

The View From HIGH FALLS GARDENS

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As you read this, we are planting Chinese medicinal herb seedlings in a gently sloping field surrounded by hedgerows, belonging to one of the loveliest farms in Columbia County. The Thompson-Finch Farm, along with its superb federal period farmhouse, has been in Marnie MacLean's family for 150 years. Out here in the field we can barely see the telephone wires along the road, the only visible clue that time does not stand still in this charmed place.

Marnie and her husband Don started farming here in 1982 by planting an apple orchard. When they started growing vegetables, the use of chemicals was not even considered. Marnie's parents and grandparents had never done so and knew the old ways were important; their foresight has been proven in many ways, especially in the preservation of the fertility of their land.

Don explains how they maintain their organic certification on page four. Here is Marnie's description of what the farm means to her.

Dear Friend of High Falls Gardens:

Laura and Jean asked us to write about why we farm organically. I could write about how conventional practices make use of chemicals that get into our food chain and affect our health, but truthfully I don't understand the science of it. So, in thinking about what to write it came to mind that farming organically and why I like farming are dramatically intertwined.

One of my favorite things is to go out in the spring and watch the soil turn over behind the tractor as I make straight lines across a ten-acre field. The soil is rich, dark and soft and filled with earthworms. Once, after my neighbor (a conventional farmer) had plowed, I went out into his field and felt the compacted soil with my hands and couldn't find even one earthworm there.

I love the taste of our strawberries and how when I walk out into the field their aroma fills the air. The people who come to pick say they have never tasted such sweet strawberries. I tell people not to wash them because they don't need to be and they taste better that way.

And to hoe and watch the garden take shape with healthy plants behind me, I'm glad we don't use herbicides because then I wouldn't get this personal satisfaction. Or be able to get up early and pick peas and eat my breakfast as I go along.

HFG JOINS CAMPAIGN FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

High Falls Gardens has signed on to the Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture, a large group of organizations banded together to influence Congress to modify the 1995 Farm Bill in favor of farmers who use environmentally sound practices.

Over 400 organizations are now part of the Campaign. They include groups as diverse as family farms, consumer co-ops, the Gray Panthers, the Archdiocese of Detroit, and the World Wildlife Fund.

The Campaign advocates changes in commodity and conservation programs, trade, research and extension programs, among others, with the goal of protecting both the environment and family farms, a national resource.

High Falls Gardens supports, in particular, the Campaign's emphasis on the protection of human health through farmland preservation and stewardship, market development through diversification, and strategies that help the farmer reclaim a larger share of the food dollar.

I love sitting on the potato planter and planting acres of potatoes and knowing that in a few weeks we'll see row after row of little plants that will yield a good substantial food for a lot of people.

And although we have found that to combat the plum curculio in our orchard and get a harvest we must spray with one chemical when the trees are blooming, I get as much satisfaction from eating that first big fat Paula Red as I do our strawberries because I know we are doing the best we can for our farm, our family and our community.

And last, I love how our farm ties my family together and keeps us connected to each other and to what is real.

Sincerely,

(More about the farm on page 4)



CHINESE HERBS AND MENOPAUSE

Of all the possibilities in the wise use of herbs, few have greater pertinence to millions of women than the prospect of easing the climacteric or change of life--of which menopause is the signal event, as menarche is of puberty.

Herbs are part of the means used by a growing number of women to challenge the prevalent notion of menopause as a misfortune to be avoided or thwarted. Indeed, we are now questioning the aging process itself. Is it inevitable that we suffer chronic degenerative disease, dependence on multiple drugs, even stooped posture and loss of muscle tonicity? Or are these conditions more a result of some combination of environmental toxicity, poor diet and bad habits?

Women who have successfully refuted negative social attitudes all their lives by actively choosing their work, their mates and whether or when to have children and to care for a home and a family, find upon approaching age 45 that our society and, in particular, corporate medicine still considers them to have a provisional existence. "Of course you will use hormone replacement therapy," says the gynecologist, the subtext being that unless you submit to the drugs, your body will wither within a few years and become pitifully vulnerable to osteoporosis, breast cancer and heart failure. It's either hormone replacement therapy (HRT) or one foot in the nursing home and the other in the grave.

The climacteric is the wisdom of the body which, in shutting down expensive processes that are no longer needed, provides a woman continued health and strength for the second half of her life.

The widespread prescription of HRT since the 1970s is yet another instance of how the medical/pharmacological establishment expands rather shaky data suggesting that some women may benefit from certain drugs in some cases, to a blanket recommendation that every woman use hormones to ward off premature death. What is rarely mentioned is that use of HRT postpones menopause but does not halt the aging process. If a woman takes the hormones and then stops, she will then suffer menopausal symptoms if the symptoms are ordained in her case. Do we really know what 30-40 years of such postponement will do to our bodies?

Chain bookstores now have shelves full of books on menopause, most of which adhere to conventional assumptions and lack any critique of corporate medicine, corporate agriculture or the SAD (Standard American Diet). Fortunately, there are also well-defined alternative points of view--not always found in chain bookstores--in fact a whole new world to be explored. We'll present

such an alternative below, with recommendations of books that are useful, and also explain important dietary considerations.

Readers, especially those suffering deficiencies or diseases, are encouraged to consult our recommended books and their health or herbal practitioner in constructing their own plan for the change.

An Alternative View of Menopause

The conventional image of the body held by Western medicine is that of a machine with parts that wear out. To quote a brochure on menopause provided by a large drug company and "provided as an educational service" in our doctor's waiting room, "Effective medical treatment involves the replacement of the very hormones your body is being deprived of." In other words, the idea is to get new parts so that you can function as you always have. No change or growth necessary.

