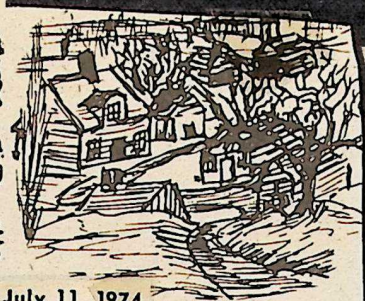


# Village View by Andrea Leonard



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If you're to have a garden this year, it's already plowed, raked, furrowed and planted.

If you're to have much of a harvest, your tomato plants are a foot-and-a-half high, and flowering; your cucumbers, if the jays didn't get them, are beginning to spread as cucumbers will without something to climb.

Corn should be knee high by the 4th of July. The strawberry patch is about done; the rest are for the birds.

Squash are blossoming, peppers, too. In spite of the cold and rain, beans are bushing or climbing, whichever variety you chose.

How's your herb garden doing? If you've never grown your own herbs for flavoring your own cooking, this summer's as good as any to start.

Herbs will be happy among your petunias, bordering your vegetables, or in a square yard of sun. Because most were once wild, they're used to fending for themselves.

Mints do well near a garden faucet or around a birdbath. They do like moisture. No herb objects to being pruned or cut back. They're used to it; it's their destiny.

As for soil, your herbs will do best and taste best grown in sweet humusy earth. You may need lime unless your ground is naturally alkaline -- 't isn't likely here on the Cape.

Perhaps, if you're a novice at herbs, you'd best start with some foolproof ones.

Tarragon, thyme, chives, sweet marjoram, basil and parsley. This half-dozen will provide your salads, fish and tomato dishes and meat casseroles with enough flavor to help you decide whether herb-gardening is for you.

A few plants of each will be ample for your own table with enough left over to dry, bottle up, and make love-gifts for the holidays.

The easiest way to get a herb garden quickly is to buy the plants. Most are perennial, so once you've begun, you can look forward to mint, dill and chives popping up, spring after spring.

Set them out in the evening or on a cloudy day. Dig a hole large enough for the plant as it comes from the pot without disturbing the earth around the roots. Not too deep; don't bury the crown.

Tamp firmly, mulch lightly, water thoroughly, and stand back.

Tarragon grows about two feet high, is an erect branching plant with small smooth narrow leaves. Cut them back by half as soon as they reach this height. Add to greens for a piquant salad; add to baked fish for delicate flavor... just a bit with butter-broiled filet of flounder is fit food for angels.

You'll have lots left. Stick a bunch of leaves in a bottle of vinegar and use in salad dressing. Dry the rest in a warm (200°) oven; then store in a tightly capped jar, for crumbling when you want it.

Set thyme about fifteen inches apart. It's a pretty edging plant, grows less than a foot high, has small deep green leaves and tiny

lilac flowers. Good with chicken, poi-  
in chowder -- lightly.

Chives are easiest of all. You may have grown them on your kitchen windowsill with good success. If so, you know their delicate onion-y taste brings out the best in cottage cheese, sour cream, cole slaw. The more you cut, the more tender tops shoot up, again and again.

Marjoram will grow to fifteen inches, a mass of soft, small gray-green pungent leaves. Make two cuttings before fall and hang to cure in your attic. No attic? Dry in a warm oven on a tin pieplate; then store in a jar. Flavor beef, especially stews, with this one.

Basil is an annual, easily grown from seed. Thin to eight inches and allow for a plant a foot-and-a-half high. The aromatic light green leaves will make a second crop before frost if you prune it well just before the buds open.

Pinch back the tops of young plants to encourage bushy growth. If you use basil with pork, eggs, tomato or in salad, you'll be glad you did.

Now parsley is a garnish familiar to all. But there's something special about growing your own. Choose the curly-leafed variety; it's prettier and dries a greener color. This hardy biennial boasts a long season, staying green long after frost.

A crop planted in mid-summer will provide fresh greens next spring before the jonquils bloom; you may continue to harvest until it flowers in warm weather.

Uses? With almost everything. All meats, fish and fowl, on eggs, peas, cabbage, and especially on carrots for both flavor and color. The only edibles parsley does little for are desserts and fruits.

If you think the stuff you buy in the stores gives nice flavors to foods you feed your family, you've just begun to find out how good things can taste.

Once you've begun a border of herbs, tucked a plant here and there among flowers or vegetable (just to see how they do), you'll be hooked, for things won't taste quite right without them.

You'll branch out into other varieties. Lemon balm, sweet cicily and dill, lovage, shallots, chervil, borage and savory. You'll grow your own sage to flavor your Thanksgiving turkey dressing. And it'll make a real difference in the taste of that bird.

You'll want to learn more about herbs. You'll be fascinated by their history; which people once believed drove away evil spirits, and which protected against infection, particularly against the dreaded scourge, plague.

Today -- we get a shot at the doctor's; centuries ago people sniffed at a nosegay of herbs.

Before modern plumbing, sweet-scented herbs -- rue, woodruff, hyssop, mint, lavender and rosemary -- were strewn on floors to overcome unpleasant odors.

Herbs are still used in medicines: Quinine for malaria; bella donna for eye diseases; digitalis, that indispensable and powerful heart stimulant which comes from the common foxglove.

Although modern physicians don't grow their medicines in their door-yards, there's nothing stopping you from growing flavors and

tasties there.

Herbs -- they're good just to chew on. But then -- I chew on many things most people would eschew. Sweet grass, checkerberry leaves, new wild cherry and sassafras leaves, grape tendrils, pine needles (the part that's inside the thin wrapper, holding them together at the base), daisy petals -- the bit attached to the golden center --, blueberry blossoms, nasturtiums, horse brier tendrils, violets, and a number of mushrooms I've learned to know. Berries and fruits, of course.

It's all a matter of taste, you see, You're not obliged to take part in any of this. It's your treat, if you do; and (I think) your loss, if you don't. Don't, however, experiment with unknowns; that could be dangerous.

Do give the herbs a chance. You'll eat happier and maybe healthier. The old folks believed in them. Lots of times, we've found they knew things we are just beginning to re-discover and understand.

The French say "Bon appetit"; Cape Codders say "Eat hearty, and give the ship a good name".