

The background of the cover is a pale yellow. It is decorated with several botanical illustrations. In the top left corner, there is a green thistle with two purple flower heads. In the top right corner, there is a cluster of green leaves with small, round, blue berries. In the bottom left corner, there are several bright orange flowers with green stems and leaves. In the bottom right corner, there is a wooden mortar and pestle; the mortar is dark and contains some dark, ground material, while the pestle is light-colored wood.

HERBAL MEDICINE — AND — BOTANICAL MEDICAL FADS

Frank Hoffmann
Martin Manning

Herbal Medicine and Botanical Medical Fads

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Herbal Medicine and Botanical Medical Fads

Frank Hoffmann, PhD, MLS
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To our parents,
Frank A. Hoffmann and Lydia Hoffmann
Martin J. Manning and Margaret L. Manning
who have done so much to enrich our lives

And to John Heinerman,
whose works served as an inspiration for this book

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Informative Web sites included those maintained by the Herb Growing and Marketing Network (HGMN), <www.herbworld.com>; the Herb Research Foundation, <www.herbs.org>; The Herb Society

of America, <www.herbsociety.org>; Herbnet, <www.herbnet.com>; and the International Herb Association, <www.iherb.org>.

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Introduction

This volume is organized in much the same manner as the titles within the Haworth fad encyclopedia series authored by Frank W. Hoffmann and the late William G. Bailey in the 1990s. There is little doubt that herbs, spices, and other botanicals have undergone a huge upsurge in popularity since the 1960s; this is reflected in the present-day sales figures of botanical suppliers and retailers as well as the proliferation of ads and profiles in the mass media. Whether or not any individual plants and associated phenomena (e.g., aromatherapy) have, in fact, achieved fad-like status could be debated at considerable length.

At this point it might be instructive to briefly consider definitions of fads set forth in other sources. In an attempt to integrate a wide range of prior definitions, Hubert G. Blumer offered the following analysis for the revised *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968):

Fads, like fashion, may occur in widely different areas of group life, such as games, recreation, entertainment, dietary practice, health and medical practice, dress, ornamentation, language, and popular beliefs. . . . Fads have no line of historical continuity; each springs up independent of a predecessor and gives rise to no successor. . . . Fads do not require endorsement by a qualified prestige group in order to gain acceptance; they may spread from any section of hierarchized society. Fads are ephemeral. . . . Fads follow the pattern of a craze or boom, thriving on spectacular and excitatory appearance . . . only to exhaust their attractiveness and undergo a rapid demise. (Volume V, p. 344)

Hoffmann and Bailey attempted to refine faddish behavior to an even greater extent in *Arts & Entertainment Fads* (1990):

We do not believe that every fad must conform to the skyrocket theory—rapid ascent, rapid fall, then disappearance. Some fads

have lingered on for years, especially those prior to the frenetic 20th century before mass communications. We do believe that a fad dies out, but not always overnight, and it can reappear at any time in the same or altered manifestation—there is nothing new under the sun. Furthermore, for a fad to be called such it must affect a sizeable number of people and be of enough importance to warrant documentation. We also believe that practically every area of life has been touched by fad, and that within some of those areas evolution has taken place. (pp. xv-xvi)

Herbs, spices, and other botanicals permeate the core fabric of everyday life, whether used for medicinal, therapeutic, cosmetic, ornamental, or dietary purposes. Most people simply regard them as substances that enhance the quality of life. Discerning a notable increase in the popularity of a given plant that has been used for centuries would appear, at first glance, a complicated business. Nevertheless, a concerted effort to plot variations in popularity within the field does pay some degree of dividends.

In the case of spices, consider black pepper. According to researchers in the Consumer Products Department of McCormick and Company, the primary producer of spices globally, this food condiment has been around as a basic seasoning for so long that it has retained a rather predictable popularity. For comparison's sake, consider cumin. Ten years ago, this spice was not well known; today it represents one of the emerging changes in popular taste as it has become one of the most popular spices that McCormick sells.

