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Health & Fitness

The Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm: A Cultivator's Guide to Small-Scale Organic Herb Production

Peg Schafer
Chelsea Green Publishing
978-1-60358-330-5
(November 30, 2011)

As demand for medicinal herbs continues to grow, transitioning to local cultivation is crucial, believes author Peg Schafer. Not only will growers be able to vouch for the purity of their herbs, but also wild plants will be more protected and allowed to flourish.

Fortunately, Schafer provides a stellar guidebook for those who want to focus on growing Chinese herbs, or just learn more about the broad array of uses for these miraculous plants. A longtime grower and teacher, Schafer brings her passion and commitment into every aspect of her advice. She discusses how, over the course of 14 years, she's experimented with growing over 250 different herbs, and was inspired to write this guide as a way to encourage others to take up the task as well.

She writes, "To my surprise, I've discovered that there are still very few other growers of these remarkable plants. So…tag—you're it!" For those willing to take up the game, she provides a wealth of wisdom, including practical information on cultivation, descriptions of changes taking place in current medicinal plant trade practices, and herb quality and conservation. Much of this information was largely unpublished until now, Schafer notes, making her work even more useful.

After providing a compelling argument for cultivating Asian botanicals and then digging into aspects like soil health, seed starting, and seasonal care, Schafer delves into an extensive list of medicinal herb profiles.

Expertly organized, each profile includes a description and photograph of the plant, propagation advice, suitable companions, field production, associated pests and diseases, and harvest predictions. A separate sidebar to each herb gives a few paragraphs about the specific medicinal uses of that particular plant. Occasionally, she'll even throw in a recipe or additional photos of the plant's distinctive characteristics.

The straightforward, very detailed information on each herb is invaluable and easy to follow. Schafer will make an ideal mentor for any gardener, farmer, or herb enthusiast willing to respond to her call.

Elizabeth Millard