

WALTZING TOWARD THE SOLSTICE
(NEWS FROM THE COMMUNITY GARDEN)
AUGUSTA BENEDICT

"Asperges me, Domine, hyssopo mundabor"

Rolls right off the tongue, like so much sun-porch honey, doesn't it? This swatch of incantation is from the Anthem at Sprinkling the Holy Water, in Latin Mass. It means "Sprinkle me with hyssop, O Lord, and I shall be cleansed." Not only is it fun to intone, but the phrase seems an appropriate prayer for any gardener embarking upon a day's work. To have hyssop in a garden is to work in the midst of what the Greeks called *hyssopos* from the Hebrew word *esoh*, meaning "holy herb".

Indeed, pulling on work gloves at the entrance to a garden is an epiphonal ritual. The cleansing of garden work is a trinity of activity that involves physical labor, grace of spirit and intellectual intent. To work a garden asks us to brush against the hyssop: to place our bodies in the physical presence of growing things, the earth at hand, the roll of weather and the tools we utilize. Gardening is rarely a hermetic activity. Especially in a community garden, we rub elbows, spirit and intellect with fellow workers, sharing in the wholeness of the site. Gardeners also share the work of the inherent community. These are the birds, rabbits, slugs and insects, those who cohabit and make the garden complete and holy.

Not surprisingly, this month's herb of the month is hyssop, an aromatic perennial that thrives in sunny, well

drained soil. Propagation of the "holy herb" is by seed, planted in the spring. Sow seeds one quarter inch deep and one foot apart. As the plant grows, periodically prune away old flower heads on the plant.

Medicinally, its aromatic, camphor-like oil lends itself to use as a cleansing herb. It is useful as an expectorant, stimulant and to promote sweating. For medicinal use cut stems prior to the flowers' opening and hang the branches upside down, out of light and damp. An infusion of leaves and tops is recommended for sore throats, coughs, colds and fevers.

As a culinary herb, hyssop flowers and leaves make splendid additions to green salads and fruit salads. Tea can be made from dried flowers. Add one quarter cup of minced, fresh hyssop to four cups of tomato sauce for spaghetti or omelets.

Gardeners will also benefit from hyssop in that the flowers attract bees, butterflies and hummingbirds. The plant itself is helpful in controlling cabbage moths, flea beetles and other pests.

If you would like to become a Community Garden member and begin growing your own vegetables, flowers, and herbs, the volunteer-operated garden welcomes new members. Regularly scheduled work parties are held at the garden each Sunday morning from 9 am to 10 am. No experience, tools, or horticultural enlightenment are required. The garden's Sprout Queen, Leslie Sroufe, can be reached at 436-0738 for more information. The garden is located at the east end of Madison Street, in the Grove.

SPUDS WILDLIFE COLUMN



As soon as it gets warm here, out of the woodwork come crawling scales and scales of big, black, 1/2" long Carpenter ants. Though huge and intimidating looking, these are actually very harmless, preoccupied creatures (though their flying counterparts are really irritating).



The Sword Fern makes up a good part of the underbrush, mixing with the Salal and other low growth where you want to walk. This variety of fern is just as happy growing out of dead stumps as actual earth.



Your cat may drag one of these in - the Northwestern Garter Snake. Though not the playful creature your cat thinks it is, this snake is non-poisonous and rarely bites, but can leave a funny smell on your hands. However, it eats slugs.



The Beaver, one of the few rodents with a 9-5 contractor's job, is also one of the most intelligent, productive, and capable critters we know of. As a matter of fact, and probably all be better off leaving it to Beavers.

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