In her 1990 book, *Herbal Treasures*, Phyllis Shaudys identified a number of fads occurring during the prior two decades. Herb clubs and study groups, an offshoot of herbal associations and societies, owe their upsurge in popularity to the Internet. They are organizing rapidly on the local, state, and national levels, often merging with university and state Cooperative Extension personnel, and offering conferences, seminars, and newsletters to the public. More recently, the promotion of herbs and spices on the Internet has become a full-fledged phenomenon. Given the ease of accessing the Net, community involvement in herb-related associations, societies, and clubs is at an all-time high, and information dissemination has been greatly enhanced by means of e-mail, chat rooms, and the maintenance of personal home pages.

According to Cary Groner in *Herb Quarterly*, two herb-related trends have been evolving since World War II. In North America, a region where the medicinal use of botanicals has lagged behind other parts of the world, an “herbal renaissance” is gathering momentum. Amid a growing awareness of the limitations (e.g., undesirable side effects) of synthetic medications, people are seeking a return to the traditional remedies employed by their ancestors. Herbal research represents the second of these trends. It is most in evidence in the Pacific Northwest; notable examples include the Eclectic Institute, located in Portland, Oregon, or the Williams, Oregon-based Herb Pharm, a combination herb garden, testing and research laboratory, wildcrafting station, organic herb screening and buying center, and tincture producer.

Some fads represent a return to an earlier era. The vogue for Victorian gardens and crafts fit this profile. Today, “Victoriana”—a widely recognized buzzword within gift shops and the decorative arts—encompasses a wide range of botanical applications.

Whatever the respective merits of these fads or trends, it is clearly easier to plot developments on a broader canvas. In other words, nuances in popularity are much harder to discern regarding specific botanicals. This perception is largely reinforced by content analysis of articles cited in the *Reader’s Guide to Periodical Literature* (1918 to the present). In his survey of mass circulation magazines, Martin Manning has compiled a time line of herb and spice trends, reflecting to some degree peak levels of popularity in contrast to a more common level of acceptance and use within the fabric of society.

Time Line of Herb and Spice Trends

Pre-1500	Herbals
1500-1900	Bible gardens
	Sachets
	Potpourri, a form of nosegays that were used in the medieval period up to the introduction of better hygiene to disguise bad body odor. Along with aesthetic beauty, there was a practical purpose.
	Herbs and spices in literature
	Library and archival material on herbs and spices
	(continued)

(continued)

1922	Condiments Herb gardens
1931	Lavender
1936-1950	Yards
1937-	Thyme
1939-	Herb teas
1942-1945	Victory gardens
1945-	Window gardens (boxes, planters)
1968-	Cookbooks
1968-1975	Nasturtium
1971-1980	Mints (plant)
1990-	Internet with chat groups and Web sites (associations, libraries, archives) "Brother Cadfael" (TV series). Brother Cadfael, the character created by Ellis Peters, was a monk who used herbs to solve murders. This British TV production did much to popularize herbs and to send viewers back to the Ellis Peters novels that inspired the program.
1995-	Herb gardens Growing healthful herbs
1998-	Kitchen spices
1999-	Therapeutic uses of herbs Healing herbs

Since World War II, the public fascination with herbs and spices has been heightened by advances in travel and communication (e.g., the Internet) and increased concern for health and the environment. During this period, interest in herbs and spices has also become increasingly diversified. In her *Encyclopedia of Herbs and Their Uses* (1995), Deni Bown notes that as recently as the 1970s, few households had more than a packet of dried mixed herbs. Indian restaurants with their curry-flavored dishes were a luxury enjoyed mostly by the gourmet. An increased interest in cooking with a greater variety of herbs and spices was followed by a resurgence of interest in their use for medicinal and other purposes.

The current interest in herbs follows many diverse paths, from pot-pourri, dried arrangements, and crafts of all sorts, to aromatherapy, to cu-

linary, landscaping, and medicinal uses. This complexity is evident in the varied applications of individual plants; for example, ginkgo means considerably different things to a gardener, botanist, and herbalist.

