

The Magazine for the Everyday Herbalist



**Violets**

**Tinctures**

**Herbs of the Zodiac**

**Elderflower Champagne!**

**\$5.95/ Single Issue**

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**SAMPLE MINI-MAGAZINE**

## Table of Contents

Nettle Soup.....	2
Herbs of the Zodiac .....	3
Elder Flower Champagne.....	4
Brown with Envy.....	6
Violets, Jewels of the Field.....	7
Try a Tincture.....	8
Bathing Herbs.....	10
Field Notes.....	10

We've put together this miniature sample of the magazine to share so that you can get an idea of what we do here at The Essential Herbal. The regular magazine is 32 full sized pages. Into each issue, we pack practical information, recipes, instructions, and ideas. Many thanks to our contributors for making this possible. They come up with some unique ideas that are fun and do-able. Hopefully you will find something useful to you and worth saving on these pages.

We began publication in 2002, and in 2012 we started offering print or pdf delivery options. Print is only available in the US, but pdf's go everywhere.

Since we began, we have found that although we never know exactly what material we will have for each generally seasonal issue right up until the deadline, it always falls together spectacularly with just the perfect blend of medicinal, culinary, fragrant, crafting, and growing information. There are projects and guidance to begin learning something new, keeping our readers busy right up until they start looking for the next magazine. We put out 6 issues a year, and each one is delightful.

So please enjoy this small sample. Hang onto it, and if you find that you'd like to become a part of it - as a subscriber, writer, or advertiser (or even all three!), visit our website or email us for more information.

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## The Essential Herbal Magazine

### The Magazine for the Everyday Herbalist

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## Nettle Soup

Mary Ellen Wilcox, herbaladie@aol.com

3 oz. young Nettle leaves  
1 t fresh Marjoram (or 1/2 tsp. dried)  
1 T butter or oil  
1 t fresh Basil (or 1/2 tsp. dried)  
1 small onion, chopped  
1/2 t fresh Sage (or 1/4 tsp. dried)  
3/4 lb. potatoes, peeled and diced  
1 t fresh Lovage (or 1/2 tsp. dried)  
3 cups chicken or vegetable broth  
2 t butter                      2 t cream

Wearing rubber gloves, pick only young Nettle leaves. Free nettles from stalks, wash and allow to drip.  
Cook in pan without additional liquid, over very low heat, till tender. Allow to cool, then chop.  
Add potatoes and saute again. Add boiling broth  
When potatoes are cooked, add Nettles and herbs. Allow to simmer for 15 minutes.  
Let stand in warm place for 5 minutes.  
Before serving, add the 2 tsp. of butter and 2 tsp. of cream



## Herbs of the Zodiac - ARIES

The beginning of a series from Susanna Reppert Brill of [The Rosemary House](#)



The Herbs of the Zodiac are those botanicals that are planted or grow or are harvested during a certain sign of the Zodiac and are considered essential to the well being of those born under that particular sign. Practiced in Europe 300 years ago, Astrological Herbology provided remedies for most ailments.

Physicians of that period were expected to be proficient in the study of medicine and botany and astrology. Today centuries of accumulated knowledge makes it difficult to keep up with even one of these three subjects.

Nicolas Culpepper (1616-1654) was the most famous of the Astrologer-Physician of that era. His "Complete Herbal" is still being reprinted and is recommended reading for those interested in further study of Herbal Astrology.

This is the first in a series of twelve articles on Herbs of the Zodiac. We will take a look at twelve herbs for each sign starting with the first sign in the Zodiac year. The Vernal Equinox heralds the advent of Spring. Many of us prefer to start our year with the "natural year" beginning with the greening and growing world.

Born between March 21 and April 19, Ariens are children of energy, heat and activation. They are best as pioneers and try new things enthusiastically. A Fire Sign, ruled by the Planet Mars. Ariens enjoy easily prepared foods, but also well-flavored and elegantly presented

foods. They find closest friends among Aquarians.

### Twelve of the Herbs for Aries:

**Nettles**, *Urtica dioica*, very nutritive used in soup or on the skin

**Burnet**, *Poterium sanguisorba*, cucumber flavor without the peptic effect, grow in your garden and harvest year round

**Rosemary**, *Rosemarinus officianalis*, That's for remembrances as well as to season chicken and to stimulate circulation in an invigorating bath

**Cayenne**: *Capsicum Annuum*, A seasoning that aids circulation, cayenne pepper also deters insects

**Broom**: *Sorghum vulgare*, Sweeps clean.

**Garlic**: *Allium sativum*, The healthiest of all herbs, garlic helped to build the pyramids; a herb "food for man or beast"

**Honeysuckle**, *Lonicera japonica* Signifies love and domestic happiness, sweet to man and bees

**Mustard**: *Brassica alba*, Ancient symbol of faith, mustard conquers all; an aid to digestion and pretty in the fields

