

The Fragrant News

December 2007

Welcome to the Fragrant News. Early summer is the beginning of flower time in the garden. Herbs are starting to flower and some are in their full flush so the perfumes abound in the herb garden. We are busy with harvesting different flowers every day. Elder flowers are picked for cordials and fizzy drinks as well as wine making. And there are still plenty left for drying so they can be used throughout the year for their different medicinal applications. Rose petals are plucked and dried too as they can be used later in the year for flavouring crab apple jelly. We make an excellent rose petal fizz now so it can be enjoyed all year long. Using red and dark pink petals colour the brew pink. Although we don't use clove pinks in our beer making we do enjoy their heady perfume as picked along with sweet peas they make a fragrant posy bowl in the house. Thank you for requesting the newsletter. We hope you find time to enjoy and share some of the information. In 2008 we are starting herb workshops and one of the first will be on herbal wine making. If you would like to participate, email us at { [HYPERLINK "mailto:workshops@fragrantgarden.co.nz"](mailto:workshops@fragrantgarden.co.nz) } for details.

Elder Flower Cordial (Jos Orum)

Boil and cool 3 pints water. Pour over these – 4 oranges (juiced) 1 lemon, 3lb sugar, 2oz tartaric acid; 24 elder flower heads. Leaves 48 hours. Strain and bottle. Keep cordial in fridge or freezer.

Elder Flower Bubbly (Marilyn Wightman)

7 to 10 heads of elderflower (*Sambucus nigra*)

3 cups sugar

jug full of boiling water

3 sliced lemons

2 tbsp cider vinegar/ white wine

more water



Boil the jug and pour over the sugar. Stir to dissolve. Allow to cool. Add other ingredients and make the water up to about 10 litres. (The normal domestic bucket is 10 litre size.) Drape over a tea towel or muslin cloth. Leave at least 24 hours. Can be left up to three days if necessary. Strain and siphon the brew into clean, screw cap bottles – such as coke or lemonade. Sometimes there is a small, black insect that infests the flowers. Even straining will not exclude it entirely. Consider the extra protein as beneficial! Screw the lids on tightly and the drink will be ready within two weeks. Because there is a fermentation process involved there will

be a very small quantity of alcohol present. The drink is similar to that produced by ginger beer bugs. It is a good family exercise to involve the children in the making and of course drinking of the end product. Leave some flowers on the tree. These can grow into berries for elderberry wine making.

Rose Bubbly Fizz (Marilyn Wightman)

A light, pink coloured very fizzy cordial. The best roses to use are the old fashioned types that have heavy, strong perfumes. Avoid using petals from bushes that have been sprayed.

9 litres total of water

1 kg sugar

4 sliced lemons
100 mls white wine vinegar
3 to 4 cups of fragrant rose petals

Boil a measured quantity of water – about 1 to 2 litres. Put sugar into brew kit or large bucket. Pour over boiling water and stir to dissolve the sugar. Make the mix up to measure 9 litres of total water. Pull rose petals away from the calyx and stamens. Spread out on a bench to remove any insects and add petals to the container. Slice lemons and put on top of petals. This helps submerge the petals. Add vinegar and either lid or cover with a tea towel. Leave two days. Strain off and put into empty fizzy drink containers. (Milk containers are not manufactured to be pressurized and will bulge.) Tighten on caps firmly. It is ready to drink in two weeks. Serve chilled and with ice if preferred. Makes a light, pleasant tasting cordial drink. Take care when removing the lid as it is very fizzy and will all whoosh out if lid is removed quickly.

Clove Pinks

Shakespeare called clove pinks ‘gilly flowers’ when he used them in his plays and sonnets. The term gilly flower is medieval and Chaucer wrote about them also in his Canterbury Tales in the 14th Century.



Clove pinks are low, mat-forming, spiky, grey leafed plants that adore the sun. They can be planted on rockeries or dangling over embankments and retaining walls. They enjoy good drainage and any dry, sunny spot in the garden. Siting them under eaves, in that often small area between house and garden is another good place.

The botanical name for clove pinks is *Dianthus caryophyllus*. *Dianthus* is derived from two ancient Greek names ‘dios’ meaning a god or a divine and ‘anthos’ meaning flower so its scientific name translates as ‘divine flower’.

