

**THE  
G A R D E N  
OF  
The Net-work  
of the Year, 2020.**

**SKIN CARE SEEDS  
Soapwort  
Calendula**

Thanks for agreeing to join in this year of shared home grown medicine; remote growing towards a communal apothecary garden at The White House in Dagenham, or remotely wherever you are. Through the summer and autumn there will be opportunities to make some medicinal preparations and I very much hope we can find ways to come together to enjoy the medicinal plants and remedies we have grown, either in person at the house, or remotely.

For this letter, I enclose seeds chosen for making soaps and balms; for skin care.

I haven't yet germinated the soapwort, perhaps you'll have better luck than me, and it won't be ready this year, its a longer project - so the calendula are included because they are easy to grow seeds for some immediate gratification. I enclose original packaging so you can see the guidelines. Seeds can be planted wherever you have space- on the kitchen countertop in some soil in an old food container, or in the soil in a garden if you have access to one, or sent to a friend.

Lastly, but importantly, if you have any medicinal plants in particular that interest you, any expertise or ideas please do let me know so we can include it in our garden, and as our seedlings get further along and become plants I'll be back in contact with ways we can share decoctions, teas, recipes, remedies, balms, soaps, syrups and pills according to ancient and modern apothecary and pharmacy recipes.

The information I enclose is an edited selection of my ongoing research folders to contextualise the plants as they grow for myself and to keep at The White House.

Sending my very best wishes

THE  
G A R D E N  
OF  
C Y R U S.  
OR,  
The Quincunciall, Lozenge,  
or Net-work Plantations  
of the Ancients, Artificially  
Naturally, Myftically  
Considered.

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BY  
*Thomas Brown* D. of Physick

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Printed in the Year, 1658.

Sent by Rachel Pimm, currently at: 1 The Dovecote, Pitsford, Northamptonshire, NN6 9SB

The image for this letterhead is adapted from the illuminated frontispiece of *The Garden of Cyrus*, a 1658 book by Thomas Browne, on ancient and sacred geometries, and patterns of planting networks.

**Calendula officinalis** or marigold flowers may have less proven medical application, but various sources on scientific paper website Pubmed confirm clinical use as well as the common traditional uses as antifungals and anti inflammatories. Petals which contain flavonoids are made into infusions to treat wounds, rashes, infection, and many other dermatology-based conditions like acne and eczema to treat the skin, especially at orifices which are broken or sore or burned. It is sometimes used alongside radiation treatment for cancer care and it can encourage healthy tissue growth. I started growing them this year, having seen them floating in the bougie product packaging of Keihls face tonic, and because they are edible, and I've been learning to forage and prepare flowers and leaves I can cook with and it turns out they are very easy to grow. They come up again and again as an ingredient in balms and lotions so here is an opportunity to get familiar with them as plants to grow and to centre any skin applications on.

In the civil war, doctors would carry calendula petals to apply to wounds to stop bleeding. Other historical uses include dye of fabrics and foods in place of saffron for example to colour butter and cheese.

Research grants are currently underway with the European commission to see if the by-products can be used in soil for framing and in animal feeds. Its name derives from the word calendar.



**Notes for preparation from Gerard's Herbal, 1597**

*The Vertues.*

The stalks and leaues of Corne Marigold, as *Dioscorides* faith, are eaten as other pot-herbes are. The floures mixed with wax, oile, rofine, and frankinsence, and made vp into a seare-cloth, wa-  
steth away cold and hard swellings.  
The herbe it selfe drunke, after the comming forth of the bath, of them that haue the yellow  
iaundise, doth in short time make them well coloured.

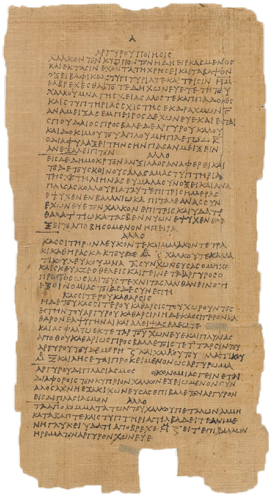


**Seedpacket/ growing notes** are really not needed, pop them in soil, not too close together, cover them up, water them and they will grow quickly and happily and hopefully flower in a few weeks. I'd say take off the flower heads or just the petals at the end of their prime after enjoying them for a bit and dry and save them for later.

Here's my first flower open from the seeds I enclose, Which themselves are very distinctive, and here's how the Plants self seed yearly.



## Soapwort/ *Saponaria officinalis*



There's too much to say here about the history of soap, but soapwort is naturally foaming in its roots and leaves especially and has been historically used to wash clothes:

The Graecus Holmiensis is papyrus is an ancient greek document from 300AD which is a set of very practical recipes mainly for details how to extract dyes from metals and plants has a short recipe for soap, translated here:

Take and treat soap weed with hot water. Make a ball from it as if from tallow. Then steep this in water until it is dissolved. The water, however, should go above the wool. Then boil up the water. Put the wool in and prevent it from becoming scorched. Leave it in there a little while until you see that it is clean. Lift out, rinse it and dry it.

