

Where The Green Grass Grows

Students grow plants to reduce stress, improve surroundings

BY NONI SRIDHARA
The Battalion

Mary, Mary, quite contrary, how does your garden grow? With silver bells and cockle shells all lined up in a row. As students grow up, this nursery rhyme becomes long forgotten, but for some, the thoughts of having a garden still hold true.

One such student is April Herring, a horticulture graduate student and Class of '98. She said she was around plants throughout her childhood because her mother was in the nursery business.

Herring said she is studying horticulture because of her family's influence and personal interest.

"I [was also] really interested in horticulture because of all the hands on experiences you get in the different labs," Herring said.

Throughout her undergraduate career, Herring said she has had many different experiences in gardening.

"We got to do a lot of neat experiments," Herring said. "I took a socio-horticulture class in which we learned a lot about gardening and medicine. In that class, we went to a local retirement home and planted a herb garden. In another class, we got our own vegetable plots.

"We planted corn and harvested all the crops and got to take them home to try them out. Whatever we didn't use we donated."

Herring has also experienced the charitable side of gardening. She said in another one of her horticulture classes, she volunteered as a gardener at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Gardens in Bryan.

"It was very neat to see how gardening could bring people in the community together," she said.

Herring said her collection of house plants has turned her front porch into a jungle. She said because she is renting her house, she cannot have a large garden, but hopes that in the future she can resume serious gardening.

"I hope I can start planting, like, a small vegetable garden," she said.

Unfortunately, due to limited space in residence halls and apartments, many students cannot have a full-fledged garden. Instead, they keep plants around the house as a sign of vitality.

Almudena Alba, a junior international studies major, said a garden would be a good stress reliever, and students could benefit from the lessons gardening offers.

"I love flowers. I think I identify with [flowers] because they seem to have a personality," Alba said. "They also express anything from happiness to sadness. It expresses so much when you give flowers to somebody and want to say something but are too afraid to say it. I feel gardening would be such a relaxing hobby."

Amira Gerges, a senior nutrition major, has kept plants throughout her entire college career because she is not allowed to have pets.

"The plants symbolize life to me," Gerges said.

Gerges said she has become as close to her plants as some other students have become to their pets.

"I love having [the plants] because they just add a lot of joy to my day," Gerges said. "It's a very fulfilling feeling. I love to just to see them grow. One of my roommates told me that my plants were my babies because I nurtured them so much."

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— Amira Gerges
senior nutrition major

Rob Sweet, manager of Plantation Gardens in Bryan, offered tips for students wishing to grow their own gardens in the future.

"The very first step to growing a garden is bed preparation," Sweet said. "You want to choose a nice loose soil [to plant your flowers] in, and the bed should also have a minimum depth of up to eight inches. The groundwork for a healthy garden is healthy soil."

Sweet said another thing to consider when preparing a garden is the plot's surroundings.

"This is more a factor of personal taste, but in the scheme of things you want to buy things that will match the landscape," Sweet said.

He said some of the most common types of plants people purchase are annuals. There are two kinds of annuals. The first kind are planted in the spring and live through the fall, and the second kind are planted in the fall and live through the spring.

Sweet also said potential gardeners should read labels carefully when treating plants with chemicals.

"[Even good] chemicals for plants can be bad if directions aren't followed," he said.

Sweet said he believes organic fertilizers are better than chemical ones.

"Initially, it's more expensive, but [in the long run], you will have to take less care of the garden, and less fertilizer will be required," he said.



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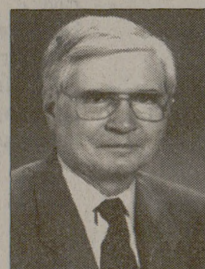
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