

# Kentuckiana Herbal Thymes

“FOR USE AND FOR DELIGHT”

## COMMON DITTANY

*Cunila organoides*

(Article excerpted from Herb Society of America website)



**Family:** Lamiaceae

**Latin Name:** *Cunila organoides* (L.) Britton

**Common Names:** Common dittany, Maryland dittany, Frost flowers, Fairy skirts, Stonemint

**Growth:** Perennial subshrub to 18 inches

**Hardiness:** Zones 5 – 8, See distribution map - <http://www.plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=CUOR>

**Light:** Full sun to part shade

**Soil:** Dry, rocky, shallow

**Water:** Moderately dry, tolerates drought once established

**Use:** Traditional medicinal and beverage plant; ornamental

**Propagation:** Seed, division, spring and summer stem cuttings

**History.** The genus name *Cunila* is from the Greek *konilee* for marjoram and the species name *organoides* is from *Origanum*, resembling oregano. The common name, dittany, is from the similarities between this plant and *Origanum dictamnus*, dittany of Crete. *O. dictamnus* is quite similar in size and appearance, including delicate purple to pinkish flowers and fragrance. According to James Duke, the “aromatic chemicals in frost flowers share the essences of European oreganos, savory, and thyme...” (Duke, p.134)

The current name was published in the *Memoirs of the Torrey Botanical*

*Club*, Vol. V, Missouri Botanical Garden, 1895, published for the Club Dec. 1893-1894, (page 278).

The leaves and flowers of *Cunila organoides* were offered for sale in Shaker catalogs from 1830 to sometime after 1880. The first of these catalogs (Catalog of medicinal plants and vegetable medicines, 1830, Cleveland, Western Reserve Historical Society) asked on its cover: “Why send to Europe’s bloody shores For plants which grow by our own doors?”

**Description.** *Cunila* is a branched subshrub with square, erect, wiry stems, appearing woody at the base. Leaves are opposite, pointed oval, nearly stalkless and slightly serrated, and 1 to 1.5 inches long. The purplish lavender to rarely white tubular flowers on this monoecious plant appear in clusters at the tip of the stems and in the leaf axils, generally beginning in August and blooming through September. The corolla consists of an upper lobe notched at the apex with three lobes below, all nearly the same length, with two long protruding stamens and pistil. The tubular calyx is glabrous with five lobes, each flower less than one-half inch long. Dark brown nutlets, to .05 inches, glabrous, form in late fall. The entire plant is pleasantly fragrant.

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## NEXT MEETINGS

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 13, 6 PM**

Central Christian Church, New Albany

Scones and Herbal Jelly - pitch-in scones, jams and teas. Bring your recipes & tips for a KHS booklet.

**TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 6 P.M.**

Central Christian Church, New Albany

Candle making with Marjo Howe.

## SUBMISSIONS NEEDED

Your knowledge and experiences are valuable to the club. Here is your chance to “promote the knowledge, use and delight of herbs through educational programs, research, and sharing the experience of members with the community”, including other members.

Experience in professional writing is NOT required; just hand write or type your “herbal” or gardening experiences (please don’t send other people’s articles). Examples could be:

- Growing a particular herb
- Visiting a special herb garden or event
- National Conference trip
- Using herbs - medicinal, cooking, household/cleaning, pets
- Holiday herbs and crafts
- Unusual herbs
- Herbal recipes
- Personal experience: what made you interested in herbs?
- How your grandparents used herbs
- Herbal book or video review

Submit as many items as you like, whenever you like. Photos are welcome and will be returned. (Printing of articles will be subject to space available and will be held for future issues.) Send to Kim Davis at: [gardenelf3@aol.com](mailto:gardenelf3@aol.com) or mail to: 545 W. Whiskey Run Road, New Salisbury, IN 47161.

**Please contribute to your club newsletter!**



**Happy  
Birthday!**

**January**

Jo Ann Luecke  
Marie Henize  
Davy Dabney  
Carol Daoud

**February**

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## 2014-2015 OFFICERS

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*The Herb Society of America is a non-profit, educational organization dedicated to promoting the knowledge, use and delight of herbs through educational programs, research, and sharing the experience of members with the community. Since we are not medical practitioners, it is the policy of The Herb Society of America not to advise, recommend, or prescribe herbs for medicinal use. Information and links are provided as an educational service, and The Herb Society of America can not be held liable for the content included in these resources.*

*Please consult a health care provider before pursuing any herbal treatments.*

## COMMON DITTANY

(continued from page 1)

Beyond the unusual (for North American native herbs) fragrance is the habit of *Cunila* to form frost flowers. Frost flowers are the thin, undulating eruptions of ice crystals in bands or ribbons in early winter when the ground is not yet frozen but the air temperature has quickly fallen below freezing. In *C. organoides*, these formations look like white flowers emerging near the base of the stems of the plant on an early morning under frost conditions. As the sun rises and the day warms, they melt and disappear.

