

**Plant Revolution
Backyard Apothecary:
Grow a Medicinal Herb Garden**

by Kalan Milhous Redwood



Lately the anticipation of spring has been strong. The signs are everywhere: manzanita and oregon grape root bloom, grasses grow and soon we will see the oak buds fatten. Visions of the herb garden begin to fill my head and seed catalogues are strewn upon the table. The list of plants to go in my medicinal garden is long this year. Pondering my long list I wonder, *What are my essentials?*

Calendula: (*Calendula officinalis*) The edible flower of calendula is a supreme skin healer. Throw the flowers and leaves in your salad or make an olive oil infusion of flowers for use on minor cuts and scrapes. Calendula's antibacterial and tissue healing actions also make it ideal for use with most viral and bacterial infections such as colds, flues and sore throats.

Calendula is easy to seed directly into a prepared garden bed. The seeds are large and ideal for spreading all around your garden to attract beneficial insects and bees. It will reseed itself and continue to bloom all spring, summer, and into the fall. The flowers are easily collected all season and dried for use during winter months.

Comfrey: (*Symphytum officinale*) Another fantastic tissue healer, comfrey has been used traditionally by herbalists for many years to facilitate the regrowth of tissue, from skin to bone. Most of the medicinal properties are concentrated in the root of this plant, although the leaves also may be used as temporary "band aids" for minor scrapes. The chemical allantoin is found at highest levels in the root in the spring or autumn and is known to stimulate cell proliferation.

An olive oil infusion of comfrey root and leaf is an excellent way to apply comfrey to

shallow surface abrasions. Do not apply to open wounds. For fractures and sprains it can be used as a compress or poultice. Those with impaired livers should exercise caution when taking comfrey internally and consult an herbalist.

In the garden this plant encourages soil health by concentrating minerals and vitamins from the soil in its leaves. The leaves grow fast and can be cut back again and again for use as green mulch or added to a compost pile. These next few weeks we are planting many fruit trees and I will place comfrey at the base of each tree to provide living mulch. Comfrey grows easily in most soils from just a small piece of the root.

Echinacea: (*Echinacea purpurea*) This North American plains native is useful for infections anywhere in the body. It seems to help the body rid itself of viral and bacterial infections. Taken at the onset of a cold or flu it can dramatically reduce recovery time. Combined with Bearberry (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*) and Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) it is useful for urinary tract infections.

Echinacea is a hardy perennial that sends up long stems with large pink/purple cone flowers. It is somewhat drought resistant and will die back each winter. Sow a new patch each year because the roots won't be ready for harvest for 3-4 years. Wild populations of this plant have been largely eradicated due to over-harvesting for medicinal use. It is very important to either grow your own or always purchase organically grown Echinacea root.

Mint: (*Mentha sp.*) During my travels in Morocco, mint tea was served to us constantly, even at the auto garage while our fuel pump was repaired. Looking back on this I see that there must be a lot of ancient wisdom behind this custom. Most mints have similar medicinal qualities. They are diaphoretic, meaning they will help us break a fever by increasing the sweat output of the body. For this purpose, combine with calendula and yarrow as a hot tea, and go to bed. A cup of mint tea is also an age old tummy soother and digestive aid.

All plants in the mint family contain plentiful antioxidants which help protect the body against free radical scavengers.

There are many mints to choose from: spearmint, peppermint, chocolate mint, etc. I have also collected wild mint from streams and cultivated it in my garden. Mint will grow well and abundantly in the garden, but you must give it moisture. It is a good idea to put it in a place where it is free to spread. To harvest, cut the tops of the plants back 4-10 inches, depending on growth. Dry this plant material for herbal infusions.

Rosemary: (*Rosmarinus officinalis*.) This is another traditional culinary herb from the Mediterranean. Used in cooking it imparts a slightly spicy and pungent, yet cooling flavor to foods. It is a gentle circulatory tonic for the entire body, and as such can be used for aching muscles, eczema, memory and anything that is related to impaired circulation such as varicose veins and low blood pressure.

Like all herbs in the mint family, rosemary is an excellent free radical scavenger and with all the toxins we are exposed to each day we need as much of that as we can get! The bitter properties in rosemary are useful for digestive upsets as they increase the flow of bile, while at the same time exercising antispasmodic actions. So put lots of rosemary in your food! Rosemary also stimulates the hair follicles and can be applied as a rinse for premature balding.

Rosemary is a hardy perennial that grows vigorously in the north valley climate. After it is established in your garden it will need very little care or water. It has a shrub like habit and small blue flowers bloom throughout the season attracting many bees.

These five plants are easily found in nurseries and neighbor's gardens. They transplant well and are suited to the north valley climate. The season is ripe for a plant revolution. May we harvest community health.

*Even the land o' plenty has its limits.
To create sustainable food security,
let's think communally
—and do it ourselves.*

by Wayne and Laurel Kessler

Faraway Food

We're all concerned about the quality and freshness of the food we eat. Prepared food has too many additives, sugar and salt, and may come from across the country or from other continents. (Many juice concentrates come from China!) Fresh vegetables and fruit may come from the Central Valley or another part of California, or from Latin America. But what



if the price of fuel rises so high that food can't be brought from great distances? No kidding, this could happen sooner than later, and we could be wondering what

to do about our food supply's terrifically high prices and limited availability. It's timely to start thinking about our families' food security for the future, and determine what we can do about it.

Abundance at Home

If we want high-quality fresh food that hasn't traveled a great distance, we can *buy locally*. Shasta County boasts a flour mill, bakeries, beef cattle and poultry ranches, a tortilla factory, local olive oil, strawberry fields, zillions of honey bees, fruit and nut orchards, wild rice, vineyards and wineries. Much of this bounty is available in Redding and Burney at farmers' markets, among the 3,700 such markets around the country.

Grow Your Own

Better yet, we can *grow our own*. Lots of people do. Nurseries offer bare-root fruit trees as well as vegetable and herb bedding plants appropriate to the season. A novice gardener can attend college classes or workshops offered by some nurseries and can ask seasoned gardeners for advice.

It takes time to get the hang of growing food, so 2007 is the year to start. Laurel and I established Shambani Organics to encourage backyard gardeners, offering bedding plants of herbs, vegetables, and edible flowers.

Sow 'n' Swap

Perhaps your neighbors grow tomatoes and pumpkins; but you've got a boatload of peas,

beans and basil. Set up a barter system! What about the trees that bear "too many" pears or apples for your small family to eat? Trade for peaches and persimmons! Dry the fruit, freeze it or can it. Why drive to Redding for fresh produce if it's grown around the corner?

Commodity Co-ops

All over Shasta County, we can cooperate. Visualize some people growing vegetables, herbs and fruits, and others raising meat animals. These folks can buy from or trade with each other, sharing gardening techniques, forming a cooperative to buy staples that aren't locally grown (flour, sugar...), as well as seeds, fertilizer and equipment. People can start very local farmers' markets, establish community processing kitchens, and deal with excess supply by making jam and pickles, drying fruit and tomatoes, and contributing fresh food to food banks.

Imagine networks in Anderson and Cottonwood, Shasta Lake City and Mountain Gate, Shingletown and Manton, Millville, Bella Vista and Palo Cedro, Oak Run and Whitmore, Montgomery Creek and Round Mountain, Burney and Cassell, Fall River Mills and McArthur. It's already happening in Happy Valley.

You can stock your pantry, fill your freezer, put fresh food in your fridge and feed your family in a way that encourages health in both you and your community. Act now for the future.