



Herbs for Cooking

by Judy Fleming, HCMG

Last month we were very blessed to have legendary herbalist Bill Varney delight us with a talk about the romance of herbs. His entire life has been a romance with herbs, indeed! Bill and his wife Sylvia founded the Fredericksburg Herb Farm in 1985, and lovingly built the gardens, restaurant and spa over the following 20 years. The Varneys no longer own the herb farm; however, they now have a new undertaking called URBAN-herbal. Bill and Sylvia's book "Herbs, Growing & Using The Plants of Romance" is a treasure of their journey, and it is chock full of essential information for anyone interested in herbs and culinary cooking.

During his talk, Bill shared with us the following essential herbs to grow in a culinary garden:

Basil There are many types and flavors and each cultivar should be separated from each other in the garden to preserve the individual qualities. Bill suggested that everyone try cinnamon basil.

Chives A member of the onion family, all parts are edible including the pompon white or pink flowers.

Cilantro/Coriander This herb is a staple in Indian, Mexican and Chinese cuisines with its pungent leaves and seeds.

Dill This beautiful fern-like plant is a mainstay in Scandinavian cooking and essential herb for pickling vegetables.

Fennel This is an excellent herb for salmon, greens and the French sauté the fennel bulbs as a side dish. Monarch butterflies love this plant, so be generous in your plantings.

Garlic Easy to grow and an absolute must for all cooks!

Lemon Balm This subtle herb with a lemony flavor is a great adjunct to greens, fruits, baked sweets and teas. It is very invasive.

Mint Mint comes in many varieties such as peppermint, spearmint, chocolate mint, etc. Keep the varieties in different parts of your garden as to not cross pollinate.

Oregano This is the king of Italian herbs. It adds a special flash to sauces, salads, vegetables and pasta. This herb is often used with basil and garlic and is also compatible with sage, chives, parsley and thyme.

Sweet Marjoram This herb is very similar to oregano and can be used in the same dishes.

Parsley There is curly, flat leaf and Italian parsley which is a main stay in the kitchen. It is a great addition to green smoothies, herbed butter as well as soups and vegetable dishes. Parsley also contains vitamin A & C.

Rosemary This evergreen herb is used with poultry and meats and roasted vegetables. Its aromatic aroma freshens the environment and is often used in soaps.

Sage This is a silver leaf herb used with poultry and sausages. It is often combined with parsley and rosemary to season winter dishes.

Scented Geraniums Cakes cookies and pies can benefit from this subtle and beautiful herb. The flowers are often added to teas and as edible garnishes.

Tarragon This herb is often used in vinegars, egg, cheese, and chicken dishes. It is slightly anise-scented and a staple of French cuisine.

Thyme This is a peppery herb that combines well with parsley. There are many varieties of thyme that can be used in both savory and sweet dishes.

Check out the activity at the Varney's web site urbanherbal.com. He has a recommendation for a medicinal herb garden and many terrific, tried and true tips for the Hill Country gardener.