**Hawthorne**: *Crataegus oxycantha*, there is no plant more useful; use the flowers or fruits to make tea, jelly or bouquets

**Horseradish**: *Cochlearia armoracia*, Few remedies can compare to this horse of a radish; delicious on roast beef, indispensable for cocktail sauce

**Tobacco**: *Nicotiana affinis*, Starry white flowers with a heavenly fragrance, found growing here by Columbus, a marvelous insecticide, for it's a killer

**Blessed Thistle**: *Silybum marianum*, the root expels melancholy.

### Zesty Aries Mustard

1 pt salad dressing style mustard

¼ C prepared horseradish

1 T garlic powder

2 t cayenne

Mix together and store in the refrigerator overnight until the flavors marry. Serve with small cubes of mild cheese or use any way you would use mustard. Great on Roast Beef.

Article submitted by Susanna Reppert Brill, The Rosemary House, Mechanicsburg, PA. This [Herbs of The Zodiac](#) series was originally written by Bertha Reppert (1919-1999) in 1984.

The book, written by Bertha Reppert is available (and VERY reasonable) here: <http://www.therosemaryhouse.com/category/Books-By-Bertha-Reppert-5>



# Elderflower Champagne

Tina Sams, [www.essentialherbal.com](http://www.essentialherbal.com)



It isn't often that in the middle of working on getting an issue put to bed for the printer that something in an article makes us stop in our tracks and try it.

Marita Orr from [With Seeds of Intention](#) sent us just such a project inside an article full of wonderful summer beverage recipes.



We had everything necessary in the cupboard. Here's the recipe:

## ELDER FLOWER CHAMPAGNE

- 7 large heads of elder blossoms
- 1 pound of white sugar, no substitutes!!
- 2 large or 3 small organic lemons/oranges
- 2 tablespoons apple cider vinegar
- 1 gallon water
- 4 liter-sized wine or champagne bottles and corks

Dissolve sugar in 1 quart of boiling water.

Add rest of water.

Slice lemons very thinly and add to water/sugar.

Add vinegar and mix well.

Place elder flowers head down in a crock, large glass bowl, or non-metal pot. (I used a: removable crock from a 2 gallon oblong crockpot.)



The elderflowers are just starting to bloom, so I started on it right away!



Pour liquid mixture over flower heads. Cover with a kitchen towel held in place with a rubber band.

After 24 hours, strain through a fine cloth (I use a clean cotton diaper), bottle, and cork.



So pretty it looked ready to drink immediately!

After 24 hours, most of the elderflowers are a little browned. It tastes very good (sweet.)

Mature your Elder Flower Champagne in the dark for three or more weeks. It will be naturally fizzy when ready to drink, so watch out when you pop the cork!

Because I can't (or won't) follow directions well, I was COMPELLED to add a slice of lemon and a bit of elderflower. I also used Mason jars.

It turned out fine. I loved it. One of my non-herbal friends hated it.





# BROWN WITH ENVY

Beth Bender Walters

I shall confess from the beginning that I am obsessed with my garden. Smitten, enraptured, possessed. To dig, sweat, weed, compost, plant and replant appear to be my calling in life.

Those living within spying distance of my puttering are perpetually perplexed by my activities. To rescue those pungent pine needles, after my neighbor stuffs them into black plastic trash bags, quickens my pulse. I positively run down the street with my trusty wheelbarrow, ready to make a clean sweep of suburbia. I gleefully collect all of those grass trimmings which were bound for the dump.

In time, all of these fine ingredients I have accumulated shall be converted into the oh-so-precious and coveted black dirt. Pay dirt. Most people do not expend so much energy on the subject of dirt, unless it is in their house and it requires sweeping, mopping, or dusting. I, on the other hand, am enamored with terra firma. Not the indoor variety; house dirt is best ignored until a rainy day.

The good stuff is all out there in the garden somewhere... or rather, in somebody else's garden. I once read an article which boasted the title "Perfect Soil in 3 Easy Steps". "312 Backbreaking Steps" would be more accurate. The author claimed the ability to "plunge my arm into my borders up to my elbow in sweet, dark humus". Not to be outdone, I zipped outside to my cosseted, pampered soil and inserted my little finger clear up to the second joint.



I suspect that the owners of these glossy picture perfect gardens are not gardeners at all, just sick individuals that enjoy making the rest of us howl in defeat and despair.

Even with my neighborhood foragings, the plot of land where I do my picking and scratching is composed primarily of clay, rock and thistle, where Canada Thistle grows in abundance and has a tap root that could encircle Cleveland within one growing season. This is my "lot (or plot) in life."

