

West Newbury - Hills House Herb Garden

A West Newbury Garden Club project is the Goose-foot Herb Garden in front of the little old shoe-maker's shop on the grounds of the Morse-Hills House, home of the West Newbury Historical Society. This appealing small garden, all green and fragrant, gay with the yellow and orange blossoms of calendulas, and "not a weed in sight" was one of the highlights of an Open House tour sponsored by the West Newbury Historical Society. Many were the sincere compliments expressed by Garden Club members who came from great distances to see it, and West Newbury Garden Club members had reason to be proud of their herb garden.

Research, Foundation Preparations, and Partial Planting

It all began several years ago when the President of the West Newbury Garden Club spoke of the great surge of interest in the Garden Clubs in herb gardening. She thought it would be a worthwhile project for our club to undertake an intensive study of herbs, their habits, and their uses. The members were very enthusiastic, a committee was formed, and a serious study on herbs was undertaken. It was decided to use Rosetta E. Clark son's book "Herbs and Their Culture and Uses" as a guide. The club purchased the book and later presented it to the West Newbury Public Library. The book as divided into sections so that a member could present a review at each meeting throughout the year. Sometimes the program that followed were related to the current book review. Following one review on Propagation of Herbs, Mr. Roger Coggeshall, President of Cherry Hill Nurseries, lectured on "Propagation", with an extensive exhibit of specimens and methods.

In further research, members went on a pilgrimage to the home of Mrs. Bertha Whiting of Newburyport to see the herbs in her garden.

Another program, the guest speaker, Miss Harrieta Jackman, presented a lecture on herbs, and members made a delightful arrangement featuring herbs.

The interest on the subject of herbs continued with members studying independently various books on herbs, reading magazine articles, and collecting recipes, and it was decided to put some of this newly acquired knowledge to use.

The next meeting a delicious herb luncheon of hot casseroles, biscuits, bread, salads and desserts, all containing herbs, was enjoyed by members and a few friends. Herb recipes were discussed after the luncheon and hints on herb gardening were exchanged. An exhibit of herb books on gardening and cooking was on display, with interesting herb wheels and charts showing medicinal uses of herbs, and the use of herbs in dyeing. Some of the books were: "Herbs, Their Culture and Uses" by Louise Evans Hale; "Magic in Herbs" by Leonie de Sounin; "The Art of Cooking with Herbs and Spices" by Milo Miloradovich; and "The Shaker Cook Book" by Caroline B. Piercy.

March 1963

In March of 1963, the club president visited the New England Spring Flower Show and saw the exhibit of the Pilgrim Garden, featuring the Goosefoot Garden, which proved to be so interesting she decided to visit Plymouth Plantation, which she did in June. The simplicity of the garden was more apparent in its outdoor setting, and simplicity was very important because the delay in establishing our herb garden was partly due to the fact that several members preferred the formal stylized gardens, which were entirely unsuitable for the simple house built by a farmer. The West Newbury Historical Society stresses the farm-like atmosphere of the Morse-Hills House. Moreover, the Goosefoot Garden was an inexpensive garden to install and needed a minimum care.

The president secured a complete set of plans, with sketches for each member of the committee to study. After much discussion it was decided to establish a Goosefoot Garden in front of the little shoe-maker's shop.

Arrangements were made for the plowing, and members installed boards to define the "Goosefoot" paths that separated the spaces for the herbs. Next the flagstones were placed in position on the paths, ready for the thyme plants. Then a few barberry bushes were planted, but then the disastrous drought was upon us, and with the ban on watering nothing more could be done.

In the meantime, another excellent luncheon, featuring the use of herbs, was served to members. Again, as at the first luncheon, recipes were discussed and question and answer period followed in which horticultural specimens of herbs were identified, bringing out interesting facts about each herb.

Spring of 1966

In the spring of the year 1966, the members of the West Newbury Garden Club determined to get the garden underway. A committee of members set to work at once. All went well.

Some herbs were donated, some were purchased, all of which were duly planted and mulched. Each plant had an herb identifying marker.

All summer long members weeded and cared for the garden, transporting gallon after gallon of water in jugs for the thirsty plants, since water has not yet been installed in the house, a situation which will be remedied. As a result of all this, the garden flourished.

The Hills House herb garden was winterized at the final work meeting of the committee and members are now looking forward to another season when additional plants will be added to the garden, as this is a continuing project.

Hills House Garden Certificates and Awards

The archives contain the complete plan of the Goosefoot Garden around the old cobbler's shop as well as a list of twenty-five herbs planted by members. There are also photographs of the garden in bloom.

In 1967 The Garden Club Federation of Massachusetts presented a certificate to the West Newbury Garden Club in recognition of distinguished service for its Herb Garden at the Historical Society. The award was sponsored by the Federation and Sears, Roebuck and Co. and is in our archives (as are the application forms and full documentation for the award).

In 1975 the project received the Award for Merit from the Northern District to the Club for the Club's slides of the Herb Garden at the Historical Society's Hills House.

These awards of distinction and the number of years the project has been maintained would qualify for consideration for further awards and recognition.