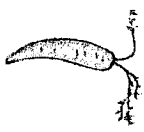

The Romantic Ways of a Gardener

*Courted with homegrown potatoes?
Irresistible! By Carolynne Hutter*



he first time I saw Bill's garden, I barely looked at it. "It's my exercise, my spirituality, and my relaxation," Bill explained as we stopped at his house in a Washington, DC suburb before we went to dinner in the city, where I lived.

"Gardening," I thought. "That's not your typical Washingtonian interest. Usually it's politics, the Redskins, or current exhibits at the Smithsonian."

But what did it matter? Bill wasn't my type. I went for artsy, urbane, European men, and here was this earthy American who lived in the suburbs and whose greatest pleasure was gardening.

Even though he wasn't my type, I continued to see Bill. Why not? We were having fun.

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Then in the spring, Bill came to my apartment with a gift. I opened the brown paper bag and found tender, elegant, green stalks. "Asparagus!" I exclaimed, holding the bag tightly. "It's one of my favorites!"

Over the course of the next month, Bill plied me with asparagus from his garden. I felt like the luckiest woman around. Who needs to be bedecked in jewelry when you can receive pound after pound of delicious, homegrown asparagus?

In the summer, Bill appeared with other goodies from his garden. "Dating a gardener does have its advantages," I mused as I scoured cookbooks for recipes to use the latest batch of his

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HEATHER GRAHAM

produce. I love cooking with vegetables. Before I met Bill, I would shop weekly in the summertime at the farmers' market. Now I stopped going to the farmers' market: The farmer was coming to my door—he brought me string beans, lettuce, spinach, onions, tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, basil, cilantro, eggplant, watermelon, and potatoes, my all-time favorite.



"I'm obsessed with potatoes," I told Bill on our first date. Good to get these things out in the open right away, you know.

"Really," he said, smiling slyly. "I love growing them." That spring he dug up half his vegetable garden and planted four types of potatoes. A man who brings me fresh, organic potatoes from

his own garden—what can I say? Store-bought roses look pale in comparison.

One day during the second spring Bill and I were together. I did look at his backyard. There were gardens on both sides of the yard, but the middle section resembled a football field.

"You know what might be nice, Bill," I said hesitantly, "a flower garden in the middle of your backyard."

"That's a great idea!" Bill exclaimed. He grabbed my hand, and off we went. Before I knew it, we had marked out a center garden and dug up the grass. He set his birdbath in the middle of the garden. Then he announced that this was my garden.

"My garden?" I was touched. I had never had a garden before. Off we went to a local nursery. As the weeks went by, Bill gave me a book on flower gardening, and we added more and more flowers to the garden.

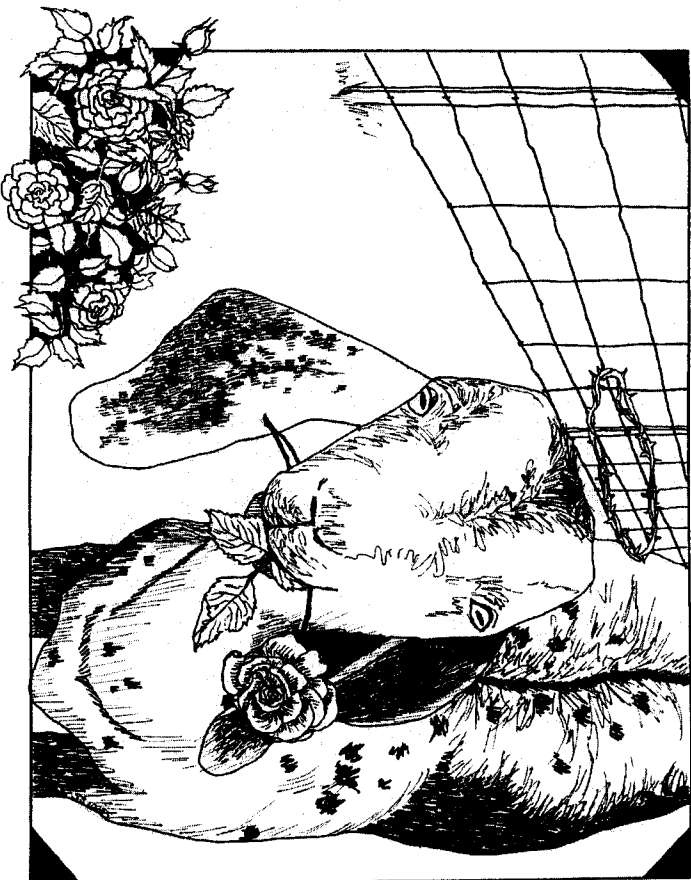
I was captivated. What a thrill to watch the plants grow! How much fun to design a garden—it's like painting with plants! I only saw my garden on weekends, though. I missed it during the week and would regularly ask Bill to report on its progress.

You can see where this is heading. Six years ago, Bill and I were married, and I moved into his house. To celebrate our marriage, we put in an herb garden, expanded the center garden, and built a patio framed by a shade garden. I am now totally hooked on gardening. We have a two-year-old son who loves to dig in the dirt. I hope he will become a gardener, too.

I have two pieces of advice for single, urban women:

1) Put down the BlackBerry, the cell phone, and the latte. Roll up your sleeves and get your hands in some rich soil. Gardening is as relaxing as yoga any day.

2) Find yourself a gardener. He'll make a wonderful mate. How do you spot a gardener at a happy hour or party? Look for the guy with the callused hands and mud-speckled clothes. If you say, "What a nice summer day," and he responds, "Too mild for my tomatoes," grab him. He's the real McCoy. Although he may be a bit rough at the edges or not have the verbal finesse of a lawyer or academic, he will understand earthly pleasures. And together the two of you can make a beautiful landscape—and life. ❖



If It Won't Hold Water

Then it won't hold a goat. By Kim Johnson



We board our horses at a local barn, where we take riding lessons. The other day, I learned something there so exciting I couldn't wait to get home and tell my husband.

"I was talking to this lady at the barn today and she told me that you can use goats to clear blackberries," I told him. We have a lot of blackberries and such taking over our property.

"Who is this lady and where does she live?" he asked.

"Why?"

"So I can go tell her that under no circumstances are we getting any goats."

"But they stay in their own fenced area."

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