

# Growers of same things start unique farm

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LITTLESTOWN — What started out as a mutual interest between two neighbors has grown into one of the most interesting and unique "farms" in the Adams County area. Alloway Gardens and Herb Farm, located on Mud College Road near Littlestown, has attracted media attention from surrounding states and draws visitors from the Baltimore and Washington, D.C. area.

Owned and operated by Barbara Steele and Marlene Lufriu, Alloway Gardens is situated literally in the backyard of Barbara's home. The house dates back to 1859 and supposedly housed Civil War soldiers. Barbara and her husband purchased the property 12 years ago and today in addition to raising Holstein steers, corn, and hay, one acre of herbs is also cultivated.

A solar greenhouse has been constructed on the south side of the tractor shed, a modern day work room was once a harness storing shed, and recently, during the annual "Grand Opening Week," the barn served as a display area for local craftsmen selling their wares.

Barbara describes herself as an "ex-art teacher." Her father owned a small home nursery where he grew azaleas and she worked for some nurseries to earn money through the years. The bulk of her knowledge, however, was gained through teaching herself.

She and her partner got together almost by fate. "Marlene and her family bought the next property and the real estate broker introduced us by saying, 'She (Marlene) grows the same things that you grow.'" Those "things" turned out to be herbs.

Alloway Gardens offers a variety of experiences for anyone who visits there. One unique aspect of the business is that all of the herbs can be found planted somewhere on the property. "I think it is really important for people to come here and see the herbs growing," Barbara says.

Unlike most garden centers where flowering plants sell themselves because of their obvious beauty, herbs are sometimes insignificant and not very exciting until you point them out, Barbara says. "Some are not really that attractive until they are several years old," she adds.

A dooryard garden located adjacent to the house, beautifully displays herbs and gives visitors the feeling of being in a quaint English garden. Herbs in the dooryard garden are grown in raised beds. Tours of the garden are available and a pamphlet "A Little Garden of Herbs" is available for anyone so inclined to plant their own herb garden.

Herbs are sold singly and in standard market packs. All plants are labelled with a common name and latin name (true herb gardeners know the latin names, Barbara says), what the herb can be used for, and its growing habitat.

Barbara said it has been their experience to find that although many people are curious about herbs, most simply do not know what to do with them. To help solve that problem, pamphlets explaining everything from how to plant a garden, even how to pick the site and prepare the soil, to recipes and harvest techniques are available at Alloway Gardens.

Another unique aspect of the business is the workshops which are offered on a variety of topics.



Barn at Alloway Gardens was filled with various items for Grand Opening Week, including quilts, pottery, tin and folk art paintings.

Basic workshops include "Getting Started With Herbs," "Kitchen Herb Wreath," "Victorian Wreath," and "A Christmas Herbal." Anyone participating in a workshop, they are held periodically throughout the year, is also treated to either a herbal sampler or luncheon. Cost of these is included in workshop fees.

In addition, speciality workshops are also offered. For more in-depth study, you can try "Herb Garden Design," "Seasoning With Herbs," "Potpourri and Sachets," and "Dried Herb and Flower Arranging."

Garden tours and club lectures are also available.

Although they do place pamphlets in local craft shops, they have not advertised in what would seem a most obvious area - nearby Gettysburg.

"We really don't want to become a tourist attraction," Barbara says in defense of this decision, "we want people to remember us for our horticultural practices and herb products."

Barbara says she considers it a challenge to find old varieties of herbs. To do this, seeds are ordered from Canada and England. Additionally, Barbara has been known to stop at old houses, usually where auctions are being held, to try and save old plants which she fears may be destroyed. She will try to identify old plants which are brought to her.

The two partners advocate planting herbs among flowers and vegetables. "Try to grow the herbs to be an asset to the garden," Barbara advises. She goes on to say that herbs can be used to avoid adding salt to foods and certain herbs are known to repel insects while other herbs act as insect attractants.

Using herbs in cooking is the speciality of Marlene. In the



Visitors can browse through tables of plants displayed outdoors at Alloway Gardens.

Summer Kitchen Shop at Alloway Gardens, visitors find herbal products, crafts and cookbooks, including a book which Barbara and Marlene wrote along with a friend. "When the Dinner Bell Rings" features a collection of recipes gathered by the three women. The book is indexed according to the facilities found at an old time farm. For example, the Springhouse chapter features recipes of dairy products.

Marlene prepares the luncheons which are served to groups desiring to taste herbal cooking, and she preserves jams which are sold in the Summer Kitchen and at a Farmers Market in Carroll County, Maryland.

Barbara says they try to be as organic as possible when growing their herbs. "We find that the plants are healthier if we can get them out of the greenhouse and into cold frames where they harden off. We use no systemic insecticides," she adds.

Although Alloway Gardens is obviously a success, Barbara says she and Marlene really didn't plan for it to grow as quickly and as large as it has. "We just kind of

woke up one morning and found ourselves here," she says. "We still have a long way to go and we want to be sure to do an adequate job and not loose the personal touch," she adds.

Anyone desiring to have their name included on Alloway Gardens mailing list to receive a schedule of workshops and events, may do so by writing Alloway Gardens and Herb Farm, 456 Mud College Road, Littlestown, Penna. 17340.

In their cookbook "Thymely Tips", Barbara and Marlene offer the following tips to using herbs:

— Dried and fresh herbs can be interchanged in most recipes. Use twice as much fresh herb as dried.

— Chervil is an excellent replacement for parsley.

— Herb Cream Cheese: to 8 ounces of cream cheese add: 1 tbsp. of parsley and 1 tbsp. dill weed or 1 tbsp. basil and 1 tbsp. fennel weed. Spread on crackers.

— Herb Butter: 1 carton whipped unsalted butter, 8 oz.; ¼ cup fresh chopped herbs (parsley, chives, marjoram and thyme); Mix together, refrigerate several hours before serving.



Customers are taken on a tour by Marlene of the dooryard garden planted right outside Steele house.



Summer kitchen shop at Alloway Gardens features herbal products, crafts and cookbooks, as displayed by Barbara Steele.



Greenhouse is attached to side of tractor shed at Alloway Gardens. Barbara Steele shows plantings of basil, which, she says, no garden should be without, especially if there are tomatoes planted.