

*“The garden must be prepared in the soul  
first or else it will not flourish.”*

-- Author Unknown

# SAGE LEAVES

**The Herb Society of America Wisconsin Unit**

Jan/Feb 2025 - Vol XXXXVI #1

## **Unit Meetings**

### **Tuesday, January 21, 10 a.m.**

Program: Grants & Scholarship Recipients

Speaker: Lore Borth

Location: Zoom

### **Tuesday, February 18, 10 a.m.**

Program: Mocktails

Speaker: Mary Beth Mahoney

Location: Zoom

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!

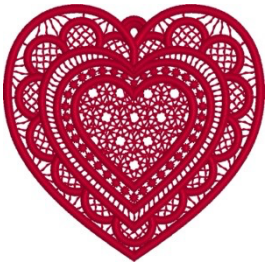
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Wisconsin Unit website: [Herb-Society-Wisconsin.org](http://Herb-Society-Wisconsin.org)

Herb Society of America office: [Herbs@HerbSociety.org](mailto:Herbs@HerbSociety.org)

Herb Society of America website: [www.herbsociety.org](http://www.herbsociety.org)

# NEWSBUDS...



As I write this message my senses are being stimulated. I **see** the snow falling on the garden beds, I **hear** the sound of snowblowers outside, I **feel** the heat pumping through the heat vents, I **taste** the chamomile in the herbal tea blend I'm sipping, and I **smell** the scent of garlic and marjoram emanating from the Polish sausage I'm boiling. Ah! Winter, you are here.

Our **January and February monthly meetings will be ZOOM ONLY this year.** In January we will hear from the HSA WI-Unit Grant recipients who will tell us about their projects, and in February we will learn about making delicious Mocktails. I also encourage you to cozy up under a blanket and watch a few HSA webinars when the winter winds blow.

I'm sure you'll find this issue of *Sage Leaves* full of information that is informative and heartwarming, so read on! Hope to see you on ZOOM. AJ

## **Holiday Luncheon – December 11**

The Town Club in Fox Point was the venue for our delightful Holiday Luncheon. The theme was "Evergreen Trees." Upon entering the beautifully decorated anteroom, we had an opportunity to create tealight Christmas trees at the crafting tables while enjoying coffee, tea, and chocolate biscuits. AJ Star read a delightful story, "Mr. Willowby's Christmas Tree."

Thirty of our members and their guests enjoyed a delicious meal in the adjoining dining room. The tables were decorated by six of our members who each added unique decorations to evergreen trees. The décor ranged from miniature ornaments, seashells, pinecones with a red and gold theme, to tiny glass balls filled with various herbs and spices with cinnamon sticks. The last two trees were frosted berries with a cardinal topper and a tree with a doll tea service set as ornaments and a miniature ceramic village on a quilted tree skirt. Joanne R. read her invocation and various members read a round of paragraphs from a holiday story. Prizes were awarded to each attendee participating in a bingo game.

As we enjoyed our after-meal coffee and tea, tree shaped treat boxes were passed to each person. Nestled inside the boxes was a special tree cookie, teabag, and a variety of chocolates and mints.

Our group generously donated bags and boxes of clothing and toiletries, as well as cash totaling \$455 for the Capuchin Community Services homeless shelter in downtown Milwaukee. Marlene auctioned her herb/spice tree to Louise for \$25 that was added to the cash donated to Capuchin.

Our 2025 Holiday Luncheon date is December 10. The theme is Cardinals. 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 & AJ Star

## **January 2025 Herb of the Month – Chamomile (*Chamomile Matricaria*)**

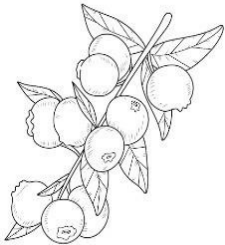
(Susan Obry)



Chamomile was the topic of the study presented by Joan and Kathy at the November 16 meeting, and further information can be found on the HSA website if you are interested in learning even more.

## **February 2025 Herb of the Month – Juniper (*Juniperus communis*)**

(Susan Obry)



There are about 45 species of juniper, however, most are toxic to humans, causing kidney problems, diarrhea, and upset stomachs. This is due to high levels of the chemical Thujone. Juniper berries are generally not considered safe for pregnant or nursing women. Junipers can also cause skin irritations. Wear long sleeves and gloves when harvesting.

In Wisconsin, only the *Juniperus communis* is edible. Avoid berries that are green, unripe, or from unfamiliar juniper species. Be certain that you properly identify the species. There are many guides to identifying Junipers on the web.

*Juniperus communis* is a spreading shrub but can grow into medium sized trees. What we call “berries” are really the fleshy cones of female junipers.

Juniper varieties are native to North America, Europe, and Asia. In Wisconsin common Juniper grows mostly along the shores of Lake Michigan and the Wisconsin and Mississippi Rivers. You will also find Junipers in Door County.

Junipers prefer sun and sandy, well-drained soils, but they can also grow in rocky areas. They can be harvested by hand, or the branches can be shaken to release the berries.

