

PIONEER PATHS

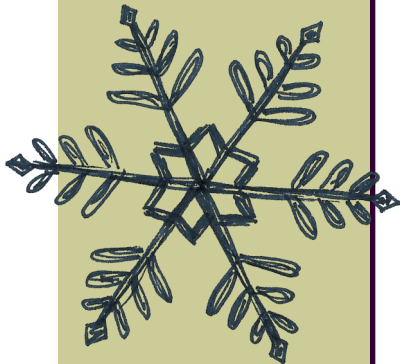
Newsletter of the Herb Society of America
Pioneer Unit

December 2020

Volume 28, Number 4

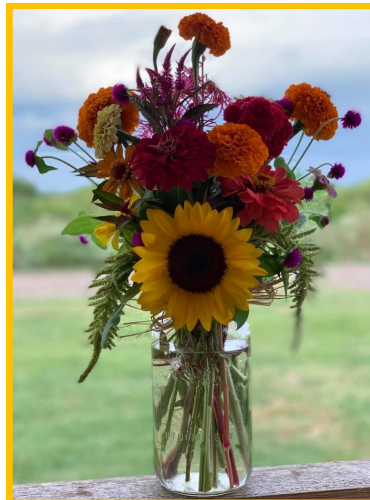
December 21
Winter Solstice

—
December 29
Long Nights Full
Moon



MONTHLY UNIT MEETING

- Date:** December 10, 2020
- Time:** 10:00 a.m. Presentation and Meeting
- Location:** This meeting will be held on Zoom. Look for the link to the meeting on our listserv.
- Directions:** You have only to turn on your computer or other internet device, click on the Zoom link, and watch the presentation. There may be an opportunity to participate in the meeting after the presentation. A video of the meeting may be available if you miss the original presentation or just want to watch the rerun. The Zoom link will be available on the listserv.
- Program:** Cut Flowers
- Speaker:** Debbie Thornton
FM Flowers
- Hosts:** You are on your own for snacks and drinks!



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Hello, everyone!

I just ate some of that broccoli I planted this fall. It was delicious. I have also been tasting arugula and lettuce. See picture included.

What a change in the weather! I moved a few plants inside last night and some I put in the shed. One was my lemon tree with a Giant Swallowtail larvae on it which I am hoping to keep alive.

Even though the sun is shining, the wind blows cold and there is no telling really what next week holds for us outside, so it is with a heavy heart that we are cancelling all outdoor meetings until the weather is better and COVID-19 retreats. The Board made this decision, and it was unanimous.

I will let Phoebe fill you in on the particulars of our ongoing presenters and what is in store for us next week. The Zoom link will arrive soon in your email box so be on the lookout.

There has been a Forum group meeting to discuss the possibility of the event taking place. We have also been talking with Lamar at Festival Hill as to how this might work in 2021. Of course, it is all dependent on the virus and Fayette County allowing us to hold not only a plant sale but to include a forum.

Stay tuned for that and know that we are trying our darndest to carry on with our herb business. Thank you for all your hours in the gardens!

Best,
Kathe Forrest
Chair



FROM OUR PROGRAMS CHAIR

We'd hoped to hold our next meeting at the Burton Pavilion, but that is not going to be possible. The board has decided that the best way forward has to have the safety of our members as our highest priority, so we will be meeting via Zoom for the foreseeable future.

Now for the good news! Our speaker, Debbie Thorton from FM Flowers in Tomball, will be speaking about cut flowers. She has sold her beautiful flowers at the Tomball Farmers Market as well as to private florists in the area. She has been a guest on Randy Lemmon's Gardenline radio show. Jay White, owner of [Texas Gardener Magazine](#), featured her in his Masters of Horticulture blog. He said, "Once you buy a bunch of her beautiful, long lasting bouquets you will be hooked!"

We may not be able to buy her bouquets next week, but we can learn how she turned a hobby into a flourishing business. Her passion is to share her knowledge and joy of growing flowers!

So check your inbox for your Zoom invite coming soon!

Phoebe Lake
Programs



MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

The Pioneer Unit has been so blessed by amazing weather at each of our meetings since July. The November meeting weather proved to be just as great - a pleasantly cool and sunny morning. Just delightful!! Phoebe arranged another exceptional speaker to enlighten us about the best herbs to grow right now. And hats off to Kathe Forrest's diligent work to provide a Zoom forum so members have the ability to attend meetings from the security of their own homes. A total of 54 people attended the meeting:

In person – 36 active members, 2 affiliates, and 2 guests (Euphanel Goad brought Blanca Alvarez, and Betty Prior brought Laura Frey.)