Caley, E. R. (1926) "The Stockholm Papyrus : An English Translation with brief notes" *Journal of Chemical Education* IV:8 : 979-1002.



The word soap comes from the ingredient saponin- glycosides that dissolve in water and create a froth with cleansing properties. Turning oils into soaps is called saponification, but it seems this plant doesn't need saponifying, it already is saponified.

Its hard to study the history of soap, because unlike glass or ceramics, its evidence disappears over time, complicated further by the fact that many organic compounds saponify as they deteriorate, so written records provide most reliable info on this plant.

Botanical Print from Flora Batava  
by J. Kops – 1849



**I Saponaria.**  
Sope-wort, or Bruise-wort.



**Literature**

In the epic of Gilgamesh (Mesopotamian Epic poem, compiled ~1300 – 1000 BCE) the goddess Ninsun, Gilgamesh's mother, bathes ceremoniously in a bath of tamarisk and soapwort

**Notes for preparation from Gerard's Herbal, 1597 on soapwort or bruise wort**

¶ *The Names.*

It is commonly called *Saponaria*, of the great scouring qualitie that the leaues haue: for they yeeld out of themfelues a certaine iuyce when they are bruised, which scoureth almost as well as Sope

**Notes for preparation from Culpeper's Herbal, 1653**

**CULPEPER'S COMPLETE HERBAL**

**337**

*Time.*—It flowers in June.

*Government and Virtues.*—Venus owns this plant. The whole plant is bitter; bruised and agitated with water, it raises a lather like soap, which easily washes greasy spots out of clothes; a decoction of it, applied externally, cures the itch. It cures gonorrhœa, by taking the inspissated juice of it to the amount of half an ounce daily.

**Germination Instructions**

Sow indoors into a cold frame in autumn or sow indoors at any time. In a cold frame, sow onto moist, well-drained seed compost. Just cover seed with a sprinkling of soil. Allow natural winter cold to offer ideal conditions for germination to occur in spring as the weather warms. Indoors, surface sow and place in a propagator or somewhere warm, ideal temp 16-18°C. for 2-4 weeks then cold stratify. Move to -4-+4°C for 4-6 weeks, a fridge is ideal. Remove to warmth, 5-12°C for germination. Acclimatise and plant out after danger of frost has passed.

**Growing Instructions**

Prefers a neutral to alkaline, well-drained soil in full sun. Do not plant near ponds or rivers as the plant contains saponins which can be toxic to amphibians or fish.

**Cultivation Instructions**

No pruning required. Will self-seed. Propagate by seed or softwood cuttings.

**When to Sow**

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

● Sow Under Cover/Plant Indoors ● Flowers/Harvest

**Recipes to make soap from soapwort** on the internet on craft and herbalist blogs are many and varied. I left the intro in from this one which I found especially interesting, rather than paraphrasing.

Soapwort was mostly used for washing delicate fabrics. It can be used as a very gentle soap, usually in a diluted solution. It has historically been used to clean delicate or unique textiles; it has been hypothesized that the plant was used to treat the Shroud of Turin. The plant has a toxic substance in the roots and contains levels of up to 20 percent when the plant is flowering. An overdose can cause nausea, diarrhea and vomiting. In excess, it destroys red blood cells and causes paralysis of the vasomotor center. It produces a lather when in contact with water. The plant grows in cool places at low or moderate elevations under hedgerows and along the shoulders of roadways.

The lathery liquid has the ability to dissolve fats or grease. It can be procured by boiling the leaves or roots in water. Take a large handful of leaves, bruise and chop them and boil for 30 minutes in 600ml of water; strain off the liquid and use this as you would washing-up liquid. In the Romanian village of Sieu-Odorhei, natives call the plant “Săpunele”. It is traditionally used by the villagers as a soap replacement for dry skin.

Despite its toxic potential, *Saponaria officinalis* finds culinary use as an emulsifier in the commercial preparation of tahini halva, and in brewing to create beer with a good “head”. In India, the rhizome is used as a galactagogue. In the Middle East, the root is often used as an additive in the process of making the popular sweet, halvah. The plant is called ‘irq al-ḥalāwah in Arabic, çöven in Turkish, and is utilized to stabilize the oils in the mixture or to create a distinctive texture of halvah.

### Instruction for soapwort solution

1. Add 2 cups soapwort leaves and stems (1 cup dried) to 1/4 (distilled or rain water) boiling water and cover the pan. For Shampoo just use 3 Tablespoons soapwort to 1 Cup of water.
2. Continue simmering for 15 to 30 minutes.
3. Remove from the heat and cool.
4. Strain through cheesecloth.
5. Include any additives, like lavender for washing fine handkerchiefs, lemon juice to lighten stains on fabric.
6. You can keep the liquid up to a week in the refrigerator.

This can cause eye irritations. Better not to use it for shampooing your dog, just to exclude any lapping of the toxicity.