



# Rattlesnakes in the garden

by Holly Fritz

Don't be surprised to find "rattlesnakes" in the Spring Run Resident gardens...rattlesnake green beans, that is. This heirloom pole bean with its distinctive reddish markings is just one of the many varieties of vegetables, herbs and flowers lovingly grown by Spring Run Residents in their gardens.



Photos courtesy of Dr. Leonard Mortenson, Spring Run Resident

Willow Valley Retirement Communities offers Resident Gardening Clubs in each community. At Spring Run, there are a variety of plots: raised beds, 10 ft. x 15 ft. garden plots for vegetables and annuals, a perennial garden, an herb garden, and a cutting garden with a stunning assortment of bright, colorful flowers. There's even an established grape arbor that yields succulent purple Concord grapes, ripe for the picking.

Each of the 30 or so members of the Spring Run Gardening Club is assigned a garden plot and takes care of his or her own little piece of heaven. But in many ways, the gardens are also a collaborative effort, with gardeners generously sharing tools, tips and labor.

Nathan Eshleman, Willow Valley Grounds Manager, makes sure compost is tilled into the rich, fertile Lancaster County soil by early spring, so the gardeners can get busy digging, hoeing and planting.

"I think one of the best benefits of the gardens is that it creates an environment where Residents get to know each other and build relationships outside the halls of

the community," says Nathan. "It's a healthy pursuit, but it's also a great way to connect with like-minded individuals."

Spring Run Resident and Garden Coordinator Pat Mortenson grows the rattlesnake pole beans, as well as heirloom tomatoes with romantic names like Prudence Purple, and a variety of colorful asters, sunflowers and other flowers and vegetables.

"This year I'm growing two varieties of Swiss chard," says Pat. "I'm growing a pepper with a Spanish name that means 'Horn of the Bull.' It's supposed to be a very mild pepper, but we'll find out."

Pat, who has savored the thrill of getting her hands dirty in the garden since she was a child, has lived in six states, and in each one, she's had a garden. "When my husband and I moved to Willow Valley, it was natural that I would have a garden here, too," she says.

### A new adventure

For some in the community, the experience of gardening itself is new and exciting.





“This year we have one couple who decided to garden who had never gardened before,” says Pat. “This is an adventure for them. Last year a Resident gave them a sun-ripened tomato fresh from the garden and they said it was so delicious, they had forgotten what a real tomato tasted like.”

Anyone who wants to try their hand at gardening is welcome to do so. “We have people who don’t want a standard-sized plot and I tell them go out and mark up what you want, whatever you feel you can care for” says Pat. “This year, for example, one person chose a little triangle for one tomato plant and three herbs.”

When Mother Nature cooperates, and there’s plenty of rain and sunshine, there’s also plenty of produce to enjoy and share. Some gardeners share with their friends, while others place their extra produce on tables where all Residents can take their pick of whatever is in season.

“One of the Residents plants about a half-dozen of the most common cooking herbs, and everyone is free to pick from it,” says Pat. “Normally you only need a small amount of herbs for any given dish, so that’s enough for everybody.”

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## Gardening Tidbits

by Pat Mortenson, Spring Run Resident

“Enjoy yourself. When you hit a certain age, you shouldn’t work too hard all at once, so pace yourself and have a good time.”

“A lot of people put up little fences about three-feet high, so I tell them to put a couple of stakes on either side of the fence so they have something to hang on to when they’re climbing over the fence.”

“It’s fun to watch people the first time they ever see a tomato worm.”

### Did you know?

Willow Valley Retirement Communities is located in the heart of the “Garden Spot of America,” Lancaster County, Pa. Lancaster County boasts some of the richest non-irrigated farmland in the country.

Source: Lancaster Chamber of Commerce & Industry.





### Garden visitors

Whether they're gardeners or not, Residents are drawn to the garden as a pleasant place to spend a few minutes admiring the bounty of flowers and vegetables, and chatting with neighbors.

"There's a little seating area where people go even if they're not gardening, just to sit in the shade of the tree and discuss the garden and see what's growing," notes Pat. "You never know who you're going to find when you walk up to the gardens. If you're out for a walk, people often say, 'Oh, let's go up by the garden and see what's growing.' It's very much a social event."

And speaking of garden visitors, Pat relates the story of one uninvited guest.

"Last year we used live traps to keep the rabbit population down. Nobody volunteered to get rid of the

trapped rabbits, so we set up the traps, but nobody put bait in them. And in spite of that, we caught a baby rabbit. I took the baby rabbit in the cage up to the top of the hill and let it go. Two days later, without bait mind you, I caught another baby rabbit, and did the same thing. The next week, there was another animal in the live trap, so I carried it up to the top of the hill and opened the door.... and out walks a skunk! I'm not sure who was more surprised, me or the skunk."

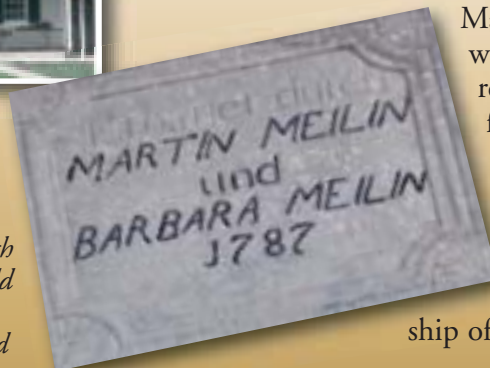
Luckily for Pat, the skunk was in a good mood that day...must have something to do with the peace and enjoyment that comes from spending time in the Spring Run Gardens.

## Gardens in shadow of historic home



*In 1787, Martin Mylin III and his wife, Barbara Baer Mylin, built the existing stone farmhouse, above, where they raised eight children. The home and farmland was passed down through the family until 1926, when it was sold to Christian Herr. It remained in the Herr family until 1998, when the land and house passed to Willow Valley Retirement Communities.*

The Spring Run at Willow Valley gardens sit in the shadow of an historic Lancaster County limestone farmhouse. Built in 1787 by the grandson of one of the original settlers of Lancaster County, the house is a charming, traditional two-story stone farmhouse with deep windowsills, random-width pine floors, and a summer kitchen common to 18th Century farmhouse architecture. (The Spring Run gardeners currently house their tools in the house's summer kitchen.)



Martin Mylin, the first owner of the land on which the Spring Run community now resides, received the property as a land grant from William Penn in the early 1700's. Mylin's descendants occupied the land for well over 100 years. From 1787 until the early 1900's, members of the Mylin family lived in the stone house which still stands today as a monument to the craftsmanship of the early settlers.