

## Leading The Simple Life

### Mintzes Enjoy Self-Sufficiency, Living Close To Nature

BY SUSAN USHER

Nestled in the woods off Big Neck Road in Ash, Henry Mintz lives quietly with Frances, his wife, and David, the younger of their two sons.

Other than the calls of wild birds, few sounds penetrate the woodland canopy. Formosa-type azaleas grow freely, their low-flung branches taking root and spreading wherever they touch the soil.

"It's quiet here," said Mintz. "The only thing I can't do anything about is the planes flying overhead."

The Mintzes are homesteaders, taking pleasure and pride in a level of self-sufficiency rarely seen today even in rural areas of Brunswick County.

"If we can't do it, it doesn't get done," said Mintz. "I can get by. I'm not afraid to tackle most anything."

As best they can, the three live in harmony with nature and strive for a healthy balance in their own lives.

Not one of them is afraid of a good day's work; they find joy in a task well done.

Mintz gardens using the basic approaches espoused in Rodale's *Organic Gardening* magazine, trying to avoid the use of pesticides, herbicides or other chemicals while building the soils naturally.

"You get better quality and the insects aren't as bad," said Mintz, crumbling a fistful of loamy soil, enriched with compost and organic fertilizers. The land holds moisture more easily and is slow to erode.

Crop rotation increases natural resistance to disease and insects.

"I don't repeat the same crop in the same place," said Mintz. "I wait five years. I plant things that don't take the same nutrients from the soil. 'If you had to eat beans every day you'd get tired of it too,'" he said by

way of analogy.

What garden produce the Mintzes don't eat or put up in their four freezers and two refrigerators, they give away.

Henry chooses indeterminate type tomatoes, with the Park Whopper and Better Boy among his favorites. Stripping all leaves off the stem except at the tip, he buries each plant in an "L" in a trench four to six inches deep, up to the leaves.

"The stem will extend roots and draw nourishment from a wider area," said Mintz.

He prunes and suckers as needed to keep the vines thinned and the fruits large, yielding slices so big they cover a piece of loaf bread.

"You've got to come back this summer and see," he says with confidence.

Other garden standards include butterbeans, squash, green beans, okra, carrots, spinach, mustard and sweet potatoes. He trains his pole beans on a six-foot-high row of utility fencing, which allows more light to reach the plants and makes it easier to harvest the beans.

Mintz has his own simple and inexpensive, if labor intensive, approach to irrigation. A row of barrels and 30-gallon rubber containers stand along the rear of a shed. Here he collects rainwater. In dry weather, he hauls the water to the field with the tractor.

Wild creatures abound at the Mintz farm, from worms that draw moles and birds, to hungry deer that are sometimes a "problem" in the garden.

Mintz sees only a few rabbits these days, possibly because the local fox population is increasing. The family puts out wild bird seed and shelled corn twice a day,

drawing even more birds as well as squirrels.

Their small house sits unobtrusively on a tract of 92 acres, just a few hundred yards from where Mintz was reared by his parents, the late Mamie and L.B. (Barden) Mintz. His and her baby blue Suburbans are sheltered side by side in a garage that also holds garden equipment, a chipper/mulcher, boat and other equipment necessary to maintaining a self-sufficient household.

The Mintzes haven't always lived here.

One year, when he was a single man "about 24" and the crops were laid by, Mintz went to town looking for work building the bridge that now crosses the Shallotte River. The foreman told him, "Come back tomorrow" one time too many; Mintz enlisted in the U.S. Army.

In Washington State the young serviceman met and married his wife, who had moved to the West Coast from the North Dakota plains.

His military career was interrupted briefly at one point, but Mintz eventually retired from the Army with just over 21 years in.

Today that small monthly check is his only income, Mintz says. And, like the hearing loss brought on by exposure to sustained heavy artillery fire in Korea, a constant reminder of those years.

Returning to Brunswick County around 1962, Mintz settled in Supply, but within a few years the family moved to the homeplace in Ash. There they took on the task of building a home.

"We had the house framed in. Me and my wife put up the floors and ceilings. They delivered the windows and it went to raining," he recalled. "We put them in ourselves. It was that or something worse."

Looking around the room with its paneled walls and knotty pine ceiling, Mintz added, "It's not that great a carpentry job, but it's livable."

There's little around the place that he or his wife can't do. When his wife was not well, Mintz learned to cook, clean, hang out clothes and "most anything a woman can do," he said, causing a few eyebrows to lift in earlier days.

The two are a team, however, and simply do whatever work there is to be done around the place, inside and out.

Henry maintains and repairs all the gardening and household maintenance equipment, from the tractor to the air compressor he relies upon to pump up tires and whatever else needs a burst of air.

Stacks of firewood, shielded by sheets of tin roofing, await use: pine and miscellaneous logs for the heater but maple only for the wood cookstove the Mintzes imported from Austria.

Bees fly in and out of hives near the outbuildings. As time allows, Mintz takes his boat out on local rivers and creeks and into the Atlantic Ocean, mainly for the pleasure of it.

But the family buys 300 to 400 pounds of fish each year to stock the freezers—mullet, spot, "whatever I can get hold of," says Mintz.

Slender and strong of build, Mintz's appearance belies his age. But, at 76, his pace has slowed a little, with a touch of arthritis in the shoulders. He no longer keeps chickens or hogs, or even dogs.

He's made other concessions to age as well.

"I used to buy rabbit manure, and cow manure and horse manure by the truckload," he said. "But I've had



STAFF PHOTOS BY SUSAN USHER

HENRY MINTZ uses organic fertilizers and compost to build the soil of his homeplace at Ash, with hefty tomatoes part of the abundant yield each summer.



BETWEEN THE THREE of them, there are few jobs that Henry, Frances and David Mintz won't tackle. They live quiet lives of relative self-sufficiency.

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