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Religious gardens come in many, varied forms

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Garden Tales

I was given branches from a tree in Delaware that had a large bronze plaque with a declaration about the cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*, II Chronicles 2:3,8; Isaiah 41:19).

Unfortunately, someone had planted an Atlas cedar (*Cedrus atlantica*) of Morocco and Algeria. Twice now I have been sent branches of what was reputed to be the cedar of Lebanon from a local church, but this turned out to be deodar cedar (*Cedrus deodara*) of Afghanistan, China, and India.

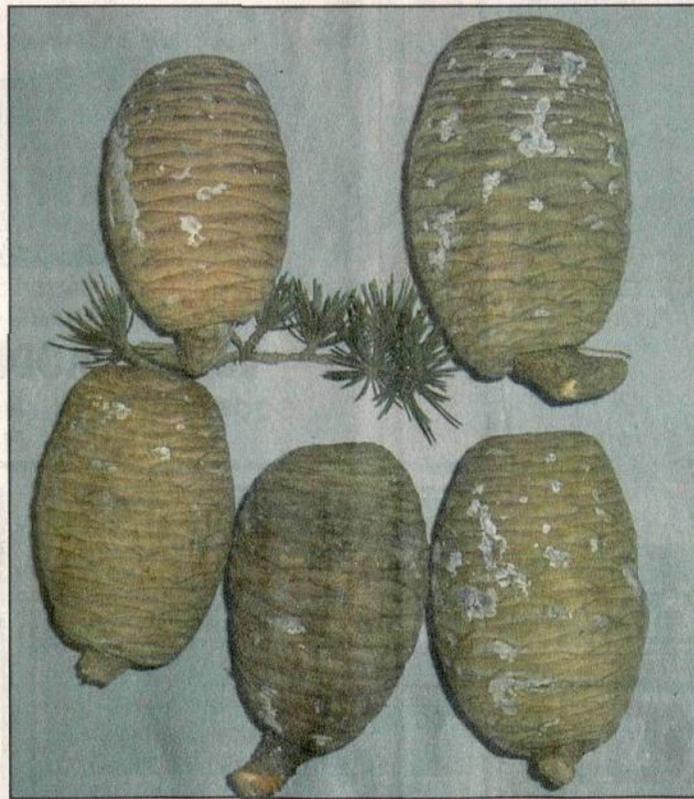
There once was a famous cedar of Lebanon at the entrance of the Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery. This was planted in 1850 by James Canby from a seedling brought from Jerusalem, but it died about 20 years ago. The true cedar of Lebanon actually ranges from Morocco to Turkey and has a number of cultivated variants.

What other plants are appropriate to a biblical garden? Probably the most authoritative reference is "Plants of the Bible" by Michael Zohary, a famed botanist from Israel. Zohary recounts the

figs, pomegranates, etrogs and other plants of both the Old and New Testaments as well as the accounts of Josephus, the Jewish historian, author of "Jewish Wars." Several years ago, I introduced a form of mint (*Mentha longifolia*; Mathew 23:23) that is common to the wadis of Israel and is now sold in the American herb trade as "habak."

Saint gardens are sometimes encountered. I recommend "Saints in my Garden" by Adema Grenier Simmons. Gardeners may not have a garden devoted to saints but many have a statue of St. Fiace, the patron saint of gardeners (as well as taxi drivers and hemorrhoid sufferers), or St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and the environment. Mary gardens, planted with flowers sacred to the Virgin Mary, are becoming more popular (I recommend "Mary's Flowers" by Vincenzina Krymow).

For Hindus, one of the most sacred plants is holy basil or tulsi (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*, formerly *O. sanctum*). It represents purity,



Submitted photo
The cedar of Lebanon actually ranges from Morocco to Turkey and has a number of cultivated variants.

serenity, harmony, luck, happiness and good health. Another is the sacred prayer bead, rudrak-

sha (*Elaeocarpus* spp.); it cannot be grown locally but many bead stores sell it. A rare but extremely

useful book on sacred plants of "Hindus and Buddhists is Sacred and Useful Plants & Trees of Nepal" by Trilok Chandra and Indra Majupuria. Plants are also found in the African-American syncretic religions (Voodoo, Hoodoo, Santería, Palo, Obeah, Candomblé, to name the most common). Probably the most famous is High John the Conqueror Root (*Ipomoea jalapa*), which is "fed" or "dressed" with Van Van oil in Hoodoo to increase your mojo. There are many scholarly books on this subject, but as an introduction, I recommend "Spiritual Merchants" by Carolyn Morrow Long.

Gothic gardening, as it is called today, is centered around the plants of the earth religions. Somber, black flowers and plants of witches and fairies are particularly prominent in Gothic gardens. There are too many web sites on Gothic gardening to even list.

To purchase the true cedar of Lebanon and other trees and shrubs, I recommend Forestfarm in Williams, Ore., ([\[forestfarm.com/\]\(http://www.forestfarm.com/\)\). To purchase "habak" mint, holy basil, and other herbs for your garden, I recommend Well-Sweep Herb Farm in Port Murray, N.J. \(<http://www.wellsweep.com/>\) and De Baggio Herb Farm, in Chantilly, Va. \(<http://www.debaggioherbs.com/>\).](http://www.</p>
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If you are interested in the herbs of the African-American syncretic religions, visit a botánica in one of the larger cities. There are also a number of Bible gardens; the nearest is probably Rodef Shalom Biblical Botanical Garden in Pittsburgh (<http://www.biblicalgardenpittsburgh.org/>).

Editor's note: On the campus of Delaware State University, the Claude E. Phillips Herbarium is Delaware's center for research, education, and outreach about plant identifications, locations, and uses. Call (302) 857-6452 (Dr. Susan Yost) to arrange a tour of the Herbarium, and call (302) 857-6408 (Dr. Arthur Tucker) for more information about this article.