

Partnership



Agenda 21 Laghi

Organized by



Città di Angera

With the contribution of



Angera

VVL-N1

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Lago Maggiore (Verbano)

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Herbal Pathway: flavours and potions from San Quirico Hill

The project to enhance the historical, naturalistic and cultural heritage of the municipality of Angera continues.

The Herbal Pathway was born of a challenge: to let the plants and flowers that grow wild on the slopes of San Quirico Hill (altitude 410 m) overlooking Angera recount the town's history, art and traditions, in dialogue with the 50 sites that already belong to the Open-Air Museum. This itinerary helps visitors to discover one of the most fascinating parts of Lombardy, with an extraordinary variety of landscapes and areas of naturalistic interest.

The drystone walls, meadows, woods and fields make up an ideal habitat for an abundant, colourful, fragrant and varied flora attractive to bees and butterflies – as well as human senses – and inspire our curiosity of explore the ancient relationship between man and nature.

The itinerary leaves from Angera's Civic Archaeological Museum (Open-Air Museum Site 1), winds through the old town centre and follows a section of the San Quirico ring (path VVL-N1), and one of the *Vie Verdi dei Laghi* mapped by the *Agenda 21 Laghi*. The route ends at the vineyards below Via Val Castellana, but more energetic visitors may continue on the San Quirico ring, passing through the Ranco municipal area to reach the Church of San Quirico (Open-Air Museum Site 30), where a beautiful panoramic lake view is in store.

The pathway and relative public information material were co-funded by the Lombardy Regional Authority ("Angera Hub del Lago Maggiore" project) and produced with the collaboration of *Agenda 21 Laghi*.

Herbal Pathway

The path starts from the Civic Archaeological Museum, Open-Air Museum site 1, Via Marconi 2

Symbols legend

- Complete ring of San Quirico
- Herbal Pathway
- Provincial road
- Civic Archaeological Museum
- Tourist Infopoint

Herbal Pathway: flavours and potions from San Quirico Hill

What can plants tell about Angera's plurimillennial history and its Open-Air Museum? These are the sights, sounds and aromas experienced by visitors to San Quirico Hill, where the flora weaves together archaeology and botany, medicine and magic, art, cuisine and folk beliefs.

Taraxacum officinale (common dandelion)



I'm used in medicine for my purifying, diuretic properties, and as a food in soups, salads, risottos, desserts and fritters. My leaves, stem, roots, buds and flowers all have their uses. I have a special bond with the Sun, with petals that open at dawn and close at sunset; according to legend I was born from the dust raised by the Sun chariot. **Did you know that...** you can see a 13th century representation of the Sun chariot in the Sala di Giustizia of Angera Castle (Open Air Museum Site 27). Depictions of the chariots of the Sun and Moon, together with other Signs of the Zodiac, may be seen above the wall paintings in the Sala di Giustizia, which depict the victory of Ottone Visconti, archbishop of Milan, over Napo Torriani and his army in 1277. After this victory the Visconti became the lords of Milan – and subsequently counts of Angera. **Flowering:** May-August

Parietaria officinalis (wall pellitory)



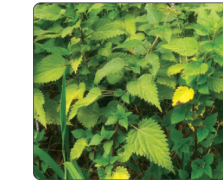
Drystone walls and house and farmhouse walls are my favourite places. For centuries my leaves have been used to clean the inside of wine flasks because of the microscopic hairs that cover them. **Did you know that** vines have been grown in the zone since Roman times? In the 17th century the Borromeo family planted vineyards in its Angera estates. Unfortunately infestations and infections led to vine cultivation being abandoned in the latter half of the 19th century. Recently grapevines have once more become a local crop, with producers in the Ronchi area in particular, where terraces have been created for this very purpose (Open-Air Museum Site 31): in 2005 Ronchi Varesini wines produced in Angera were awarded the Agriculture Ministry's I.G.T. (Indicazione Geografica Tipica) denomination. Grapes and wine are protagonists of the Settembre Angerese festival, which lasts the whole month of September and has been celebrated since 1497, the year in which Ludovico il Moro granted Angera the status of 'città' and two yearly fairs, one of which was tied to the grape harvest. **Flowering:** June-September

Humulus lupulus (hops)



Many Angerans have cooked my shoots (*levertis*), which are similar to asparagus. However, I am more famous as a flavouring for beer, to which I give its typical bitter taste. Beer, which is obtained from the fermentation of cereals, was known to the Celts, who in our area already added hops to it, as demonstrated by the hop pollen found in a 6th century BC glass from a Golasecca graveyard in Pombia (NO). The glass once held a red-brown beer with medium-high alcohol content. **Did you know that** according to Roman writer Pliny, the Celts from this area taught the Romans to use brewer's yeast to make bread: it was probably employed 2000 years ago to make the bread rolls found in Angera's Roman cemetery. These may now be seen in the Civic Archaeological Museum (Open-Air Museum Site 1) and you can even try eating one! On the basis of the results of archaeobotanical analyses conducted on the Angera rolls, chef Claudio Mei Tomasi and baker Claudio Giombelli have recreated the recipe and started making them again: look for them in the town's bakeries and restaurants! **Flowering:** July-September

