

# HERB GROWER

PUBLISHED BY THE ORGANIC HERB GROWERS OF AUSTRALIA Inc.

March-April 92  
June-July

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P11 copy

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PLUS: MARKET REPORT, ORGANICS,  
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QUALITY GUIDELINES, AND MORE...





# EDITORIAL

ABOUT four months ago, we received several offers from American herbal newsletters to exchange publications. Since then, we've received quite a few enquiries from the States and Europe about our Herb Grower and membership of our organisation. The first to actually become an overseas member is Mike Bencich from Freedom, CA. Welcome to OHGA, Mike. I know that Russell is really keen to come and certify you! I'm hoping that you will write us a little article about what is happening herb-wise in your life in particular and in California in general.

I hope you all like our new-look Herb Grower. We're trying our very best here and are still eagerly awaiting contributions, comments and suggestions from members and readers. Deadline for the next issue is June 10, so you all have plenty of time to think about it. The OHGA membership is growing rapidly, thanks to publicity about our Association in several other publications, like the BGF journal. Good one, Rebecca! That was a great write-up.

The committee members have decided to do more promotion for the Association and at the May 10 Channon market we will set up a stall, distribute leaflets, run a "do you recognize these herbs?" competition, sell seeds and generally talk to people about herbs and OHGA. If there are any volunteers out there who'd like to help (wo)man the stall, if even for half an hour or so, we'll be delighted to see you there.

Don't forget to show Herb Grower to your local healthfood shop manager to see if she/he is interested in stocking and selling it. I'm sure that you agree that OHGA deserves wider recognition and publicity and that our certification scheme in particular, offers a real alternative to that of the other organizations. Anyone wanting to distribute OHGA leaflets should write to Carlene at the OHGA postbox and she will send them to you for distribution in healthfood stores etc. Herbs have really come up in the world. OHGA, with the efforts of all of us, is going to be big.

*Elle*

## Letters to the Editor

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Dear HERB GROWERS,

Saturday, April 4, 1992, 2.30 pm – the official opening of His 'n Herbs, and the culmination of a year's hard work. Guests and visitors were invited to wander through the garden and share the afternoon tea. Some 60-70 people enjoyed herb scones, herb bickies and dips, herb jams and scented sponges, all served with wine and fruit punch, in typical 35 degree, Mallee weather.

When thinking back, the actual beginnings are a little hazy. A long-term interest in herbs and our need to develop a regular income, were perhaps the incentive to attend the workshop Howard Rubin gave in Swan Hill in Feb. 91. Inspired, after two days packed with info, we made firm decisions and began channeling our energies. In mid-March I began a six-week, full-time business course. This forced us to look logically at all the aspects of our prospective business. Incorporating the need for tourist venues in our area, we decided on a herb garden and a sales outlet for our herbal products. Simultaneously we planned a commercial fresh culinary area and, following Howard's advice, we selected a number of perennials that, from earlier experience, had proved themselves happiest in our hot, dry climate. Our commercial sales began early this year.

The past year has been a constant learning process, with the old adage "if at first you don't succeed..." being applied over and over again, while devising ways and means appropriate to our Nyah West environment. We are grateful that the reaction to our venture has been so very positive and we look forward to the next twelve months. For us, this is just the beginning.

Marge and Barry Morgan, His 'n Herbs, Barbour Lane, Nyah West 3595



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**NIMBIN & RAINBOW NEWS**

P.O. BOX 209,  
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## Dept of Ag goes Green

During 1991 The NSW Dept of Agriculture undertook a review to "clearly identify the legitimate role and core business activities...to analyse current programs with a view to improving their relevance in a changing environment...and to improve the organization's structural, functional and operating efficiency.

As a result of the review, the Department's mission statement has been amended to read: *"to enhance the competitiveness and environmental sustainability of the food and fibre industries in order to maximize their contribution to the economy and the community of NSW."*

To implement this mission statement, the Department has suggested the following strategies in their draft Conservation Strategy.

- \* the department recognizes that there is an interaction of causes in our land degradation crisis. A holistic approach must be taken for its solution. Integrated catchment management and whole farm planning are part of the departments Farmcare program.
- \* All the department's advisory and research programs should use the sustainable approach to direct their activities.
- \* Promote the need for conservation of natural habitat in order to produce a balanced rural ecosystem. Bio-diversity is a vital component of our ecological support systems and provides us with many indispensable free services.
- \* encourage rural land users, particularly intensive producers, to reduce waste and recycle byproducts in their enterprises. This will help rationalize the use of non-renewable agricultural resources.
- \* Farmers should be directed to cease all exploitative landuse practices such as excessive tree clearing, overgrazing and inappropriate irrigation.
- \* Support the maintenance of prime crop and pasture land as a strategic resource. The department must participate actively in environmental planning in order to anticipate and counteract the cumulative impact of unsound resource use practices.
- \* Identify areas and agricultural systems which cannot sustain productivity through ecologically sound techniques. The department should direct and encourage such agricultural systems to adopt alternative methods, relocate to another site or be replaced by another suitable enterprise.
- \* Promote to urban and rural communities the benefits of agriculture and prepare educational material on sustainable agriculture for schools and tertiary institutions.