Such varied uses for traditional herbs were unknown to the early herbalists. When Maud Grieve published *A Modern Herbal* (1931), she was responding to a critical shortage of drug imports during World War I. Today, our society deals with the devastation of AIDS and other diseases, the stresses of everyday living, and the high rate of extinction plaguing plant species. When Grieve published her classic work, there was little concern for the natural habitat of herbs and other botanicals. At the outset of the twenty-first century, there exists a very real concern about the propagation of herbs, whether in the wild or through cultivation. For example, the rapid disappearance of South American rain forests is seen as posing a threat to the subsistence of desirable medicinal plants (both those presently in use and others yet to be discovered).

The various uses of herbs and spices throughout history have reflected the practical interests of the period in question. The fields of botany and horticulture originated with the study of herbs as documented in the early herbals. Early works included Dioscorides' *De Materia Medica* (A.D. 512), the oldest illustrated herbal to survive, as well as the *Leech Book of Bald* (tenth century) and *Herbarium* by Apuleius Platonius (c. 1481). The earliest gardens were herb gardens; these were maintained by monks and nuns during the Middle Ages to guarantee a ready supply of medicinal plants. The Muslim military expansion played a key role in disseminating the knowledge and use of spices in both the Old and New Worlds.

The importance of herbs and spices in everyday life was best reflected by the publication of a steady stream of landmark herbals as reprints. *The Herball; or, Generall Historie of Plantes* (1597), by John Gerard, was a model for many works within the genre during the modern era. It was essentially an index to various plants and medicines, with over 1,300 pages of text and illustrations for the "parfyt knowledge and under standyng of all maner of herbes" (from the herbal's subtitle), and incorporating information from other sources, such as a French herbal, *Le Grant Herbiere* (1498). At the time, Gerard was accused of plagiarism when scholars found that the text relied heavily on a translation of Dodoens' *Stirpium Historiae Pemptades Sex* by a member of the London College of Physicians,

Robert Priest, who died before it was first published in 1583. The manuscript allegedly came into the hands of Gerard, who then issued the work as his own. Nevertheless, the book became a “Bible” to medical and garden professionals as well as amateur herbalists who valued its thorough integration of existing knowledge about herbs and somewhat crude drawings.

Many other landmark herbals remain available today. *The Great Herbal of Leonhart Fuchs: De Historia Stirpium Commentarii Insignes* (1542), typifies the current state of affairs, having been re-issued as a two-volume boxed set in 1999; it is available in outlets as diverse as the gift shop in the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, and the American Botanical Council herbal education catalog.

The serious study of herbs and spices has found a place in the curriculum of at least one institution of higher education. In the fall 2001 semester, Bastyr University, Kenmore, Washington, offered a bachelor’s degree program in the herbal sciences. The program, requiring ninety credit hours of coursework toward the receipt of an undergraduate diploma, is intended to provide a thorough, scientifically rigorous introduction to the field of herbal medicine. This is considered to be the first accredited herbal sciences degree in the United States, in contrast to the array of self-development courses typically offered in community colleges and local educational centers.

Botanicals are even closely aligned with religious behavior. Many long-standing Christian denominations utilize herbs and spices to symbolize key events in the Church calendar. Wiccan rituals place a special emphasis on the magic qualities of herbs and on the divinity of nature in general. The Web offers a wide range of herb products and literature geared to such practices.

The Internet also abounds with critics of and apologists for less government control of botanicals. The Rocky Mountain Herbal Institute site (www.rmhiherbal.org) typifies the latter approach; in early 2001 it included a link to an extended essay titled, “Stop FDA Attempts to Restrict Availability of Herbs and Natural Products.” The article included a survey of recent FDA raids on private citizens, a discussion of concerns over the quality of herbal supplements, recommended strategies for political lobbying, and a lengthy list of source material (print and Web links). Rob McCaleb’s Web essay, “Controversial Products in the Natural Foods Market” (www.herbs).

org/greenpapers/controv.html), reflects the conscientious efforts on the part of many apologists to provide rational responses to critics of herb products. McCaleb, the president of the Herb Research Foundation, cites the controversial products noted in a roundtable discussion at New Hope Communication's Winter 2000 Networking Conference and includes a brief defense for each. The listing includes comfrey, chaparral, stevia, ephedra, laxative and stimulant diet teas, hemp, Kombucha "mushroom" products, kava kava, grape seed extract/pine seed extract/Pycnogenol, evening primrose oil/black currant oil, melatonin, tryptophan, chromium picolinate, beta-carotene, single amino acids, germanium, selenium, and organic sugar.

