

# HERB and ROSE GARDENS

By Ellen Watson

Herbs, too, she knew, and well of them could speak,  
That in her garden sipped the silv'ry dew.  
—SHENSTONE'S "Schoolmistress."

THE good old days, nearly two centuries old now, when this ancient dame rested from her mental labors and the taming of unruly pupils by taking healthful exercise in her garden, are in a way coming back to us. Fresh-air work is the order of the day, and almost every one finds an hour or so at least in the twenty-four to devote to the culture of something in the flowering line. And this old "Goody" of the eighteenth century sets us a most charming example.

She providently planted many birch-trees near her thatched cottage, from which to cut the "baleful twigs," her sceptre and sign of awful power. And what a quaint picture she makes sitting in the summer sunlight in her sheltered garden, erect in her elbow-chair, sceptre in hand! We can hardly hope to follow her today in all the varied industries her rustic garb implies: her snow-white cap and apron of harebell blue are made of linen for which she herself has grown the blue-eyed flax; her russet gown is of homespun from the wool of sheep she herself has tended.

And what a sweet occupation her garden affords her, between the busy hours in school and the long evenings spent in carding, spinning, and weaving! Here she raised all the aromatic herbs we must note in our list for

the planting of a new garden, which is to vie with hers in sweetness: "the tufted basil," "pun-provoking thyme," with sweet marjoram, balm, and rosemary; above all, and in the sunniest corner, the blue lavender, to perfume the family linen-chest:

And lavender, whose spikes of azure bloom  
Shall be, ere-while, in arid bundles bound,  
To lurk amidst the labors of her loom,  
And crown her kerchiefs clean with mickle rare perfume.

We may plant our herbs in odd corners of a garden already laid out, and we may make a new herb-garden, large or small, as space offers. But if we are so fortunate as to choose a new spot for the permanent growing of herbs, let us select a plot of ground some eighty feet long by fifteen feet wide, some corner of land that is likely to be left undisturbed, lying not wholly in the sun nor yet too much in the shade.

It is well to plough deep and dress heavily with well-rotted manure, as some of our beds will need no replanting for many years, and this first

preparatory work should be thorough. Through the centre lay out a path for the entire length and fully three feet wide, as vigorous root-stocks are sure to encroach on this space, from both sides, as the herbs spread with each year's growth.

A simple trellis of cedar posts, ten feet in height and eight feet above the soil, may be built to shut in this space and afford support for the vines which will form an ef-



"PRETTY MAIDS ALL IN A ROW."

fective background as well as a shelter for our flowers and herbs. These posts should be joined together by more slender branches, the bark and rough knots being retained if a rustic effect is desired. As a matter of fact



A BUNCH OF FENNEL IN A JAR.

the design of the trellis matters little, as after the second year the vines entirely cover it.

To cover the square arch and the four posts that mark the end of the garden where one enters, plant six crimson ramblers; trained and trimmed with care, they will rapidly form a green archway, and the mass of crimson bloom in early June can hardly be excelled in sweetness and beauty. The yellow Rambler is also a good bloomer.

On the right we may alternate the many varieties of sweetbrier roses with the wild grape-vine or the Isabella grape. These are all rapid growers, especially the wild brier; they fill the air with the rarest fragrance when in bloom, while their foliage too is perfumed, and of lasting beauty. Beyond these plant the Japanese honeysuckle for the sake of its pure white flower and honey-sweet breath; a *Clematis paniculata* will make a beautiful show of white bloom here against the dark green of hop-vine leaves. The hop

blossom, too, forms a graceful contrast in paler, yellower green.

The *Akebia quinata* has a chocolate-purple flower and curious, deep-cut leaf that could only come from Japan, and when this vine coils round the tall new shoots of a sweetbrier, and the shining leaves of the *wichuriana* rose strive to follow suit in its heavenward course, the tangle formed is a very pleasing one.

On the left we may continue to cover our sheltering trellis with the *Rosa multiflora*: the snowlike masses of tiny flowers are followed by full sprays of brilliant red berries which are gay against the real snow of winter. Here bees will swarm and butterflies hover, while the rarer humming-birds dart in and out—there is no lack of pleasant companionship in your true herb-garden,—and here comes in the pussy to rub and sniff and purr and roll over and over—when once the heat has begun its good work.

