

Windhaven Farm will produce baby's breath

BY SUZANNE KEENE
WASHINGTON BORO — Early in May Marilu Shaw of Windhaven Farm will be perched on one seat of her old tobacco planter, but she won't be planting tobacco. Instead, she will be planting two acres of Gypsophila or baby's breath that she has already contracted to sell.

Marilu and her husband, Stephen, purchased a small farm in Washington Boro about nine years ago and decided that while their farm was set up for tobacco farming, they did not want to grow tobacco.

"We couldn't afford to buy all that farm equipment," Marilu said. Besides, she laughed, "I don't like those big green worms."

To use their land the Shaw's decided to raise flowers and herbs. Planting and harvesting tobacco and flowers is quite similar, Marilu explained. The flowers are planted like tobacco plants and then left to grow until early July. During the first week of July, long before tobacco growers are ready to harvest, the Shaw's cut the flowers with tobacco clippers,

spear them on lath, and hang them in the barn to dry.

"It's really almost the same operation as tobacco harvest," she said.

But unlike tobacco farmers, Stephen and Marilu don't have to use pesticides. They do use a limited amount of herbicide to control weeds, but weeds aren't as much of a problem as they are with tobacco because flowers are harvested before weeds are in their glory, Marilu said.

Another advantage to flowers is that they weigh much less than tobacco and are easy for a woman or even a child to lift.

This will be the first year the Shaw's devote the majority of their land to baby's breath. When they first started growing flowers they planted a lot of mums that people dug for themselves. They also had a demonstration herb garden and sold herbs, something they plan to continue for their existing customers.

Each year they planted fewer and fewer mums and more and more dried flowers and herbs.



Marilu Shaw and daughter, Krissy, show how easy it is to handle dried flowers on a lath.



The lavender in Marilu's herb garden is starting to come up and soon the rest of the herbs will also come to life. Marilu uses her garden to show customers how herbs look, taste and smell.

"It was just sort of an evolutionary process," she explained.

Marilu also offered classes on making spice and herb wreaths that turned out to be very popular. The first year she held the classes in the house while Steven was away deer hunting, but it was cramped and the customers had to be scattered in different rooms, making it hard for her to conduct the class, she said.

The following year they refinished part of the barn and moved the classes in there. The barn also houses a craft shop which they open only during the Christmas season. They invite a group of local craftsmen to join them and the shop works like a co-op, Marilu explained. Only unique, top-quality handcrafted items are accepted.

For the past two Christmases they have also decorated a house on the Holly Trail, a tour of Lancaster County Homes held each year in December.

Marilu is enthusiastic about flower growing and says that demand for dried flowers is increasing. While more people are making dried flower arrangements, there are few suppliers on the East Coast. Most of the flowers sold here come from California, she explained.

But despite the demand, growers must search for the market, Marilu said.

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Herbs add unique flavors to food and are fun to cook with. Marilu Shaw of Windhaven Farm makes her own herb vinegar and recommends "Hildy's Herb Recipes" for beginning herb cooks.



Just a few dried flowers remain in the Windhaven's barn, which will be full of baby's breath later this year.



This dried flower wreath is just one way Marilu's dried flowers can be arranged.