A natural history/meditation from "Monarchs and Milkweeds Almanac" by Ina Warren

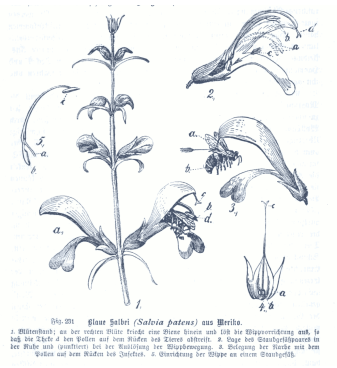
Mints

I plan my garden as I wish I could plan my life, with islands of surprise, color and scent.
~ Diane Ackerman, *Cultivating Desire*

Common names in Spanish:
Hierbabuena; Yerba buena

In the monarch overwintering reserves in central Mexico, there are six genera of mints. These include *Lepechinia, Prunella, Salvia* (12 spp.), *Satureja, Scutellaria* and *Stachys* (4 spp.).

It was mint to be:
Worldwide, the Mint Family has 180 genera with over 3500 species. There are 50 genera of mints in North America. A typical mint flower has 2 lips, actually fused petals. Labiateae>lip; the lower lip serves as a landing spot for pollinators. The upper lip serves as a canopy shielding its male and female floral parts.



Junior Mints... They're refreshing, they're delightful. Who's gonna turn down a junior mint?

Gather. Mints. Repeat: In addition to those listed below, familiar Mint family members are oregano, sage, germander, obedient plant, basil, savory, coleus, betony, catmint, horehound, melissa, peppermint, spearmint, dead nettles, lemon balm and *Collinsonia*.

Looking for a few good mints: Mints were one of the three approved "tithing" herbs (along with cumin and anise) in the Bible. Wonder if that is how the word *mint* became associated with currency, as in US Mint?

Mountain Mint
Pycnanthemum muticum

Don't mints words: Mints were important species and were listed in all medieval herbals in 9th century convent gardens. Linnaeus wrote that mints "dispel the fumes of drunkenness".

Let's get mythical: In mythology, *Menthe* was a nymph, who because of the love Pluto had for her, was changed into a plant by Proserpine - green from jealousy.

Please don't squeeze the sweet marjoram: Sweet Marjoram –- wild Oregano; a cultivated perennial with lilac flowers. It is an aromatic strewing herb. Besides yielding red and purple dyes, it was used to flavor ale. Greeks and Romans newlyweds wore woven garlands and it was reputed to have value as a magical herb....

Motherworts of all mints:
Motherworts were planted on graves to ensure a happy afterlife. It was also thought to protect milk from souring in "bad weather".

Hyssopity do da, hyssopity de day: Bees love hyssop (*Hyssopus officinalis)* and it flavors their honey. Hyssop oil is distilled for making perfumes and is one of the "strewing herbs" of olden days.

Here I am Lord, scent me:
Hyssop has dark evergreen leaves and long, blue spikes of narrow whorls. It is used to flavor chartreuse and other liqueurs. Hyssop was mentioned in Bible writings in sprinkling rites for purification.
Hyssop was also used for "hysteria" - uncontrollable laughing and crying. A woman suffering from disturbance of womb was treated by a "hysterectomy" as hyster>womb.

Boogie-woogie bugle bloom that bumblebees need: Early spring bugle blossoms provide the early, continuous supplies of nectar that bumblebees need.

According to ancient herbalists Gerard & Culpepper, bugle (*Ajuga)* was used in prepared syrups for preventing "inward burstings" a name for disabling blood clots.

Thyme is on our side: The herb thyme is associated with death. Souls of the dead were thought to find rest and solace in the flowers. Being in the Mint family, thyme contains thymol, an essential oil used in a variety of medical applications. A familiar place for thymol is on the ingredients list of a jar of *Vicks Vapo-Rub*, (or as it is pronounced in Guatemala: *Bix-Bape-uh-roob*.)

Never enough thyme for kindness:
Ovid recounts the breath-taking hospitality of Baucis and Philemon scouring their table board with green mints before laying food on it intended for their divine guests.

Caterpillar Cafe:

Square Meal Deal: Several moth caterpillars feed on mints. Ingesting the volatile oils perhaps gives them protection from would-be predators.

Get the sensation!

For range maps, see: http://plants.usda.gov/core/profile?symbol=PYMU