



*“The New Year stretches before us
like an empty patch of ground.
So, dig, plant, grow, bloom.”*

— *Anonymous*

SAGE LEAVES

The Herb Society of America Wisconsin Unit

Jan/Feb 2026 - Vol XXXXVII #1

Unit Meetings

Tuesday, January 20 – Meeting at 10 a.m. – Speaker at 11 a.m.

Program: Grants & Scholarship Recipients

Speaker: Lore Borth

Location: Zoom Only Meeting

Tuesday, February 17 – Speaker at 10 a.m. – Meeting at 11 a.m.

Program: Growing and Maintaining Roses and Other Interesting Facts

Speaker: Sam (Samantha) Gilbert, Rose Garden and Perennial Mall
Horticulturist at Boerner Botanical Gardens

Location: Zoom Only Meeting

Editor: Diane Kescenovitz – if you will be going out of town for an extended period,
please notify Diane of your change of address or request an email copy – thanks!

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Herb Society of America website: www.herbsociety.org

NEWSBUDS . . .



As the song lyrics say, "Fast away the old year passes (2025) Falalalala . . . lalalala!" When I reflect upon our 2025 meetings, I recall stimulating educational programs including our member panel on the Herb of the Year Turmeric Study, delicious bruncheons where we tasted dishes that included the herb of the month in the recipes and successful outcomes from our major herbal education events – Spring Symposium and Herb & Artisan Fair. We welcomed a few new members and enjoyed renewal with a few members who attended meetings or events when they could. We came through a financial scare, landed on our feet and learned from the process. We sent Headquarters our sponsorship support for Ed-CON 2026 in April. So, with that in mind, I say, "Happy New Year 2026, Everyone!"

In the short term, we will be having ZOOM ONLY meetings in January and February; see the front page of this *Sage Leaves* for dates and speaker topic information. Please realize that during January and February your HSA/BOD members are hard at work planning for meeting speakers, Spring Symposium on April 11 and Herb & Artisan Fair on May 16. Please contact any board member if you have ideas, questions, or concerns that would assist us in our planning efforts.

You may want to put February 13-15, 2026 on your calendar. Attending the PBS Wisconsin Garden & Green Living Expo in Madison is a great way to shake off the Winter Blahs if you get them. Check out website for a full schedule (wigardenexpo@pbswisconsin.org).

Look for more information from HSA Headquarters, announcing speaker and registration information for the HSA National Educational Conference, **It's Spicier in Texas**, April 15-17, in San Antonio Texas. AJ

Holiday Luncheon

The Town Club, in Fox Point, was again the venue for our delightful Holiday Luncheon held December 10, 2025. The theme was "Cardinals." Upon entering the beautifully decorated anteroom we had an opportunity to create an ornament of a cardinal perched on a branch at the crafting tables while enjoying coffee, tea and chocolate biscuits. While we sat by the fireplace, AJ Star and Mary Williams read two charming holiday stories about Cardinal birds and their experiences.

Many of our members and their guests donated items for the Capuchin Community Services homeless shelter in downtown Milwaukee. AJ sorted and delivered 16 bags of clothing, an additional bag of toiletries, and \$115 in monetary donations in early December. The shelter was most appreciative!

The invocation written by Joanne Ruggieri was shared with the 29 attendees before they enjoyed their lunch of Chicken Piccata or Pesto Pasta. Dubia-style chocolates were shared with the group as we prepared to play a holiday trivia game. Each winner chose a prize from the table of holiday gifts. As we enjoyed our after-meal coffee/tea, Cardinal theme treat bags were passed to each person. Nestled inside were special nutmeg spiced cookies, teabags, and a variety of chocolates and mints.

December 9, 2026, will be the next Holiday Luncheon. The theme, suggested by Elaine Wilhelm, will be ornaments. Those members who were not able to attend the lunch received a lovely holiday card with a tea bag from the Wisconsin Unit to mark the season. Denise Nelson and AJ Star

Botanical Reads Recommendations

Fiction: "The Last Garden in England" by Julia Kelly. Historical fiction centering around a garden at the fictional Highbury House estate. The story follows three different women connected by the garden over various timelines.

Nonfiction: "The Girl Who Drew Butterflies: How Maria Merian's Art Changed Science" by Joyce Sidman. Biography of Maria Sibylla Merian, one of the first entomologists to observe live insects and draw them. She documented the metamorphosis of the butterfly, which was not understood in the 17th century. Beautiful color paintings. Amazing story.

January 2026 Herb of the Month: Turmeric (Curcuma Longa)

How do you feel about yellow hands?