## ESSENTIAL OILS... A POTENTIAL INDUSTRY ?

With the ever increasing consumption of convenience foods, food flavourings, particularly essential oils have been steadily increasing in sales and soaring prices. The NSW Department of Industrial Development commissioned a report in October 1987 to try to understand this industry. Unfortunately, their expertise was limited to Eucalyptus, tea tree and citrus oils. This document did not address the fundamental problem in essential oil production. That is the lack of established growers with expertise.

Although there are many diverse and varied essences, there are in fact only  $\pm 150$  kinds which are traded commercially. Flavours used in the food industry can be broken down according to application: soft drinks, confectionery, alcoholic beverages, cooking flavours, seasonings and spices. Mint is probably the worlds most widely traded essential oil, followed closely by orange and lemon oil.

Essential oils are odorous and highly volatile. They have a consistency more like water than oil. Their chemistry is quite complex, but in general they contain alcohols, esters, ketones, aldehydes and terpenes. The actual "odors" are formed in the chloroplasts of the leaf. They combine glucose to form glucosides, which are transported around the plant. The oils are present in tiny droplets. While in the plant they are constantly changing their chemical composition, and move from one part of the plant to another depending upon the time of day and the season. The odours and chemical constituents change with different soil conditions, variations in climate and methods of cultivation.

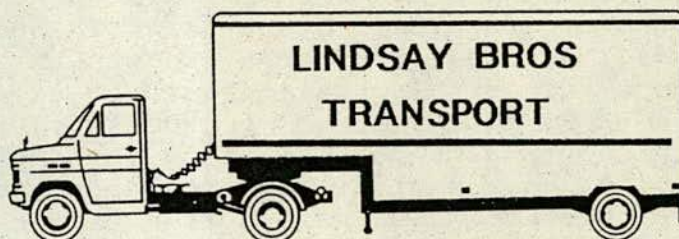
Essential oils are usually extracted by distillation. This process involves placing the plant material in a vat and passing steam through the plant material. The essential oils evaporate with the water. This distillate is then cooled and the oils are separated from the water. Another commonly used method, although much harsher, is solvent extraction. The herbs are placed in a

suitable solvent, usually alcohol, until the oils are dissolved into the solvent. Then the solution is distilled which condenses the oil, but not the solvent.

The amount of essential oil in plants varies from .01% to 10%, with the average being 1%. To equate that into plant material it will take 1000 kilos of fresh leaf to make 10 kilos of essential oil.

New Zealand and Tasmania have taken a bold step towards the establishment of an Essential Oil industry.

If we look at the economics of an essential oil industry, obviously the most important factor will be can the grower/processor get the same or better return for his crop, as from the fresh/dried herbal market. Otherwise, what is the point. There are enough countires out there, who have access to cheap labour, abundant land, and the old fashioned technology sufficient to manufacture oils. For Australia to become competitive in essential oil production, we will require an abundance of plantation style herbal crops, mechanical harvesting



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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR CONT'D

Dear HERB GROWER,

Noticed today in the local paper an article about Herb Farms Australia and your organisation's innovative herb growing. It inspired me to write to tell you about what I have to offer. I have a property of 2 blocks (amounting to one whole acre) that I have worked for eight years with fruit and vegetables, supplying healthfood shops with fresh beans, spinach etc. I have been a bit exhausted running the lot by myself, so I now live in Coffs Harbour as a "Bowen" technician (fixing up the tired old body, getting a person who has a sprained ankle on their feet, without pain or swelling the next day). Could you please place an ad in your paper. I would quickly go back to the property if I had an able man to help me, it is so lovely, refreshing and quiet there, just the sound of a waterfall in the distance as the spring water flows along.

Margaret Hillam, Coffs Harbour.

(for Margaret's offer, see classifieds)

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equipment, improved technology for extraction, and most importantly the targeting of a specialized high yielding expensive oil. We need to find a niche that is still not yet exploited by another country. This will require R&D on the part of the industry.

Let us just compare the cost and price of Rosemary. One acre will yield 4000 kilos of fresh herb. Sold as a fresh culinary one could expect to receive on average \$6. per kilo or \$24,000. Sold as a dried culinary herb, the price would be 4000 kgs fresh becomes 1000 kilos dried at \$12 or \$12,000. As an essential oil the price would be 4000 kilos fresh yields 40 litres oil at \$60 per litre or \$2400, the lowest price of the three scenarios.

Therefore, if essential oil production is to become an industry, it will be very important to identify and target a specific new herbal essential oil which will have a very high price, a high yield, can be broad acre farmed with mechanization, and have a world-wide demand. The search is on.

