



*“May flowers always line your path
and sunshine light your day.”*

— Irish Blessing

SAGE LEAVES

The Herb Society of America Wisconsin Unit

Mar/Apr 2026 – Vol XXXXVII #2

Unit Meetings

Saturday, March 21, 9:30 a.m. Brunch, 10:00 a.m. Meeting

Program: Edible Flowers and Plants

Speaker: Tracy Hankwitz

Location: St. Christopher's

Tuesday, April 21, 9:30 a.m. Brunch, 10:00 a.m. Meeting

Program: “Kickstart Your Health”

Speaker: Kathy Egan

Location: St. Christopher's

Upcoming Events:

April 11, 2026 Spring Symposium at The Woman's Club of Wisconsin

May 16, 2026 Herb & Artisan Fair at Boerner Botanical Gardens

December 9, 2026 Holiday Party at The Town Club, Fox Point

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 . . .



I went to my neighborhood Pick 'n Save on February 16 to buy a few basics. The floral and produce departments greet you immediately upon entry. To my delight I saw a sign stating "75% OFF All Valentine Planters." BINGO! I bought a dark purple hyacinth and a Tête-à-tête daffodil planter. These flowers are now bringing me a sense of spring into my home. I hope you all are finding small ways to bring that pop of SPRING's renewal into your lives too.

March 21 means we are back to in-person Unit meetings at St. Christopher's. I look forward to seeing us chat and mingle over a delicious brunch, listen to our committee chairs share news and learn from our speaker, Tracy Hankwitz from Bella Botanica, about "Edible Flowers and Plants." Some of you like to participate in a seed exchange at this meeting, so bring them and share to your heart's delight.

April 11 means our 30th Spring Symposium. Read more about this fabulous event in the article from Denise

We will meet on April 21 for a Unit meeting, and our speaker Kathy Egan will present "Kickstart Your Health." We will also vote to elect our Unit treasurer and secretary; read more about this in [2026 Elections](#) below. See you soon! AJ

Spring Symposium – April 11, 2026

Look in your mailbox for your personal invitation to the major educational event sponsored by our Unit, our 30th Spring Symposium. The historic downtown Woman's Club is a delightful site to host a day filled with herbal gourmet meals and tastings, a raffle table, and herb-related vendor offerings for sale. The featured speaker, Carrie Hennessy, will present a lecture focusing on: Fungi (mushrooms), Fairies (fun aspect of woodlands), and shade herbs.

If you have volunteered in the past, you will be hearing from me to see if you will reprise your role at our event. My phone number is (262) 376-0482. Appreciatively, Denise Nelson

Renewal Message from Treasurer Denise Nelson

It will soon be time to renew your HSA-WI membership. We look forward to having you as a continuing part of our society. Your friendship, support, and generosity toward the Unit is greatly appreciated.

In the envelope with the symposium invitation, you will find a membership renewal form. Please complete the renewal and send it to me with your check payable to HSA-WI. Thank you in advance for paying your dues by the May 12, 2026, deadline.

Checks should be mailed to me at: W72N904 London Court, Cedarburg, WI 53012

2026 Elections

We will be voting at the April meeting for the offices of secretary and treasurer. Current Secretary Tricia Hallam and Treasurer Denise Nelson have agreed to be on the ballot. Thank you to both of them for their past service and willingness to continue. An absentee ballot may be requested before April 1 from Melody Orban (melody.orban@yahoo.com) and must be returned to her 10 days before the April meeting. Ballots will be opened and counted by the Nominating Committee, and officers shall be elected by a majority vote of the members present and the returned absentee ballots at the April meeting.

Submitted by Nominating Committee: Chair Melody Orban, Cheryl Kazmier, and Kathy Bussanich

HSA-WI Unit 2026 Grant Awards to Milwaukee Area Public Gardens

The Herb Society of America-WI Unit continues its years-long tradition of helping support southeast Wisconsin public gardens and their educational programs with financial donations for the 2026 calendar year. Requests for proposals were sent to Boerner Botanical Gardens, Friends of Boerner Botanical Gardens, and the Old World Wisconsin Foundation in mid-September of 2025. The Unit's Grants and Scholarship Committee made their recommendations to the Board, and the Board and the Unit voted on these recommendations at their January 2026 meetings. The following grants are supported with income generated at the Unit's annual May Herb & Artisan Fair at Boerner Botanical Gardens. We thank all who support our grants and scholarships by attending and working at the Fair.

Our \$1,000 grant to **Friends of Boerner Botanical Gardens** continues to help sponsor educational programs through their Children's Plant Science Education Initiative. This program provides indoor classroom and hands-on, in-nature learning with outdoor plant bed classes at Boerner for K3-12 public school students from low-income areas in southeastern Wisconsin. These classes are taught by Wisconsin-certified educators. Transportation is also paid for by the program. As we are all coming to realize, programs like these are much needed to help counteract the constant bombardment and influence of electronic devices on today's young and easily malleable minds.

