

# Gardening

Written by Yvette

She awoke at the third cock crow to greet the day with prayer and a praise. After a light breakfast with her husband and children, she plans her work in the garden. Without the garden they would have no medicine, no herbs to hide the taste of old meat, and no tilling vegetables to eat when meat was scarce or a holy day prevented the eating of meat, save for fish. Thus began the day of a woman in the Renaissance era. Whether a farmer's wife, a shopkeeper's wife, or a laborer's wife, if there was space, she would grow a garden. Most gardens of common folk were made and managed by women. They were the primary dispensers of medicine and the primary cooks. They knew exactly what they needed and how to preserve it while it was in season for times when a plant was out of season. Anyone of modest means or above had a stillroom. The lady of the house would spend many hours in the stillroom making potions, lotions, preserves, drying herbs, fruits, and vegetables, and making medicines. She kept a book in the stillroom with all the recipes for medicines and methods of preservation written down that were passed down from her mother and grandmother before her. When she had to treat an illness or wound in an innovative way, she wrote down exactly what she did in case she or her daughter would need the information in the future. Records were kept in the book from year to year about what was planted, what did well and what didn't. She kept records of the new plants she acquired from friends, family, and prizes found in the meadows or forests around her. At the end of her life the book would be passed onto her daughter or granddaughter to use in her stillroom. When a young bride plans her first garden, she must take into account her family's most immediate needs. Most likely she would plant herbs with medicinal qualities that could also be used as culinary herbs when necessary. When time and space permitted, she would plant herbs and flowers used for culinary purposes and basic vegetables next. If she enjoys gardening and has the time (if she and her husband are somewhat prosperous), she will begin growing flowers just for the pleasure of it. A garden consisted of individual beds with borders to keep the different crops separate. Herbs and vegetables were grown in individual beds and the border plants had to be such that it would not disturb the growth cycle of the primary herb or vegetable in that plot (companion planting). The border plants were often such that could tolerate plenty of trimming and training, thus doubling as strewing herbs (for the floor, along with straw). Everything planted in the garden had a use. Space and effort were precious. When the household had everything they needed from the garden, surplus was sold at the local market to supplement the family income. An enterprising woman could make the difference between a family just getting by or prospering.