

# MRS. DUNSTON'S MAGIC FLOWER MIX

Sarah Dunston loved to grow flowers. She had twenty acres on the outskirts of town with two large greenhouses on it that she operated as Sarah's Gardens. Unquestionably, she grew the most beautiful flowers in the region. When asked how she gained such a green thumb, she would always reply, "Mrs. Dunston's Magic Flower Mix". As to the ingredients of the product, she declined to reveal how she came up with this "Magic Mix". On other things, though, she was less mum.

On one particular Tuesday, Sarah welcomed the fifth-grade class of Belvedere Elementary School to tour her gardens. She relished talking to the kids and had stories galore to share with them. With school tours, she always made sure each child got a small paper cup with a growing young seedling when they first arrived. Every cup had a label that gave the common name of the plant as well as the scientific name. When the tour ended and the kids got ready to board the bus, she always challenged the young ones with a test. If they could tell her the name of the plant that they had without

reading the label, then they got a special bonus gift—usually something of a sweeter nature. Because she made the plants so interesting with her tales and tips for remembering their names, most kids got at least the common name. A few could even recite the scientific name. For those poor souls who didn't pay attention and could not remember common or scientific name, well, they also still received a gift—a nice fresh pack of spinach seeds.

As the line dwindled down to get on the bus, one young lad at the end of the line posed a question to Sarah, “Mrs. Dunston,” asked Jimmy. “How do you get the flowers to grow so pretty?”

“Well, now, Jimmy,” said Sarah, reading his name tag. “I'll just have to show you my Magic Flower Mix.” Calling out to Mrs. Davis, the teacher for the fifth grade, “Mrs. Davis, is it okay to show Jimmy something really quick?”

“Sure,” answered Mrs. Davis.

“Okay, Jimmy. Follow me back to the barn.”

Sarah opened the barn door and took Jimmy behind a little divider.

“Wow,” exclaimed Jimmy. “Is that a flower-making machine?”

“Not exactly, Jimmy, but it is what I use to help me grow the flowers.”

“That’s cool, Mrs. Dunston.”

“Okay, Jimmy. Back to the bus, but remember this is our little secret, okay?”

When the school bus pulled out of her driveway, Sarah went back to work in the greenhouse, satisfied that she had helped to expand the imagination of the blooming young folks of the community.

Later that evening, Jimmy’s mom asked him if he enjoyed the tour at Sarah’s Gardens.

“Yes, Mom,” he replied. “It was really nice. Can we put my plant in the window like Mrs. Dunston does in the greenhouse?”

“We sure can, Jimmy,” answered his mom. “What was your favorite part?”

“Getting to see Mrs. Dunston’s flower-making machine,” answered Jimmy.

“Flower-making machine? ... What did this flower-making machine look like?”

“It was a big shiny pot with lots of curly pipes.”

“A big shiny pot with lots of curly pipes, hmm,” repeated Jimmy’s mom. “That sounds an awful lot like a ... no, it couldn’t be. Was there anything else you remember about this machine?”

“Yes, she had a fire going underneath it,” answered Jimmy.

“Well, that certainly sounds like a flower-making machine to me, Jimmy,” said his mom.

After Jimmy went to bed, his mom called her best friend and fellow fifth-grade mom, Betty Jackson.

“Hi, Betty, this is Liz.”

“Oh, hi, Liz,” answered Betty.

“Betty, I was wondering if Matt said anything special about their tour to Sarah’s Gardens today?”

“Well, he seemed to enjoy it. He proudly told me the name of his plant.”

“Did he say anything else?” asked Liz.

“Not a whole lot more. I was happy to get that much out of him.”

“He didn’t happen to mention anything about a flower-making machine, did he?” asked Liz.

“A flower-making machine? ... What are you talking about, Liz?”

“Jimmy told me he saw Mrs. Dunston’s secret flower-making machine and that’s how she grows such beautiful flowers.”

“Okay, but you know how kids can imagine things sometimes, Liz,” said Betty. “What did this flower-making machine look like?”

“He said it was a big shiny pot with lots of curly pipes and a fire underneath it,” answered Liz.

“A big shiny pot with lots of curly pipes and a fire underneath it? ... That sounds an awful lot like a ... a still.”

“That’s what I thought, Betty. Do you think we should say anything to anybody?” asked Liz.

“Let me tell Tom, and maybe he can check it out.”

“Okay, thanks, Betty,” said Liz. “A little bit of intrigue, huh?”

“Very interesting, indeed.”

The next day Tom, a deputy sheriff, made a casual visit to Sarah's Gardens. Pulling up next to the barn, Tom got out of his patrol car and greeted Sarah by the door.

"Hi, Sarah," said Tom. "How are you today?"

"I'm good, Tom," replied Sarah. "What brings you out to this neck of the woods today?"

"Oh, just passing by, when I remembered Betty's birthday coming up, and I thought I'd get her a flowering plant. Everybody knows you have the prettiest flowers in the county."

"Oh, I've got some beautiful Peace roses in bloom right now. Come let me show you."

