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Geddy Garden News



ROSEMARY

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**Mist in May and Heat in June
Bring all things into tune.**

The garden is thriving. I've harvested the lettuce and last night I ate my first white potato from my garden. It was delicious! The rudbeckia is blooming and our scarecrow is guarding it all. There are quite a few herbs in the garden and I have decided to focus on one of those herbs each month. As we concentrate on the Headline Events we can appreciate the important role that the herbs played in this place at that time. From the practical point of view and in an effort to be politically correct herbal teas also known as liberty teas became the drink of the day in the colonies.

In this issue I begin my herbal profiles with my favorite herb, rosemary. Aside from its many attributes it was also my mothers name.

Herbs were valued early on. The herbalist Harrison wrote, "They are to be cherished and God to be glorified in them because they are His good gifts and created to do man help and service." John Parkinson in *Paradiso*, 1629 wrote, "The herb without all question is an excellent help to comfort the heart as the very smell may induce any so to believe."

Petrus Crescentius in the 13th century wrote about herbs in his *Treatise on farming and gardening*, "according to the pleasures they afford to the mind, consequently preserving the health of the body as the state of the body affects the mind."

In 1656 William Coles in the *Art of Simpling* put herbs in an honorable place in time when he wrote, "Herbs are more ancient than the Sunne, or Moon, or Starres, they being created on the fourth day whereas plants were the third."

Most herbs are easy to grow and serve many purposes. They were grown for centuries medicinally, as remedies for ailments, cosmetically and of course for culinary purposes to spice and enliven the taste of food. Another use of the herbs was aromatic.

Most herbs are at their best for practical uses when they are going to flower. Young leaves have more virtue than old-coarse leaves. They should be picked after they dry from the morning dew and before the hot sun is upon them. If you dry them, do so in a cool, dry, dark place, to preserve flavor and aroma, never in sunlight. Rosemary is easy to grow from cuttings. When taking cuttings it is important to take soft cuttings from strong side shoots or from the tops of the branches and folklore tells us rosemary cuttings should be set on Good Friday. There is a great amount of folklore that relates to rosemary. Although I don't take these legends seriously I love to learn about them.

The Spanish traditional legends credit rosemary with having power against magic and the evil eye. Another ancient belief suggests that by putting rosemary leaves under the bed, evil dreams will be driven away and if the leaves are put into wine the body is rid of evil.

Rosemary is so rich in folklore, it carries the name Mary's Mantle due to another Spanish legend in which the Virgin Mary changed the color of the flowers from white to blue by draping her cloak over the rosemary shrub as she fled from King Herod's soldiers with the baby Jesus.

Rosemary is well known by many cultures and civilizations as a memory-strengthening herb. William Shakespeare wrote, "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance, pray you love, remember."

In Banks' Herbal of 1525 he wrote, "In the back bed in my garden I am growing the remembrance herb."

It was for the idea of remembrance that rosemary became a traditional sight at weddings. Bunches of rosemary were given as New Years gifts and sprigs of it were thrown on graves for remembrance.

Rosemary is a pine like perennial herb with leaves like needles. It likes full sun and grows well and tall against a wall. If you wish to be

creative you can train it on ready-made wire frames available at garden centers and nurseries. A cone form can create a miniature Christmas tree. By simply pinching off the tips the plant becomes bushy and fills in the form of the cone. This is a nice idea for your Christmas decorating or even for a special Christmas gift.

There was a gilded rosemary which was a gold variegated rosemary mentioned by Parkinson in *Paradise in Sole* in 1629 which was often given for a new years gift. Small bunches of this remembrance plant seems to me to be an appropriate gift for any occasion.

In Tudor times the gilded rosemary branches were given by the bridesmaids to the bridegroom. In the 16th Century Hampton Court garden walls were completely covered with it.

During Charles II time the price of a small bunch of rosemary rose due to the belief that the plant had the power to ward of infection and they were suffering from the great plague in England.

The medicinal uses for rosemary varied greatly. Serapio wrote that it was a remedy against, "the stuffing of the head, that cometh through coldness of the braine, if a garland be placed about the head." He also suggested that rosemary with water be taken morning and evening to, "taketh away the stench of the mouth and breath."

In the *Complete Housewife* we find the instructions for making stocking garters which contain chopped rosemary leaves to be worn day and night as a remedy for leg cramps.

In France another name for rosemary is incensier because it was sometimes used as a substitute for incense when the cost of incense was too high. It was burned in sick rooms and carried at funerals in early times.

It was used to make dye, and the wood of the plant was used in the 16th century to make carpenters rules and lutes and other similar musical instruments.

Its culinary uses ran from being ingredients in stews to jellies and cakes and bread. Of course rosemary tea was one of the many herbal

teas enjoyed by the Virginia colonists. It was often mixed with other herbs like peppermint. To make rosemary tea place fresh chopped, rosemary leaves into a teapot. Pour boiling water over them. Steep for five minutes in a covered pot and add honey if you wish. It will relax you, taste good and serve as a cough medicine as well.

A favorite use of the rosemary plant was for its aroma. The colonists believed to stay in perfect health, herbs should be smelled continually. The felt herbs contained the sweet scent of sunshine which contribute to giving one a state of perpetual joy. It is from the leaves of the herbs more than the flowers that the fragrance is drawn. Leaf odors are permanent, where as the flowers odors are evanescent.

In a colonial home rosemary was often strewn on floors to give the house a fresh odor and to protect against infection. Often bunches of rosemary could be found in a container on a table.

To enjoy the scent from the rosemary leaf we must coax it from the leaf by pressing, bruising or touching the leaf. Flowers on the other hand presents their odor whether we choose to smell them or not. For that reason rosemary makes an excellent gift for a sick patient in a hospital. Sometimes flowers scents can be overwhelming but with rosemary the patient is in control and if he chooses to lift his spirit with the fresh fragrance of rosemary it is within his power to do so.

Janet Guthrie