

IN THE GARDEN

Work and Play

Tom Sawyer has nothing on Kathleen Gips, owner of the Village Herb Shop in Chagrin Falls. Tom's friends traded marbles and chalk for their turn whitewashing Aunt Polly's board fence, because Tom made the work look like fun.

Likewise, Gips coaxes customers to spend two hours each month pulling clover and tilling soil in 13 5-by-5-foot display plots with names such as "kitchen," "tea," "fragrant," "moon" and "faerie." For their efforts, customers are rewarded with a hands-on herb gardening class.

"We've lost that generation that gardened next to Auntie and Grandma," Gips says. "This [class]

is a way for customers to learn to take care of the garden properly."

During a recent "Gardening With Kathleen" session, Gips introduced students to 5-foot-tall lovage and suggested they use its hollow, celery-tasting stem as a straw in tomato juice. She urged those who love mint and lemon balm to plant them in terra-cotta or plastic quart pots and then submerge the containers in the garden, to prevent the invasive roots from spreading.

Customers eagerly take in her ideas. And, when they're finished working in the garden, they're rewarded with more conversation and a salad of well-rinsed edible flowers over organic mixed greens.

Rose petals are a romantic favorite for salads. They're best, says Gips, when the petals have been separated and mixed in.

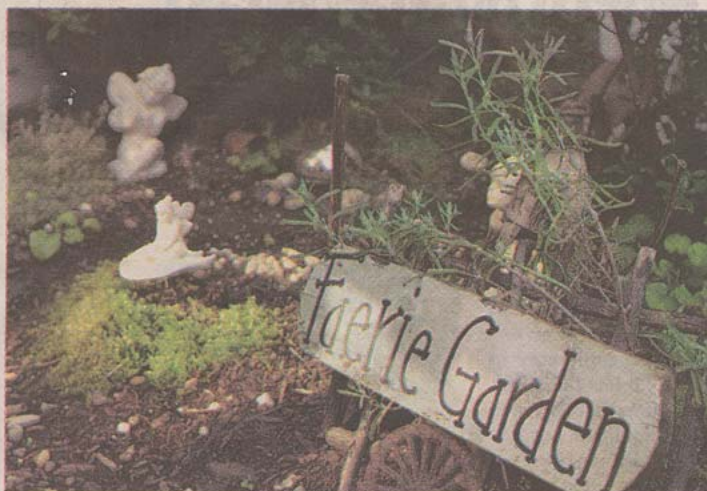
Also recommended are pinks, calendula, violas and the peppery nasturtium and oniony chive blossom.

To prepare the flowers, Gips removes the sepal, the green part that connects the stem to the flower. Then she places the flowers atop her selection of greens (perhaps a bagged mix or mesclun greens). Before serving, she pulls apart the petals and tosses the mix with a dressing of $\frac{1}{4}$ cup fruit or herbed vinegar, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil and 1 teaspoon sugar.

One caution: Flowers should not be treated with pesticides, warns Gips. Avoid blossoms from florists or those grown near the road, as municipal crews often spray the edges of the road.

"When in doubt," she notes, "leave it out." — PARIS WOLFE

The next "Gardening With Kathleen" class will be Wednesday, September 17, from 10 a.m. to noon. Reservations are required. Call 440-247-5029.



Plants in the Faerie Garden — thyme, rosemary, lavender, sweet violets and strawberries — are designed to attract "the native spirits," says Kathleen Gips.