In response to the growing complexity of this field, the present work attempts to integrate information from a variety of perspectives; agriculture and botany, the medical sciences, gardening, the decorative arts, cosmetics, cooking, and popular culture. In addition to a basic description of herbs and spices, augmented by discussions of their cultivation and use, the book looks at their history and folklore, governmental regulation, notable clinical research, and popularity with the general public. Geared toward both herb enthusiasts and students in schools and institutes of higher education, the entries encompass notable herbs and spices, industry organizations, social customs, and consumer commodities. Limitations of space dictated the omission of a considerable number of lesser-known, albeit culturally important, botanicals as separate entries. An inventory of these plants is provided in the Appendix, along with a brief listing of their respective uses. For further information, readers are advised to consult the works cited in the Recommended Reading list at the end of the book.

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ALFALFA

Alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*) is a perennial herb typically found rimming fields in low-lying valleys. It consists of a smooth stem that grows from an elongated taproot and reaches a height of a foot or more. Blue to purple flowers appear during the summer months, eventually producing spirally coiled seed pods.

The ancient Persians fed their horses alfalfa to make them look sleeker and feel stronger. The Arabs designated it “the father of all food,” employing it as livestock feed. It continues to be widely used in this capacity by modern farmers due to its high nutritional value. The herb includes vitamins A, B-1, B-6, B-12, C, E, K-1, niacin, biotin, folic acid, pantothenic acid, and others. It also contains many amino acids, proteins, naturally occurring sugars (e.g., sucrose, fructose), major minerals, and trace elements such as iron, calcium, magnesium, potassium, phosphorus, zinc, and copper.

Because of their exceptional nutritional value, alfalfa sprouts make an excellent lettuce substitute. According to the August 1984 issue of the *Journal of Nutrition* (cited by Heinerman, 1996, p. 9), scientists at the University of California at Davis determined that the high manganese content in alfalfa extracts improved the condition of diabetics who failed to respond to insulin.

The herb has many other medicinal applications as well. Clinical nutritionists have demonstrated that alfalfa meal, when eaten by lab monkeys whose diets included considerable amounts of cholesterol, helped prevent atherosclerosis in addition to reducing serum cholesterol levels. Dr. Henry G. Bieler included the following story in his best-selling book, *Food Is Your Best Medicine*, to illustrate alfalfa’s value as an infection fighter. Coming upon a farmer in rural Idaho who was suffering from a very bad leg ulcer (to the point that the entire limb seemed close to becoming gangrenous), Bieler recom-

mended a blend of chopped alfalfa shoots and equal parts water and canned grapefruit juice. The leg condition eventually healed completely. The plant's rich chlorophyll content has been used by doctors in some major hospitals since the 1940s to treat infections arising from surgical incisions, bedsores, and inner ear conditions. In these situations, patients drank fresh juice made by running raw alfalfa sprouts through a blender. Applying the juice externally to surface infections has also proven effective.

A Mormon farmer has recounted the following application of the herb in his autobiography, *History of a Pioneer: Edward Leo Lyman, Jr. (1881-1958)*:

... [my father] said to me, "If you ever get the blues a sure cure is to go out and look at your alfalfa a while." I've recommended this bit of sage advice to several farmers who faced foreclosures and were in deep depressions. A couple of them followed it and claimed afterwards just how therapeutic it was to gaze out on their fields of uncut alfalfa hay for an hour or so.

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ALLSPICE

Allspice (*Pimenta dioica*) is derived from a tall tree native to Latin America and the Caribbean. Spanish explorers discovered it shortly

after Columbus came upon the islands. Because the dried berries resembled black peppercorns in shape and color, they were referred to as “pepper.” The Aztecs employed allspice to sweeten and flavor their favored chocolate drink. The spice was exported to Europe from 1601 onward as a substitute for cardamom. During the seventeenth century, pirates utilized it to smoke and barbecue meat prior to their expeditions in West Indian waters. The pirates called the wooden grid used to smoke the meat boucan after the French verb “boucaner” for cured or barbecued; as a result, they became known as buccaneers.

