



Deerpark Diary

Town of Deerpark Historian's Office, 1863 Huguenot Schoolhouse
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Wild Plants and Herbs Growing in our Yards

By Norma Schadt

A few weeks ago I was sitting on my front porch enjoying the spring scenery with its many shades of green and colorful flowers. It was a welcome sight after the long, cold and dreary winter. The bright yellow dandelions were everywhere and our old apple tree was in full bloom. The blossoms looked like large snowflakes. As I looked at all the dandelions, I remembered an article that I had read about beneficial wild herbs. With reference book in hand, I wandered around the yard to see what native plants have a history of usefulness. The following section is about the history and uses of some beneficial herbs and plants growing in our area.



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Barberries were prescribed in Europe during the Middle Ages as antiseptics, purgatives, and tonics. It can be used as an astringent. When autumn arrives harvested fruit can be

used to make jellies, jams, or chutneys.



Dandelions

were used as a diuretic for centuries. The juice of the dandelion root, even to this day, is still used by European herbalists to treat diabetes and liver diseases. Dandelion wine has a taste suggestive of sherry and a reputation as an excellent tonic for the blood. Young tender dandelion leaves, called greens, taste a lot like chicory when used in salads.

Foxglove was used as a cough medicine, a treatment for epilepsy and a cure for swollen glands as far back as 1000 AD. Drugs have been derived from Grecian foxglove since the late 1940s. Although the plant is very toxic, gardeners love it for the beauty of its blossoms. It fits nicely in almost any garden setting. The plants naturalize easily along forest edges.

Goldenrod is an astringent used for healing wounds. European goldenrod has been used to treat periodontal disease, arthritis, and chronic eczema. Chinese medicines prepare it as a headache remedy and for treating flu, sore throat, malaria and measles. In general, modern science offers no evidence that goldenrod is an effective medicine for anything. Americans look on goldenrods as a road-



side weed. Europeans cherish them in colorful perennial borders in their gardens.

Juniper's chief use is the source of gin's distinct flavoring.

Legend has it that juniper planted beside the front door will keep out witches; the only way for a witch to get past the plant was by correctly counting its needles. Arthritis, bruises, ulcers, and wounds are



said to be relieved by juniper poultices and rubs. Juniper has a place in the kitchen other than in the gin bottle. The berries are said to stimulate the appetite, and for this reason they can be added sparingly to sauerkraut, salads and hors d'oeuvres. Crushed juniper berries are a key ingredient in many wild game dishes. It is also an ornamental tree in a garden.

Plantain According to legend, this plant was a maiden who spent so much time by the roadside watching and waiting for her absent lover that she eventually was transformed into this common roadside plant. Indians called it white man's foot. The plant, with its rosette of leaves and its stalk of seeds looking like a miniature cattail, seemed to have followed the white settlers everywhere they went. If you're stung by a bee while mowing a not quite perfect lawn, pick a fleshy plantain leaf, crush it, and apply it to the welt. The New England Journal of Medicine printed an account of the successful use of crushed plantain leaves to stop the itching of poison ivy.

Sassafras This native American tree's root was once a valued flavoring agent in root beer, but safrole, a constituent of sassafras oil, has been identified as a carcinogen. In 1960s the FDA outlawed the sale of flavorings containing it. The tree is still worth planting for the refreshing smell of its leaves and bark and for the colorful fall foliage. Although the plant's volatile oils are toxic, sassafras preparations are safe for external use. The root bark contains antiseptic constituents, making it an effective remedy for skin wounds and sores. It has been recommended for relief from the itching of poison ivy and poison oak.

Violets were a love token between Napoleon Bonaparte and Josephine and later his political emblem. Ancient writers wrote of the medicinal virtues of the violet in curing gout and spleen disorders. In France during troubadour times, violets were given as a poetry prize and in southern Germany in the Middle Ages, the finding of the first spring violet was celebrated with dancing. The leaves and flowers have antiseptic and expectorant properties. Violets add verve to jams, jellies, liqueurs, puddings, flans, gelatins, fruit salads and green salads. Violet water, made by weighting and steeping leaves and petals in water until fragrant, is used in tea breads, cupcakes, puddings, ices, fruit compotes and chilled soups. The flowers were used in the perfume industry.

Yarrow is an old herb. Fossils of yarrow pollen have been identified in Neanderthal burial caves. The use of yarrow to heal wounds has been found in medical records throughout history. It is also used in cosmetics as



an astringent and cleanser in skin locations. Gardeners add yarrow to their flower beds and dry them to use in flower arrangements. The yarrow flowers can be used to dye wool.

There are many other useful wild plants and herbs. Even the new shoots of the **skunk cabbage** can be eaten. However, first you have to get past the smell.

