



Kathy's Garden:

Seedy Herbs in a Garden of Squares

The other morning when nostalgia or my dormant Swedish genes got the best of me, I determined to bake some limpa. My old recipe calls for fennel seed and anise seed, as well as orange peel, to lend that straight from Sweden flavor, & I dutifully bought some cute little bottles of the flavorful seeds.

Later, as I was kneading the dough & musing on the high cost of herbs & spices, I remembered my fennel plants, grown for the delectation of swallowtail butterflies. At my doorstep I have a free source for those pricey seeds; indeed the roadsides are lined with great stands of plummy fennel. As for anise, well, it's an annual. I could scatter some in the meadow even now, & perhaps have seeds enough for my winter baking.

All of which makes me consider the virtues of a seedy herb garden. Most of the herbs grown for seed are members of the *umbellaria* group & have pretty clusters of flowers like lace doilies held above fine-cut foliage.

Anise is white flowered & grows about a foot and a half tall, looking like a delicate version of Queen Anne's Lace. It originated in Egypt & was grown in Ancient Greece as well for the licorice-sweet seeds. In the middle ages its cultivation spread to Europe and Scandinavia, reaching my ancestors who were doubtless sitting about wishing they could do something about the tedious rye bread. Planted in May in a warm spot it flowers in July. I'm going to try some now, though it is late; if our autumn is warm the seeds might still ripen.

Coriander looks much like Italian parsley, the flat sort, & has a dual purpose. The young leaves, called cilantro in most places, are an essential for great salsa. If you let the seeds ripen their scent changes dramatically to a sweet & spicy, faintly orange flavor. Palest mauve flowers lend beauty to the garden, even if you don't want to eat your coriander.

If you grow only one seedy herb in your garden I'll bet it is dill. Dill and fennel look a lot alike; a taste of the leaves will quickly let you tell them apart. If you grow cucumbers and are an ambitious pickle maker of course you will plant dill. Dill "bouquet" is a somewhat more refined version of the plant, and is pretty in the flower border.

If you don't live near roadsides ripe with fennel, which has naturalized all through northern California, even in the streets of San Francisco, you may plant the vigorous common sort with its greenish yellow flowers, or the more elegant smoky red-purple bronze fennel. Or both. You could, in fact, make a hedge of fennel in two colors. Fennel was once believed to be a sure safeguard against the evil eye; I know it is a sure beacon to butterflies. Where there are butterflies there can surely be only wonderful things happening—or so I console myself. Fennel is a perennial; plant it now & you'll have it for years to come.

Caraway, which my Swedish ancestors like to slip into their bread, is a biennial. Plant it in autumn & you will have seeds the following summer. The flowers are white, on plants as tall as anise, and the leaves may be used to flavor soup.

You could also plant tall, tropical looking Angelica; Lovage, which smells & tastes a bit like celery; Sweet Cecily, which tastes like licorice candy and tolerates shade well, & of course, masses of parsley.

If you had room and were an obsessive herb gardener with a taste for aromatic seed you could design a garden of squares filled with these plants, each square edged in some bright annuals—ribbons of blue lobelia or foamy alyssum, brazen marigolds or subtle bands of clipped rosemary or santolina. You could also try the other seed bearing herbs, sesame and poppies, massed in blocks.

I'm not certain if sesame, with its soft foliage and big white flowers, will ripen in Humboldt County, but it would be worth a try. Poppies of all sorts do well here, particularly for those lucky enough to garden in sandy river bottom soil. Imagine the great splashes of scarlet and orange and pink and white and orchid. If you want the culinary seeds, *papaver somniferum* is the kind to grow; if your garden is for curiosity and delight more than eating you could, perhaps, substitute any of the silky annual poppies, or even the startling perennial oriental poppies. Your garden will look like something from the Enchanted Land of Oz.

~ Kathy Epling



October is an especially difficult month this year, rich with possibilities, and with Pluto recently direct dredging up for final consideration all the ugly, unacknowledged, unprocessed old experiences around power; taking on or giving away our personal power, abuses of power in our personal lives and in our world. Pluto in Capricorn is particularly concerned with government, big business and institutions of society, and will continue to be over the next few years. Of course the foundation of all abuses of power beginning with sexual abuse and demeaning of whole classes of people, mostly the women of the world, is patriarchy. Now in its decline the cruel system of male dominance fights tooth and nail to maintain control. In 1st World countries women live under the threat of rape, whether conscious or not, (ie don't go out alone at night, don't dress in skimpy clothes, don't lead men on, if they lose control it's your fault, etc, etc) and in 3rd World countries women not only are largely preyed upon but tend to be the "beasts of burden." This system is not aligned with the natural inclinations of human beings as we are essentially social and community oriented animals.



In any case the mental/emotional imbalances are impacting everyone in ways unique to each of us. As we undergo the very deep and usually unconscious process of unwinding millennia of false beliefs, guilt, shame and blame heaped on us by society's distorted world view we experience many different physical symptoms as well, making self care and self compassion especially crucial. We're engaged in a dance on the high wire where each moment can bring a challenge to stay balanced rather than take the fall.

Attending to relationships by way of recognizing unequal power dynamics is a prominent theme, and as Venus goes retrograde on Friday the 5th we'll be in a particularly deep diving internal passage where what to do about unequal relationships is of major importance. Our values, personal and collective are part of the review, while female power arises as never before, at least in terms of the last many thousands of years. We're on fire with the energy of transformation, an inescapable force moving through us that will not be stopped. "Resistance is futile!" (Vogons fr. Hitchhiker's Guide)

Venus' fierce aspect has been in the fore most of September, all of this month and all through December. Wherever each individual's personal Venus resides in natal charts is an area to be focused on, as well the signs of Libra and Scorpio as the Queen of Heaven goes into her underworld passage. Reading the Sumerian myth of Inanna will help to orient ourselves around the depths of our personal journey. In the outer world we must stand firm in our values and priorities while becoming part of the collective NO resounding through the world with women and other oppressed peoples, and certainly in the US to the developmentally delayed, pathetic and self-serving caricature of a judge who is being considered for the United States Supreme Court.

- Salina Rain



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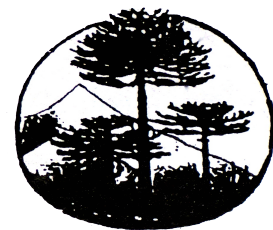
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