

Receipts, &c.

HERBS, THEIR DOMESTIC USES, PROPERTIES, CULTURE.

THE term "herbs," though formerly applied to all the "green herbs" provided "for the service of man," is now commonly restricted to those plants of home growth which are used to give flavor to culinary preparations, or in domestic medicine. "Potherbs," and "sweet herbs," are phrases of loose application, and it would be difficult to class the several kinds under them. The first is generally given to those used in cookery only, and many of those known as sweet herbs are employed as potherbs. Apart from their value in improving flavor, aromatic herbs in cookery have a stimulating action on the system, and, in the quantities in which they are used, are beneficial; although many of them would be absolutely poisonous, if taken in large quantities. Of the medicinal properties of the various plants, which are at the present day too much in danger of being lost sight of, we shall touch while treating of them in detail.

The cultivation of all the more valuable and better known herbs is extremely simple, and they may be grown by those who have gardens too small for the cultivation of vegetables. They are much better gathered fresh for use when required, than when partially faded, as will commonly be the case when purchased.

For winter use, whether home grown or otherwise, they must be dried, and the proper time for gathering them for this purpose is when they are most in season, which is, as a rule, when the color of the blossom first begins to appear. They should be gathered after sunshine, when they are perfectly free from moisture. Most people hang them in bunches, in a shady place, under cover, to be dried by the circulation of air alone; but a quicker method preserves the flavor and aroma more fully. They are better divided into small bunches, and cured in an oven before an ordinary fire; care must, of course, be taken not to burn them—this will not happen so long as they do not change color. When dried, they should not, as is the general practice, be hung up in the bunches, or inclosed in paper bags, since either of these methods involves some loss of their properties; but the leaves should be picked off, reduced to powder, and passed through a hair-sieve. They should then be put in glass-stoppered bottles, and labelled; when stored in this manner, they are ready for immediate use, and will keep uninjured for a great length of time.

To save trouble when required, an excellent herb powder may be prepared by mixing the following—the leaves being dried and powdered, as directed above: parsley, winter savory, sweet marjoram, and lemon thyme, of each two ounces; lemon-peel, cut very thinly and dried, and sweet basil, one ounce each. Dry in a warm, but not hot oven, till they can be finely pounded in a mortar, and rub the powder through a hair-sieve. This, when put in a glass bottle as above, will retain its fragrance for many months, and form a delicious and cheap flavoring.

Thyme.—Of this, two species, common or garden thyme, is a shrubby evergreen of about a foot high; the leaves and young shoots are much used for stuffings, and also for soups and sauces. Lemon thyme has a strong perfume, like the rind of lemon. Thyme grows best on a dry and rather poor soil; it may be propagated from seed sown in early spring, but offsets or layers are the more usual methods. As bor-

ders, it may be grown to advantage—the variegated kind is exceedingly pretty.

Sage.—Its use in cookery is chiefly in stuffings, for correcting the too great lusciousness of certain kinds of meat, such as goose and duck; for this, the common red sage, and the green variety, are most employed. The other kinds—the small-leaved, and the broad-leaved balsamic sage—are more esteemed for medicinal purposes. As a medicinal herb, sage has lost much of its reputation in our own time, and that unjustly, for it possesses considerable aromatic and astringent properties; and sage tea is undoubtedly useful for debility of the stomach, and in nervous cases. For sore throats it makes a grateful and cooling gargle. The Chinese are said to prefer tea made from sage to that of their own country. This plant requires little or no care; it thrives best in a shady border, and may be propagated by slips merely dibbled into the ground in spring and autumn.

Marjoram is of several kinds. Marjoram is used for soups, stuffings, &c., the sweet and winter marjorams, being preferred. These plants grow readily on a light, dry soil, but require frequent change of situation. Winter marjoram is propagated by layers, but sweet marjoram must be sown in April. For seasonings, the leaves are best when dried. Marjoram is heating in its nature.

Savory, being highly acrid, is not much used in cookery, and is preferable when dried. There are two sorts, summer and winter savory. Winter savory is used as a vermifuge.

Mint.—Spearmint, or garden-mint, is the kind most cultivated for cookery. Its use for boiling (to be afterwards withdrawn), with peas and some other dishes, is well known. Pea soup should never be made without it, not only on account of the improved flavor given, but also because it corrects the flatulency to which that dish is apt to give rise; it is also used in spring salads. Few plants bear drying better without loss of properties. Medicinally it is stomachic and antispasmodic. The peculiar flavor and properties of peppermint are chiefly owing to the camphor which it contains, and of which one-fourth of its essential oil is composed. It is not used in cookery; we have tasted it, substituted it for spearmint, with lamb, in mint sauce, by an ignorant cook, and can by no means advise our readers to repeat the experiment. Pennyroyal is still used to flavor certain dishes, as hogs' puddings, but not so much as formerly. All plants of this family delight in low, moist situations. When the leaves become pale or yellow, it indicates that a change of soil is required. They are propagated by dividing the roots in spring.

Parsley has been so long cultivated, that the time of its introduction is unknown. The common, plain-leaved variety is now almost superseded by the curly, which equals it in flavor, and is far superior in beauty for garnishing purposes; and is, moreover, less liable to be confounded with fool's parsley, a kind of hemlock and a poison; from this plant being used in mistake, some accidents have arisen. Parsley is a diuretic, and is useful to cleanse and purify the teeth and breath from strong smells. It should be remembered that to parrots it is poison. Celery parsley is a variety between parsley and celery, and is used as the latter. Parsley should be sown in drills on any spare border in March. A good supply of parsley may be insured through the winter by sheltering the rows with some light covering, as brushwood; or it may be dried. It may be remarked, that of celery (a member of this family), the outer stalks, which are usually thrown away, because acrid when green, lose that taste when dried, and become, for soups, equal in flavor with the centre.