



The Herrs live on the farm that has been in Fred's family since the 1700s. The 80 acres has been divided, with the Herrs keeping 40 of them for Sassafras Farms. "Give me enough time, and I'll have nothing left to mow," Fred joked at the many requests his wife makes for additional flower beds complete with curves and indentations.

More Than 140 Herbs Grow At Sassafras Farms

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WILLOW STREET (Lancaster Co.) — Herb usage seems to be sweeping the country. What is folklore and what is fact concerning the benefits of herb usage?

Ask Carol Herr. She grows and sells 140 different kinds of herbs on the family's Sassafras Farms in Willow Street.

Herbs, according to Carol, is any plant with a fragrance, a flavor that can be used as medicine, as a pesticide or as a color or textile.

She offers expert advice in herb usage. For five years, she has taught adult educational classes and lectured on herb gardening, culinary usage, and aroma therapy for baths, potpourri, and decorating with herbs. She lectures on herbal folklore and writes a column for Penn State.

While ginseng, St. John's wort, and other herbs are making headlines as cure alls for many ailments, Carol frowns on growing herbs for medicinal purposes. She cautions that growers have little control over the strength of herbs, which varies greatly from the plant itself, how and when it is harvested, and on the soil and

weather conditions.

In addition, some medicinal mixtures are extracted from roots, some from plant leaves, and some from stems. It is often difficult to know which part or how much to extract.

Herbs are often impractical to grow for medicinal purposes. In the case of ginseng, which is harvested from the roots, it takes five to seven years before it can be harvested, and then only a small amount can be extracted.

Carol and her husband Fred traveled all over the country looking for unusual herbs to offer to customers at Sassafras Farms.

"For years, our vacations always included stops to pick up exotic herbs," Carol said.

She has an unusual herb called horsetail, which is a long winding herb in which a piece is broken off and used for sandpaper and to scour pans.

"Herbs are so forgiving. Not many pests bother them. When planted outdoors, you never need to fertilize or water them—although you can to make them grow better but the oils will weaken. They grow best in full sun and poor soil. People can kill herbs

by overwatering them," Carol said.

In addition, just because a plant is touted as being a perennial doesn't necessarily mean it is a perennial in this area, according to Carol.

"Like lemon grass, it can be grown here, but it won't grow back the following year," Carol said.

Parsley is a biennial plant that actually should be planted annually, otherwise it bolts to seed.

The Herrs live on the farm that has been in Fred's family since the 1700s. The 80 acres has been divided and the Herrs are keeping 40 acres.

"We didn't have the money to invest in big equipment, but we wanted to do something with the land," Carol said of the perennials, annuals, and herbs raised and sold at the farm.

After Fred sold his business and purchased the farm, the couple sat down and discussed, "what are we going to do with the rest of our lives?"

"I always wanted a greenhouse," Carol said. Fred asked if she could make it pay for itself. Carol thought she could.

After hours of research, the couple built a 20x100-foot greenhouse



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within 10 days. It's a hoop house with a double layer plastic that has an air inflator system between the layers.

Her love for gardening was instilled from walking in front of her grandfather while harrowing.

"He must have had the patience of Job," Carol said of now realizing the inconvenience of having a child help do chores.

Her cooking interest was sparked from her aunt.

"No offense to my mother, but I grew up in the 1960s when TV dinners were in vogue," Carol said.

Her lack of cooking instruction as a child hasn't been a drawback as an adult. Over the years, she has won several blue ribbons for her pies at the West Lampeter Fair.

Carol has been a master gardener since 1992. She furthered her knowledge by devouring books and taking additional courses through vo-tech and Penn State.

"Between the two of us, there isn't much we don't tackle," Carol said.

Fred raises homing pigeons, quail, partridges, chickens, bantams, and brittany hunting dogs.

Fred said that he has been raising pigeons from the time he was 12 years old and sells them privately. He also is an amateur taxidermist. He rebuilds farm equipment.

The large stone forebay barn has three date stones, with the oldest dated in 1791. The barn makes a nice area for the marketing of the herbs and perennials. Part of the barn is used for herbal arrangements and to hang plants from the rafters for drying.

Some of the gift items include

bath bags, used for aroma therapy. Herbs are placed in a muslim bag to dangle from the shower head. The aroma that comes out can have a refreshing, softening, or stimulating effect, depending on the herb selected.

The large double house was built in 1881 by Fred's great grandparents. The Herr's daughter and family live in the one part.

The Herrs have three adult children and one grandchild. Their 6-year-old grandson is a big help with the herb operation.

"He knows the good bugs from the bad ones, and weeds from plants," his grandmother said.

For those who have trouble differentiating between weeds and plants, Carol's advice is to let it grow and see what comes up.

"A lot of people think goldenrod is a weed, but others like it as a plant in the flower bed. Grandpa, who fought goldenrod for years, would turn over in his grave if he knew I was growing it here," Carol said.

When asked to name her favorite herbs, Carol declined by saying, "That's like having six children and you'll ask to pick the five you want to keep."

The name Sassafras Farms was derived from the sassafras trees growing on the land.

"I get nothing done but pulling up sassafras," Carol said of the plants that continually replant.

Numerous herb and flower beds are strategically placed in the yard. A kitchen herb garden is right off the kitchen porch. Plans are in process for a dye garden, a German

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Homestead Notes