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## Recommended South Texas Herbs I May Have Killed

by Jeffry Brown

The present author and often killer gardener (not a good thing) comments on recommended herbs listed for South Texas in a paper handed to us by Grace Emery during her speech in the January 2019 meeting on herbs, some have grown well, others ... My soil is thin, and is probably clay (goo when wet, cracked when dry) on top of stones and maybe lime (caliche). This is my "junk soil".

**Basil.** In the past the common basil planted in our clay taffy soil did fairly well. However the hot summer sun scorched the leaves, causing many brown spots and faded green. Clearly for the summer some afternoon shade would help, as it so often does for plant tortured by our hot South Texas summers. For years now I've been continuing the yearly self-reseeding of a basil variety obtained from basil plant stems at a Vietnamese restaurant many years ago. One wet year it spread temporarily in the ground by the back fence, creating a small basil jungle. That only happened once, mostly it likes the pots better (or maybe better garden soil). That Vietnamese basil is nice as the green leaves often have bright lavender bottoms, which the wind can reveal. Basil leaves add a good flavor notes to various food dishes, and the common basil goes very well with tomatoes.

**Chives.** These onion relatives have good onion family flavor (not so much crying with the chives!). I've planted them, but later they usually are gone somehow. Looks like I should throw them in pots too.

**Dill.** I've never tried to grow it.

**Lemon Balm.** A small bushy bunch of this plant has thrived in one spot along the back fence in the junk soil, which has afternoon shade. I'm not sure how it's doing, it may be there's too much shade there for good growth now. The leaves definitely have a lemony smell! We'll see if it comes back this summer. It has white flowers.

**Lemon Mint Marigold.** This is a small bushy plant I've kept in a medium sized pot. The leaves are narrow and, when broken, produce a powerful tarragon smell. Sometimes it has flowered with pretty yellow flowers. It now (January) has died back for the winter.

**Lavender.** A good smelling small bushy herb. It's not for eating, more for odor and refreshing the old time bad airs. I had a bush some years ago along the back fence with the afternoon shade and junk soil. It was delightful while it lasted. There are many many lavender varieties, so look around!

**Mint.** Like lavender, there's many types. I prefer spearmint, which seems popular in Vietnamese food. But when I've planted mints in the junk ground, it likes to die. So I've had some spearmint growing in containers. Once I was up in the mountains by Death Valley, CA, and the creek there was overgrown with some sort of mint. So as we learned during Grace's talk and from comments, mint does love water.

**Oregano.** There's many types of this plant too. I've had

what I think is the common one (Greek?) growing in the front for years. It sometimes is "leggy" in a lot of sun, but won't grow even in full moderate shade. It's a ground cover, in part shade, that won't stop all weeds; but may stop some. In brighter sun it has flowered with fuzzy looking white and dark reddish color flowers.

**Rosemary.** Years ago I planted various herbs in the sunny desert out back (now more a shady hot glen). Only one did well in the junk soil, rosemary. This 2 foot herb grew up 6 feet and was too big. When reducing it my wife developed an allergy, and the plant died. Because of the allergy I don't plant it. But it develops small flowers earlier during the year than any other plants start to bloom, which attracts honeybees. As taste additive, it's powerful, so like cilantro, use sparingly! A decent sized small bush should prevent you from ever have to buy fresh rosemary herb again!

**Sage.** My one nice sage bush in front is perishing in the excess oak shade and weed attack it is experiencing. In late spring it formerly bloomed with nice purple flowers. Ornamental sage species are famous for their flowers, but I like the official sage its fragrant pebbly surfaced leaves. I occasionally made tea with it to treat throat soreness. It worked well, and made a somewhat yellow greenish tea. I should plant it all over except in shade, it even grows in our junk soil (but it doesn't grow like the rosemary did).

**Thyme.** Grace's sheet says sandy soil, which may explain why my attempts to grow thyme in my junk soil were miserable failures. Can this be grown in a low weight pot?

**Cilantro.** This is called coriander when grown for seeds, and cilantro when grown for leaves (don't confuse with culantro, a different plant). It's common in food here in San Antonio. The leaves have a soapy like taste to me, which my wife doesn't like. In a Mongolian Barbecue meal I learned a little cilantro can TAKE CHARGE of the taste, so use sparingly! I've not tried to grow it, but it's a winter plant like parsley. Planted too early it will bolt when hot weather arrives, like fennel or other plants. Bolt means it will throw up flower stalks while the leaf supply wilts away. The Vietnamese basil does that too during the summer, though when in shade it hardly blooms. So this year Vietnamese basil stealth bloomed (somehow I missed it) in Autumn!

**Borage.** This plant was not on the list, but I saw it in Grace Emery's slides. Or I think I did. For several years I had it growing by the south side of my house, in mostly shade and the junk soil. For a long time in the summer it would flower, with bunches of pretty little blue flowers, and fuzz. The leaves were very fuzzy, but too rough for me to eat despite text that advocated eating them. The flowers were good though. I'd put them in tea at the Vietnamese restaurant. One day the lady thought there was something wrong with the tea, but it was OK. The flowers seemed slightly sweet to eat and their dark blue color looked nice floating on the tea. Later the plant would produce lots of little barrel shaped seeds.

**President's Corner**    *Continued from Page 2*

This year the **Alamo Regional Science and Engineering Fair** will take place on March 1-3 with our judging on March 2. This is always a fun event as it helps us realize that we can count on future generation to carry the torch of science and innovation forward. I am hoping that Frank Rios will step up once again and Chair this worthwhile event so please volunteer to help and don't worry about your qualifications as the students talk and you listen and act like you know what they are talking about.

The **SAWS Spring Bloom** will take place most on March 9, 2019. The Spring Bloom is fast and furious event and one of the club's best fund raisers. It is a fun event with lots of give-away plants and demos. It starts at 9 AM and is over by 1 PM.

Please **volunteer for all these events** because it makes our club more visible to the general public and we can have fun at the same time without paying the price of admission. Also, it affords us an opportunity to mingle with, and stay more connected to, other clubs and the greater gardening community. This will facilitate our membership goal of giving our members more exposure to others for the mutual benefit of all.

*Hopefully, I will see all of you attending the February 7, 2019 meeting where you will be hearing our great guest speaker Mark Fanick. Mark is one of the family owners of the oldest nursery in San Antonio, now in its 80<sup>th</sup> year of operation. The Fanicks have a soft spot in their hearts for the MGCSA since Grandpa Eddy Fanick, the founder of the nursery, was a card carrying member of our club.*

## Men's Garden Club of San Antonio (MGCSA)

*Open to men and women.*

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