With the holidays approaching it's time for me to take a break. There will not be a newsletter for January. I'll be back in February. Hope everyone has an opportunity to spend time with family and friends.

Nora Graf, editor

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**Events & Activities**

Master Gardener Association Meeting, January 16, in Prescott. You will receive a letter with information about location. See you there!

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**Herb Vinegars**

Are you looking for a nice personal gift this holiday season—something special for those people who already “have everything?” Since warm weather has prolonged the growing season, do you have some herbs still doing well? Put all that together and make some homemade herb vinegars. Herb vinegars can be an elegant, useful gift to give and they are simple to make.

You can use distilled white vinegar, wine, balsamic or rice vinegar to create a perfect vinegar! Find a large plastic or glass container with lid. Do not use a metal container, as the vinegar will eat the metal and ruin the vinegar.

Clean the herbs thoroughly!! The wash water should be clean enough for you to feel comfortable drinking. Let herbs dry; water in the vinegar will cause cloudiness. Cut, chop, or dice your herbs (or fruits like raspberries or strawberries can be used also.) Use peppers or garlic cloves for a more pungent flavor. Place in container. For fast results, heat the vinegar until boiling and then pour over herbs or fruit. Seal and let stand in a dark, warm place at least two weeks and up to four. Strain out the herbs and pour into clean, dry bottles and add some sprigs of the herb for decoration. Seal with a cork or plastic cap. If you find the flavor too strong, dilute with plain vinegar before the final bottling. You can also dilute with wine to create a wine vinegar. These fresh vinegars can be stored for up to three months.
Watkins Lemon Herb Vinegar

Lemon peel, thyme, basil, oregano and rosemary or lemon thyme, lemon basil, lemon grass or lemon balm. For a lemon mint variation use the peel from one lemon and 1/4 cup fresh basil in 2 cups white vinegar.

Spicy Oregano-Lemon Vinegar

1 lemon quartered
1/4 white mustard seeds
1 teas. peppercorns
3 whole cloves
1/2 c. fresh oregano, crushed
2 c. white vinegar

5- Herb Vinegar

1/2 c. chopped fresh rosemary
1/4 c. chopped chive blossoms
1/2 c. fresh thyme
1/4 c. chopped fresh oregano
1 sprig fresh parsley, chopped
4 shallots, thinly sliced
12 peppercorns
3 1/4 c. white wine vinegar

For even more unusual vinegars, try caraway seeds, chive blossoms, a floral vinegar (carnations, violets, elderberries, roses or lavender,) mint and nasturtiums.

Garden Gifts

Still looking for the perfect gift for a gardening friend or family member? Does the idea of a gift certificate from a local nursery seem a little impersonal to you? Well, there are a number of quick and easy things to do that add a personal touch to your gift giving.

Create a chili wreath. This time of year it is easy to find chilis (even ready made chili wreaths.) These are great to send to innocent relatives back East, especially if you use some of the more fiery varieties.

Chili Wreath

String dried chiles by piercing the chili just beneath the stem, using a needle and strong thread. Make into a circle to fit a twig or straw
wreath you can find in any craft store. The smaller the wreath the fewer chiles you will need. String a second ring of chilies to fit the wreath. Stack circles on wreath base and secure with florist pins and raffia. Use different colors and varieties of chili and sprigs of dried herbs to add accent or even use small glass ornaments or beads. Rosemary makes a nice accent, in part because it's very sturdy and will dry well.

**Cornhusk Wreath**

Soak 2 oz. of cornhusks (you can find them in grocery stores and craft stores) in hot water to soften. Separate them and wrap a 9 1/2 inch foam or straw wreath base with some husks, fasten with florist pins. Attach flatten husks with pointed ends out, to back and front of base. On top of wreath, alternate large dried anaheim and pasilla chiles, overlapping slightly, stems facing in. Pin through the pods to the base.

**Devil Claw Wreath**

from Martie Maierhauser in Native Seed/Search newsletter, “The Seedhead News” (This wreath is for the brave at heart, ed.)

Insert the stem of one claw into the body of the next, making sure they fit snugly (you may have to trim the stem to accomplish this); then put hot glue on the stem and glue them together. As you keep adding claws, they will curve into a wreath shape. There will be a point when the wreath itself will show you that it's time to insert the last claw—usually about claw number 13 or 14. The wreaths are interesting just this way or they can be decorated quite attractively with chilies, berries, dried flowers, raffia or ribbons, miniature bird figures, and the like.