Now, in direct defiance of our dame with the birchen rod, for she allowed no gaudy bloom in her sombre, purely utilitarian and medicinal herb-bed, we will boldly plant on our right a long row of hollyhocks, single and double, pink, yellow, white, and purple-black. If we can get plants a year old, so much the better. If not, we must plant the seed in a long drill some two inches deep—these will require thinning,—and wait a year for the bloom.

On the left let us put in every variety of foxglove—these also bloom the second year;—white, pink, and yellow are the main colors of the graceful spotted bells German children call “thimbles.” Now we shall have established two lines of good form and good color just inside our vine-covered trellis, decorative in design and ready to supply us with endless seeds for neighborly exchange.

So much for our perennial background which may be left well to itself after the first year, save for the annual trimming and—weeding! the never-ending weeding which we have always with us!

For the first year, if over-impatient for the colors that make for cheerfulness, we may put in rows of nasturtiums, quick to “arrive,” and of late years most beautiful in their variety of color.

And now for the long-delayed herb seeds,

sweet-smelling even in their sealed packets, a promise of joy to come!

We have left now on either side of our long central path two beds of finely prepared soil, some three feet in width. Let us divide these, for future convenience in sowing, weeding, and future cutting of stalks and flowers, into beds some six feet in length, making our side paths two feet wide.

In all these beds the drills should be made about two inches deep and eighteen inches apart. The soil should be well pressed down over the seed, to keep in the moisture; this may be done with any flat board about a foot square with a handle on the upper side. The drills are conveniently drawn by an old wooden hay-rake with the teeth extracted, leaving gaps of eighteen inches. For this saves much stooping when the first busy day comes in late April or early May, when the soil is warm, and we want to plant everything before the sun sets! And a longish pad of old carpeting to lay under one's knees when planting or weeding saves another set of bones which are bound to come to much wear and tear before the autumn frosts kill the weeds.

Let us plant on the right the perennials that may be left undisturbed year after year, beginning with sage—*Salvia officinalis*—"the wholesome saulage" Spenser calls it. This is surely one of the many herbs "whose names express their natures." *Salvia* is from the Latin *salvo*, I heal, and its reputation as a valuable medicinal herb has remained unshaken through the centuries. The Arabs wrote long ago of its healing power, and the line "cur morietur homo cui salvia crescit in horto" is perhaps the origin of the rather crude English couplet:

He that would live for aye  
Must eat sage in May.

Evelyn boldly asserts: "The assiduous use of it is said to render Men immortal!" and adds that the Japanese and Chinese merchants gave triple the quantity of their own choicest teas in exchange for the dried leaves of sage! A cup of sage tea, made like other tea, with a somewhat longer brewing, is to-day a refreshing cure for feverish colds. Its main excuse for being, however, is its delightful flavor

in stuffing for poultry; cream cheeses are marbled with its gray-green leaves, and it adds a poetic glamour even to roast pork. But anything prettier than a silvery bed of sage, shining in the dew of a summer morning, it would be hard to find! It should be cut for drying, as should all other herbs, just before it begins to bloom. Very often a third or fourth crop may be cut; spread the tender branches on newspaper in some sunny room, and turn daily until perfectly dry; then rub the leaves off from the tough stalks—which are of no service,—and preserve them in air-tight tin boxes or glass jars.

Next may come a bed of mint, redolent of cooling drinks, of spring lamb, and other warm-weather delights. Mints require shade and much watering. They grow wild by many a shallow stream, of pleasant memory.



SWEET MARJORAM AND FENNEL.

We'll make the mints remembered spices serve  
us,  
For Autumn as for Spring.

Our common mint is *mentha viridis*, or spearmint. The peppermint leaves, full of pun-

gent flavor, always produce that curious chill which the round white candies they are used in making leave on the tongue.

Let us plant next the lemon-balm—*Citronen melisse*—whose shining, bright green leaf, fully as sweet as the lemon verbena, has charm enough to allow of a whole bed of it. That and the French marjolaine, or marjoram, with its purple-pink blossoms, makes a pleasing border for a bouquet of mignonne and sweet peas, so we may place them side by side.

The sweet fennel—*Anethum fœniculum*—proverbially symbolical of flattery both in English and Italian, makes a pretty addition to a bouquet, with its plumelike leaf and bright yellow umbelliferous flower. The seeds, either green or ripened, are pleasant to the taste, and in old times were used by the poor "to relieve the pangs of hunger on fasting days." After two hours of hot weeding it will still be found to have a most refreshing and staying power, stalk, leaf, or seed. This is true of lovage—*Levisticum officinale*—as well. In fact, the leaves and seeds of almost all the herbs are delightful to browse on, and help to revive our "little Mary," as Barrie has taught us to name that portion of our anatomy noted for its receptive powers!

