

# Grace Your Garden with Historic Herbs

CONTRIBUTED BY HELEN FALLON, TRUSTEE, MONTCLAIR HISTORY CENTER



Mint

**I**N 1796, Israel Crane brought his new bride, Fanny, to a brand new home on the Old Road (now Glenridge Avenue). It's likely Fanny planted an herb garden that contained many of the plants grown in colonial gardens and through the 1840s.

A physician's daughter, Fanny knew a thing or two about herb-based remedies: which herbs soothed upset stomachs, tamed a headache, made a tea to calm the nerves or lessened the chance of infection. She, and most women of the time, also would have used herbs and flowers for dyes, sachets, and decorations.

Perhaps it was in Fanny's honor that 42 years ago the early leaders of the Montclair History Center, then the Montclair Historical Society, hosted its first Annual Herb Sale. As we go to press, the date for this year's Herb and Heirloom Vegetable Sale is in flux due to coronavirus; please check [www.montclairhistory.org](http://www.montclairhistory.org) for details..

Here are some of the multitasking herbs commonly found in gardens of the late 18th century that will work just as hard – and look and smell just as lovely—in your home garden today. You may be surprised by some of the attributes well known to Fanny's generation, which may be lesser known to us today.

■ **BASIL** is great with your Caprese salad, but in powder form, it had also been used as snuff. A 17th century book noted that basil can “procure a cheerful and merry heart.”

■ **BORAGE** produces vibrant blue flowers and has cucumber-flavored leaves often used in salads. It is also said to drive away melancholy (“borage for courage!”).

■ **CHAMOMILE** produces a lovely daisy-like flower which can be used to create a yellow dye and is also well- known for its

Calendula



Lamb's Ear





calming qualities when used as a tea.

■ **CALENDULA**, also known as the “pot marigold,” is one of the cheeriest yellow/orange flowers in the garden. It served many purposes: to create a yellow dye, often for butter and cheese; dried and used in broths, potions, and cough syrup; and was also a go-to ingredient for skincare products.

■ **CATNIP** makes a tea to soothe nerves, unless you’re a cat!

■ **FEVERFEW** is a member of the chrysanthemum family. Our ancestors used it in a tea known to reduce fevers (hence the name!)

■ **LAMB’S EAR** was used for medicinal purposes as a wound dressing. The shape of the leaves as well as the soft-to-the-touch fuzzy texture inspire its name. The spire of pretty purple flowers is a bonus.

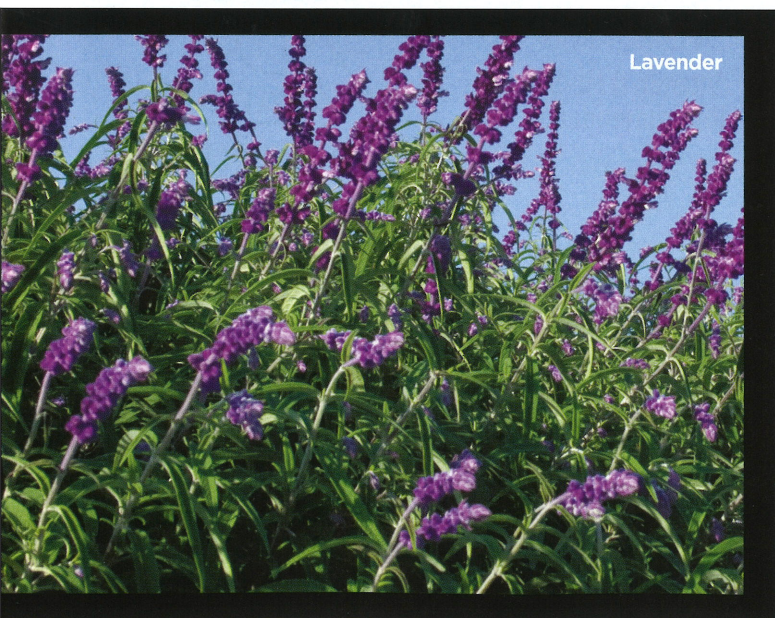
■ **LAVENDER** was prized for its lovely smell in an era when strong and unpleasant odors were common.

Dried stems were placed between layers of clothing or linen to infuse them with scent. The long-blooming purple flowers are pretty, too. It’s also used as a flavoring—particularly in desserts, jams, and vinegars – and is a key ingredient in “herbes de Provence.”

■ **LOVAGE** leaves have a celery-like flavor and are a great addition to green salads or potato salads. The hollow stems were used as sipping straws and might be worth a try as we “go green.” Because lovage has deodorant properties, medieval young women would hang a bag of it around their necks when meeting their beaux.

■ **MARJORAM** leaves were used for flavoring foods, in perfumes and sachets, and as an infusion for headaches. And, best of all, snakes will not approach it in the garden.

■ **MINT** flavored foods were used in a refreshing tea thought to be good for digestion. Native Americans were said to have tied bands of spearmint around their heads to cure headaches.



## The Quickest Route to a GREAT SMILE

Pediatric Dentistry  
Family Orthodontics  
Special Needs Dentistry



The Smile Express  
Pediatric Dentistry &  
Family Orthodontics

301 Belleville Ave  
Bloomfield, NJ 07003

(551) 227-2551

[www.TheSmileExpress.com](http://www.TheSmileExpress.com)

■ **PARSLEY** was not simply used as a garnish and seasoning, but also as a health tonic and to make green dye.

■ **ROSEMARY** has always been used to flavor foods and for its scent in sachets but is also considered a traditional wedding herb. Place a sprig under your pillow and it’s said to keep night-mares away.

■ **SAGE** leaves, a Thanksgiving favorite, were used to flavor gamey meat or for medicinal, anti-inflammatory tea. Sage poultices were used to reduce the itch associated with insect bites. Also, a sage rinse was said to keep dark hair “lustrous.”

Summer savory leaves were used as seasoning or crushed to relieve the pain of a bee sting. Stems, after drying, make fragrant tinder for a firestarter – something interesting to try in today’s backyard firepit?

The plant sports tiny white flowers towards the end of summer. (Winter savory has similar uses but not as delicate as the summer variety)

■ Many of these herbs as well as some of the other favorites such as **THAI BASIC, GREEK OREGANO, JASMINE, HORSERADISH** – as well a selection of delicious **HEIRLOOM VEGETABLES** and even some old-timey colonial garden standby’s such as **HOLLYHOCK**— are available through the Montclair History Center’s Herb and Heirloom Vegetable Sale. Sale hours and a comprehensive list of herbs and heirloom vegetables is available at [www.montclairhistory.org](http://www.montclairhistory.org). ■