

O'dina Herb Book





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Herb Book



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Odina History

Odina is a tiny hamlet located at 650m above sea level, which according to some documents dates back to the Early Middle Ages or even to Roman times. There were just a few houses lived in by farmers and stockbreeders who used to work in the Cocollo castle service.

There are no definite reports, but it seems that around the mid 14th century, the castle fell under the authority of the Florence municipality, becoming less important than Loro Ciuffenna.

Municipal statutes of the Cocollo castle from 1538 to 1774 bear witness to this period of time.

As the upper countryside was progressively abandoned, Cocollo was slowly deserted, though by the end of the 18th century some castle annexes were still intact.

In 1815 it is said that the church bell was brought down the valley to Querceto: a unmistakable sign of an inexorable decadence.

From this period on information about Odina and the castle is not available and we have to get to the Second World War to read about Odina in Father Morandini's diary at Querceto.

These pages testify the many difficulties of that period of time and the few occasions of feasts and celebrations like mass which was regularly held at the Odina chapel.

After World War II the hills became even more abandoned, many people preferred to move to the valley villages where life was easier. Odina had no electricity or road access until the 1970s!

Today instead it is the other way round, people are slowly leaving the cities to move to the countryside and to a life in contact with Nature.



Brief introduction

by Paolo Trenti

About 15 years ago Odina made my child's dream of living in a natural environment come true and in a 4 year period I managed not only to have my country home but also to offer the first house as an "agriturismo" to our guests.

Renovation works and creation of the garden have been a hard work, but in the end everything was restructured according to the bio-architectural principles, following Tuscan tradition and using only local materials.

Mainly cotto tiles, stones and chestnut beams have in fact been used in restructuring the buildings.

I personally took care of each apartment in every single detail, not only the exteriors, but also furnishing and decoration.

Glicine, Vigneto, Margherita and Edera, the first 4 apartments to be ready, have frescoes which reproduce some of the plants in the garden.



Villa Roseto instead, displays a series of period prints reproducing many different species of antique roses.

One of my main aims has always been to achieve continuity between in and outdoors so as not to create a barrier between house and garden and let the look wandering from inside to outside in perfect harmony.

The gardens surrounding the estate consist of lawns cut off by hedges of typical Mediterranean plants such as: cistus, strawberry-trees, guelder roses, brooms, bramble roses, mirth, etc., but certainly the most enchanting is the huge rosemary hedge which covers a whole slope; when it blooms with its startling little blue flowers, its beauty leaves you speechless.

Then olives and cypresses which together create the structure of the garden. Important trees which witness Tuscan tradition, farmers indeed loved to grow useful plants to benefit from: the olive tree for its fruit, olives and olive oil should never be missing from our tables. Cypress trees were planted to determine the estate boundaries in a harmonious and natural way.

By the pool many fruit trees are grown, especially apples, pears, cherries and plums. They grow above the two main gardens of the estate: the iris garden and the herb garden.

In May, Odina becomes a colourful feast for your eyes. More than 50 different varieties of iris start blooming and the estate looks so pretty thanks to this graceful and regal flower, symbol of Florence. Yellow, orange, violet, blue, black and white are only some of the colours of this magnificent flower, the most classical one being the light blue *Iris pallida*.

After a few years we have become producers of these interesting rhizomes which are widely used in cosmetics and in the perfum industry.

A little for fun and a little for passion, together with the closest members of the staff, we have also started to design the herb garden with about 50 different species of herbs.

For the past few years we have been experimenting which plant to grow in accordance with their medicinal properties, their look, their strength and their capability to grow next to each other. Sage and rosemary for example should be planted far from each other, basil does not like to stay in full sunshine, lovage is quite invasive, but not as much as sorrel, not to say about mint! It is however great to have flowers around, also to create dishes both rich and also beautiful to see. A salad made with chicory, calendula petals and the cornflower blue borage flowers will be most appreciated by whoever sits at your table; a fried dandelion flower will astonish your guests!

This is where our idea of writing this book came from: why do not give other people basic information to allow them experimenting, playing and creating with plants?

But now enjoy the book! I hope and wish that the wonderful world of herbs may fascinate you too.

Paolo





Basil

Ocimum basilicum L.

Labiatae

Parts used

Leaves and flowers.

Constituents and properties

Tannic acid, cineol, saponin, an essential oil made of camphor.

The neuro-sedative effects of basil are universally known, in fact it is used for nervous tension or when stressful situations induce overexcitement, restlessness and sleeplessness. Basil is also used in treating hyperthyroidism and for people exposed to a sea climate rich in iodine. It is not a coincidence that many recipes containing basil come from places close to the sea. It is very important not to use dry basil, because it contains estragole, a potent carcinogen.