Susan Obry



Turmeric is a golden-yellow spice with a slightly bitter, earthy taste that is native to India and Southeast Asia and is a member of the ginger family. Its use dates back over 4,000 years, and India is the largest producer.

Turmeric cannot survive frost or cold weather below 50 degrees so you must be vigilant when growing it outside. Turmeric matures at 8 to 10 months. You can grow it in containers and move it indoors as the temperature drops.

Ground Turmeric, when stored in an airtight container in a cool, dark place, will stay fresh for a year. Fresh Turmeric will stay fresh for about three weeks when stored in the refrigerator in a paper bag.

Culinary Uses: It is used in curries, mustards, desserts, soups, sauces, egg dishes, roasted vegetables, marinades, rice dishes, and breads. It pairs well with coconut milk, tomatoes, paprika, cumin, ginger, grains, and lentils.

Medicinal Uses: Further research and clinical studies are needed to support the following statements: Turmeric has been used to improve gut health, strengthen the immune system, as an inflammatory agent in conditions such as arthritis, to improve heart and brain health, and as an antioxidant. Consult your doctor before using turmeric supplements as they may interact with certain conditions or medications.

Of Great Note: Turmeric is used as a natural dye for textiles and foods. So, wear gloves when handling fresh turmeric. It will stain your hands, counter tops, cutting boards, and utensils.

February 2026 Herb of the Month: Mexican Tarragon (Taquetes Lucida)

Susan Obry

Mexican Tarragon is a perennial herb native to Mexico and Central America and belongs to the Marigold family. Its use dates back to the Aztecs.

Mexican Tarragon grows better in warmer climates but can be grown as an annual in Wisconsin. If you decide to overwinter it, add a thick layer of mulch around the plant. Cover the plant during harsh cold conditions. Tarragon will not survive heavy frost during the growing season. Tarragon can be grown in containers and then moved indoors during cold spells. Mexican tarragon prefers full sun but can tolerate partial shade. It prefers well-draining rich soil.

This plant has a strong anise-like scent with a spicy licorice-like taste. Its flowers are edible.



Culinary Uses: Mexican Tarragon is used with poultry, seafood, lamb, in soups and stews, egg dishes, sauces, salads (fruit and potato), vinegars, butters, tea, rice and beans, and desserts such as custards and sorbets.

Medicinal Uses: It is used to treat digestive disorders, alleviate nausea and stimulate appetite. Also used as a pain reliever in conditions like osteoarthritis, and it has natural sedative properties to lessen anxiety and promote sleep. It serves as a natural diuretic and is said to promote cardiovascular health. Excessive use of this plant can cause very negative side-effects. Important to research further before using this plant.

Other Uses: Mexican Tarragon is used as an ornamental plant and used in perfumes.

Interesting Information: Some Indigenous communities use it in rituals to ward off evil spirits and bring good fortune. It is central to the "Day of the Dead" celebrations. Its scent and bright color along with those of Marigolds help the deceased find their way back to their families.

RECIPES

Waldorf Salad

(Kathy Bussanich – 10/25 Unit Mtg)

Ingredients

1/4 cup whole Greek yogurt
2 T mayonnaise
1 T fresh lemon juice
1 tsp honey
3/4 tsp sea salt
fresh ground black pepper, to taste

2 tart apples, chopped (Granny Smith or Honeycrisp)
2 cups celery, thinly sliced
1 cup grapes, sliced
1 cup walnuts or pecans, toasted and chopped
2/3 cup chopped parsley

Instructions

1. In a large bowl, whisk together the yogurt, mayonnaise, lemon juice, honey, salt, and pepper.
2. Add the apples, celery, grapes, walnuts, and parsley and mix to combine.
3. Season to taste and transfer to a serving platter.

One Pot Turmeric Chicken and Rice

(Mary Williams - 11/25 Unit Mtg - from NY Times recipe section 2025)

Ingredients

1-1/2 lb. skinless, boneless chicken breast, cut into 1-inch pieces
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
1 T unsalted butter
1 tsp. ground turmeric (I used more)
1 cup onion, chopped
2 tsps. ginger, peeled and minced
2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
1 cup chopped tomato
2 cups green beans, cut into 2-inch pieces
1 tsp. curry powder (I used more)
1 pinch ground cinnamon (I used about 1/2 tsp.)
1/4 tsp. ground cumin (I would use 1 tsp. making it again)
1 cup jasmine rice
2 bay leaves
2 tsps. fish sauce (found in Asian food section)
1-1/2 cup chicken stock

