

HOME & GARDEN



AP Laserphoto

Still going strong

Ken Butterfield, a retired junk dealer from Hiram, Maine, keeps in shape by working his garden with a gasoline powered cultivator. Both Butterfield and his cultivator are over 70-years-old. And both are still going strong.

Cut your losses

Vacations can wreck gardens

By DICK L. BOYCE
Extension Service

Vacations can raise havoc with the garden. The degree is dependent upon the time spent away. No matter how well you prepare before you leave, your plants generally look slightly abandoned when you return. The weeds jump, the bugs eat and if the woodchucks don't mow down the beans, the neighbor's dog has chewed the zucchini.

Maybe I'm exaggerating a little, but an untended garden can look pretty bad. It makes you realize how much it needs that daily grooming. It also brings home the need to make your garden as maintenance-free as possible and to adapt it to your needs. If you are going to be away from home for extended periods during the growing season, you can't grow plants that need daily attention.

We grow both vegetable and ornamental plants that are native to all parts of the earth. Some that we plant are quite self-sufficient. Others have to be coaxed. They either aren't at home in our growing conditions or can't compete with our native weeds. Stay away from the plants that demand your attention if you like to spend time at the beach or touring the countryside.

Whether you grow flowers or vegetables, the soil will determine their well-being during vacation time. The medium in which you grow anything is probably the most important factor in the plants health. Of course, there are other factors, too, but how you prepare that soil is crucial for good root growth. If the resulting plant is strong and healthy, it will resist drought, insects and disease. This doesn't mean it can't sustain some damage, but that it will usually survive for a reasonable time.

The type and variety of plant you select also figures in vacation-neglect. It's a mistake to plant potatoes unless you'll be there to battle the Colorado potato beetle. The striped cucumber beetle; an invasion of Japanese beetles on your sweet corn or your beans being attacked by the Mexican bean beetle, can all be king-size vacation problems. If you know you aren't going to be around to fight these invaders, you may want to eliminate or cut back on these vegetables.

Those gardeners with a sandy soil may have prepared their soil well, but still face a vacation drought problem. How do you keep those vegetables going during dry spells? The addition of organic matter to the soil will help, but it takes several

years to add enough for plants to survive a prolonged drought. So try a mulch to help retain moisture. Everything from woodchips to old rugs will help to prevent moisture evaporation.

Mulches will also help with the weed population. The plants we call weeds seems to grow much faster when you are away. In fact, they grow so fast, it's sometimes hard to find the vegetables or flowers when you return. So you can use any number of different materials to retain moisture in the soil and also keep the weed nuisance down. You have to be more selective for ornamentals than for vegetables, but you can usually find a suitable material.

This year, I have used three different mulches on our vegetable garden. The black plastic works fine for the vine crops, such as melons, squash, cucumbers and pumpkins. It is especially well adapted for those plants that like a warm soil. I have used woodchips between the rows of sweet corn and it has done a good job of keeping the weeds down. An old rug pad cut in strips has been perfect for the rows between the tomatoes. If I had enough old rugs, I'd use them all through the garden.

To make the peony and daffodil bed vacation-proof, I chose woodchips. I was able to obtain two truckloads this year and find them attractive and useful for ornamentals. The chips are large enough so they break down slowly and don't tie up the nitrogen in the soil like sawdust. I have also used pine needles and find them both inexpensive and neat looking. If you don't have time to hunt up a good mulch, use paper or cardboard as temporary vacation aid.

As a last resort, you can always ask someone to "look after" your garden. Unless you are very fortunate, this arrangement seldom works out to the satisfaction of all concerned. The one who is left in charge feels badly if the tomatoes suddenly acquire late blight or he steps on your prize delphinium. If there are plants to water, he is apt to overwater and rot your favorite begonia. It's seldom you can find someone to step into your garden shoes.

So try to vacation-proof your garden as well as you can before you leave. Then, take your losses as they come. If you do have to ask someone to sub for you, take time to write down full instructions on how and why. Most of all, enjoy your time away from home. With a little disaster-proofing, your garden should be in good shape when you return.

Rosemary is a powerful, beautiful herb

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
Recorder Columnist

"Rosemary, lily, lilac tree,
Kind in the dooryards bloom all three,
But the kindest of them is rosemary."

Phyllis McGinley, the award winning poet, goes on to explain in the "Ballad of Rosemary" that on their flight to Egypt the Virgin Mother washed the Christ Child's clothes in a river and hung them to dry on a humble rosemary bush. From then on, the bush has borne small blue flowers in memory of the Virgin's cloak and

"All shall be aromatic
Said Mary, for I bless
Leaf, stem and flower
That from this hour
Shall smell of holiness."

BETWEEN THE ROWS

That is one version of how the rosemary came to have flowers and smell so sweet.

Rosemary is obviously an ancient plant. It has been used in incense, in magic spells, as a physic and very practically, in the kitchen. It was used long ago during funeral services when each mourner would be given a sprig to carry in procession and then to toss on the coffin, but oddly enough it was also an important decoration for weddings. It is symbolic of wisdom, love and loyalty. Ben Johnson says it was the custom for bridesmaids to present the groom with a sprig of rosemary bound with ribbons on his wedding day.

The herbalist Culpepper reminds us that it was strewn on the floor of the courts in olden days, partly because it was believed to help a weak memory, but also to counteract the pestilential air surrounding the poor prisoners.

Rosemary is an herb rich in tradition and association and it makes a lovely addition to the herb garden or to the perennial border where its muted green needles and modest blue flowers will introduce a quiet note.

It is a tender perennial and you must be prepared to dig it up every fall and move it

into the greenhouse or house to a spot where it can have plenty of sun. It is also important to mist the plant often so that it will not dry out. It will not grow much indoors during the winter, but when it is set out again in the spring as the days lengthen and become warmer, it will spread and expand in the sun.

I bought my rosemary plant from the Kitchen Garden in Charlemon, but they are available from seed houses and mail order nurseries like Wayside Gardens and White Flower Farm. If you have a friend with a plant, it is possible to start your own by taking some cuttings. Clip a 4-inch sprig off the top of the plant with a sharp scissors, making a slanted cut to provide as much open surface area as possible. Strip off the bottom 2 inches of leaves, then dip in hormone rooting powder if you wish, and then stick in the rooting medium, either clean, damp sand or a mixture of perlite and peat moss. You might want to put a small plastic bag over the cuttings to keep the air moist. Just be sure not to let the sides of the bag touch the cuttings, and do not place it in strong, direct sun. In six weeks or so the cut-

ting should have rooted and be ready for transplanting to a pot or to the garden.

In the garden rosemary likes a neutral or slightly limey, well-drained soil and it should be planted in the full sun and where there is some protection from the wind.

Rosemary is wonderful in the kitchen. Sprinkle it inside a roasting chicken for a subtle change from the ordinary chicken. Insert the needle-like leaves into slits made in a pork roast or make slits in a leg of lamb for slices of a garlic clove and then rub the meat with rosemary. So simple and yet so delicious and memorable — you'll pardon the expression.

If you should be one of the rare few you don't like to use rosemary in your cooking, you can make a "tea" out of it, steeping the leaves in boiling water for 10 or 15 minutes, and then using that cooled infusion as a beautifying hair rinse for dark hair.

Any way you want to use it, in your bridal bouquet, in a magic spell, in the kitchen or in your cosmetic box, rosemary is a powerful, useful and beautiful herb.

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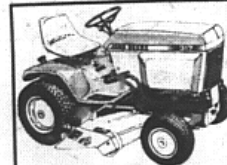
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