Basil supposedly derives its name from the terrifying basilisk -- a half-lizard, half-dragon creature with a fatal piercing stare according to Greek mythology. The medicinal application of a basil leaf was considered to be a magical cure against the look, breath or even the bite of the basilisk. Although this story moved into the realm of fable, basil was still considered a medicinal cure for venomous bites.

In India, basil was consecrated to the Hindu god, Vishnu, whose wife Tulasi (also known as Tulsi) was said to have taken the form of basil when she came to earth. Hindus avoid harming basil plants, unless there is a good reason, and even then offer up prayers of forgiveness for touching a part of Tulasi. Interestingly enough, tradition requires the head of a Hindu be bathed in Tulasi water before being buried and a tulasi leaf is placed on the chest over the heart.

To the ancient Romans, it was a symbol of hatred, yet basil eventually became a token of

love in Italy. Young maidens would wear a sprig of basil in their hair to profess their availability.

Basil is regarded in a similar manner in Romania where if a boy accepts a sprig of basil from a girl, it means they are engaged to be married.

In Greece today, basil is readily grown as an ornamental and is used in certain religious rituals as a symbol of fertility.

Tagliatelle with Basil Pesto Sauce



Serves 1

70 g tagliatelle (fresh egg pasta)

A diced potato

A bunch of green beans

20 basil leaves

40 g pine nuts

1 tablespoon freshly-grated Pecorino cheese

1 garlic clove

Extra Virgin olive oil

Salt to taste

Bring a pot of water with potato and green beans to boil, salt and add tagliatelle. Dress pasta and vegetables with the basil pesto sauce, prepared as follows: mix in a food processor, or better crush in a mortar, pine nuts, basil leaves, garlic clove, grated Pecorino cheese and Extra Virgin olive oil until creamy. Salt to taste.

Tagliatelle are an excellent source of carbohydrates and, like all kinds of pasta, they are easier to digest than proteic food and contain tryptophan, which is the precursor of serotonin; therefore ideal for an evening meal. Since tagliatelle are a long-shaped pasta, they release sugars slower than short pasta.

Boiled potatoes are rich in sugars which guarantee a constant intake for the cardiac muscle, without developing hyperglycaemia, as they are rich in potassium. Boiled potatoes support the liver and facilitate kidneys since they are gluten-free.

Boiled green beans are rich in potassium and can therefore ease pre-menstrual pain and reduce night cramps.

Pine nuts contain large quantities of proteins and lipids, as well as potassium, phosphorus, calcium, magnesium and iron; and being provided with vitamins B1, B2 e PP, they act as a tonic of the nervous system.

For its features the pine nut is considered helpful with anaemia, human growth, during pregnancy, in respiratory diseases, and it has anti-inflammatory; anti-bacterial and anti-viral action.

Pecorino cheese has large amounts of salts, calcium and phosphorus. Compared to Parmigiano cheese, Pecorino induces a quicker and deeper excitement of the nervous system. Moreover it is very fat and thus hard to digest.

Garlic is a natural antibiotic, a fluidizer and therefore prevents flu syndromes, heals bronchitis and lung diseases, regulates the bacterial flora, regularises blood pressure and the nervous system (thanks to its alliin content), eliminates fear, anxiety, and depression and reduces insomnia.

Extra Virgin olive oil is rich in chlorophyll, carotene, lecithin, poliphenols, linoleic acid and vitamins A, D and E. It is very easy to digest, it helps to counteract cholesterol and it is rich in monounsaturated fatty acids.

Basil, garlic, pine nuts, potatoes and green beans all substances which contribute to sedation. With its large amount of potassium this recipe represents a very good support to the nervous system indeed.







Chamomile

Matricaria chamomilla L.
Compositae

Parts used

Blossoms.

Constituents and properties

Essential oils with chamazulene, an alcohol (chamomillol), several acids, resins and sugars.

This herb may be sedative or stimulating, depending on how it is used.

Chamomile has antispasmodic, diaphoretic and digestive properties.

Due to its azulene content it is anti-inflammatory too.

Chamomile Tea

To prepare chamomile tea, boil 5 g in 250 ml of water for 3-4 minutes.

This herbal tea is used to reduce stress, promote relaxation and restful sleep.