Sarah led Tom back to her rose area and showed him the gorgeous block of roses growing in containers. As they walked, Tom studied everything along the path to see if anything suspicious stood out.

"These are beautiful, Sarah. I'll take one of these Peace roses."

"I'm sure Betty will love it, Tom," said Sarah. "It's got plenty of buds coming on it too."

"Tell me, Sarah, what is the secret to your flower growing success?"

“I’m glad you asked, Tom. Let me show you.”

Sarah led Tom back to the barn and opened the door. She walked over to a shelf and grabbed a small bag of Mrs. Dunston’s Magic Flower Mix.

“Here you go, Tom. Put one cupful of this around your rose once a month.”

“Mrs. Dunston’s Magic Flower Mix, huh? Is that all there is to it?”

“That will do it. Just follow the label for the dosage for any other plants.”

“Well, Sarah, and here I thought you had some kind of flower-making machine in the barn.”

“Flower-making machine? ... Oh, oh ... Mrs. Dunston does have a little help. If you promise not to tell, I’ll show you my little secret helper.”

A little surprised that she would show him so easily (he was a deputy sheriff, after all), Tom carefully considered his words.

“Sarah, I hate to say this, but that looks an awful lot like a still.”

Looking at her machine, Sarah said, “Well ... yes ... yes, I guess it does, but that’s because it was

a still that my old grandpa had in his garage. When he died, I cleaned out his garage and I found it under an old tarp. I had no idea what I'd ever use it for, but you know me, I have a hard time throwing anything out."

"Sarah, you know it's illegal to run a still in this county," said Tom.

"Yes, of course, but it's not running as a still. It's what I use to make Mrs. Dunston's Magic Flower Mix."

Tom looked at the liquid collected in the jar under the copper tubing. He walked over, picked up the jar, and took a sniff of the liquid.

"Sarah, this is alcohol, moonshine, hooch, whatever you want to call it."

"I don't know about that, but it smells so awful, I take it out back and pour it around in the field. I'm always glad to get it out of the barn, but I discovered that it works great in keeping out those Bully Weevils from the field better than anything I've ever bought."

"So, you pour the liquid out onto the ground?" asked Tom.



“Yes, like I said, it’s good for getting rid of those weevils. What I really use is the ground up mash in the bottom of the pot. I take the sediment and mix it with ... do I have to tell you what all I mix them with? It’s kind of my secret recipe for Mrs. Dunston’s Magic Flower Mix.”

“No, no, Sarah. Let me just ask you one more time. Do you do anything else with the liquid from your machine?”

“No, I’m glad to get rid of it. I feel fortunate to have been able to put it to good use.”

“Okay, Sarah. Look, you need to be very careful with this machine. I’ve known you a long time and I know you wouldn’t do anything illegal, but if someone else were to see this machine ... Well, it is a still of a sort and you could get in a lot of trouble. Maybe keep it well hidden and don’t show it to anybody, not even inquisitive little kids.”

“I’m sorry, Tom. I guess I never thought about it in that way. I just know it has been, ... well, like a miracle to me.”

“I know, Sarah. Just out of curiosity, what all do you cook in there? Would you be using corn?”

“Sometimes I’ll throw in some ears of corn if the earworms have beat me to it ... but I have this problem with henbit and wild onion in my pasture. I pull all those weeds I can and grind them up. Then I mix them in certain proportions with other things that I don’t want from the garden, and it all goes into the pot.”

“Henbit and wild onion? I love it ... Keep your flower-making machine out of sight and mum’s the word, right?”

“Absolutely, Tom. Absolutely.”

“I will take that bag of Mrs. Dunston’s Magic Flower Mix with my rose, Sarah.”

“Thank you, Tom ... Thanks for everything and wish Betty a happy birthday for me.”

Mrs. Dunston’s Magic Flower Mix never gained world-wide product status, but just about every gardener in the southern part of the state eventually used it in their quest for more beautiful flowers. When Sarah passed away a few years later, gardeners from all over came to pay their respects at her funeral.

Tom kept her little secret for the rest of his life, as he had promised. Sarah left no written

recipe for her flower mix. She just did it all by heart. She declined to patent or trademark it. When she passed on, so did the recipe, for she had no remaining kin. Many tried to duplicate it with complex laboratory analysis, but they never could get the combination right. They always seemed to lack one key ingredient. There arose a rumor that late, after one long night in the lab, a technician decided to pour himself a little glass of bourbon and accidentally poured it into the beaker of material he was testing instead of the glass. In the morning, the lab was all abuzz, thinking that they had found that long awaited proper mixture in that beaker, but the solution proved unfruitful, and the answer continued to elude them.

Undoubtedly, given sufficient resources and time, science will find the right combination to make Mrs. Dunston's Magic Flower Mix. It is most probable they will be able to divert more money and personnel to the project once they solve the problem they are currently facing. Agronomists and entomologists from a five-state area are desperately seeking a way to control the Bully Weevils that have wreaked havoc destroying crops everywhere in their states ... well, everywhere ... except

for twenty acres with two greenhouses on it that sits on the outskirts of a small town.