

JUNE'S GARDEN

"Rose Cottage
Berkshire Downs,
Berkshire, England"

"Dear Clare,

"I think we had better have the battle about Latin names sooner rather than later, and it won't take me long to have you on the ropes.

"I know you like hellebores and talk of growing some yourself. Are you going to write to a nursery and order 'six hellebores please?' I don't know what you would get. I have in my garden *Helleborus atrorubens* with blood-red cup-shaped flowers which come out at Christmas, *H. Orientalis* in many colours, with speckles inside the petals and which flowers for weeks from early spring, *H. Corsicus*, a larger plant with flowers like pale green waterlilies, and *H. Cyclophyllus*, a rarer plant which was given to me by a great botanist.

The hellebores are not a large genus, but when I tell you that there are thousands of species of euphorbia, you will see that identification must be exact. 'Honeysuckle' will not do to describe a plant except in literature or casual conversation..."

Excerpt from the book,
"Gardening Letters to My Daughter"
By Anne Scott James
with some replies by Clare Hastings

The author Anne Scott James, a renowned writer on gardening in England, and her daughter, Clare Hastings, live next door to each other in a small village on the Berkshire Downs. When Clare decided to seriously turn her hand to the soil, she began to receive letters of encouragement and helpful advice from her mother, undertoned with positive steps to become a knowledgeable gardener; such as, it will be easier in the long run to learn the proper botanical names when you first start gardening.

My daughter Lee gave me this book, and I treasure what she inscribed inside the cover, "Mom, thank you for giving so much to me, especially the love of flowers."

What she should have said was, "Mom, along with giving me the love of flowers, why didn't you teach me the correct botanical names."

Lee is a gardener like I am, she loves all kinds of flowers, but now we have to learn how to be more specific than to ask the nursery people, "Do you have one of those cute little blue flowers that grow close to the ground that kind of look like a morning glory?"

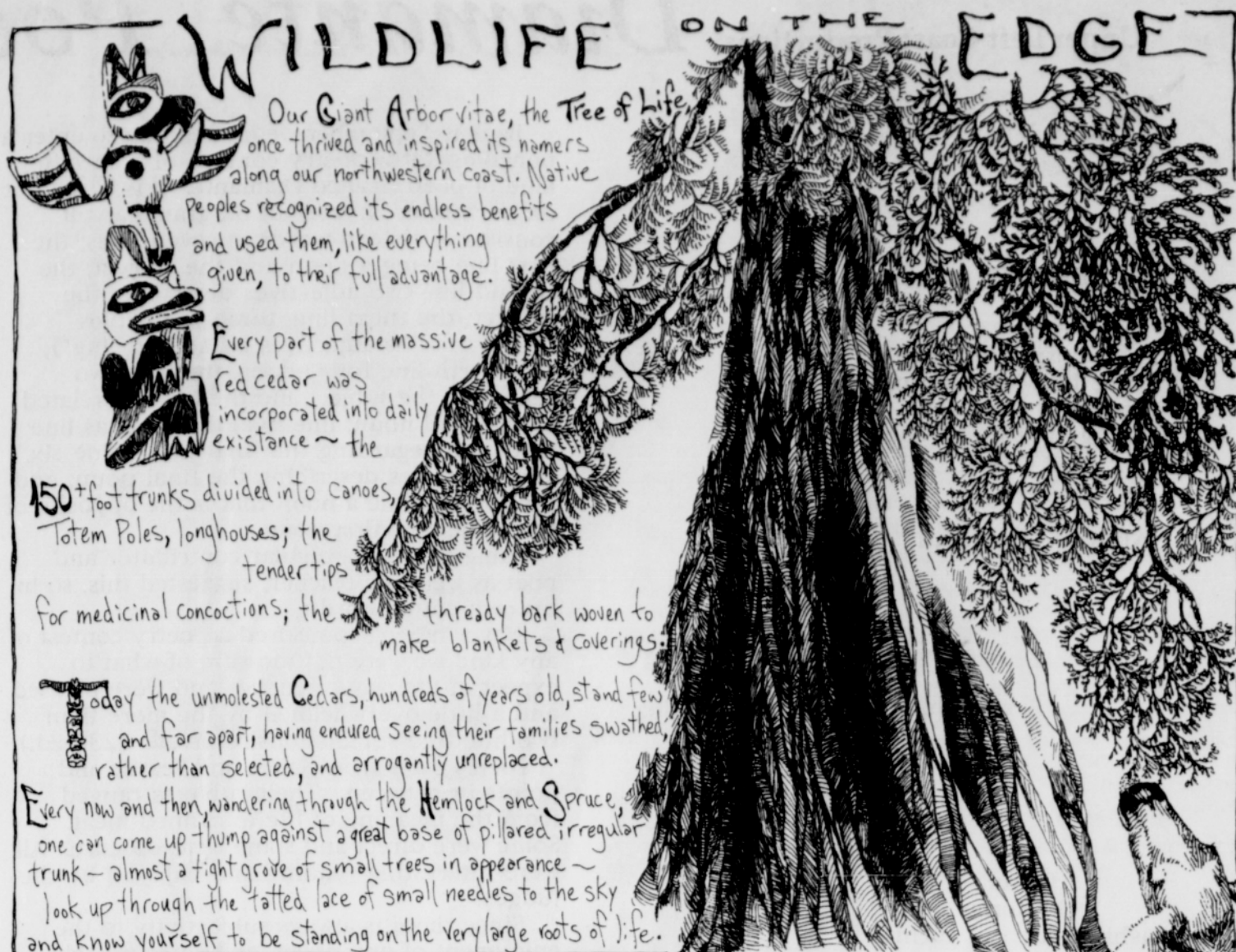
My daughter Leslie also is an avid gardener. Her role and mine are reversed from those of James and her daughter. Leslie knows many more botanical names of flowers than I may ever know. Many plants that I have in my garden labeled with the proper names and lists of hints on how to care for them are her presents to me.