Viewed with a reverence for Nature instead of through the distortions of negative social attitudes, a different image of the body appears. The climacteric is a result of the wisdom and economy of the body, which in shutting down expensive processes that are no longer needed, allows the woman continued health and strength for the second half of her life. This concept is described in Honora Wolfe's book, *Menopause: A Second Spring*, which explains menopause as understood both by Western medicine and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). (See Recommended Reading, below.)

This life-affirming viewpoint is further elaborated by Jeffrey C. Yuen, Taoist priest and teacher, who describes the climacteric according to classical Chinese tradition as follows. Menopause is analogous to conception and pregnancy but this time the woman is giving birth to her spiritual self. Cessation of menstruation occurs when the physiological cycle of seven years reaches seven ($7 \times 7 = 49$ years old) and a halfway point is reached. The Celestial Fluids (menstrual blood and its energies) go into a state of cultivation and become transformed into Jing, or primal substance. The process involves a spiritual letting-go of the world, forgiveness, inward contemplation and, finally, learning to become a mother to one's self. Denying or resisting this natural cycle is akin to blocking one's own development.

An attitude of resistance can bring on typical menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, irritability, insomnia and hypoglycemia. For instance, when a menopausal woman complains of problems in relationships with other people, this may indicate that she is fighting her body's attempt to consolidate its energies. Perhaps she needs to respect that inward pull and to let the world go until her birth is complete. ("The world" is perhaps most easily understood as expectations from outside, such as from

parents or social convention, as opposed to a woman's own heart.)

From this perspective we can imagine that another form of resistance is to treat one's 50-year-old body like that of a 20-year-old, with various forms of abuse such as alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, no exercise, overstress and poor diet. Our 50-year-old bodies are far too sensitive and refined (so unlike the crude energies of youth!) to withstand such misuse without penalty. Not all women suffer menopausal symptoms, but none can afford to continue self-neglect, which is to deny the aging process and resist the body's efforts to compensate for aging.

The problem for most women then becomes how to make a smooth transition through menopause without hormones while coping with daily responsibilities and pressures. The qualities of self-contemplation and forgiveness might be easier to attain without the pesky outside world constantly demanding attention! Menopausal symptoms can be overwhelming in some cases and a woman may turn to hormones in desperation.

The solution is to prepare for menopause by eliminating as many bad habits as possible, to maximize fitness (including nutrition) and to ease any symptoms with a wise use of herbs. Such a regimen may also be used by those past menopause to improve their health and, if desired, to gradually wean themselves from HRT.

Preparing for Menopause

Even if a woman can get her bad habits under control and has established a regular exercise routine (all much easier said than done), there remains one major area of improvement in her life before she can be considered fit. That is the SAD (Standard American Diet), ubiquitous because fully underwritten by agribusiness and big food corporations. Although this subject is worthy of several books but hardly ever gets mainstream media attention, two points about the SAD are especially relevant to fitness for the climacteric.

• *Reduce consumption of animal protein*

The greatest hazard of menopause is osteoporosis. Bone fractures put more women in nursing homes than anything else. HRT has been demonstrated to be effective in reducing osteoporosis; herbal formulas, regular weight-bearing exercise, and stopping smoking can make a difference as well. But there is one important factor usually overlooked: evidence suggests that too much animal protein in the diet can interfere with the body's absorption of calcium. The mechanism seems to involve the body's need to release calcium from the bones, whether to compensate for the too-high ratio of phosphorus to calcium in milk, or to neutralize acidity in the blood caused by digestion of too much protein (from foods that are too Yang, according to the classical Chinese view). Phosphorus interferes with the absorption of calcium; food additives in everything from ketchup to

soft drinks contain phosphates, with the result that most Americans are overdosed with the stuff.

So the rumor may be true, about pre-industrial Chinese women being free of menopausal symptoms, but due to the very small amount of meat and absence of dairy foods in their diet as much as to their use of herbs.

Dairy products are not required for adequate calcium; excellent vegetable sources are kale, broccoli, parsley, pinto beans, chickpeas, sunflower seeds, almonds, tofu and seaweed. Calcium supplements are at the top of the priority list, as noted below.

• *Take supplements to compensate for the SAD*

Readers may recall from our previous article, "Soil and Health," the idea that most Americans are malnourished--due not only to junk food addiction but also because chemical-based agriculture has depleted our soils of nutrients, while the practice of transporting food over long distances results in additional nutrient loss. The best single action that any American can take to preserve or improve health may be to grow his or her own food organically, to become a shareholder in a local Community Supported Agriculture project, or to otherwise eat locally grown, organic food.

Even if one manages to eat well much of the time, denatured food is hard to avoid. For this reason alone, dietary supplements are a good idea.

The consensus of advice on supplements usually includes the following as a basic protocol for menopause support. These vitamins and minerals help balance blood sugar, reduce fatigue, control hot flashes and address other symptoms as well.

Calcium	1000-1500 mg/day, with food
Magnesium	500-750 mg/day, in a 1:2 ratio with calcium
Vitamin E	Mixed tocopherols, with food, 800-1200 mg/day or 400 mg, 2-3 times per day
Vitamin D	400-800 mg/day
Vitamin C	1000-1500 mg/day or 500 mg, 2-3 times per day
Zinc	30-50 mg/day
Vitamin B	Balanced complex, including niacin

Herbs to Support the Climacteric

Herbs are the icing on the cake of this alternative scenario of the climacteric. That is, without an attitude of acceptance and cooperation with Nature, proper diet, exercise and other good habits, herbs will have much less effect. However, the good news is that Nature has provided a large array of wonderful herbs to help with symptoms and imbalances.

Herbs may be taken in addition to HRT, or as a means to gradually reduce dependence on HRT. (Don't go off cold