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BORAGE (*Borago officinalis*)

Courage. Herb book after herb book speak to the power of borage to dispel melancholy and inspire courage. During the Middle Ages, borage flowers were embroidered on scarves and presented to warriors before battle as an emblem of courage. Taken as a tonic by competitors before tournaments and jousts in England, borage was believed to exhilarate the mind. Its popular names are indicative of its other attributes—herb of gladness, cool tankard, and bee bread.

Borage, a hardy annual that is believed to have originated in northern Syria, is loved by honey bees, aiding the pollination of neighboring plants. Good companion plants for borage are strawberries and tomatoes. (Borage is known to repel tomato worms.) Readily reseeded, borage is simply delightful in beauty. The actual color of the plant's stems and leaves is dark blue-green, but prickly white hairs covering the whole plant give it a silvery cast. The stems are hollow and succulent, the leaves alternate and wrinkled. Its beautiful blue, shy, downward-facing star-like flowers, accented with black anthers, can steal your heart. Borage, a lovely, often round-shaped furry plant that can grow knee high, can be found in our Meadowbrook garden.

Borage's leaves and flowers are chock full of minerals and vitamins, including potassium, calcium, and high levels of gamma linoleic acid. Some folks like the fresh young leaves and flowers, with their cucumber-like flavor, as a cooling accent to salad, pickles, and iced beverages. Medicinally, most of the most-noted herbalists throughout history have considered it a very effective antidepressant. Borage has also been used to break fevers, as an anti-inflammatory, a mild diuretic, and a tonic for rheumatism.

Still, borage is best known for its courage-inducing properties. Many writers note that when entering stressful situations, borage blossoms have been tucked into a pocket or buttonhole.

Thanks to Jan Kalmar for this report on borage.