But is this search really worth while? The answer has to be a resounding YES. Australia which is full of many exotic native species has only commercially exploited 30 varieties, of which 20 are Eucalyptus. there remains a vast amount of unknown species which one could hope will someday unlock the secret to the 21st century illnesses. Then there is the industrialization of the essential oil industry, which has left its own mark. Synthetic organic chemicals, including medicinal compounds may be contaminated

with toxic by-products of their synthesis and with residues of any catalysts employed. Secondly, synthetic organic chemicals are almost always dependent upon the petroleum industry. Since this natural resource is becoming increasingly scarcer, it would only seem logical to rely upon plants as the natural and true source, which is renewable and unlimited.

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by RUSSELL QUINN

The recent warm and humid weather has brought an increase in some unwelcome pests, particularly the flea beetle, which has picked on our sage. As this plant is quite stressed at this time of the year and quite often suddenly dies, it has been fair game for this bug. If the herbal sprays are not working and there is a market demand for a good quality herb, you may be considering something like pyrethrum to help in the battle with this pest.

Pyrethrum is a natural insecticide, extracted from the flowers of *Chrysanthemum Cinerariifolium*. It is a nerve poison, affecting the central and peripheral nervous system of insects. The affected insects suffer from excitation, paralysis and death.

Commercial Pyrethrum/Pyrethrins are available as sprays and dusts. They are also used in some mosquito coils and mats. Low volumes are sometimes used for large scale treatment against flies and mosquitos. These products almost always contain Piperonyl Butoxide. This is a compound which is used as a synergist which enhances the toxicity of the active ingredients. It does this by blocking or inhibiting the function of enzymes which break down the poison, hence the insects are less likely to build up resistance to the poison. On its own, Piperonyl Butoxide is not toxic to insects or animals. However, the same enzyme occurs in all animals and there may be less obvious long term effects. For instance, the combined administration of fluorocarbons and pip. but. has been found to cause cancer in mice. For the above reasons the frequent use of such sprays near people, particularly children, may mean a potential health risk. Even if the active ingredient itself is not particularly toxic, the synergist may reduce the response of the human immune system to assaults by other chemicals or organisms.

Also derived from pyrethrum are synthetic pyrethroids. They are now in large scale commercial use in household and agricultural insecticides alike and come in varying degrees of toxicity, some quite high, but for the chemical user, if used properly, they offer a better alternative to the even more toxic

chemicals. Products containing Piperonyl Butoxide and Pyrethroids are not permitted for use under the OHGA Certification system.

For the organic grower, concerned with inputs onto the garden or farm, it is most important to understand labelling and ingredients of seemingly sound organic products. To minimise the risk of importing unfavourable substances onto the farm, not to mention saving the high dollar cost that some products incur, it is much safer and cheaper to make your own, using ingredients from known sources.

To make your own pyrethrum insecticide, the plant *Chrysanthemum Cinerariifolium* can easily be grown from seed or the established plant split up in spring.

For best results, pick the flowers before they are fully open; dry and pulverize them. This powder can be used as an insecticide, e.g. for fleas, or made into a spray: stand a tablespoon of pyrethrum powder or 2 tablespoons of flowers in a liter of hot water for an hour (add some natural soap to the water, which will help the spray to stick to the plant, strain and use. Never boil pyrethrum as the fumes are toxic. Alternatives to pyrethrum are Daisy Cress, Feverfew (of which mainly the leaves are used - Ed.) and Sacred Basil. Varying quantities of these are necessary for a similar effect.

These sprays kill predators as well as pests; using them in the evening may spare bees. They are best used as a last resort, when other cultural or manual methods fail.

These sprays and other chemicals should be kept out of the drains, where they would add to the accumulated toxic waste which already pollutes our soils, air and waterways. Also when storing, please label POISON and keep safely away from little hands.

References for this article were: A-Z of chemicals in the home, published by the Total Environment Centre and Australian Consumers' Association; Natural Control of Garden Pests, by Jackie French; Pests, Predators and Pesticides, by the Organic Growers Association of W.A. These last two books offer many alternative ways of dealing with pests.

I will be travelling south to Kempsey in June on the certification trail. Anyone wishing to apply for certification should do so as soon as possible, so the appropriate exchange of paperwork can take place in plenty of time. I hope to see some familiar faces again.



by Amare Pearl

One of my favourite uses of cinnamon in a medicinal mix is a spicy tea, often referred to by it's Indian name "Chai". This is a wonderfully warming brew for winter and for the early stages of a cold. The ingredients can be found in most kitchens. Chai consists simply of warming spices. Select from finely chopped or grated fresh ginger, a little bit of freshly ground black pepper, cinnamon sticks, cardomom pods, cloves and maybe even a sprig of fresh rosemary. I boil these ingredients together first, then turn the heat off and add black tea leaves. It can be sweetened to taste with sugar or honey. In India "Chai" is made with lots of milk but