The country or common name of these plants – clove pinks describes them perfectly. *Clove* for their heady, strong perfume that is reputedly clove-like and *pink* as the flower tones are always white, pink, red and maroon. Innkeepers preferred to use clove pinks in their ale making as the flavour was imparted to the brew. Some clove pinks have a single colour to the flower. Many of them have bullseye markings and are multi-toned. Most have a ragged, frilly edge to the petal. Because they have been favourites in the garden for hundreds of years there are now many colour tones and varieties available. Several 19thC varieties are still grown today such as the white flowering Mrs Sinkins. Some of the varieties we grow at The Fragrant Garden have their correct names. Others have been collected from old gardens such as “Hurworth”. In the 1980s a weekend expedition by Manawatu Herb Society viewed the cottage gardens at the historic cottage called Hurworth in Taranaki. The curator let us take a few cuttings from the garden. As its name is unknown it is called “Hurworth” – the flower is two-toned maroon and white.

The fascinating part is the flowers, on the same plant reverse the colouring structure as some are mainly white with a speckling of maroon and others are predominately maroon with a splash of white stripes. Clove pinks usually have a flat, open flower. When massed together, the combined perfumes are strong and pleasant. They are good picking flowers and last a long time in the vase where their sweet fragrance can perfume the air indoors. Modern day carnations owe their beginnings to these ancient clove pinks. Unfortunately, the perfume has altered and become almost non-existent in these newer carnation breeds. What the carnation flower has gained in size and colour has seen the loss of the heavy, sweet fragrance of the clove pinks.

Plant clove pinks at the edge of the garden where people often walk past. These delightful, spreading plants will flower all summer long. They need little care. Plant them in full sun as they thrive in dry spots. A light pruning after flowering and trimming to keep them in a tidy shape several times a year will reward the gardener with an attractive, perfumed display.



Scented Pelargoniums

Scented Pelargoniums are ideal plants for water thirsty gardens. They originate from South Africa where they thrive in dry areas. The scientific explanation for their fantastically strong perfumes is that the plants have evolved their heavy scents to deter animals from browsing on them and eating all the leaves. What is the animal's loss is our lucky gain! The plants belong to the geranium family so have heavy, strong branches and thick, leathery leaves. There are over four hundred varieties worldwide and many new cultivars are being bred each year. The scents



all imitate other perfumes that are found in the garden. There are many rose and citrus scented types. These are both larger varieties of Scented Pelargoniums that will grow over a metre high and just as wide. Capitatum and graveolens are regarded as the classic rose scented types. Both have very heavy perfumes that are redolent of old-fashioned roses. Capitatum is a lower, ground hugging variety that will spread to cover 1m square very quickly. It has round shaped leaves. Graveolens is a more upright type and will attain over 1 metre in height. "Peppermint" and "Oak Leaf" are both lower and tend to sprawl along the ground.

"Nutmeg" and "Cider Apple" are low plants that form clumps about 40cm wide. The leaves are quite grey and they have small white flowers. "Claramar" (bred by Clara Rowe of Auckland) is a lovely combination of both rose and lemon scents. "Poradens" has an unusual scent that is musky. There are several variegated leaf types also – "Lady Plymouth" and "Snowflake" are two of the more common types. Most have small flowers that are pink with maroon markings. At 'The Fragrant Garden' there are over 20 varieties available.

Although the flowers are not as showy as the Regal Pelargoniums the Scented Pelargonium group have many virtues for the dry garden. They are equally at home at the beach as in the inland garden. From December onwards they will start flowering and continue over summer and into autumn. North facing aspects are preferred and they do well up against the house and in under the eaves. This garden can be a problem at times but Scented Pelargoniums will grow well in such places, filling out to provide year round foliage cover. Often such areas have paths and the beautiful perfumes are released as people walk past and brush against the plants. In cooking they can be placed between the baking paper and the tin when making sponges, biscuits and light cakes such as Madeira cake. The leaves dry well and retain their lovely perfumes so they are good to harvest and use in pot pourri.



In November the biennial conference of the Herb Federation of New Zealand was held in Wellington. As usual there was a wide variety of key-note speakers and the usual array of excellent workshops. Both Ian and Marilyn were invited to be workshop presenters and while Marilyn did a seminar on fibre dyeing with herbs, Ian did a very popular herbal ale, wine and liqueur seminar. The theme of this year's conference was "Saving the past for the future" and the focus was on becoming more self-sufficient. We were all encouraged to take an active role in preserving our environment by accessing valuable information from our forebears and utilizing and practising vegetable, fruit and herb growing to help sustainability. Next on the calendar for the Herb Federation is the annual herb awareness week. Look at their website for details

<http://www.herbs.org.nz>

Herbally yours,

Marilyn and Ian Wightman

Feilding, New Zealand

{ [HYPERLINK "http://www.fragrantgarden.co.nz"](http://www.fragrantgarden.co.nz) }

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