

HOME & GARDEN

Rosy's Herbs: delightful, practical, fun

By LYNN STOWE TOMB
Recorder Columnist

GUILFORD, Vt. — Hidden away in the midst of southern Vermont's most picturesque country — on a dirt road near a covered bridge — is a garden to delight herb lovers, home gardeners, chefs, and students of herbal medicine.

Rosy's Herb Garden, on Green River Road in Guilford, offers over 50 varieties of perennial and annual plants. Carol Levin and Richard Gobbie, proprietors, specialize in plants that are winter hardy in the northern climate.

The garden is well worth the half-hour trip from Greenfield, if only to view the unusual foliage and summer-long array of flowers. It would be impossible, however, to walk away without an armful of hard-to-find seedlings or bunches of leaves for drying.

The labeled herbs are planted in individual beds with rock borders. The paths and beds are abundantly mulched with soft, old hay. The gardens are completely organic, from the use of soap for insect control in the greenhouse, to manure "tea" and fish emulsion for fertilizer.

Rosy's Herbs is open to the public on Sunday from noon to 6 p.m., so Ms. Levin and Gobbie spend much of their weekday time delivering produce to gourmet restaurants and markets in Brattleboro and selling at the farmer's market and co-op. Two unusual herbs they grow for local demand are coriander, used in Laotian and other Far Eastern dishes, and shallots, a tiny onion used in French cooking.

Rosy's Herbs has been developing for years, but this is only the second year open to the public. Ms. Levin ran the Chelsea House Folklore Center in Brattleboro for the previous eight years. "The herb garden is my next venture in life," said Ms. Levin. "In time we hope to expand to include a wholesale business with a possible mail-order catalog."

In addition to an abundance of common herbs like parsley, basil, dill, chives, thyme and four varieties of mint, the garden holds many unusual culinary and medicinal herbs.



Carol Levin of Guilford, Vt. watches her cat discover a catnip bed and works on plants.



Recorder Photos/Chuck Blake

"Many culinary herbs seems to fall into two categories," said Ms. Levin, "either lemon or anise (licorice) flavored." Rosy's has sorrel, lemon geranium, lemon balm, and lemon thyme. These are usually used in salads or for flavoring seafoods. In the anise group are: chervil, tarragon, fennel and sweet cicely.

Some "old-time herbs used for teas or external medicines are sold as seedlings, cuttings or cut bunches of leaves and flowers.

Comfrey, a plant growing 4 feet tall with blue flowers and large, fuzzy

leaves, is used as a tea or a hot compress for injuries. It's often called "bone-knit." Its abundant foliage makes it useful as fodder for sheep and rabbits.

Herbs have been used historically as insect repellents. Ms. Levin and Gobbie grow tansy, pennyroyal — used in flea collars — and rue, a moth repellent for glassets. Other medicinal herbs available at Rosy's are costmary, catnip and purple yarrow.

Beebalm, or bergamont, which grows wild in New England, was used by colonial settlers to make Oswego

tea. Its taste is similar to black tea, when they refused to buy during the tax dispute.

Rosy's has a small patch of rosa rugosa, which is harvested for rose hips. Prized for its high vitamin C content, the fruit is used in teas.

Another experiment that is growing well is hops, a perennial similar to a grape vine that produces one of the prime ingredients in making beer.

There are two different varieties of camomile. The most common uses only the tiny bud-like flower. This herb has a number of medicinal and

soothing qualities and is even used as a hair lightener.

Herehound is the flavoring in cough drops mixed into a boiled-down sugar candy. It's reputed to have medicinal qualities. Feverfew is an herb drunk in teas for reducing high temperatures.

Ms. Levin and Gobbie are very free with their knowledge of herbs and have books available for reference as well as handout postcards with recipes. The following uses the lemon-flavored sorrel:

2 cups soup stock
4 tablespoons butter
1/2 cup onion, chopped
1 cup milk
1 tablespoon dill or chervil

Heat butter and cook onions. Add sorrel, potatoes, soup stock and cook until potatoes are tender. Pour mixture into blender and puree. Return to saucepan and stir in milk and dill or chervil. Reheat to serve hot or refrigerate to serve cold. Serves 4.

