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HISTORY OF THE APOTHECARY GARDEN - Tamarra S. James

The idea of separating a garden into one for useful plants and another for beauty is a fairly recent innovation. Until about three hundred years ago, all plants were considered to be useful either as medicine or food, some in a practical way, others in a purely symbolic application. Even the beauty of the plants themselves was thought to be medicinal, contributing to the general health of the individual by strengthening the spirit. giving comfort to the soul, and lifting depression of the mood. One must not lose sight of this principle when approaching the medieval garden, as in a very real sense, all gardens had their origin in the physic garden.

Aside from the few basic medicinal plants grown by every housewife for the cure of common minor ills, much like we use the patented medicines of today, the bulk of the truly curative herbs

were originally cultivated in the monastery gardens.

Healing was, from the earliest recorded times granted the distinction of being a religious practice. Each culture of the Pagan period had its healing gods, and in evolution, one of the greatest miracles attributed to the god of the new religion was the power to heal.

The monks were, by and large a literate class of people where the greater population was not, so it is that the majority of the hard information regarding growth, plant description, and garden lists has come from them. We can assume that the gardens of the doctors and apothecaries were similar if on a much smaller scale, as the monks had greater access to plants imported from other parts of the world than the common man.

The infirmary garden of a monastery generally consisted of several raised rectangular beds with walkways between them. Most of the plants were to be found in the Emperor Charlemagne's list of medicinal herbs which formed a part of his "Capitulare de Villis" a document from the ninth century which detailed the plants he wished his gardeners' to plant on his estates and which

he encouraged all of his subjects to plant for the benefit of the nation.

As society reached out of the Middle Ages into the fifteenth century, new plants were being brought back from the Americas. Master Ion Gardener wrote the practical text, "The Feate of Gardening". This was a set of instructions on cultivation, grafting, and the culture of herbs. All of the herbs listed in Master Ion's treatise were old world, and had been commonly grown all over Europe for hundreds of years. It reached beyond the folklore of plants and provided a sound scientific base for the gardener to work from.

In the sixteenth century we find the first wave of dramatic change in the gardening consciousness of Europe since the beginning of the Crusades. Prior to this there had been a limited number of herbs that had grown familiar to the herbalist through years of cultivation and use. Now we have almost daily expansion of the herbalists, as navigators and explorers carried back new seed and rootstock, along with documents containing native applications of the medicines of their lands. Most significant in this influx of new botanicals were those from the Americas.

The feeling of the time is best illustrated by a quotation from Holinshed, a historian of the sixteenth century. "It is a wonder also to see how many strange herbs, plants, and annual fruits are daily brought unto us from the Indies, Americas, Taprobane, Canary Isles and all parts of the world. I have seen in someone's garden to the number of three or four hundred of them, if not more, the half of those names within forty years past we had no manner of knowledge."

The first botanic gardens as places of study were founded in Padua Italy 1545 and in Oxford England 1621. These schools of herbalism effectively took medicine out of the hands of the monastery and placed it under the control of the educating physicians. Doctors began to lecture on the healing properties of herbs, and their reliance on leeching, or bleeding, and chemical alchemy was largely replaced by the study of the new science of herbal alchemy.

It was in the seventeenth century, following this great influx of herbs, that the largest number of herbals were published. Many of them included the New World herbs as a matter of course. Most of these books were written by doctors of medicine, but they were now leaning more heavily on the botanical properties and

characteristics of plants than on the previous, almost mystical systems of humours, planetary influences, and doctrine of signatures.

Prior to this time, almost all herbals relied heavily on Dioscorides volume entitled "De Materia Medica". It required the discovery of new plants to generate original research and the development of herbal philosophy. There was still a problem in that many of these authors were writing about plants they had never seen or used. There existed popular engraving templates for the illustration of herbals, usually created by artists rather than herbalists, and often from description instead of observation. In some cases, such as John Gerard's "Great Herbal", or "History of Plants" the wrong illustration was placed in the text, confusing the reader, and the dilettante herbalist, who repeated the error in his own book.