Urtica dioica (stinging nettle)



My Latin name is derived from the Latin word *urere*, meaning to irritate, because my leaves are covered with hollow hairs that break at the slightest touch, injecting stinging substances such as formic acid. Pliny the Elder was aware of my remarkable properties: I'm a nourishing and diuretic plant. I've also proven my usefulness for cloth-making, having been employed since prehistoric times to make ropes, sheets, clothes and even paper. **Did you know that...** my tenderest leaves, picked in the spring and blanched or dried, are excellent to eat. I'm a protagonist in several Lombard dishes, including nettle omelette and risotto. I also make a great filling for ravioli! **Flowering:** May-August

Saponaria officinalis (common soapwort)



If you rub my leaves they produce a scented lather similar to soap, which is why they were traditionally used for washing hides and wool – so I am the forerunner of modern detergents. **Did you know that** until the 1960s doing the laundry was hard work, but an occasion for the women of Angera to meet together. The washing was done either directly in the lake or in ditches, the numerous streams that cross the area, in both summer and winter – when it might have been necessary to break ice to reach the water. The introduction of a piped water supply in the first half of the 20th century was followed by the building of a washhouse in Capronno, an old farming village on a hill outside Angera. The Capronno Washhouse (Open-Air Museum Site 46) was always crowded, teeming with life and animated by popular songs sung by the women who used it. **Flowering:** June-August

Artemisia vulgaris (common mugwort)



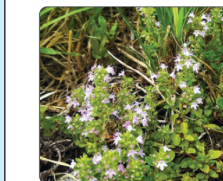
I'm a common wild plant and in medieval times was thought to have the power to drive out the devil because of the anti-epileptic virtues attributed to me. A Brianza legend binds me to St. Carlo Borromeo, and in fact many know me as *Sancarlin*: one day St. Carlo was reprimanded by a farmer for walking in his meadow before mowing, which would have resulted in a poor harvest. St. Carlo replied that the field was already impaired because it was infested with mugwort. The peasant, respecting his authority, granted him the right of passage – which the saint promised to remember. When the field was cut, the farmer was surprised to find just fresh grass that he could use as fodder, instead of mugwort! The miracle was attributed to the saint and from that day mugwort was called Sancarlin in his honour. **Did you know that** St. Carlo (1538-1584) was archbishop of Milan, an illustrious representative of the house of Borromeo. Originally from St. Miniato in Tuscany, the Borromeo family were forced to flee in the 1300s; they later managed to acquire prestigious positions in the Duchy of Milan (in part through loans given to the Viscontis, the dukes) and extend their influence to the Angera countryside. During the 15th century they obtained a fiefdom of most of the land along the two shores of Lake Maggiore; in 1449 Vitaliano I Borromeo helped the Milanese in the war against the Venetians and in exchange became owner of the Rocca di Angera, one of the best preserved medieval castles in Italy, still owned by the family and now open to the public. **Flowering:** July-September

Achillea millefolium (yarrow)



My Latin name refers to the hero Achilles, who learnt from his teacher, the centaur Chiron, to use me to staunch bloodflow from his wounds; I'm also sometimes called Soldier's Woundwort or Sanguinary. I'm one of the plants listed by Pliny to treat women's problems, and still used to treat sore nipples during breastfeeding. **Did you know that** many herbs have been used since antiquity to treat women's health problems. Those employed at the most crucial times, such as during childbirth and a newborn's first months of life, include sage, St. John's wort and basil, fennel, elderberry and chamomile: each was taken at a particular time during pregnancy or childbirth, or to help with breastfeeding. Women have always known the power of herbs, which is linked to particular female cults of which evidence survives here in Angera. More than two thousand years ago the cult of the *Matronae*, deities who protected mothers and children, was followed; they were also called *Fatae* because they predicted the fate – or destiny – of the unborn child. In the Christian era, St. Liberata was invoked in Angera, (with the prayer Saint Liberata, as pleasant was the entry, make also the departure). A small oratory in Angera was dedicated to the saint, protector of women giving birth, from which comes the painting showing her with two newborn babes; this was the basis for the work artist Andrea Ravo Mattoni painted in 2019 at the intersection of Via Piazzi and Via Rocca, near where the church was once located. On St. Liberata's day, January 18th, a lunch was held just for married Angeran women and a Mass dedicated to the saint was celebrated with the funds raised from door-to-door collections. **Flowering:** June-September

Thymus serpyllum (wild thyme)



