

MY STORY AS AN URBAN FARMER & A VERY SPECIAL HERB

MEXICAN MINT MARIGOLD



LIFE BEFORE FARMING

- Born & raised in Monterrey, Mexico
- BSc. in Economics & Finance, Monterrey Tec
- Worked in corporate banking for 5+ years
- Cooking kept me sane



MOVING TO AUSTIN 2012

- Came to Austin to obtain a Master in Business from the University of Texas
- Met wonderful people but SURPRISE! corporate life wasn't for me



WHAT NOW?

- In 2014, finished MBA at UT and had no clue what to do next
- Started cooking authentic Mexican recipes as a stress release



FARMER BY ACCIDENT

- Couldn't find the right ingredients for authentic Mexican food, started growing herbs & peppers in apartment balcony
- What if local restaurants & chefs had a similar problem?



FOOD IS MY PASSION

- Eating & cooking have always been passions of mine, so you could say food was the gateway drug to farming!



WHY LA FLACA?

- As an immigrant, wanted something that represented my history & culture
- After all, I started my farm with the intention to locally grow ingredients that I missed from Mexico
- LA FLACA in Spanish literally means Skinny Woman but it can also be another name for the grim reaper
- I chose LA FLACA as nod to our celebration of the Day of the Dead, one of my favorite Mexican traditions



STARTING LA FLACA 2014/15

- Moved from an apartment to a house with a tiny backyard
- Started selling to Austin restaurants out of my backyard on April 2015
- Pictured is said backyard where I grew herbs & edible flowers for a handful of restaurants: Olamaie, Emmer & Rye, L'Oca door



GROWING LA FLACA IN 2016

- Bought first “farm”—a house in the suburbs with an 1/4 acre backyard
- Received grants from UnLtd USA, Austin Food & Wine Alliance to transform said backyard into a farm



FROM LAWN TO FARM

- Summer of 2016, transition from lawn to farm
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EF84w3snA00>



WHAT WE DO

- We sustainably grow edible flowers, herbs, and hot peppers for local chefs
- In 2019, we harvested over 100,000 edible flowers for 40 local restaurants & caterers—Emmer and Rye, Royal Fig, Lucky Robot, Suerte, Comedor, Olamaie



WHAT WE DO

- We harvest our flowers, herbs, & peppers at their best to transform them into flavorful seasoning salts, beautiful pressed flower art
- You can buy our products through our website or at seasonal markets such as Blue Genie Art Bazaar



WHY WE DO IT

- Sustainable farming is the way of the future: we can't expect to take from nature without giving back
- Space for our community to learn about farming
- Providing locally-grown beautiful flowers and fragrant herbs to Austin kitchens
- Safe space for pollinators



GROWING PRACTICES

- IT'S ALIVE! Healthy soil is an active biome of bacteria, fungi, and insects. We only feed it nutrients in the form of organic compost or decomposed mulch
- NO PESTICIDES! We take an integrated approach to pest management based on early action, healthy soil, & strong plants
- SEASONAL! We work with nature, not in spite of it. Each season comes with its unique mix of herbs & flowers fit for cold or hot weather



MOMENT OF TRUTH

- Passion is not enough to be a farmer, commitment & resilience are a must to survive changing seasons
- Profits are slim but satisfaction is high—sustainable farming is a worthy purpose



MARIGOLDS & MEXICO

- Marigolds (genus *Tagetes*) have been grown by indigenous peoples of Mexico for centuries before colonists arrived
- They're a big part of Mexican culture, which is evident in our food & traditions



Estas flores que se llaman Cempoal suchitl: son amarillas y de buen olor y hermosas ay muchas dellas que ellas se nacen y otras que las siembran en los huertos son de dos maneras una que se llama macho Cempoal suchitl y son grandes y hermosas: otras ay que se llama hembra Cempoal suchitl y son grandes y hermosas y tan grandes.

MEXICAN MINT MARIGOLD

- *Tagetes lucida* is a compact perennial that grows up to 2ft tall, 1 ft wide
- Other names alluding to its fragrance: sweet mace, Texas tarragon, sweet marigold, anise herb, root beer plant
- Originally from Mexico and Guatemala



FUN FACTS

- 'Huichol' is a traditional variety used by Huicholes in Mexico that grows at an elevation of 5,000-6,000ft
- Its blooms are amongst the most sweetly-scented of all flowers; they can be used to obtain a yellow dye
- Good companion plant for tomatoes—secretions from the roots have an insecticidal effect on the soil, effective against nematodes
- The dried plant is burnt as an incense and to repel insects



GROWING MINT MARIGOLD

- Tolerates heat & drought well, as it prefers dry or moist soil
- Suitable for: light (sandy), medium (loamy), & heavy (clay) soils; prefers well-drained soil
- Suitable pH: acid, neutral, & basic
- Prefers full to part sun, can't grow in the shade
- Plant transplants after last frost, water regularly until established



