

HERBAL WISDOM

BY ELLEN ZIMMERMANN

PLANTING YOUR FALL “FARMACY”

Being an avid gardener, I’m afflicted with fall fever. No matter how busy my herbal practice keeps me, I take advantage of the more tolerable weather as I plant my fall garden and admire the cooler colors of fall herbs and flowers.

If you have a ‘Texas hankerin’ to get a favorite plant in the ground, now’s the time. In fact, if you think ahead, you can have fresh herbs throughout the winter, including the following favorites.

Fall is the best time to plant **parsley** (*Petroselinum sativum*). I find the flat Italian varieties the tastiest. Because parsley seeds can be difficult to germinate, I recommend buying four-inch transplants to plant in part sun/part shade. Parsley lasts for two years, then bolts (goes to flower), but before that happens, I use it in soups, stews, tabouli, salads and more. Parsley is high in vitamin C, and its leaves and root are used for urinary tract infections. All parts of the plant are good for digestive weakness.

Another great herb to plant now is **cilantro** (*Coriandrum sativum*). I like it in salsas, salads, with beans and on vegetarian tacos, as well as made into pesto. It’s easily grown from seed if planted in a sunny location, in well-drained soil. Cilantro usually bolts in springtime, forming a lovely, delicate white flower that eventually becomes coriander seeds. These seeds can be used as a spice in chili or curry powder, in my own High Energy Chai Tea, or pickled and used like capers when ripe and green. Herbalists recommend using a cilantro tincture to rid the body of heavy metals.

Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*) is probably my favorite fall herb. Seeds planted in full sun now will produce rich, vibrant, orange flowers in late winter or early spring. Calendula

flowers are not just edible, but effective as an antidepressant. Applied externally, calendula salve will effectively treat burns and promote the healing of wounds, insect bites, diaper rash, chapped lips, hemorrhoids and bruises.

The lovely little orange **California poppy** (*Eschscholzia californica*) is another perennial that grows well here. Known as “nightcap” in the United States, it contains flavone glycosides and alkaloids known to have pain-relieving and sedative properties, but not considered narcotic. The California poppy can be made into a tincture for relief of pain, insomnia, anxiety and diarrhea. It also inhibits the cough reflex. It blends well with such other herbs as passionflower (*Passiflora incarnata*), lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*) and valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*).

Two other herbs best planted in the fall are **dill** (*Anethum graveolens*) and **fennel** (*Foeniculum vulgare*). Dill grows well from seed, planted in full sun; I prefer a transplant for fennel. Dill leaves add unique flavor to fish and breads, and its seeds are used for pickling cucumbers. Both dill and fennel have excellent digestive properties, calming flatulence, heartburn, colic and indigestion.

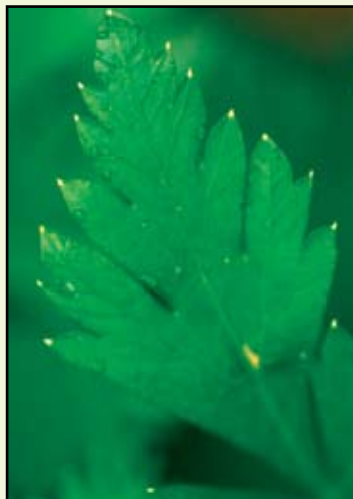
Both these herbs are also food plants to the Eastern Black Swallowtail caterpillar, which can just about defoliate the aerial parts of the plant, only to reward gardeners by growing into outstanding butterflies. When these critters occupy my dill or fennel, I just let them be. They don’t seem to bother the rest of my bounty.

Beyond our beloved herbs, now is also the time to scatter wildflower seeds. Texas wildflowers are full of color and magic and delights, not just for us but for our wildlife. Water them in, sit back and wait for spring.

And as always, have fun in the garden!



Eschscholzia californica



Petroselinum sativum



Calendula officinalis