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# SOLF Presents: What does Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass have to do with “eastern wintergreen?” - My Southborough

*Beth Melo*

~2 minutes

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*Above: (image cropped from photo contributed by SOLF)*

*[This post is part of a special guest series focused on appreciating nature in Southborough, contributed by the [Southborough Open Land Foundation](#) (SOLF), a non-profit dedicated to preserving and stewarding natural resources here in town.]*

Gaultheria Procumbens or eastern wintergreen is also known as spicy-wintergreen, checkerberry and teaberry. Native Americans used this plant, that contains methyl salicylate, the active ingredient in aspirin for pain relief. It can be used as a tea, by boiling the leaves.

In the early 1900s a man named Charles Burke in Pittsburgh NY patented the flavor for chewing gum and it gained popularity. Eventually, the TL Clark Company bought the patent from Burke. In the 1960s they commissioned Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass to re-record their popular song “The Mexican Shuffle” and rename it “The Teaberry Shuffle” for a series of commercials featuring people popping a stick of Teaberry Gum into their mouths and breaking into dance to that snappy tune.



This low-growing plant with ever-green leaves has little white flowers in the summer which become green berries in the fall. In winter they turn bright red and provide food for many birds including bluebirds, cedar waxwings and robins. The berries and leaves are tasty and chewable.



In my research, I also found this old online image of Checkerberry syrup made at Douden’s Pharmacy in Guilford CT.

Debbie Costine, SOLF Trustee, artist and curious naturalist.

SOLF – Southborough Open Land Foundation

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