The Christmas Herb – Rosemary

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Rosemary is closely associated with the Christmas season. It is referred to in the Bible and in Shakespeare's play Hamlet, 'there's Rosemary, that's for remembrance'. Since it was often found growing by the sea, it was named 'dew of the sea' by the Greeks and Romans who first made use of it. Christians later associated it with the Virgin Mary, in part because of the 'mary' in its name. But also because Mary is said to have placed her cloak over the plant – instantly giving the light blue flowers their colour. Greeks used a sprig of rosemary braided into their hair to help them remember important facts while studying. Brides and grooms used rosemary in their wedding ceremonies to remember their parents' love for them and to remember their own fidelity. Today, rosemary topiaries are becoming popular in decorating homes for the Christmas season.

Rosemary is an evergreen herb with aromatic, pine needle shaped leaves and whorls of very small pale blue flowers. There are also white and pink blooms. It is best propagated by cuttings or layering. In the northern areas of the United States and in Canada, rosemary is considered a tender perennial, which means that is won't survive cold winters and should be potted up and brought indoors.

Rosemary has medicinal qualities ~ a cancer prevention plant, good in treatment of fatigue and neuralgia and is an astringent, antibacterial and anti-fungal herb. Cosmetic uses for rosemary include hair rinses, dandruff shampoo, soap and herbal baths.

This holiday season include a sprig of rosemary in your greeting card ~ an aromatic remembrance to that special person.