I covet other people's fertile soil in the same way that others drool over sports cars. My sister in law can produce the most delicate spires of lupines (that I attribute to her dark, fertile soil), whereas in my garden they languish, wither and perish. I am convinced that

there is a secret recipe for her crumbly soil. Perhaps there is a secret recipe, handed down through generations, safeguarded like Grandma's pie crust recipe. As much as I beg, plead and threaten, she still refuses to admit that there is a formula that she follows. Ha! I've seen her shed where she keeps bags of peat moss, lime and dried manure. I know that her magical blend is floating somewhere in her head.

It's only a matter of time before I either pry the recipe from her or stumble upon it myself. In the meantime, I'll still gather my neighbor's clippings, I'll continue to pick the endless supply of shale out of my garden, and I'll continue to dream of the next season. After all, I am a gardener.





# VIOLETS, JEWELS OF THE FIELD

Elisha Goulet, third generation wild crafter

One of the things I look forward to most every spring is stepping out into the field, basket in hand, to collect the sweet smelling violets blooming across the fields. Visions of candied violets and sweet smelling salve fill my mind. As I follow my well-loved path I spy the first inklings of spring. Blooming dandelions, the wild onions shooting up and chickweed starting to come to life. Often I find them cropping out in mounds along the wood line as far as I can see. Before I know it my basket is filled to the brim with my sweet smelling harvest.

Violets are one of the easiest herbs to identify in the wild making them a great beginner herb to forage. Wild sweet violets have dark green, heart shaped leaves and small, purple or white flowers. While there are no poisonous species of viola it should be noted that African violets are not true viola. Violets are most often found in fields along a wooded area or in a damp shady wooded area. When harvesting from the wild be sure to find a place away from the road and in an area free of pesticide spraying. You can always ask any groundskeeper if the areas you have scouted out are sprayed. As with any wild harvesting you truly need to find a place as far from auto pollution as possible.

While violets can be cultivated, and have been by the Greeks as early as 500 BC., I find wild harvested violets to have better flavor. As they propagate by throwing runners much like a strawberry where you find one plant you are sure to soon find more. Finding only one plant has always been a rare occurrence for me. In much of North America you will find them blooming anywhere from the end of February and well into April. With two blooming seasons they can be harvested later in the year but spring will find an unmatched abundance. The spring bounty is also has sweetest aroma of the year.

Native North Americans commonly used them for medicinal purposes, including the treatment of cancer. More recently the list of attributes include the treatment of ailments such as eczema, psoriasis and cradle cap when made into a salve for topical use. Making a syrup or dried tea from your harvest to aid in the treatment in migraines, whooping cough and other respiratory symptoms is a great item to keep in your home Herbal medicine chest. And my personal favorite uses, candied and fresh salad greens. Rich in vitamins A & C, both the

leaves and blooms can be added to salads. They have a delicious mild spring flavor.

Some of my personal favorite uses are to make them into a violet infused oil for salve and making violet sugar. And of course, drying for herbal tea. Always use fresh violets, picked early, just after the morning dew has burned off for the best flavor. For tea I use a 2:1 ratio of two parts dried violet leaves and one part dried chamomile or violet flowers. Prepare this as you would any other herbal tea. Aside from being delicious, it also aides in respiratory problems. Especially handy around cold and flu season.

Here is a recipe I love making with my two young daughters. Together we collect about half a cup or so of just the blooms. We place them in a clean, dry pint jar and fill 3/4 full with sugar. Cover and give a shake to mix well. Let it sit for about a week, giving a shake once or twice a day. This is my girls' favorite part. After a week or so sift out the now dried up blossoms and discard, leaving the **sweet, lightly flavored sugar**. This is wonderful for dusting treats and delicious in lemonade and teas.

One final recipe I'd love to share is my very own personal recipe for **wild violet salve**. You will need one cup of violet infused oil. I make this using a very small crock pot set on warm. I add about a cup and a half of grapeseed oil, and one cup of mixed blooms and greens to the crock and stir. Be sure they are free from excess moisture. I like to do this part in the evening and let the combination steep all night. Be sure your crock pot has a warm setting which is very different from low. In the morning simply strain your oil. This will make a little more than one cup. Exactly what you need for this recipe. Set a double Boiler on low and melt about one half cup of beeswax. When melted add the violet oil and blend well. At this point I add five drops of lavender essential oil. This is when you will want to test your salve for consistency. Take a bit out on a spoon and allow to cool. Test on your wrist to see if this consistency suits you. If you prefer a harder salve simply add a bit more beeswax. When you have it the consistency you like pour into your desired storage. I like Small glass jars for this. Even repurposed jars if they are clean and dry work well. Allow salve to cool before closing the lids.

I hope you're feeling inspired to add wild violets to your herbal medicine chest, confidently foraging for and harvesting your own supply.

Tinctures are a concentrated form of herbal preparation, which are quickly absorbed and easy to take.

The word 'tincture' comes from the Latin "Tinctura" meaning colored herbal extract made with alcohol.

