

# Thyme In The Herb Garden

by Lynne Belluscio

This year we have spent quite a bit of time enlarging the kitchen garden next to LeRoy House. This memorial garden is dedicated to Loreli Ketter's mother, Kathryn Zimmerman Beverly. The sundial sits on the cover of the old hand dug well that supplied water to the house. Most of the herbs are perennials, but there are a few annuals. If you come to visit the garden, here are some of the descriptions of the herbs that you will find this year.

**Bee Balm** - This North American native plant was known by the Indians and was discovered by white settlers growing in Otsego. Although not considered a culinary herb, it makes a wonderful tea, and the colorful flowers can be added to salads. The leaves have a mild citrus flavor and can be added to pork and chicken recipes. Bee Balm has many other names. Sometimes called monarda, or bergamont, it was one of the many herbs cultivated by the Shakers. Unlike most of the herbs in the garden that were brought to North America by early settlers, bee balm made the reverse trip and was taken to Europe in the 1700s and is commonly grown there.

**Loveage** - This impressive plant is a wonderful substitute for celery and is much easier to grow. The roots, stalks, leaves and seeds can be used in a variety of recipes. It can be dried or frozen. When freezing, it must be quickly blanched then dried and frozen. It has many medicinal properties, and is considered a diuretic.

It was grown in the garden of the Emperor Charlemagne.

**Sage** - There are several varieties of sage in the garden, including purple, variegated, golden and common sage. It is known primarily as a culinary herb, commonly used in sausages and with poultry, but it does have medicinal properties. The flavor of fresh sage is much different from

dried sage. Historically, sage is associated with immortality and longevity and was credited with increasing mental capacity.

**Thyme** - The herb garden has several varieties of thyme, including moss thyme, red creeping thyme, English thyme and lemon thyme. The plants seem to be susceptible to ant colonies. Thyme has been described as the "perfect herb." The name is derived from the Greek word, Thymus, meaning courage.

**Lemon Balm** - This plant is a transplant from my grandmother Marvin's garden in Cincinnati, New York. The square stems identify the lemon balm as a member of the mint family but its strong lemon scent makes it ideal for salads, vegetables, poultry and fish, and tea and punch. The flowers are a favorite with honeybees.

**Lady's Mantle** - The whorled leaves of this medicinal herb, collect dew drops which appear like jewels in the morning light. The name is a reference to the Virgin Mary. The bright chartreuse flowers, can be used in dried arrangements. Many of the medicinal attributes are related to female illnesses and childbirth.

**Borage** - Borage has a reputation for invoking courage and was served to soldiers before going to battle. The plant is both

a medicinal herb and a culinary herb. Its cucumber flavor can be enjoyed raw, steamed, or sautéed like spinach. The delicate blue flowers are great for salads or as a colorful garnish. The flowers are also candied by first dipping them in beaten egg white and then in sugar. The leaves could be used as a cooling poultice it was known as a mild expectorant.

**Nasturtium** - These brightly colored annuals were brought from Peru to Spain in the 1500s and by 1590 the English were using the peppery plants in recipes. The flowers and leaves add a flavor much like a hot radish to salads and also can be floated in punch. The seedpods can be collected and pickled in vinegar and are a good substitute for capers.

**Salad Burnet** - This edible perennial herb was extremely popular in the 1600s. The young leaves are excellent in salads and the flavor is often described as mild cucumber. The seeds can be used to flavor vinegars, marinades, sour cream and cheese spreads. It can also be used as a garnish in drinks, much like celery. Older leaves are very bitter. The herb loses its pleasant flavor when dried. The Shakers sold the herb in the 1820s to dress wounds.

**Wormwood** - A hardy perennial this herb is one of the many

Artemisia varieties. Because of the oil in the foliage, it can stunt the growth of nearby plants. However, a tea of wormwood can repel aphids. It is not used in cooking, although it is an active ingredient in the alcoholic drink, absinthe and may be used to flavor vermouth. It is considered one of the "bitter herbs" in the Old Testament. It was used, as its name implies, to rid intestinal worms, although the active ingredient is extremely dangerous. It was used externally for a variety of ailments, although some people react negatively to its application. Sprigs of wormwood were hung on windows and doors to discourage insects. It was also used in sachets to discourage moths.

**Fennel** - A semi-hardy perennial herb that can be used in a variety of recipes. The "seeds" are not seeds, but the fruit of the plant. Known for its anise flavor, the leaves as well as the bulb can be used in salads, soups and as an accompaniment to fish. There are many medicinal uses for fennel, including helping to reduce acid reflux. The flavor of fennel is lost when heated, so it should be added just before serving. Fennel seeds were eaten during long church services to suppress the appetite. Others believed that it warded off witchcraft and it was hung over the doorway during Midsummer Eve's night for that purpose.

