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FEEL-GOOD COLORS, CLUTTER BUSTERS & BIG FLAVORS

Display until February 12, 2021



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A

ny plant that has a place in Ona Belk's Denver garden has a purpose. Raised beds hold an array of vegetables as well as parsley, cilantro, sorrel, and other herbs. "For me, the most important thing is to have an edible garden, a medicinal garden," she says. "Whatever is growing, I make use of it." And it's not only the culinary herbs that get put to use. Ona works flowers like calendula and lavender into bath salts and scrubs; berries from landscape shrubs, such as elderberry and red currant, get harvested for tinctures and syrups.

Using plants for food and home remedies is part of her Lithuanian heritage. When she was growing up in a Chicago row house filled with extended family, vegetables covered every square inch of their postage stamp backyard. Back in Lithuania, her grandmother, aunts, and other family used herbs for medicinal purposes. "My great-aunt was over 100. She knew when and

where to pick all the different wild herbs in the forest," says Ona, recalling how that great-aunt took a special herbal tincture for her health every morning.

In her own yard, Ona snips fresh herbs for recipes—like extra-flavorful tomato sauces and pestos for freezing—and dries others for teas and tinctures. She also packages skincare concoctions as gifts for friends. When it's time to let the garden rest under a blanket of winter snow, she transplants small herb plants—thyme, tarragon, dill, rosemary—into pots and takes them indoors. "It's so nice to have some fresh herbs in the kitchen," Ona says.

On top of its practical benefits, the garden keeps her connected to her past. As she snips thyme flowers, she remembers traveling to Lithuania each summer, where her uncle would take her children to the seashore to pick wild thyme. Today, Ona's daughter Analise Stein is an herbalist, creating a line of products called Milda Apothecary. "She's teaching me things now," Ona says. "It all circles back."



■ OPPOSITE

The generous paver pathway invites strolling amid the fragrant thyme ('Elfin' and woolly) and lavender.

■ LEFT, FROM TOP

Ona incorporates rose-scented geranium, which is believed to have antiaging properties, into facial serums and lip balms. She combines linden flowers with others in a body polish and tosses nasturtium into fresh salads or dries it for teas.

■ BELOW AND TOP RIGHT

The garden wraps around a dining porch, with a long, narrow table situated to take in the view. An abundance of fresh flowers, herbs, vegetables, and fruits are within easy reach for entertaining and everyday purposes.



INFUSED OILS

To make Ona's floral-infused oils for your skin, fill clean, dry bottles with (above, from left) linden flowers, rose petals, or calendula petals. Top off with sweet almond oil and let steep for 4 months at room temperature away from direct sunlight, shaking the bottles daily. Strain and use oil as a body moisturizer or mix into an unscented lotion; use within 6 to 12 months. ■