

Building a Teaching Herb Garden  
at Mountain Dell Farm  
by Lisa Wujnovich

I was notified in January of 2000, that I received a SARE grant to build a double dug teaching herb garden at Mountain Dell Farm. I envisioned an herb garden that would be a learning tool, a gathering place, a meditative place, an inspirational place, a healing place, and finally, a source for a range of medicinal remedies.

I was determined to make a sustainable perennial herb garden that could thrive in the demands of a working farm; an herb garden with healthy plants in rich easy to work soil, protected from invading weeds, set up for drip irrigation, accommodating numerous people at once. Jim Huff of Skoloff Farms helped make the transition from weeds to garden by rototilling the 22 by 44 foot space. Thanks to the SARE grant, I hired double digging enthusiasts to work with me. A soil test confirmed my intuition that the soil was healthy, but we added compost, some peat moss I'd had hanging around for years, and a sprinkle of bone meal, just in case the bottom layers needed a little boost. Being rocky Delaware County, sometimes we literally took out as many stones, as we turned over soil. We even had to abandon double digging two beds, when we realized they sat on top of either an old foundation, or a rock pile.

I figured we could finish the digging by the end of the spring, but the rainy growing season put us on an elongated schedule with many perspective work days canceled. Still, the beds were getting dug and even some herbs planted, although it made me nervous to plant herbs in beds with no walkways or mulch. The thought of overgrown double dug perennial beds seemed too sad, so I postponed planting herbs until later, to prioritize my energy into finishing double digging and building the pathways first.

Rock pathways seemed the logical choice for all those big rocks. The many buckets of little rocks filled the holes in our long driveway. I worried that grass and weeds would come up between the rocks. Then I talked with Richard Tredigo of North Slope Farms, and we came up with the solution of suppressing weeds by laying down old row covers. (Yea, the first real recyclable use for them in eleven years!) On top of this we added at least six inches of sand.

The garden was to be fed by the center, the empty space, a lawn of Roman Chamomile (*Anthemis nobilis*), similar to German chamomile (*matricaria chamomilla*) with much of the same calming influence; although it is a shorter plant, more reminiscent of Wild Pineapple Weed (*Matricaria matricarioides*). Interlaced with the Chamomile would be Wild Thyme (*Thymus pulegioides*), said to attract fairies, and a component in every garden I've ever planted. Although Thyme is stimulating, it is also used for insomnia, for its balancing effect; relaxes you when needed, wakes you when needed. During the Middle Ages it was slept on for melancholy. Perfect center plants. I saw myself and others, lying down, doing yoga, sitting, meditating, watching, drawing, learning, and listening with plants in this center.

The only problem with the center lawn was that it housed a large Wormwood, (*Artemesia absinthia*). I had trepidation about moving it, since it grew over the remains of a spotted fawn that I had hit, and buried summers before. When I asked the

plant if it would mind being moved, I received a clear message that it was "the protector" of the garden, so I decided I could be flexible, I'd work around it.

I designed the gardens by systems, with the beds surrounding the central lawn. The inner rectangular beds correspond to the five elements of Chinese medicine, the chakra system of Eastern healing systems, and the endocrine system of Western medicine. The outer rectangle consists of beds of herbs addressing particular health problems in the categories of Skin, Women, Rest and Relaxation, Colds and Viruses, Blood Cleansers, Liver and Gall Bladder, Digestion, Cancer, Inflammatory Conditions, and Spiritual Cleansers.

The scientific part of me likes evidence, results, physical changes, and is the basis of a half of the of this teaching herb garden. The other part of me recognizes the mystery, and uniqueness that surrounds individual healing. The garden uses both these elements. The modality of the outer beds addresses physical ailments, the modality of the inner beds addresses spirit. The two rings show how to approach a problem that overlap and connect. If you take care of your spirit, overall health ensues, the physical thrives. At the same time, there is a feed back mechanism where you can start from from a physical ailment, and through the process of healing, deepen spiritually.