I'm sure that a wonderful herb like Echinacea would work well in the same condition, but in this case the principle of treatment would be different, since echinacea is a cooling herb. Western herbal medicine has written records as far back as the ancient Greeks. In those days energetic attributes, such as hot and cold, were a part of medicinal understanding. When the scientific revolution began to influence western medical thought as early as the 14th and 15th centuries, herbal knowledge became relegated to folklore, whilst the scholastic and scientific community became more interested in chemical experimentation. When Culpeper wrote his English Physician in 1653, it was for the common person. He was after cheap, but wholesome medicine that could be picked in people's own gardens. He was against chemicals as much as he was against complex prescriptions. By attempting to make herbal medicine more understandable for the lay person, he left out most of the energetic references, but added more astrology. Herbalism became a footnote to western medicine.

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## Gardening by the moon

By Elle Fikke-Rubin

### MAY

16-17 Too close to Full Moon to be thinking of planting anything. Take this weekend off.

18-23 Time to plant perennials and rootcrops. Roses, lilies and other bushes and bulbs can be planted out. Don't forget to give the roses chives or garlic as companions. Most herbs, such as thyme, oregano, rosemary, sage and others can also go in now.

24-25 Not a good time for gardening.

26-31 Days for cultivating, weeding and checking for pests.

### JUNE

1 Another day off, thanks to New Moon.

2-4 Days to plant or sow leafy annuals, such as lettuces, parsley, chervil, dill, coriander, silverbeet and brassica's.

Green manure crops such as cow peas, lucerne or lupins can also be sown.

5-8 If you intend to grow broad beans, these are good days to prepare the soil well and put up some stakes and twine on both sides of the row.

9-14 The broad beans can go in now, as well as other flowering and fruiting plants. In tropical districts beans, capsicums, sweet corn, peas, amaranthus, celosia, cockscomb, marigolds etc. In more temperate zones there's still time for viola's and pansies, primulas, wallflowers, carnarions, peas, beans and broad beans.

15 Full Moon, forget about gardening.

16-22 In particular the weekend, these are good days to work with perennials and root crops. Onions, radishes, beetroot, carrots, asparagus and rhubarb,

accompanied of course by perennial herbs, can be planted. Remember that onions and peas or beans don't mix. Carrots and dill don't like to grow together either, but carrots do love the company of onions, rosemary, sage or wormwood. Asparagus likes basil and parsley.

23-30 The rest of this month lends itself to cultivating new beds. Check the pH in the soil, even in the areas that you've already been working on. If you started off with an acidic soil, you will most probably need to add some lime every year for quite a few years. Dig in some rotted animal manure, if you can find it, or use the commercial variety and blood and bone. Yarrow and comfrey leaves dug in, will also add valuable minerals to the soil, and for those areas that are in need of worm activity, you can do no better than to plant valerian.

### JULY

1-2 Time for leafy annuals. Cresses, parsley, lettuces, cabbages and chinese cabbages, dill and chervil can still be planted.

3-5 If you have a lot of snails in your garden, this is probably a good time to collect them all, since most will be hibernating. Or you can dig yourself a little pond and get some ducks. They're very good at snail collecting, especially if you rear them on snails.

6 Another day to plant annual greens.

7 A good day to dig that pond or to prune your roses.

8-14 Especially the first three days are excellent to plant seed bearing annuals and flowers.

Depending on where you live, you can still plant peas, broccoli, sweet corn etc.

*Opinions expressed by contributors to OHGA publications are not necessarily those of the editor, executive officers or the committee. Whilst every effort is made to publish accurate information, the Association accepts no responsibility for statements made or opinions expressed.*





# HERB FARMS AUSTRALIA

## Market Report

The first light frost has hit Central Victoria and already the phones are ringing. Winter is just around the corner and demand is already picking up. Prognosis is for a big season with Basil being the leading seller. It's not too late for those who still wish to get in a crop. But you will need to use seedlings and be in a warm sheltered location.

The past two months, saw consistent prices with a medium turnover. Export has also been consistent with a weekly order going to Hong Kong. Next period, we start up with Singapore as well.

The key word to success has to be **QUALITY**. Even more important than continuity of supply. We are finding that we must become more diligent in our quality assurance program. We will not be able to sell poor quality produce, nor should we. This will only bring down the reputation of the North Coast growers. Better that we do not sell than send second grade produce.

It is a really satisfying feeling walking around the various towns and seeing all the organic herbs for sale in greengrocers. Well done, growers!