It may be said of all herbs that they have a certain old-time flavor, but this is peculiarly true of lovage. The root makes a delicious confection when sliced thin and candied, and was as popular as fennel seed, coriander, and caraway for "meeting-house" purposes in the good old days when hymns were "deaconed out" in an atmosphere redolent with such simple restoratives. A word of warning should be given concerning these last umbel-bearing plants: anise (*Pimpinella anisum*), coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*), caraway (*Carum carui*), and dill (*Anethum graveolens*), which gives a pleasant flavor to pickles,—all ripen far more seed than can possibly be used unless one is supplying a confectioner with the materials for "comfits" or providing a distillery with the necessities of pharmacy. Unless the seeds are cut before ripening they rapidly spread beyond all control.

Beyond our lovage we may start our bed of bergamot; the oval leaf with its fine, penetrating, "exhilarating" odor is suggestive of the days when powdered beaux with dainty lace frills and jabots carried enamelled snuff-boxes in the pockets of their embroidered

satin vests. "My mother," says Mrs. Ewing's Phœbe, "always says there's nothing like red bergamot to take to church. She says it's a deal more refreshing than old-man, and not so common." This is a near relative to the red-balm, or bee-balm, on which we may count for a brilliant bit of color as well as for an aromatic perfume.

"Old-man" is also called "lad's-love," which would seem to indicate a certain gay irresponsibility often met with in the popular naming of common flowers. The real name, southernwood—*Artemisia abrotanum*,—belongs properly to a rather shrubby, tall-growing herb, with deep-cut silver-gray leaves of very penetrating odor and strong medicinal properties. It is found in almost all old gardens. Indeed, if one has friendly "old-fashioned" neighbors, the planting of many of our beds may be simplified by a method of amicable exchange which is never robbery. The latest novelty from a "city" catalogue, the newest variety of sweetbrier rose, is often gladly welcomed in return for roots of lovage, bergamot, lad's-love, and the humble catnip,—for some corner we must find for this weed which is at once pussy's pleasure and panacea.

The bitterness of the world, it would seem, has been concentrated in the gray-leaved wormwood—*Artemisia absinthium*. This is a handsome foliage plant, a tall grower, with heads of yellow blossoms in panicles; leaf and bud are alike "silky-hoary," and like the *Umbelliferae* it does its own sowing! In its least innocent form, distilled into the French absinthe, it recalls little white tin tables crowded together on the sunny sidewalks of the boulevards in Paris. Here tiny thimblefuls of this strong poison are measured out and poured into tumblers filled with water, at the social "green hour," "*l'heure verte*" of late afternoon, when a gay crowd assemble to chat and read their papers.

No one interested in the culinary art will omit to order the roots of the true tarragon, whose small, linear-shaped leaf flavors vinegar and salads so pleasantly. This cannot be raised from seed, and the roots require transplanting after three years' growth.

Nor could a French *chef* be content without a plentiful supply of the fine-leaved thyme—*Thymus vulgaris*—of a very pungent taste, much used in soups, sauces, and salads. It forms a part of every bouquet of "*finer herbes*," a bunch of sweets sold in every

French market, which comprises parsley, mustard-seedlings, chevril, tarragon (*estragon*), broad-leaved sorrel, pepper-grass, and many another subtle scent and savor. The difficulty of finding these herbs, fresh or dried, in our markets is the source of much hair-tearing on the part of imported and ambitious chefs,—and to tear one's hair is a bad habit in a cook!

This pink-flowered thyme, which keeps fresh and green throughout our winter, has many poetic associations as well as practical ones. It is the "wild thyme" known to *Oberon* and *Puck*, and dear to those who are so fortunate as to have had the leisure to lie on the sunny banks covered with its bee-haunted, honey-sweet bloom in the south of France. It grows in perfection not far in reality from that other bank of Monte Carlo, but far removed from it in ideality!

