

Herb Gardening

Now might be the time to start thinking about establishing an herb and aroma garden. A good source of inspiration is a field trip to the Boyce Thompson Arboretum just outside of Superior. Founded in the 1920's as a living museum for plants, the Arboretum has a collection of 3,201 different types of plants. "Colonel" Thompson, a wealthy mining engineer, was the owner of the Inspiration Consolidated Copper Company at Globe-Miami and Magma Copper Company of Superior. While doing volunteer work for the Red Cross in Asia during World War I, he became impressed with humanity's dependence on plants and especially the creative ways mankind had utilized the scarce plants of arid regions. It was during this trip that he started thinking about creating a desert arboretum, where plants from arid regions of the world could be studied and their seeds distributed. In one such cooperative study with the University of Arizona, it was discovered that the oil of the Jojoba seed contained a wax that is useful as a substitute for Sperm Whale oil.

Located in the midst of the Arboretum is the Wing Memorial Herb Garden, which contains over forty species of pot herbs and fragrant plants. The herb garden is constructed around the Clevenger house, a stone edifice built into the side of the mountain in the early 1900's, and home to the five-member Clevenger Family. After Colonel Thompson developed the property, he refurbished the rock structure as a playhouse for his grandchildren. It is used today to store and dry herbs, and as a place for visitors to take refuge from the summer heat.

Of the many herbs one encounters in this shady bower, several make excellent landscape plants. Rosemary typically comes in two varieties, a prostrate form (great as a ground cover or to drape over walls) and a more upright, growing plant that can be trimmed as a specimen plant or even a low-growing hedge. Rosemary has been used for everything from seasoning foods to repelling moths.

Society garlic provides a splash of color in the spring and early summer. Having earned its name from tasting like garlic, yet not passing along its dreaded reputation for producing bad breath, it is partial to afternoon shade and comes in a variegated variety for additional interest year-round.

One of my favorite herbs for beauty and aroma is Lavender. Its striking blue flowers spring upward from the grey foliage with a force that is truly breathtaking. Lavender has been cultivated for centuries and is used extensively for sachets and potpourris. The dried flowers can be used to scent water or soap. Certain species (*L. angustifolia* and *L. X intermedia*) are used for flavoring foods such as ice cream, salads and pastries. (Note: other species of Lavender contain harmful chemicals that should NOT be ingested.)

The Boyce Thompson Arboretum is open to the public, contains a Heritage Rose Garden, a Eucalyptus forest, cactus and butterfly gardens, and a low-water use demonstration garden, just to name a few. There is a nursery that is amply stocked with plants and cool garden art, as well as a gift shop to pick up that book on plants you've been searching for.