Be prepared for punctured fingers any time you work with devil's claw.

**Living Wreath**

This wreath is a bit more time-consuming and expensive but it is the gift that keeps on giving. It will take at least two hours to put together and cost will depend on the plants you purchase.

**You will need to purchase**

For a strawberry wreath, you will need approximately 28 plants for a 14 inch frame and 36 plants for an 18 inch wreath. Turn wreath periodically, so the bottom plants aren't wet all the time. Use a dilute complete fertilizer every time you water.
Other choices for plants—a mixed selection of lettuces or a variety of herbs. With herbs, put the mint at the bottom as they like the extra moisture.

Sphagnum moss
Controlled-release fertilizer
Water absorbing polymers (optional—I'm not convinced these are very useful)
potting soil, 1 cu. foot
1-14 or 18 inch living wreath frame or three floral box-wire frames of the same size (check at craft stores or florist shop.)
80 to 95 feet of #24 copper wire—you will need more if you are making your own frame
4 skewers and four corks (for candle holders)
Seedlings

You will also need
bucket
rubber gloves

hours on a screen or nursery tray, covering with plastic to prevent drying.

Cover a work table with plastic. Mix fertilizers and polymers into the potting soil; set aside.

Place the wet moss in the center of the work area with the greener (top) side down. Spread the moss out to form a round mat about 2 1/2 times the diameter of the frame and 1 1/2 inches deep. Try to keep it in one piece. Set aside any extra moss.

Place the frame upside down in the middle of the circle of moss. (If you are making your own

wire cutters
chopsticks or long tweezers
30 gal trash bags

Soak the moss in a bucket of water. It needs to be thoroughly wet. It can irritate the skin so if you are sensitive, use rubber gloves when working with the moss. Let the moss drain for several
frame from the three box wire frames, fasten two together with wire to form a tube.) Now is also the time to attach two loops if you plan on hanging the wreath. The loops should be opposite one another so you can rotate the wreath. If you are going to have a tabletop wreath, mark the places you want candle holders with the skewers.

Gently scoop potting soil mix on top of moss and firm it down. Lift the outside edges of the moss over the frame toward the center of the wreath. Start with a side flap, then pull over the opposite side, top and bottom flaps.

Make a hole in the center of the moss; lift the inside edges of the moss over the soil and frame without stretching it. Patch exposed areas with extra moss.

Leave a 6-8 inch tail of wire at wreath top, wrap the moss-covered frame tightly with a continuous length of wire at 3/4 inch intervals. It may help if you have someone hold the moss in place while you wrap. Patch thin places as you go along. Go twice around and then, using the tail you left behind, twist the two ends together and curl ends into moss.

Turn right side up. If your frame has built-in candle holders, replace the skewers with corks. Using tweezers or chopsticks, make a hole through the moss into the soil. Start planting. Remove the plant from its container and remove the soil or gently swish in bucket of water to remove soil. Gently tuck roots into hole you’ve created, firmly pressing in with moss. Work around the inside edge first, then move across the top and to the outside edge, covering the entire wreath with plants.

Water well and set in bright indirect light for several days. Once the plants have recovered, you can hang the wreath. Use the third floral frame to keep the wreath from laying on the wall or door.

Display in full sun. Keep soil moist but not soggy. Soak the wreath on the top of a clean trash can lid filled with water, letting it sit for 10 to 20 minutes or until thoroughly moist.

Cut off plants as needed, leaving roots in place. Replace plants as necessary.
Angelica archangelica

Big, green and easy to grow describes angelica. Not one of the more common herbs, but an interesting addition to a shady location in your garden.

Angelica is thought to have originated in Syria but is now found throughout Europe and the Americas. Its history is filled with glowing reports of its virtues. Its name, according to one story, comes from an angel that in a dream revealed it would cure the plague. A variation on that story is the archangel Michael is supposed to have told monks to chew the roots of angelica to protect them from the plague. Another story of its name comes from the idea that it blooms on the feast day of Michael the Archangel, May 8 (in the old Julian calendar.) During the Renaissance it was referred to as the ‘root of the Holy Ghost’ because it was thought that it could cure any malady and offer protection against witches, spells and evil spirits, also.

