



A trio of sparrows rest within the frames of a wire fence.

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TASTY OLD REMEDIES

BY LAURA HUNT ANGEL

This being among the warmest winters on record, it hardly seems right to complain about the cold. However, the older I get the less I like it. In an effort to attain a more positive outlook, I have begun compiling a list of interesting things concerning the current season.

So far, this winter I have learned the following:

It takes approximately four sparrows to equal the weight of one grackle. (Or four juncos, or any combination of juncos/sparrows.)

Chinese plum trees bloom in the winter and have come to symbolize hope and perseverance.

The coldest temperature ever recorded was at Vostok Station in the Russian Antarctic, where in 1983 it dipped to -123 Celsius. (That's -189 Fahrenheit, so, yeah... pretty cold.)

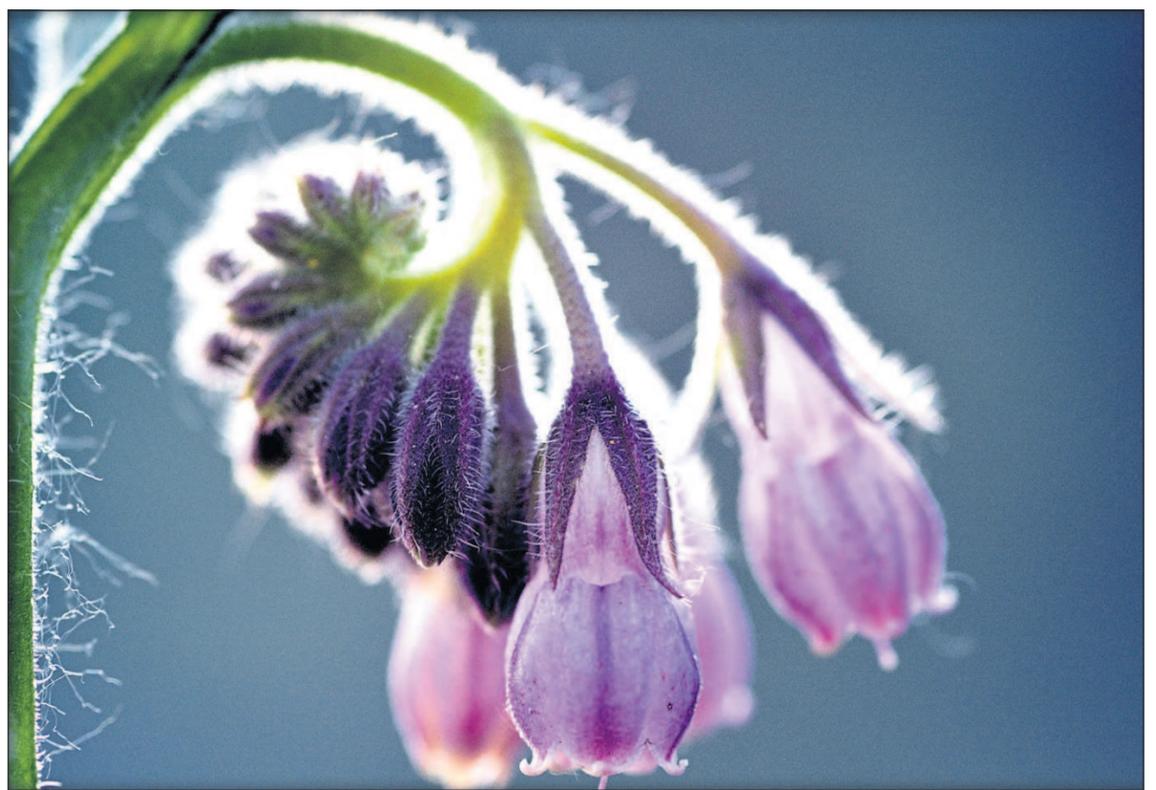
Like me, many people do not like winter, but for Daddy, winters were an exceptional challenge. It was difficult for him to sit still long enough to watch a full-length movie, let alone occupy himself throughout an entire snowstorm. After he retired, it became even worse. Mama often said that Daddy got into more messes than all of us kids combined. And when he wrangled us into a project with him, well, that opened up a whole new can of worms.

For Mama, winter provided an opportunity to quilt and sew. On really cold days she baked, because having the oven on helped warm our furnace-less house. Sometimes she would suggest that Daddy make a batch of his bread, which we all loved. It has been a standing joke in my family that hubby Chuck loved my father's bread so much that after trying it he proposed to me. Since this past week we celebrated our 35th wedding anniversary, I prefer to think of the bread as a happy coincidence. At any rate, Mama considered cleaning up the floury remains of bread baking quite low on the scale of possible messes to have to clean.

