

The Artemisias

Herb of the Year 2014

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In 1991, the International Herb Association established National Herb Week to be celebrated every year during the week prior to Mother's Day. The purpose of National Herb is to bring national attention to herbs, herb uses, herb businesses and Associations which support it. The International Herb Association, United Plant Savers, American Botanical Council, American Herbal Products Association, American Herbalist Guild, American Herbal Pharmacopoeia and the Canadian Herbalist's Association of British Columbia.

Every year the IHA chooses a herb to highlight. The herb must be outstanding in at least two of the three major categories: Medicinal, Culinary, or Decorative. Herb societies, groups, and organizations, from around the world work together to educate the public about these important herbs throughout the year. This year's choice for Herb of the Year is actually a large and diverse group of plants. Important in medicine, cooking and as a landscape plant. The Artemisias are very deserving of this honour. This family includes:

- Tarragon, one of the most finest and important ingredients in French cuisine.
- Sweet Annie, the source of a medicine crucially important for the prevention and treatment of malaria.
- The bitter Wormwood, the defining ingredient of vermouth, without which the martini could not exist!
- Other mentionable herbs of the species are: Mugwort, White Sagebrush, Yomogi and Southernwood.

Man's connection to the Artemisias goes a long way back. They are found growing in large expanses though out the world. According to the Greek myths, Artemis, the goddess of the wilderness and of the hunt, gave the power of the plant to Chiron the Centaur who was a great healer and teacher. It was Chiron who developed the first medicines from Artemisia.

Artemisia is best known for its bitter qualities. Bitter herbs kick-start the digestive system stimulate the liver, and boost the immune system.

MUGWORT

Latin: *Artemisia vulgaris*

Common Names: Artemis Herbs, Artemisia, Felon Herb, Muggons, Naughty Man, Old Man, Old Uncle Henry, Sailor's Tobacco, St. John's Plant.

Habitat & Cultivation: Mugwort is found in temperate regions of the northern hemisphere, it flourishes in open areas and along roads, and is gathered in late summer just before flowering.

Parts Used: Leaves, Root.

Constituents: Moonwort contains volatile oil, a sesquiterpene lactone, flavonoids, coumarin derivatives, and triterpenes.

History & Folklore: Mugwort was used since the aerialist time in Europe and Asia. Roman centurions reputedly placed it in their sandals to keep the soles of their feet in good shape. The Greek physician Dioscorides (1st century AD) recounted that the goddess Artemis, who inspired the plant's genus name, was believed to give succour to women in childbirth. There 13th century Welsh Herbal "The Physicians of Myddfai" recommended: "If a woman be unable to give birth to her child let the mugwort be bound to her left thigh. Let it be instantly removed when she has been delivered, lest there should be hemorrhage." An 18th century Spanish herbalist, Deigo de Torres, recommended the application of a mugwort plaster below the navel as an effective method of inducing labor. In China, mugwort has been valued for millennia and is the principal ingredients lot "moxa" used in moxibustion.

Medicinal Actions & Uses: A digestive and tonic herbs, Mugwort has a wide variety of traditional uses. Milder in action than most other Artemisia species, it can be taken over the long term at low dose to improve appetite, digestive function, and absorption of nutrients. In addition to encouraging the elimination of worms, mugwort increases bile flow and mildly induces the onset of menstruation. The European conception of mugwort as a uterine stimulant is contraindicated by Chinese usage, in which is it prescribed to prevent miscarriage and to reuse or stop menstrual bleeding. Mugwort is also an antiseptic and has been used in the treatment of malaria.

Magical Uses: Mugwort has both a large lore from past use as a Magical Herb and enjoys great popularity even today. It is considered a Visionary Herb, being used much by those practicing prophecy and divination. It is used to protect homes, friends, and possessions, and to consecrate various implements of magic. It has a strong connection with the crystal ball.

Place Mugwort in the shoes to gain strength during long walks or runs. For this purpose pick mugwort before sunrise and say, "Tollam to artemesia, ne lassus sim in via." A pillow stuffed with Mugwort and slept on will produce prophetic dreams. Mugwort burned with sandalwood or wormwood during scrying rituals, and a mugwort infusion is drunk (sweetened with honey) before divination. The infusion is also used to wash crystal balls and magic mirrors, and mugwort leaves are placed around the base of the ball, or beneath it to aid in psychic workings.

