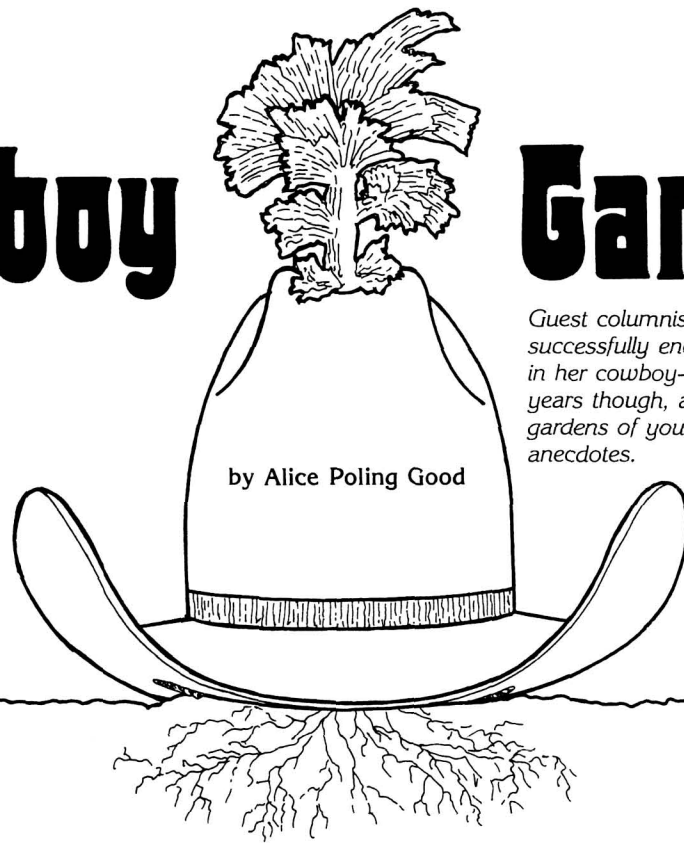


Cowboy

Gardener



Guest columnist Alice Poling Good successfully encouraged the green thumb in her cowboy—the process took several years though, and many of you with gardens of your own will enjoy her anecdotes.

by Alice Poling Good

Bas anyone ever tried to make a gardener out of a cowboy? Do not try it, unless you have about forty years to work at it.

Early in our married life Paul and I moved to a place where we had space for a garden. In my enthusiasm for growing things, I hadn't noticed his lukewarm response to all my chatter about a vegetable garden. My folks lived nearby, so Dad volunteered to prepare the plot for us.

"Every family needs a garden these days. It's a lot of work but you're young!" Those were the words of Paul's mother.

The following winter as I glanced through the seed catalogs, I asked, "How many varieties of lettuce seed shall we order for our garden, Paul?"

He quickly responded, "Only order one. That will grow all we can eat!"

"Umm, did anyone ever hear of a garden with only one variety of lettuce? You want corn in our garden, Paul? I thought you liked it. You say we can buy potatoes as reasonably as we can grow them? . . ." My interest was evident in my running comments, hardly leaving him time to answer.

In May we staked the garden rows, dropped a variety of seeds and nearly completed planting our early garden. I called to Paul, to cover the beet seeds. When I turned from the carrot plot, I saw him at the end of the beet row, mounding the soil high and unevenly over the small seeds with first one big boot and then the other.

I cried, "Oh, you're piling the soil too high on those little seeds, Paul. They will never grow."

"Yes, they will," he retorted, "Don't you know anything about gardening, girl?"

Except for the beets, that year our little plot produced enough vegetables for us and some to share. All summer long I felt smug each time I noticed the few beets that broke through that long heaped row of soil.

Two years later when we moved to ArtAnna Farm, Paul thought a vegetable garden and a beautiful lawn

would contribute to our seasonal pleasures. No store in our area supplied such delicious Bibb lettuce or such fresh peas as those we grew.