THE OLD WOOD STOVE

For Mama, one of the saving graces of winter was when we got a wood-burning stove. Not only did it help keep our house warm, but it gave Daddy something constructive to do. If all else failed, he could always pull on his boots and go out to gather firewood. He enjoyed stacking wood so much that once, when hospitalized and delirious from a bout of hyponatremia (low salt in the blood), he believed that he was stacking wood from his hospital bed.

One damp winter day, my sister and Gina's Polish father-in-law, Bernie, came for a visit. An insurance salesman, Bernie's gift of gab ranked right up there with Dad's, and the two enjoyed their



The ornamental blossoms of the comfrey plant can be added to teas, fritters or even mashed potatoes.

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conversations immensely. Topics varied widely, as neither man was ever at a loss for words.

As the evening grew cold, Daddy drew closer to the old wood stove seeking relief for his aching joints. Bernie took note of this and told Daddy about an old arthritis treatment that his grandmother used to make in Poland. When his family came to America they brought the remedy with them.

AN OLDE WORLD REMEDY

Bernie called it zywkost (pronounced "zhivacuss"), but Polish grandmas weren't the only ones who knew about it. Its scientific name is Symphytum, from the Greek for "a plant to make grow together." It has been used extensively throughout Europe and America for ages. Native Americans called it comfrey ague weed, and mountain peoples called it knit bone or boneset. Most of us know it as comfrey.

As with Polish grandmas, comfrey was widely used by Appalachian granny women, herb specialists who served as midwives and doctors throughout sparsely populated mountain settlements. They applied comfrey salves, tinctures or even whole leaves to bruises, strains or broken bones. Comfrey tea, made from dried leaves steeped in boiling water, was employed to help fend off the effects of influenza. Throughout the 1800s, strong comfrey tea was frequently used to relieve coughing and bleeding from consumption or tuberculosis.

Like the old-time healers, Bernie believed that zywkost worked

wonders on arthritis and sore or bruised muscles. On his next visit, he brought a bottle of the remedy with him, along with instructions to rub it on affected joints. Daddy eagerly tried it, and it did indeed reduce his aches and pains. When spring came, Bernie brought some comfrey plants to Daddy and told him how to make zywkost for himself.

Before long, Daddy had a real zywkost production going. He passed bottles of the remedy around at church and handed it out to neighbors. My sister, Suzi, began taking orders for zywkost from her bus driving friends, too. In addition to helping with his aches and pains, Daddy made a little extra money selling it. Mama appreciated it mostly because it kept Daddy occupied.

A HOLY HERB

Comfrey is just one of hundreds of herbs that have become known for their healing properties. In 529, the Rule of Benedict of Nursia declared that "Before all things, and above all things, especial care must be taken of the sick." From that time on, monasteries, and Benedictine monasteries in particular, were known as places of healing. In addition to vegetables and ornamentals, monastic gardens became repositories for medicinal herbs from all over the known world.

One of those that remains popular to this day is basil. There are up to 150 varieties to choose from including cinnamon, lemon and common sweet basil. Purple basil has showy dark purple leaves, while

Christmas basil is known for its sweet, fruity undertones.

One of the oldest varieties is known as holy basil. With the close tie between herbs and monasteries, one might think that holy basil received its name from a Benedictine monk, but it's actually much older than that. In fact, until the middle ages, most Europeans believed that basil was poisonous.

The mottled green and purple leaves of holy basil plant are native to India and by the Hindu. Every Hindu home was required to have a holy basil plant, which was believed to be the incarnation of the goddess, Tulsi. Tulsi was said to give divine protection to the home in which it resided. The Hindus used basil for treating respiratory illnesses and believed that it purified anything it touched.

THE TEA CABINET

In other parts of the world when a common sickness strikes, many families head to the kitchen to brew one of a host of herbal tea cures. The European Medicines Agency has even compiled a glossary of teas, their uses and instructions on preparation and dosage. Most families, however, simply rely on what Grandma told them. Check out the tea section of your favorite grocery, and you may find one or more of these:

Echinacea, a popular cold remedy that is now widely available in the U.S. In Europe, the tea is often fortified with a shot of raspberry syrup to soothe sore throats.

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Devising a 'Culture of Health'

You people are not very helpful. I haven't had a single suggestion about a topic in the past six weeks or so. You think it's easy coming up with new subjects to write about? Well, it's not. A little help would be nice. Thank you very much.

