



# Bl-Herbs

/'blərbz/

Quarterly notes on herbs and herb gardening

## Winter 2007

Happy New Year! So much for quarterly newsletters – I think I started with this idea last April/May, and just haven't been able (or ready) to put one of these together. So, here's to my New Year's resolution – a regular newsletter to customers that focuses on just herbs. This includes various tidbits of information, such as upcoming events, herb gardening tips, amendment information, timing, prolonging the life of your herb plants, recipes, and any other related events/items of interest.

A small disclaimer (but really, just something to note) – though many articles in this newsletter will be for general use, anything related to planting and/or timing for outside cultivation and harvest will be based on the central North Carolina (planting zone 7b) climate, and my personal experiences with such. Part of the problem I've found with a lot of the literature is that the consumer is provided with one, general way to plant something, usually without any consideration for geographic specifics, which causes a LOT of unnecessary plant killing – something I try to prevent!

Anyway, I hope you enjoy this premier issue of Bl-Herbs (pronounced "Blurbs"); the plan is for distribution every quarter. Please pass this on to anyone else you think may enjoy the information contained in this newsletter! If you have any suggestions for content, please send me an e-mail at [info@herbanmeadows.com](mailto:info@herbanmeadows.com).

Angela Coulter  
President/Owner, Herban Meadows

P.S. If you would like to subscribe to this newsletter and are not already on mailing list, please send an e-mail to [info@herbanmeadows.com](mailto:info@herbanmeadows.com) with "Newsletter" in the subject line. If you would like to be removed from the mailing list, please send an e-mail to the same e-mail address with the word "Unsubscribe" in the subject line.

## Herban Meadows Spring 2007 Open House Weekends



We've been busy starting plants for your spring herb planting needs. Below are the dates for our Spring 2007 open houses at our greenhouse location, 4317 Kildaire Farm Road, Holly Springs. Our selection of herbs has expanded; see the Herban Meadows Website ([www.herbanmeadows.com](http://www.herbanmeadows.com)) for directions and more information on planned potted plant availability!

April 14, 9am-5pm	April 28, 9am-5pm	May 12, 9am-5pm
April 15, 12pm-5pm	April 29, 12pm-5pm	

Also available at the open houses this year – a small selection of handmade pottery for potting (first come, first serve) – if you find a piece of pottery and a plant you'd like to purchase and put together, we'll pot it for you for free!

*Growing good things, naturally.*

## Upcoming Events

### Gardening and Companion Planting With Herbs

1/30/07 and 2/6/07  
7-9pm, Durham Academy  
Upper School,  
Durham, NC



This is a 2-class series we are holding through *Academy Nights* (<http://www.da.org/pa/acadnite/>), the annual fundraiser for Durham Academy. In this class, we will talk during the first week about how to recognize basic herbs and their varieties, how to use and store herbs (focusing on culinary herbs), and how and where to plant herbs for year-round use, as well as organic dirt amendments, preferred potting materials, and fertilizers. In the second class, we'll discuss the idea of companion planting with herbs in the garden to help naturally optimize the growth and health of other garden plants.

Cost: \$30. [Register today](http://www.da.org/pa/acadnite/registration.html) at <http://www.da.org/pa/acadnite/registration.html>; seats are limited!

## In This Issue

Editorial notes .....	1
Events .....	1
Open House Weekends .....	1
Lemon Balm: Herb of the Year ..	2
Recipes .....	2
Winter Fertilization .....	3
Coir: An Eco-Friendly Soil Amendment .....	4
Miscellany .....	4



## Recipes



### Chamomile-Lemon Balm Sun Tea

1 gallon plastic or glass container with an airtight lid  
 Approx 2½ ounces of chamomile  
 4 or 5 large sprigs of lemon balm  
 Honey  
 Approximately 1 gallon filtered or distilled water  
 Lots of sun!

Place chamomile and lemon balm in container; pour water over herbs to fill container. Seal container tightly (sealing will contain the herbs' flavor/essence and prevent evaporation from the heat). Place container in a warm, sunny location for 6-8 hours, or until tea reaches desired color/taste.

Remove herbs from water. Add honey to taste, refrigerate. and enjoy!

### Lemon Balm Chicken

4 boned chicken breasts  
 2 Tbsp dry sherry  
 ¾ cup shredded cheese (Swiss or another white cheese)  
 ½ cup light cream  
 4 Tbsp butter  
 1 Tbsp chopped lemon balm (or more, to taste)  
 Salt/pepper

Season chicken with salt and pepper. Melt butter and sauté chicken 5-7 minutes. Place chicken in glass baking dish. Add sherry and lemon balm and cream into the pan of hot butter. Stir and simmer over low heat. Pour liquid over chicken. Top with cheese and bake for 15-20 minutes in 350°F oven in covered dish. Serve with sauce over angel hair pasta.<sup>1</sup>

Recipes continued on page 3

## 2007 Herb of the Year: Lemon Balm (*Melissa officinalis*)



Every year, the International Herb Association (IHA) designates an "Herb of the Year," to help with the education and promotion of herbs and their uses to the general public. This year's herb, lemon balm, is a great addition to the garden; though it is in the mint family, it doesn't spread via the invasive runner of traditional mint. It will clump and also disperse seed, which will spread it in the garden, but not so much that it can't be controlled.

