



INTRODUCTION

My Grandma Putt always had a way with youngsters, and when I first went to live with her, she took me for a walk in her fantastic garden, introducing me to all of her friends. Quite simply, the plants in her garden were her friends—she looked out for them, and they looked out for her.

It never seemed even a little odd to me that Grandma treated her plants just like people, or that she would spend long hours conversing with them. And she never seemed to feel the slightest bit awkward about including her grandson—me—in those conversations.

It wasn't long before I was also wandering around the place, jabbering away to "Grandpa Putt," the big horse chestnut tree out front by the road, and to "Great Grandpa Coolidge," the old maple tree near the back porch. My favorite tree was a huge white oak way back at the edge of her property which Grandma and I named "Chief Black Feathers." I would lie on my back, look up at the branches, and start talking out loud. Before long, I could see the Old Chief take form in the thousands of leaves shimmering black against the sunlight.

Grandma Putt was a remarkable woman—a real honest-to-goodness pioneer. As a small girl, she had helped Great-



Grandpa Coolidge carve their farm out of the Indian Territory. She was part Indian herself, and she treated each plant, tree, and flower as an individual, with a spirit and personality all its own. She taught me how to recognize these plant peculiarities, and how to use them to make a successful garden.

There was a time in my life when I was convinced that Grandma Putt knew just about everything. Most of her knowledge came from hard work, experience, and the school of hard knocks. Some of it was handed down from her Indian and pioneer ancestors. I don't remember ever seeing her read any books except her time-worn Bible and her dog-eared almanacs. But, somehow, somewhere, she accumulated an amazing amount of information on the art, history, lore, and science of gardening. To tell you the truth, I learned a lot more about gardening from her in a few short years than I have learned in all the years since.

And I wasn't the only one! People would come from miles around to see Grandma Putt, bringing their sick house plants, diseased patches of lawn, weeds they wanted identified, and a multitude of questions about their toughest gardening problems. Grandma never charged for her good advice or home remedies, and as often as not, she sent the person away with new hope, and a basketful of berries or fresh vegetables.

THE REST IS HISTORY...

For a ten-year-old, city-born and city-bred boy, coming to live with Grandma Putt in the country was like a leap to another universe. I was looking forward to fun-filled days and

restful nights, when one day, Grandma came up with a bright idea that dashed my hopes, and changed my life forever!

As I recall, we had gone to town that day to do some shopping. We were walking along Main Street, and I was thinking about how good an ice cream cone would taste. All of a sudden, Grandma Putt jolted me out of my reverie!

“Junior, I think it’s about time we laid out some chores for you to do. A little work never hurt a boy your age.”

Work! That word had a nasty ring to it—work was taking out the garbage, cleaning up my room, or shoveling snow off of the driveway. Work was no fun; as a matter of fact, it was the *dirtyest four letter word* I knew at the time!

“Yes, it’s about time you got acquainted with my friend, good ol’ Mother Earth,” she said.

And, as they say, the rest is history. Those seemingly innocent words started me off on a life-long journey spreading the gardening wisdom that I first learned working beside Grandma Putt. Over the years, I have added to that storehouse of gardening know-how, picking up thousands of tips, tricks, and tonics along the way. In my travels, I’ve discovered that Grandma’s old-fashioned methods really aren’t all that old-fashioned after all; some of the “newest” discoveries are techniques that she effectively used more than fifty years ago!

Of course, there have been some revolutionary breakthroughs in the past five or six decades that have made certain aspects of home gardening safer, easier, and less time-consuming. But over the years, I’ve found that Grandma Putt’s common-sense methods still work best. They have withstood the test of time, and proven themselves over and over and over again in my garden.



In this book, I'm going to share the gardening gospel according to Grandma Putt with you. Some of the anecdotes, techniques, and remedies you'll find in the chapters ahead are very old-fashioned, while others are relatively new.

Even back in Grandma Putt's day, it was a mixture of old and new ideas that made our country, our families, and our gardens great. The same is true today. I hope that in these pages, you'll discover the knowledge, joy, and pleasure I first gained from gardening with Grandma Putt, and that you use some of her old-time gardening wisdom to create the garden of your dreams!