Juniper berries have been used since the 17th century to make gin. Gin was first used as a medical diuretic tonic. The berries are also used to season meat (primarily game), stews, teas, sauerkraut, cakes, breads, and pickling meats. They have a slightly bitter taste.

Juniper berries have antiseptic, anti-inflammatory, and anti-viral properties.

Juniper berries can take about two years to mature and turn a dusty blue to black color. This is the time to harvest them.

## **The Garden in Winter**

Frosty-white and cold it lies  
Underneath the fretful skies;  
Snowflakes flutter where the red  
Banners of the poppies spread,  
And the drifts are wide and deep  
Where the lilies fell asleep.

But the sunsets o'er it throw  
Flame-like splendor, lucent glow,  
And the moonshine makes it gleam,  
Like a wonderland of dream  
And the sharp winds all the day  
Pipe and whistle shrilly gay.

Safe beneath the snowdrifts lie  
Rainbow buds of by-and-by;  
In the long, sweet days of spring  
Music of bluebells shall ring,  
And its faintly golden cup  
Many a primrose will hold up.

Though the winds are keen and chill  
Roses' hearts are beating still,  
And the garden tranquilly  
Dreams of happy hours to be  
In the summer days of blue  
All its dreamings will come true.

*-- Lucy Maud Montgomery*



## *In Memory . . .*

### *Nino Ridgway*

We are saddened by the news of Nino Ridgway's passing on September 27 after a brief illness with pancreatic cancer.

Nino was an active participant in Herb Society for over 25 years. She was our horticulture chair for decades, started (with Anne McNitt and John Kovach) "All About Herbs" lecture series, which ran for many years, was the plant sale chair for our Herb & Artisan Fair for years, speaker at various events, wrote many articles on herbs and gardening, and prepared mailing lists for Herb Society events. Nino also prepared food for unit meetings and the Herb & Artisan Fair, and she was our go-to person for general knowledge of gardening and herbs.

In 2021 the Herb Society of America awarded Nino with a "Certificate of Appreciation" for her excellence in horticulture.

Many of us shopped at her flower/herb/perennial business, "Herbs & Everlastings" – and enjoyed produce from Barthel Fruit Farm, such as apples, strawberries, etc. that she brought to our meetings. We will miss Nino's quiet presence at our meetings and how much she educated us through the years.



### *Kathy Laurent*



Kathy passed away peacefully on October 4 at 81 years.

Kathy Laurent and I joined the Herb Society within a month of each other in early 2011. We were also born in the same year, she in April of 1943 and I in September. We lived near each other on the East Side in Milwaukee. Besides a love of dogs, Kathy and I also shared a love of good food. We'd often ventured to Pitch's near Brady Street for their superb ribs or Friday night fish fry. And we loved the Milwaukee Repertory Theater—the last time I spoke with Kathy, we were making plans to see "The Women of Rock" at the Stackner Cabaret.

What drew me to Kathy over the years—as it drew so many to her—was her gentleness, her soft voice, and her wicked sense of humor. A rare combination! Kathy loved to cook, but Kathy took it one step further by also being known as an excellent baker . . . we've all enjoyed many of her delicious baked goods over the years, whether at the Herb & Artisan Fair or at one of our Unit meeting lunches.

I will miss Kathy—her gentle voice and wicked sense of humor. I think we all will. Lore Borth

# **RECIPES**

## **Blintz Casserole with Blueberry Sauce**

(Louise Block – 11/24 Mtg)

### **Filling**

1 8 oz. pkg cream cheese, softened  
1/3 cup sugar  
1 egg  
1 15 oz. container ricotta cheese  
2 tsp. lemon zest  
1 ½ T lemon juice 1/8 t salt

### **Batter**

¾ cup flour  
1/3 cup sugar  
2 tsp. baking powder  
1/8 tsp. salt  
2 large eggs, lightly beaten  
1/2 cup butter, melted  
3 T milk  
1 tsp. vanilla

### **Topping**

¼ cup sugar  
¼ cup firmly packed brown sugar  
½ tsp. cinnamon

### **Remaining Ingredients**

Top with Blueberry Sauce (below) and  
Sweetened Whipped Cream  
Garnish with fresh mint

1. Preheat oven to 325F.
2. **Filling:** Beat cream cheese and sugar at medium speed with an electric mixer until smooth. Add egg and beat on low speed just until blended. Add ricotta, lemon juice and zest, beating at medium speed just until blended.
3. **Batter:** Whisk together flour, sugar, baking powder and salt in a bowl. Whisk together eggs, butter, milk and vanilla. Gradually add egg mixture to flour mixture, whisking until blended.
4. **Topping:** Stir together sugars and cinnamon in a small bowl.
5. Pour ¾ cup batter into a greased 9x13" baking pan. Spoon filling over batter. Dollop remaining batter (about 1 cup) over filling; spread batter to edges of baking dish. Sprinkle topping over batter.