Also supported with a \$1,000 Unit grant is the Herb Garden at **Boerner Botanical Gardens**. This money will primarily support the purchase of plants, seeds, and shrubs to create a new Gothic-design bed and incorporate Goth-colored herbs in other herb beds. An overriding theme will be to educate garden visitors that beautiful herbs and other garden plants can be dangerous, and that nature should always be treated with caution and respect. The grant will also be used to pay for membership in our Unit and the International Herb Society.

With regret, **Old World Wisconsin** had to forego an application for financial support for the 2026 calendar year, as they were unable to fill the Site Director's position until November 2025 and a Landscape and Gardens Coordinator will not be hired until spring of 2026. In response to our request for a proposal, the Old World Wisconsin Foundation Executive Director said, "We hope to get back on track in '26 and hope to be asked in '26 to apply for a '27 grant." We certainly wish them the best and look forward to continuing our work with them.

Submitted by Grants & Scholarship Committee: Chair Lore Borth, Denise Nelson, and Susan Williams



Botanical Reads

Recommendations

Kathy Bussanich and Cheryl Kazimier

Fiction

"The Heirloom Garden" by Viola Shipman

A story about loss and friendship between 2 women separated by a generation and war (WWII and the Iraq War). The healing power of a garden and the story behind the flowers being grown. The author is a marvelous storyteller.

NonFiction

"The Plant Messiah" by Carlos Magdalena

The author, a botanist, writes of his efforts to save plants on the verge of extinction. He writes of his travels to the Amazon, the Australian Outback and the jungles of Mauritius. Fascinating read.



February Book Club, Melody Orban

There was interest in Kathy's book suggestion of 'The Girl Who Drew Butterflies' by Joyce Sidman, with Helene Pizzi and another member. A small group of us met in the library at Boerner to discuss the book. It is a children's nonfiction book about Maria Sibylla Merian, a pioneering female naturalist and artist who defied 17th-century conventions to study and illustrate the life cycle of insects, proving butterflies metamorphose from caterpillars. Additionally, AJ brought a beautiful art book and Melody brought articles about the author. <https://www.joycesidman.com/books/girl-who-drew-butterflies>
At our in-person meeting in March, we can discuss book club title selection and meeting date.

March 2026 Herb of the Month: Epazote (*Dysphania ambrosioides*)

Beans without the music! Susan Obry



Epazote is a perennial herb native to Central and South America but can be grown as an annual in Wisconsin. This plant has been cultivated and used for centuries. Plant in full sun in a well-drained area. It will tolerate droughts and a variety of soils. Since it spreads quickly and can become invasive, a suggestion is to plant Epazote in containers.

Culinary Uses: It is said Epazote may be an acquired taste; its taste has been described as medicinal, pungent, and astringent with the aroma of petroleum. It has a hint of anise, oregano, mint, and citrus. Both the fresh leaves and stems can be used in soups, stews, salad, stir fries, bean and rice dishes, and many other Mexican dishes such as salsa, tamales and enchiladas. Add towards the end of the cooking time. It is known to reduce gas and bloating when used in bean dishes. You can find many recipes on this site: <https://nummyrecipes.com/epazote-recipes>

Medicinal Uses: Used to treat intestinal parasites and as a digestive aid. According to the National Institute of Health, small amounts of the herb can be safely used in cooking - a few sprigs or a teaspoon of dried or fresh leaves. Larger amounts can be toxic, and concentrated oils should not be consumed. Medicinal use should be under controlled situations. Source: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/8964384/>.

April 2026 Herb of the Month: Chile Peppers (*Capsicum spp.*)

Finally, a Way to Keep Elephants Out of Our Yards! Susan Obry



Chile peppers originated in Central and South America thousands of years ago. Now they are grown on every continent except Antarctica. There are 4000-5000 varieties of chile peppers. Chile can also be spelled Chili (American English) or Chilli (British English). They are a member of the nightshade family.

Plant in full sun in well-drained, rich soils. Some of the peppers that grow well in Wisconsin are: Jalapenos, Habaneros, Sweet Bell, Anaheim, Italian, Cayenne, and Poblanos. Please note that Poblanos do not grow well in clay soils so clay soils will need to be amended.

Culinary Uses: Chiles are used throughout the world but are primary seasoning ingredients in Caribbean, South American, Mexican, Indian, Thai, Korean, Chinese and Malaysian dishes. The leaves of every species are edible. If you are looking for a good chile recipe, avoid the internet and ask a friend since there are over 4500 chile recipes on the internet.

Medicinal Uses: Said to boost metabolism, reduce pain, ease headaches, improve circulation, and may reduce the risk of death from cardiovascular disease and cancer. They are rich in vitamins C and A.

