



Plants of the Golden Plough Tavern's Pennsylvania German Foursquare Garden

York was settled by German immigrants, who would have traditionally used Foursquare Gardens such as the one located behind the Golden Plough Tavern. These gardens were originally modeled after gardens of the German monasteries, which would have had the squares in the center, with smaller beds lining the perimeter. The monks would have had a well or fountain in the middle to make it easy to water the plants. The German people adapted this idea, creating their own foursquare gardens. When the Germans came here, they brought this layout with them, but replaced the well in the middle with a plant. The plant was used to let people know the family's religious beliefs. A Yucca plant in the middle, such as the one in the center of this garden, indicated that the family was Protestant. On the other hand, a Rosemary plant would have indicated that the family was Catholic.

Generally, Germans grew kitchen vegetables in the center squares and herbs in the outer beds.* In the interest of using this garden as an educational tool, we do have other plants growing in our garden, to allow visitors to see them. You will find a bed of flax in the middle, the plant that they used to make linen clothing, as well as plants that would have been used to dye their clothing throughout the garden. The staff and volunteers try to maintain historical accuracy as much as possible, and only use those plants that Pennsylvanians of the late 1700s would have had.

You are welcome to wander through our garden, taking a look at our plants. Each plant is marked with a stake- and an alphabetical listing of the plants and their uses, as well as believed benefits, follows. Please, though, do not pick any of our plants, fruits, or vegetables, to help ensure that future visitors will have the pleasure of seeing the same items you are able to see today. **We also do not recommend trying to use these plants in the way they were used in the 1700s.** Thank you for visiting.

Bee Balm- The Oswego Indians made tea from the leaves and introduced this to settlers as a beverage. The Shakers thought that the tea was effective in treating upper respiratory infections. The early settlers steamed the plant and inhaled the fumes to clear their sinuses. The tea made from these leaves had relaxing, antidepressant qualities, and could be used for minor digestive disorders. Tea made from Bee Balm became very popular as a replacement for imported tea when Colonists boycotted imported tea from the British East India Company after the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773.

Borage- For centuries, borage was thought to be a mood elevator when ingested as a tea or as leaves steeped in wine. It was also believed that borage would lower fevers, and could treat rheumatism.

* Information about this type of gardens is from Irwin Richman, "The Pennsylvania-German Foursquare Garden," *The Magazine Antiques*, (Brant Publications, Inc, July 2001).

Chives- Chives, of the same family as garlic, were thought to stimulate the appetite, as well as lower blood pressure.

Comfrey- The leaves of comfrey were used in poultices. They would place a bruised leaf on cuts or scrapes to help treat it. The roots were used to treat internal inflammation. **WARNING-** Comfrey is now considered very toxic, and should not be ingested in any form.

Coriander- The oil from Coriander (or Cilantro) was added to medicines for nausea. It was used to treat digestive disorders, relieve flatulence, and reduce fever.

Dill- The oil extracted from the seeds of the dill plant were made into medicines that were given to colicky babies, or to adults to relieve indigestion.

Echinacea-

Fennel- Fennel was used as an antispasmodic, used to relieve bloating, and helped with digestion, as well as the kidneys.

Feverfew- This plant was made into a tea that was used to treat fevers.

Foxglove- In 1775, foxglove, or Digitalis, was found to be effective in the treatment of congestive heart failure. It was later discovered that the chemicals in the plant helped in regulating the heart rate and rhythm, as well as strengthening the heart muscle. It is also a strong diuretic.

Horehound- This plant was used as a cough suppressant and expectorant, and was put in candies and syrups, to hide its bitter flavor. As a tonic, it was believed to increase the appetite and aid in digestion.

Horseradish- Horseradish served both medicinal and culinary uses. Germans used the root as a condiment on meats, but this was also used as a medicine. It was known to be a diuretic, and was used to treat urinary tract infections, bronchitis, sinus congestion, and coughs.

Jerusalem Artichoke- This plant is a root vegetable that is native to this country, and was first cultivated by Native Americans.

Lambs Ear- Also known as wood betony, people of this time had at least 29 uses in treating physical ailments. One of these was its use as an antiseptic, when applied directly to injuries.

Lavender- Lavender had a history of being used to treat insomnia, anxiety, migraines, depression, rheumatic joints, and as an antiseptic. Dry blossoms were often also stuffed in pillows and given to agitated patients to produce sedation.

Orris Root- The root of the Iris flower was used for a variety of purposes. It was used in teas to soothe coughs and other bronchial maladies, as well as in potpourri, and in powdering wigs and hair.

Parsley- Beyond the culinary uses, parsley had many medicinal uses as well. The roots of the plant could be used for falling sickness and high blood pressure, while the seeds were distilled for colic.

Peppermint- Breath freshening properties aside, peppermint was often used to treat colic, as well as headaches.

Pot Marigold- The flowers were traditionally used to impart a yellow color to cheese. When preparations of this plant are applied to skin wounds and burns, there is an antiseptic healing effect, for which anti-inflammatory and antibiotic properties are responsible. It would be used in the treatment of ailments such as ringworm, athlete's foot, cuts, and burns.

Rhubarb- Besides making a good pie, this plant was used to treat diseases of the head. Just be aware that the leaves of this plant are toxic.

Rosemary- Rosemary was believed to be a symbol of remembrance and fidelity. It was believed to stimulate cerebral circulation, thereby improving concentration and memory. It also was believed to relieve nervous depression. Its strong flavor also makes it popular for culinary uses.

Sage- Sage has numerous traditional medical uses. It was used as a gargle for inflammations of the mouth, tongue, or throat and the leaves were applied directly to an aching tooth to relieve the pain. It was also used as a remedy for disorders of the digestive system.

Soapwort- Soapwort is so named because of the lather that is created when its roots come into contact with water. Though now considered toxic, it was used as a laxative and expectorant.

Sweet Woodruff- This plant has a sweet smell, and was often used in potpourris, and as a moth repellent. The plant was also used by the Germans to flavor May Wine, beer, sausages, and many other food items, though this is now banned due to the toxicity of the plant when used in large quantities. The plant could also be made into a tea that could be used as a sedative, or could treat respiratory tract ailments.

Tansy- Tansy has strong antiseptic qualities, and was believed to stop decay. It also has very toxic effects, and was used to treat internal parasites, and to kill insects.

Walking Onions- The name "walking onion" comes from the plant's unique self-propagation habit. After a mature plant produces a set of bulbils on top of the stalk, it

often sends out a shorter flower stalk from the bulbils and sets another cluster of bulbils at the end. This second set of bulbils weighs down the main stalk and allows bulbils to make contact with the soil several inches away from the mother plant. The bulbils will then root and start producing more plants. The stalks may be eaten like chives, and the bulbils on top may be eaten like pearl onions or shallots.

Weld- This flowering plant is not only attractive to bees and butterflies, but its seeds also gave colonists a yellow dye for clothing.

Woad- This plant's leaves were used to get a blue dye, before indigo was widely available. Woad was a much more common, cheaper dye plant.