My Lavender Garden

By Marian V. Dorsey

We, a generation of city-born and reared descendants of country forebears, had come "back to the soil;" back to the maternal homestead where lavender had grown in the old garden, with the Hundred Leaf rose, since the first mistress had tucked a sprig of it in her go-to-meeting kerchief in 1671 and where, thereafter, the purple blooms were picked to scent the hand-woven linen sheets of the high post tester beds, keeping them, one imagines, in the deep drawers of the old mahogany secretary with the cut glass knobs, which is our pride.

A passing allusion of Mrs Gaskell's to the aesthetic possibilities of fragments—especially of lavender and rose leaf fragments—fell not unheedingly upon my ear; it was now made possible to put these promptings to the test of experiment, the results justifying themselves a hundredfold in the direct and reflected pleasure given.

And let no town or suburban dweller, nay, no city woman whose "acreage" is a mere patch of a yard, despair of growing this delightfully aromatic plant of manifold uses if she wills to have it.

Supposing that lavender was always lavender—which it isn't—no specification was made in ordering seed from the florist and, as is frequently the case, those known as *Lavendula Spica* were sent, instead of *Lavendula vera;* and there is a great difference between these varieties, as my lavender garden showed in the end. As it happened, eleven small cuttings of the genuine English lavender, *Lavendula vera,* were sent me by a neighbor when my own little seedling plants were a year old, and seven of these were successfully rooted in wet earth in the shade, just as you root geranium cuttings.

These were, the next summer, so much finer than my other bushes and bore so unmistakably the "real thing" that the *Spica* will be allowed to die out as soon as rooted tops or cuttings from the English lavender bushes shall be ready to replace them; for these, when once matured, may be prolonged indefinitely if transplanted every two years, dividing the root and setting them deep each time.

If one has never compared the *Spica* with the *vera* the former will seem very sweet and lovely, and, as it is more easily grown, be content with it; but the true lavender is an excellent illustration of the added beauty good takes on in becoming best.

The first of March little shallow drills were made with the finger in the pulverized earth of the indoor window boxes and the seed dropped in and lightly covered, afterward sprinkling daily till they came up. They were made very wet when ready to transplant in the garden, when they had four leaves. A bed three feet square held the plants the first season, a hundred and fifty of the finest culled from the rest, the desired number one hundred and the others allowed for casualties. These were set five inches apart, being slow growers, but late the next March they were set out in rows, three feet apart each way—none too much space for the true lavender, but more than necessary for the *Spica,* the finer variety blooming in June, the other not till August. It must be well drained.

One versed in garden lore advised cutting the sprigs in full bloom and drying or curing in a cool, shady place—a spare room or cupboard—and keeping wrapped closely to retain the fragrance. They were laid on newspapers, as cut, so that all the shed lavender might be saved. The bunches were wound and tied with lavender baby ribbon rolled in spotless tissue paper and then in white wrapping paper, for mailing. The sprigs, lighted at the blossom end and burnt one at a time, fill the sick room, or any other, with the elusive sweetness of the old garden.

The shed blooms were made into sachets of swiss, small ones to be placed under the pillow, larger ones for the linen closet; and a dessertspoonful of them steeped in three or four ounces of spirits is the potent cure for colic in an historic Maryland manor family. What, then, were the altruistic uses made of this lavender as "aesthetic fragments"? The same as those the homekeeping Cranford ladies found worth while. It has cheered forgotten old people with reawakened memories; sick friends in hospitals have kept it beside their cots; those far distant from their native place have inhaled it to appease homesickness; it has given quieting thoughts to those on restless pillows within sound of the harassing trolley cars, and even a little child has been known to beg, with pleading eyes, for a handful of "that sweet stuff."