

Educate Your Senses At the Village Herb Shop

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BLUE BALL (Lancaster Co.)

—If you're interested in landscaping, cooking or decorating with herbs, visit the Village Herb Shop.

The sprawling herb business located in the little town of Blue Ball, east of Lancaster, immerses visitors in the wonderful possibilities that herbs offer.

Pat Dyer, who manages the business, said, "We offer an educational experience."

Garden tours, workshops, extensive literature, and dinners are ways the shop finds effective in educating others.

The most outstanding feature of their educational experience is the exquisite five-course meals served in a country Victorian setting.

Chef Sally Kramer prepares the meals. Each course, from the punch to the dessert, is enhanced by the use of herbs.

Unlike many herbalists, Kramer uses salt, sugar and meat in the preparation of the meals.

She said, "We believe that most people prefer a moderate approach to herbs although we will prepare a vegetarian or salt-free or sugar-

patio with its brick floor and country-Victorian decor. A typical meal, like that scheduled for April 20 at 6 p.m., includes a herbal punch, canapes, herb soup, leg of lamb, saffron rice, spring vegetable mixture, spinach bread, cheesecake, herbal tea and gourmet coffee.

"When the meal is finished, Sally reveals the herbs she has used to prepare the meal and shares recipes and hints for cooking with herbs.

"Herbs give food an interesting taste, but it's better to experiment with one at a time before throwing a bunch of herbs into a dish," Sally said.

She tells how to make herb butters, cream cheese dips, vinegars, oils, herb cheese and beverages.

All of her dinners are attractively arranged and garnished. One of Sally's specialties is making edible flower dishes available only in season. She tells guests how to layer herb leaves in bottom of cake to flavor it. Herbs are used to make tasty jellies, sorbets, and candied herbs.

Sally also caters dinners under the name Good Thyme Catering.



Chef Sally Kramer prepares exquisite five-course meals for guests at the Village Herb Shop, Blue Ball. Each course, from the punch to the dessert, is enhanced by the use of herbs.



The Village Herb Shop offers everything and anything related to herbs, from dips, potpourri, tea pots to jewelry.

free meal if requested by a group of 12 or more."

The meal alone is an impressive affair, but it is not limited to merely the dinner. It begins with a tour of the herb gardens where guests can pinch and sniff the plants that are marked for cooking, medicine or tea use. Dyer explains the use of various herbs and gives ideas on planting and landscaping with them, but does not get into the medicinal use of herbs.

Dinner is served in the enclosed

After the dinner, Pat Dyer presents a short lecture on gardening with herbs. She often uses slides to show the beauty of landscaping with herbs or dried arrangements that can be made with them.

"There is a lot being done with herb landscaping," she said. "Gardening is America's number one pastime and provides good therapy and useful produce."

Pat has taken classes in landscaping and will serve as an advi-

sor to those who ask, but she is not licensed.

Beginnings

Pat said the business began five years ago when her parents, Paul and Dorothy Weaver, purchased the property.

"We had big ideas, but found it took a lot of more work than we ever imagined," Pat, who has two children, said.

"We started out with the dream of growing organic herbs," Pat recalls.

The first morning Pat rose early and picked mint, hung it on the line, striped it, dried it and sold the package for a mere 65 cents.

"Right away I learned I would not make any money doing this," Pat admitted.

So the business changed. "I love to work in the gardens, smell the fragrance and experiment with the beauty of landscaping," Pat said. Now instead of drying herbs for others, Pat encourages customers to purchase the plants she has started. She instructs customers on

the proper way to grow, display and use the herbs.

For those who prefer to purchase fresh or dried herbs, the shop has commercial and organic herbs.

One of the unique aspects of the shop is their drying shed where customers can cut the amount they want to purchase.

Herbs can be grown on the windowsill or planted outside the door. Basic herbs that are good to begin include dill, basil, chives, rosemary, French tarragon, thyme, and Italian parsley.

Pat's dad added a greenhouse and figured out a solar system to heat it.

Pat's parents have purchased surrounding properties to enlarge the Herb Shop's services.

Gift shop

The gift shop has three rooms for display. "We started out selling herbal teas, gourmet coffee and herbs," Pat said. "And one thing led to another. "Now we sell everything herb related and even some things not herb related." For example, jewelry with flower designs and stamps to make your own stationery.

Herb gardening workshop

In slide show presentations, gardens are shown at different stages of growth. Both the mistakes and the right way to place individual plants are shown. "A picture is worth a thousand words," Pat said.

Perennials, annuals and ground cover is combined to enhance the beauty of each plant. Lots of handouts will be distributed during classes offered on April 16 at 7 p.m. and on April 18 at 1 p.m. Cost is \$7 and includes a 30 minute consultation for drawing your individual garden plan if requested.

Dried material workshop

Wreath bases, pins and dried materials are sold. For the do-it-yourselfer, a class on growing and

preserving everlasting is offered on April 23 at 7 p.m. and April 24, at 1 p.m. Cost is \$5. The class will instruct others of the best time to pick flowers and grasses from the wild, as well as what to grow in your garden to preserve. Different methods of drying will be discussed and some tips on working with dried flowers will be demonstrated.

Herb cooking workshop

A demonstration on using herbs in a variety of dishes will be presented by Sally Kramer. There will be lots of tasty samples at the May 15 session at 7 p.m. and at the May 16 session at 1 p.m. Cost is \$7.

Herb dinners

Individual reservations can be made for the third Friday of each month April through October, but Pat said, "We will prepare a luncheon or dinner at any time for groups of 12 who make reservations two weeks in advance." Boxed luncheons are available for a group of six to 25 people with one week's notice.

Prices vary from \$15 to \$17 and includes a garden tour, gourmet herb dinner, and a short lecture. Each dinner includes a five-course meal in which herbs have been used to enhance the flavor of food. Each meal has a theme that compliments the type of food served and the topic of lecture.

Individuals can make reservations for the herb dinners scheduled for April 20, May 18, June 15, July 20, August 17, September 21 and October 19.

Groups may requested available dates.

"We feel we give a good overview of herbs and are both eager to share with those who are eager to learn," Pat said.

All workshops and dinners require a reservation and deposit. The gift shops are opened weekdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., except Thursday until 8 p.m. and Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.



Visitors at the Village Herb Shop tour the herb gardens, drying sheds, and gift shops to experience the fragrance and taste of herbs. Chef Sally Kramer and Herbalist Pat Dyer stand outside the drying shed where guests can cut bunches of herbs for purchase.