



FAIRHOLME
PLANTS



Newsletter January 2018

**"The love of gardening is a seed once sown
that never dies."**

GARNISH YOUR GARDEN with herbs for dry conditions

Humans have used herbs almost since the first caveman lit the first barbecue. Written records of herbs go back more than 5,000 years, to the Sumerians, and herbal medicine in India may be as much as 4,000 years old. The Ebers Papyrus from ancient Egypt describes hundreds of medicinal herbs. Modern gardeners would be familiar with many of these, such as aloe, garlic and cannabis. Well, maybe not cannabis.

Early peoples employed herbs for healing more often than for cooking. Herbs with "officinalis" in their scientific name were thought medicinal. Examples include rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*) and sage (*Salvia officinalis*). The word refers to the "officina", the medicine store of a medieval monastery.

In modern times, herbs have migrated to the kitchen. Different cultures each favor their own combination of herbs and spices. This helps to make regional cuisine distinctive.

Herbes de Provence is a classic mix of French herbs, ideal for grilled meat and fish, as well as vegetable stews. The blend usually contains thyme, marjoram, fennel, basil, rosemary and lavender. These are herbs that grow in the Provence region of France.

Provence has a Mediterranean climate. Summers are hot and dry, just like in the Western Cape. Gardeners can look to the Garrigue landscape of Provence for inspiration. Here, lavender, sage, rosemary, thyme and cistus grow wild in the most arid conditions.

You can recreate the essence of Provence in your own garden, by adding a selection of drought tolerant herbs. Plant a few of these and spend future summers in the shade with a glass of wine. No need to worry about watering, only about keeping an eye on the barbecue.

We discussed lavenders and sages in previous newsletters. This month's newsletter features an additional six herbs suitable for the dry garden.

Bring Provence home to your garden

Lesser calamint
Calamintha nepeta



Size

↑ 40 cm
↔ 40 cm

Soil

Sandy or stony soils
Requires good drainage

Exposure

Full sun

Season

Flowers summer to autumn

Drought resistance

4 months per year



Size

↑ 2 to 3 m
↔ 1 to 2 m

Soil

Not fussy
Requires good drainage

Exposure

Full sun to partial shade

Season

Flowers spring to summer

Drought resistance

4 months per year

Common myrtle
Myrtus communis

Lesser calamint forms a dense mound of soft leaves. The plant spreads by rhizomes and may seed itself under good conditions. Calamint is ideal for ground cover or edging. Place it where you can appreciate the fragrance of the foliage.

Lesser calamint is native to the Mediterranean region. Italians know it as “nepitella”. Cooks in Tuscany use nepitella when preparing artichokes, mushrooms and pork.

The **common myrtle** is an evergreen shrub with shiny, fragrant leaves. White flowers in spring are followed by deep blue, almost black, berries. Myrtles withstand clipping and are perfect for hedges and topiary.

Ancient Greeks and Romans held the myrtle as sacred to Venus, the goddess of love. Myrtles turn up in the Old Testament and still play a role in some Jewish rituals. The flowers symbolize love and marriage. Added to the fire, myrtle gives a unique flavor to food. In Sardinia and Corsica, a myrtle liqueur is drunk after meals.

Holy basil or “tulsi” is not a Mediterranean plant, but instead comes from India. The plant is a small, upright shrub with simple, hairy leaves. The flowers are pale pink with darker calyces. On hot days, a strong smell of basil and cloves rises from the foliage.

Holy basil is often planted in courtyards of houses and temples of Hindus. Tulsi has always been a key plant in traditional Ayurvedic medicine. The stems and roots are also used to make prayer beads. Thai people know this plant as *kaphrao* and include it in stir-fries.

You may have encountered tulsi tea, a stress reliever, at your local health shop. Try planting holy basil in your garden to counter the stress of dry summers.

Rosemary is an evergreen shrub from Asia and the Mediterranean. The leaves resemble needles and have hairy undersides to limit water loss. Rosemary can withstand severe drought. In fact, watering in summer is harmful, promoting diseases that kill the plants.

Rosemary is available in several forms. Varieties like Tuscan Blue are upright and can be grown as a hedge. The prostrate types, such as *Rosmarinus officinalis* var. *repens*, have a low, spreading habit, great for ground cover.

For an authentic taste of southern France, put your rosemary prunings on the barbecue. Sprigs of rosemary also impart a wonderful flavor to grilled meat and vegetables. Rosemary has long been a symbol of remembrance and enjoys a reputation for enhancing memory.

The **wall germander** hails from the Mediterranean and the Middle East. It is a woody shrub with shiny, evergreen foliage. The small pink flowers are popular with insects. Low growing wall germander is ideal for edging or ground cover.

Germander is not edible. In the past, people took decoctions of the leaves for gout and asthma. As germander can damage the liver and lead to death, we recommend you don't try this.

Holy basil *Ocimum tenuiflorum*

Size

↑ 50 cm
↔ 50 cm

Soil

Not fussy
Requires good drainage

Exposure

Full sun to partial shade

Season

Flowers spring to summer

Drought resistance

4 months per year



Rosemary
Rosmarinus officinalis



Size

↑ 40 cm to 2 m

↔ 1 to 3 m

Soil

Sandy or stony soils

Requires good drainage

Exposure

Full sun

Season

Flowers spring and autumn

Drought resistance

5 months per year



Size

↑ 30 cm

↔ 30 to 60 cm

Soil

Not fussy

Requires good drainage

Exposure

Full sun

Season

Flowers summer

Drought resistance

4 months per year

Wall germander
Teucrium chamaedrys

Thyme
Thymus vulgaris and serpyllum



Size

↑ 5 to 25 cm
↔ 30 to 90 cm

Soil

Not fussy
Requires good drainage

Exposure

Full sun

Season

Flowers summer

Drought resistance

4 months per year

There are about 350 species of **thyme**, as well as many more cultivated varieties. Those familiar to gardeners are small shrubs or ground covers. *Thymus vulgaris* is culinary thyme, which is available in different flavors. *Thymus serpyllum* is creeping thyme and spreads by lateral shoots. Creeping thyme is less drought resistant than the shrubby varieties.

The ancient Egyptians used thyme during embalming. Later, the Romans believed that the scent of thyme purified the air. They also added it to cheese and liqueurs.

A sprig of thyme beneath the pillow is said to promote sweet dreams and a good night's sleep. We guarantee that you will sleep better with thyme in your garden, as it doesn't need watering. The plants may become brown and dormant under extreme drought, but will recover in autumn.

MORE DROUGHT RESISTANT HERBS

Wormwood

Artemisia species

Lavender

Lavendula species

Oregano

Many *Origanum* species

Pelargonium

Many *Pelargonium* species

Cotton lavender

Santolina chamaecyparissus

Sages

Many *Salvia* species

Rue

Ruta graveolens



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