

My Friend and Herbs

by Alice Poling Good

This month our guest columnist Mrs. Paul Good of Van Wert, Ohio, shares her memory of a dear friend who sparked her interest in growing herbs. Mrs. Good's grandson provided the illustration.

It would be remiss for me to share my interest in culinary herbs without introducing my 91-year-old friend and neighbor, Arthur Brooks. Arthur was first a friend and neighbor of my father.

As a young man Arthur was apprenticed at Lord Aldenham's 200-acre estate near Elstree, England. In 1911 Arthur came to the states as a horticulturist at Dr. R.R. Reeder's school at Hastings-on-Hudson, N.Y. When Dr. Reeder came to Van Wert, Ohio, as director of the Marsh Foundation School, Arthur Brooks became director of the horticulture program there.

His interest in horticulture continued throughout the years. He judged flower shows in New York, Cincinnati, Boston, Chicago, and yes; in Ohio at Van Wert, Delphos and Lima. At his home Arthur has a rock garden and grows flowers, herbs and vegetables.

In 1935 Arthur organized Van Wert County residents to participate in an annual bird count which continues today. Through the years on Arbor Day he turned the first shovel of dirt to plant young trees in the community. He encouraged and instructed students so they would continue the tradition.

When my father wished to impart some bit of garden wisdom to us children, he prefaced it with, "Arthur Brooks says..." When Dad wanted to plant anything special, he consulted Arthur.

I can still picture Arthur on one summer day as he walked through our pasture toward the farm pond. A dozen 4-H youngsters followed as he led them on a nature walk. He stopped a moment and shared with them his knowledge of the relationship of sunshine, soil and rain to all of life. Later he picked up a sun-dried cowchick and said, "Observe the insect life on the underside of this cowchick, children. All of life is dependent on other life. It's an endless cycle."

His gracious ways win cooperation from all sectors. "Squire Good," he flatteringly called my husband, "I think your wife would like a rose bed." Roses were far from Paul's thoughts but I soon had eight lovely roses bloom near my back entrance.

"Alice tells me she plans a perennial bed, Squire. This open space is a good place for it with the dark board fence as background," he said. "And here at the drive's edge I visualize a small rockery. I have a couple miniature evergreens and several Alpine plants for it in my garden," he encouraged. "If you'll gather various sizes of rock and fill this area with pea-size gravel, I'll be over with the plants when you have finished."

Well integrated into the plans by now, my husband asked, "And how can I possibly repay you for all this help, Arthur?"

"If you'll just share with me a load of that fine Angus manure for my compost, I'll be amply repaid," he answered.

Between the efforts of Arthur and my husband I once had a rose garden. I still have a perennial flower bed and a small rock garden to show for their efforts. But the herbs I grow are just between me and Arthur. It started 30 years ago when we first moved to the farm and he brought me a tansy which I immediately lost. Next it was rosemary. Something happened to it before spring. Arthur never embarrassed me by asking about the lost ones. He just



persisted. He brought lavender, then French tarragon. In his un-failing list of instructions he suggested I put a sprig of tarragon in my vinegar jug and he said in his broad English accent, "When selecting tarragon, be certain to get the French variety, the Russian is coarse and not so lovely a fragrance."

When he presented the gift herb, he stressed the tarragon name and then he always included the Latin name for good measure. One day when he brought chives to me, his eyes twinkled as he suggested, "Try them in your cottage cheese. They have a lovely mild onion flavor."

"Good morning, my friend and neighbor," Arthur greeted me one October day. "I have several garlic bulbs for you. Use some on your good Angus beef and now is the time to plant the remaining toes. When the foot and a half tall plant turns brown next summer, it will be time to harvest. You'll have garlic to share with all your friends."

So with such encouragement to grow herbs, plus my joy in cooking, who could not become interested in culinary herbs? My husband calls it an obsession of which he is very tolerant because he, too, enjoys tasty and aromatic flavors.

My chives, garlic, thyme, oregano, several mints, dill, horehound, and borage (all easy to grow perennials) add interest to our food, beauty to our garden and nectar for the bees. Each spring I plant the annuals: basil for tomatoes and summer savory, the bean herb. This year I added two new herbs, purple basil and salad burnet.

One fall before we left for Florida, Arthur stopped with a small sack of shallot bulbs. They're thriving. I no longer lose the treasures he brings to me; I've learned to cherish them.

Our young daughter who ran from the hoe when she was a kid, married last summer. Today in town, an eight-foot sloped area runs the length of her small back yard. Recently when we stopped to visit, she suggested, "Come look at my garden, Mom! See how tall the horseradish is. Now what is this herb you gave me?" she asked as she pointed at her thrifty plants. "The mints are over here and look at my chives," she continued.

So now I, too, have a protege, just as I was Arthur's. AJ