

Herb Society members get set for May 3 sale



June Louise Evans, chairman of the Susquehanna unit of the Herb Society of America, displays some of the potpourri that will be sold during the group's annual sale May 3.

BY SUZANNE KEENE

LANCASTER — The many uses of herbs both in cooking and throughout the home have been rediscovered in recent years. Many rural homes now boast herb gardens and homemakers are learning what their predecessors knew long ago — herbs are fun to grow and have a multitude of uses.

A number of herb enthusiasts in Lancaster County have joined together to form the Susquehanna Unit of the Herb Society of America. Members of the local unit maintain an herb garden at Rock Ford Plantation, the home of General Hand, adjutant general to George Washington during the Revolutionary War.

One of their projects is an annual herb sale. This year's sale is scheduled for May 3 at Rock Ford Plantation from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The sale will offer culinary, fragrant, dye, insecticide specialty herb plants, books and gardening items, potpourri and an educational exhibit that will include a display of herb jellies.

Proceeds from the sale go toward maintaining the garden at Rock Ford and to an herb garden at the National Arboretum in Washington D.C. Some of the plants to be sold are from members' gardens, while others come from the Rock Ford garden, unit chairman June Louise Evans reports.

June Louise has informal gardens in the flower beds around her home and spends a great deal of time cultivating her hobby. "I put a lot of time into it," she says.

However, she adds, it isn't necessary to spend a lot of time to have a successful herb garden. She devotes the time because she enjoys it so much, and goes as far as saying that she enjoys weeding. "It's just fantastic to weed an herb garden," she noted.

Some of the herbs from June Louise's and fellow members' gardens went into making potpourri, a fragrant mixture of dried flower petals, dried herbs and spices, for the sale.

Last summer members dried some of the blossoms, herbs and herb foliage from their gardens in preparation for potpourri production. Among those herbs and flowers included in the unit's homemade potpourri are lemon verbena, an herb with an intense lemon scent; scented geraniums, which bear smaller, more delicate flowers than regular garden geraniums; rosemary; mint; sage; sweet cicely, which produces an aise type of scent; and lavender.



Herb Society member Bonnie Miller inspects the herbs in her garden to see how well they weathered the winter.

Dried flower petals of many perennials and annuals such as marigolds, zinnias and daffodils were also dried and added to the potpourri. Although many of the

flower petals lose much of their scent in the drying process, they add a nice touch of color to the mixture, society member Bonnie Miller said.

Bonnie suggests the air drying method in preparing herbs and flowers for use in potpourri. "It's better not to dry things in the oven if you want scent," she advises.

To air dry, lay materials on screens or hang them in small bunches. Placing the materials on a cookie sheet on top the refrigerator is a good drying method because of the heat and air circulation. Drying time depends on a number of factors, but usually takes between three days and week, Bonnie said.

The dry ingredients are then mixed together and a fixative is added to blend and prolong the scent life of the herbs, flowers and spices. A variety of fixatives are available and include orris root, ground cinnamon and cloves, oak moss and ambergris, a synthetic material.

Society members also added a variety of oils, including rose, lemon verbena and violet, to

enhance the dried materials and to prolong the life of the potpourri.

"To have something that is really going to last, oils really help," June Louise said. By mixing oils, you can achieve a unique scent, she continued.

In preparing the potpourri for the sale, members "dropped and sniffed, dropped and sniffed," June Louise reports, until the scent was just right. "We really had neat, neat scents," she noted.

Recipes for potpourri abound, Bonnie said, but duplicating a scent is quite difficult.

Bonnie said she uses potpourri throughout her home to perfume the air. She keeps an open container of potpourri in the powder room and in any other area she wishes to scent. However, she cautioned, potpourri works best in small areas, like the powder room or a clothes closet.

The more the potpourri is exposed to the air, the more quickly it will lose its scent. One way of reviving the scent is to rub the dried materials between your fingers. Another way is to add more oil.

Anyone interested in purchasing some of the society's potpourri or herbs is invited to attend their sale May 3. Rock Ford Plantation is located in the Lancaster County Park off South Duke Street in Lancaster.

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