

# Growing Herbs For Home Use

By Ed Dillingham

Dr. Rhonda Janke, retired professor at Kansas State University- Cooperative Extension Department, provided an interesting and informative presentation on growing and using herbs for medicinal and culinary uses as a home garden crop and then took us on a tour of her current experience of living and teaching in Oman, a country on the east coast of the Arabian Peninsula.

Dr. Janke's first piece of advice is that taking any herb or combination of herbs is not going to negate the effects of bad lifestyles, i.e. routine meals of hamburgers, French fries, diet coke, a few cold brews, no exercise and a few herbs is not going to make you healthy. In addition, not all herbs are safe to consume and some herbs may be safe for some to use while others may be allergic to the same herb. Therefore, Dr. Janke suggests first use common sense when choosing and taking herbs.

Do your research from independent, trusted sources on the expected outcomes and possible side effects of any herbs you are planning to take. Especially discuss with your regular physician possible interactions with any medicines you are currently taking. If you are talking with an herbalist be sure you discuss their training. There are very few rules on who can be an herbalist. They may be home-trained or have formal training. Also, discuss the cultural philosophy of the herbalist. The western culture emphasizes extracts of the active ingredients from the herbs while the European culture leans more toward using the fresh plant parts and the Chinese tend to extract the active ingredients in teas.

Although there are few rules on who can be an herbalist, in the United States, there are very strict rules on what terms and claims an herbalist can make. They cannot make a diagnosis of any condition, use the terms "cure" or "treatment" or even call you their "patient." They can educate you as a client to the herb being suggested. Furthermore, there are few rules concerning the purity and potency of herbs. Because many herbs are grown abroad in countries with cheaper labor and no regulations, quality control may be questionable. The United States government does not consider herbs as medicine and, therefore, has few regulations on them. To counter these concerns, Dr. Janke advised members to grow their own herbs when possible. To that end, she described various studies and plant trials conducted at the K-State trial gardens on more than 30 herbs that could be considered as viable in Kansas' environmental conditions and whether or not it was feasible to expand these plantings to commercially viable niche crops. A complete write-up of the uses, storage, cautions and feasibility of niche farming herbs can be found in a K-State publication, "Farming a Few Acres of Herbs: An Herb Grower's Handbook," Rhonda Janke, Jeanie DeArmond and David Coltrain, Kansas State University, June 2005. The publication can be found at [www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/S144.pdf](http://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/S144.pdf). Another publication by Dr. Janke is "Growing Herbs for Home Use" and can be found online for download at <https://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/mf2579.pdf>.

Dr. Janke also talked about life in Oman where she teaches (in English) organic farming and sustainable agriculture at the Sultan Qaboos University. The work week is Sunday – Thursday. There are two seasons – summer tolerably hot and summer intolerably hot. The growing season is from October – March/April. Rainfall averages 3.6 inches a year and tends to all come at once creating flooding conditions. The population for the entire country is about 4.4 million people of which about half are foreign workers. Less than a thousand are from the United States. In the bigger cities, modern wastewater treatment systems allow for treated wastewater to be used to irrigate trees and landscapes. Because of the intense heat, normal outdoor activities, such as shopping and going out to eat, begin at sunset and continue well into the night while sleeping is for the hot daytime.