When carrying Mugwort you cannot be harmed by poison, wild beasts or sun stroke, according to ancient tradition. In a building, Mugwort prevents elves and "evil thynges" from entering, and bunches of Mugwort are used in Japan by the Ainus to exorcise spirits of disease who are thought to hate the odour. In China, it is hung over doors to keep evil spirits from buildings.

Mugwort is also carried to increase lust and fertility, to prevent backache and to cure disease and madness. Placed next to the bed it aids in achieving astral projection.

WORMWOOD

Latin: Artemisia absinthium

Common Names: Absinthe, Old Woman, Crown for a King

Habitat & Cultivation: Wormwood is a wayside plant, native to Europe. It now grows wild in central Asia and in eastern parts of the US. It is also cultivated in temperate regions worldwide. Wormwood is propagated from seed in the spring or by dividing the roots in autumn. The aerial parts are harvested in late summer.

Parts Used: Aerial Parts

Constituents: Volatile oil containing sesquiterpene lactones (artabsin, anabsinthin); thujone; azulenes, flavonoids, phenolic acids, lignans.

Actions: Bitter tonic, carminative, anthelmintic, anti-inflammatory.

History & Folklore: Absinthe Wormwood is the source of "absinthe", an addictive and toxic drink favoured in 19th century France. Absinthe, once banned, was flavoured with essential oil of wormwood,

which due to its thujone content, is toxic in excess, today, it is available in Canada and widely available in Europe. The name *Artemisia* derives from the name of the Goddess Artemis. However, it is possible that this plant's genus actually takes its name from a Persian queen, Artemisia. The name absinthum may come from a word meaning "unenjoyable" referring to the bitter taste.

The name wormwood refers to the historic use of this plant as a cure for intestinal worms. It is said that wormwood first grew from the path of the serpent as it exited the Garden of Eden.

Medicinal Actions & Uses: Wormwood is an extremely useful medicine for those with weak and under active digestions. It increases stomach acid and bile production and therefore improves digestion and the absorption of nutrients, making it helpful for many conditions, including anemia. Wormwood also eases gas and bloating, and if the tincture is taken regularly, it slowly strengthens the digestion and helps the body return to full vitality after a prolonged illness. As its name suggests, wormwood is a traditional remedy for eliminating worms. It is moderately effective. Wormwood is a good insecticide and insect repellent. The anti-inflammatory action of wormwood makes it useful for infections and it has occasionally been given as an antidepressant.

Magical Uses: Wormwood is burned in incenses designed to aid in developing psychic powers, and is also worn for this purpose. When carried, wormwood protects not only against bewitchment, but also from the bite of sea serpents. Also according to accent traditions, it counteracts the effects of poisoning by hemlock and toadstools. Hung from the rear-view mirror wormwood protects the vehicle from accidents on treacherous roads. Wormwood is also sometimes used in love infusions, probably because it was once made into an alcoholic beverage called absinthe, but the reputation lingers and wormwood is still used in love mixtures. One such use is to place it under the bed to draw a loved one. Wormwood is also burned to summon spirits. It is sometimes mixed with sandalwood for this purpose. If burned in graveyards the spirits of the dead will rise and speak, according to old grimoires.

TARRAGON

Latin: *Artemisia dracunculus*

Common Names: French Tarragon, Estragon (French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Russian), Tarkhum (Arabic, Russian), ai hao (Mandarin), dragon (Dutch, Swedish), Tarragon (Hebrew), taragone (Italian), esutoragon (Japanese, and estragao (Portuguese).

