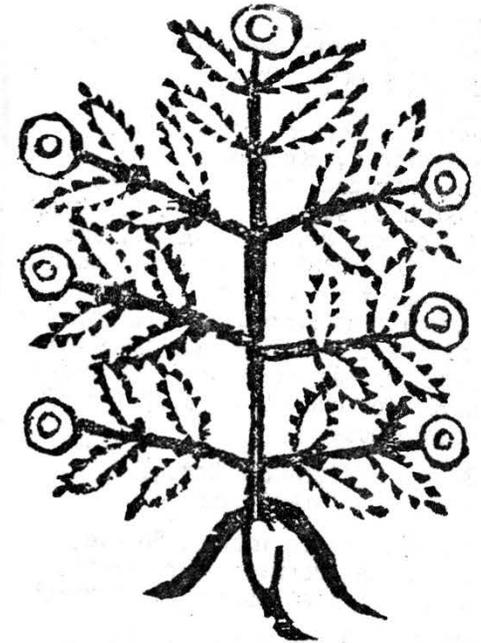


Artemisia Absinthium
"Absintheum Wermut"
Herbarius, Passau, 1485

(10)



Artemisia Absinthium
Mattioli, 1579



Artemisia vulgaris
"Herba Artemisia Leptafilos,
i.e. Matricale", Herbarium
Apuleii Platonici, 1481 (?)

Artemisia vulgaris Mugwort.

Medieval names include Artemisia, Mater herbarum, Matricaria,
Amaracos, Aleptafilos, Valentina, Arivosa, Ampolata, Britania,
Campanaria, Matricaria minor, Thagetes, Monoglossa, Viterumen,
Robides, Gulber, Fibar, Toxites, Arthemis, Ambrosia, Matriona,
Erba ragia, Bifuo, Biboz, Bugga, Buggela, Byfuess, Muchworz,
Schossmalten, Peypas, Pesmalten, Sunbentgurtel, Sand Johannes
gurtel, Pukeli, Himlker, Buck, Felon Herb, Cingulum, Sancti
Johannes.

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Mugwort abounds on hedgebanks and waysides in most parts of England. It may have derived its name from having been used to flavor drinks, especially beer before the introduction of hops. It has also been suggested that its "mug" is not the drinking vessel, but from "moughte" (a moth or maggot), because from the time of Dioscorides it has been used as a moth repellent. Mugwort has sometimes been used as an aromatic culinary herb, for example in stuffing for roast goose.

Borago officinalis Borage.
Beebread. Starflower.

Medieval names include Borase, Boratsche, Porrage, Wurmkrautt, Scharlachpluem, Scharley, Borrich.



Borago officinalis
Brunschwig, *Book of Distillation*, ca. 1530



The old verse "I, borage, bring courage" comes from the Latin saying, "Ego borago gaudia semper ago". In medicine the physicians debated whether its affects were cooling or heating. Dioscorides and Pliny claimed this was the Nepenthe of Homer which, when drunk steeped in wine, brought absolute forgetfulness. It has been recommended "to revive the hypochondriac and cheer the hard student". Francis Bacon claimed that it has "an excellent spirit to repress the fuliginous vapor or dusky melancholy". The flower sprays are still used in cool drinks and in salads. When cooked, the leaves lose their bristliness and the young ones make an especially good potherb. Peter Martyr mentioned it being planted on Isabella Island by the companions of Columbus.

Calendula officinalis Pot Marigold. (Not to be confused with the marigolds of American gardens, which are of the genus *Tagetes* native to South America.) Marybud. Gold Bloom.

Medieval names include Eliotropium, Sorolugium, Solsequium,

Water of wylde saffran.
Ca. c. 1530



Coccydium latyn.

"Wylde saffran. *Coccus ortulanus in latyn*" (= *Calendula officinalis* ?) Brunschwig, *Book of Distillation*, c. 1530



Calendula officinalis
Johnson's Gerard, 1633

Ancusa, Aureola, Anglica, Caput monachi, Arcola, Capparius, Sponsa solis, Verrucaria, Sunnenvirpila, Sonnenwervel, Ringula, Ringelo, Ringil, Engelwurze, Ringelblumen, Weinpluemen, Prosepluemen, Goltblume.



he name *Calendula* has been said to come from "Kalendae" either because it continues to bloom "through the months" or because it was thought to be a cure for menstrual disorders.

In *The Winter's Tale* (IV, iv, 103-106) Perdita's second bouquet (see *Rosmarinus* below for her first) informs us of both the habit and the medicinal properties of *Calendula*. "Here's flowers for you: Hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram, the marigold, that goes to bed wi' th' sun and with him rises, weeping. . ." All five of these herbs were designated as hot in the traditional European pharmacology, which endured into the 17th century. And the *Calendula's* manner of opening its flowers at sunrise and closing again at night earned it such names as "Sponsa solis" and "the husbandman's dial". This notable performance was even the subject of a Salernitan question, "What causes the *solsequium* to display her blossoms in the presence of the sun's fiery rays, and to slumber underneath them in the darkness of night?" Pliny, Isidore, Urso, and Alexander Neckam discuss it, too.

The petals of the *Calendula* can be used to color butter, biscuits, etc., and in general as an adulterant or substitute for saffron. It seems possible that this connection accounts for an otherwise anomalous figure found in Brunschwig's *Book of Distillation* (London, ca. 1530), shown here. This woodcut appears in chapter ccxcviii "Water of wylde saffran. *Crocus ortulanus* in latyn". H.J. Abrahams, the modern editor of this text has identified "wylde saffran" as *Crocus sativus* (the usual source of true saffron and an obvious equivalent of "*Crocus ortulanus*"). But a comparison of the figure with a later figure (Johnson-Gerard, 1633) and with the plant on display suggests that the conflict between this figure and its title as "*Crocus ortulanus*" should be resolved in favor of the figure. For this figure, if indeed it is *Calendula officinalis*, did present to local medicine gatherers a form of "wild saffron".

