

Herb Garden Diary



The Purple Gate Farm Newsletter

March 2010

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.

WOW....and wonderful!

The Green Corn Project

submitted by Mary Mills



Some of us have heard our parents or grandparents tell of “Victory Gardens” that supplemented food shortages during World War II. We have lost so much of the knowledge our parents and grandparents learned in providing food for their families. We live isolated from the sources of our food. Could we help ourselves

today?

The Green Corn Project brings information about becoming a little more self sufficient in our digital age with the support of enthusiastic and energetic volunteers. Mitch Mills, on the Board of Directors of The Green Corn Project, was the Austin Herb Society’s February speaker. He presented us with the goals and methods of this organization. They create and teach how to create low cost and low input gardens using traditional garden tools and volunteer muscle and know-how. In a few hours these volunteers can begin the process of turning unproductive backyard soils into rich organic garden soils that will support the production of year - round fresh food for a family. To date they have created 130 gardens and counting in Austin.

A little background on “ Ecology in Action”.

There are a number of formal organic gardening and farming systems that prescribe specific techniques for soil fertility management.

You probably have seen the catch words in gardening articles and books. Here are definitions of some of those terms.

In 1978 the staff of the Organic Gardening magazine published The Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening. This guide to the principles and practices of organic gardening has been my constant reference work since that time. There have been many other magazines and books that explore these principles of soil building, conservation, pest management and heirloom variety preservation in the intervening years. Knowledge and techniques of earth friendly farming were present in the agricultural practices of ancient Chinese, Greek, Mayan and Early Modern periods of Europe. These techniques evolved over thousands of years and were rediscovered, studied and copied by organic garden practitioners.

French Intensive “double dig” gardening consists of raised beds worked to a depth of 24 inches with added compost. This treatment promotes fantastic root growth and subsequent high yields in the gardens. Although turning the soil is labor intensive, once these gardens are established, they require very little additional work on the soil. Deep watering to reach the 2 foot depth of the beds is mandatory to encourage the plant roots to penetrate into the deep loosened soil.

Biointensive gardening is a method focusing on maximum yields from the minimum area of land while improving the soil at the same time.

Other methods have developed with similar goals of high yield gardens in small spaces. They are variously called **biodynamic gardening, permaculture, square foot gardening** and sometimes referred to simply as “**the method**”. Some other techniques are included in these methods.

Inter-cropping - planting quick maturing crops within or between rows of a slower growing crop to maximize the garden’s yield.

Planting a new, different crop in the same space as a crop that is about to mature, giving the new crop a head start while the original crop matures.

Green manure crops planted and plowed under before maturing to add organic material to the soil.

Organic practices may take extended periods of time to develop chemical free and earth friendly gardens and the Green Corn Project is there to get the process started and work with the gardeners to develop their confidence and abilities to have sustainable gardens and fresh produce.

This organizations represents the best Austin has to offer. The Green Corn Project translates catch words like **Bio-intensive, organic,** and **sustainable** into meaningful, food producing gardens. The website tells their on-going story and is a must to add to your list of favorite websites. www.greencornproject.org.

Bud and I prepared the soil in our new passive solar greenhouse by "double digging" and enriching with compost. When the weather outside the greenhouse was 6 degrees our plants were in a comfortable 53 degrees ground temperature.



One of Bud's Best Shots



Snow at the Purple Gate Herb Farm Feb-2010
Submitted by Leonard (Bud) Mills

An interesting and honest account of one early pioneer doctor's use of herbal medicine:

In about 1893 a female physician, on her way to treat a child that is having difficulty breathing is reviewing what she must do:

``If the child is strangling when it inhales, as if it were breathing through a sponge, then give it spongia; but if it is strangling when it breathes out, give it aconite."

When I reached the baby I listened, but could not tell which way it was strangling. However, I happened to have both medicines with me, so I called for two glasses and mixed the two remedies, each in its own glass.

I gave them both to the mother, and told her to use them alternately, every fifteen minutes, until the baby was better. The baby got well; but whether its recovery was due to the spongia or to the aconite I never knew.

THE STORY OF A PIONEER

BY ANNA HOWARD SHAW, D.D., M.D.

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### **Tip**

**In addition to being an important culinary herb, Garlic will help in the garden.**

Plant one or two garlic cloves among rose bushes and they will remain aphid-free. An infusion of garlic crushed into water and sprayed over affected plants will ward off aphids.

Schofield, Bernard. A miscellany of Garden Wisdom. Running Book Press Book Publishers. Philadelphia, PA. 1990.

## Never Again In February!

Boy OH Boy. We agreed to host 51 people in February. What were we thinking? What were they thinking? Who visits a garden in the winter?

We have had two years of drought and a very early cold spell that has weakened or killed so many plants. Even in the woods there is a lot of tree fall.

It seemed like everything was against us that week before the bus with 52 people arrived. Rain saturated the ground and our septic backed up filling the air around it with unpleasant aromas. Not great for an herb farm where we say "Herbs make scents".

The rain soaked ground also made the ground around the house and driveway very soft. Joshua, our grandson, came by the night before our big event and when he left, it was raining (again) and his truck got stuck. We finally got him out-- I was ready to throw in the towel. We called the tour organizer and suggested he cancel.....he said no.....we were stuck.

The day came when we had to face up that 52 people were coming and it wasn't raining but it was in the 30 degree range. These people were SENIORS. Oh boy, we sweated it. We called the tour guide and told him he could not bring his huge bus up the driveway,



he would have to unload his passengers at the road and the passengers would have to walk up the driveway. (freezing). On the positive side, there was not strong wind or rain. All of the seniors were able to walk without help.



The people from Austin, Texas were cold although we enclosed the garden room with tarps, making it seem like a tent.



They seemed very willing to be here. (amazing) and enjoyed the 10 minute video of our summer gardens and wildlife around The Purple Gate Herb Farm.



Some hardy souls toured the passive solar greenhouse with Bud



When our guests left, they smiled, thanked us, said we had a great place and many said they would like to come back in the spring. We were sure relieved. Maybe more business will result.

"All is well that end's well."

**However.....**

We will never again allow anyone to have a tour in winter.....the Texas weather is too unpredictable for an outdoor event.

On the subject of Texas weather the next day was sunny, dry and 60 degrees. And a week later-



Snow in South Central Texas-Feb2010