Other Uses: Capsicum has been registered as a biochemical pesticide since 1962. May deter some garden diseases such as fungi, and deters animals such as deer, rabbits, rodents, squirrels, bears, and elephants. Also used as a method of crowd control; irritates eyes and the mucous membranes in noses and mouths. If you chose to use this method of control, further research is necessary since it is toxic to dogs and cats.

Of Note: The Carolina Reaper holds the Guinness World Record for the hottest chile pepper, measuring over 2 million Scoville Heat Units. Just touching the peppers can cause a burning sensation.

RECIPES

Trending Turmeric – 2026 Herb of the Year

Susan Belsinger – HSA Webinar, Jan. 22, 2026

Turmeric has steadily been building in popularity over recent years due to its amazing health attributes—especially its antioxidant and anti-inflammatory benefits.

I really first became acquainted with turmeric back in the 70s and wrote about that in my golden milk article. Currently, that beverage is all the rage—and it is indeed a wonderful wellness beverage to drink before sleep. (Recipe below)

In *Spice Health Heroes*, author Natasha MacAller calls turmeric *the master spice*, stating “Some consider turmeric the most powerful spice in the pantry. Not only does this rhizome give curry dishes their distinctive, rich earthy flavor, but turmeric is quite possibly the oldest and most scientifically studied spice in the world.” In Medieval times, Ottoman traders brought turmeric to Europe, where it was used as an alternative to saffron, thus the monikers Indian saffron and false saffron. Globally, most of the turmeric is grown in India and there are two main kinds: the pungent, deep ochre-hued ‘Alleppey’ is the most esteemed of these rhizomes, while ‘Madras’ is brighter yellow in color and has a bit of sweetness to its taste.

There are some foods as well as seasonings that I know (although I am sure there are a vast number of Indian dishes and spice blends) which cannot be made without turmeric. The dried ground powder is essential to spice blends like curry powder, *ras-el-hanout*, and *garam masala*, as well as condiments such as American yellow mustard, English piccalilli and pickles of all sorts.

The inimitable flavor of turmeric is at first earthy with musky, woody and bitter notes and some pungency, which is due to the flavor compounds tumerone and ar-tumerone. Eleanor Ford, author of *A Whisper of Cardamom* (I have attended her Smithsonian webinars—one in particular on turmeric—I would say she is a spice expert) describes: “Turmeric’s earthiness serves to bind other flavors together and give depth” and further “To keep turmeric’s vibrancy, store away from light and use alongside an acid such as lemon juice to make the color pop.”

I use both the fresh and dried, ground rhizome in recipes—I love the flavor of the fresh in recipes as it has more zest and stronger flavor—although I use the ground often also. Of course, in my spice blends, I use the ground. I use fresh grated when I have it and where I want it to really brighten a dish—especially in the following turmeric shots and sauerkraut recipes.

I find that turmeric stored in plastic often gets wet and molds, so I tend to keep my fresh rhizomes in a brown paper bag on the door of the refrigerator. Inevitably if left too long it will dry up. When I have excess fresh rhizomes, I break them into fingers and put them into small, tightly sealed freezer containers and freeze them. When needed, I take them from the freezer and chop or grate them and they work quite well, although they are a little watery. Alternatively, grate the rhizomes and add a bit of coconut or grapeseed oil to just barely moisten and a few grinds of black pepper and freeze in small containers; spoon out as needed.

For the best absorption of the curcumin in turmeric, one needs to grind just a little bit of freshly ground black pepper into the same dish; a little bit of fat also helps with the absorption.

As I write this, I look at my hands which are stained yellow from curcumin. It is evident that I have been testing turmeric recipes this week. Turmeric stains hands, clothes (my apron is pretty much covered in multi-colored bright yellow blotches), cutting boards, food processors, plastic containers as well as kitchen counters and appliances! So be aware and take precautions—it doesn’t wash off—though it may eventually wear off.



Turmeric Shots

Turmeric shots are very popular these days and are available at groceries, health food stores, smoothie and juice bars, however they are very easy to make at home and will be much fresher, not to mention you can use whatever juices you like best. These little power shooters build your immune system and boost your energy. I looked at a lot of recipes online and drank quite a few commercial ones that are available and decided I like mine made in my own kitchen best. I have adapted my own version from the following two recipes: <https://turmericlife.com/blogs/news/turmeric-citrus-wellness-shot-recipe-by-dr-doug> and <https://www.verywellhealth.com/turmeric-shots-8784927>.

The boiling water helps to dissolve the oil and honey and "cooks" the turmeric. Adding the fat and black pepper helps the body to better absorb the curcumin in the turmeric. Use fresh-squeezed juices—not from concentrate. This is a strong-flavored potion; you might want to use the lesser amount of turmeric and ginger at first—or just go for the gusto!

