

Herb Garden Diary



The Purple Gate Farm Newsletter

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Our Herb Garden Diary Newsletter explores herbal knowledge, practical garden information with historical insight and current research to reveal the delight and enrichment of life by the growing and using of herbs. We explore the seasons in our south central Texas gardens and share our gardening experiences in this environment.

Balancing Act © 2003 Mary H. Mills. The Purple Gate Herb Farm

The “back to nature” movements developed in many time periods when people found themselves in civilizations that insulated or removed them from contact with the natural environment. The yearning for the essential, nurturing environment of our ancestors is alive in our increasingly technological age. It is obvious that we cannot return to the idyllic days of hunter gatherers and follow the sun to gather whatever we find. We have adapted survival techniques to the modern industrial and technological world, yet many of us still harbor dreams of a little place in the country. Civilized man throughout the ages found a way to “return to nature.” Ancient Greeks, Romans, as well as Kings, Popes, Shogun and Emperors all lived in cities or in palaces that insulated them from nature. And all who could afford it had villas in the countryside to refresh their spirits.

This look back to a time when people lived with the natural environment is not just whimsy; it is a yearning for a balance in life. Modern man tries to sooth the yearning for a natural environment with paintings of nature on his walls, house plants that adorn his interiors and even recordings of the natural sounds of waves beating a beach or nameless birds trilling. There is an enormous industry devoted to creating artificial scents that are advertised to be *natural*, i.e., like the real thing. Yet the yearning persists. Eric Hoffer, a longshoreman philosopher of the 1960's told us that a substitute can never satisfy a real need. We overdose in the substitute and never feel satisfied. We need the real thing.

How do we get the real thing? Open the door and walk outside. Look around for a small piece of ground and plant an herb garden. You can even plant a garden in containers on a patio or porch in the city. Herbs take very little space and reward you with the authentic sights and scents of nature. It is true-Herbs Make Scents!

Our environment should provide us with food, shelter, health as well as a stimulation to act. We have created interior environments that provide us with many needs but to have a balanced life we should explore what nature has to offer. All the benefits of nature are available to all of us right outside our doors. Herb gardens are especially rewarding as they require little space and most herbs are survivors that have adapted to a variety of environments much like we humans have. Growing herbs encourages one

to think of many creative ways to use them in cooking, landscaping, scented gifts and so many others. The plants in the environment have always supplied nutrition for energy and health to humans as well as the stimulation for action needed for a balanced life.

WHO, The World Health Organization, defines health in the following way:

“Health is more than simply the absence of illness. It is the active state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being.”

While our ancestors gathered what nature provided, while they planted and harvested, they were stimulating a healthy life. As they worked in the forests, mountains, plains and beside the seas of their various environments, the environment surrounding them made them wonder and ponder the mysteries of the universe. Their physical bodies benefitted through exercise of work and nourishment of the foods and the herbs they were growing. The spiritual and emotional life of our ancestors was enhanced by the sight of sunsets, trees, by the observation of other life forms on earth and the changes in seasons. Healthy, active individuals responded to the environment with creativity in many ways: poetry, prose, music, architecture and painting. They were inspired by the interaction with nature. Modern life demands we spend most of our time indoors in artificial environments. Growing a garden, especially an herb garden, provides natural experiences that enhance and balance all of the active states of well being in our lives. Many herbs are wonderful to see, smell, touch and taste. They are not substitutes. They are the real thing!

The best is yet to come, when your herb gardens are in full fragrance, and as Emerson says, you can sit,

"Pondering shadows, colors, clouds
Grass-buds, and caterpillar shrouds
Boughs on which the wild bees settle,
Tints that spot the violet's petal."

Emerson's Wood-Notes.