I'm sitting in a hotel room in Washington, D.C., at the moment, at a meeting of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Leaders program. Last summer, I wrote a grant proposal to be part of this new program and was fortunate enough to be selected. We've been doing a lot of studying, online learning and meeting with executive coaches and the like on the phone. This is our second gathering this year in a three-year program.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation was endowed by the guy who made the Johnson and Johnson company into a global powerhouse in medical products and pharmaceuticals. It's the largest philanthropic organization in the world dedicated to the promotion of health. Like other such healthcare-related foundations, the RWJF supported all sorts of research and education for many years. However, a couple of years ago, the foundation decided to rearrange the way it did things, coming up with the "Culture of Health" program. The idea was that the foundation would start focusing its funding on projects designed to specifically address the way healthcare is delivered.

There are four branches of the Culture of Health program. The Health Policy Research Scholars is directed at providing opportunities for graduate students to use their educations to study and help implement new ideas in how health policy is developed and implemented at the government level. The Interdisciplinary Research

Leaders program is designed to help teams of researchers from different areas of sciences and healthcare to work together to address complex issues. The Clinical Scholars program is for health professionals who are working on new ways to improve health care delivery. The Culture of Health Leaders program, the one that I'm part of, is designed

to take people from a wide range of disciplines, including business, health care, social services, education and so forth and help train them on leadership skills and issues around community health so they'll be in a position to work collaboratively with all the different players in the community that impact the health and well-being of the population.

Why am I using this science column to tell you about this when I should be talking about how eyeballs work or why lightning bugs glow in the dark or something like that? I'll tell you why. It has a lot to do with the science literacy thing I was talking about a little while ago. Things like the Culture of Health initiative are where science and society meet most directly. The RWJF has, historically, spent hundreds of millions of dollars a year funding research projects that related to improving medicine and healthcare, using the common model of just asking for proposals from clinicians and scientists on various topics, then picking the best ones to support.

The reason they shifted to the single focus of the Culture of Health was because they determined, after a great deal of research, that there was a very fundamental issue in healthcare that wasn't really being addressed, and until that issue was addressed, health care delivery could never get anywhere near as efficient and equitable as it should be and

must be. That issue is how people — all people — can get access to the health care that they need to live the healthiest lives they can. They then determined that, since they were looking at a new model of health care delivery, they would have to find new ideas and train the people that would be needed to implement those new ideas and make it happen. So the Clinical Scholars program and the Interdisciplinary Research program funds clinicians and related professionals who have projects directed toward how to best provide quality health care to everyone in an environment of limited resources.

The Health Policy Scholars program helps people train for and choose careers that will impact direct policy decisions. The Culture of Health Leaders program will help train people to work with everyone in the community, from the citizens to the community service organizations to the government to the health care providers, to implement new ways to make sure that everyone has access to the very best, most efficient care possible.

The background to all this is that, as we all know, medical care is changing. Not only is the actual capability of our providers, our hospitals and our technology constantly improving, but the ways medical care is paid for and the way patients and their caregivers will be working together to heal the sick and, just as importantly, keep people healthy, is also rapidly evolving.

Health care has, historically, been focused on making sick people well, which kind of makes sense when you think

about it. The thing with that approach, however, is that waiting for people to have a heart attack, for instance, and then keeping them alive afterwards and then providing the support to help them get back to normal is not really as desirable as keeping them from having the heart attack in the first place. What we're learning is that keeping the community healthy is a much better way of addressing health than waiting for something bad to happen and then responding to it. Certainly, things will still happen and the health care community will stand,

as always, ready to deal with it, but from an efficiency standpoint, as well as a quality of life perspective, keeping people healthy is a better approach. It's not just the health of individual people that is impacted by this idea, either. It's the health of the entire community.

Think about the issue of jobs. If you owned a business and needed to build a new factory, you would look at many factors as you tried to determine where to build your facility. You would consider such things as access to resources and transportation, quality of the community and schools, availability of a work force with the right abilities and cost. Cost is,

of course, going to be a major deciding factor. If you narrow your choices of where to build down to two places and everything is pretty much the same between the two of them except that the health statistics of one community are better than those of the other, you will choose the healthier community. Why? Because the healthier community will cost you less in

terms of your health care costs, in terms of time lost due to sickness and in terms of more productivity. Businesses look at health care costs much as they look at taxes. It's a cost of doing business, and if they can lower that cost by building in a healthier community, they will.

We are, in this country, embarking on a new approach to medicine in which all people will have access to good health care and where we will foster a Culture of Health in our communities. We will seek to enable people to live healthier lives where primary health care is more about working with people to help keep them healthy than it is about dealing with the consequences of not managing their health issues. It's a great task we have before us, but we, as a community have a lot of unique resources available to us that very few towns of our size have.

