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# INTRODUCTION

Everywhere I go—even after a gardening career that spans more than half a century—people still come up to me and say, “Jerry, where did you ever learn so much about plants?”

The answer: from a remarkable lady named Ethel Grace Putnam, a.k.a. my Grandma Putt. Not only did she have a seemingly magical touch with every green, growing thing there was, but she generously shared her problem-solving knowledge, her wisdom, and her boundless love of life with everyone she met. In this book, I’ve dug deep into my archives to uncover a treasure trove of Grandma’s old-time tips, tricks, tonics, and down-to-earth grow-how that you can use to cast a magic spell of your own on your yard and garden.

We’ll start off **Part 1** with an in-depth look at each kind of plant, from turfgrass to towering trees and everything in between. You’ll find a barrelful of Grandma’s secrets for pleasing all of them—whether they’re growing in the ground, in pots, or maybe a little bit of each. Plus, you’ll learn how to use plants to beautify your yard in all sorts of ways, ranging from screening unwanted views to inviting beautiful, and surprisingly helpful, wildlife into your yard.

In **Part 2**, we’ll focus on the foundation of any thriving lawn or garden: strong, healthy soil that’s literally teeming with life. You’ll

discover Grandma Putt's time-tested techniques for nurturing the tiny organisms that can turn plain old dirt into fertile, root-pleasing humus faster than you can say "Presto Change-o!" Then we'll move on to her savvy strategies for planning, planting, and tending your own personal paradise.

Grandma Putt knew firsthand that Mother Nature has plenty of ways to keep us gardeners on our toes. So in **Part 3**, I've gathered some of her very best tips and tricks to help you through all kinds of growing challenges, ranging from insect invasions and devastating diseases to wild and woolly weather-related woes. And, since nobody's perfect, I'll also let you in on a few secrets for coping with spills, splatters, and other, um, "blessings" that arrive by way of human error.

This book is chock-full of fabulous features, like *Grandma's Guidance*, which spells out when, where, and why you need to summon forth the key attributes of most successful gardeners. I've been preaching about them for many years, but I first learned them working at my Grandma Putt's side way back when. They're what she called the three Ps: **Practice**, **Patience**, and **Persistence**. Follow them faithfully, and you're all but guaranteed to have a green scene that'll knock your socks off.

## Grandma's Guidance



You'll also get plenty of *Green Thumb Tips*, which help you solve or prevent yard and garden problems of all kinds. For instance (believe it or not), there's an easy-to-find, easy-to-grow plant that'll send dogs, cats, and rabbits packing—and make a beautiful addition to your yard (see page 286).



## MAGICAL MIXERS

*Magical Mixers* are Grandma's remarkably simple recipes for everything from a potion that'll give you the tastiest tomatoes in town (page 147) to an old-time, all-purpose organic fertilizer that beats modern commercial products hands down (page 249).



I can't begin to count the number of times Grandma Putt bailed me out of gardening trouble or simply set me straight on more effective ways to do things better. That's what the *Lesson Learned* feature is all about—and believe me, some of those lessons were learned the hard way! In other cases, her simple, loving words of wisdom saved me countless hours of time and trouble (see one dandy example concerning pest control on page 123).

The *Oldie but Goodie!* boxes contain tricks that work just as well today as they did for Grandma and generations of gardeners before her. Here's a hint: Those old-time, everything-goes cottage gardens that are all the rage now also serve a highly practical purpose—namely, helping to fend off throngs of plant-munching pests (see page 54).



*Oldie...but Goodie!*

Last but not least, in a special bonus section entitled **More Magical Mixers!**, you'll find 101 recipes for Grandma's mixers, fixers, and elixirs, including dozens of my own special formulas that were inspired by her down-home grow-how. So whenever you need to solve your backyard problems, check it out for solutions to fighting bad bugs and dastardly diseases, protecting your yard from weather woes—or simply getting your plants off to a strong start in life.

So without further ado, as Grandma Putt liked to say, "Let's get this show on the road!"