### PRICES RECORDED IN THE LAST PERIOD (for a standard OHGA bunch size)

BASIL sweet	.40C-.90C
BASIL purple	\$1.- \$2
Basil bush	40C-.90C
CHIVES	30C-.90C
LEMON GRASS	40C-.60C
LEMON THYME	30C-.50C
MARJORAM	40C-.90C
MINT	40C-.60C
OREGANO	40C-.90C
PARSLEY	60C-.80C
ROCKET	30C-.90C
SAGE	30C-.80C
SORREL	40C-.90C
TARRAGON	30C-.90C
THYME	30C-.90C
VIET MINT	30C-.80C



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# ECHINACEA

Although we usually write up a culinary herb for this column, we will make an exception for Echinacea, due to popular demand. There is very little growing info, but we've managed to dig up the following.

Yields per acre: 700-800 kg. fresh

Fresh:dry ratio: 4:1

Spacing: ±50 cm.

Propagation: seed/root division

Position: sunny

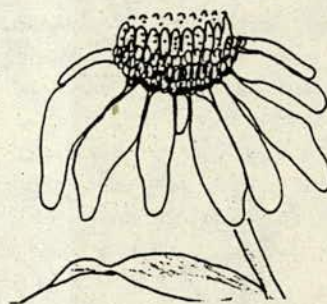
Pests: none in our experience

Problems: none in our experience

Parts used: roots dried of *E. Angustifolia*

whole plant fresh of *E. purpurea*

Actions: immuno-stimulant, anti-viral, anti-inflammatory, alterative, antiseptic, digestive.



A few years ago we acquired a few Echinacea Purpurea plants. They grew really well and after collecting the seed heads and splitting up the roots, we now have quite a few. Echinacea does go dormant in the winter, after forming it's seed heads, but will shoot up again in spring, if the roots are left in place. The easiest way to propagate the plant, is by digging up the roots in autumn, cutting them into sections and replanting them, though the seeds, of which you will have many once you start growing, will germinate without any problem.

Echinacea is so named by Linnaeus; it's also known by the less common name of Rudbeckia, named after Rudbeck. The flowers are large and of a rich purple colour; the leaves of *E. purpurea* are wider than those of *E. angustifolia*, which, as the Latin name indicates, are long and narrow. There are several other species: *E. pallida*, the third species used for medicinal purposes; *E. atropurpurea*, *E. paradoxa* with yellow flowers, *E. sanguinea*, *E. simulata*, a white flowered species; *E. tenesseeensis*, now an endangered species and *E. laevigata*, a rare Appalachian species, which is about to go onto the endangered species list.

The plants are all native to the American prairies and mountain regions and have been used by the American Indians for centuries for all sorts of ailments from colds to snakebites. During the middle of the last century, American medical practitioners started to use the herb and since then it has gained an ever wider reputation, in this day and age in particular, as a stimulant and strengthener of the immune-system.

Both *E. angustifolia* and *E. purpurea* are used for medicinal purposes here. Both varieties are equally good, although some "experts" favour one above the other or the other above the one. Of the Purpurea variety the whole plant is used fresh. It can be made into a tincture or even into a tea. Of *E. Angustifolia* only the dried root and rhizomes are used, and one herb book warns us that, as soon as it's faint aromatic smell is lost, it has also lost it's efficacy. Recommended dosage is 1 tsp. dried and powdered root to one cup of water, 1 tbsp. 3 to 6 times a day.

A tincture may be made by steeping the whole fresh plant of *E. Purpurea* in a good Vodka and sitting this in the sun for 3 weeks, shaking it well several times a day. Filter through a coffee-filter and keep in a dark, well stoppered bottle. Some drops in water two to three times a day should keep the nasties away.

References: Mrs. Grieves, A Modern Herbal,

John Lust, the Herb Book

Sage, the journal of the Queensland Herb Society Inc.

Pot-Pourri, the journal of the Herb Society of North Queensland Inc.

HerbalGram, the journal of the American Botanical Council

Greenridge Botanicals



# GREEN PARTIES

IN this issue you will find the first ever political ad in Herb Grower. What? Politics? I hear you say. OK, think for a moment. We have a government now that has been meddling in our business and has even put quite a few worthwhile herbal companies out of business. They are still threatening us with a ban on comfrey. They are now even looking at making quite a few homeopathic medicines illegal. Did we elect them to do that? Moreover, did they ask advice from herb growers, herbalists or homeopaths. Indeed, they did not. The time has come where we can no longer stand on the sidelines, but must make a stand. GREEN PARTIES form a real alternative to the two major ones. Listen to their four principles:

- \* Ecological Sustainability
- \* Social and Economic Justice
- \* Grassroots Democracy
- \* Peace and Disarmament

Perhaps the most important one is GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY. There is no one centralised Green Party. Instead, there are only local groups, who are concerned with local issues. So, by electing a Green candidate, you'll be voting for your area. In NSW there may be an election in the near future. Joining your local Greens would be an excellent way to voice your concern about the environment, unwarranted government intervention in our industry and above all, to have a real say in matters that concern your area.