Via Zoom – 10 active members and 4 affiliates

Earning Volunteer Hours – not easy, but not elusive

Our Bylaws require each Active Member to complete 20 volunteer hours every year to maintain active membership status. Obtaining volunteer hours hasn't been an easy task this year. This is quite understandable with concerns of being in close proximity to others. All is not hopeless however. There are many different types of volunteer opportunities available, and one or two are sure to work for you. Some may mean that you have to step out of your comfort zone and explore doing something you haven't done before (like writing an article for the newsletter).

There have been some inquiries about whether some activities are acceptable to be counted, so I thought I would provide a quick review. Volunteering implies one is providing a service to an organization that will benefit the organization and its members. So while you are learning lots of great information while attending a meeting or reading gardening articles, you are your own beneficiary of your edification, and that doesn't count as volunteering. On the other hand, if you do some research on a particular topic and write an article for our monthly newsletter, then the members benefit from your knowledge, and that does count.

The Pioneer Unit has many types of volunteer opportunities in which members can participate to help the organization meet the purpose of volunteering and help each of us obtain our 20-hour requirement. There is plenty to do. Here are a few ideas:

Garden Work

Time spent watering, pulling weeds and other support of Festival Hill, Sensory Garden or "other" gardens (those designated by Pioneer Unit Board). Did you know that currently, due to COVID, a volunteer earns double time for every hour worked in one of the gardens? You may have bad knees like me and not be able to be on them for weeding, but there is always raking and watering. Contact Myra Simmons (Festival Hill) or Cathy Kietlinski (Sensory Garden) to find out the next work date. If you prefer to work alone, find out what needs to be done and go to a garden when you don't expect others to be present. This is Tony Scanapico's method, and he is accomplishing so much at Festival Hill.

Hostesses

The Pioneer Unit has been meeting physically each month with hostess volunteers coordinating setup, door prizes, and occasionally bringing snacks. Patty Mills is seeking volunteers to sign up to be hostesses for the future. Contact Patty to find out what is involved and to sign up.

Speaker Angels

What a fun volunteer activity this is! You meet the Speaker and assist them to get situated for their presentation. Phoebe Lake has arranged incredible, wonderful speakers for our meetings. She would really appreciate having some Speaker Angel volunteers. Contact her today.

Education

Do you enjoy writing? Do you enjoy sharing that special knowledge you have about a specific topic? Would you be willing to share gardening successes and failures? Consider writing an article for our monthly newsletter or giving a short presentation for one of our monthly meetings. Phoebe Lake recently submitted a question through our Listserv asking if anyone could provide her with information about potpourri. As the responses poured in, I thought what a great topic that would be for an article. As a novice herbalist myself, I would love to learn something from each of you – how to make soap, how to make herbal lotions, etc. Pick an herb and tell me what are your top 5 favorite things to do with it, how to make wonderful drinks from herbs, lessons you have learned over the years. The topics are endless.

Herbal Forum

Plans are in the works to have a plant sale for sure. Susan Yancey is the lady to contact. There are many different type volunteer hours available for this activity alone:

Caring for plants during Forum

Plant Sale Holding Area - watch over plants for Guests and Members

Plant Sale Cashier

Watering plants pre/during Forum

Setup/Breakdown Team

Thyme Well Spent Shoppe

A decision has not been made regarding opening the TWSS during the plant sale, but Belinda Weatherly is gearing up for it with collecting seeds. This is a huge task that requires many woman or man hours. Did you know that the Pioneer Unit sells seed packets during the Forum? During the November meeting, Belinda requested that members collect seeds from their plants and give them to her. However, there is a requirement - **Belinda wants just the seeds**, removed from the rest of the plant material. This would be an excellent activity to perform at home and a great benefit to the unit. One could probably get a number of hours from this activity. Cathy Nitsch and Jane Press are the Chairs for the Thyme Well Spent Shoppe. Contact them to see how you can do some volunteer work for them.

Diana Sellers
Membership Chair

December Birthdays

December 2 — Lynn Ehler
 December 13 — Cathy Comiskey
 December 19 — Linda Rowlett
 December 25 — Becky Nichols
 December 28 — Cathy Nitsch
 December 31 — Phoebe Lake
 December 31 — Gwen Barclay



MINUTES OF UNIT MEETING
HERB SOCIETY OF AMERICA
PIONEER UNIT
November 12, 2020

Kathe Forrest, Chair, welcomed members present at the November meeting and those attending on Zoom.

Phoebe Lake, Programs, introduced the speaker, Cindy Meredith from Hallettsville. She owns a nursery called The Herb Cottage which has been open since 1998. Cindy gave a great presentation on a variety of herbs, their planting needs, and some great cooking ideas along with it! For example, tea made from thyme is a great expectorant; thyme does great in containers and is winter hardy; oregano is summer and winter hardy and is an evergreen; and also if you add compost to your amendments for herbs, it will help on many levels. For more information you may listen to the Zoom recording and/or go to Cindy's website: <http://www.theherbcottage.com/>

Kathe then announced the birthdays for the month of November.

