

In the early 1990s, I volunteered to write the “Herb of the Month” column for the Boston/Cambridge/ Arlington Food Coops for about four years. I usually got around to writing each column a few hours before the deadline, often pounding away at the computer at the Boston Food Coop location, surrounded by a pile of herb books. (No Internet access, then.)

Regardless of the venue, the introductory paragraph of any piece of writing exemplifies skills applicable to any sort of writing, whether it is ad copy, PR, persuasive writing, etc. These samples also exemplify my ability to write well under time constraints. (!)

Here are the intro paragraphs of four columns:

Nutmeg

Psychedelic drugs in the kitchen cabinet? Well, not quite, but I did learn some interesting things about nutmeg in my reading. I thought nutmeg would be a nice herb or spice on which to focus this month, with its being a noteworthy ingredient in so many holiday fares, from pumpkin pie, to mulled cider – and eggnog – who can forget the eggnog? What is it about eggnog, anyway? Or, more pointedly, what is it about the nutmeg sprinkled on it?

Sage

“Why should a man die, when he can go to his garden for sage?” – Medieval saying

Longevity, protection, wisdom, wishes, immortality! And you thought you were just getting Thanksgiving dinner. Although now best known in this country as the key ingredient in turkey stuffing, sage has long been revered as an herb with incredible healing and magical powers. And, since at least the 16th century, sage has been a popular culinary herb, as well.

Saffron

But it is so expensive! So goes the typical lament of the would-be preparer of, perhaps, an Indian or Mediterranean rice dish. It is a common complaint; in fact, I hear it so often that I decided to find out just why saffron is so expensive. I found that there is ample justification for its high price and that those not including it in a recipe are missing out on its distinctive flavor as well as its wide array of healing qualities.

Avena Sativa

Avena Sativa – such a beautiful name. Use this plant and you will have a healthier heart, a calmer outlook on life and, if you add it to your bath, your skin will feel soft and nourished. Sound enticing? Well, providing you were not traumatized as a child by bowls of cold, lumpy porridge, benefiting from this herb is as easy as eating your oatmeal.