We have a large and terrific health care infrastructure, dating back to the 1950s. We have great community organizations dedicated to moving us forward. We have excellent educational institutions. We have great community leaders. Most importantly, we have a lot of good, strong, decent people who are up to the task of changing our current culture to one of a Culture of Health. It's one of the primary keys to helping to raise our community up and help it move into the new age of the twenty-first century as a vibrant, economically viable town. We have all we need to be an example of everything a rural community can become as we make the transition from our old economy to a new one that is geared to navigate the challenges of the future. We can do this.

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REMEDIES

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Nettle, used to treat a host of complaints from achy muscles to urinary tract infections.

Hibiscus, said to calm jarred nerves and as an anti-inflammatory.

Chamomile, perhaps the most recognized herbal tea, is used to treat upset stomach.

The Recipes

In addition to their ability to treat certain illnesses, herbs can be a tasty supplement to a healthy diet. Here is the method for preparing Bernie's arthritis treatment as well as a couple of flavorful ways to incorporate fresh herbs into your meals.

BERNIE'S ZWYKOST FOLK REMEDY

The original version of this recipe, which is a tincture, calls for wintergreen, but when wintergreen rubbing alcohol became available there was no need to search the woods for the plant or buy the oil. Although this remedy was used extensively by my father without adverse effect, I advise seeking the advice of a medical professional before trying it yourself.

3 1/2 oz comfrey leaves
24 oz rubbing alcohol with wintergreen

Place the comfrey leaves in the alcohol and store in a dark, cool spot for 14 days. Shake the bottle daily. After 14 days, strain the liquid and place it in a dark colored bottle. To use the tincture, simply rub it on affected muscles and/or joints. Keep out of eyes and away from sensitive areas of the body.

CARAMELIZED SECRET CHOCOLATE CAKE

Ok, I am giving away the secret by telling you that this recipe comes from the National Onion board.

Before you turn up your nose, though, keep in mind that onions have been proven to lower cholesterol and blood pressure, improve immunity and help fight infections. Having said that, I must confess that this is one recipe I didn't test ahead of time. Since cocoa has also been shown to reduce blood pressure and is a great antioxidant in and of itself, I think it might be ok to replace the onions with sour cream or mashed bananas. Sorry, Onion Board.

6 oz unsweetened chocolate, melted
1 cup finely diced yellow onion
1 cup vegetable oil, divided
2 cups sugar
2 eggs



Laura Hunt Angel

Sweet basil is only one of the many varieties of the basil family.

1 teaspoon vanilla
2 cups plain flour
1 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 cup buttermilk (or soured milk)

Grease 2 9" round cake pans; preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

Put 2 tablespoons of the oil in a skillet over low heat and cook the onions until they are caramelized, 8-10 minutes. In a large bowl, beat together the sugar, eggs, vanilla and remaining oil until smooth and

fluffy, 2-3 minutes. Beat in the warm chocolate and onions. In a separate bowl, combine the flour, baking soda and salt, then blend it alternately with the buttermilk into the chocolate mixture. Divide the batter evenly between the prepared cake pans and bake for 25-35 minutes or until a pick inserted near the center tests clean. Cool 15 minutes then remove cake from pans and cool completely on a

wire rack. Frost as desired.

FRESH BASIL AND CHEESE LASAGNA

Per health and nutrition expert Dr. Josh Axe, basil boosts immunity, fights bacterial infections and has been proven to prevent several illnesses including diabetes and cancer. This easy

rendition uses organic ready-made sauce for a flavorful family-sized meal that can be whipped up on a weeknight.

3 cups ricotta or cottage cheese
2 eggs
3 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
Salt and pepper to taste
2 24-oz jars organic spaghetti sauce
3/4 cups good quality Parmesan cheese, divided
2 cups fresh basil leaves
1 16-oz pkg lasagna noodles, cooked
1/2 cup mozzarella cheese
Lightly oil or spray a 9"x13" pan with non-stick spray; pre-heat oven to 350 degrees F.

In a medium bowl, combine the ricotta/cottage cheese, eggs, parsley and salt and pepper. Spread a thin layer of spaghetti sauce on the bottom of the prepared pan. Arrange a layer of lasagna noodles over the sauce. Top the noodles with one-half of the ricotta mixture, then sprinkle with one-fourth cup Parmesan and half the basil leaves. Make a second layer of sauce, noodles, cheeses and basil. Finally, top with a layer of noodle. Cover completely with sauce and sprinkle with mozzarella and the remaining Parmesan cheese.

Cover loosely with foil and bake for about 40 minutes, or until hot and bubbly. Remove the foil and bake 5-10 minutes more, or until the cheese just begins to brown. Let stand about 10 minutes before cutting. Makes 12 squares.

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