
MWSHS Student Newsletter

Summer 2015

Germinating Dormant Perennial Seeds

by Mary Schmidt

Perennial herb seed germination can be very tricky. Nature has devised many methods for making sure that plant species survive drought, flood, fire, severe winters, wet springs, and dry summers by spreading out germination over many years, so that all the seeds don't sprout at the same time and the plants wind up being destroyed by some weather extreme. These natural germination deterrents are what challenge us to get good germination.

To get the best results, we must mimic natural weather conditions. We start by observing just when, in nature, the seeds drop and seedling germinate and emerge. We watch temperature and moisture, look at the amount of sun the plant gets in a natural setting, and observe the kind of soil in which it thrives. With this information, we can encourage the perennial herb seed to break its dormancy.

The soil is always an important consideration. We must use soil that is alive, not sterilized—well drained and fairly moist, but not sodden. I like to use a mix containing sand, peat and compost—combining a bit of good dirt with the natural micorhizza (beneficial fungus) already in the soil.

Now let's look at some specific techniques to break the dormancy of perennial seeds. The most common deterrent is cold dependency, meaning that the seeds need a period of cold temperatures, mimicking wintertime, before they will sprout. Here we use cold stratification, which consists of storing the seeds for a length of time—either in the refrigerator or outside during the wintertime. For the former method, mix the seeds in a cup of moist sand or peat and put them in the back of the fridge for four to twelve weeks. For the outdoor method, seed in a weed-free seed bed. Make sure to label, mulch and moisten the soil before the winter sets in.

The winter weather will give the seeds a natural cold stratification encouraging germination to occur, as expected, in the spring. *(Continued on p. 4)*



MWSHS Director Matthew Alfs Examines an Interesting Wild Plant on a Wild-plant Walk. (Watch for Announcements of Upcoming Wild-plant Walks on the MWSHS Website..)

Late-2014 & Early-2015 MWSHS Graduates

We offer our congratulations to the following graduates of our Western-Herbalist Certificate Program:

Barbara Johnson, C.H.
Sherry LiaBraaten, C.H.

We also offer our congratulations to the following graduate of the Asian & Integrative modules of the Master-Herbalist Diploma Program:

Pamela McNally, C.H.

Student-to-Student Message Board: A Real Resource!

Have you taken advantage, dear student, of the opportunity to post a thought on our new message board?

Many students have already done so, relating herbal experiences or perhaps asking about others' experience with particular situations or seeking study partners. So far, the board has had hundreds of visitors, the vast majority of whom have viewed most of the messages that have been posted.

Why not, then, take *your* turn to post a thought? Undoubtedly, both your fellow students and persons interested in MWSHS who are visiting our site would welcome reading your thoughts. So, then, we encourage you to post a thought today. To do so, simply visit our website (www.midwestherbalstudies.com) and click on "Message Board" on the menu to the left.

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WORKSHOP CREDIT OPTIONS

Except where noted, all of the below-listed events qualify as Workshop (Module 5) credits toward the Master-Herbalist program. Each hour of *verified* attendance (per instructor-completed workshop-credit slips as supplied by MWSHS) counts toward an equivalent hour of Workshop Category #3 credits (up to the student limit of 20 hours), unless another category is specified or unless one attends a particular workshop at one of these events that is *strictly* in one of these other categories. *MWSHS-sponsored workshops are boxed.*

Workshops, Conferences, Lectures, & Events in Herbal Studies Across North America

May 29th to June 1st, 2015. "2015 Medicines of the Earth Symposium" **Black Mountain, NC.** \$399. For further info or to register, visit the website at <http://botanicalmedicine.org>.

May 31st, 2015. "Wildcrafting & Processing Little-known Medicinal Plants," **New Brighton, MN.** \$60. This event qualifies for Workshop Category #3. For more info or to register, visit the website for the Midwest School of Herbal Studies at www.midwestherbalstudies.com.

June 12th-14th, 2015. "Twelfth International Herb Symposium," at Wheaton College, **Norton, MA,** \$325.00. For more info or to register, visit the website at www.internationalherbsymposium.com.

Sept. 18th-20th, 2015. "Nature Wonder Wild Weekend," North Bend State Park, **Harrisville, WV.** Experience the bounty of wild foods while celebrating the wonder of nature at North Bend State Park. Enjoy a full weekend of hikes, programs, and a wild foods banquet. This event's wild-plant walks qualify for Workshop Category #2 "Wild Plant Walks." For more info or to register, call 304-558-2754

Workshops: Where to Find?