This plant grows to approximately 2-3 feet in height and about 2 feet in width. The leaves of lemon balm are oval and serrated around the edges, at grown size about three inches long and about one-and-a-half inches wide. When you rub the leaves, they emit a wonderful, strong lemon scent. As with mint, lemon balm prefers cool weather, and will grow leaves profusely in the spring and fall, stalling quickly in humid heat of the North Carolina summer. During the hot season, the plants will develop flower spikes, which stops leaf production. Cut off these flowering stems 6 inches from the crown; the plant will regenerate itself for the fall.

Though many plant references recommend planting lemon balm in part to full sun, those guidelines don't fare well in our planting zone; I've tried putting lemon balm in the direct sun, and it has just quickly turned brown and fried once the temperatures consistently reached 80°F. Logic says that if it's a cool weather plant, the direct sun here won't serve it well. I have had the best success with this plant in part to even full shade in my gardens. In fact, I have a shade garden in my yard where lemon balm has become the predominant plant; I originally planted one ring of plants around the maple tree in the garden, and it's been so happy there, I have left it alone, and it has spread throughout the entire garden!

There's been a long history of lemon balm use. The botanical name, *melissa*, is Greek for "bee," for the flowers are definitely a bee attraction. Lemon balm has been cultivated in the Mediterranean region for about 2000 years. The Muslim herbalist Avicenna recommended lemon balm "to make the heart merry." Paracelsus claimed this herb could completely revitalize the body and called it the "elixir of life," and 14th century French King Charles V drank its tea every day to keep his health. Sacred to the temple of Diana, lemon balm was called "heart's delight" in southern Europe. It is used today in aromatherapy to counter mild anxiety and depression. (Source: *Herbalpedia 2006*) Overall, its oils and active components have been used for stomachaches and other stress-related conditions, such as anxiety, headache and depression, and it also has antiviral properties.

Personally, I've used lemon balm as a tea, both hot and iced (as a sun tea). I usually mix it with chamomile, which makes a very soothing, downtime tea! I've also cooked with it, but please note that it takes a LOT more leaves than some of the other lemon-scented herbs (such as lemon verbena) for the lemon taste to pervade cooked food. Some people and chefs make a simple syrup with it and then use the simple syrup to infuse its taste into the cooking. See the Recipe sidebar for some ideas on how to use this herb.

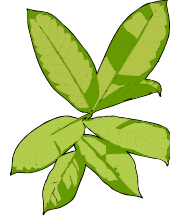
continued page 4

*Growing good things, naturally.*



## Fertilizing Your Herbs in the Winter

Fertilizing is nothing more than feeding your plants. Over the winter, many people tend to forget to fertilize their herbs – even the ones they’ve taken inside in pots, and then wonder why they have trouble keeping the plants alive, let alone producing enough to use regularly.



However, herbs can also easily be fertilized TOO much; many herbs actually lose their value in taste and/or beneficial properties if they are over-fertilized (prime examples of this are cilantro and lemongrass). However, they do need SOME food regularly, especially if they are grown in containers.

So, what should you do? First of all, make sure the fertilizer you use is organic. This is important, because remember, you are using the leaves in food, which you are ingesting; therefore, you really don’t want to be putting manufactured chemicals (such as MiracleGro) into your body!

Second, make sure you use a fertilizer with a low N-P-K number (all three should be less than 10), and use it approximately every two weeks. It is not recommended to fertilize more often unless you supplement your herbs’ natural light with florescent and/or plant lights to lengthen their “day” throughout the winter. As a review (and for those who always wanted to know, but never asked), N-P-K is the percentage of nitrogen (N)-phosphorus (P)-potassium (K) mix in the fertilizer:

- **Nitrogen** helps the plant with photosynthesis, which in turn helps leaf development – obviously very important for plants whose leaves you would like to use for their optimal properties!
- **Phosphorus** also helps with photosynthesis, but has to do specifically with root and bloom growth. Though you definitely need some for healthy root development, be careful – supplying too much of this to your herbs could make them start trying to produce flowers, which will in most cases deplete the value of the leaves – or make you crazy from having to continually clip off the buds (think Morticia Adams!).
- **Potassium** mainly helps the plants stay healthy and fight off diseases (think immune system).