In the inner bed, plants pertaining to the five Chinese elements of fire, earth, metal, water, and wood are planted in two C-shaped end gardens. Included is Grecian Foxglove (*Digitalis lanata*) for fire element, which corresponds to the heart. This herb is used commercially for heart disease, and I would not recommend that it be used to make remedies, as it is very dangerous. I do suggest sitting with the plant for help with issues of the heart. Also in the bed will be Alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*), as chlorophyll is one of the best known remedies for sepsis or systematic infections that may injure the heart from cavitations. Since the fire element rules the lymphatic system, I will include the lymphatic Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*). Wild Bergamot (*monarda fistula*), which is an earth element herb known for allowing sweetness (a characteristic of the earth element) is planted in the earth section. Bronze Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare dulce*), another sweet herb, will move from another garden in the spring. Gum plant (*Grindelia robusta*) is a new one for me in the metal (lung and large intestines) section, much touted as an expectorant. Marshmallow root (*Malva sylvestris*) is planted in the water section, as it is cooling and soothing, and works particularly well on the urinary tract which is part of the water element. Also to be transplanted, will be Gravel Root or Joe Pye Weed (*Eupatorium purpureum*), known for breaking up kidney stones. Its doctrine of signatures is the gravel found on its roots, where it is known for breaking down rock. The wood section which corresponds to the liver, will include the common tonics Dandelion (*taraxacum officinalis*) and Yellow Dock (*Rumex crispus*), both classic cholagogues which increase the flow of bile helping to cleanse a much taxed organ in our modern society.

The long side bed flanking the center lawn on the east is the Chakra Garden, on the west is the Endocrine Garden. These two beds mirror each other in a sense. In Eastern healing systems, such as in yoga, chakras are the body's power or energy sources. They are also filters through which you interpret life. In Western science, the Endocrine system of glands with specific functions, corresponds to the individual

chakras. These glands work in conjunction with the nervous system in complex communication that affects mind/body/spirit.

The beds planted in the garden have been an unfolding process. I've tried to come up with a plan all mapped out like those you find in gardening magazines, nice little cloud shaped blobs with the names of the plants printed inside, but they keep changing. I'm trying to listen to the plants, and the land; to plant what best suits the spot. I'm also applying my knowledge, which is an ongoing, changing process. This garden is an excuse for me to learn herbalism, create herbalism, teach herbalism, speak herbalism with others. Herbalism is after all, an oral tradition. The more actively I am engaged in the learning process, the more I have to offer as a teacher. It took me years to realize, that I didn't have to know everything about herbs to practice as an herbalist, or teach herbalism. Half the challenge and fun of herbalism, is the detective work of solving the problem.

Some beds came together effortlessly, like the Colds and Flu Bed. Leif Winters arrived in the late spring with large beautiful potted plants that he and Barbara Winters had dug up from their beds. Echinacea Pallida was one, and I included it, because what virus garden wouldn't include echinacea? I also wanted to compare Echinacea Pallida's harvest, with its fat tap root, to Echinacea Angustifolia which I have grown for years. They also brought a Horehound (Marrubium vulgare) plant, which I was personally unfamiliar with, but soon got to know, when I used it for my daughter's sore throat. Mullein (Verbascum thapsus) had to be included, flowers for ear aches and leaves for bronchitis. I moved a volunteer plant from another bed next to a Greek Mullein (Verbascum olympicum) from Beth Strenkoski who started it from seed. It's supposedly easier to harvest flowers from than the traditional wild variety. Strangely enough, a Johnny Jump-Up (viola tricolor), and a Violet (viola odorata), both appeared in the bed, both high in Vitamin C, and most dramatically noted as breast herbs, with a long history of the leaves used as poultices to dissolve tumors. Their history with colds was made vivid to me by Sherrie Mickel's story of freezing violet flowers in the spring, in ice cube trays, and then thawing them in teas for her daughter's winter colds

Crisis hit in the summer, in the form of four skinny legged fowl. Our free range farm/pet chickens loved the straw mulch, that surrounded the herbs already planted. They strewed the pathways with it, and started in on our double dug soil, completely covering the side walk with dirt. I tried to catch up in the herb garden, but between the challenges of a rainy farm season, the children's schedules, the added work of the chickens' demolition, my husband Mark Dunau campaigning for Senate off the farm, the progress seemed to standstill, and even back track. I knew the chickens needed to be fenced in--a prospect I wasn't happy about, and was yet another project to add to the MUST DO NOW, BUT WHEN? LIST.

It was fortifying to think back on the people who had participated in the garden. at an earlier afternoon work party. There was a delightful mix and range of people--farmers, retired people, homesteaders, herbalists, people ranging ranging from a six month old to seventy something. Several people who attended had physical disabilities. Duties divided easily amongst everybody. Children and adults worked along side each other. Some watched the baby, while the new mother worked unencumbered. People took turns double digging. Others started in on the paths.

Snatches of herbalism were spoken. Buckets of sand were filled and dumped, buckets of rocks filled and dumped. People organized the pot luck meal, and we all came in just as a dramatic storm hit. We watched it from the inside of our converted barn and exchanged potted herbs.