Chrysanthemum Parthenium (formerly *Pyrethrum Parthenium*)
Feverfew.

Medieval names include Febrifuga, Matricaria minor, Parthenium,
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Amarella, Matercale, Dentaria, Oculus consulis, Marella, Metra, Metere, Meidelbloume, Meter, Parthenion.



common wild flower and garden plant in England and a not uncommon garden plant in the United States. Its name is a corruption of "febrifuge". It has a long history as a folk remedy. Gerard claims it can be used against the ague both in drinks and bound on the wrists.

Datura Stramonium Thornapple. Jimsonweed.



hornapple, though described by Dioscorides under the name *Strychnon manikon*, seems to have been uncommon in Europe until it was introduced from central Asia during the Middle Ages. Perhaps due jointly to its rarity and its hallucinogenic properties, it is surrounded by mystery and confusion. Even as late as the 17th century a successful botanist like Fabio Colonna described a (non-existent) plant as having some of the features of *Atropa Belladonna*, or deadly nightshade, and others of *Datura Stramonium*.

Like many in the Solanaceae (or Nightshade family), *Datura Stramonium* contains powerful alkaloids used in the medicine and magic of numerous Old and New World cultures. (*Physalis alkakengi* of this family is also on display.) The account of Dioscorides (in a 17th century translation) is succinct. "The root being drank with wine the quantity of a dragma hath the power to effect not unpleasant fantasies. But two dragms being drank make one beside himself for three days and four being drank kill him." One peculiar feature of atropine, which *Datura stramonium* contains, is that it can be absorbed through intact skin. Michael Harner argued strongly that this property fits well with descriptions of the salves and ointments applied



Chrysanthemum Parthenium
Mattioli, 1554

to themselves by witches. Since the hallucinations induced by such chemicals, usually as dreams or visions during an externally deep sleep, are often of being carried or flying, Harner inferred that for European witches "the use of a staff or broom was undoubtedly more than a symbolic Freudian act, serving as



Datura Stramonium(?)
C. Acosta, *Tractado de las drogas y medicinas...*, 1578 (1583 ed.) (16)

an applicator for the atropine-containing plant to the sensitive vaginal membranes as well as providing the suggestion of riding on a steed, a typical illusion of the witches' ride to the Sabbat."

An early (and pre-psychedelic) American account of an incident at Jamestown--the name Jimson weed is supposedly derived from "Jamestown weed" --presents a less diabolic picture. "Some of the soldiers sent to Jamestown to quell the rebellion of Bacon, gathered the young sprouts of Stramonium and ate them as a potage, 'the effect of which was a very pleasant comedy, for they turned natural fools upon it for several days. One would blow up a feather in the air, another would dart straws at it with fury; another, stark

naked, was sitting up in a corner like a monkey, grinning and making maws at them; a fourth would fondly kiss and paw his companions, and smile in their faces with a countenance more antic than any in a Dutch droll. A thousand simple tricks they played, and after eleven days returned to themselves again, not remembering anything that had passed.'" (From Millspaugh, quoting Beverly's *History of Virginia*)

One might wonder if such experiences lie behind some recipes in the pseudo-Albertus *Marvels of the World* which promise, for example, "a perfuming by which every man shall seem to other(s) that be in the house in the form of elephants and great horses." This recipe, in fact, calls for "alcachengi", of the nightshade family, in itself probably not hallucinogenic. (The full recipe is quoted below under *Physalis alkakengi*.) Note that Dioscorides' *Strychnon manikon* and *Strychnon alikakabon* have been identified respectively as *Datura Stramonium* and *Physalis Alkakengi*.



Datura Stramonium
Johnson's Gerard, 1633

Dipsacus fullonum or *Dipsacus sylvestris* Teasel.

Medieval names include *Cardus*, *Cardones*, *Virga pastoris*, *Cardus niger*, *Cardo fullonum*, *Dipseus*, *Cameleonta niger*, *Cardus agrestis*, *Cameleonta alba*, *Cardus alba*, *Cardus domesticus*, *Labrum Veneris*, *Scardazzo*, *Cartendistel*, *Carte*, *Wolfszagel*, *Zeisela*, *Straler*, *Disteln*, *Karten*, *Wildkart*, *Wagentasch*, *Nadelpain*, *Vehedistel*, *Zamkarten*, *Wyssdististeln*, *Dipsakos*.



Although the teasel is today recognizable, if at all, only as a roadside weed usually mistaken for a thistle, its dried flower-heads have been used for centuries to raise the nap on woolen cloth. After weaving and fulling, the nap was fleeced and cut short with a shears. Artificial devices could hardly match the combined rigidity and fragility of the bracts of the dried teasel, which would break upon encountering a knot, instead of tearing the cloth. In addition to its importance in the wool-cloth industry, *Dipsacus* was regarded as having medicinal and magical virtues as well. Dioscorides described the making of a suppository: "But the root of this being soaked with wine and beaten, taking the thickness of a cerat [i.e. a hard ointment of oils, etc., mixed with wax], being put in, heals the chaps and fistulas in the seat...They say also that it is a cure of...hanging warts."