Research ecologist and author D. Bruce Means wrote in a 2004 *Natural History* magazine article: "On close inspection, I saw that the "petals" of my ice flowers push their way through the vascular bundles of the dead stems. Water from the roots is drawn up the stems (either as part of the plant's natural transportation system or through capillary action) and expands as it freezes, breaking the stem walls and creating a flow of ice. The leading edge of the ice freezes to the stem's papery bark, as the ice grows it is lifted upward by the attached bark, forming delicately curved, lacy ribbons."

**Habitat.** The airy appearance makes this an often overlooked plant on dry forest floors, usually under deciduous trees. *Cunila* makes its presence known when brushed against, releasing its startling fragrance with a high thymol content. When in bloom, it is also eye-catching, with abundant clear lavender flowers. It favors dry, rocky soil in mostly Eastern U.S. states. This is not a threatened or endangered plant, but it is surprising to run across it while out hiking, requiring close attention to the small plants of the forest floor.

**Propagation.** Propagation of dittany is seldom covered in popular books or in the body of academic literature. The seeds, which are extremely small, are rarely for sale. If you collect the seed, be prepared for containing what has been described as dust-like seed. However, being a mint, it is easily propagated by stem cuttings in the spring and summer. You should see root initiation in 7 to 10 days. A low concentration of rooting hormone may be used, but it is not necessary. It is also easily divided in the summer. It will self-seed in the garden much like its namesake, oregano, but the seedlings are easily removed and transplanted or composted. (Peter Borchard,

pers. comm., Feb 28, 2014. D. Knapke)

**Uses.** Historically, the plant was used as a stimulant and tonic to act on the nervous system. The Cherokee used the plant as an analgesic for headache, a cold remedy, snakebite remedy, febrifuge and as a gynecological aid (Moerman, p. 188). Its history of use for inducing menstruation should be a reminder that those who are pregnant should not consume this plant. It also does not have Generally Recognized As Safe status from the FDA. Duke reminds us that "Even GRAS herbs should be used in moderation." (Duke, 134).

**Sources.** Plant Information Online is a source to links to North American seed and nursery firms. It is a free service of the University of Minnesota Libraries. <http://plantinfo.umn.edu>

### Bibliography

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Clute, Willard Nelson. *The American Botanist*, Volumes 27-29 (Google eBook), Willard N. Clute & Co., 1921, <http://books.google.com/books>

"*Cunila organoides*." [http://missouriplants.com/Blueopp/Cunila\\_organoides\\_page.html](http://missouriplants.com/Blueopp/Cunila_organoides_page.html)

Duke, James A., with Mary Jo BogeNschultzGodwin, Judi duCellier, Peggy-Ann K. Duke. *CRC Handbook of Medicinal Spices*, CRC Press (Boca Raton, FL, 2003)

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Miller, Amy Bess. *Shaker Herbs, A History and A Compendium* New York, Clark N., Inc. 1976

Neltje, Blanchan, *Natures Garden*, New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1907

Peterson, Roger Tory and Margaret McKenny. *Peterson Field Guides. A Field Guide to Wildflowers. Northeastern/North-central North America*. Houghton Mifflin. Boston. 1968.

Tucker, Arthur O. and Thomas DeBaggio. *The Big Book of Herbs*. Interweave Press. Loveland, CO. 2000.

Tucker, A. O. and Thomas DeBaggio. *The Encyclopedia of Herbs: A Comprehensive to Herbs of Favor and Fragrance*. Timber Press, Inc.: Portland, OR, 2009

For complete, original article, go to: <http://www.herbsociety.org/herbs/documents/Cunila2014.pdf>



Kentuckiana  
Herb Society

## QR CODE

In an effort to “keep up with the times”, we have linked our website to this QR code, which means anyone with a smartphone can instantly go to our website with a quick click. It can be used on almost anything, but needs to be about 3/4” or

larger for the phone to “read” it. We might use it on Marketplace products, promotional flyers, or any number of ways.

Please give it a try and let us know how it works for you (editor does not have smartphone!).