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English designer Penelope Hobhouse has established a new herb garden in the New York Botanical Gardens. There are European and American herbs and shrubs surrounding two knots of boxwood. All plants are labelled and the garden is designed to be both educational and ornamental. The Henry Luce Foundation donated \$300,000 for design, construction and maintenance. We could do with a philanthropist here. Wouldn't OHGA make a beautiful herb garden in Lismore's Heritage Park!

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# MEDI HERB

MANUFACTURES

**HIGH QUALITY HERBAL EXTRACTS**



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- Herbs must be certified as Organic.
- Organic methods that do not use chicken manure are preferred.
- Prices vary according to quality.

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After years of study, migraine headaches still remain a mystery. Because they are considered a neurological disorder, a pair of researchers, T. Mustafa and K.C. Srivastava at Denmark's Odense University, investigated ginger, an ancient ayurvedic remedy for neurological disorders. The Journal of Ethnopharmacology reports on a case study of a 42 year-old lady who has experienced serious migraines since she was 26. The Profs advised the woman to stop all migraine medication 2 to 3 months before the trial. Then, at the first sign of visual disturbance, the so-called aura, she was given 500-600 milligrams of powdered ginger in plain water. According to the report, within 30 min. the migraine stopped. For the following 3-4 days the subject took 1.5-2 grams of powdered ginger in 500 milligram lots four times a day. This experiment was without side effects and so successful that she began to take fresh uncooked ginger in her daily diet. She now has few migraines and those not very bad at all.



herb & flower

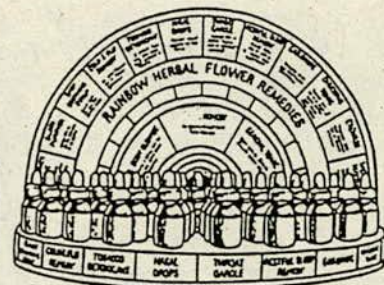
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## GROWING HINTS

by Dave Carey

### How to Combat Sage Dieback

Sage dieback occurs in plants as young as four months. The plants are looking healthy, growing in raised beds of about 30 cm high, 30-40 cm apart and suddenly large leaves of the whole plant curl in, wither and discolour. Adjacent plants will soon show the same symptoms and we have noticed that the dieback will move along and "up" the bed, even when planted on a slope.

The roots of sage are large and fibrous, suggesting that they're used to drier conditions. Increased dieback seems to coincide with wet weather, most likely caused by some type of water-logging or soil-borne disease or deficiency associated with excess moisture.

We have tried, with some success, the following ideas:

- \* Choose beds at the top end of the herb farm.
- \* Mound beds higher than usual.
- \* Apply gypsum to the soil, to help better drainage in clay soils.
- \* Separate plants by at least 60 cm.
- \* Companion plant with rosemary. It seems to deter some of those leaf eating bugs and grubs which can attack sage.

## HERBAL GUIDE PLANNED

*FOCUS ON HERBS*, the Tasmanian quarterly magazine, is compiling a resource guide to the herb industry, which will provide an information network for herb growers and users throughout Australia.

The guide will list wholesale and retail herb nurseries, display gardens open to the public, sources of exotic and native herb seed, suppliers of fresh and dried herbs etc.etc.

Listing in the guide will be free.

Anyone wanting to be included needs to send them up the following:

- \*name of business, proprietor, address, phone/fax
- \*opening times
- \*nature of business, products and services
- \*whether wholesale or retail
- \*brochures available and at what cost?
- \*any other relevant info

Send all this to: HERB INDUSTRY  
RESOURCE GUIDE, Focus on Herbs,  
POBox 203, Launceston, Tas 7250



## Farming in the Air

DURING summer, I came sweating in from the paddock one evening to slump down and watch Bill Mollison yarn his way through building a high-rise balcony farm.

I was impressed with his inventiveness. After all, everyone should have the opportunity to grow their own food – even those odd people who choose to live up on a balcony rather than in a back yard.

But I really couldn't imagine actually growing anything productive in tubs and pots. If a plant doesn't have its roots in the real earth, then it wouldn't really be a happy plant, I figured.

After all, how is a worm expected to climb five stories up a concrete building just to work the soil in a balcony tub?

It was Clayton's farming, I finally decided. Something worthwhile to keep retired people occupied. Something as therapeutic as, and more productive than, knitting.

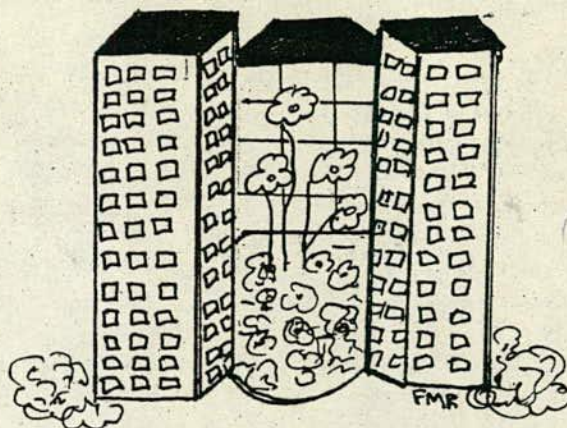
It is well I watched Mr. Mollison that evening. Because a couple of months later, here I am looking out through plate glass, over a balcony across a brightly-lit Brisbane night horizon. Freya's drawing up there for this column has become eerily prophetic. We are now apartment dwellers. We have gone high-density. You can't step off our verandah onto the wood heap any more. Visitors with vertigo, beware!

