

Teaching The Herbal Essence Of Life

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Twenty-seven years ago Bertha Reppert joined a garden club and heard a speaker talk about herbs as the "spice of life." That speaker changed Bertha's life.

She recalls, "I could hardly wait to get started. It was overwhelming. What she said really struck a fire."

It is this "fire" and love of herbs that Bertha will share with ladies attending the 1988 Pennsylvania Holstein Association convention being held at Willow Valley Family Resort and Convention Center at Willow Street. The ladies luncheon will be on Wednesday, February 24 at the Treadway Inn, and Bertha will speak on "Herbs with Confidence," the title of her second book.

As Bertha became more and more interested in herbs, "carrying the torch" of her mentor, she found herself inundating her friends with herbal gifts. "My house got filled. I

was inundating my friends and relatives and they were screaming 'help'."

The result was that she looked for another outlet and opened "The Rosemary House" 20 years ago in May. The shop has been a boon to herb lovers everywhere, offering almost everything anyone could ask for, including a great deal of education on the use of herbs.

The Rosemary House, located at 120 S. Market Street in Mechanicsburg, has become famous for being a well-stocked outlet for herbs, spices, craft materials and plants. Bertha has turned over the daily operation of the store to her daughter, Susanna, so that she can be with her retired husband. She continues to give demonstrations and is still writing.

Susanna grew up in The Rosemary House, coming there every day after school to be with her mother. There were four daughters growing up among the herbs, and now Bertha also has two grandchildren.

Bertha makes it clear that she is

delighted with Susanna's interest in the shop, adding, "It's a calling. You have to want to do it."

Bertha's first book, "A Heritage of Herbs," published in 1976, provided information on how herbs have been used in this country. The book deals with plants available to colonial settlers, and what the Indians taught them about native plants. It also mentions which herbs the colonists shipped back to the old country.

After giving a speech at Colonial Williamsburg, the bookstore there stocked this book, which has become a big seller. It is one of the few that deals exclusively with early American herbs and their uses.

A second book, entitled "Herbs with Confidence," is an outgrowth of questions Bertha has been asked at The Rosemary House over the years. It includes 135 recipes, 55 herb crafts and other information to help people better understand ways in which to use herbs.

She adds, "It is very basic, with gardening and recipes and crafts. It is definitely for the beginner, and answers questions we've been asked right here in the shop. There also are many garden plans included."

Bertha is very practical in her use of herbs, and she says that people can keep dried herbs in their cupboards indefinitely if they keep the herbs away from bright light, steam or humidity, and air. She says she keeps hers in a dark cupboard in tightly stoppered bottles. "If you want to display your herbs you must use them up," she cautions.

The best way to dry herbs is to hang them, according to Bertha, who adds, "Hang them out of the light because sun destroys color. When the color is gone the flavor is gone." Attic rafters and drying racks are good to use, and the room where they are hung should be hot and dry and relatively dark.

To dry rose petals, Bertha lays them on a sheet on the attic floor.

Bertha says that many people are intimidated by herbs. "They don't know anything about it and they're afraid to use them. They use them with great timidity, and they've read a lot of warnings to the point they're even timid about herb teas, which are something that are quite pleasant and healthy."

Bertha adds, "I try to instill confidence and stress the use of herbs for pleasure - to enhance life."

She insists that herbs are as easy to grow as weeds, saying, "They can survive drought, and many of them come from desert areas." Probably the one most important requirement is sunlight, according to Bertha. "They are easy to grow, and it is very satisfying because you get such enormous quantities so quickly."

Bertha says she also likes the idea that you can have herbs year round. She said she has sometimes gone out in January and harvested herbs and revived them by throwing them in a sink full of hot water. "They wake up and have a bouquet."

She says emphatically, "To use them is definitely to love them. The key word is to experiment." Of course, she notes, nothing should be put in the mouth which is potentially dangerous.

She admires the "incredible usefulness" of herbs, saying, "Every-



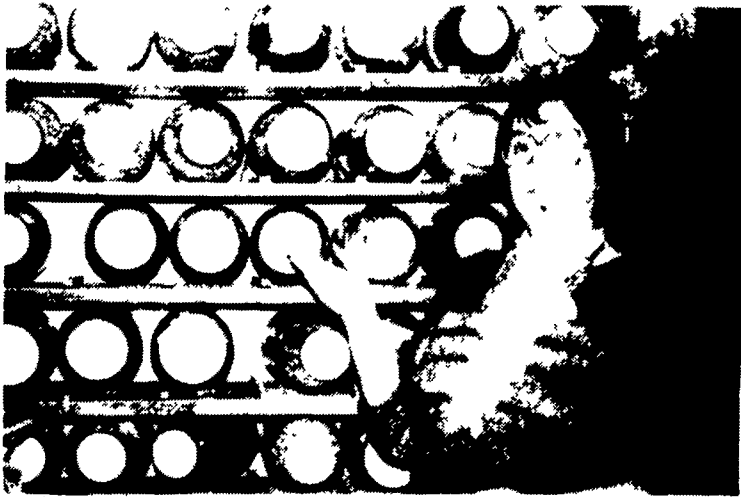
Susanna, left, and Bertha look over Bertha's cookbooks, which are available, autographed, through the store. Bertha will personalize books as well. She has written two books and several booklets about the use of herbs. The Rosemary House in Mechanicsburg is known far and wide as a great source of herbs and information about herbs. Celebrating its 20th year in 1988, the store is now being operated by Bertha's daughter Susanna, while Bertha spends more time with her now-retired husband.

one is a plant with a purpose." Many were used for ancient medicinal purposes and many are still useful today. She cites rosemary as an example of an herb that is useful to the hair. "It stimulates the circulation and will stimulate the growth of hair." Although, Bertha added with a laugh it will not grow hair where there is none. She explains the rosemary can be boiled and that water used with shampoo. "It will help you have really healthy hair. People have done it for centuries."

During her presentation Bertha will demonstrate potpourri mak-

ing, which she says has gained a hocus-pocus." She said most people have available what is neces-

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Bertha stands in front of the "medicinals" that her store carries due to demand. Originally she carried just a few, but demand has been great. Bertha says she never prescribes herbs but many people know just how they want to use them.



Bertha works in the small greenhouse found behind the store in Mechanicsburg. They use the greenhouse primarily to keep some of the herbs over winter. Raised beds in the small "city" garden are used to produce a few herbs for use in the store.



These wreaths are a few of the herb crafts on display at "The Rosemary House" in Mechanicsburg.

Homestead Notes