There are two types of chamomile grown and used: German Chamomile (Matricaria chamomilla) and Roman Chamomile (Anthemis nobilis). The name chamomile is derived from the Greek word 'khamaimelon', which means 'earth apple', or 'ground apple' due to the fresh herb's scent reminiscent of apples. The genus name, Matricaria, given to the German chamomile species means 'matrix' (womb), and was used by the ancients; as a woman's herb for relieving female conditions and aiding childbirth.

The Egyptians used chamomile as a cure for a condition called 'agu', which is a form of malaria. The Egyptians dedicated chamomile to their sun gods since the flower reminded them of the sun. It was associated with the god Ra for its healing powers. When the body of King Ramesses II was displayed in Paris, permission was obtained to take skin tissue for analysis. One of the findings was that the body and abdominal cavity of the

king had been anointed with chamomile oil. It is believed that the chamomile oil was used in the mummification process of the King for its insect repelling qualities.

The Romans also dedicated chamomile to their gods. Chamomile was also used by India's ancient Ayurvedic physicians. The Vikings added chamomile to hair shampoos to aid the lightening of blond hair.

Chamomile was used by the ancient Egyptians and the Moors, and it was one of the Saxons' nine sacred herbs, which they called 'Maythen.'

Rose and Chamomile Omelette



Serves 1

2 eggs
1 handful rose petals
1 handful chamomile blossoms
1 tablespoon Parmigiano cheese
Extra Virgin olive oil
Wine vinegar
Salt to taste

In a mixing bowl whisk the eggs, add rose petals and washed chamomile blossoms, freshly grated Parmigiano cheese and salt; pour the egg-mixture into a pre-heated non-stick frying pan, simmer on both sides till golden brown. Dress with balsamic or blackberry vinegar.

Parmigiano cheese: it has high contents of proteins, calcium and phosphorus. It has less fat than similar cheeses and is rich in vitamins and electrolytes.

Extra Virgin olive oil: see basil

Eggs are rich in proteins but the protein level decreases remarkably in an omelette, and fats are more saturated than in other egg-preparations, since the egg is exposed for a longer time to high

oil temperature.

However the omelette stimulates hepatic and gastric functions, therefore its digestibility depends on the health of the liver and of the stomach.

Wine vinegar favours food digestibility, by increasing the gastric acids secretion.

In this case, the combination with rose petals, rich in vitamin C, and the chamomile blossoms, make this dish easier to digest. The rose petals and chamomile flowers also make it nice to see. At the same time they are able to stimulate positive emotions.

The addition of balsamic or blackberry vinegar completes the dish and improves its digestibility by increasing the gastric acid secretion.







Parsley

Petroselinum sativum Hoffm
Umbelliferae

Parts used

Fresh leaves and roots harvested in autumn and dried.

Constituents and properties

Vitamins A, B, C, iron, potassium, calcium, apiole. This substance is basically toxic but only if consumed in excess; if taken in proper amounts, apiole is useful in helping to support metabolism.

Being a rich source of vitamin C (a tablespoon of chopped parsley covers 2/3 of the recommended daily value of vitamin C!) parsley benefits the body by stimulating metabolism, and for its iron content, it favours digestion.

It is diuretic, emmenagogic, galactofugic, tonic, stimulating and slightly sedative.

Functional food

While parsley is a wonderfully nutritious and healing food, it is often under-appreciated. Most people do not figure out that this vegetable has a wider use than just a decorative garnish that accompanies restaurant meals. Parsley is in fact a storehouse of nutrients and it features a delicious green and vibrant taste.

The ancient Greeks thought that Hercules used parsley a lot, so they would crown the winners of games and war with garlands of parsley in honour of the great feats of Hercules. Greek soldiers fed parsley to their horses so they would run better. It is associated with the hero god Archemorous, the herald of death. It is said that parsley sprang up where his blood drenched the ground after serpents devoured him. Later it became associated with Persephone who guided the souls of the dead to the underworld and was used to decorate the tombs and graves of the dead, in hopes of pleasing her. Parsley can take up to 4 weeks to start growing.

An old legend explains that parsley has to go to Hades and back 9 times before it will germinate. Who would have thought that the king of plate garnishes could have such a sordid history? For the Romans too, parsley represented both death and evil as well as protection and purification. The

Romans would tuck sprigs of parsley in their togas to protect themselves and may have been the first ones to adorn their plates with parsley sprigs, only it was not for decoration but rather to protect against food contamination. Parsley garlands were also worn at great banquets and masked the stronger smells of onion and garlic.



