

## A DIFFERENT DEVOTION

# "Mary's Gardens" Project Transforms Flower Beds Into A Prayer

By JEAN TUCKER

A flower can be an ejaculation — and a garden a prayer, transforming a window box or a yard into a niche of beauty and fragrance in praise of Our Lady.

This is an old-world concept, forgotten for centuries and thus new today, but a lovely idea . . . for flowers, delicate and graceful, are so appropriate to Mary, the Mystical Rose.

In March 1951, John S. Stokes Jr. and Edward A. McTague established in Philadelphia, at 901 South 47th street, a project called "Mary's Gardens".

They believed that gardens, besides giving pleasure, have a religious meaning, and have learned that "in the old popular traditions of Catholic England—Mary's England—more than 500 flowers bore names honoring Her and the mysteries of Her life . . . . Some were named from the liturgical feast of Our Lady for which they were usually in bloom . . . Others were associated with Our Lady because of roles, which according to legend, they played in Her life. . . . Still others were named because of their mystical symbolism."

### Wrote Booklet

And so they wrote a little booklet, giving the Latin, popular and religious names of Mary's flowers, and telling how they came by those religious names; then prepared packages of seeds that are sold at a nominal cost.

The two men became acquainted, Mr. Stokes says, "in the Spring of 1949 on a student-teacher basis at St. Joseph's College Institute of Industrial Relations, Philadelphia, where Mr. McTague taught. 'Mary's Gardens' was an unexpected fruit and 'love' which grew from our work together in the fields of economics, politics, communications, industrial management, etc.

"Until we conceived the 'Mary's Gardens' idea, Mr. McTague and I were casual backyard gardeners on a modest scale. Some marigolds from Mr. McTague's garden were the occasion of our discussing the old names together and undertaking the project."

The fact that in the popular tradition of pre Reformation England many flowers formerly bore names recalling Our Lady, first came to their attention by way of a magazine article in which Rev. James J. Galvin told of the garden of a Mrs. Lillie who had been importing flowers from England, and planting them in a plot across from St. Joseph's Church in Woods Hole down on Cape Cod.



### ORIGINAL GARDENS AT WOODS HOLE

The original Mary's Garden in Woods Hole belonged to Mrs. Frank R. Lillie of Chicago who commissioned Miss Dorothea Katharine Harrison of Concord to design it as a setting for the sculpture of the Madonna by V. M. S. Hannell. It is on a narrow piece of land across the street from St. Joseph's Church, and now belongs to the church. The original plan for the planting used more than 40 plants with religious names. Mrs. Lillie, Miss Harrison and Mrs. Alfred Emerson of Chicago who at the time was working on a book on the religious symbolism of plants, did the research.

"In the Summer of 1950," says Mr. Stokes, "I had an opportunity to visit Mrs. Lillie's gardens. I found that the original conception of the garden—that of growing flowers formerly named after Our Lady—was no longer followed, because the original planting was destroyed during the hurricane, and was not restored.

### Charming Garden

"The garden was most charming, however, and I was able to obtain a list of the flower names and a copy of the original planting scheme from Mrs. Lillie, now in

Chicago, and the garden caretaker, Wilfred Wheeler. We are currently working with Mr. Wheeler bringing about a restoration of Our Lady flowers to the Woods Hole garden," the first Mary's Garden in America!

Since the two men launched their project, publicizing through lectures, letters and magazine articles, they've had response from throughout the country.

"Last year we were testing year we are introducing, year we hope to be established they say. "Once public attention has been called to the 'Our Lady' names of flowers, and to the prayerful, religious sense associated with gardening in former centuries, we hope that 'Mary's Gardens' will become a popular movement along the lines of the Christophers, and that an established institution or religious order will head it up. Needless to say, there are endless possibilities to be developed. Mary's Gardens Clubs, flower shows, shrub publications."

### Flowers Well Known

The flowers listed in their booklet are well known varieties. The culture falls within the sphere of standard outdoor horticultural techniques.

"Never-the-less," they emphasize, "Good results depend, as they do in any arts-craft, on understanding and diligent care. 'Our Lady's Garden' is for those who have a sense for the idea and for those who are willing to acquire understanding and to develop the practical habits of horticulture."

The two stress the fact that they are not in the seed business, and sowing and tending Mary's Gardens is a means of instruction, as well as a joy.

About half the varieties of flowers in their packages are listed in the catalogues of the commercial seed houses. Others are carried by rare seed houses here, still others they have had to obtain from Europe.