On the balcony are all the valuable herbs from the previous Top Paddock – still in their temporary pots. Alive, but looking a little lost. A little like their shepherd. They remind me I should have owned a video recorder the night Bill set up his balcony.

The astrologers among you will nod wisely at the news that we are both air-signs. Our feet are going to be a long way off the ground for a year or two. The odd pigeon comes up to keep us sane but gravity has got the better of beetles, wasps, bugs, mozzies and moths. However, now that I am no longer giddy, let's look at the good side of living in this vertical street.

For one, you can see the lie of the land. Brisbane is a very hilly city. Few people ride bicycles to work. And looking out across the remaining timber, I can imagine what the country must have looked like before the white man. A beautiful, dense scrub and rainforest with a big, tidal river meandering through it. It is difficult to visualize that picture at street level.

There are also some reminders of why we need to clean up our lifestyle. At his height, I can see the different coloured layers of the sky – and know what the dirty one on the bottom really is. Some days I can see more than a 100 km across to Cunningham's Gap in the Great Divide. Usually though, it is obscured by a floating, human-made haze.



### PADDOCK ON TOP by Kenrick Riley

There is another reminder when I walk down the street to the bus stop. I had found myself sneezing occasionally for no explicable reason. It wasn't winter, it wasn't a cold coming on. Finally, I suspect it was due to concentrated "car" smell. Petrol and rubber fumes obviously thin out as they rise. And despite its looks, the air is less polluted up on the balcony. My nose had obviously been living at street level for so long, it had revised its notion of what normal air smells like.

Oh... and cockroaches can't fly this high either. For some years I have been walking this fine line between recognising the cockroach's equal right to a place on the planet, and a phobic passion to restrict that right with whatever natural, devious means I could muster. I suspect the final move to the farm later on will renew our tenuous relationship – if they haven't learnt how to breed on a balcony in the interim.

The balcony. The new farm. Nothing touched, no foundations to build on, no mistakes to correct. No idea really where to start either. Well, I know to contact someone in the permaculture world to follow up what Bill has already done.

Perhaps some readers can help me here. The balcony is reasonably large with big, built-in tubs. It faces south-west with good indirect light but a minimum of direct sun in summer and a lot less come winter I suspect. The challenge will be to second-guess the herbs and choose which will appreciate those conditions best. There is another balcony which receives western sunlight where the hardier herbs will get at least some light.

What really stumps me at present is what to do about a compost heap. Composting was an art, I felt I was close to mastering on the last paddock. Here, we still have the pig bucket in the kitchen from habit – but no idea how to compost it yet. There is the possibility of launching a major lobbying exercise with the other 150 families and the gardener to convert part of the garden to composting. But that is the long-term goal.



In the meantime, if anyone knows what year Bill Mollison is heading through Brisbane, please let me know. I can be found sweating and swearing up above the roofline, trying to convince some stubborn herbs that developing long aerial roots at this stage of their evolution would not upset the whole scheme of the universe.

*(How about starting a worm farm in one of your tubs, Kenrick? One way to get rid of the compost. If we get enough suggestions from the readers, we might do a feature on balcony farming in the next issue.)*

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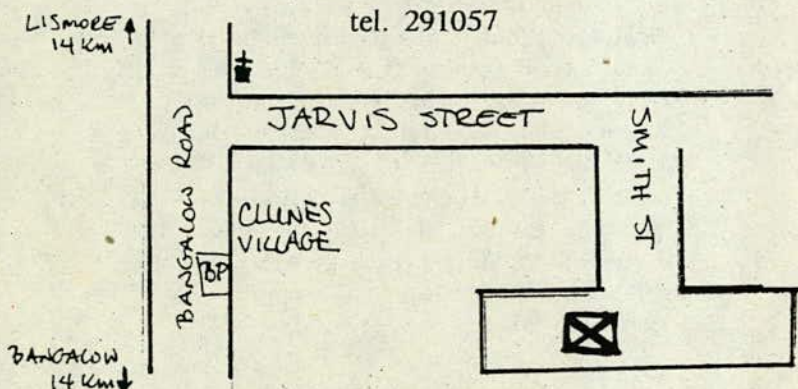
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- \* use sharp secateurs
  - \* don't cut in the rain
  - \* cut in the early morning hours
  - \* cut only perfect leaves
  - \* pick off damaged leaves
  - \* be gentle, do not bruise
  - \* use only #10 or 12 elastic bands
  - \* wrap elastic twice around bunch
  - \* leave some room after elastic
  - \* wash all herbs in clean cold water
  - \* change water often
  - \* never leave bunches to soak in water, as essential oils are soluble
  - \* after herbs are washed, shake off excess water
  - \* allow herbs to drain freely in rack
  - \* cool herbs in refrig at 2°C
  - \* cool on racks to ensure drainage
  - \* be careful that herbs do not touch cooling unit, as this will damage
  - \* chill for a minimum 1-2 hours
  - \* gently shake excess water off
  - \* use only new cartons
  - \* never force herbs down in carton
  - \* when 2 varieties in box, always pack side by side rather than on top of each other
  - \* place woody herbs on bottom and leafy fragile ones on top
  - \* pack with stems in one direction
  - \* reverse direction for each layer
  - \* when all herbs are packed in box tip excess water from carton.
- Repeat at depot. This is the most frequent complaint, which after a long distance freight damages the entire carton.