For directions to Rosy's, or to make an appointment, call (802) 254-4670.

Success—of sorts—is always accessible in the garden

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
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My neighbor and I were out looking at the garden that was soaking up the first sun in days. "Well," he asked, "will it grow?" I nodded yes and he questioned again. "All right, but will it produce?" "Of course," I said, "of course." He called me the perpetual optimist.

BETWEEN THE ROWS

Actually I was able to tell him that my lettuce was doing wonderfully and that I even used some thinnings on my lunchtime sandwich the day before. On the other hand, I had to admit that my tomatoes were looking a little sad, my cucumbers have germinated poorly, and I've not only had to replant some of my beans but my zucchini, too. Three times!

Still there have been other successes this spring beside the lettuce. I've been

creating a new perennial flower border, and the new plants I've put in have been doing very well. The lack of sun has made them slow to bloom, but the rain and overcast days have made it very easy for them to settle into their new home. Two bunches of Siberian irises that I moved in the fall of 1980 didn't do well last year, but this week they burst into bloom — dozens of deep purple blossoms with veining as delicate as that on a butterfly's wing.

Because of rain, graduations and weekend trips, yesterday was the first Saturday that I was really able to spend all day in the garden. I enjoyed it a lot because everytime I got a new tool, or water for the transplants or fertilizer, I walked past the Raspberry Sundae peony that is in full and flamboyant flower, inhaled its fragrance, paused beside the irises to admire the neat little flowers and the elongated buds tightly wrapped in gossamer, and inspected the swollen buds of the Canterbury rose that are almost ready to unfold. Yes, the weeds may be growing lushly among the stunted beans, but there are some successes already.

Thoreau's approach to life in general articulates my approach to the garden: "... if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours."

Perhaps one of the reasons I like gardening so much is because success is always within my reach and often in my hand. Not always, I would never claim that. Like everyone else, I crave suc-

cess, and in the garden it can be achieved.

Let me rephrase that. I can meet with enough success in the garden. The beans may fall, but if the lettuce and peas thrive and are bountifully harvested, I've been successful enough to plan the next garden with anticipation and optimism. A little success — some success — is all one needs to continue happily.

Success does not mean succeeding at everything. The memory of a dozen failures during the season falls away at the contemplation of a single success, whether it is a long-lasting bumper crop of brussel sprouts, the ephemeral and delicate ripeness of the raspberries or the sweet-scented bloom covering an old-fashioned rose bush.

It's not always easy to define what causes success. It helps, of course, to know a few basic facts about soil and the cultural requirements of individual plants. Potatoes are not apt to thrive if they are planted in heavily limed soil, no matter how many other clever techniques are used. These facts can be learned from books, or from neighbors

who marvel at our techniques or lack thereof, and most emphatically from our own mistakes.

But after learning that the cabbage family is a heavy feeder or that tomatoes love heat, there are a myriad of wonderful ways to achieve healthy plants and an abundant harvest.

Gardens are rife with individuality, sometimes bordering on the eccentric, but no matter how different, two gardens can be equally successful — in the food and flowers produced and in the pleasure and satisfaction gained by the gardener.

Magazines are filled with dozens of ways of growing tomatoes or roses or making compost. And the amazing thing is they all work! You can use whatever method you want, depending on your own circumstances, microclimate, inclinations or aesthetic preference, and you can succeed. You can even try your own variations and invent your own successful technique.

Because success is so accessible in the garden, it's not difficult to take

risks. Try planting a little earlier, or a little later. Try planting something new, something temperamental, something exotic. There is always the chance you will succeed again. This success will be all the sweeter because it was a risk. And if you meet with failure, there might be time to try again, as there is this spring after all the cold rain, and there is always next year.

So much gardening is done in the head. Lists are drawn up and gardens are plotted on graph paper as an aid to achieving that vision that is formed over drowsy cups of tea by the wood stove in winter. This past winter I spent some time rereading Thoreau's *Walden* (as well as poring over the seed catalogs) and Thoreau's approach to life in general articulates my approach to the garden. He said, "... if one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours."

So I walk confidently down the garden path, a clear vision in my mind. How can success elude me?