Aside from the workshops listed in the *MWSHS Student Newsletter* and on the MWSHS website, another way for M.H. Diploma students to fulfill workshop requirements for category #1 (Assessment Skills) is by arranging with a local naturopath, Western herbalist, Oriental-medicine practitioner, or Ayurvedic practitioner to sit in as a silent observer, especially on initial consultations with patients, where the lion's share of assessment is made. By tactfully explaining that you are a serious and enrolled student in an herbal-therapy school and that you promise you will only *quietly observe* (or "shadow," as the term is used in the health-care field), you may find that your efforts will be fruitful. As for workshop category #2 (Wild-plant Walks), you may wish to contact local park naturalists, horticultural clubs, and community-educations centers to find qualified persons who regularly lead wild-plant walks. And as for Workshop category #3 (Misc. Workshops on Herbal Therapy), you may find that community-educations centers, community colleges, holistic newspapers, and health-food stores are great resources for locating talks and events in this category. Remember, with any such attendance at any workshop of any category, you need to present documentation as to the date and hours spent in the event. (The School can supply you with generic forms for documentation as an email attachment, at your request.)

Oct. 15th-19th 2015. "American Herbalists Guild 26-year Anniversary Symposium," Callaway Gardens, **Granby, CO.** Members: \$250 till 7/31, \$290 till 10/9, and \$325 after 10/9. Non-members \$335 till 7/31, \$375 till 10/9, and \$410 after 10/9. There are usually opportunities to fulfill hours for Workshop Categories 1, 2, and 3 at AHG symposiums! For more info or to register, visit the website www.americanherbalistsguild.com.

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Proving Successful as an MWSHS Student despite Distractions

by Matthew Alfs, M.H., R.H., Director, MWSHS

The ancient Oriental sage Lao Tzu once said: “The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.” As a student of herbalism, you are on such a long—and sometimes arduous—pathway. That being so, it is possible to get discouraged, especially with all of life’s distractions. However, the reward for perseverance is great, namely, the illumination of one of life’s greatest mysteries: *The secret to health and long life!*

Truly, what wouldn’t a wise person sacrifice for the knowledge of such? Jesus of Nazareth once emphasized the value of sacrifice for something precious by relating a stirring story of an insightful man who found ‘a pearl of great price’ and ‘sold everything he had’ to obtain it, knowing that what he was about to obtain was worth far more than anything else he had already possessed. In this regard, what could be more valuable than the vitality of body, mind, and spirit, and the ability to help others to preserve such in themselves? After all, such *wholism* is the basis, not only of the world’s health-care traditions, but of its great religions and philosophies as well!

So, then, dear student, we encourage you to persevere in your studies, not letting mundane matters crowd out your time. After all, “nothing will ever be accomplished,” observed the noted English author Samuel Johnson, “if all possible objections must be first overcome.” Therefore, *set aside time for study*, and barring genuine emergencies, *use this time as planned*.

“But, how can I find that time in the first place,” you might wonder? In asking those students who’ve moved along most efficiently in the program how they’ve accomplished so much, we’ve received some helpful answers, a few of which we’d like to share with you here, directly below....

“I devote half of my hour-long lunch break to study.” “I take a brief nap after work and then have the workbook next to me on my bed, ready to go once I awaken and feel renewed in mind and spirit.” “I study first thing on Sunday morning when I wake up, as I’m not rushed at this time.” “I click on a CD in the morning while getting ready for work or play one while driving to or from work.” “My teen-age daughter reads portions of the Workbook to me, or I listen to the CDs, as I’m washing dishes or folding laundry.” “My

husband and I read from the Workbook on Sunday mornings when we’re not rushed.” “I listen to the CDs while I work on my home exercise program.” “I have a headphone and listen to the CDs while I garden or walk around the park. I keep a pocket notepad with me to take notes.”

Whatever may work for you, dear student, we urge you to find your niche and to work at it wholeheartedly.

However, Lao Tzu, previously quoted, said something else that is worthy of consideration here: “People usually fail when they are on the verge of success. So give as much care to the end as to the beginning. Then there will be no failure.”

Time and time again, we have witnessed the above observation prove true with students: As if they were in a foot race, they start off with a bang—but then burn out and fall to the wayside.

In this regard, please bear in mind that those of us here at MWSHS stand ready to offer you encouragement or suggestions whenever you feel the need for either—or even if you’re stuck somewhere in your studies and need some guidance. Such support is really part of your student package, and we are only an e-mail away. Please rest assured here, too, that *we very much want you to prove successful* in your studies and to move on to graduation. *That is why we are here and do what we do*—not to mention that we love to brag about our graduates and how they go on to live and share the valuable things that they have learned.

Finally, please bear in mind that the student profiles we publish are still another way for you to glean some tips on how to prove successful in your studies, as the students profiled therein have all demonstrated a real stick-to-itiveness in their student paths and have been pleased to share their secrets of success with the rest of the student body by being profiled. As an example, a senior student profiled in the winter 2009-10 issue of the *MWSHS Student Newsletter*, Terry Nelson, wisely encouraged his fellow students: “Just don’t put your studies off; once you sit down and open the books, they should grab your attention, as they always have mine.”