The more potent virtues described in the pseudo-Albertus *Book of Secrets* may in part derive from its alternate name, *Virga pastoris*, since in late Latin *virga* acquired the meaning of "phallus". In this book we read: "The third herb is named of the Chaldees *Lorumboror*, of the Greeks *Allamor*, of the Latins *Virga pastoris*, of Englishmen "Wild Teasel". Take this herb, and temper it with the juice of Mandrake, and give it to a Bitch, or to another beast, and it shall be great with a young one and shall bring forth the birth in [its] own kind; of the which young one, if the gum tooth be taken and dipped in meat or drink, every one that shall drink thereof shall begin anon battle."

Ficus Carica Edible Fig

Medieval names include *Ficus*, *Caricus*, *Ficus fatua*, *Ficus dura*, *Ficus sicca*, *Fige*, *Fichpoum*, *Feygenpawmb*, *Fygen*, *Sykon*.

(18)

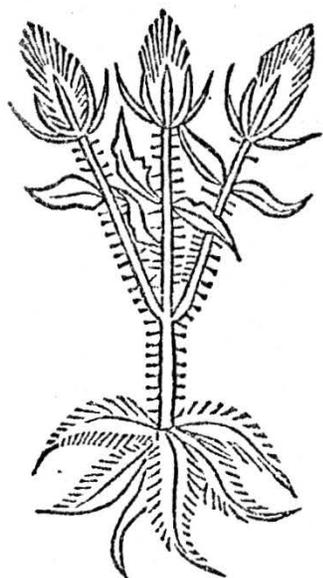
Dipsacus sylvestris

A 20th-century copy of the illustration in the early 6th-century manuscript of Dioscorides, the *Codex Aniciae Juliana*, now in Vienna,



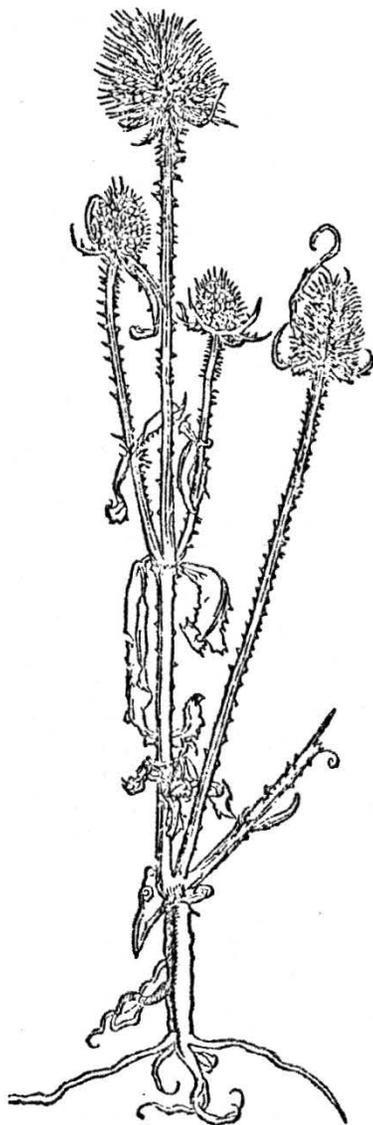


Brunschwig, ca. 1530



Latin Herbarius, 1484

(20)



(on opposite page)
Brunfels, 1530-1536

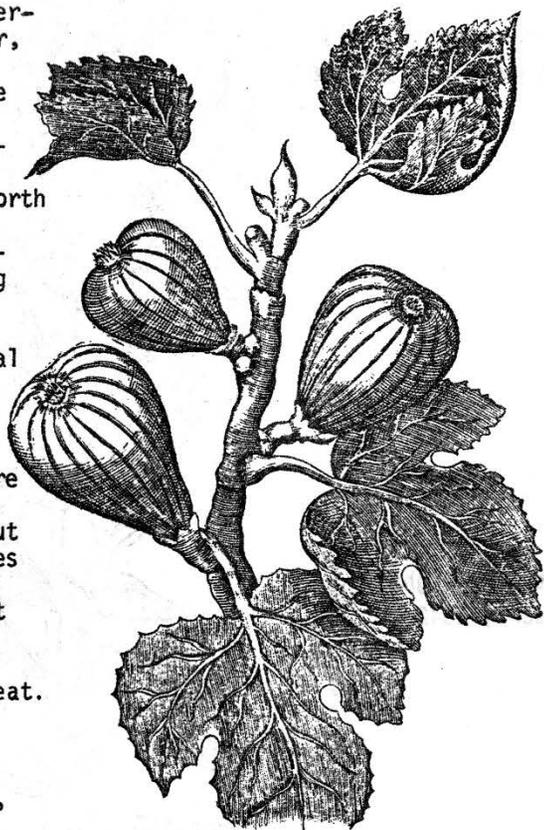
(to the right)
Fuchs, 1542



(21)

Findigenous to Persia, Asia Minor, and Syria, the common fig-tree is now wild in most of the Mediterranean countries and grows in the United States as far north as Pennsylvania. The mythology and the culinary history of the fig are too extensive to even suggest here. As to some of its medicinal attributes, part of Dioscorides' long account may suffice.

"Ripe figs being new are bad for the stomach, loosening the belly, but the looseness that comes of them is easily stopped. They call out . . . the sweat, they quench the thirst and are extinguishers of heat. But the dry ones are nourishing, warming, more causing thirst, and good for the belly, but they are unprofitable for the fluxes of the stomach and of the belly, but good for the throat and the artery and the bladder, and the kidneys, and for such as are ill-colored by a long sickness. . . . The raw ones being beaten small and taken with moist mustard and put into the ears so cure the noise and ringing of them. The milky juice of the wild and sative fig is a coagulator of milk, like as rennet



Ficus Carica
Emanuel Sweerts, *Florilegium*, 1612

(22)

is. . . . It expells the menses."