## NEXT MEETING

The open days have been really successful. We've seen many new faces and some have become members, but what these meetings are really about, is that the growers, who usually labour on their own, get to show off their place to others. Also, members now know that they get to meet each other every other month and can discuss problems and successes, arrange parties and now, with our newly instituted raffle, can win a nice prize. Connie was the first one to win and went home with a large bag of Dynamic Lifter.

We are running out of places to visit though, so let us know if you would like the crowds to roll up to your herb farm in the near future.

For the next meeting we will revisit Howard and Elle's place in Clunes.

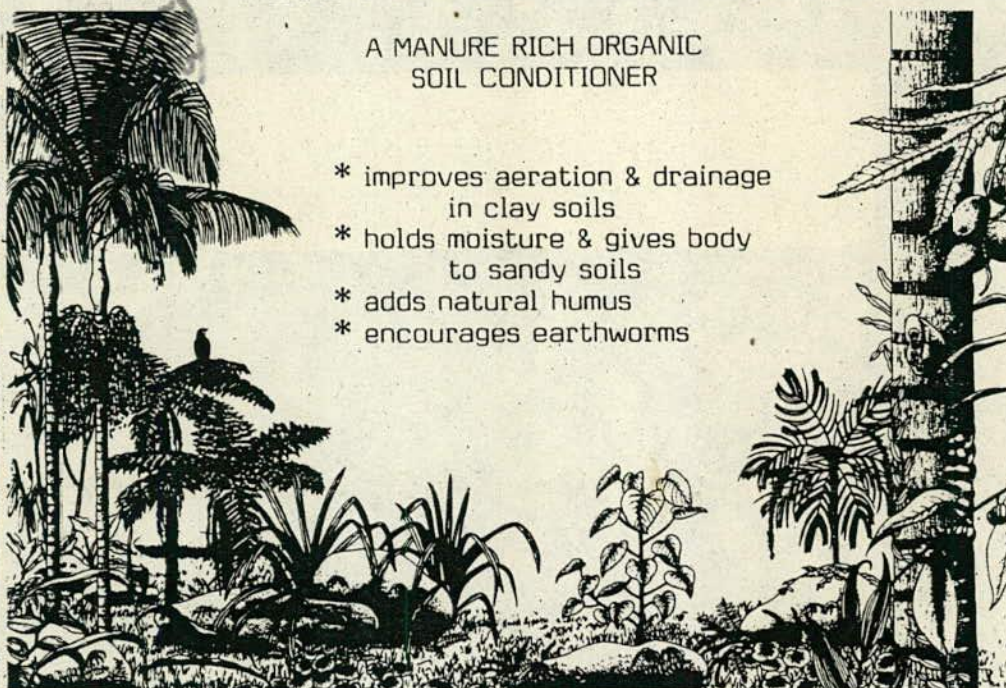


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For info on future commercial organic herb growing courses, phone Howard Rubin on 066-291057. Workshops in your area can also be arranged.  
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#### A MEMBER'S PROFILE



Our organic certification officer, Russell Quinn, (with hat and tool of trade) originates from South Island New Zealand, where his family had a mixed farm and nursery. He spent his spare time helping out with all types of farmwork, as well as earning the money for his first car by working in a neighbour's market gardens. He came to Australia in 1976 and lived in Sydney and Melbourne, before going back to basics. He now owns a small-holding where, together with Carlene, he has built a solar powered mud brick home, set up an acre of herbs and landscaped the remainder using permaculture methods.

He ran a signwriting business in Melbourne and later in Lismore and studied for his A.D.A. at the Northern Rivers College, until the call of the dirt became too strong. In his spare time he likes nothing better than going to the beach, bushwalking and working at re-afforestation. For even more exercise he also indulges in games of tennis. He is constantly studying and researching to further his knowledge of organics, so as to keep the members well informed and aware of the total care of the environment.