



New Years 2010 Friends Newsletter

Winter has officially come to south Texas. Some in the area actually had enough snow for snow-people and snowball fights. This weekend lows in the teens and highs barely reaching 30. Quite a change for us! Hope this finds you all warm and happily into the New Year.

Susan's Holidays

Susan has been spending some time in her rather secluded cabin in the New Mexico mountains, perhaps taking some time off, but truthfully working very studiously on the next China Bayles book, *Mourning Gloria*, which is due to come out in 2011. Luckily we won't have to wait that long for another visit with China, Ruby and friends. Before we know it, spring will be announced by the arrival of *Holly Blues* (April 6, 2010). Can you believe it, this will be #18 in the series. Why, these women are like family now, aren't they? If you're waiting for the paperback edition of *Wormwood*, it will be available in early April.

Book News

If your club is reading the China series, did you know discussion questions and herb lists are available for each book? The latest to be posted are for *Wormwood*. These are a great way to expand on the theme of the books, and to spark some good dialogue. Summer will bring us a whole new set of friends to meet. In July, *The Darling Dahlias and the Cucumber Tree* will be the first in a new series. A group of gardening friends is worried about what the future holds, but mysteries are troubling them, too. What's happened to Bunny Scott? What's going on at the bank? Where is the escaped convict? Join Lizzy, Verna, Ophelia, and Myra May as they set out to solve these puzzles. Sounds to me like these ladies will be busy. The setting is unique—Darling, Alabama in 1930. These gardening club buddies are sure to capture your heart and your imagination. I'm just sure *Dahlias #2* is sprouting in Susan's mind as I write this. The *Dahlias* have their very own website now, so y'all drop by to say hi now, ya hear?

Fall will see the publication of #7 in the Cottage Tale Series: *The Tale of Oat Cake Crag*. Won't it be fun to re-connect with Beatrix Potter and friends? Be on the lookout, too, for Susan's *An Extraordinary Year of Ordinary Days*. I think I can safely promise you that this will be an extraordinary book.



Book Winner

Congratulations go to our latest winner of our monthly book drawing. The lucky group for December is the **Mysterious Mondays Book Club of Myrtle Beach, SC**. Thanks to Socastee Library for hosting this club. The lucky group for January is the **The Book Buddies of Mather, PA**. Thanks to the Fredericktown Area Public Library for hosting this club. Libraries are among our best friends and we are big supporters of libraries.

Contest!

An exciting weekly contest seems like a good way to begin the year, don't you agree? Answer all three questions correctly and you might win one of three copies of *Holly Blues*. You can find all the rules and the questions by following the above link. Check back on Mondays for new questions.

Herbal Goodies

As you relax and renew in the New Year, we're attaching a second page with goodies for you—recipes and a craft idea. There are so many creative ways to use herbs. You can find references not only in the China Bayles' mystery series, but also in China's *Book of Days*.

That's all for now from our part of the world. All of us associated with Susan and Book Club Friends want to wish you and yours a prosperous and peaceful New Year. See you soon!

Suellen Ideus

Coordinator, Susan's Book Club Friends

Where to find Susan Albert online:

- * Websites: MysteryPartners.com; AboutHyme.com; CottageTales.com; DarlingDahlias.com; SusanAlbert.com
- * Blog: Lifescapes
- * Twitter & Facebook: [Twitter](https://twitter.com/SusanAlbert); [Susan's Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/SusanAlbert); [China's Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ChinaBayles)

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Winter Herb Fun

Winter-Thyme Dreams

Dream pillows--fun to design, easy to sew, soothing for a long winter's nap--are wonderful herbal presents for friends and family. But instead of making ho-hum rectangular pillows, be creative. With right sides together, cut two layers of fabric (felt, cotton, satin, silk) into a crescent moon, a circle, a heart, or other pleasing shape. Seam the edges, leaving a narrow opening. Stuff 6-7 small pillows with this dreamy mix of herbs:

- 4 cups rosebuds and petals
- 1 cup dried chamomile flowers
- 1 cup dried mugwort
- 1 cup dried lavender flowers
- 1 cup dried mint
- 20 drops rose essential oil, dropped on $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cellulose fiber fixative

Turn in the open seam and whip. For more fun, add lace, ribbons, and other fine fripperies.



Mulled Cider

Winter evenings before the fireplace are times to be treasured. Make yours special with warm, sweet cider.

For the cider, heat one quart apple cider and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup orange juice in a large saucepan. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ cup packed brown sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cloves, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground allspice, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground ginger, 1 two-inch cinnamon stick. Bring almost to boiling, stirring occasionally. Remove from heat, cover, and let steep for an hour. Remove cinnamon, reheat, and pour into mugs. Serve with fresh cinnamon stick stirrers.



Cinnamon-Spice Shortbread

1 cup sugar
2 cups butter
4 cups flour
2 teaspoons cinnamon

1 teaspoon allspice
1 teaspoon nutmeg
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon cloves
2 teaspoons cinnamon-sugar

Cream together sugar and butter. Combine flour and spices and add to the sugar mixture, 1 cup at a time. Lightly oil a 9x12" cake pan, and press dough evenly into pan. Cut dough into small squares or diamonds. Sprinkle with cinnamon sugar and bake in a preheated 300° oven for 50-55 minutes, or until lightly browned. When you take this out of the oven, cut the shortbread along the original marks and remove from the pan to cool.