Habitat & Cultivation: Only the Russian and wild varieties produce viable seed. A lot of growers are propagating and selling to the unsuspecting public as French Tarragon. French and Russian tarragon can be propagated by cuttings. It grows best in a warm dry position, and will need protection in winter. It also dislikes humid conditions. The plant should be renewed every 3 years because the flavour deteriorates as the plant matures. A native of southern Europe, tarragon is now found in dry areas of North America, Southern Asia and Siberia. The species is widely cultivated across the world mainly in southern Europe, Russia, and the United States. Tarragon plants are established from vegetative or roots cuttings, because the plant rarely produces seed. Russian Tarragon, a separate cultivar, is often confused with and sold as French Tarragon. Except for being taller, the Russian Tarragon, looks similar to French Tarragon but it is considered far inferior to the French Tarragon in taste.

Parts Used: Pick sprigs of French tarragon early in the season, pick leaves for fresh use throughout the growing season. For freezing it is best to pick the leaves in the midsummer months.

Constituents: Flavonoids (flavones, flavanones, dihydroflavonoid, chalcones), Phenylpropanoids; Chromones/Coumarins; Alkaloids. Tarragon contains an anesthetic chemical, eugenol, which is the major constituent of anesthetic clove oil.

History & Folklore: *Dracunculus* means "little dragon". Its naming could have occurred (via the Doctrine of Signatures) as a result of the shape of its roots, or because of its fiery flavour. It was

certainly believed to have considerable power to heal bites from snakes, serpents, and other venomous creatures. In ancient times the mixed juices of tarragon and fennel made a favourite drink for the Kings of India.

In the reign of Henry VIII, tarragon made its way into English gardens, and the thyme. There is also the story that Henry VIII divorced Catherine of Aragon for her reckless use of Tarragon! The anise-flavoured leaves and flowering tops are used to season foods, and its essential oils are used in the manufacture of Tarragon vinegar, mustard, tartar sauce, and liquors. Tarragon is essential in classic béarnaise sauce. Tarragon is one of the herbs that does not “translate well” into the dried version. Since most of its essential oil is lost in the drying process, you’ll find that dried Tarragon is a poor substitute for the fresh herb.

Medicinal Actions & Uses: No modern medicinal use. Formerly used by the Ancient Greeks for toothache. Traditionally, a tea made from the leaves is said to overcome insomnia. Tarragon leaves are rich in Vitamins A, C, Iodine, and mineral salts. Tarragon tea is good to help digestion. Chew a leaf to stop hiccups. Tarragon may act as an antioxidant in some foods, and it is a component of some perfumes, soaps and other cosmetics. As a medicinal plant, Tarragon had been traditionally considered a diuretic, emmenagogue, and stomachic. The root of Tarragon was a folk remedy for curing toothaches. The volatile oil of Tarragon is reported to have anti fungal activity.

Magical Uses: Tarragon is bound to Mars and Fire. It is best known as a protective and calming herb, being used in kitchen magic to put guests at ease and make them feel welcome. It is used in rituals of consecrations, and can also be carried in charms or sachets for compassion, love peace, nurturing and good luck. Its invocatory is Lilith, considered the original independent woman goddess. Tarragon brings a Magic with promotes compassion for others. This Greene Herb might be useful for woman who are caregivers, helping them extend love and nurturing without becoming martyrs. This herb is also recommended for women recovering from abusive situations, for it helps them reclaim their strength and independence. Tarragon may be used to consecrate ritual chalices. It can also be used as a banishing herb in other ways. For example, you can use it as an incense as you write down the thing you want to banish on a white piece of paper, and then burn the paper in a suitable container.

SAGEBRUSH

Latin: *Artemisia tridentata*

Common Names: Sagebrush, Big Sagebrush

Habitat & Cultivation: The Chaparral biome is one of the environments where sagebrush can be found. Sagebrush can also be found on the dry plains of the western US and the drier southern side of mountains. The Sagebrush grows in dry places where other plants do not. It produces seed, and can be propagated by seed planting. White Sagebrush is on United Plant Savers list of “to watch” herbs, as it does not grow in many as many areas as it used to. It also will not grow back after a fire.

Parts Used: Leaves

Constituents: Tannins, terpenoids, cuticular waxes.

History & Folklore: Sagebrush is used by the Native Americans as a smudge herb. It is picked along with juniper, chaparral, desert tea and other herbs. When wrapped around perishable food it will keep insects and rodents away. Some livestock and wildlife animal that eat this plant are: cattle, domestic sheep, horses, pronghorn, elk, mule deer, white-tailed deer, small mammals, small non-game birds, upland game birds, and waterfowl.

