2011 Nettle Project Journal May

The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for. The most you can do is live inside that hope, running down its hallways, touching the walls on both sides." —

from Animal Dreams Barbara Kingsolver

This is page 3 of the Journal beginning May 1, 2011. For Feb. – March Journal click here April here

Calendar of Methods and Tasks with input from other researchers Click Here

Original Stinging Nettle Research Application to USDA

February, March Journal   April Journal   May Journal   June Journal   Calendar of Steps & Methods
July Journal August Journal September Journal

May 1, 2011: Rain Rain Rain: attempted 2nd distillation of stinging nettle. Aborted due to leak in second water tub and steam escaping from retort. Drying some nettle in shop with de-humidifier on. (everything is damp). Rain predicted next four days.

May 2nd, 3rd: Did two more distillations of stinging nettle – obtained about 2 l/2 gal. each distillation. Found that 2nd wash tub in cooling arrangement was leaking and this caused the bottom tub in which the pump resides to run out of water frequently. Purchased new 2 bushel wash tub from Foster Feed in town – Mike, my helper, picked it up with the fencing for the research plot, 45 tomato cages. Tomato Cages $1.99 each $89.55 (bought new so all the cages would be the same size).   2 x 2 by 72 inch 100′ fencing: $103.51. Wash Tub: $36.49. I have enough posts here to put up fence. Total $229.55. Mike has not been able to till due to on and off rain for days. Tomatoes in greenhouse looking good. I have been looking for extra help to this project.Communication from Dr. Wicklines assistant at WV Dept. of Ag

Brenda Keavey, Assistant Director West Virginia Department of Agriculture

Regulatory and Environmental Affairs Division1900 Kanawha Blvd. East

Charleston, WV 25305 phone (304) 558-2208 Ext. 4000

FAX (304) 558-3594BKeavey@ag.state.wv.ushttp://www.wvagriculture.org/

asking for # of samples which will be needed for project. I have asked what amount and in what containers my 3 samples of fertilizers (dried Ist cut stinging nettle, hydrosol and commercial Fertrel) will need to be shipped in.

Bruce Lloyd the Ext. Agent for my county (Lewis) gave me two sample bags which I will use to get soil samples from both the tomato beds and the herbicide treatment site.

May 4th: As we hope to be able to have the research plot tilled and raised beds (5) put in by May 16th, the first stinging nettle tea is being made. To cover nine plants, we are putting 2 oz. of dried stinging nettle in .5 gal. of water covered (and sited near research plot) – which will make 2.5 gal. of tea which we think will be sufficient for treating 9 plants.

"He who is afraid of nettle should not piss in the grass."
Thomas Fuller British clergyman, 17th C.

5-1 Tappy's Heritage research tomato plants on left, back up Cherokee purple and chocolate plants on right.

5 lb (added another lb) of fresh stinging nettle for distillation.

Out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety. William Shakespeare.

May 4: Heard from Carol DeLaney of USDA who said the critique on the original Stinging Nettle Research Grant will not be available until the end of May.
May 9: Mailed samples of stinging nettle hydrosol, dried stinging nettle and Fertrell commercial organic fertilizer to USDA Dept. of Ag in Charleston. Brenda Keavey, Ass't Director, emailed me today, 5-10 that they had recv'd the samples and will be doing the testing this week. They wanted 2 cups (16 oz.) of each fertilizer sample. They were shipped in clean plastic bottles with twist caps covered with tape. Arrived next day.May 10: Finally, we had two days without rain and my helper, Mike has finished tilling the area for the research. We had planned to do raised beds, but due to my age (76) and his (alot younger) decided we would probably die in the attempt, (after making a desperate attempt) so we will be planting the 45 tomatoes on flat tilled land tomorrow if the universe agrees. I will also take soil samples tomorrow for analysis- the area has never been farmed in the 30 years I have been here – and the soil looks quite healthy. The samples will be delivered to Bruce Loyd Ext. Agent Lewis County.

May 11: Starting at 8 a.m. as temp was 81 by mid day, Mike, my helper and Kevin, a neighbor started putting a fence around the research area.   After plotting out the spacing, I began planting the tomatoes in five rows, making sure a similar size tomato plant was in each row. Mike planted the first two, then I planted the remaining 43 – I planted in humps as it was too strenuous to make five raised beds. The tomato cages were $1.99 each and were quite flimsy, so hilling the earth around the tomatoes made it easier to affix the cages in the ground. Each plant had bottom leaves removed and was planted deep enough to cover the stem above the removed leaf area. Two handfuls of McEnroe Organic Compost was put in each hole, then filled with water and then the tomato planted. It was hot, and the ground was quite uneven and I felt every year of my 76 years – I rested once on the bench nearby under an umbrella for about 5 minutes and the last ten plants were the hardest – I had to sit in a chair in the garden- I thought I was going to pass out! Labor: Last two days: Mike 6 hours tilling, 6 hours helping me plant tomatoes and putting in fencing. Kevin, neighbor 2 hours fencing.
Myra labor: 5-10: 2 hours 5-11: planting 5 hours, journaling: 1 hour.
Color enhanced for clarity
Row # 1

Nine plants each row; 5 rows.

Rows go south to north so that all rows get similar amounts of sun.

May 12th: Hilled tomatoes further by taking loose soil from row walks and putting it around plants. Began raining heavily around noon with thunder and lightening so we stopped working in the research plot early.
Mike, helper: 4 hours labor
Myra: 1 hour supervision; 1 hour journal.Too wet to take soil sample today. About 3 inches of rain!