Phoebe thanked the hostesses and gave away three great door prizes. She then announced that next month's meeting will be in Burton at the Pavilion that is part of the Cotton Gin Complex, weather permitting. There are nice amenities there, and it is covered. There will possibly be a box lunch option for this meeting also. More detail will be in the December Newsletter.

Kathe then started informing the group about the By-Laws Committee and the proposed changes to the Pioneer Unit By-Laws. (At this time Zoom stopped working, and as I was on the Zoom call, the rest of these minutes are what was relayed to me.) The By-Law changes were approved by all present.

Cathy Kietlinski, Sensory Garden, let all know the next workday is on November 17th. Workers will be adding dirt. Cathy said that she needed all who could help to come!

Kathe stated that the Forum Committee is still working with Festival Hill on getting things worked out for a possible Forum 2021. Lamar has stated that the personnel at Festival Hill are still eager to have the Pioneer Unit hold an event there.

Susan Yancey, Plant Sale, stated that the Plant Sale Committee is still going forward as planned.

Cammie Beierle, Membership Cochair, let all know that 700 hours have been clocked so far on the Track It Forward app. There were also two guests who came to this meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Lori Yeats
Secretary

PROPAGATION WORKSHOP

On November 19, Madeline Johnson and Phoebe Lake presented a second propagation workshop. The workshop was held in the greenhouse at Festival Hill. Participants learned propagation via cuttings, including how and where to take cuttings, soil considerations, moisture control, and sanitation to prevent disease. The group also learned how to propagate plants via seeding, and considerations included size of seed, depth of planting, temperature, and again moisture control. Finally, cardamom ginger and bulbine were used to demonstrate propagation by division.

During the break everyone was encouraged to take cuttings and seeds from plants found in the surrounding gardens. All participants went home with their own "treasures." Perhaps we contributed to the continuation of a few of the wonderful plants found at Festival Hill!

Phoebe Lake



HOW TO HARVEST, DRY, AND STORE HERBS

Susan Gail Wood

When I am harvesting herbs to dry, I use the spray nozzle on my hose to clean plants the night before. This is helpful when drying for wreaths, potpourri, or any use other than culinary. For culinary use, spray plants off the night before then rinse freshly cut herbs, if needed, in a sink of cold water. Shake off excess water and lay the bunches out to dry on fresh towels or newspapers.

Pick a sunny or cloudy day to cut herbs in the morning after the dew has dried – about 9 a.m. in the Houston area. The essential oils will be at their peak at this time. Inspect the leaves to make sure there are no bugs or defects, and remove anything undesirable. Cut only the amount you can handle in the space available for drying, because this process will take from several days to a week from start to finish. For perennial herbs, cut back only up to 1/3 of the plant at a time.

It appears quaint to hang bundles of herbs here and there to dry, but this takes longer because there is not good air circulation within the bundle. If this is the way you want to dry them, it's okay, but just be sure to use rubber bands to secure the bunches because stems will shrink as they dry, which could allow the bundle to fall apart. I prefer to dry herbs quickly by laying out freshly harvested herbs in a single layer on clean newspapers or a drying screen. Elevate the screen a few inches to allow air circulation above and below for fastest drying. I bought portable window screens years ago – they can be opened for drying and closed for storing. Available now on Amazon of course. Drying in bundles may take a week; drying flat on newspapers or screens takes just a few days depending on the thickness of your herbs and humidity of your home. You can find all sorts of screens made just for drying herbs online or get a friend to make some for you.

I use the dining room table and/or the bed in my spare bedroom to dry herbs in bulk. Use drying screens (over newspapers to collect small bits) or overlap newspapers on the table or bed so you can collect all herbs easily once dried. Spread the herbs out so they do not overlap each other. Leave herbs such as pineapple sage, mint, lemon balm, lemon verbena, basil, Mexican mint marigold, rosemary, and oregano on their stems for two days. This helps you space out the harvest for maximum air circulation. Turn them over after the first day. Then strip leaves off stems by holding the cut stem upright by the growing tip to strip in a downward direction with your thumb and forefinger. In other words, pulling leaves off in the opposite direction of growth. Now you should only need another day or two of drying to complete the process.

Cut lemongrass into ½- to 1-inch pieces as needed while fresh. Lemongrass has a saw tooth edge on leaves which can easily give you a paper cut if not handled with care. Lemongrass grows rapidly in summer heat so you can harvest frequently. If using it fresh for tea, you can tie long pieces into a knot to fit in your teapot.

When growing basil for culinary use, do not allow it to bloom because this adversely affects the flavor. Handle gently to keep from bruising the leaves. Harvest the entire plant before the first freeze; basil will not survive temperatures near 32 degrees. Make pesto in the fall before freezing weather.