GROWING MINT MARIGOLD

- During summer, water deeply weekly to encourage root growth
- Thrives in compact spaces, somewhat deer resistant
- Harvest its distinctive anise-flavored leaves from spring to first frost
- During the fall produces bright yellow flowers that attract migrating butterflies and other pollinators



PROPAGATING MINT MARIGOLD

- Divide plants by digging the clumps every two to three years
- If stems fall over and touch the ground, they will take root, causing plants to spread
- Remove young shoots (5 - 10 cm tall) making sure to get as much of the underground stem as possible. Pot up and keep in light shade until roots are formed, usually take 2-3 weeks
- Seeds should be started indoors for germination in 2-weeks



OVER WINTERING MINT MARIGOLD

- May freeze to the ground during winter, doesn't mean it's dead!
- Whether it freezes or not, shear it back to the ground in late winter or early spring, only the harshest of winters will kill its roots
- To prevent freezing, cover the roots of your mint marigold with a couple of inches of hardwood mulch
- If flowers are left to seed, it may reseed itself but doesn't tend to spread readily



CULINARY USES

- Can be used as a substitute for French Tarragon, which doesn't grow well in Texas
- Has a unique anise-like flavor
- Leaves can be used in soups, salads, sauces, eggs, and fish
- Try chopping fresh leaves into chicken salad, eggs, & pesto
- The petals are also edible and have an intense anise flavor



Mexican Mint Marigold
Tagetes lucida

Sunflower Family Asteraceae
Native to Mexico and Guatemala

CULINARY USES

- Unlike French tarragon, which doesn't retain its best flavor when dried, mint marigold dries quite well
- To air dry, bundle tightly with twine and hang to dry in a cool, airy place
- Ideally, use dehydrator on the lowest setting to dry leaves and flowers in 4-6 hours
- The dried leaves and flowers are brewed into a pleasant anise-flavored tea—a popular drink in Latin America known as 'pericon'



TRADITIONAL USES

- The dried leaves were an important flavoring for *chocolatl*—stimulating cocoa drink of the ancient Aztecs
- Huichol Indians in northern Mexico ceremonially smoke a mix of tobacco & mint marigold leaves to induce visions
- Both Mayans & Aztecs used a tea made with mint marigold to treat gastrointestinal ailments
- There are reports from various parts of Mexico of message-carrying long-distance runners using robust mint marigold tea to for strength & stamina



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BASIC HERB BUTTER

- ½ pound butter (unsalted)
- 1 tablespoon chives
- 1 tablespoon mint marigold
- Dash of salt

Bring butter to room temperature. Lightly chop herb and blend with butter in a food processor or chop more finely and blend in by hand. Refrigerate at least 6 hours or overnight if possible.



MINT MARIGOLD LIQUEUR

- 1/3 cup of chopped mint marigold leaves
- 1 cup Brandy
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons water

In a clean half-pint mason jar combine the marigold and brandy. Let sit for 5 days, shaking daily. On day 5 make a simple syrup with the sugar and water over low heat. Allow to cool. Strain the herbs from the brandy through a fine cheesecloth. Add simple syrup. store at room temperature or in the refrigerator, capped tightly. Keeps indefinitely. Sip cold or add to cocktails.



MINT MARIGOLD STEAMED FISH

- Place one pound of fresh fillets on a piece of buttered aluminum foil
- Slash the fillets at 2-inch intervals and insert a thin slice of lemon into each cut
- Generously dot the fish with herb butter, salt and pepper to taste, sprinkle 1/4 cup of chopped mint marigold leaves
- Double-fold the edges of the foil to seal; fold parchment around the fish, letter style, then turn the ends under
- Bake the packet no more than 20 minutes in an oven preheated to 350°F



MEDICINAL USES

- Medicinal uses include treatment for upset stomach, for stimulating the appetite, as a diuretic and stimulating beverage
- There are reports from various parts of Mexico and the southern United States of message-carrying long-distance runners using especially strong mint marigold tea to give them strength and stamina; the robust tea acting similar to the caffeine in strong coffee



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AZTEC MARIGOLD

- *Tagetes erecta* is an annual native to Mexico & central America
- Flowers are edible and can be used in dye and food coloring
- May help soothe digestive and respiratory ailments



AZTEC MARIGOLD

- Know in Mexico as “flor de muerto” they are ever-present in Day of the Dead altars and offerings, why?
- Chosen by Aztecs to honor their dead on Day of the Dead (Nov. 2) for their prolific, bright blooms from September to December, a tradition passed on to modern times



AZTEC MARIGOLD

- Their vibrant color is said to represent the sun, which in Aztec mythology guides spirits on their way to the underworld
- During the Day of the Dead our ancestors believed their strong aroma together with incense would guide the dead back to their families

CEMPOAL XOCHITL
Caryophylli Mexicani planta.