Spaghetti "Crudaiola" _____

Serves 1

70 g spaghetti
5 cherry tomatoes
1 sprig parsley
1 sprig basil
1 teaspoon pine nuts
1 tablespoon Parmigiano cheese
1 garlic clove
4-5 almonds
Extra Virgin olive oil
Chilli to taste
Salt to taste

Chop cherry tomatoes, add fresh basil and parsley, previously chopped by hand so as not to alter their iron content; then mix the crushed pine nuts and the remaining ingredients. Cook the spaghetti "al dente" and dress with the sauce.

Spaghetti: see basil (tagliatelle)

Tomatoes: see oregano

Pine nuts: see basil

Parmigiano cheese: see chamomile

Extra Virgin olive oil: see basil

Garlic: see angelica and basil

Chilli is disinfectant, healing, antihemorrhagic, anti-viral, anti-inflammatory and it benefits digestion.

It is better to use it raw so as not to lose its precious contents, such as vitamin C.

A diet including chilli improves the general state of health and strengthens the body but it is not suitable for those suffering from hypertension with increased adrenal tone.

Almonds are rich in calcium, potassium and magnesium and are therefore useful in treating spasticity, epilepsy, sleeplessness or hyper excitability. Furthermore almonds contain lithium, copper, zinc and vitamins F, B1, B2, E and PP.

This recipe is useful for those who suffer from over excitement, insomnia, nervous hyperactivity, depression, problems with gastric mucose, osteoporosis, fractured bones, or scurvy.





Yarrow

Achillea millefolium L.
Compositae

Parts used

Flowers and leaves.

Constituents and properties

Essential oil (cineol, camazulene), resin, tannin, alkaloids, bitter glycoside, betonicin (achillein), potassium, nitrogenous substances, flavonoids.

It is antiseptic, diuretic, healing, haemostatic, tonic, antispasmodic, digestive, anti-inflammatory, aperitif, useful to alleviate dysmenorrhoea.

Yarrow Appetizer

Serves 1

1 whole egg
3 yarrow leaves plus for decoration
½ lemon juice
1 tablespoon mayonnaise
Extra Virgin olive oil
Salt to taste

It's the herb of heroes and prophets! Its name comes from Achilles, the Greek hero who used it to heal many of his warriors. It was said that Achilles learned from Chiron (the person who started the cultivation of medicinal plants in Thessaly and who was later deified as a Centaur) the use of yarrow as a remedy to heal the wounds of his companions and of king Telephus but he wasn't capable of healing his heel injury caused by Paris's bolt: this was the will of gods. Yarrow was considered a sacred herb by Druids and the Chinese. It was the Celtic priests duty to exactly establish the period of sowing, and if on one hand they deeply studied the sky in order to create a very precise lunar calendar on the other hand they used yarrow stalks to forecast weather. The Chinese instead, used yarrow stalks to foretell the future from the 'I Ching, or Book of Changes, one of the most ancient texts in the world. For this purpose 50 yarrow stalks were needed and carefully

kept in a box. When starting the ritual one stalk was put aside and not touched again. Then with the right hand the stalks were divided into two groups and some were removed; the ritual was repeated several times and became a sort of meditation technique. At the end some numbers were obtained and with them it became possible to make a judgement. This method is still used in China and Japan.

Hard boil the egg, shell it, slice in half lengthwise and gently remove yolk. In a bowl mix yolk with yarrow leaves, Extra Virgin olive oil, lemon juice, salt and if you like, a tablespoon of mayonnaise (beat an egg yolk with two tablespoons of Extra Virgin olive oil. Only when the emulsion thickens, add two teaspoons of lemon juice and season with salt). Spoon egg yolk mixture into the egg white half. Arrange on a serving plate with a layer of yarrow leaves. Please note that yarrow leaves are quite hot and therefore to be used sparingly.

Hard boiled eggs: see winter savory
Extra Virgin olive oil: see basil
Mayonnaise: see winter savory
Lemon juice: see caraway





A combination: of passion and playfulness brought this book into being. It is a homage to the medicinal and aromatic herbs present in the marvellous surroundings in which Odina can be found. Odina is a farm holidays in the Tuscan Arno Valley.

If we add a garden, some plants and joyful enthusiasm to some basic knowledge, we have a small jewel which allows us to enter into direct contact with Nature and discover a new dimension. We can luxuriate in a place where a thousand perfumes fill the air, we can enjoy the sensation of walking barefoot through grass wet with dew early in the morning, we can compete with a bee in the choice of the most beautiful and juicy flower. We can finally close our eyes, trust our sense of smell and decide whether we prefer a sweet smell or a more bitter one. Just pick the herbs and create. There are many properties to use and every small herb has great power. The book guides us on our journey and allows us to experience this marvellous world!



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