

Near the Water - I have been asked many times by newcomers and visitors, "What can you possibly grow in that sandy soil?" My stock answer has been, "You would be surprised." The next question is, "How do you do it?" Again my stock answer is: peat moss, fertilizer and water. Then they ask whether you can raise everything and anything you want. Here I must hedge a bit and say no, not everything. In my two years of experience of growing a vegetable garden on the beach I have found that the following do not yield well: cabbage, melons, squash, and for cabbage, both Dortha and I have eaten enough cole slaw since moving to North Carolina to last us a lifetime.

The best yielding vegetables, starting early, are onions, which are superb (I put the sets out in September in order to have them in very early spring), radishes, lettuce (Bibb is our favorite). Then later on come the beans, potatoes, and beets, followed by cucumbers, corn, tomatoes, peppers, and sweet potatoes.

I believe it unnecessary to use top soil, either in your garden or lawn. Use peat moss mixed with fertilizer (8-8-8). The soil in this area appears to be acid; therefore, lime should be used as a neutralizer. When you plant, keep the surface flat. If you hill or mound the surface, it will not retain the moisture to the roots. My last suggestion, which I feel is very important, is the construction of a wind break on the north and east side of your garden spot as a protection against the salt spray and the spring wind.

Everyone may not agree with me on this matter, but my two years experience has proven to me that you can have a marvelous vegetable garden on the beach.

HARRY HALL

From our roving editor - MARY DOLL (On the train from Bordighera toward Florence) Rocchetta, in Italian, means little fortress. The tiny village of Rocchetta, a few kilometers from Bordighera, is exactly that - a little fortress that has stood on the side of a mountain, beside a rushing stream, for probably at least 400 years.... Yesterday a delightful young man who works at the hotel we chose in Bordighera, drove us up to see this incredible place (Massimo Lepare and his wife, Rosalba, are both employed at the Hotel Spendid, speak fine English, having worked before for the Hilton chain, and we became good friends in the few days we spent at beautiful Bordighera by the sea.) Massimo had a few hours off yesterday and suggested we might enjoy the short journey to Rocchetta in his Fiat; he knew of Rocchetta through the chef at our hotel who seems to live there.

We drove out of Bordighera into the hills above. Very shortly we came around a curve and there it was:-Rocchetta, a miniature town, cuddled into the side of one of the hills. We parked in a sort of piazza that overlooked the clear stream, and we got out and stared across the arching foot bridge at the ancient walled village.

Walking across the bridge, we came upon, first, a man walking behind an enormous ox who, true to his reputation, was carrying a heavy burden as he waddled along the cobblestone paths. And paths they are, no more than six feet wide. Automobiles are left behind in the piazza, although the paths have names as if they were streets, and the doors have numbers (except the doors on the lowest levels which we discovered led to beds of hay for the various animals.) Massimo said he'd been there one day when he saw a donkey waiting patiently in front of one of these doors for his master to come along and open it.

Here and there are chicken coops and rabbit hutches, and all over are cats. Occasionally you come to an open place, a tiny square, and there are two or three hole-in-the-wall shops where old ladies in black were chattering together. And it is indeed old folk who abound, for Rocchetta is not attracting the Italian young; they apparently grow up and away, and the old die, and this village shrinks each year, with fewer people to tend the grape vines and sow seed in the land. What a pity, too, because, before long, Italians, as well as Americans, will see through the plastic world of technology and want to return to the soil -- and meanwhile, the soil will have been sadly neglected -- the world can't eat technology.

Well, there are still some good folk working very hard in Rocchetta. As we stood on the hillside we watched a man walking down toward us, carrying a burlap bag of greens for his rabbits, followed by a very pregnant (expecting twins) goat, who, in her condition, felt the urge to stop at every bit of bush along the way for a bite... Later, after we had peeked into the very bare but cleanly swept church, lighted candles at its altar, we came upon two women, one carrying on her head a huge basket of black olives (they are completely self-sufficient in Rocchetta; even make their own olive oil), and the other bearing long poles with which they had knocked the olives off the trees... We walked out of Rocchetta feeling quite moved, quite warmed; everyone had smiled and spoken to us. We stopped in the local bar for a local "grappa", (a sort of brandy) passing a local donkey who was tied outside while his owner sat within sipping red wine with his cronies. Then we slipped away from the past to the present again, full of pleasant memories of the "Little Fortress".