

# HSA Herb Study Group Guidelines

## ***HERB STUDY - EVEN MORE FUN AS A GROUP!***

***By Dr. Lois Sutton***

Even if you have an active unit or group of members at large, the needs and interests of individual members will vary. No matter how creative your programming is there will be more that you didn't get to cover, there will be people who couldn't attend that day, or there will be people who don't share the same interest. A herb study group might be just the thing for you!

### **What can you gain with a herb study group?**

The needs of your group will define the purpose of the study group. Here's a list of goals that quickly come to mind. You'll find others that apply to your specific situation.

- Increase cohesion / contacts among members (unit or members at large).
- Involve the public and recruit new members.
- Meet a greater variety of member interests.
- Address learning needs of long-term and new members.
- Provide alternative meeting times and thus, increase member attendance and participation.
- Focus on a single topic or project.
- Serve as an information resource (for the unit, a herb event or newsletter article, The Society's website).

### **How do you get started?**

1. Define the needs of your group.
  - If you're in a unit, talk to your unit chairperson and board members to explain your ideas and to see how a study group might fit in with already planned activities.
  - Talk to your district delegate - he/she may know of other study groups in your area or may know of others who would be interested in participating.
  - Do a formal or informal survey of your members (try a face-to-face chat or phone call for better response)
  - Host a meeting of a few other people you think might be interested in participating.
2. Define the structure of the group:
  - What is your specific goal, i.e. what are the anticipated outcomes?
  - When will you meet?
  - Where will you meet?
  - How often will you meet?
  - Is there a specific time line for the group (1 year, ongoing)?
  - Will you meet face-to-face or electronically, via e-mail or a chat room?
  - Who will lead/ coordinate the group?
  - What is expected to happen at each meeting, i.e. a program provided by a member or a local expert, a group discussion on a shared topic?
  - Is there a limit on attendance?
  - Are there costs involved? If so, who will cover the costs?
  - Will there be refreshments? If so, who will provide them?
3. Advertise the first meeting. Make sure you describe the purpose of the group.

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- Talk about it at the unit meeting or event.
- Put a notice in a newsletter (the district round-robin letter, other local gardening clubs such as the Master Gardeners, the unit, a culinary group, your neighborhood paper, an arboretum....).
- Call people you know who share your interest.
- Challenge them to bring someone else along.

4. Plan the first meeting so that you deliver what you marketed. Be prepared to modify your plan based on discussions at the first meeting.
5. If you haven't done so yet, schedule the next meeting before everyone departs. Turn vague promises of hosting or participation into cheerful commitments!
6. Keep in mind that you are getting this group together to have fun - by learning something new, by honing skills, by expanding knowledge.

### **What are some types of herb study groups that units or herb associations have?**

Several groups have botanical study groups, i.e. groups that do plant studies. Some groups have very successful culinary groups. Another approach tried by units is a craft or stitchery group.

#### Botanical Study Groups

Clear guidelines for participants are critical - is the study to be a monograph (a really in-depth study) or a more casual overview? Allow enough time for the research. Be creative in the way we present the herb. Try one of these:

- displays of different varieties of the herb and/or items that are made using the herb
- an herbarium of specimens of different varieties
- an arrangement featuring the herb or different varieties of the herb
- slides of the herb taken at different times in the growth cycle
- games or quizzes such as a 'mystery herb'
- a group of herbs that might be used together or that have common traits (insect repellent herbs, tea herbs, lemon herbs)
- specimens that provide a 'touch and smell' experience
- similarities and differences between plants in the same family or genus

The herb plant study guideline used by the South Texas Unit includes the following:

- botanical and common name
- plant family
- plant description
- culture - cultivation and propagation
- method of harvest and preservation
- folklore, symbolism of plant, historical tidbits
- uses
- sources for herb
- reference / resource list
- A sample form appears as Attachment 1.

# HSA Herb Study Group Guidelines

When studying a plant, be creative in your research resources.

- your personal library
- other members' book collections
- The Society's lending library and slide collections
- local garden or botanical centers
- local university or master gardening programs
- friends who grow the plants
- electronic resources - the websites of libraries, other plant societies, other Society member groups or Units, the HSA website

## Culinary Study Groups

When an herb study group has an evening of herbal cuisine, an interesting herb study might be to look at a group of herbs used in a particular type of cuisine, by a certain culture or to look at the variety of uses of a single herb (savory to sweet). Try a soup to nuts approach. Explore how herb flavors blend together - how many herbs was too many over the course of the dinner, what was the most successful flavor pairing.