We submit the above as some methods by which you may “give as much care to the end as to the beginning” so that “there will be no failure.”

Germinating Dormant Perennial Seeds (cont. from p. 1)

However, rarely will you get a large percentage occurring at one time. Be patient: Sometimes you will get new seedlings each spring for many years running! Another technique is to use a six-inch-deep flat with a well-drained, but moist soil mix, and place it in a cold greenhouse (or cold-frame it in early spring). The night's cold, alternating with the day's heat, can repeatedly "freeze-thaw" to hasten the release of the dormancy. Also, you can put the deep flat in a protected area under some trees or on the north side of your house. But be sure to mulch well and cover with a screen or glass to keep critters from eating the seeds. Prick the seedlings off as they germinate and transplant to your growing area after the second pair of true leaves appears.

Some varieties require a long germination time and many seasons before they break dormancy. Here we need to: (1) Use a shaded area and sink the flat (or a terra-cotta pot) into the ground; (2) mulch well; (3) cover with a screen; and (4) keep it moist. Time and patience are the most important factors in this scenario. Some examples of plants in this category include: *Eleuthero*, *Ginseng*, *Gentian*, *Blue flag*, *Uva ursi*, *Golden seal*, *Virginia snakeroot*, *Oregon grape*, *Hawthorn*, *Blue cohosh*, and *Schizandra*

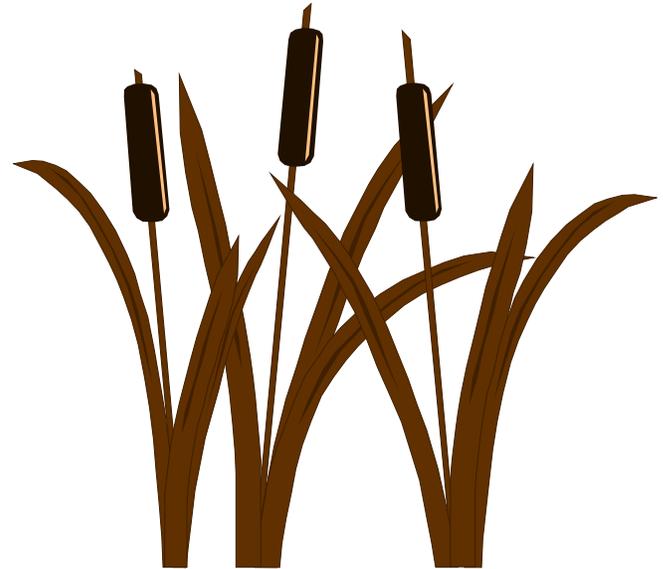
Another problem that may need to be overcome with some seeds involves inhibitors in the seed's fruit. To re-move these inhibitors, mash the fruits together and soak them in a glass of water until they ferment. The seeds will usually sink to the bottom of the glass when released from the fruit tissues. By dripping a slow stream of water into the glass, the fermented goo will float out and the seeds will stay in the glass. Listed below are a few of the fruits that benefit from fermentation: *American ginseng*, *Schizandra*, *Cayenne*, *Eleuthero*, *Ginkgo*, *Prickly ash*, *Ashwagandha*, *Golden seal*, *Spikenard*, *Elder*, *Poke*, and *Wild Cherry*

Many seeds are light dependent, that is, they need some light in order to germinate. So here, we simply leave them uncovered or use less than 1/4-inch of topsoil. Either way, it is advisable to at least pat the seeds lightly in the soil in order to hold them in place. Use this technique for the following seeds: *Gentian*, *Mullein*, *Angelica*, *St. John's wort*, *Horsemint*, *Meadowsweet*, *Catnip*, *Lobelia*, *Lovage*, *Violet*, *Figwort*, and *Bergamot*.

A few plants have photo-prohibited seeds, which means that sunlight will impede their germination. For these, you must cover with compost or mulch to keep

them in the dark. *Lily-of-the-valley* is an example of a plant that needs this sort of treatment.

Some plant seeds have a hard coat that requires a scarifying sort of treatment. If you rub these seeds between two pieces of sandpaper, you can scratch their surface sufficiently so they will imbibe water and begin the germination process. Examples of such are: *False Blue Indigo*, *Lupine*, some *Mallows*, and *Sweet Pea*.



Another problem involves seeds that get too dry and won't sprout. (Over time, of course, most seeds will dry up and not be viable.) With some plants, though, you must make sure to use only seeds that are ultra fresh. *Ginkgo* and *astragalus* are two such plants.