Little did I realize that in my senior years I'd be trying to write a garden column and with Leslie's encouragement "to get on with this garden stuff." I should learn the proper Latin names for flowers even if I can't pronounce them.

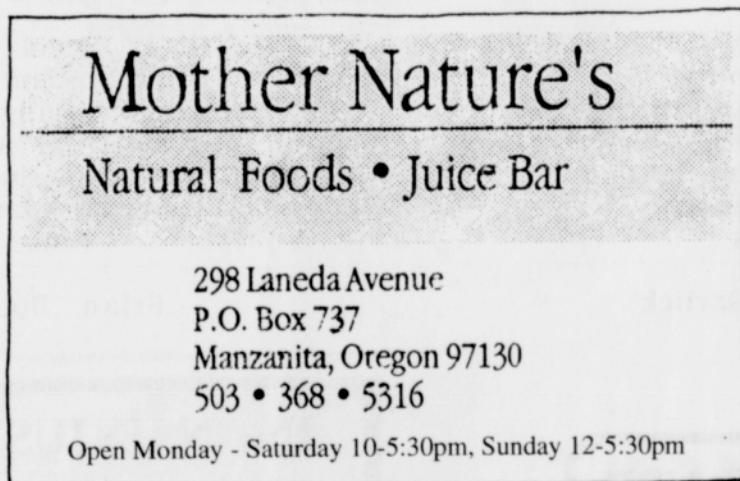
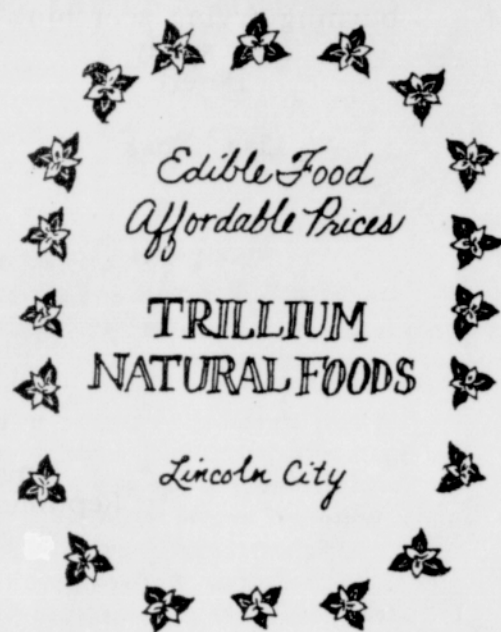
When I struggled trying to pronounce "*Sisyrinchium*" in a conversation with Beth Holland about a small Iris-like plant I was trying to identify, she quoted a helpful hint she had heard at a garden lecture: "Just tuck your chin down and slur your words; possibly your audience wouldn't know the difference." Beth never slurs her words; she is very knowledgeable (but I may have to practice slurring).

Let's begin our lesson:

"When scholars began to classify plants, they chose the universal language Latin. Plants are referred to scientifically by two names, generally written in italics. The first name, which always has its initial letter capitalized is that of the genus, the second is the species name, or specific epithet: for example, *Rosa canina*. In nature, species often show minor variations in character; these are given a third name, prefixed by "subsp" (subspecies), "var" (variantas), or "f" (forma): thus, *Rhododendron rex subsp. fictolacteum*. A cultivar (cultivated variety) is



Friendship is a common belief in the same fallacies, mountebanks and hobgoblins.
H. L. Mencken



one that has been selected either from the wild or from gardens and grown in cultivation, and whose characteristics are preserved by some means of controlled propagation. The name of such a plant is written in Roman type with an initial capital letter and in single quotation marks: thus *Choisya ternata* 'Sundance.'

The American Horticultural Society
Encyclopedia of Gardening

A helpful verbal book to study to become more familiar with the correct botanical names is "Sunset's New Western Garden Book". Its alphabetical index steers the reader to the botanical name such as: under H is *Holly* in parenthesis (see *Ilex*), which is the proper name for Holly.

A pictorial book that has 2,048 illustrations in full color is "The Color Dictionary of Flowers and Plants for Home and Garden", by Roy Hay and Patrick M. Syngé.

I have used both of these books to cross section and usually find the names of the plants

I'm in doubt of, either the correct botanical name or other information I might need.

All garden books and some catalogs use the Latin names for their text. A catalog that gives extensive information is "White Flower Farm". Along with color pictures of flowers, the text gives the botanical name, the pronunciation, the common name and information about the plant.

There are many more catalogs that are helpful in choosing new plants for your garden, but be sure that what you are sending for is the right species for our climate. When I first started ordering plants from catalogs, I was intrigued by the colorful pictures and fanciful names like Tinkle Toes, Fairy Bells, Rainbow Giants, etc. I tried them all and because of not knowing which zones they would grow best in I made many costly mistakes. Also, read the fine print as to the age of the plant you are ordering. One catalog I was reading showed arbors covered with roses and wisteria and advertised to send for these plants and soon you will have arbors full of flowers. The prices seemed unbelievably inexpensive, but reading the small print (one year old plant), one would have to wait 20 years or more to have an arbor covered with flowers like the ones in the catalog.

I hope by the end of this year I'll be able to read through a garden book without having to look up every other Latin word that is used in the text.

I would really like to hear from others who enjoy gardening. Please write to June's Garden, P. O. Box 74, Cannon Beach, OR 97110.