Directions

1. Pat chicken pieces dry; season with salt and pepper.
2. Melt butter in large casserole or Dutch oven and sprinkle with turmeric. Add chicken pieces in a single layer and cook over medium-high heat until lightly browned, about 3 minutes. Turn and brown the other side, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer chicken to a plate and keep warm.
3. To the same pot, add onion, ginger, and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until they start to brown, about 2 minutes. Add tomatoes, green beans, curry powder, cinnamon, cumin, and rice. Stir constantly until fragrant, about 1 minute. Return chicken and any accumulated juices to the pot, and add bay leaves, fish sauce, and chicken stock. Be sure to stir up all the browned bits from the bottom of the pot into the sauce.
4. Bring to a boil, cover, and reduce heat to low; simmer for 10 minutes. Meanwhile, make raita.
5. Adjust the lid to partially cover and vent; continue to simmer until rice is tender, 10-15 minutes.
6. Remove from heat, uncover, and let stand for 5 minutes. Serve warm, with raita as a garnish.

RAITA – Adds a cool, tart note to the entrée. Delicious and popular. Make a double recipe!

Add to a bowl and stir, 1/2 cup Greek yogurt, 1/3 cup grated, drained cucumber, 1 T minced fresh mint, 1-1/2 tsps. lime juice, 1/8 tsp. garam masala (I will use 1 whole tsp. next time), and 1/4 tsp. granulated garlic (I used fresh minced). Add salt to taste. Serve Raita over the chicken.

Note: Grating cucumber was difficult, so I finely minced and drained it in a sieve about 15 minutes.

Gingerbread Bundt Cake with Nutmeg Whipped Cream

(Mary Williams – 10/25 Unit Mtg)

Ingredients

2 boxes Trader Joe's Gingerbread Cake Mix
2 eggs
2/3 cup vegetable oil
1/2 cup raisins
1/2 cup molasses
1 cup water, plus 3 T if needed



Directions

- Heat oven to 350 degrees.
- Soak the raisins in hot water for about 30 minutes, then drain thoroughly before adding to the batter.
- Spray Bundt cake pan with Pam or butter carefully.
- Follow the directions on the box cake mix except add the drained raisins and the molasses and then add the eggs, vegetable oil, and cup of water (the molasses makes up the full liquid measure). If batter is stiff, stir in a tablespoon or more of water so batter will be thick but pourable.
- Pour batter into prepared Bundt cake form. Add about 20 minutes to the baking time on the package (making a double recipe). It is done when knife inserted into the thickest part comes out clean.
- Let cake stand to cool about 30 minutes in the Bundt pan.
- Place a plate over the cake and invert to unmold. Carefully remove the cake.
- Serve warm or at room temperature.
- Fill the cake's center hole with whipped cream and place the remaining cream in a bowl with a spoon so people can add more if they wish.

Whipped Cream

2 cups whipping cream, 3 T sugar, 1 tsp. ground nutmeg, and 1 tsp. vanilla

- Whip cream until it stands in peaks.
- Add sugar, nutmeg, and vanilla, and fold until sugar and nutmeg are evenly distributed. Enjoy!!

Zesty Pretzels

(Marlene Mravik – 11/25 Unit Mtg)

Preheat oven to 325 degrees

Ingredients

1 bag Snyders pretzel balls (or other small shape)
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil or avocado oil
1-1/2 tsps. dried dill weed
1 tsp. lemon pepper seasoning
1 tsp. garlic powder

Note: increase quantities of seasonings, if you wish

Directions

Toss pretzels, oil, and seasonings in an oven safe pan, and bake for 5 minutes, remove and stir. Place back in the oven for 5 minutes, remove and cool, stirring several times. These are best when made ahead and stored in a tin.

Combine everything in a large bowl, mixing thoroughly. Can adjust ingredients to taste. Refrigerate overnight for flavor!

Mother's Ruin Gin and Tonic Cake

(One of Mary William's favorite recipes that she wanted to share with us!)

Ingredients

8 oz butter, softened
1 cup golden caster sugar (or demerara sugar)
1 cup self-rising flour
2 tsp. baking powder
Finely grated zest of 2 lemons and 1 lime
4 eggs
3 T dry gin
1 T tonic water

- Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
- Grease and line a loaf pan with parchment paper.
- In a large mixing bowl, put butter, sugar, flour, baking powder, and zest. Add eggs and beat using electric mixer (about 3 min.) or wooden spoon (about 10 min.) until mixture is thick and smooth.
- Beat the gin and tonic into the mixture one tablespoon at a time, vigorously to prevent curdling.
- Spoon the mixture into the lined loaf pan and gently level the top.
- Bake in center of oven for about 50 minutes or until the cake is golden, risen, and has slightly shrunk away from the pan at the sides. Test by inserting a metal skewer into the center of the cake; it should come out clean. If not, bake a little longer.

