

Kathy's Garden: **GROWING WEEDS**

I have sweet *woodruff* spreading in the shade of my old fashioned roses, where, come midspring, the pretty whorls of leaves spiral up into tiny bouquets of white flowers, looking like something from a medieval tapestry or a Botticelli painting. These flower sprigs are traditionally floated in the *maibowle*, a drink made of sweet white wine, wild strawberries, and woodruff, beverage of the revels of May Day. When the foliage dries in later summer it smells enchantingly of vanilla and spice, a fragrance you can keep by pressing sprigs or whorls of the herb in your favorite heavy books. The sweet perfume lasts for years.

When I lived in England many years ago my neighbors in Kent thought I was a bit mad to take roots of sweet *woodruff* from the woods behind my house to plant in my garden. To them it was a common & uninteresting weed. Why I would want to grow it when it grew abundantly in every little wooded corner of the countryside escaped them. My nearest neighbor, who grew magnificent cabbages & rows & rows of tall *delphiniums* in every shade of blue, whose petals drifted through my yard in midsummer, warned that that nasty creeping weed would take over my garden. He invited me to admire the newly blooming *eschscholzia* in his rookery. "Had a terrible time with this one," he confided. "Seems to want a bit of dryness." To his pride it was finally blooming, two nice silky orange blossoms that I recognized as California poppies. He did not believe me when I told him these poppies covered entire hillsides in the spring in the Mohave Desert, & that, as a young teen, I had walked over those hills, dazzled by the expanse of orange blazing against the deep blue sky.



I often think of those poppies in Kent as I struggle to grow some lovely, much coveted exotic flower. I think, too, of the *woodruff* I loved in England & which I love in my garden here, though I can't go into my woods here to dig up another root or two. These plants remind me of the virtue of seeing and loving what is already close at hand, and taking nothing for granted.

No, I am not going to give up all exotica. I will struggle all my life with the bewitching, seductive strangers I encounter in shops, catalogs, & other people's gardens. Some may return my affection & consent to stay alive & bloom for me. But

periodically, as I tend plants from Europe or Asia or Australia, I remind myself to remember the virtue & beauty of those plants that grow close at hand in my woods & fields and spontaneously in my gardens.

Except for plants as common as *woodruff* was in Kent (& here I would our little white flowered *modesty* & the beautifully fragrant *yerba buena*) I would not now so blithely & carelessly gather any wild plants, unless they were in danger from roads or development. Around my cabin I rarely move the native plants & flowers, but mark their places & leave them alone, except to admire them as they increase -- the *trilliums*, *Henderson's fairy bells*, *starflowers* & twin flowers & the rest.

I am finding lately that even weeds have much beauty in their place. California *hedge nettle* runs rampant by the road & in some corners of my garden; a rather unpleasant smelling gray green soft leaved member of the mint family. I pull it out by the handful but never quite get it all. By late summer when the white and rosy mauve flowers bloom I am glad it is there. It is every bit as pretty as the cultivated *lamiums* -- *White Nancy* & *Beacon's Silver* & the rest. And it reminds me of the white dead nettle, or archangels, that ran through many an English hedgerow, blooming quite unappreciated, eternally lovely.

I took roots of white *dead nettle* to my garden too. My neighbor knew I was crazy then. He eagerly showed me a fine orange *rudbeckia*. "There is a plant worth growing!" I admired it and never told him it was the pretty black-eyed Susan I, along with generations of stateside children, had gathered in vacant lots and by country roadsides in the dusty golden afternoons so far away and long ago.



~ Kathy Epling

CONCRETE HAS NO MEMORY

Goodbye. Give me back the photographs of home, fragrance of cedar & balm
Let's close this house of straight chairs
& let the gardens go under

Concrete has no memory.
But remember the white cups
painted with red flowers. Remember
our bitter coffee & fugitive touch
moths or kisses against
the broken screen. We were aware
of burning. It was a time of war.
Pretend, as we close the door
ours was a grave romance
flammable & stern, inevitable
as numbers. At your cuffs
the buttons are tarnished. Yes
love too hangs by a single thread.



IF WE HAD THE DOMINION OF DUST

If we had the dominion of dust
principality of glaciers
though ice shatters
though the Isaac eyed children
peer from newsprint
though we can't stop explosion
we might go hand in hand
a cut paper chain
singing our way wholly to paradise
those ivory & gold gates
the boarded walls of chrysophase
where birds fly up shining like oil slicks
& the dead rise from the mass
grave of our longing
lamb eyed, & so young

~ Kathy Epling

CHINUTAUQUA
NATURAL FOODS

Open Mon-Sat 9am-7pm • Sundays 10am-5pm

Organic Foods • Vitamins • Herbs
Body Care Products
(707) 923-2452
783 Locust St. Garberville, CA 95542

Redway
Liquor
& DELI

Open Daily
9:00am-10:30pm
923-3913

Big selection of
Liquor, Beer & Wine
Great Burgers, Pizza,
Sandwiches & Chicken

3262 Redwood Drive, Redway

Whitethorn
Construction

Retail Lumber & Building Services

Garden & Building Supplies

Sustainably Harvested Hardwoods

'Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that endure as long as life lasts.'
-Rachel Carson

(707) 986-7416
545 Shelter Cove Rd.
Whitethorn CA 95589