

Finding thyme on the farm

From herb-infused fruit preserves and truffles to oils, teas and vinegars, growers across the state invite visitors to enliven spring menus.

ALBERT M. TODD was one of Michigan's earliest agricultural pioneers, with expansive farms in Kalamazoo and Van Buren Counties. By the early 1900s, the A.M. Todd Company was the largest producer of mint in the country; their world headquarters remains in Kalamazoo.

Still, St. Johns — 20 miles north of Lansing — is touted as Mint City, USA. The community is home to both the St. Johns Mint Festival in August and the Crosby Mint Farm (www.crosbymintfarm.com), which sells both peppermint and spearmint oils.

Incorporating locally-grown herbs into



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commercially produced edibles is becoming more prevalent throughout Michigan.

A full line of naturally-grown culinary herbs — potted, dried and fresh — is found at the 20-acre Wood's Edge Herb Farm (www.organicherbfarm.com) in Jeddo. Owners Dave and Connie Rutkofske encourage visitors to walk through the lush gardens on this seven-acre farm to pick their own herbs.

With more than 20 themed gardens and dozens of teas, workshops, classes and special events throughout the year — including an Herb Festival in July — The Grand Oak Herb Farm (www.grandoakherbfarm.com) in Bancroft, between Lansing and Flint, has grown to become one of the state's largest.

Tim and Kathy Young at Food For Thought (www.foodforthought.net) in Honor proudly produce a line of organic/fair trade herb-infused fruit preserves, including Blueberry Lavender and Strawberry Basil, on their five-acre, all-organic certified farm.

Just a bit north on M-22 in Empire, Grocer's Daughter (www.grocersdaughter.com) offers a four-piece Herb Collection.



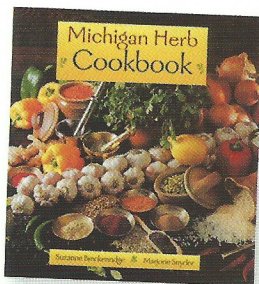
These decadent truffles are infused with rosemary, mint, lavender and thyme, grown on site by chocolatier Mimi Wheeler.

Traveling M-72 toward Traverse City warrants a stop at Light of Day Organics Tea Company — Michigan's only biodynamic family farm. Here, registered nurse, horticulturalist and tea master Angela Macke grows a variety of herbs for her specially-blended line of teas, including Hummingbird Nectar.

Donna Frawley is the inspiration behind Frawley's Fine Herbarium (www.frawleysfineherbarium.com) in Midland. Specializing in culinary herbs, visitors will find 35 herbal mixes, a dozen herbal vinegars and a handful of herbal teas. Resources including cookbooks and videos provide a wealth of information for novice and expert herbalists.

Another must read is "The Michigan Herb Cookbook" by Suzanne Breckenridge and Marjorie Snyder (University of Michigan Press, 2001), which is full of herbal history, growing tips and regional recipes specific to Michigan-grown herbs. To learn more, visit www.michiganherbs.com.

— Tai Alexander



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