The time eventually came, when we fenced in the chickens. I removed the straw mulch, it was too seedy and messy for my taste, anyway. I replaced it with wood chips, *procured from the town*, generously loaded and delivered by a neighbor. I was ready to focus on planting more plants, except for this tedious, rather loud voice that kept saying THE GARDEN NEEDS ANOTHER STONE PATHWAY AROUND IT. THE GARDEN NEEDS A BOUNDARY. THE GARDEN NEEDS TO BE PROTECTED FROM THE OUTSIDE AS WELL AS THE INSIDE. We had used all the stones from the digging, but a neighbor who lived at the bottom of a blue stone quarry offered all the blue stone we could transport. That was what I asked for, and got from my husband for my birthday.

In the next couple of months, the pathways were laid little by little, in and around family farm life. The center lawn was spreading, and I rewarded myself by lying down in it every time I finished working.

From Perennial Pleasures in Vermont, I ordered organically grown roots from plants I'd wanted to order in the spring. I was heartened to hear that they plant all their perennials in the Fall, when they have the time, and have wonderful results in the spring. My time to plant them turned out to be a chilly dusk with my daughter. They were so easy to pop in the well worked beds. I surveyed them and wondered what they would be like. Was the Turkey Rhubarb (*Rheum palmatum*) in the Cancer bed--really so different than my regular Rhubarb (*Rheum officinale*) ?

The garden is sleeping under a thin sheet of snow. As I meditate on the chakra beds, in my visions, they fill easily. Queen Anne's Lace (*Daucus carota*), for the root chakra, Meadow Clary Sage (*Salvia pretensis*) for the Second Chakra, Black Eyed Susan (*Rudabeckia hirta*) still feels right for the solar plexus, Roses (*Rosacea*) for the heart, cornflower blue Hare Bells (*Campanula rapunculoides*) for the throat. What but Wild Indigo, (*Baptisia tinctoria*), a potentially toxic herb for the sixth? A plant called Crown of Thorns appears for the seventh, which I research and have yet to find, but I will know it when I do.

I visualize and plan activities in the garden. I see it as a giant game board of sorts, a springboard, a physicality of the relationships herbs have with us and other herbs. Motherwort (*Leonorus cardiaca*) is in the women's garden, but it could easily fit in the Fire Element because it is so helpful in regulating tachycardia, or what about being in the endocrine garden? I see myself and others walking the pathways between these relationship, dancing it, drawing it, creating an endless string of opportunities. I see each bed as a starting point that moves us to the wild plants and then as a place to return to assess what's been learned and experienced. Like all gardens, this garden has taken on a life of its own, comprised of the unique community of living organisms and spirits growing there, both plants and humans. It's exciting to be one of this community. I can't wait to play and learn with others in it.

More about the herb garden and herb stories in the next issue of OFFF .

Anti-INFLAMMATORIES

SPIRITUAL CLEANSERS

SKIN

arnica

Witch hazel

california? Poppy

costmary <sup>Sage</sup> Sacred basil rosemary angelica dantura

METAL

Grindelia  
Pleurisy Root  
Leonard Flower

WATER

Solomon Seal  
marshmallow  
Joe Pye

WOOD

Butcher's Broom  
Dandelion  
Yellow Dock

Heal All  
yarrow  
celandine?  
St. Johns wort

CANCER

Turkey Rhubarb

clover

Burdock

sheeps sorrel

violet

CHAKRA

Common Thorns?

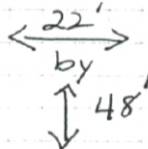
Baptisia

Harebells

roses

lemon Bergamot

Healing Herb Garden



Roman chamomille  
Wild thyme lawn

ENDOCRINE

Petasites

yarrow

plantain

Borage

Blue Flag

lemon balm

lavender

poke

licorice

False Unicorn

WOMEN'S

Southernwood

Lady's Mantle

rue

motherwort

False Unicorn

nettles

GUT DYSBIOSIS

Chinese agrimony

Catnip

sweet Annie

meadow sweet

Spilanthes

Pk Eyelet  
Susan

meadow clary

thuja

Wid ca. root



REST & RELAXATION

st. Johns

Skullcap

Lemon Balm

Hops

Valerian

LIVER GALLBLADDER

Milk Seed

thistle

Celandine

Ho Sho Wu? Blue Flag?

Blessed Thistle

Bronze

Fennel

Sweet Cicely

EARTH

Monarda

Fistula

sweet grass

Henthorn?

Alfalfa

Grecian Foxglove

FIRE

Celandula

COLDS & FLU

Echinacea

Lung wort

hyssop

violet

Johnny Jumpup

honeysuckle

ALTERATIVES

bilberry garlic

codonopsis

ash walgandic

Wild Ginger

Bone Set Good Kinstenny

cheavers

mullen

Creek mullein

Lisa Wynovitch