Majorana hortensis (formerly *Origanum majorana*) Sweet Marjoram. Annual Marjoram.

Medieval names include Amaracus, Sampsucus, Maiorana, Maggiarana, Amaraco, Maioran, Meigeron, Sampsuchon, Amaracon, Maryolayn.

Modern botanists have given Marjoram its own genus distinct from *Origanum*, but these related plants have shared much history as well as the same names. Dioscorides advises a decoction of it for dropsy, a mixture of the dry leaves with honey applied in a pessary to induce menstruation, and an ointment made with salt and vinegar for scorpion bites.

In folklore it seems often linked with Marigold (See for example a passage from *The Winter's Tale* under *Calendula*, above.) as in this charm to dream of a future lover. A young woman is to recite three times "St. Luke, St. Luke, be kind to me; in dreams let me my true love see" while anointing herself with the following preparation. "On St. Luke's Day take marigold flowers, a spring of marjoram, thyme, and a little wormwood; dry them before a fire, rub them to powder, and simmer it over a slow fire, adding a small quantity of virgin honey and vinegar." (Grieve)

Marrubium vulgare Horehound. Hoarhound.

Medieval names include Marubium (album), Prassium, Alestine, Nastrofon, Urtica matura, Balachia, Felofedia, Herba Serapionis, Philoflores, Andron, Andorn, Gotisvergeszene, Apfelkraut, Marobel, Sigmynzen, Eselorn, Maril, Todnessel, Gotuerger, Rotsnabel.



Majorana hortensis
Brunschwig, ca. 1530

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Marrubium vulgare
Johnson's Gerard, 1633

Marrubium, a name used by Pliny, is said to come from the Hebrew *marrob*, a bitter juice. To make horehound candy, a popular domestic medicine, the fresh plants are boiled down until the juice is extracted and then sugar is added with further boiling down until it candies. Walafrid's recommendation:

"... a precious herb, though biting
And sharp on the tongue where it tastes so unlike
Its scent: for whereas the scent is sweet, the taste
Is not sweet at all. Yet taken in a draught,
For all its nastiness it assuages pain
In the chest, and most when drunk still warm from the fire
And ladled out quickly to close the meal. If ever
A vicious stepmother mixes in your drink
Subtle poisons, or makes a treacherous dish
Of lethal aconite for you, don't waste a moment--"

Take a dose of wholesome horehound; that
Will counteract the danger you suspect."

Melissa officinalis Balm, Lemon Balm, Garden Balm, Common Balm.
Medieval names include Barochus, *Melissa pilosa*, *Apiastrum*, *Citraria*, *Cedronella*, *Citrago*, *Melisophilos*, *Pigmentaria*, *Marmacora*,

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Turego, *Melissa alia* *ortulana*, *Melissa alia silvestris*, *Herba muscata*, *Cetronella*, *Narazanta*, *Meladella*, *Mellisserno*, *Allegra cuore*, *Senerta*, *Molucca*, *Metere*, *Honigkrawt*, *Wanzenkraut*, *Muterkraut*, *Melise*, *Hertzkraut*, *Honigbluen*, *Malliss*, *Melissophylon*, *Apiatrum*.

Balm, its flowers yielding an abundance of honey, has gone under many names related to *mel* (honey) and *melissa* (bee); its lemon-like fragrance is the origin of several other designations. Since Theocritus *Melissa* has been mentioned constantly by Greek and Latin poets and herbalists. Dioscorides recommended the leaves soaked in wine to be drunk and also to be applied directly for scorpion bites and dog bites. He suggested too that balm-water as a bath would induce menstruation, as a mouthwash would help tooth-aches, and as an enema would help (!) the dysenterical.

Nearly three pages in the English translation of Brunswig's *Book of Distillation* (ca. 1530) are devoted to Balm. This extract will perhaps illustrate the sort of self-help information provided to the rapidly increasing reading public of Tudor



Melissa officinalis
Dioscorides, Codex Aniciae Julianae

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England. (It seems possible that as much as forty percent of the populace could read at this time.)

"Water of moderworte, Citraria vel Melissa in latyn. The best parte and tyme of theyr dystyllacyon is all the herbe chopped, brenned, and dystylled, in the end of Maye. [Virtually every prescription in the entire book recommends May!]

"A. The same water put in wyne that becometh trouble and unclere, after the quantyte of the vessell causeth it to come agayn in his fyrst myght and condycyon.

"B. The herbe of moderworte a lytell stamped and steped all nyght in wyne and after that dystylled. Of the same water dronke a spone full fastynge causeth in a man to have sharpe wytte, good understandynge, and good memory and remembraunce, for to kepe and remembre every thyng that is possyble for a man to remembre.

"C. The same water is good for them whose stomake is greved with colde and unclenes.

"D. The same water dronke an ounce and a halfe causeth them to be mery and refresht agayn which were afore sore greved with anger, it maketh also softe and good myndes and an amyable color.

"E. The same water preserveth a man from gray heres, twyce dronke of the same water in a day, at each tyme an ounce and the heres wet with the same water, and let drye agayn by hym selfe. . . .

