

# Gardening

## A garden of herbs

By Pat Leuchtman  
leisure Columnist

The Shakers, a religious sect that flourished in the 1800's, were famous for the clean uncluttered lines of their architecture and furniture, for the high quality of their workmanship and for the many inventions which they shared with the world. Since theirs was an agricultural society many of their inventions had to do with farm equipment and paraphernalia and one of their innovations was to pack garden seeds in small paper packages and to sell them that way. Previously seeds had been sold in bulk.

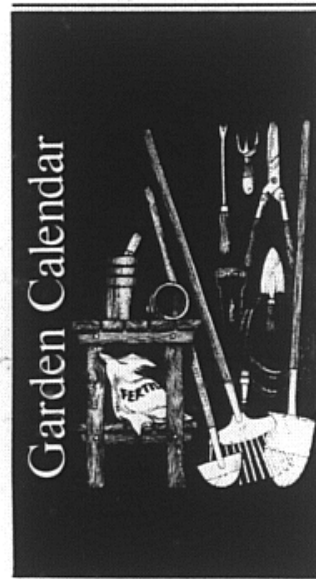
Hancock Shaker Village, located just outside Pittsfield, put out its first seed catalog in 1813. Although

herbs were to become a very important part of the Shaker economy, that first catalog offered only four varieties of herb seeds: peppergrass, parsley, summer savory and sage. But because the Shakers placed so much emphasis on good health and preventive care, it was only natural that the herb gardens expanded until they were able to meet their own need for tonics and herbal remedies, and were able to supply doctors, pharmacies and hospitals in the world as well.

By the time the Civil War broke out, Hancock Shaker Village had over two acres of sage under cultivation and was averaging a yearly gross sale of \$7,000 for herbs.

Though sage constituted the bulk of their sales, they grew many other herbs including boneset, sarsaparilla, camomile, comfrey, burdock, catnip, wormwood, fleabane, wintergreen, coriander, balm of Gilead, and mandrake root. According to an old formula book kept by the Hancock Shakers these and other herbs were good for "poor appetite, shortness of breath, pains in all parts of the anatomy, boils, smallpox, palpitations, stoppage of water, palsy, diabetes, stones in the bladder, warts and corns, pains of fatality, and wounds, not minor, burns and scalds."

The Shaker herb gardens are just a remnant of what they were a hundred years ago, but along with the rest of Hancock Village they are open to the public until the end of October. I visited during the summer and the two herbalists, Vickie Harrison and Esther Zuraw,



The following information is provided by the Franklin County Extension Service:

### Now is the time to:

- Have your soil tested and apply lime if necessary to gardens and lawn. Remember lime takes time to work in the soil.
- Pot up spring flowering bulbs for forcing inside.
- There is still time to sow a cover crop of rye grass to be tilled under in the spring.

### Note:

- Don't save seeds from hybrids in your garden.
- Winter squash can be stored for three to four months.
- Browning of inner evergreens is natural.

### PLANT FALL COLOR



- HARDY HUMS
- BURNING BUSH
- BLUEBERRY BUSHES

#### NOTE:

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showed me around and answered my questions.

Vickie pointed out a long row of calendula — pot marigold. She said the petals of this golden flowers are still made up into a burn salve that is used in the village. The petals are collected and cooked in melted lard. The resulting mixture is cooled and used whenever anyone has a burn. The blacksmith swears by it.

Vickie also gave me a little lesson in comparative botany and for the first time I was shown the difference between lemon verbena and lemon balm. In spite of the similarity of their names, the plants are quite different. "Lemon balm is hardy," she said, "and survives New England winters without any trouble. Its broadly oval leaves make a pleasant tasting tea. On the other hand, lemon verbena had long slender leaves of a darker green. It is very tender and must be taken indoors for the winter. However, it doesn't make a good houseplant because it is prone to attract too many pests. The best thing is to winter it over as you would a geranium. Keep it in the cellar. It can get quite cold as long as the temperature stays above freezing. Water it occasionally and in the spring cut the plant back, and put it back in the garden. It should thrive."

Vickie reminded me that the

Shakers sold their herbs in many forms. They sold dried leaves, they sold the herbs passed into blocks, and herbs extracts. One visitor to a Shaker village was a penniless peddler named Gale Borden. He was fascinated by the vacuum pan used in making herb extracts. He eventually modified that apparatus and invented a process to evaporate milk and so set himself on the road to riches.

If you are interested in learning more about Shaker herbs and the Shaker herb business you might enjoy reading Amy Bess Miller's book, *Shaker Herbs — A History and Compendium*. The delicate illustrations are reproductions of work done by Sister Cora Helena Sarle of Canturbury, Village, New Hampshire, in 1886-87.

Hancock Shaker Village also gives herb workshops through the year, which will conclude Oct. 31 with the exception of special tours for groups.

Herb workshops this month, all on making wreaths, are: Oct. 15 and 25 from 9:30 a.m. until noon, and Oct. 29 from 2 to 4:30 p.m. The fee for each is \$8 with a class limit of 10. For all village events, write for their Calendar. Send to: Hancock Shaker Village, P.O. Box 898, Pittsfield, Mass.