

Colonial Uses of Herbs

The Ball-Sellers House



Owned by the Arlington Historical Society, the Ball-Sellers House is the oldest structure in Arlington County, Virginia. It was built by John Ball in the 1740s and given to the Arlington Historical Society by Marion Sellers in 1975.

Open Saturdays, 1-4 pm, April through October and on summer holidays free to the public. The House also can be visited by appointment by calling 703-942-9247 or 703-577-7042 or sending an email to Annette.benbow@arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org. Admission is free. Donations are greatly appreciated.

The Ball-Sellers House in Arlington County, Virginia, is a short distance from Washington, D.C.

From Washington, D.C., take Route 50 West to Carlin Springs Road exit. Go south on Carlin Springs Road for three blocks. Turn left on Third Street South to 5620.

From I-66, take Glebe Road South to Route 50 West to Carlin Springs Road exit. Go south on Carlin Springs Road for three blocks. Turn left on Third Street South to 5620.

Basil



Used as a stewing herb, fragrance, and sweetener. Medicinally it was used to treat nausea, vomiting, headaches, tension, acne, indigestion, muscle spasms, dizziness, and colic. Fresh basil was used to sweeten bath water and to attract bees for gardens

Bee Balm



Used in a poultice to treat skin infections and minor wounds. A tea made from it was used to treat mouth and throat infections.

Chives



Used in cooking for a mild onion flavor, the growing plant repels unwanted insects and the juice of the leaves can be used for the same purpose and to fight fungal infections and reduce mildew.

Fever Few



Used with rum to relieve toothaches. It also was useful for "female complaints" and headaches. Colonists drank fever few tea to reduce dizziness and fevers. It was said to pacify those who are liable to sullen, spiteful, or "rude irascibility."

Ginger



Used to quiet stomach disorders or increase perspiration which was considered to be cleansing. Today it seems to help prevent motion sickness and nausea.

Lavender



Lavender oil was believed to have antiseptic and anti-inflammatory properties so was used to help heal burns and bug bites. It also was used to treat anxiety and insomnia. At one time it was thought to prevent hair loss.

Lemon Balm



Used to freshen rooms and attract bees. It also flavored beverages and "made the heart merry and joyful."

Mint



Used to make tea and in jelly and sauces. It also was used to sweeten the breath. Mint teas were thought to cure headaches, heartburn, indigestion and gas.

Oregano



Used since ancient Greek times as an antiseptic and a cure for stomach and respiratory ailments.

Rosemary



Used for many medicinal purposes including as a tonic to treat digestion, depression, headaches, and muscle spasms and as an expectorant to promote menstrual flow. Externally, it was made into an ointment that treated rheumatism, sores, eczema, bruises, and wounds. During weddings rosemary was a symbol of love and loyalty.

Sorrel



Used as a diuretic and a cooling drink for fever. It was very effective in treating scurvy. The juice of the plant was used to relieve itching.

Thyme



Believed to relieve gout, rheumatism, headache, and facial neuralgia. It was also used for mouthwash and to treat hookworm. It is still used in cough drops.