

Herbs important part of garden

BY ANDIE L. BRYMER
Staff Writer

While herbs were once limited to a tin of dried oregano and maybe a prepackaged mint tea bag, today gardeners are planting herbs for culinary, medicinal, craft and aesthetic reasons.

For Kings Mountain resident Sandi Dawson, herbs are an important part of her kitchen and garden. Before moving to North Carolina seven years ago, she operated Ageless Arts Herb Garden in her native Ontario.

Dawson says she got involved in herbalism in a backwards way. Instead of starting with a garden, she began with essential oils which are highly concentrated liquid extracts. Enchanted by the scents, she bought a book and learned that the oils were good for more than creating pleasant aromas.

Dawson began making scented oils and lotions. Soon others were purchasing her products. Then she offered classes on how to make the items. Not content for her students to purchase ingredients, she began teaching them to grow their own herbs.

Since moving to Kings Mountain, Dawson has worked and volunteered as an herbalism instructor at Daniel Stowe Botanical Gardens and has taught at the Cleveland County Arts Council, assisted living facilities, at garden club meetings, Dillards and other companies. Though she no longer teaches, Dawson still keeps a home garden to satisfy the eye and pallet.

She shares with the Herald some information from her days as an herbalism instructor.

The North Carolina Piedmont's clay soil is similar enough to the calciferous soil of the Mediterranean that herbs native to that region do well here also. Those plants includes rosemary, thyme, oregano, sage, chives, basil and mints.

These herbs will thrive in the ground or in containers. Cooks often place these around the kitchen or back door for convenience. Before using an herb in the kitchen, it should be bruised, herb lingo for rubbing firmly enough to release the strong scent.

The hot Carolina summers are not hospitable to lavender, calendula and chamomile which prefer cooler temperatures.

Dawson considers alopecurus one of the most important medicinal herbs. When broken, the plant releases a slimy gel which helps burns and skin abrasions heal.

"That's one everybody should have in their house," she said.

The plant is best left inside, especially in the winters. It is generally not hardy enough to withstand this region's January and February temperatures.

Good herbs for stomach distress include rosemary, peppermint and sage. A tea can be made by pouring boiling water over the fresh leaves. Allow the mixture to steep 10 minutes then drain. Herbal teas can be consumed warm or iced.

The antiseptic properties in thyme make it good for combatting a cold. To raise the temperature and sweat out a cold, a cup of ginger tea is often helpful. Ginger is known as an energizing herb.

The leaves are not the only edible part of the plant. The flowers of most herbs including lavender, rose,

violets, nasturtiums, honeysuckle and scented geraniums can be eaten.

Pouring white wine vinegar over herbs and letting the concoction sit for four weeks in a cool, dark place produces a nicely flavored dressing. For an overnight version, heat the vinegar first. The vinegar can be strained and fresh herbs added for decoration.

Herbs can be used for dyeing fabric. Some good ones include tansy, mullein, madder, calendula, bedstraw and acrimony.

During the Victorian era, an entire language of flowers developed. Called tussy

musses, these small bouquets of flower messages were attached to a stick and wrapped with a ribbon.

Iris signified hope and power. Sunflower denoted riches and pride. Sweet pea signified departure. Violet symbolized steadfastness.

Not all were so positive. French marigold was a messenger of jealousy. Lavender meant distrust and columbine, folly.

Herbs do not have to be harvested to be useful.

Parsley is often used as a flower bed border and other herbs are mixed in among blooms.

See Herbs, 3B



ANDIE BRYMER / HERALD
Sandi Dawson has a raised herb garden filled mainly with culinaries behind her Kings Mountain home. For several years she operated Ageless Arts Herb Garden in her native Ontario.

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