Now in direct defiance of our practical "gossip" who will no doubt have approved thus far of our choice of herbs, barring, perhaps, the gay bee-balm, I venture to propose here, right across the "resting" end of our garden, a bed of brilliant poppies, Shirley, Japanese, and all the charming pinks, whites, yellows, and scarlets of the varied annuals. In the background let us put in a line of the tall perennial "orientals" of the scarlet and black livery of Mephisto himself, and then all the yellow, orange, and white Iceland varieties, about the earliest to bloom among all perennials. Unlike their frailer sisters, these hardy Icelanders retain their crumpled petals for weeks when kept in water, especially if picked in the bud. The large white opium poppy—*Papaver somniferum*—belongs by good rights in an herb-bed, and is a very beautiful addition to any garden. The poppies, too, do their own sowing, and their lively colors are most cheering after a morning spent in toilsome w— But I have mentioned that before!

A great log of Norway spruce lies across the path here in the garden I have in mind,

shaded after six years by a tangled growth of hop-vines, sweetbrier—*Rosa setigera*,—and other sweet-smellers. This is a good place to rest, to look down the path and plan out our beds of annuals, in which some of our peren-



MINT GROWING IN THE HERB GARDEN.

nials must find room after all. We are bound to have a greater difficulty with our blue-spiked lavender than did our English dame, resting in her elbow-chair! It is really a perennial, but like the rosemary—*Rosmarinus officinalis*—requires a much more careful protection through the winter than our others; a light covering of pine needles and boughs of Norway spruce is quite enough for those already mentioned, whereas the lavender should be covered much deeper, and with great care. Nothing can be more tantalizing to your true lover of lavender, living in New England, than the pictures of whole fields of the blue and gray herb as it is raised for the market in old England. Even the vigorous growth in the wide borders of some English gardens are enough to fill one with envy. Here we must raise the seedlings in some sheltered sunny room, and transplant them only when the soil is really warmed through in May; and we must give them the sunniest exposure and the greatest care.

To turn from the linen-shelves to the pantry again, the two herbs next in importance to the sage are surely sweet-marjoram—*Origanum majorana*,—and summer savory—*Satureia hortensis*,—and we must plant an

ample supply with neighborly intent. The former stands first among all herbs in concentrated sweetness, as you will soon perceive when crushing a single dried leaf. The latter has such a pretty purple-pink blossom that it is quite worth while to leave two or three drills uncut, when harvest-time comes. And in the autumn leaf and flower turn to dark shades of purple.

Now come several herbs that are interesting to grow for one season, perhaps, but are hardly of permanent value. Saffron is one of these, and its name is a synonym of the shade of yellow dye its sap is used in making. Its thistlelike bloom must be cut before the winged seeds have a chance to sail away into all the other beds.

Blue borage, blue as any Swiss gentian in color, has also a hoary-silver leaf, a pretty finish to float on red claret "cup" or on the amber of sherry cup.

Sweet basil carries in its white labiate flower a pleasant suggestion of the "Isles of Greece" where it is called the flower of welcome, and also of Keats and his Isabella.

Rosemary with its silvery-gray leaf and dull blue flower is a shrublike growth, used for flower borders in some cloistered gardens in Italy, cut as we cut box here. But, like the lavender, with us it is hard to protect through a severe winter.

The different camomiles, the pennyroyal, the flaxes blue and red, the gay marigolds whose orange petals are pretty to scatter in soup or in finger-bowls, rue with its deep-cut silver-green leaf and yellow flower, the hysop of the Bible with its purple spike—all these are charming herbs to grow and to know.

The sweet woodruff which German poems celebrate under the name of "Waldmeister" ("master of the forest"), and is used always to perfect their "Bowl" or punch, has thus far refused to grow in my garden. I always hope some happy chance will bring me a plant that will bear transplanting, or seeds that will germinate here.

Of course the first planning of such a garden, the choice of locality, etc., is best done in the autumn; then the land chosen may be cleared if necessary; the dressing left in piles during the winter may be ploughed in as soon as the frost is out of the ground, and made ready for the fine seeds in late April or early May, not forgetting Lowell's saying that it is often "uncommonly like Mayn't," in which case May 15 is a good date for planting.

Gardeners who are impatient for the first bloom of snowdrops, squills, crocuses, and other very early bulbs could plant the beds cleared of annuals in late autumn, just before the winter covering of dried leaves or pine needles is spread, and enjoy them through the month of April, if the sun shines on their work.

The celandines, pimpernels, yarrows, spicy bay-trees, and other treasures dear to readers of poetry and so often introduced into books on herbs, suggest a "poet's garden," a sort of "university extension" of an herb-garden, as a pleasing sequel. But that is another story! Even of herbs there are some three hundred varieties!

Thus ends in brief of herbs the chief.  
To get more skill, read whom you will!

—*Old song at close of Tusser's "List of Herbs."*