Through the years we annually added a few trees or shrubs to the wide expanse of lawn that we enjoyed as we sat on the patio in the summer evenings.

I noticed my cowboy still dragged his boots, however, when a big garden project loomed ahead. I also soon learned that turmoil ruled if you turned him loose with a pair of hedge shears when he had a burst of energy. His idea of a good job was to trim shrubs extremely short so it need not be repeated soon.

Three successive seasons I suggested to Paul the lawn shrubs needed to be pruned. I had a selective trim in mind, to top growthy branches and clip old woody stocks to the ground.

One summer morning, as our daughter Ava and I rounded the curve to the garage from a trip in town, she cried, "Mom, look what Dad is doing to the shrubbery."

A quick glance told me it would take several years for even the honeysuckle to recover from that clip.

Our gardening strategy often conflicted. I wanted flowering crab branches to billow to the ground beneath. But Paul questioned how anyone could possibly maneuver a riding mower under such low branches. I liked trees planted in an informal design; he thought a straight row of trees would be easier for mowing.

For several seasons I nurtured a blue spruce into a beautiful specimen. One evening I happily weeded the beds in back of our home while Paul clipped shrubs alone in the front.

He proudly called to come see how he had pruned the blue spruce for me. When I rounded the corner of the house, I felt faint. There stood the remnants of my efforts—a foot of small laterals supported by three feet of trunk.

When Paul saw my tears he tried to console me. "Don't you understand, the mower will no longer brush the tips of the branches!"

Continued on Page 380

One day he said, "Now we have enough plantings in the lawn. We won't need to buy more."

Well, he did not realize gardeners never stop planting. Paul did not say we could not grow more, and he did not indicate we could not accept gifts.

Of course we had to plant the Christmas pine the Drakes gave us, and the Norway maple from Aunt Mae. We planted the old-fashioned red peony from his grandmother's garden by the bell post. And what about that Sassafras tree the Paulding County Angus breeder brought to me?

I found it productive to propagate boxwood and to see what a lovely plant emerged in five years when I tended it carefully. I transplanted seedlings that sprang up in the shrubbery—they grew big, if you gave them more space. We enjoyed grapes from vines a friend planted for us.

For several seasons, we talked of an asparagus bed. When the roots arrived one cold day, Paul said he had an excellent place to plant them. That evening he persuasively talked of the new asparagus bed in the far corner of the front lawn, behind the tall shrubbery. Another time he divided the garden with asparagus roots planted down the center. Finally, we planted seeds and waited the five inevitable years to enjoy beautiful asparagus near the back door.

One June day I told my cowboy the Evergreen Garden Club was to meet at our home the next week. We would enjoy a sack lunch while we sat on the lawns.

"Will you please dig and mulch a bit around the trees and shrubs?" I asked.

The morning of the eventful day I looked out the window, and there I saw Paul adding the finishing touches—big chunks of dry barnyard manure well infused with straw. He never questioned that my guests might find Angus manure offensive. His loyal efforts won thanks from me as I made other plans for lunch.

Thirty-five years after that first garden, when I leafed through the seed catalog on a winter's evening, Paul said, "I know you admire Arthur Brook's rock garden. Arthur said he would plan one and help me put it in if it's agreeable with you." I wondered if this was the same cowboy I married?

When our old one winter-killed, Paul knew I wanted a new redbud. The fall before his surgery, he surprised me. He dug five strong seedlings from a dear friend's garden and planted them in our lawn. Their blooms are among the first to greet us in the spring.



Nowadays as he rests in his chair after working on the exercise bars, Paul asks, "Did you say those pale blue flowers are flax? And that herb, I know you said it's Artemesia, but I'd prefer to call it by its common name, sweet Annie. It looks to me as if that garlic is ready to harvest."

Of course he reverts. When he watched Ava and me plant a few small peach trees three years ago, he asked, "Now you don't think you're going to get any good out of those, do you?"

Who do you think counted all thirty-four of the Red Haven peaches the next spring and advised us when each one was ready to pick? A