Continued on next page

Cilantro does not keep its flavor when dried. That is why it is almost always used fresh or can be made into pesto instead of using basil. All parts – flowers and stems – can be used. Unripe green seeds add a pop of flavor to dishes. Ripe, brown seeds are called coriander and are used as an ingredient in curry. Ripe seeds smell and taste different from fresh cilantro! Use parsley fresh for best results. Dill and fennel leaves are usually used fresh too. Dill seed can be sprinkled on bread or used along with dill weed for a wonderful herbal spin on grilled cheese sandwiches. Grow fennel to attract butterflies even if you do not enjoy the licorice flavor in cooking. Three of these herbs are cool weather annuals planted in the fall and harvested in spring. Parsley is a biennial. Once you have harvested these, it is time to plant basil which thrives in summer heat.

I usually cut back catnip after blooming in late spring to harvest and dry for my cats. They love to play with a white cotton sock with the toe of the foot stuffed with dried catnip. Tie the top in a tight knot, and you have a catnip toy that will withstand lots of play. My catnip usually suffers through the summer whether it is too wet or too dry, and I end up having to replace it in the fall.

To enjoy the small, yellow flowers of Mexican mint marigold, stop cutting and harvesting it by the end of June. This allows the plant time to set buds for blooms in late October or early November. I add the fresh leaves to red wine vinegar (steep for 2 months) then mix with a good olive oil for a great salad dressing. Dry the water from fresh herbs before adding to vinegar.

Harvest lemon verbena leaves by pruning the plant throughout spring and summer. Lemon verbena will usually drop all its leaves when the weather turns cold or freezes. Although it may look dead in spring, give it time as it is one of the last herbs to bud out when the weather warms up again. Lemon verbena tea, with herb used fresh or dried, is very relaxing, with a wonderful fragrance too.


Now that you have dried your herbal harvest, you will want to protect it from absorbing any moisture until used. The absolute best method is to store dried herbs in a glass jar or airtight glass container in a cool, dark place (your pantry). Once you run out of jars, you can use gallon or quart size zip lock bags. Another choice would be to staple shut folded over tops of paper bags full of dried herbs. Be sure to label your herbal bounty with name and date of harvest.

It is best to use your dried herbs as soon as possible. Do not try to keep them for more than 6 months to a year. If you harvested more than you can use in that time, give some away to friends. Remember the motto of The Herb Society of America: "For Use and For Delight."



If your recipe calls for fresh herbs, you can substitute 1/3 of the amount needed with dry herbs. Or substitute 3 times the amount of dried with fresh. When cooking, add herbs in the final 5 to 15 minutes for best results. Bay leaves can be added initially for soups and stews, then removed before serving. Give at least an hour for cold dishes to absorb the flavor of added herbs. Add dill to potato salad. Pineapple salvia, lemon balm, and lemon verbena give a nice flavor to a fruit salad or fruited beverage. Be creative with herbs by adding them to your favorite recipes. A small amount can go a long way; use just a little at first then increase the amount to suit your taste.

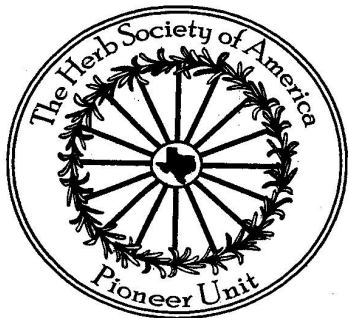
December 2020



Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
CG = Culinary Group FH = Festival Hill SG = Sensory	HG = Horticultural Study Group	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10 Unit Meeting on Zoom	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27 Newsletter Deadline lrowlett@gmail.com	28	29	30	31		

January 2021

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
CG = Culinary Group FH = Festival Hill	HG = Horticultural Study Group					
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14 Unit Meeting on Zoom	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24 Newsletter Deadline lrowlett@gmail.com	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						



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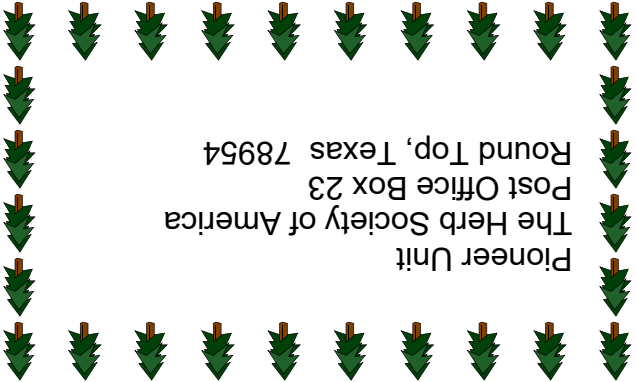
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Vice Chair Membership—Diana Sellers

Secretary—Lori Yeats

Treasurer—Debi Thomas



Pioneer Unit
The Herb Society of America
Post Office Box 23
Round Top, Texas 78954