The source of the information about these plants was Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs. You can find it in the library.

History of Useful Native Plants and Herbs

"The history of herbs is a history of economic botany—plants used by man for food or physic or for aromatic, cosmetic or dyeing use." (Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs)

The oldest history dates back to China, India and Egypt where herbs were used primarily for medicinal purposes. Over the centuries herbs were used for other purposes besides their healing properties to combat illness. Their scents disguised poor sanitation. Their flavors masked bland or spoiling food. Their properties were used to dye fabrics.

According to Peter Gumaer's *History of Deerpark*, the early settlers lived off the land by hunting the many animals that lived in the forest, as well as fishing the rivers and streams that teemed with fish. The Lenape Indians taught the settlers about the wild plants that could be gathered and used to supplement their diets as well as using herbs for medicines. There were white walnuts, hickory nuts, chestnuts, butternuts, hazelnuts; as well as fruits and berries: large and small grapes, plums, black and red wild cherries, huckleberries, strawberries, black and red raspberries, blackberries and wintergreen berries. The Indians also taught them how to grind acorns to form a kind of flour to make bread.

Slowly through the cultivation of small portions of their lands, the settlers were able to produce a supply of grain, vegetables, fruit and herbs. They had brought some herb plants with them because herbs were as important as the vegetables planted in their 'kitchen gardens'. Dye plants and medicinal herbs were included as well as their many flavoring herbs.

With the advent of scientific discoveries use of healing herbs diminished, however folk medicine with its use of herbs made it possible for the excellent drugs available to modern science. Today old herbals have been rediscovered and used for potions, potpourris, herb gardens, herbal teas and even some time-honored herbal remedies.

History of the Apple

I often have wondered about the history of apple trees which are growing alongside roadways and in vacant fields. How did they get there? Where did they come from?

The original home of the apple is not definitely known. Scientists have come to the conclusion that it was indigenous to the area around the Caspian Sea. Since prehistoric times apples (wild and cultivated) have existed in Europe from the Caspian Sea to the Atlantic Ocean, except in the extreme north.

It was natural that Europeans would bring their favorite fruits with them when they settled on this continent

The introduction of the apple into New York began nearly four hundred years ago. In the earliest settlements the varieties of apples first brought into New York were mostly from Holland. Once introduced, Indians, traders and missionaries carried seeds into the wilderness. In 1779 when General Sullivan made his reports about the Cayuga and Seneca villages which were de-



Cuddebackville
Our old apple tree in
full blossom.

Spring 2011

stroyed, he frequently mentioned the many apple and peach orchards that the Indians had cultivated.

These early apple trees were planted from seeds, however the fruit of a seedling apple seldom resembled the fruit of the parent tree. The fruit from seedling trees would now be called “natural” fruit, distinct from the grafted varieties produced today.

Grafting and budding on wild stocks was recorded as early as 1647, but it was not common until Robert Prince established the first large commercial nursery in America around 1730. He was a French Huguenot who immigrated to America after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. These Huguenots who settled at New Rochelle brought with them a variety of French fruits. In the middle 1800s most orchards were established using grafted trees from nurseries. The varieties of apples grown at that time were: Putnam Russet, Seek-No-Further, Early Chandler, Gilliflower, Pound Royal, Greening, Pippin, Sweeting, Cooper, Prolific Beauty, Queening, English Pearmain, Spitzenburg. We do not find these apples in our stores today.

As transportation facilities gradually improved with the opening of canals and railways, commercial

orchard farming increased rapidly in New York. Today New York is ranked as the number two grower of apples in the United States. New York’s average annual production of apples is about thirty million bushels. Throughout the years apples have been adapted to the climate and other changes in our environment. New York produces today’s nineteen most popular apple varieties: McIntosh, Empire, Red Delicious, Cortland, Golden Delicious, Acey Mac, Idared, Ginger Gold, Jersey Mac, Paula Red, Jonagold, Macoun, Jonamac, Fuji, Gala, Rome, Braeburn, and Fortune.

There are still wild apple trees growing in New York, especially along hedge rows and in abandoned pastures. These ‘natural’ trees are either from abandoned orchards or their seeds were scattered by birds or other animals.

**Georgine Ogden
Orange County
Poet Laureate (1996-2002)**

Her mother told her that she was a keen observer. Later, while in college, her professor commented in the margins of her reports, “You write well...” He suggested that she keep a daily journal—advice she kept.

Georgine Ogden, a descendant of Deerpark’s early Gumaer and Cuddeback families, described herself as a farm girl at heart. She grew up on a farm on the outskirts of Middletown. Although, Ms. Ogden lived in many large cities throughout her life, she reclaimed her ancestral roots later in life by moving to Lake Guyard, Goddefroy, where her mother and father met in 1923.