Makes about 1 1/4 cups; shot glass-size is a serving

About 1 1/2 to 2 tablespoons freshly grated turmeric root

About 1 tablespoon local honey or pure maple syrup

Scant 1/2 teaspoon coconut oil

3 tablespoons boiling water

1 cup fresh-squeezed orange or apple cider/juice

About 1 1/2 tablespoons fresh-squeezed lemon juice

About 1 1/2 to 2 tablespoons freshly grated gingerroot

Few grinds of black pepper

Coconut water, optional

1. In a measuring cup, combine the turmeric root, honey and coconut oil. Pour the boiling water into the cup and stir well to dissolve the honey and oil. Cool to room temperature.
2. In a larger measuring cup, combine the orange and lemon juice and stir in the gingerroot. Pour the turmeric mixture and the orange juice mixture into a blender and add a few grinds of black pepper. Blend for 20 to 30 seconds until well combined.
3. Let stand for 5 to 10 minutes and strain the beverage through a strainer. Serve immediately or refrigerate for up to a few days. If you'd like it further diluted, add a little coconut water. Sip slowly; hold in your mouth for a few seconds before swallowing so it mixes with your saliva.

50 Years of Golden Milk

I first drank golden milk while studying Kundalini yoga in an Ashram in 1971. They drank this age-old Ayurvedic beverage every night before going to bed and said that it "oiled the joints and kept us limber." Powdered turmeric turned the milk golden yellow in color, and we all know that warm milk is supposed to help us sleep. (Besides being high in antioxidants, present day studies have shown that it reduces joint pain and inflammation—see <https://www.healthline.com/nutrition/golden-milk-turmeric#section9> for 10 healthful reasons to drink golden milk.)

The concoction seemed strange to me at first, however once you drink it a few times, it becomes a pleasant beverage. Of course, fresh grated turmeric makes a much tastier beverage, although good-quality powdered turmeric is perfectly fine. The black pepper is an essential ingredient; the piperine in the pepper helps the body to better absorb the curcumin in the turmeric, as does the fat.

Back in the ashram days, it was ghee and honey with the turmeric and pepper—nowadays there are many versions of golden milk—and actually I prefer the coconut oil and maple syrup combo with organic whole milk, cashew, coconut or oat milk.

I've seen jars of the golden milk mix with all sorts of other ingredients added (see creative possibilities below), for sale at health food stores and drugstores (it is very spendy)—with labels that say just add milk. Making your own is much less costly. This recipe makes 1 cup; just multiply the recipe for however many people you are serving.

Flavortherapy

Grounding, relaxing and balancing—I can drink this before bed and fall asleep.
Simple and nourishing; turmeric has an earthy taste.

Makes 1 serving

1 cup milk—your choice of dairy or plant-based
1 tablespoon fresh, finely grated turmeric root or 1 teaspoon ground turmeric
1 teaspoon ghee, or unsalted butter, or coconut oil
1 to 2 teaspoons local honey or pure maple syrup
2 or 3 grinds black pepper (or 1 pinch)

Heat the milk in a small, heavy-bottomed saucepan. As it warms, add the turmeric, fat, sweetener and black pepper and stir well with a small whisk to combine. Once hot, stir, turn off the heat and put a saucer or lid on the pan and let it sit for 5 minutes or so before serving (steeping seems to meld the flavors together more). Taste and adjust seasonings if need be.

Pour into a mug and serve hot. (If using fresh turmeric root, you may want to strain the golden milk into your mug.) Stir before serving.

Creative Possibilities

- Use any type of milk: organic whole milk, 2% or nonfat, coconut milk, cashew, almond, soy or oat milk.
- Variations include additions of ground or fresh grated ginger (which is a stimulant), ground cinnamon and/or powdered ashwaganda and/or astragalus root, vanilla extract or powder, cardamom, fennel, mace or nutmeg, star anise or any spice or herb that you'd like to add.
- Use whatever sweetener you prefer. I like maple syrup best, then honey—there is also sorghum syrup (strong in flavor) and agave, organic sugar, or some use stevia.
- Although ghee was the traditional fat, butter or coconut oil work just as well—in fact I prefer the flavor of the coconut oil.
- My friend Tina Marie Wilcox adds semi-sweet chocolate chips to her golden milk.



April Showers
God made rainy days
so gardeners could get
the housework done.

--Author Unknown



“In my garden many herbs grow,
Along the paths to and fro:
Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme,
All herbs for the kitchen ready to be
Used to make dishes from soup to tea!

--Rosemary Riffle, Peoria Area Herb Guild



If you have an event, article, recipe, book, etc. that you think members might find interesting, please send to kescenovitz.diane@att.net, and 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 May 1, 2026, and July 1, 2026.