Look for me near the drystone walls and the vineyards. I'm a small plant, only a few centimetres high, but you just need to rub my leaves to smell my powerful scent. The same aroma accompanied the Angeran peasants when they trampled me as they walked about in the meadows. After drying I keep my perfume for years and can be used to season delicious dishes. And bees especially love me, attracted by my small pale pink flowers. **Did you know that** Angera's particular microclimate and biodiversity make this small town on Lake Maggiore an ideal habitat for bees. There are a number of Angera honey producers. Taste chestnut honey with mature cheeses, especially goat or mixed cow & goat cheeses; acacia honey is sweeter: try it with mature pecorino cheese; when preparing a homemade dessert, try wildflower honey instead of sugar! **Flowering:** June-August

Hypericum perforatum (St John's wort)



My 5-petalled golden yellow flowers are easily recognizable; I've been renowned for my special properties since antiquity. In the Middle Ages I was known as a treatment for melancholia: actually I'm still used today as a remedy for depression. I am also called St. John's wort because, according to tradition, if harvested on St. John's Eve (June 23rd) I can unleash extraordinary powers! **Did you know that** throughout Europe the night before the 24th June is thought to be magical; in some areas they still prepare, following a special ritual, an infusion of St. John, with verbena, mugwort, mint, lavender and rosemary: applying this to your skin and giving it to loved ones brings love, health and happiness. **Flowering:** July-September

Campanula rapunculus (rampion bellflower or rapunzel)



My roots, gathered in winter, are a delicacy much appreciated for their delicate flavour and used in traditional cookery. They're so good that they are a real temptation – at least according to the fairytale '*Rapunzel*' by the Brothers Grimm. **Did you know that** the tale tells of a maiden named Rapunzel, locked up in a tower since birth where she is the prisoner of a sorceress. Her pregnant mother had constant cravings to eat rapunzel, but the plant only grew in the garden of the sorceress, to whom the father promised to give the child in exchange for the delicacy. He had to maintain his promise, but eventually the young woman managed to escape. **Flowering:** June-August

Verbena officinalis (common verbena)



The ancients considered me a *hierà botàne*, which means sacred plant in Greek. Pliny the Elder wrote that the Celts used me to predict the future, and the Romans for cleaning the gods' sacred altars. I was so important that the ancients used my name for all the plants employed in religious rites, including those for preparing love potions and charms. In Eclogue 8 by the Roman poet Virgil, the shepherd Alpheusibeu describes a rite that a desperate woman, assisted by her handmaid, carries out with verbena to bring about the return of her beloved Dafni. **Did you know that** in Angera there is a Contrada d'Amore, where local men used to propose to their girlfriends, with courtyards where couples would kiss; it was once called Via da 'Muu, now Via Merzagora (Open-Air Museum Site 42). It is near the lime trees where the fishermen used to dry their fishing nets (Open-Air Museum Site 16) and where women often did their laundry in the lake: a place where people could easily meet and fall in love. There are records until 1871 of the name Contrada d'Amore, which probably refers to the surname of a family that once owned the surrounding land and quarries; the name's origin was forgotten over time, but the reference to 'amore' (love) encouraged the development of a romantic tradition. At the start of the road there is a copy of the painting The Kiss by Hayez to mark the tradition. **Flowering:** June-September

Medicago sativa (alfalfa)



My name has nothing to do with medicine, but instead derives from Media in ancient Persia, which was my homeland. I arrived in Europe at the time of the Greco-Persian Wars around 2500 years ago, and the ancient Romans considered me an excellent fodder plant too. It is no coincidence that I'm also known as alfalfa, which comes from the Arabic *al-fāsfasa*, meaning forage. Today I am quite rare in Angera, but until a few decades ago you would have often seen me bordering fields; farmers cultivated me to feed the cattle that were traditionally raised in these hills. **Did you know that** cattle breeding in Angera is known since Roman times. Archaeological excavations conducted in Viale della Repubblica, near the former church of St. Vittore (Open-Air Museum Site 11) unearthed the remains of a bronze cauldron for boiling beef; the skeleton of a slaughtered cow was found not far away. These finds are exhibited in the Archaeological Museum (Open-Air Museum Site 1). Meat was often boiled in ancient recipes; this may well have been necessary, since above all old cattle (whose meat was tough) were slaughtered, after they had exhausted their potential for milk production and agricultural work. **Flowering:** July-August

PRATICAL ADVICE: ■ The path can be walked by everyone; here are a few tips: wear comfortable footwear and appropriate clothing. ■ Don't forget a bottle of water. ■ In summer, wear long trousers and long-sleeved shirts to avoid mosquito bites.
RECOMMENDATIONS: Watch, examine and smell, but please leave everything where you find it ... take a picture and post it on Facebook and Instagram! (#visitAngera #sentieroerbeAngera #angeramuseodiffuso #doyoulake #inlombardia #angeramab #agenda21laghi).