"Aloe Vera: The Healing Herb"

I am especially fond of the two potted Aloe plants sitting in my kitchen window. Their leaves have saved me from extreme pain and a possible infection that I would have experienced from the hot grease that splashed on my arm when I was searing a roast!

In seconds, I had broken off several Aloe leaves, split them open to expose the sticky gel inside the leaf, and placed them on the burned areas. The pain subsided quickly and the burn healed without infection or deep scarring. The gel contained inside the leaf will relieve the pain of burns, insect bites, abrasions, and rashes, including poison ivy! It is called the "burn plant" because of its ability to regenerate damaged tissues. The skin softening ingredient in aloe vera is often an ingredient in skin lotions, creams, salves and shampoos.

Aloe vera is a member of the Liliaceae (lily family) and has long been prized for its healing properties. Although it is a native of South Africa, it has naturalized throughout much of the Mediterranean as well as Mexico and the Rio Grande Valley where aloe vera plantations have been established.

The aloe plant is easy to grow under certain conditions. Make certain the plant container has adequate bottom drainage. And do not overwater this plant. It is a succulent, and requires minimal water. I give my indoor plants a thorough watering at two-week intervals. Even in Central Texas, the aloe plants are best grown as container plants and enjoy being inside close to a window for adequate light. They cannot survive freezing weather and dislike strong afternoon sun; thus having them inside year-round and handy for emergency medical aid is recommended.

The plants are attractive, sometimes sending up a spike of yellow flowers and always producing "pups" (small aloe plants) at the base. Aloe plants enjoy a bit of fertilizer now and then, and they prefer a sandy/loose soil mix. They will reward you with their attractive leaves and their healing abilities. There are also variegated varieties for a difference in textures.

SOURCES: Southern Herb Growing by Madalene Hill and Gwen Barclay; Legends & Lore of Texas Wildflowers by Elizabeth Silverthorne.

Have any questions about gardening in Central Texas? Contact ask bcmg@gmail.com