Today the plant is used as a stimulant, diaphoretic, stomach aid and expectorant. The active ingredients are known to have antiseptic and fungicidal properties. Laplanders use it to pack fish in occasionally. It is especially touted as a remedy for stomach and intestinal discomfort but can be used to combat typhus. It is not recommended for topical applications or eye conditions because it can cause serious reactions, including photosensitivity. One concern with angelica is that there seems to be disagreement over its benefits and safety. One source listed it as a possible carcinogen, although the U.S. Food and Drug Administration considers it safe for food use. While we are frequently reading about “natural” products being safer than manufactured ones, this may be a case of “just because it’s natural, doesn’t mean it’s safe.” Talk to your physician before taking any herb remedies, especially if you are already taking other medications.

Some people are more aware of its uses in confections and in the distillation of flavored liquors such as Chartreuse and Benedictine, even in perfumes and jams. A bit of the root added to rhubarb reduces tartness.

The plant is easily cultivated in the garden but in our zones it would probably do better in the shade or with at least afternoon shade. While you can propagate the plant by root divisions, it would be unlikely to find someone who actually grows it around here. Fortunately, it can be started from seeds easily. Plant fresh seed (the seed deteriorates quickly) in the fall—August through September—and it should be ready to harvest stems in the spring. I have to admit I planted mine before I actually did any research and I planted in the spring. Angelica needs a good soil, so if you plan to grow it make sure you put it somewhere that has a lot of organic matter incorporated in the soil. A little extra water helps also; it prefers moister soil. I have grown it out in the sun at my garden at Fort Verde in a marginal soil and it actually grew well. It didn’t last long, though. In a shady area it probably would have survived longer. It is considered a perennial or a biennial, depending on the source of information. It may depend more on growing conditions. Mine grew and bloomed in one year, versus the two some books suggest. Apparently it dies after flowering; if you remove the flowers before they open you will prolong its life.

With large broad leaves and thick stems, it is an attractive plant but it is large. It can grow to six feet high and wide and the blooms can extend even higher. The blooms are umbels of whitish or yellowish to greenish and small and form dramatic clusters at the top of the plant. Fruits are small, pale yellow and egg-shaped. Angelica will reseed itself.

It is not entirely pest free as it can be afflicted by spider mites, leaf miners, earwigs and aphids. If kept too wet, it will suffer from crown rot. (Angelica sylvestris is the European wild variety)
The Master Gardener Association is off and running. Our first meeting was a success. Around 30 people showed up and I was especially glad to see a large group from the Prescott area.

Lucy Bradley from Maricopa County Extension was the guest speaker. She brought us up to date on all the exciting things happening in Youth Gardening. Before you groan—it is exciting. Maricopa County has developed a wonderful program. They even received an award for it at the last National MG Conference. This includes a Master Gardener program for kids. They have produced a huge source of material. What this means is we can benefit from their expertise and avoid some of their mistakes. If you are interested in developing some type of youth garden. The information will soon be on a web site. The Yavapai County Extension website will have a link—watch for it.

In the business meeting that followed, we went over the new by-laws, discussed elected officers and the committees. We will be covering the same information at the meeting in Prescott in January. If you couldn’t make this first meeting, please attend the one in January. We will give folks an opportunity to volunteer to run for office or be a part of a committee.

In March we will present a slate of candidates and in May we will vote. By that time we will also have the committees formed and we can be off and running.

We are still looking for people interested in running for office and the committees.

By-laws Committee will only need to meet if there is a need to change the by-laws. Program and Education Committee is responsible for arranging programs and speakers for the membership. Membership Committee is responsible for tracking volunteer and education hours and developing a recognition program. The Volunteer Committee will coordinate and develop opportunities for Master Gardeners to volunteer. We are a volunteer organization and we need to do a better job of outreach to the community. The final committee is the Social Committee. They will be responsible for organizing social events and arranging the refreshments for the meetings.

We already have some volunteers for these committees but everyone still has the opportunity to help out.

See you in January.

The "Arizona Master Gardener Manual" is now on-line. Check out http://ag.arizona.edu/pubs/garden/mg/

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:
Let me know about your garden, the types of seeds you planted, interesting articles you found—anything of gardening interest. Send to: Nora Graf
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