In 1577 an herbal of an entirely new type was translated from the Spanish into English. It was written by Nicholas Monardes, and was entitled, "Joyfull Newes Out Of The Newe Founde Worlde". This book catalogued and described medicinal plants from America. Then, in 1629 and 1640 a pair of books were published that changed the entire face of herb lore. They are often considered to be the greatest English books on herbs and plants ever published. They were written by John Parkinson, and are entitled respectively, "Paradisi I Sole Paradisus Terrestris" and "Theatrum Botanicum: The Theatre of Plants". More than 3,000 plants are described in this volume, and unlike their predecessors, these books combine history, horticulture, botany, and pharmacy all in one place. Parkinson is also the first herbal author to seriously attempt botanical classification into tribes or families of plants, and into classes.

The herbals of Parkinson and Gerard went to the New World along

with the settlers, and a selection of seed and rootstock for various medicinal herbs accompanied them. The ships returned to England with native North American plants to be cultivated, and studied in the European botanical colleges and gardens. The properties of many of the plants were learned from the Native Indians, which lead to the publication of John Josselyn's book, "New England's Rarities Discovered" in 1672. This book included "The Physical and Chyrurgical Remedies Wherewith The Natives Constantly Use To Cure Their Distempers, Wounds and Sores". In 1728, John Bartram founded North America's first botanic garden near Philadelphia. In 1765, he was commissioned 'Botanizer Royal For America' and began to travel and collect plants, accompanied by his son, who was a major botanical artist. It is through the labours of these two men that many North American herbs came to the attention of the Swedish Botanist Carl Linnaeus, and were classified by him.

The study of the herb garden is in itself a study in the evolution of botanical medicine and its development. In the garden lists we see not just the herbs that were known to the early doctor, but more importantly, those which were used by him.

A list of the herbs from John Bartram's garden examined in relation to the monastery garden of the ninth century gives indication of a greater range of subtlety in the mixing of possible ingredients, and a wider set of applications than those

available to the lay brothers in their time. An asterix marks the New World herbs.

Melissa officinalis, Lemon Balm.
Ocimum basilicum, Sweet Basil
*Mondara didyma, Bee Balm.
*Cimicifuga racemosa, Black Cohosh.

*Eupatorium perfoliatum, Boneset.
Borago officinalis, Borage.
Nepeta cataria, Catnip.
Dianthus caryophyllus, Clove Pink.
Vinca major, Periwinkle.
Symphytum officinale, Comfrey.
Digitalis purpurea, Fox Glove.
Cochlearia amoracia, Horseradish.
Pulmonaria officinalis, Lungwort.
*Lobelia siphilitica, Great Lobelia.
Calendula officinalis, Pot Marigold.
Verbascum thapsus, Mullein.
Paeonia officinalis, Peony.
Myrtus communis, Myrtle.
Hypericum perforatum, St. John's Wort.
Teucrium marum, Germander.
Galium odoratum, Sweet Woodruff.
Tanacetum vulgare, Tansy.
Artemisia dracunculus, French Tarragon.
Dipsacus fullonum, Fuller's Teasle.
*Asarum virginicum, Wild Ginger.
*Gaultheria procumbens, Wintergreen.
Acorus calamus, Sweet Flag.
Crocus sativa, Saffron Crocus.
Allium schoenoprasum, Chives.
Lonicora caprifolium, Woodbine Honeysuckle.
Rubus fruticosus, Blackberry.
*Hamamelis virginiana, Witch Hazel.
Lindera benzoin, Spice Bush.
Punica granatum, Pomegranate.
Cassia acutifolia, Alexandrian Senna.
Ilex aquifolium, English holly.
*Populus candicans, Poplar, Balm of Gilead.
*Cornus florida, Dogwood.

*Sassafras albidum, Sassafras.
Laurus nobilis, Bay laurel.

(The following herbs are also to be included in this garden.
Latin names can be found in the previous list:

Chamomile, Lovage, Dill, Fennel, Horehound, Hyssop, French
Lavender, Pennyroyal, Mint, Rosemary, Rue, Agrimony, Sage, Thyme,
Yarrow, Madonna Lily, Apothecary's Rose).

It is likely that this is an optimistic list since weather
conditions in Philadelphia would have made the growth of plants
such as Pomegranate extremely difficult, although most of the
herbs would quite handily grow there. As you can see, the
majority of the herbs from the ninth century list are still
included, with the many additions of the New World herbs.
Today, many of these herbs are still grown for their use as
pharmaceuticals and even as medicine advances into the "Modern
age" it remains rooted with the herbs, in the origins of the
apothecary garden.

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