

CAN ASPIRIN PROTECT OUR PLANTS FROM PESTS AND DISEASES?

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The current issue of the Journal of the Australian Fuchsia Society included the following excerpt of an article titled "An Aspirin a Day" published in the Jan-Feb 2007 issue of the New Zealand Fuchsia Society Journal.

"It should be no surprise to learn how an important aspirin ingredient – salicylic acid – is being used as an earth friendly first aid to warding off plant diseases".

Martha McBurney, the master gardener in charge of the demonstration vegetable garden at the University of Rhode Island, tested aspirin water on some vegetables after reading about it in a gardening publication, and had some astonishing results. What caught her eye in the original article was that it said that aspirin is an activator of systemic acquired resistance, SAR. Plants under stress naturally produce salicylic acid, but not fast enough or in sufficient quantities to really help them out in time. So the bugs get them and diseases get them, and they show even more stress. Aspirin helps to boost the immune system.

The plants were sprayed every 3 weeks. By the end of the season the plants sprayed with Aspirin water looked like they were on steroids. Plants were huge and green with no insects. She also saw some disease problems that reverse themselves. Martha also sprayed aspirin water on the seeds directly sowed in the ground. Results were 100% germination compared to spotty germination in other trials.

Currently research may explain a modern old wives tale of adding aspirin to a vase of cut flowers to keep the blooms fresher longer. The explanation is the cutting of flowers is perceived by the plants as a wound, so it stimulates the production of the substance that not only aids the plant fight off bugs, but also hastens aging or wilting, just like cut flowers. Aspirin halts the formation of that substance, keeping the flowers looking younger and not wilting prematurely."

I found this article interesting, but had no idea of what measurements were used in *Aspirin water*. George and Monica Wraight were about to visit New Zealand so I enlisted their help. Super Sleuth Monica was successful in her quest and found out that the recipe was 1 aspirin in 10 litres of water and that we could find more information at www.plantea.com/plant-aspirin.htm.

I also found a wealth of information by simply typing in 'Martha McBurney' and doing a Google search. Of particular interest in some of the articles was that plants vary in their tolerance to applications of salicylic acid and aspirin and too much can harm some plants, so it is probably best to keep to the above recipe. Another article said that it is also important to crush the aspirin to a fine powder before mixing with water, do not just add a tablet, no reason was given. Do not use coated tablets or tablets with additives such as Disprin.

In America there are several other compounds being explored and researchers are finding results similar to those of salicylic acid. Induced systemic resistance [ISR} is an encouraging development in the realm of pest and disease control as these methods are safer and less harmful to the environment. Perhaps in the future the farmers will simply spray their crops with an aspirin instead of some of the nasties used now.