Medicinal Uses & Actions: When the leaves are powdered they can be used for rashes such as diaper rash. Its decoction, which is the water that it has been boiled in, can be used on bitten and irritated skin. The sagebrush’s smoke is offensive to many animals and insects and help to keep mosquitoes away.

Magical Uses: Sagebrush is used today only by magician who are not afraid of supernatural contacts. Since ancient times, witches, nymphs, shamans used sagebrush in various ceremonies and rituals, potions, amulets and talisman. Sagebrush drives away evil spirits, protects people from the evil eye, damage and fatalities. The ancient priestess of the goddess of fertility and motherhood Isis wore garland of Sagebrush, and its branches adorned the temple. In many religions, fragrant smoke of smouldering sage was used in conducting religious activities. Sagebrush has long been revered as a plant-Ward. Evil is afraid of the bitter smell of sagebrush, it is also one of the most powerful herbs against the demons that affect the energy of the whole organism, the anti-demon properties of Sagebrush grown in the waning moon. Burning Sagebrush drives out evil spirits, protects the house from evil spirits and elves. In China the plant is hung above the door for this reason. Sagebrush is burned with sandalwood during the ritual of awakening psychic powers, it helps with astral projections. The oil of Sagebrush is used for the consecration of crystal balls, prisms, mirrors, magic and other predictive tools, especially made of silver.

SOUTHERNWOOD

Latin Name: Artemisia abrotanum

Common Names: Old Man, Lad's Love, Boy's Love, Applerie, Garde Robe (French)

Habitat & Cultivation: Woodland, Garden, Sunny Edge, Dapples Shade, Hedge. The flowers are hermaphrodite and pollinated by Wind. Suitable for light (sandy), medium (loamy), and heavy (clay) soils, prefers well drained soil and can grow in nutritionally poor soil. It prefers dry or moist soil and can tolerate drought.

Parts Used: The young shoots.

Constituents: Essential Oil (absinthol); abrotanin and tannins.

Properties: Bitter, emmenagogue, anthelmintic, anti-microbial, stimulant.

History & Folklore: The Latin name of the plant, "abrotanum" is from the Greek "habroton" meaning elegant. At its arrival in 1548 the English called it "suthernewude" or "a woody plant from the south" and used it as a strewing herb. The French named it "garde robe" because they placed it among their woollens to deter moths. Southernwood asked were mixed with olive oil to promote hair growth, giving rise to both the common names, young lad's love and old man's beard. The leaves were included in buckets given to women being courted. Women carried southern wood nosegays, with lemon balm, to church so they wouldn't feel drowsy. Judges used it with Rue and Rosemary to protect themselves from typhoid in the courtroom. In Poland, Southernwood was placed in the shoe of a bride to protect her against evil intent. Language of Flowers: bantering, jesting.

Medicinal Uses & Actions: Southernwood had the following actions: Bitter, emmenagogue, anthelmintic, anti-microbial, stimulant. Southernwood encourages menstruation, is antiseptic and kills intestinal worms. It was used to treat liver, spleen and stomach problems. It is seldom used medicinally today, except in Germany, where poultices are placed on wounds, splinters and skin conditions and it is employed occasionally to treat frostbite. Its constituents have been shown to stimulate the gallbladder and bile, which improves digestion and liver functions. The leaves are mixed with other herbs in aromatic baths and is said to counter sleepiness. It can be taken as a tea of 1 Tbsp of dried leaves to each cup of boiling water. Sweeten with honey. Drink three times a day or take 1-4ml of the tincture three times a day. Combines well with false unicorn root for delayed menstruation. Do not take during pregnancy.

Magical Uses: Southernwood was believed to protect the home from witches and evil spirits by strewing liberally on floors and hanging above the threshold. It has been used by men to increase their virility. Young men placed southernwood in bouquets of flowers to encourage young women to feel love and

lust for them. Southernwood may be used to represent a promise to be faithful to one's intended lover. One usage would be in the ritual baths in preparation for a hand feasting of ritual of union. Men who wish to increase their magical testosterone might try working with southernwood.

