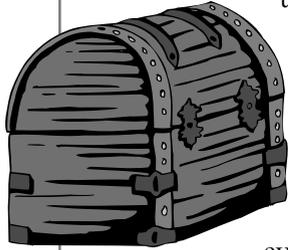


# The Homegrown Advantage

Not long ago, I was poking around in a big old trunk in my attic, and I came across the very first garden scrapbook that Grandma Putt and I ever made together. It was a record of the garden she helped me grow just after I'd gone to live with her that



spring. Talk about bringing back memories!

That book was crammed full of notes, drawings, lists, pages torn from seed catalogs — even recipe cards — and lots of old, faded photographs.

## It's Magic!

Back then, gardening was a whole new, magical world, and it seemed to me that Grandma Putt knew more about it than any person could possibly know about anything! Every day, as we were tending our gardens, she showed



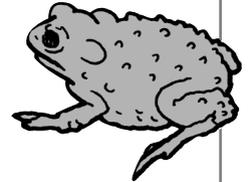
### *Jerry Baker Says*

*"As we worked in the garden, Grandma Putt and I mixed up batches of her special teas and tonics that she guaranteed would make our plants grow up stronger and give us bigger, tastier harvests. And you know what? They did, too! I wrote all her recipes in my scrapbook, and they became part of the collection of terrific tonics that I still use today."*

me how to take care of every plant just the way it liked, and what it needed in the way of soil, water, and food.

## The Old Neighborhood

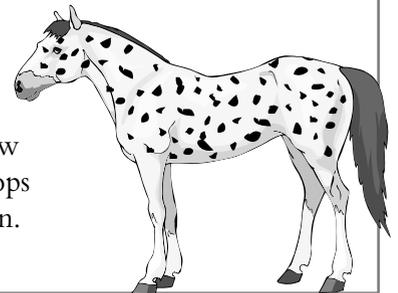
Grandma Putt knew what plants made good neighbors and which ones liked to be as far away from one another as they could get. She knew which crops to plant when the moon was full and which did better if you waited until the new moon. Plus, she knew how to build fences that would keep the most determined deer in the county away from the corn patch, and how to get toads to set up housekeeping and solve bad-guy bug problems lickety-split.



## Veggies in Wonderland

Best of all — at least from the standpoint of a 10-year-old boy — she knew how to make gardening fun! She gave me old-time seeds that grew into vegetables I'd never even imagined, like white tomatoes and red corn, and beans that were splotted just like the neighbors' Appaloosa horse.

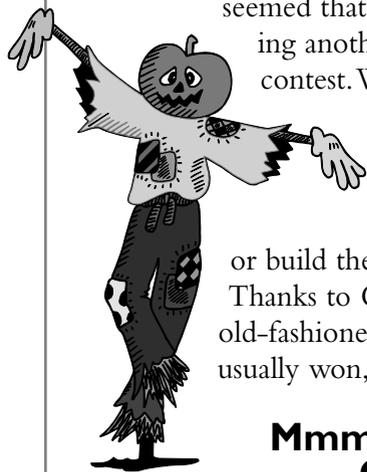
And she taught me how to save my own seeds so I could grow those same crops again and again.



She showed me how to build beanpole teepees where I could hide out on warm summer afternoons and day-dream about Wild West adventures. She also helped me grow cucumbers in bottles and make lanterns out of turnips.

## The Thrill of Victory

And every time I turned around, it seemed that she was organizing another neighborhood contest. We were always setting out to harvest the earliest crop of peas, grow the biggest pumpkin, or build the scariest scarecrow. Thanks to Grandma Putt's old-fashioned grow-how, we usually won, too!



**Mmm-mmm ...  
Good!**

All summer long, friends and neighbors would come by to visit — and more likely than not, Grandma Putt would insist that they stay for supper.” She'd cook up one of her special recipes and serve up platters full of corn and tomatoes fresh from the garden. For

dessert, we'd have chocolate-mint cake made with our own homegrown mint, or if we were really lucky, her strawberry-rhubarb pie that took a blue ribbon at the county fair.

## Tricks of the Trade

Naturally, the conversation always turned to gardening, and Grandma Putt made sure I didn't get left out just because I was still a little guy. She knew that the best way to learn about gardening — next to gardening itself — is visiting with other gardeners. We'd swap stories about our favorite plants and promise to save seeds for one another come fall, or we'd talk about problems we were having with pests, the weather, or some temperamental kind of plant.

And you know, I don't think I can remember a single time that Grandma Putt didn't help at least one guest solve some problem or another. Sometimes, the solution was one of her old-time remedies; at other times, it was a clever tip, trick, or tonic she thought up on the spot.



## What's in a Name?

Grandma Putt had her own special names for just about everything, and I was no exception. My parents named me Gerald F. Baker, Jr., in honor of my father. But to Grandma (as you'll soon see), I was affectionately referred to as “Junie” — short for Junior.