There is a huge variety of different types of organic matter you can add as fertilizer, and we will spend more time in future issues discussing different items as consideration, but this article won’t go into specifics, for lack of space. However, there are a number of different mixes you can get from your organic supplier (GardenWorks is the most stocked organic/hydroponic supplier in the immediate area, on Hillsborough Street in Raleigh, [www.gardenwaves.com](http://www.gardenwaves.com), but you can also order most of these online at sites such as [www.AbundantLifeSeeds.com](http://www.AbundantLifeSeeds.com), [www.PlanetNatural.com](http://www.PlanetNatural.com), or [www.groworganic.com](http://www.groworganic.com)); here are a few we’ve used with success:

- Metanaturals Professional Organic Plant Nutrient 3-3-3
- FoxFarm GrowBig 6-4-4
- EarthJuice Grow 2-1-1
- Down to Earth All Purpose 4-6-2

## Recipes

(cont’d from page 2)

### Lemon Balm-Spearmint Pesto

2 cups fresh lemon balm and spearmint leaves  
 ½ cup olive oil  
 ½ cup garlic cloves

Chop and blend all ingredients together. This blend can be stored frozen for 2-3 months in an airtight container. Ideal to use as a fresh sauce on fish.<sup>2</sup>

### Zucchini Strands with Lemon Balm

2 small to medium zucchini squash  
 ½ tsp salt  
 1 tbsp unsalted butter or olive oil  
 1 clove garlic, finely chopped  
 2 tbsp finely shredded fresh lemon balm  
 Freshly ground black pepper

Cut the stems and bottom tips off the zucchinis and slice them into long, spaghetti-like strips, about 1/8 inch wide and 1/8 inch thick. Toss with the salt in a medium mixing bowl, then transfer to a fine sieve or colander and set it over the mixing bowl. Let the zucchini sit for 15 minutes at room temperature, then gently squeeze it in your hands to extract some of the water.

Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium-low heat. Add the garlic to the pan and stir until it loses its raw fragrance but is not browned, less than 1 minute. Add the zucchini and lemon balm and toss with tongs just until heated through, about 1 minute. Taste and season with pepper.<sup>3</sup>

*If you have any herb recipes to share, please send them to us at [info@herbanmeadows.com](mailto:info@herbanmeadows.com); we will make sure to credit you if we use it in the newsletter!!*

*Growing good things, naturally.*





## Miscellany

- Now's the time to start planning your herb garden for the spring. Do some research; make a list of the herbs you want to infuse into your garden, whether they are perennial or annual in our planting zone, and what plants go well with others (more on companion planting in the next issue!). Also, schedule out when you'll need to plant short-lived annuals, such as cilantro, since you'll probably need to make multiple plantings for continual availability.
- Even though it's an evergreen, rosemary really doesn't like cold winters. If there's danger of an extended period (more than three days) of nights when the temperatures drop below 30°F, make sure there's adequate mulch around the roots; in this situation, it would also be wise to throw a sheet over the plant for the duration of the cold snap. This is especially recommended if the plant is out in the open, without any wind protection.
- Tropical herbs that can withstand our zone 7b weather (bordering on zone 8) include eucalyptus, bay, lemon verbena, and pineapple sage. Just watch the weather and treat as recommended above for rosemary.

## Coir: An Eco-Friendly Soil Amendment

Coir is a by-product of the coconut industry, coming from the husks of the fruit after a harvest. When compared to peat (the use of which can easily harm non-sustainable, fragile bog habitats), coir is a more ecologically responsible choice. It will hold up to 10 times its weight in water, and does not shed moisture like peat moss. Plus, it is pH neutral (vs. the slight acidity of peat), so there's no concern over pH amendment for some of the pickier plants. It also adds an element of airiness to the soil mix; we use this at Herban Meadows for all potting and beds. You can usually purchase it as a dried, compressed brick, which makes it easy to store. The bricks have a compression ratio of 5:1; for expansion of the fibers, simply soak bricks for less than 30 minutes in a container that can hold water.

As this product isn't yet readily available in most garden centers, Herban Meadows will have coir bricks available for purchase during our Spring 2007 open houses, and you can also purchase them at any time in small or large sizes from GardenWorks Hydroponics in Raleigh ([www.gardenwaves.com](http://www.gardenwaves.com), +919 852 4747).

## Herb of the Year: Lemon Balm

*(continued from page 2)*

*Use and storage.* Though you can dry lemon balm in a hydrator or by hanging the stems upside down in a dark, cool place for several weeks, the flavor gets much weaker when the plant is dried, though it maintains a faint lemon-minty aroma and taste. When possible, it's best to use the leaves fresh, or you can freeze them fresh, either in ice cubes or in a vacuum storage bag.

*Please, please provide feedback on the content of this newsletter! We want it to be as welcome and useful to you as possible, so the more feedback we get, the better. E-mail us at [info@herbanmeadows.com](mailto:info@herbanmeadows.com) with article suggestions, recipes, or comments.*

*Also, send us any herb gardening and use-related questions you would like answered in a Q&A section, as we would like to make that a regular section in this newsletter.*

*Thank you!*

### Footnotes:

#### From the Recipes section:

<sup>1</sup> Herbalpedia 2006, which credits **The Herbal Connection Collection-Volume 1**, Maureen Rogers and Patricia Sulick, Herb Growing & Marketing Network, 1995

<sup>2</sup> Herbalpedia 2006, which credits **Herb Mixtures & Spicy Blends**, Maggie Oster, Storey Communications, 1996

<sup>3</sup> From **The Herb Farm Cookbook**, Jerry Traunfeld, Simon & Schuster Inc., 2000



*Growing good things, naturally.*