The booklet which accompanies each order tells how, where and when to plant each flower. For example Our Lady's Tears or Lily of-the-valley, prefers partial shade and should be planted in the Spring five or six seeds close together and covered with fine soil to a depth of two to four times the thickness of the seed. The flower was so named from the resemblance of its tiny blossoms to teardrops, especially when covered with dew.

The wild Violet is called Our Lady's Modesty, named from the "modest" manner in which the flowers hang their heads and the forget-me-not is known as Eye of Mary, from the resemblance of its dainty blue flowers to blue eyes.

One of the prettiest legends is that of the Rosemary whose blooms changed from white to blue when Our Lady one day placed her blue cloak on them to dry.





## Vest-Pocket Gardens for Mary

*Two men in Philadelphia are giving flowers  
their right names*

By JAMES C. G. CONNIFF

Out of their blue-lettered gray envelopes there will be rumbling into the hands of an Irish beauty in Brooklyn named Minnie Martin, right about now, the evidence of one sweet little racket. She is its latest victim. I know, because I'm victimizing her. I sent her a set of seed packets, each about the size of an open matchbook cover. I sent them to her so that she could plant a Mary's garden.

Cement broods in every direction where Minnie lives. There isn't room to make a mud pie; and under the cement there's rock. But Minnie will plant Mary's garden in a window box looking out on St. John's place. With the sun and the rain and God's love, it will blossom, come spring, defying the concrete as faith does the desert, to honor our Lady. All over America, in tin cans and cigar boxes, in backyards and on parish lawns, Minnie will have lots of company. This is because in March, 1951, two Philadelphians, John S. Stokes, Jr., and Edward A. McTague hit on a new idea. They decided to restore the spirit of prayer to gardening. It was to be a spare-time denying.

In that first year, 134 Mary's gardens bloomed across America. By the spring of 1952 the number had trebled. This year the thing will probably get out of hand. Stokes and McTague, who've operated on an expenses-only, nonprofit basis, are hoping some missionary group will take over and benefit by the wildfire response.

The idea came to Stokes from a unique garden he ran across on the grounds of St. Joseph's church at Woods Hole, Mass. A Chicago woman named Mrs. Frank R. Lillie had established there something never before seen in the U.S. For that matter, its like hadn't been seen anywhere since the 16th century.

Every flower in it, including some Mrs. Lillie imported, bore its original pre-Reformation English title honoring Mary. Stokes was overwhelmed. He went home to Philadelphia, excited. When Artan- tic storms wiped out half of the Woods Hole garden, he shared his idea with Edward McTague. To-







will be another garden across the street at the school, around the Fatima group. As pastor tells pastor, Stokes and McTague want to yell delightedly for help. Their spare-time apostolate has swamped them.

Bill Riordan will have his Mary's Garden, too. It'll be in a funny place, though. Bill is a radio operator on a merchant ship, American registry, and his devotion will blossom in wood trays in the radio shack. He chose only the toughest varieties. If his pots of call don't include the subarctic, he's confident they'll bloom. They did last year. Somewhere in the Middle West

a Negro on parole will be on his knees, planting another Mary's garden in a modest back yard. The first one he planted, back in 1951, was in a prison courtyard. It was

his silent, multicolored prayer to Mary that he might be paroled. Fellow convicts gave him the horse laugh at first, then watched with interest as the little plants came up. The Negro's prayer was answered when the Mary's gold was in bloom. This year he plants in thanksgiving, and for the grace to keep going straight.

A Jesuit on the island of Yap in the Carolines will this year be making his garden pray. So will an American infantryman on maneuvers in western Germany. The

Son wove a classic around one much smaller."

There's no proof it's happened yet, but more than one enthusiast for Mary's gardens has suggested that border patrols would have one sweet time preventing these seeds of devotion from piercing the Iron Curtain and haunting their holy colors inside Russia.

"The idea is always the first step in these things," Stokes agrees. "The modern parable of a nation's redemption might be written in part around our Lady's seeds. Her

But the kind of faith that makes a heart leap up with yearning for the rediscovered past in Mary's gardens is precisely the kind that does work miracles. In the preface to a moldy 16th-century translation of a gardening manual by "one of the St. Vincent abbey, France," Stokes and McTague found a prayer that made it their Old Garden prayer. It reads in part: "In Thy name, Lord, we plant these seeds, desiring that by Thy mighty power they may grow upon the earth, and bear plenty of fruits, to the profit of all Thy faithful, through Christ our Lord."

It's only a small flowerpot, but the known portable tribute to Mary. soldier's garden will be the first general feeling is that if it survives it will really be a near miracle.

CHILDREN may tear up a house but they never break up a home.  
Ruth Stokes.