

HIGH FALLS GARDENS E-LETTER, SPRING '04

Dear Friend of High Falls Gardens,

Your outpouring of support in 2003 generated momentum that's still building. One year ago we asked for your help, you responded, and now the action is intense. Even during our cold, dry winter there was no fireside dream-time for farmers this year. Let's try to catch up on the news....

******* Medicinal Herb Consortium Launches 2004 Project *******

In mid-December the five medicinal plant growers associations working together as the Medicinal Herb Consortium (MHC) received news of a \$148,000 grant from the USDA to test the feasibility of marketing Chinese medicinal botanicals directly to herbal practitioners. The funds must be matched by the associations in California, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York and West Virginia, together representing more than ninety small ecological farms.

No wonder there was no winter break! The Consortium Steering Committee started teleconference planning sessions right after New Years. Much of our program involves outreach to the Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine community through events, ads and solicitation of comments. If you're an A&OM practitioner, do YOU believe domestic ecological production of herbs is feasible? Email Jean at hfg@capital.net to receive the descriptive flyer. We want to hear your opinions.

******* "Ginseng Direct" Project Indicates Positive Response to Sensory Attributes *******

As part of HFG's 2003 New York project, in which trial plots of Chinese medicinals were established on five certified organic farms and a marketing study was completed, we organized a group purchase of Catskill Mountain wild-cultivated ginseng direct from farmers. One group of A&OM practitioners was sent the order form with a fact sheet on the reverse side. Another group was given the order form but also was shown a product sample. The participation rate of the first group was 5 percent and the second group 15 percent.

Making no claims to scientific validity, we continue to suspect that the way to a herbalist's heart is through the senses. Or perhaps it's that the color, aroma and Qi of well-grown, fresh-dried local products speak for themselves. On cue this spring, our growers are busy germinating and planting as much as possible to produce a range of samples for the autumn 2004 harvest. Come to one of the herb festivals for a sensory experience and to enjoy the fruits of the harvest – see schedule at the end of this E-Letter.

******* HFG Growers' Workshop in January Warmed Hearts *******

In the depths of January, fifty farmers huddled together in Philmont for HFG's winter workshop, "Cultivating and Marketing Wild Quality in Medicinal Plants." Pipes to the toilets thawed just in time for a wonderfully successful event, thanks to cosponsors CADE (Center for Agricultural Development and Entrepreneurship), the Northeast Organic Farming Association of New York, and a grant from the Birch Swinger Fund.

A farmer-to-farmer program, the workshop featured Andrea and Matthias Reisen of Healing Spirits Herb Farm, Avoca NY, who showed details of their operation including the solar drying system they pioneered. Jean-David Derreumaux, a biodynamic grower who heads The Healing Plant garden at Camphill Village, Copake NY, transfixed us all with his gorgeous multimedia midwinter meditation, "Remember." Intrepid Californians Leslie Gardner, director of the Sonoma County Herb Exchange of Sebastopol, and Peggy Schafer, Chinese Medicinal Herbs in Petaluma, showed us medicinal herbs from the Golden State perspective. Scott and Cindy Snyder, West Virginia members of the Consortium, and also Cindy Riviere, experienced Chinese medicinal plant grower of Plant-It Herbs in Athens OH, participated and lent us some additional warmth. We're grateful also for Peter Buhl, who led us in Qi Gong exercises, and for Alison Appleby's cooking, voted best food in the history of workshops.

****** New Mexico Medicinal Plant Growers Convene in March ******

Charles Martin of NMSU's Sustainable Agriculture Research Center, also a member of the Steering Committee of the Consortium, put on his second well-received medicinal plant growers workshop March 19th in Santa Fe. This state, with its diversity of herbal traditions including 800 licensed A&OM practitioners, its many small farms and widely divergent climates, is proving to be a center of activity in the development of medicinal plant cultivation.

****** AOM Alliance Spotlights Medicinal Herbs ******

The Herb Committee of the AOM Alliance succeeded in putting their favorite topic front and center at the recent annual meeting in Hollywood, not once but four times. Members of the Medicinal Herb Network of Minnesota – farmer Renne Soberg, practitioner Chris Hafner, and professor Craig Hassel -- gave a demonstration of their descriptive analysis protocol for evaluating the properties of medicinal herbs. The University of Minnesota is one of the world centers for this form of research developed in food science. The method holds great promise as an adjunct to biochemical analysis -- in essence, another language that can describe herbs in terms of their functional, rather than structural, properties.

Special presentations were given by Michael McGuffin, president of the American Herbal Products Association, and Loren Israelson, a leading industry attorney who worked with Orrin Hatch in getting DSHEA passed in 1994. Their messages roused practitioners from any tendency toward complacency regarding the FDA's April 12 ruling on Ephedra, which contained phrases seeming to exempt traditional Oriental medicine practitioners from the regulations. Since that ruling some of the 600 FDA officers newly hired under the Bioterrorism Act and stationed at U.S. ports have blocked shipments of Ephedra and Pinellia destined for A&OM use. The profession is attempting to obtain clarification from the FDA, so far without success.

On the Friday afternoon before the Alliance meetings, eighteen practitioners drove in a convoy to Venice High School, site of perhaps the most successful of the Student Gardens funded with HFG stipends in 2001. Having not seen The Learning Garden's site since the summer of '01, I found the transformation miraculous. Out of a barren, inner-city lot surrounded by chainlink fencing now grows a glorious array of foliage and flowers, strong Yang colors sparkling in the southern California light. They've made great use of raised beds, restored the water garden feature, and are using the fence as vine support. Over one hundred species of Chinese medicinals have been planted. Other sections of the Garden feature the herbs of several traditions and also an area where the high school students cultivate vegetables. Robert Newman, David Crow and David King served as hosts and tour leaders for the afternoon. If you're in the Los Angeles area, try to see this wonderful garden.

****** Save the Dates! ******

August 14	Tour of Quarryhill Botanical Garden led by Peggy Schafer, Glen Ellen CA
September 11-12	Practitioner Workshop at High Falls Gardens, Claverack NY
September 18	Sonoma County Herb Association Festival, Sebastopol CA
November 5-7	West Virginia Herb Association Annual Conference, Morgantown WV
November 19	Herb Samples in Manhattan

Your donations to the High Falls Gardens Fund are essential to the future of this work. Grant agencies and foundations need to see enthusiastic, tangible support from the practitioner community AND members of the general public who value the herbs. Please remember us this year!

Jean Giblette, Director
High Falls Gardens
Box 125 Philmont NY 12565 USA
518-672-7365 / hfg@capital.net

© 2004 High Falls Gardens. All rights reserved.