After the rain

May 16, 2011 Rain off and on all weekend. Mike, my Helper, gathered all the grass clippings we had stored for the last two weeks and was able to cover all but two tomato plants in each row. Next mowing will complete the mulching. We figure on renewing it again each month. Mike: labor – 3 hoursConsulted Bruce Loyd of Lewis Co. Extension – will take soil sample and dry it in house so it can be sent asap. Samples of hydrosol, dried nettle and commercial organic Fertrell fertilizer being analyzed by Dept. of Agriculture.

Grass clippings applied as mulch around tomatoes and between plants to decrease weeding and keep in moisture (not that that's a problem this Spring!)

May 17: took soil sample in rain – drying in house – taking out roots, debris – when dry will mail. (according to directions from Bruce and insert from Extension.)
May 18: still raining, flood watch. Leaf day a/c to Kimberton Calendar (bio dynamic).May 19: First application of all fertilizers completed in the muddy muddy research plot. First row: stinging nettle tea (the face is because of the smell – smells like a herd of cattle all letting loose at once)second row: 10 to 1 solution of stinging nettle hydrosol. third row: 20 to 1 solution of stinging nettle hydrosol. fourth row: commercial Fertrell organic fertilizer and fifth row: control.

Stinging Nettle Tea phew-eeee

It stinks! Soil is so mushy from almost constaint rain, my foot sunk in about 8 inches and sucked my shoe off!

May 20, 2011. Analysis of three fertilizers received from Dept. of Ag. WV. See Table below. As the hydrosol shows little or no nitrogen, potash or potassium, first we have distilled stinging nettle again today using much less water. Research is also being conducted as to previous research on chemical constituents of stinging nettle, what tomatoes need etc. This will be on a separate page of this website. Soil sample of research plot dried and so sent to WVU Extension for Analysis 5-20. $2.39.Contacted Art Tucker at U. of Delaware, WVU ext. personnel and Dr. Wickline regarding hydrosol analysis results. Dr. Wickline agreed to allow me to send the hydrosol we distilled today (with less water) to see if the results in analysis were any different.

Re-read Suzanne Catty's topic (Hydrosols, The Next Aromatherapy) wherein she states hydrosols are a hologram of the whole plant. ???????

West Virginia Department of Agriculture (304) 558-2228 Fertilizer Laboratory Analysis Report – Unofficial M<y 18, 2011

Dealer: La Paix Herb Farm Myra Bonhage-Hale

Assayed For	MIN	MAX	FOUND	HIGH/ Low	STATUS
Dried Stinging Nettle	Nitrogen (N) 1.00 Avail Phosphate (P205) 1.00 Soluble Potash (K 20) 1.00Overall Index Value (OIV)		2.98 0.85 (Low) 3.80 253.39		Pass Accept (within tolerance) Pass Pass
Fertrell Fish & Seaweed Liquid (2-1-1)	Nitrogen (N) 1.00 Avail Phosphate (P205) 1.00 Soluble Potash (K20) 1.00 OIV		1.80 (Low) 1.90 1.00 119.53		Pass Pass Pass
Stinging Nettle Hydrosol	N 1.00 P205 0.10 K20 0.00 OIV		0.03 0.01 0 3.73		Accept (within tolerance) Accept (within Tolerance) Pass Fail

May 19 – 22: Due to unusual and unexpected hydrosol analysis (see above), I have been in contact with Dr. Wickline (will send another sample using less water to distill), Art Tucker of the U. of Delaware and author of the Big Book of Herbs and The Encyclopedia of Herbs, Suzanne Catty, author of the quintessential book Hydrosols the Next Aromatherapy and Robert Seidle of the Essential Oil Company (where I got my distillery ten years ago). All have given me good and expert advise and as a result, I will be distilling again using even less water. I will send that sample to Dr. Wickwire for analysis. Those in the research project have not brought their stinging nettle here for distillation as yet, so I am hoping that all the problems will be ironed out (no pun intended) by the time they bring their nettle. It's been nettlesome!
May 26th: Mike, my helper, and his son, were finally able to mow between rain storms and collected enough grass clippings to cover the beds between the last 2 tomatoes in the 2 remaining research beds. (Commercial fertilizer and Control). It has rained almost every day for 2 months. Took photos of growing tomatoes evening of the 26th.

May 26th, 2011: Tomato Research Beds looking north west.

Tomato Research Bed #1 Stinging Nettle Tea Application. Have not recv'd soil sample report yet from WVU, but I suspect the soil is pretty good from the color and texture.

Looking west at tomato research beds

May 30th: 85 degrees on shaded porch. Must be 95 easily this p.m. – and humid. Tried to seed fruit day (cukes, squash and melons) but it was too hot in the Vegetable Garden. Tomorrow morning Mike will harvest first cut stinging nettle left and we will distill it with very little water in the condensor – hopefully the hydrosol will then show better nutrition when it is analyzed by Dr. Wicklines office at WV Dept. of Ag.

I didn't buy enough 6 foot high steel fence to go around the research plot (after all, it is my $) so I used 5′ high on the west and south sides (recylced from another plot) – but placed rebar cages (about 3 feet wide, 4 feet high, six feet long) all along the lower fence line on the outside – to out Gestalt the deer (however, the deer are very scarce since the last two terrible winters and we no longer see the vast hordes which roamed previously.)

May 31st: Mike, my helper and I distilled 6 lb. of first cut stinging nettle – distilled it above water in condensor – could only be distilled about an hour. Got 3/4 of a l/2 gallon of hydrosol – sending 8 oz. +- to Dr. Wickline. Hydrosol was quite strong smelling (not a bad smell – very green) and much darker than that used heretofore. I probably won't have enough for the entire research, so will have to distill a second bottle the same way (ala Suzanne Catty's directions) for use later in the summer.