Possessing a slim trunk that sheds its soft, light-grey bark annually, the allspice tree branches high above the ground, bearing pairs of lanceolate leaves. The leaves—shiny dark-green on top and lighter underneath—possess the same aromatic properties as the berries (most notably, eugenol).

Although best known as a culinary accent, allspice is also popular in the Caribbean as an analgesic for toothaches. The berries are mashed while still green and left to dry in the sun; the resulting powder is then pounded further until it attains a fine consistency. John Heinerman relates that a Creole-speaking herbalist based in Montego Bay kept this powder in a chewing tobacco can. Whenever a toothache occurred, the herbalist dipped a wet forefinger into the powder and rubbed it inside his mouth along the gum line, relieving the pain almost immediately.

Heinerman also tells of an executive secretary who used allspice powder to mask bad mouth odor. The treatment consists of mixing the powder in a glass of warm water; the liquid is then swished around in the mouth cavity for a minute or so.

The majority of the world’s supply of allspice comes from Jamaica. Honduras, Guatamala, the Leeward Islands, and Mexico also produce the spice, though the quality is inferior.

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ALOE

Aloe (*Aloe vera*) is a perennial succulent native to East and South Africa; it is presently cultivated throughout the tropics, most notably in the West Indies. Aloe's fibrous root produces a rosette of fleshy basal leaves. The leaf tissue contains a mucilaginous extract from which aloe gel is produced.

Aloe possesses an illustrious past. It was allegedly used to embalm Pharaoh Ramses II as well as to preserve the physical remains of Jesus Christ. Immediately prior to setting sail for the New World, Columbus wrote in his diary, "All is well, aloe is on board!"

John Heinerman states that no other herb has been touted so highly by medical and dental practitioners in modern times. Aloe contains ninety-six percent water, making it possible to supply that vital ingredient to injured tissue without closing off the needed air supply. According to the December 1981 issue of *Runner's World* (Heinerman, 1996), the balance of the plant "contains complex carbohydrate molecules, believed essential to aloe's natural value as a moisturizer. Substances present include . . . enzymes, trace sugars, a protein containing 18 amino acids; vitamins; minerals like sulphur, silicon, iron, calcium, copper, sodium, potassium, manganese, and more. The mixture of active ingredients in aloe is called aloin . . . It's responsible for the plant's healing properties" (p. 12).

Aloe has a proven track record in the treatment of a wide range of conditions, including:

- X-ray burns, sunburn, and chemical burns
- Traumatized tissue (after normal and regular cleansing)
- Decubitus ulcers or bedsores
- Primary candidal dermatitis (skin inflammation caused by infection of the yeast *Candida albicans*)
- Stomal ulcers (intestinal ulcers between the stomach and the jejunum)
- Herpes simplex
- Periodontal surgery

- Plant stings, insect bites and stings, and other minor dermatological manifestations

Furthermore, a Dallas, Texas, oral surgeon reported outstanding success in using aloe to treat facial edema, immediate denture placement, lockjaw, and mouth sores. The herb is available medicinally as a prepared ointment, salve or lotion, liquid drink concentrate, and encapsulated powder.

Aloe's reputation as miracle cure-all is reinforced by one Lubbock, Texas, woman's story. Possessing a wart on her arm as large as a pencil eraser, she began covering it with a piece of cotton soaked in aloe gel. Additional gel was applied every three hours. The wart had disappeared after two weeks without the slightest trace of a scar.

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ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

Alternative medicine has enjoyed a rapid upsurge in popularity since the 1960s when many of today's major social movements—including Eastern spirituality, ecology, and the back-to-nature ethic—had their genesis. The Discount Natural Herbs home page states that by 1998 60 percent of all U.S. citizens were using some form of alternative medicine.

Alternative medicine is perhaps best described as people taking an active role in their own health care programs, rather than relying on the prescriptive approach employed by many medical practitioners today. It attempts to determine the reason behind a particular medical