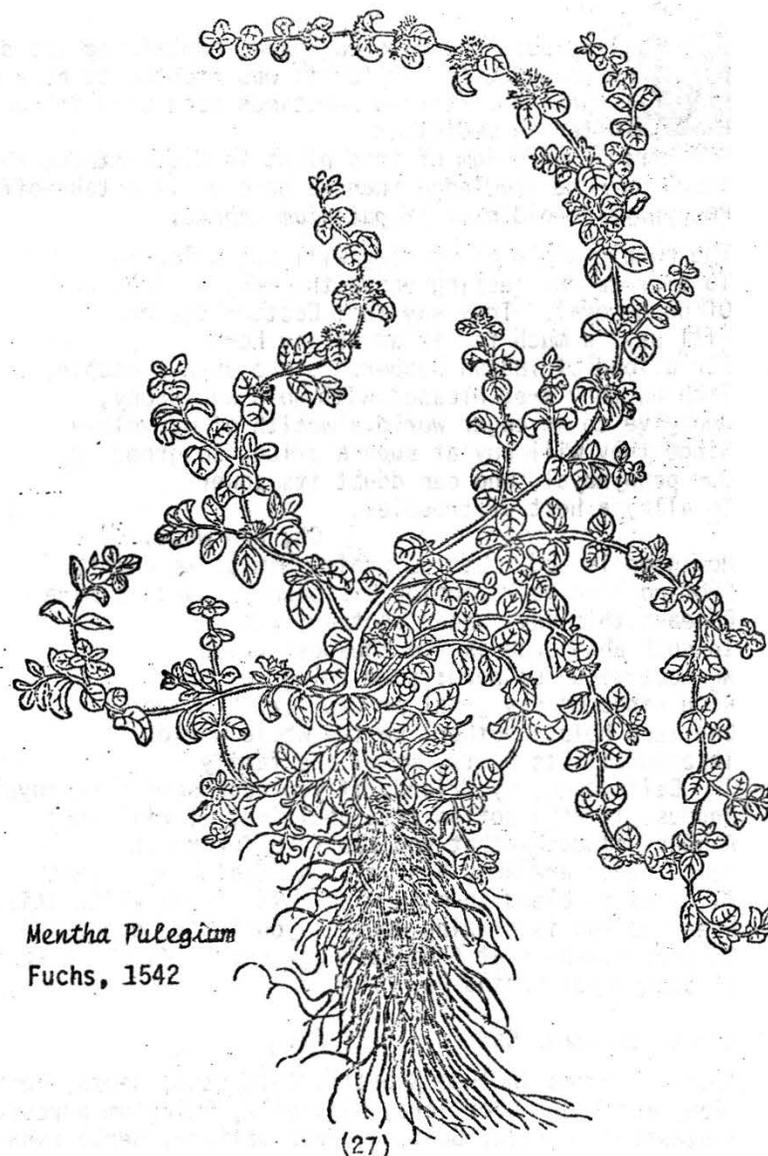
"I. The tethe and gomme often washed with the same withdrueth the stenche of the evyll brethe and the evyll tethe."

These prescriptions using Balm continue through Z and then run from AA to OO.

Mentha Pulegium Pennyroyal. True or European Pennyroyal.

Medieval names include Poleya, Pulegium, Gliganum, Glutemum, Clitonium, Juliana, Medianus, Pulegium regale sive domesticum, Semen pulei, Bubula, Cunile, Polegiola, Clicon, Polego, Polei, Polai, Glechon, Poleium.

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Mentha Pulegium

Fuchs, 1542

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Dliny used the name *pulegium*, explaining its derivation from *pulex* (flea) for it was reputed to be a flea-repellent. It has sometimes been used in cooking, more often in medicine.

Walahfrid's encomium of this plant in his *Hortulus* seems to be based on more knowledge than we have or is a take-off from Pennyroyal's old name of *pulegium regale*:

The humble scale of my song will not allow me
 To embrace in fleeting verse the many virtues
 Of pennyroyal. They say that Eastern doctors
 Will pay as much for it as we pay here
 For a load of Indian pepper. Since such a people,
 Rich as they are, blessed with gold and ebony,
 Who give to an eager world a wealth of marvels--
 Since they will buy at such a price, so greedily,
 Our pennyroyal, who can doubt its power
 To allay a host of troubles.

Oh, how wise,
 How good is God! Let us praise Him as we ought.
 From no land He withholds His bounty; what is rare
 Beneath this sky, under another lies
 In such abundance as the cheapest trash
 We have among us here: some things we scorn
 Rich kingdoms pay great prices for. And so
 One land helps another; so the whole world,
 Through all its parts, makes one family.

Believe me, my friend, if you cook some pennyroyal
 And use it as a potion or a poultice, it will cure
 A heavy stomach--that you can take for truth,
 Some things are only hearsay, but custom and usage
 Allow us to blend them in with lofty truth--like this:
 When the sun is blazing down on you in the open,
 To prevent the heat from harming your head, put a sprig
 Of pennyroyal behind your ear.

Nepeta cataria Catnip. Catmint.

Medieval names include Nebetta, Calmentum, Nepta, Mentha alba, Menta non odorifera, Nepitella, Pulegium agreste, Mentastrum agreste, Gattara, Erba gattara, Herba sasa gattaria,

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Nepitastra, Wizminza, Katzenkraut, Siminza, Stincminte, Chatzenmyntzen, Futloch, Nebt, Steinmintz.



Although *Mentha pulegium* and *Nepeta cataria* do not much resemble each other, some confusion over these plants or similar plants under these names goes back into Antiquity. Of "calamint" Dioscorides says "the other wort is like Pulegium, yet greater, whence some have called it Pulegium agreste, because also it is like it in smell; this the Romans call Nepeta." And the pseudo-Albert *Book of Secrets* reports: "The sixth herb is named of the Chaldees *Bieith*, of the Greeks *Retus*, of the Latins *Nepeta*, of Englishmen Calamint, otherwise Pennyroyal. Take this herb and mix it with the stone found in the nest of the bird called Lapwing, or Black Plover, and rub the belly of any beast, and it shall be with birth, and it shall have a young one, very black in [its] own kind. And if it be put to their nostrils, they shall fall to the ground anon as dead, but a little space after they shall be healed."

