

Herbs make gardening a pleasure

A good way to develop an interest in herbs and herb gardening is to begin with the culinary herbs. Chives, garlic, thyme, sage, tarragon, mint, savory, oregano and sorrel are all perennials, which means they grow for three years or more in the same area.

Annuals such as sweet basil, dill, marjoram, parsley and summer savory will need to be planted every year, from seeds or plants you buy.

First, some general information. Most herbs like sun and are not fussy about the soil in which they are grown. There are some that do well in shady locations. They can be planted in borders and intermixed in a perennial bed.

They are wonderfully fragrant. When working in a garden that contains these plants, a bonus of sweet or pungent scents is a great reward. What fun it is to walk in an herb garden and enjoy a snip or a taste of the various flavors.

Chives is a good beginning herb and there are several forms of this plant. The most common one has round, pink blossoms and likes a sunny location. Clumps will last four to five years. The plant is a perennial and can be divided to share with neighbors and friends.

If you wait for the plant to produce blossoms (early to mid-April), they can be used in a green salad. The outer hollow leaves, cut down to the base can be used in flavoring in many recipes that call for chives. When the blossoms begin to get a deep rosy color is the time to make chive blossom vinegar.

Place the blooms in a glass jar, cover with white vinegar, cap with a non-metallic cover and place in the sun for a week or so. At this time you can strain the lovely pink vinegar into bottles and use it for flavoring salads, or save some for gifts for special friends.

You can also dry the blossoms. Cut them with a long stem and hang upside down in an airy place. These are lovely in dried arrangements. The fresh leaves can be dried very easily. Just snip them as you would fresh salads or omelets, spread on a screen or in a shallow basket (in which you have placed a paper towel) and let them air dry. The chives can also be frozen, put in a container and use as you wish.

Now is the time to prune your spring-flowering shrubs. Be sure the flowering is past. Cut out some of the old branches, remove faded blossoms and reshape to improve appearance. Try the natural form of your plants. After blooming, these shrubs put out new growth that will bear the next year's flowers.

On shrubs that produce fruits in the fall, leave most of the cutting until the berries ripen, when they can be gathered for decoration or enjoyed by the birds.

When your rhododendrons complete their blooming cycle, remove the spent bloom truss, breaking it off just below the lowest flower and above the small new growth buds. If you have a plant one to three years old, pinch out the single new leaf bud as it starts to push out in the spring. Larger plants may be shaped by



down to earth

Marty Figley

pruning, but the cut should always be made just above a fan of leaves.

An excellent way to do some minor pruning to shape your rhododendrons is to cut the flowers for spring bouquets. Irregular growths of previous years, which destroy the sym-

metry of a plant, are good candidates for these bouquets, and can be enjoyed indoors for awhile. Remember to make all cuts just above a rosette of leaves.

'Til next week — Naturally, Marty.



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John Raleeh, bass-baritone, Bloomfield Hills, is singing the role of Dr. Bartolo in Michigan Lyric Opera's production of Mozart's "Marriage of Figaro," which continues at 8 p.m. Saturday and 2:30 p.m. Sunday, at the Marquis Theater, 135 E. Main, Northville. Douglas Morrison, conductor of the Scandinavian Symphony Orchestra, is artistic director. For ticket information, call 349-8110.



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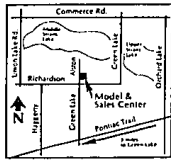
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