As County Poet Laureate Ms. Ogden generated much enthusiasm for the arts by making public appearances and attending ceremonies for town celebrations. She wrote and dedicated a special poem “Ode to Deerpark” for the Town of Deerpark Bicentennial Celebration in 1998.

Her poem *Apple Trees in Winter* lends itself perfectly to this *Deerpark Diary* article about apples.



Georgine Ogden

Apple Trees in Winter

By Georgine Ogden

Scraggly hags of witches,
Gnarled, twisted, are bent over
The ground in their stark bark
Darkness from perennially bearing
Heavy fruit and after being
Pruned by the fellows from Vermont
Who come every year to do the job;
Yet with a waft of Spring’s wand
They will turn into fairy princesses
Wearing green leaf gowns and pink-
white
Blossom crowns.



Apple Facts

Fresh apples float because 25% of their volume is air. A good thing or we couldn't experience

bobbing for apples.

The actual fruit of the apple is the interior core. The edible portion is simply the swollen floral cap.

There are about 7000 varieties of apples in the Americas.

The apple is the official state fruit of New York.

Apple varieties range in size from a little larger than a cherry to as large as a grapefruit.

Apples have five apple seed pockets. Each pocket contains seeds.

Different varieties will have a different number of seeds.

Apples are a member of the rose family.

A bushel of apples weighs about 42 pounds.

It takes energy from 50 leaves to produce one apple.

Dangers of Herbs

"Herbs are wonderful plants, nature's miracle plants some call them. By definition, they are useful to man, for food or physic, color or fragrance or simply for their beauty. But the herbal realm is not without its dark side.

"Each year, countless numbers of people experience the dark side of herbs, generally in the form of some malady caused by an herb. It may be a rash or a bout of nausea. In the extreme, the herb causes a brush—or worse, a face-to-face meeting—with death. The unpleasant fact of the matter is that some herbs are downright dangerous. The dangers that surround herbs and their uses are these: misidentification; mislabeling; and misinformation."

(*Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs*)

Here is such a story:

Evening Gazette
Port Jervis, New York
March 25, 1929

"Earl E. Allen and Robert W. Chase, 16 years of age, died at the St. Francis Hospital on Saturday and Sunday morning respectively, as the result of poisoning from eating an herb known as hellebore. They lived but a few hours after consuming the herb. Allen died on Saturday morning and Chase died on Sunday morning nearly 20 hours after eating the hellebore root... They had decided to take a fishing trip and went to a spot near the Delaware River where they dug some angle worms. Both boys complained of feeling faint and dizzy, but thought it might have been caused because neither had eaten much breakfast.

"In company with Ralph Teeple, the boys started for their fishing trip in the Neversink River. Allen had his first attack and fell on the ground, writhing and groaning. Ralph Teeple remained with him and Chase rode his bicycle to the High School where he asked to use the telephone. After telephoning from the office of Supt. of Schools A. H. Naylor, Chase left. A few moments later he was found lying on the floor of the hall, apparently in intense agony.

"Both lads were unconscious when taken to the hospital. Allen never regained consciousness. Chase died less than three hours from the time he had left to dig the worms along the Delaware River. Ralph Teeple informed Coroner Sheldon and Chief of Police Moorehead as to the activities of the boys previous to their attacks. They went to the spot where it was believed the pair had been digging and soon found evidence of newly excavated ground. Near the spot two pieces of root were found.

"Evidently Chase and Allen had mistaken the root for artichoke

and had eaten it. Many onlookers followed the Coroner and Police Chief and volunteered in digging around in an effort to locate artichoke, which grows along the river. They unearthed several specimens.

"At the Hospital every possible medical assistance was given the stricken youths... Samples of the hellebore have been sent to the State Health Department at Albany for analysis."

Town of Deerpark Museum News

Herb Program

Kate Honders, Master Gardener from Cornell Extension Services, will be presenting a program about herbs and their uses at the Town of Deerpark Museum, 25 Grange Road, Huguenot on Sunday June 5, 2011 at 3:00. She will discuss the cultivation of herbs, their culinary uses and demonstrate how to use herbs in infusions. Some herbs will be available for purchase at the end of the program. There will be free refreshments. For additional information please call 845-754-8070 or 845-856-2702.

Schoolhouse Stitchers

Learn How to Crazy Quilt

Thursday Mornings 10:00-12:00
1863 Schoolhouse, 25 Grange Rd.
Huguenot--Call 754-8070 or 856-5691. It's fun!



Are you interested in Deerpark history? Come join the Town of Deerpark Museum Committee that meets on the first Thursday of every month at 7:00 pm at the 1863 Schoolhouse, 25 Grange Road, Huguenot.