The fertile powers of catnip were of such repute as to become a recurring topic in the *questiones* literature. Brian Lawn argues that the inquiry "Why does catmint fertilize the cat, and wind the mare?" originated at Salerno. Cornelius Agrippa may have drawn on that source for his statement in *De occulta philosophia*: "Sic feles sive catus gaudet nepeta herba, ad cuius affricationem concipere traditur et defectum masculi supplere."

Walahfrid, again:

Among the herbs my garden is always renewing
 The sprigs of catmint grow as brisk as any.

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Nepeta cataria
 Albertus Magnus,
 1581

Its leaves are like the nettle's, but the scent it casts
 So lavishly around its tall head is passing sweet,
 It has long been known as a cure for many ailments
 And ranks high among herbs. Mixed with oil of roses,
 The juice makes an ointment which, they say, can clear
 The hurt of a wound and the unsightly marks of a scar,
 Restoring the bloom of the skin and renewing the hair
 Which the blood and pus of the gaping sore had eaten away.

Ocimum Basilicum Basil,
 Sweet Basil.

Medieval names include Basilia,
 Basilica, Ozimum, Gariofilatum,
 Basilicon, Amaratus, Cocus,
 Wilder senif, Girgila, Basilien,
 Basilige, Okimon, Basilikon.

Basil probably needs little introduction. It has long been a popular flavoring herb, especially cooked with tomatoes and in the famous Genoan *pesto*. Most basilis (there are over fifty species in warmer climates) are native to India. Pliny said it was considered an aphrodisiac and was given to horses and asses at the mating season. Need more be said?



Ocimum Basilicum
 Brunschwig, ca. 1530

Origanum vulgare Wild Marjoram. Oregano, Organy.

Medieval names include Origanum, Origeron, Gelena, Pulegium maior, Gallicum, Glitonum, Cunela bubula, Menta grossa, Menta pelosa, Majorana grossa, Majorana pelosa, Doste, Dosten, Zirminza, Wolgemut, Beymdntz, Wolmuet, Tost, Rotkost, Agrio organon, Panakes herecleion, Conila.

Wild Marjoram was preferred in medicine, whereas Sweet Marjoram (*Majorana hortensis*, formerly *Origanum majorana*) and Pot Marjoram (*Origanum Onites*) excel in cookery. The name is supposedly derived from Greek *oros* (mountain) and *ganos* (joy) for the way the plants decorate the hillsides. Today some of the spice called oregano, especially the more pungent type used in Mexican food and chili powder, comes from a different plant, *Lippia graveolens*.



Origanum vulgare
 Brunschwig, ca. 1530

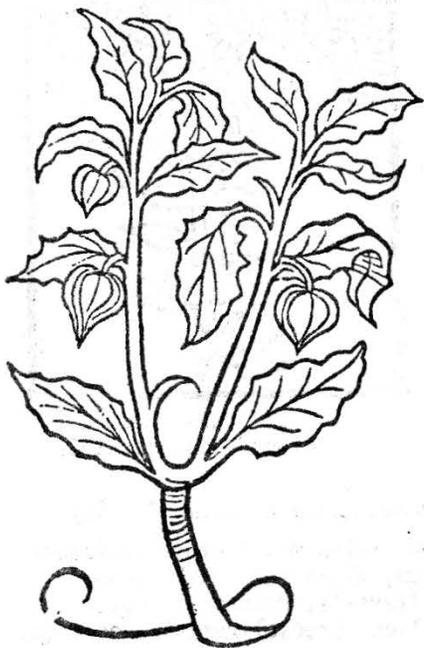
Petroselinum crispum Parsley

Medieval names include Petroselinum, Alixanter, Oxillatrum, Pfifersell, Petersill, Peter-silien, Oreoselinum, Petrocilium.

Pioscorides distinguished two "parsleys"--marsh *selinon* (our celery) and mountain *selinon* (i.e. *oreoselinon*, which name developed into *petroselinon* or rock parsley). In Greece and Rome it was woven into festive garlands. Albertus Magnus described both celery and parsley and noted that parsley was more a medicine than a food. Brunschwig claimed that distilled parsley water was good against the stone and that it cleaned the bladder and the



Petroselinum crispum
 Mattioli, 1579



Physalis Alkekengi
Ortus sanitatis, 1491

tyer and aided digestion of meats. He also claimed that it would work as a depillatory.

Physalis Alkekengi Winter Cherry, Chinese-lantern Plant, Ground Cherry.

Medieval names include Alchikingi, Alkekengi, Herba salutaris, Coralli, Concordia, Solatro Alicacabo, Erba cocca, Boberella, Sluthber, Pfaffenteschel, Iudenteschel, Iudencherss, Boberellen, Saltriana, Schlutte, Strychnos halikakabos, Physalis.

In *The Book of the Marvels of the World*, usually appended to *The Book of Secrets of Albertus Magnus of the Virtues of Herbs, Stones, and Certain Beasts*, is found this 13th-century recipe for a "marvel": "A perfuming by which every man shall seem to other[s] that be in the

house in the form of elephants and great horses, Take a spice which is called *Alcachengi* and bray it, mix it with a little fat of a dolphin fish, and make thereof grains, as be of *Pomecitron*. After, perfume some of them upon a fire of cow's dung, which is milked. And let not a place be in the house from which smoke may come forth, but the gate [of the oven], and let the fire be under the earth within; all which be in the lodging shall seem as they were great men in the shape of horses and elephants, and it is a very marvelous thing." An interpretation of this of this recipe is discussed above under *Datura*.

