



Gardening Naturally

BY GARY LOCHTE

Something Grandma taught me years ago....Starting seeds without store-bought plastic or mulch pots.

Between the military and the oil company, my Dad was required to move the family several times as I grew up. Because Grandma lived in Kerrville we always considered it "home".

I always paid attention to her, and remember a certain practice she taught me. Often Grandma invited me to help with meal preparation. One of her "things" was to save egg shells. She taught me how to carefully open them. Her technique was to crack open the upper third of the shell, and save the remaining 2/3 of the shell for something special. She was an avid gardener, and I always enjoyed planting and harvesting with her.

When time to start seeds, Grandma would have her little box of opened egg shells. She and I would carefully fill them with soil and place a seed of whatever crops she intended to grow. She's place the seeded shells into her egg cartons and place them in a nearby window. Very little water was needed to keep the soil inside the egg shell at the proper moisture level.

Before you knew it, the life inside those seeds would sprout, and a healthy green "shoot" would appear. After a week or so, we'd take the egg cartons full of the new plants, and carefully place the egg shell into the prepared soil. A little water ever so often was all that was needed to help the plants grow. I never knew until later that the egg shell planters served a number of different purposes.

Obviously the shell served to hold the moist soil and protect the roots. But it also provided a mineral rich layer of calcium and other essential minerals which was a sort of natural fertilizer. The shells would disintegrate as the plant began to grow and would eventually dissolve into the soil. I never knew at the time that the egg shells provided nutrients and enriched the soil.

Grandma also taught me to take the wood ashes from the fireplace and her old wood cooking-stove and sprinkle them into the garden soil. It was not until many years later that I learned the remarkable benefit of her technique. The addition of wood ashes was an ingenious way of re-mineralizing the soils where her garden grew. You see, plants do not produce minerals, rather; they extract minerals from the soil they are growing in. The only way to grow mineral rich crops is to grow them in mineral rich soils.

This requires a continual replenishing effort, and the "old folks" did it instinctively. They never even considered buying the petroleum based plant fertilizers used by modern gardeners and farmers.

In many respects, the "old ways" are still the best ways, and we'd do well to take a journey back to the old ways and practice them. And by the way, take advantage of teaching your children and grandchildren some of the "old ways".

Grandma was so smart!

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