In creating a tincture, the medicinal parts of herbs are extracted and preserved by a menstruum (solvent): alcohol, apple cider vinegar or glycerin. The tincture method is called maceration and can easily be prepared in your home.

#### **Alcohol as a Menstruum:**

Vodka is the best alcohol to use in tinctures due to its lack of color and taste. Tincturing works best with a ratio of 50% alcohol to 50% water which is fairly equivalent to 100 proof vodka and provides an indefinite shelf life. Alcohol extracts volatile oils, alkaloids and flavonoids from the herb; whereas water extracts the saponins and glycosides.

#### **Vinegar as a Menstruum:**

Organic apple cider vinegar has many medicinal properties and makes a good base for extracting the medicinal properties from the herbs. Shelf life of apple cider vinegar is reported to be about one year. I use 3 parts vinegar to 1 part dried herb or 2 parts fresh herb. Vinegar extracts only the alkaloids from the herb, making the tincture less potent than one made with alcohol.

#### **Glycerin as a Menstruum:**

Because of the sweet flavor and the fact that it does not contain alcohol, it is useful in making tinctures for children and people averse to drinking alcohol. Though it has good preservative properties and dissolves mucilage material, vitamins and minerals, it does not dissolve the resinous or oily components as well as alcohol. Glycerin needs to be thinned with water 1:1. The rest of the process is the same as the alcohol based tincture. When buying glycerin (available in natural food stores) make certain it is 100% vegetable glycerin which is of much higher quality. Glycerin is effective at extracting tannins from herbs but is a much weaker



solvent than alcohol or vinegar.

#### **Creating a Tincture**

Using the simple folk method: Fill a glass jar half way with dried herb(s). If you are using fresh herbs fill the jar loosely to the top. Be certain that the jar has a tight fitting lid. Cover the herb completely with your choice of menstruum: alcohol, vinegar or glycerin. Next day top off your jar to be sure the herb is entirely covered after absorbing the liquid. Keep the jar in a cool, dark place and shake the tincture a couple of times a day.

Allow the herb to sit (macerate) in the menstruum for a minimum of 2 weeks. I typically infuse my tinctures for 3 to 4 weeks. After 6 months the menstruum will no longer extract the medicines from the herb. At this point, strain the herbal tincture through several layers of cheese cloth, using a colander and a large bowl to catch the liquid. Using your hands, squeeze the remaining liquid from the tintured herb through the cheese cloth. I do a second strain through coffee filters via a colander to get the remaining sediment out of the tincture. Pour the liquid in a glass jar, seal with a lid, label and store in a cool, dry, dark place. Tinctures do not require refrigeration. Pour into individual amber or blue dropper bottles, to keep light from entering, and label the tincture.

**ALWAYS CLEARLY LABEL YOUR HERBAL PREPARATIONS!**

Tinctures are usually taken by the dropperful, approximately 30 drops. It is best taken under the



tongue, as then it goes directly into the bloodstream.

You can mix your tincture with a bit of juice or tea to mask the taste if needed.

If you don't wish to ingest the alcohol, stir a dropperful of tincture into a cup of boiling water. This allows the alcohol to evaporate very quickly. Drink the mixture when it cools slightly.

(editor's note: this is NOT sufficient to remove alcohol for those with a sensitivity to alcohol.)

*The information in this article is intended solely to inform the reader. Please be certain to 'know your herb' before consuming it. "Walk Gently on this Earth".*





## FIELD NOTES SPRING MINI '18

Spring is finally arriving between the snow storms.

Our 99th issue just went off to the printer, and we're preparing some special treats for subscribers before #100 goes to print in May.

We're just starting to be able to gather some small nettles, field garlic, chickweed, dandelions, and various wild greens for soups and pestos.

This has to be the best time of the year in herbalism (I say that a lot) because we've been waiting all winter for those first precious leaves and flowers

My sister Maryanne and I have also been keeping busy restocking the shelves of her soap and body care business for spring. Not complaining. We have a blast working together. Daughter Molly has taken off for the west coast, and sends us mid-Atlantic region dwellers pictures of "weeds" out there to rub salt into our winter-weary wounds.

Be sure to try some of the items covered inside. I really loved the elder blossom champagne. We use most of the items in this issue on an almost daily basis.

Have some fun with herbs today!

Peace,

Tina



### *Soothing Herbal Bath for Aches and Pains*

*Equal parts of the following herbs:*

*Chamomile flowers*

*Rose flowers*

*Comfrey*

*Lemon Balm*

*Sage*

*Oregano*

*Combine the herbs and mix thoroughly. Fill muslin bag or tie into a washcloth (about 1/2 cup), and submerge into a quart or two of very hot water. Allow to steep while running the bath. Pour tub tea into the bath, slip in, and relax for 20 to 30 minutes.*