Other Uses: It is used as an insect repellent. The stems yield a yellow dye and the foliage is used in decorations.

QING HAO

Latin: Artemisia annua

Common Names: Sweet Wormwood, Sweet Annie, Annual Wormwood, Qing Hao, Chinese Wormwood, Sweet Sage wort.

Habitat & Cultivation: Hillsides, edges of forests and wastelands. It is widely planted commercially as a source of essential oils and artemisinin.

Parts Used: Aerial Parts

Constituents: Volatile oil, Sesquiterpene lactone, Vitamin A.

History & Folklore: The first mention of qing hao was in a Chinese text of 168 BC. Traditionally, it was "seen as an herb that helped to clear and relieve summer heat." Qing hao was extensively researched in China, especially in Guangzhou, in the 1980's. Studies revealed that it has an antibiotic effect against many fungal skin conditions and leptospirosis (Weil's disease). In addition, the plant has a direct effect against the malaria parasite, Plasmodium, a protozoon introduced into the body by infected mosquitoes. Recent research has focused on the isolated compound artemisinin, which has proved to be a dramatically effective antimalarial. Recent clinical trials in Thailand have shown artemisinin to be 90% effective and to be more successful than the standard drug chloroquine.

Medicinal Uses & Actions: Qing hao has a cool, bitter taste and is used for conditions brought on by heat, especially with symptoms such as fever, headaches, dizziness, and a tight-chested sensation. It treats chronic fevers, night fevers, and morning chills, and is a traditional remedy for nosebleeds associated with heat. Qing hao had been used to treat the fevers and chills of malaria for thousands of years, and artemisinin reduces the risks of developing malaria and aids a quick recovery. It is particularly helpful in treating drug-resistant strains of malaria. The whole plant can also be used to treat malaria and acts as a preventative, reducing the chances of infection.

Magical Uses: The magical use of the Sweet Annie is to rid the area of parasitic negative spirits, the kind that give a sleeper nightmares or make trouble in the kitchen with slippery knives or hidden little shards of broken glass on the floor. For that purpose, infuse the herb in hot (not boiling) water and use as a wash or spray. You can also combine it with a good general purifying resin like frankincense for a spirit busting smudge. Also consider this as a component in a bundle dedicated to Artemis, along with Mugwort and Wormwood. These can also be a nice foundation for an Artemis incense. Combine them in equal parts with a Moon resin, like sandarac or storax. Or make a libation to Herbs by infusing some of the three herbs in potato vodka. Although this does not have juicy or watery leaves, I identify it as a Moon herb because in Traditional Chinese Medicine, its uses all involve cooling.

YOMOGI

Latin Name: Artemisia Princeps

Common Names: Japanese Mugwort, Kui hao

Habitat & Cultivation: Prefers full or partial sun and well-drained soil. Grows in temperate climates of both hemispheres.

Parts Used: Young leaves and seedlings.

Constituents: Flavonoid (Eupofolin), Volatile Oil (eucalyptol, alpha-terpineol).

History & Folklore: The leaves and new shoots or sprouts from this plant are edible, with the blanched leaves being added to the sticky rice dumplings called yomogi mochi, which can be found in health food shops in countries other than Japan. Young leaves are boiled slightly and then pounded into dumplings made with gelatinous rice adding distinctive and delightful colour, aroma and flavour. It is used in traditional medicine in East Asia where it grows; in China, Japan and Korea. In Japan it is either taken orally or used in moxibustion which is a burning of compact bundles of the herb at acupoints on the body.

Medicinal Uses & Actions: It is used to treat inflammatory diseases and inflammation generally, and piles, circulation problems and ailments which arise from these, and is also used to treat cancer, ulcers, and digestive problems. One study has shown that it can inhibit the growth of tumours in vivo and in particular those of cervical cancer. Another study suggests that it may in future help in the treatment of asthma as well as being able to inhibit the growth of tumours. The essential oil from the plant contains eucalyptus and alpha-terpineol which can inhibit the growth of bacteria such as Candida.

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