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Rosmarinus officinalis Rosemary, Compass-weed, Compass Plant. Medieval names include Rosmarinum, Anthos, Libanotis, Rosmarin, Rosenmarin, Incensier.

This evergreen shrub is the common plant on the chalk hills of the south of France and near the seacoast. Its name is said to mean "sea dew." The very fragrant leaves, when lightly rubbed, give off an odor described as "nutmeg, pine needles, and heliotrope all combined." They taste bitter, resinous, camphorous, warm, and distinctive.

In later times the "marine" in the name became associated instead with Mary, the mother of Jesus. The legend arose that when she once washed her sky-blue cloak, she spread it over a rosemary bush to dry and the flowers of this plant were henceforth blue.

Rosemary was an emblem of remembrance and fidelity. In *The Winter's Tale* (IV, iv, 73-76), Perdita's first bouquet is offered with an explanation, "For you, there's rosemary, and rue; these keep seeming and savour all the winter long: grace and remembrance be to you both. . . ." In *Hamlet*, (IV, v, 75) Ophelia, however, separates the two herbs, offering one to her brother, "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance--pray you, love, remember," and the other to Queen Gertrude, "There's rue for you, and here's some for me, we may call it herb of grace o' Sundays. O, you must wear your rue with a difference." Take a deep whiff of the rue plant on display and compare that with a gift of a sprig of rosemary.



Rosmarinus officinalis
Brunschwig, ca. 1530

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Rumex Acetosella Sheep Sorrel, Sour Grass. Common or Field Sorrel.

Medieval names include Acetula, Accidula, Aizon, Herba acetosa, Oxitropa, Ossalida minore, Suregraz, Ampher, Sauramph, Klein ampheren, Sauerampher, Surich, Suring, Oxalis, Anaxyris, Lapathon.

In the Middle Ages this plant was not always distinguished from *Rumex Acetosa*, Garden Sorrel, which was then known under these names; Paratella, Lapathum, Lapatium, Arginonis, Acetosa, Accidula, Oxigalla, Furella, Arsdula, Erba brusca, Amphora, Ampharo, Pletaha, Bletecha, Grossampheren, Ampffer, Rampheier, Saurampffer, Scharffletich, Lapathon, Oxylapathon.



oxalic acid in the leaves of this plant gives it the sour taste that along with its halbard-shaped leaves is its prime characteristic. The whole herb is employed medicinally in the fresh state. It is also used in salads and sorrel soup, Gerard reported of its value as follows: "Sorrel doth undoubtedly coole and mightily dry; but because it is soure it likewise cutteth tough humours. . . . The leaves are with good success added to decoctions which are used in Agues."

Ruta graveolens Rue. Common Rue. Herb-of-Grace.

Medieval names include Ruta, Piganon, Byfasa, Rude, (Wein)rautten, Weinkrautt, Peganon, Ruta ortensis.



ne of the most bitter herbs, Rue comes from southern Europe, is mentioned in the Bible, and abounds in lore and legends. Among the Greeks and Romans it was thought that if rue were stolen from a neighbor's garden it would thrive better than if raised at home. Pliny reported that

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Rumex Acetosella
Johnson's Gerard, 1633

rue inhibits generation (*Natural History*, XX, 13, 51) and this "fact" recurs as the basis of one of the Salernitan questions, being treated by Constantinus, Urso, and Alexander Neckam.

Walahfrid, in his *Hortulus*, observes:

"Touch it but gently and it yields a heavy fragrance. Many a healing power it has-- Especially, they say, to combat hidden toxin and to expel from the bowels the invading forces of noxious poison."

See also two quotations from *Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale*, above, under *Rosmarinus*.

Salvia officinalis Sage.

Medieval names include Salyia domestica, Lilifragus, Elbium, Elifagus, Lingua humana, Livissaco, Selba, Saluan, Saluay, Salveye, Elelispakon.



s a seasoning, sage is used especially in stuffings and sausages. Sage tea has been a favorite household remedy for colds and sore throats. The leaves can be smoked. Sage (tansy and black walnut leaves too) is said to keep ants away. In a Renaissance version of the medieval *Regimen sanitatis Salerni* we find: "In Latin *Salvia* takes the name of safety, In English Sage is rather wise than crafty: Sith then the name betokens wise and saving, We count it nature's friend, and worth the having." (*The English Doctor*, 1609)



Ruta graveolens
Hortus sanitatis, 1492

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The *Book of Secrets* (13th century) reports: "The twelfth herb is named of the Chaldees *Colorio*, or *Coloricon*, of the Greeks *Clamor*, of the Latins commonly *Salvia*, of Englishmen *Sage*. This herb, being putrefied under dung of cattle in a glass vessel, bringeth forth a certain worm, or bird . . . with whose blood, if any man be touched on the breast, he shall lose his sense and feeling the space of fifteen days and more. And if the aforesaid serpent be burned and the ashes of it put in the fire, anon shall there be a rainbow with an horrible thunder. And if the aforesaid ashes be put in a lamp and be kindled, it shall appear that all the house is full of serpents, and this hath been proved of men of late time."



Salvia officinalis
Naturalia Alberti Magni, 1548

(at the right)
Saponaria officinalis
Johnson's Gerard, 1633



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Saponaria officinalis Soapwort. Bouncing Bet. Latherwort. Fuller's Herb.

Medieval names include Borit, Herba fullonis, Sapanaria, Herba Philippi, Sandex, Electra, Ostrutium, Astricium, Centauria minore, Aalcrout, Weschwurz, Wertwurz, Seyfkraut, Wech, Krutwurz, Struthion, Radix lanaria, Herba lanaria.