## Come One, Come All!

At the end of the season, those same folks would come on over for harvest

**Taking Home the Blue**  
Harvesttime was also county fair time, and we didn't miss one for as long as I can remember. We'd take our best vegetables and Grandma Putt's tastiest pies and cakes, and we always came away with a fine crop of blue ribbons.



bees and help us get in the crops — and we'd do the same for them. Grandma Putt knew all kinds of games to turn the work into fun, of course, like stomping our popcorn off of the cobs and whacking away at sacks of dried beans the way kids swing bats at piñatas at parties nowadays. And there always was a pumpkin-carving contest and corn-shucking races.

## Wild, Wild Eatin'

You'd think that canning and drying and socking away veggies would be the worst kind of torture for a young boy. But Grandma Putt had a way of making it almost as much fun as tending the garden. For one thing, she always made sure that, besides regular canned tomatoes and pickled onions, we made up special treats like "leather britches" beans and fruit and vegetable "leathers" just like the ones cowboys carried on those long trail drives. While we worked, she'd tell me tales about the Wild West, and we'd sing cowboy songs.

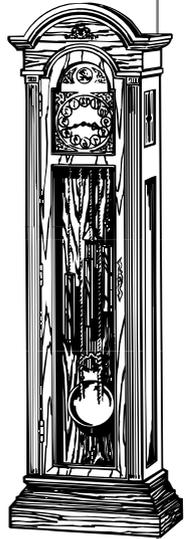
## The Family Heirlooms

Grandma also told me about how all the vegetables came to be in our gardens. She said that Native Americans, including some of her own ancestors, had grown lots of crops, like corn and squash, for thousands of years before folks from Europe had even arrived on the scene. And the Europeans, she said, brought plenty of others with them, like peas and beets. She told me about a lot of old-time varieties that had gone away, like the dinosaurs, because folks hadn't kept growing them.

## Use 'em or Lose 'em

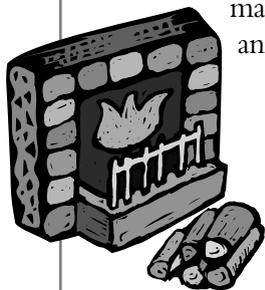
Grandma Putt taught me that antique vegetables aren't like that big clock my Grandpa left me. She always said, "The only way to pass vegetables on to your kids is to grow them." Then we'd talk about the ones that were still around, like 'Big John' pole beans that she said folks in Kentucky have been growing since Revolutionary War times, and 'Carolina' lima beans that Thomas Jefferson grew for years at Monticello.

Sometimes, just the names were enough to make me want to grow them and pass on the seeds to other folks — after all, what kid could resist 'Yellow Tommy Toe' or 'White Rabbit' tomatoes, or 'Pink Banana' squash? Not me, that's for sure!



## Eat Up!

Come winter, we chowed down on all that good food we had put by, and we'd make up baskets of the fancy things (like Grandma Putt's special watermelon pickles and her honeyed carrot-ginger marmalade) to give to family and friends during the holidays.



## Sittin' by the Fire

On long cold evenings, we'd pop ourselves a big bowl of homegrown popcorn, light a fire in the fireplace, and set about having some of the best fun we could have: planning next year's garden, which we just knew would be the best garden anyone in the whole world ever saw!

## Good Old-Fashioned Grow-How . . .

All of those good times with Grandma Putt and all of her solid country wisdom found their way, in one form or another, into that first garden scrap-

book and the ones that followed. A lot of them have found their way into this book, too, along with more than a few tips, tricks, tonics, and recipes that I've come up with myself over the years.

In these pages, we'll look at everything it takes to grow the best darned vegetables you ever tasted — from sure-fire strategies for getting your seedlings growing on the right foot to harvesting your bumper crops and putting your plot to bed for the winter. We'll learn tried-and-true secrets for choosing plants and seeds that will perform like champs no matter where you live, fighting — and winning — the war against pesky pests and dastardly diseases, and protecting your garden from all those curve balls Mother Nature sends its way.

## . . . and Where It All Leads

Finally, we'll get up close and personal with 38 of America's favorite vegetables. Most important, we'll have fun at every step of the way, because, for Grandma Putt, that's what gardening was all about — and for me, it still is!



## The Good Old New Days

Grandma Putt would be pleased as punch if she could see what's going on in the gardening world today. Every year, more and more folks are discovering how satisfying — and how much fun — it is to grow their own vegetables. At the same time, more and more seed companies and even nonprofit groups are offering seeds of those old-time varieties Grandma Putt set so much store by. Why, folks are even turning away from all of those pesticides and chemical fertilizers that were all the rage for so many years, and going back to the simpler (and less expensive) methods that worked like magic for Grandma and her friends.