**Blueberry Sauce** (tip: can be made the day ahead and reheated):

1 10 oz pkg frozen blueberries, thawed (2-¾ cups)  
1/4 cup sugar  
1 T lemon juice and 1 tsp. lemon zest  
1 T cornstarch and 1 T water

1. Combine blueberries, sugar, lemon juice and zest in a medium saucepan. Bring to boil over medium heat, stirring often.
2. Combine cornstarch and water. Add to blueberry mixture. Cook, stirring constantly, until lightly thickened.

## **Brie, Cranberry and Pear Puffs**

(Louise Block – 10/24 Mtg)

1 T unsalted butter  
1 T minced shallot  
½ cup diced pears (peeled, if desired)  
¼ cup dried cranberries  
1 T honey  
1 T apple cider vinegar  
½ tsp. fresh thyme leaves

¼ tsp. kosher salt  
1/8 tsp. ground allspice  
½ pkg. frozen puff pastry sheets, thawed (1 sheet)  
4 oz. double cream Brie, cut into ¼ inch pieces

Garnish: fresh thyme sprigs, if desired

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. In a small saucepan, cook butter and shallot over medium-low heat until shallots are softened and translucent. Add pears, cranberries, honey, vinegar, thyme, salt and allspice. Cook until fruit is softened, 5-7 min. Keep warm.
3. Roll puff pastry into 9x13 inch rectangle, trim edges to create 8x12 rectangle. Cut sheet into 24 equal squares (4 rows of 6). Place 1 square in each well of 24-cup mini muffin pan and gently press into well. Divide Brie among wells.
4. Bake until golden brown and Brie is melted, about 14 minutes. Let cool slightly. Remove puffs from pan. Top each with a small amount of pear mixture. Serve warm.

## **How Houseplants Can Improve Your Health**

(Ebert's Village Gardener Express 3/8/24)

Growing plants indoors can provide you with a peaceful haven away from the outside world and many people find it to be very gratifying. By introducing houseplants into your apartment, condo or home, you will likely notice your health improving and experience a boost in your overall happiness. Creating a living space that is soothing to be in enhances your mood, and it turns out that plants can also help with loneliness and depression too. Caring for and nurturing a living thing is very rewarding - especially when you see it thrive!

**Reducing Illness** - Studies have shown that adding plants to hospital rooms can speed recovery rates of patients who have had surgery. When compared to patients in rooms without plants, it has been found that patients in rooms with plants have requested less pain medication, have had lower heart rates and blood pressure, they have experienced less fatigue and anxiety, and tend to be released from the hospital sooner! Workplace studies revealed that adding plants to an office setting decreases fatigue, colds, headaches, coughs, sore throats and flu-like symptoms. Even in some cases, sickness rates fell by more than 60 percent in offices with plants.

**Cleaning Up the Air** - Plants can remove toxins from air - sometimes up to 87% of volatile organic compounds every 24 hours! This includes substances like formaldehyde (present in rugs, vinyl, cigarette smoke and grocery bags), benzene and trichloroethylene (both of which can be found in paint, inks, man-made fibers and solvents). Benzene is commonly found in high concentrations in places like libraries, where books and printed papers are abundant. Modern climate-controlled, air-tight buildings trap toxins inside. Research has shown that plants "cleanse" trapped air by pulling contaminants into soil, where root zone microorganisms convert toxins into food for the plant. Pretty interesting, huh?

**Distributing Water** - During the respiratory process, plants release moisture, which increases humidity of the air around them. Plants release roughly 97% of the water they take in (wow!). If you place several plants together, you can increase the humidity of a room, which can help keep common respiratory ailments to a minimum. Using plants in interior spaces can decrease the incidence of dry skin, colds, sore throats and dry coughs.

**Improving Focus** - Here is another interesting tid-bit: It has been found that students had a 60% better ability to concentrate when they are in learning environments that have plants in them. In addition, it improved their attention span and attendance was also higher for lectures given in classrooms with plants.

So, if you haven't become a "plant parent" yet, adding them to your indoor living spaces has the potential to enhance your quality of life in addition to making them more beautiful! Why not consider adopting some this spring?

Source: Everyday Health

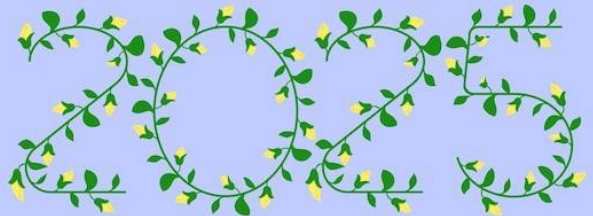




## A Community Garden Blessing

Let us direct our desire for a better  
world into the earth itself.  
Each seed we plant, however small,  
is a tangible wish for growth:  
for shoots of tenderness,  
for roots of extending kindness.  
And may the greenest, most hopeful  
leaves be lessons of compassion  
taken from our holiest books.

-- Carol L. Mackay



If you have an event, article, recipe, book, etc. that you think members might find interesting, please send to Diane at [kescenovitz.diane@att.net](mailto: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 and May 1, 2025.