And, of course, ask information about the cultures and the herbs.

1. Botanical name, common name and plant family
2. Brief plant description
3. How was the herb brought to that geographical area, that culture or that cuisine? Is it native to the area or a gift from some explorer?
4. Was the culinary use preservative, religious, medicinal before it spilled over into common culinary usage?
5. Was the herb or spice available to commoners and royalty alike?
6. And last but not least - let's eat!

## Other Herb Study Groups

A *Stitchery* group could talk about fiber and dye plants. A project might even be to dye cotton or silk threads to be used in a small embroidery project. Or cross stitch a collection of lemon herbs, a knot garden, a sampler of plants in the garden your group maintains, roadside herbs. When you're done, display the handwork along with cards detailing the plants and or gardens depicted.

A *History* group might explore the use of herbs in some particular time period. What was the purpose of a garden in that age? What were the plants? For what were they used? What are those things called pot herbs? This might even take you into the language of flowers - tussie mussies. Or it could lead to a garden design!

An *Economic* group could explore herbs used commercially - how are herbs grown as commercial crops? How do you extract essential oils? How does a herb move from historical medical use to FDA trials?

## HSA Herb Study Group Guidelines

*In Support of Children* - a collection of herbs with animal names, discovery boxes (What does this aroma remind you of? Does this smell like lemon drops? Does this one make you think of pizza?). Herb crafting - spray painting around small herb branches as the cover for a scrapbook.

*The Electronic Herb* - gather the group around a computer and explore where you can go by searching for a herb name. Visit some of the web sites listed in those magazines you read. Stretch your borders and look for sites in other countries - England, Down Under, India, the Spice Islands.

*A Book Club* - From Harry Potter to Brother Cadfael to Shakespeare - there's no end to the possibilities for the fictional herb. Share your favorite gardening books or that old cookbook / household guide you found at the used bookstore. Learn how to critically read a gardening book.

Household herbs, gifts from the garden - the possibilities for herbal study are endless! When will you have time to ever do anything else again?



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<b>Folklore, symbolism of plant, historical tidbits</b>
<b>Uses</b>
Medicinal:
Culinary :
Decorative, crafts:
Cosmetics, beauty, scent:
Economic:
Other:
<b>Reference / Resource List</b>

*The Herb Society of America, South Texas Unit*

# HSA Herb Study Group Guidelines

## Herbal Program Ideas

### Culinary

herbs for tastier foods  
herbs in commercial food products  
pot / salad herbs  
rare old culinary herbs  
herbal beverages  
-teas, tisanes  
-coffee substitutes  
-liqueurs & infused wines  
-summer coolers  
herbs for low fat cooking  
herbal gadgets - new & old  
spices  
-cinnamon, not just from Durkee!  
-saffron  
-mace & nutmeg  
culinary herbs/ spices in history  
-spice traders (the first commodity traders?)  
-spices, the real bounty of explorers  
the herbal pantry  
the roadside herbal bounty  
flowers - edible color

### Fragrant

aromatic plants and herbs  
strewing herbs  
herbal mimics  
-lemon herbs  
-licorice herbs  
scented geraniums  
-a fragrance for everyone  
the queen of all scents - lavender  
roses  
fragrant gums, woods & resins  
adding scent to everyday life  
-bath herbs  
-scented candles  
-herb pillows & sweet bags  
-pot pourri & sachets  
take a sniff & name that herb!

### Ornamental and Symbolic

herbal magic  
tussie-mussies and the language of flowers

# HSA Herb Study Group Guidelines

herbs in art, history, music  
herbs in holidays, rituals and special occasions  
herbal flower arranging - dried & fresh

## Utilitarian

detergent herbs  
herbs - from front door to the laundry room  
herbal insecticides  
useful weeds  
herbal dyes  
plants that give us fibers

## Cultivation

herbs for unusual places  
-paths, slopes, benches  
herbs in challenging climates/sites  
-seaside, desert, mountain side, bogs  
herbs - the great mixers  
-with perennials, roses  
-with vegetables  
theme gardens  
floral clocks  
herbal propagation  
successful indoor herbs?  
controlling those pests  
herbs of foreign countries  
herbs associated with specific cultures  
(or herbs that cross cultural boundaries)

## General

herb comparisons - by family or genus  
herbal preservation - photography, printmaking, drawing, herbarium  
herbal journals  
sharing your favorite herb books

Contact the HSA Library for research assistance or to borrow materials. Website:  
<http://www.herbsociety.org/library/index.php>. Email: [library@herbsociety.org](mailto:library@herbsociety.org).