### International Herb Association Herb of the Year™ Selections:

1995	Fennel	2009	Bay Laurel
1996	Monarda	2010	Dill
1997	Thyme	2011	Horseradish
1998	Mint	2012	Rose
1999	Lavender	2013	Elderberry
2000	Rosemary	2014	<i>Artemisia ssp.</i> (Wormwood, Tarragon, et al.)
2001	Sage	<b>2015</b>	<b>Savory <i>Saturea ssp.</i></b>
2002	Echinacea	2016	Peppers <i>Capsicum ssp</i>
2003	Basil	2017	Coriander/Cilantro <i>Coriandrum sativum</i>
2004	Garlic	2018	<i>Agastache ssp</i> (Anise Hyssop, et al.)
2005	Oregano & Marjoram	2019	Hops <i>Humulus ssp.</i>
2006	Scented Geraniums	2020	<i>Rubus ssp.</i> (Blackberries, Raspberries, et al.)
2007	Lemon Balm		
2008	Calendula		



summer savory



winter savory



## MEETING MINUTES

*By Marjo Howe, acting KHS Secretary*



### Meeting - November 11, 2014, 6 p.m., Central Christian Church, New Albany

Our KHS Nov meeting started at the Central Christian Church at 6:00pm. Our hostesses were Jett and Joann; they supplied tasty tomato basil soup, squash and apple soup, chicken noodle soup, pecan pies, goat cheese and many great desserts. We started the meeting by appreciating the great food spread.

Maggie Oster discussed her writing career and the many herbal and gardening books she has published and answered questions from the group.

The reports were then given:

- Kim Davis reported that the newsletter is out on schedule.
- Joan Burton reported on the Sensory Garden, mums in flower, our rain gauge recorded 1/2-inch of rain recently.
- Edith Davis reported on the Pioneer Garden and suggested that the next time O'Bannon Woods has a hay press demonstration - the event always draws a large crowd - it might be a perfect time for the KHS to bring information and recruitment skills for KHS membership by

setting up a table.

- Carolyn Cutshall, the librarian, said that she has a couple of new books for our library.
- Joan Burton, as our historian, brought a scrapbook from 1982 for all of us to peruse.
- Jett Rose and Joan Burton saw Davey Dabney and Joyce Brown, both past members, at a Master Gardener presentation.

Attending were Edith Davis, Maggie Oster, Cynthia Johnson, Cynthia Hardy, Joan Burton, Marie Henize, JoAnne Luecke, Carol Daoud, Jett Rose, Julia Warf, Carolyn Cutshall, Deb Knight, Barbara Lusco, Cara Sajko (guest), Helen Sajko, Juanita Popp, Kim Davis, and Marjo Howe.

Juanita Popp did the allspice talk, telling us that allspice trees grow up to 50 feet tall and grow in the Caribbean and Central America. The trees resemble Bay Laurel trees. The dried berries are used in men's toiletries such as Old Spice. The whole berries have a longer shelf life than the ground berries. The famous Cincinnati chili recipe uses allspice.



## MEETING MINUTES

*By Marjo Howe, acting KHS Secretary*



### Meeting - December 9, 2014, 6 pm, home of Marjo Howe

Our Herb Society had its annual Christmas Party at Marjo Howe's home. We convened at 4 P.M., still light enough for all of our members. We pot-lucked - great food! As always, our members seemed to know exactly what balance of treats to bring.

Attending were Jett Rose, Joan Burton, Edith Davis, Marie Henize, Cynthia Hardy, Barbara Lusco, Gerri Crawford, Marjo Howe, Kim Davis, JoAnne Luecke, and 2 guests, Margaret Muchow and Norma Lincoln. We had a gift exchange and played Christmas Charades. A great time was had by all.



**Kentuckiana Herb Society**  
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Postage



*The Herb Society of America*



Kentuckiana  
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Nature does not hurry,  
yet everything is accomplished. ~Lao Tzu



## POTPOURRI

- **Wanted:** Members needed to review books from the KHS library and submit reviews. Other herb-related book reviews also welcome. **Reminder:** Please return any KHS books you have borrowed as soon as you are finished. There are several books missing from our library that have been out a long time; some as long as two years! Please go through your books, just in case.
- **Wisconsin Unit's Spring Symposium.** March 7, 2015. Deadline to register is February 28. More info at: [www.herb-society-wisconsin.org](http://www.herb-society-wisconsin.org) or contact Joan 262-377-1461 or Denise 262-376-0482.
- **Central Indiana Unit presents "Sweet and Savory" Symposium** April 11. Go to [www.herbsocietyofcentralindiana.org](http://www.herbsocietyofcentralindiana.org) or registration and info.
- **"A Step Back in Thyme"** 2015 Educational conference and Annual Meeting of Members. **May 7-9, 2015**, Williamsburg, Virginia. Go to the HSA website <http://www.herbsociety.org/events/conference-15.html> for more information.
- **Websites of interest:**
  1. **Frost Flowers**  
<http://mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/common-plants-and-animals/wildflowers-and-grasses/frost-flowers>
  2. **International Herb Association:**  
[www.iherb.org](http://www.iherb.org)
  3. **Long Creek Herbs:**  
[www.longcreekherbs.com](http://www.longcreekherbs.com)
  4. **Frawley's Fine Herbarry**  
[www.frawleysfineherbarry.com](http://www.frawleysfineherbarry.com)
  5. **Seed Savers**  
<http://www.seedsavers.org/>