Drizzle

Juice of 2 lemons
3 T dry gin
1 T tonic water
2/3 cup golden caster sugar (or demerara sugar)

Mix ingredients thoroughly until most of the sugar is dissolved in the liquid.

As soon as the cake is removed from the oven, prick the top evenly with a fork to create lots of little holes. Pour the drizzle over the cake, making sure it drips into the holes. Let the cake cool completely, then remove from the loaf pan and peel off the parchment paper.

I doubled the recipe and baked it in a 9x13 cake pan. If you do this, bake less time because it is thinner in the cake pan than the loaf pan. Check for doneness after 30 minutes and keep an eye on it. You can decorate it with lime zest and a sprinkle of sugar if desired. Note: I carefully took my sharpest paring knife and cut off the yellow and green peels of the lemons and limes and pulsed them in a blender. I hate grating, which usually involves grating the skin off at least one knuckle, and this blender version works fine.

This is a delicious, unexpected and yummy cake, very fresh. Great name too.



*Cooking is like love.
It should be entered into
with abandon or not at all.*

Harriet Van Horne, 1956

The Many Benefits of Gardening

(Ebert's Village Gardener Express – 2/1/25 – Source: Mayo Clinic)

For generations gardeners have known that planting, watering, weeding and all the beauty that emerges as a result is good for you. Science is catching on, too, with numerous studies showing that gardening can improve your physical and emotional well-being and has social benefits as well. Whether it's a few plants in the windowsill, containers on a deck, beds and borders in the yard or a vegetable plot, gardens big and small can reap big benefits for you and your family. Here's what gardens can do for you:

Gardening reduces stress and improves mental health. According to the Mayo Clinic, chronic stress is hard on your body and contributes to anxiety, depression and disease, such as heart disease and diabetes. That's why finding healthy ways to cope and take care of your mind and body are so important. Sow some seeds, do a little watering, cut a bouquet or pull weeds and you'll soon find that time has flown and cares that were pressing in on you earlier have faded away. Working in the garden reduces cortisol levels (a chemical your body produces in response to stress) even more than reading a book. Gardening routines, like watering and weeding, can create a soothing rhythm to ease stress. Just sitting in a garden helps, too. More and more hospitals are adding gardens to their facilities to help patients heal faster and prevent burn out for staff members.

Gardening boosts your immune system. Who would have thought that getting dirty would help you be healthier? It turns out being exposed to friendly soil microbes on a regular basis boosts your immune system, cuts your risk of inflammatory disease and yes, helps to reduces stress.

Gardening is great exercise and prevents disease. Think of all the things it takes to create and maintain a garden – getting up and down, walking, stretching, moving heavy bags of mulch or soil – it can be quite a workout. Regular maintenance, such as weeding or raking, can burn as much as 300 calories in an hour. Besides working off that extra cookie you ate at lunch, gardening helps with dexterity, strength, and endurance – it's a whole-body workout! Physically active people are a lot less likely to develop diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer, and could lower the risk of dementia. Staying active in the garden has never been easier with lots of tools that make gardening easier on the body and more accessible.

Gardening helps your kids eat better. Tired of your kids not eating their vegetables? Get them out in the garden! Kids that work side by side with their parents to grow vegetables are more likely to eat them when you sit down to dinner, and that habit is maintained even as adults.

Family and community gardens foster feelings of connection. School gardens, family gardens, and community gardens are sprouting everywhere. The reason these small local gardens are flourishing may have as much to do with human interaction as it does with the produce that is grown in them. Students who have participated in planting and maintaining school gardens took photos of their work and shared what they experienced. They also reported that the skills they learned and relationships they formed gave them a sense of personal well-being. Working in a garden with people of different ages, abilities, and backgrounds is a way to expand both what you know and who you know!

Gardening offers various benefits to the body, mind, and emotions. It's also great for the environment. So, whether you have a seasoned green thumb or a gardener in training, taking the time and investing the space to cultivate your own garden is well worth the effort.





Wintry Day

*Woolen socks, morning tea,
Hungry house cat nudging me.
Soup to simmer. Friends to call.
Book to read. Mend my shawl.
Bundle up. Take a walk.
Neighbor waves- stop to talk.
Hurry home. Starts to snow.
Curl up by the fire's glow.
Evening tea, candlelight,
Wintry day turns cozy night.*

-- Eileen Spinelli



If you have an event, article, recipe, book, etc. that you think members might find interesting, please send to kescenovitz.diane@att.net, and I will try to put it in the next issue of *Sage Leaves* if room allows.

Future *Sage Leaves* will be mailed out to arrive by March 1, 2026, and May 1, 2026.