The last topic we will cover entails the fire-dependent seed. Here we need to create a flash fire with pine needles on the flat to mimic a prairie or woodland fire. After preparing the flat and seeding it, we need to top it with dried needles and set them afire. (Caution: Use a wood or ceramic flat and don't allow the flat itself to catch fire). Let the ash lie there and the seed will come up right through it! *Fireweed* (*Epilobium angustifolium*) and *Jack pine* are examples.

All of the aforementioned natural-germination deterrents provide sufficient challenges for even an experienced gardener. But with patience and willingness to research and experiment, you may find your satisfaction sprouting with each newly emerging cotyledon!

Mary Schmidt, M.H., is a Master Gardener and a graduate of MWSHS's Master-Herbalist Diploma Program

Dynamic Herbal Pairs

Matthew Alfs, M.H., R.H., Director, MWSHS

Good herbalists use well-chosen herbs, based upon careful case analysis, to help individuals to heal. Knowing the specific indications of herbs—their energetics and the physiological systems that they support—is critical in this regard. In Western herbalism, these indications were initially developed by the Greeks (esp. by Galen) and then refined centuries later by the Anglo-American Eclectics and Physio-medicalists.

A number of the abovementioned healers discovered that carefully combining two herbs with complementary properties created a clinically potent synergy that was truly amazing! To some extent, pairs also been used in Chinese medicine and in Ayurveda, although the preference in these systems has been to use formulas containing three or more herbs.

Here are some of my personal favorite combinations and the circumstances in which they have been most appropriately utilized....

Milky oat seed (*Avena sativa*) and **skullcap** (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) were recommended as a pair by the Eclectics for nervous exhaustion, especially that caused by long-term addictions where the addict is seeking the nervous strength to break the addiction. I have had occasion to use this combo many times and have found it most effective. The gentleness of each of these tonics allows for long-term, or repeated, use, if necessary.

Cinnamon (*Cinnamomum spp.*) and **horsetweed (fleabane)** (*Conyza canadensis*) essential oils, in a base of 87% grain alcohol, were teamed by Eclectic physician Finley Ellingwood for passive hemorrhages, including menorrhagia. Herb Pharm currently makes a commercial extract of this combo (called “Erigeron Cinnamon Compound”) that is so potent that one can often smell the cinnamon right through the sealed bottle! It has the potential to cause gastric irritation in sensitive individuals, so this must be borne in mind, and thus also dosing and dilution guidelines should be strictly observed; but it is a real dandy when needed and tolerated.

Black cohosh (*Actaea racemosa*) has been pigeonholed as a “menopause herb” in the mind of the public; but this laudable botanical has a variety of other, time-tested and effective applications. For one thing, it was recommended by both the Eclectics and

the Physio-medicalists for *rheumatic (inflammatory musculoskeletal) pains*. However, the latter healers discovered that combining this herb with **prickly ash** (*Xanthoxylum americanum*) bark intensified the anti-rheumatic effect through a seeming synergy of the two plants. I can say that I have used this combination, which I gleaned from the Physio-medicalist literature, on a number of occasions in my clinical practice, and with always *excellent* results.

Gotu kola (*Centella asiatica*) and **plantain** (*Plantago major*) is a combination that I have discovered in my clinical practice as being quite remarkable for healing stubborn wounds. I once helped a woman heal from a mastectomy sore and a man from a passively bleeding rectal injury with this team (and that was through oral use, not topical use). In both cases, the person’s physician was stupefied by the success (as, I must admit, was I).

Chickweed (*Stellaria media*) and **cleavers** (*Galium aparine*) is a favorite depurative (alterative) combination for cleansing the blood-lymph, supporting urinary elimination of wastes, nudging the thyroid to improve bodily metabolism, and encouraging weight loss. It is a gentle combo that is safe for long-term use and is well tolerated even by children.

Blue vervain (*Verbena hastata*) and **skullcap** (*Scutellaria lateriflora*) create a nice combination that can be used by children or adults as a nervous-system tonic when there are reoccurring convulsions (Note: If the convulsions occur premenstrually in a woman, blue vervain is a must as a simple or as a formula ingredient, as it is the supreme gynecological normalizer).

Chinese licorice (*Glycyrrhiza uralensis*) and **white peony** (*Paeonia lactiflora*) are combined in Chinese medicine for spasmodic conditions. However, recent clinical trials have found this combination to reduce testosterone levels in persons with elevated levels of said hormone. This includes women with polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS). As the clinical trials have evinced, the botanical aid here may even reach the point where the infertility produced by this condition is reversed and pregnancy is achieved. Since reading these trials, I have used this combination successfully in my own practice, helping a number of women to achieve reproductive balance in this regard—to their great joy.

In Coming Issues

** Student & Alumni Profiles*

** Book Reviews*

** News & Views*

**Informational Articles*

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