As the leaves and root contain saponin a cleansing lather can be produced by crushing them in water. Claims are made that this is still the best soap for cleaning old tapestries and brocades. Dioscorides claimed that, being inserted, Soapwort would induce menstruation and act as an abortifacient. It has also been recommended for venereal diseases and for clearing the eyes.

Satureja hortensis Summer Savory, Calamint.

Medieval names include Satureia, Timbria, Puleium maius, Psillum, Timola, Saturegia, Serpillus domesticus vel maior, Tymbra, Cunila, Cuenela, Chonela, Cunela, Wilder ysopp, Gärtkol, Gartenküle, Sedenness, Garthagen, Ioseple, Thymos, Epithymis, Thyrsion.



One of the important sweet culinary herbs, Savory is used fresh or dried, often with marjoram or thyme. Its German name *Bohnenkraut* reminds us that it is often cooked with beans. There are two kinds: Summer Savory, an annual grown from seed, and Winter Savory



Satureja hortensis
Johnson's Gerard, 1633

(*Satureja montana*), a perennial. Both are mentioned in a list by John Josselyn, one of the early settlers in America, of the plants introduced to remind English colonists of their gardens at home. In medicine, it is usually added primarily for its aromatic and warming properties. Savory is joined with Marigold, Lavender, Mints, and Marjoram in Perdita's speech in *The Winter's Tale* quoted above under *Calendula*.



Symphytum officinale
Brunschwig, ca. 1530

Symphytum officinale Comfrey,
Boneset.

Medieval names include *Consolida*, *Buglossa*, *Consolida maior*, *Simphitum*, *Anagoricum*, *Anagulicum*, *Pithemum*, *Alo*, *Anealco*, *Soda*, *Svarzwurze*, *Gahheila*, *Beinwelle*, *Scharwurz*, *Wilder alant*, *die gross Wallwurz*, *Solidago*, *Yalluc*.

As a remedy, the roots of Comfrey are used primarily for the abundant mucilage they contain, even more than Marshmallow. It has been used like Marshmallow for intestinal troubles. Grieve reports that the old reputation of Comfrey "as a vulnerary has been considered due partly to the fact

of its reducing the swollen parts in the immediate neighborhood of fractures, causing union to take place with greater facility."

Tanacetum vulgare Tansy. Golden Buttons. Cow Bitters.

Medieval names include *Tanacetum*, *Matricaria maior*, *Matricaria media*, *Sanacum*, *Arthemisia domestica*, *Arbor sancte Marie*, *Athanasia*, *Apium rusticum*, *Reinefano*, *Rainevane*, *Refano*, *Rival*, *Rayfan*, *Rainval*, *Wurmkraut*, *Purnepff*, *Würmfar*.

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The name *tanacetum* is of uncertain origin. Two of the plant's other names, *ambrosia* and *athanasia*, both indicate immortality. Dodoens, in the 16th century, speculated that the connection might be either that the tansy lasts so long in flower (and in dried form, we might add) or because it is used for preserving dead bodies from corruption. It is also reputed to keep flies away and to act as an abortifacient and a vermifuge. Tansy tea as well as cakes and omelettes have been highly regarded at times.

This herb, too, is found in Walahfrid's little garden:

"Not far away grows tansy,
commonly called
Ambrosia. Famous it certainly is, but whether
This is that same ambrosia so often mentioned
In ancient writings many would doubt. However,
The doctors use it for the powers it has.
A draught of it clears away as much blood inside
As the size of the dose you take of this nourishing brew."

Thymus Serpyllum Wild Thyme.
Mother-of-Thyme.

Medieval names include *Serpillum*, *Cenebubula*, *Crassinia*, *Pulegium regale*, *Colindrium*, *Gigosis*, *Pulegius*, *Tymolea*, *Sesebra*, *Serpiglio*, *Feltconele*, *Wild polai*, *Veitquenela*, *Quenula*, *Veitconele*, *Quendel*, *Weldysop*, *Chadel*, *Hünerkul*, *Polion*, *Serpyllum*.

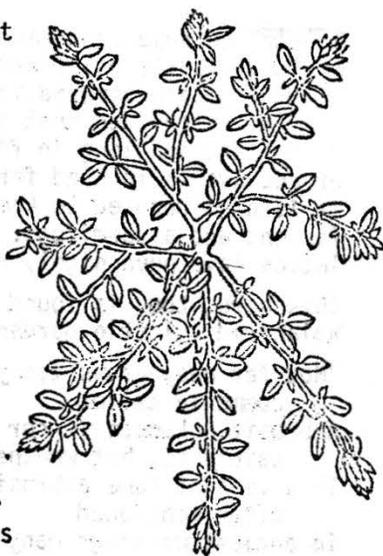


Tanacetum vulgare
Johnson's Gerard, 1633



Although we learn little about thyme from Iago (*Othello*, I, iii), his garden speech shall be quoted nonetheless. "Virtue? A fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus, or thus; our bodies are gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners, so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce; set hyssop, and weed up thyme; supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many; either to have it sterile with idleness, or manured with industry, why, the power, and corrigible authority of this, lies in our wills. If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to more preposterous conclusions; but we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts; whereof I take this, that you call love, to be a sect or scion."

Rather than reflect too long on such sobering words, it would perhaps be best to crush a few leaves of thyme to enjoy the fragrance and try to envision with Oberon (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* II, i, 250) the "bank where the wild thyme blows, where oxslips and the nodding violet grows . . . [where] sleeps Titania, sometime of the night, lull'd in these flowers, with dances and delight."



Thymus Serpyllum
German Herbarius, 1485

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Physician-astronomer Nicholas Copernicus, ca. 1500