

# Bible in Bloom at St. John the Divine: Sunrise to Sunset

By ARI L. GOLDMAN

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When Adam and Eve realized they were naked, they covered their nakedness with fig leaves. Noah knew the flood waters had subsided when the dove returned to the ark with an olive leaf. Moses heard the Lord calling to him out of the burning bush, and Jesus spent the night before his crucifixion at the foot of the Mount of Olives.

There are enough fruits, flowers and plants mentioned in the Bible to fill an entire garden. And therein lie the beginnings of the Biblical Garden that has been created at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

The trustees of the garden, on the grounds of the cathedral at Amsterdam Avenue and West 112th Street, are offering free tours Saturdays and Wednesdays through the end of August. They are given between 11 A.M. and 2 P.M. by the people who know the garden best, the volunteers who tend it.

### Sunrise to Sunset

"It has a soothing effect on people," Tania Bayard, a guide, said the other day as she stood on one of the sandy paths that crisscross the lush and varied vegetation at the cathedral's south wall.

At each end of the quarter-acre plot, there are simple stone benches where visitors can relax from the time the garden opens at sunrise until it closes at sunset. The trustees ask only that visitors close the green wooden gate behind them when they enter the garden.

For all its peacefulness, the garden does have its surprises and intrigue. The intrigue is provided by three peacocks, a family of cats and a loose alliance of squirrels that make the cathedral grounds their home. Although the animals are a favorite of visitors, they often plot to help themselves to the some of the garden's



Coriander was a biblical spice

treasures — a ripening fruit or a rare flower.

Among the surprises of the garden is that it has no apple tree. "Some people find it upsetting," Mrs. Bayard said, but biblical scholars agree that the fruit that brought the downfall of Adam and Eve was more likely an apricot, plum, fig or quince than an apple. Trees bearing all these other fruits are found at the Biblical Garden.

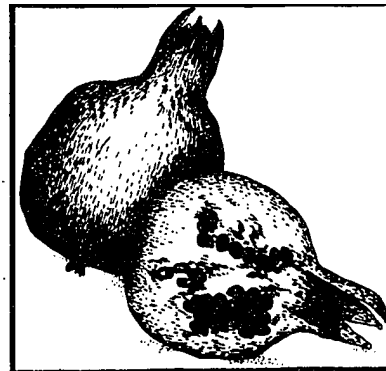
Because the Bible's events are set in the often-arid Holy Land, many of the 100 varieties of plants in the garden have to spend the winter months indoors at the Rosedale Nurseries in Hawthorne in Westchester County. Others, such as dandelions, endive, chicory and sorrel — traditionally the "bitter herbs" (Exodus 12:8) eaten on the feast of Passover — are comfortable in the New York climate year round.

The Biblical Garden was founded by Sarah Larkin Loening of Southampton, L.I., who donated the money to buy the original plants and remains the head of the organization that runs the garden. According to those who were at the opening ceremony in 1973, the garden was christened by a pouring rain, which delighted rather than angered the participants. Ever since, the garden has flourished.

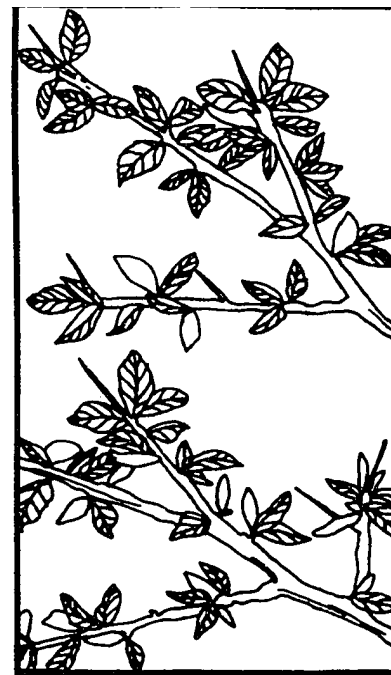
The plants range from the spindly mustard, a seed of which "a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree" (Luke 13:19), to the mighty cedars of Lebanon, which were used by Solomon in the building of his temple (1 Kings 5:13-18).

In one corner is a little pond where papyrus grows. Scholars believe papyrus plants were the "bulrushes" used to make the cradle for Moses when he was cast off at the brink of the Nile as an infant (Exodus 2:3).

Against the eastern fence of the garden is an arbor from which a small ripening bunch of grapes hung the other day. The fruit of the vine plays a significant role in the Bible, Mrs. Bayard pointed out, from Noah's drunkenness after the flood (Genesis 9:21-24)



Pomegranates grew in Holy Land



Myrrh was used as incense

to the Last Supper (Matthew 26:21-29).

One of the few things in the garden that is not actually mentioned in the Bible is the redbud tree. According to a legend, Judas, the betrayer of Jesus, hanged himself from a redbud tree, and the flowers of this tree blush red with shame.

King Solomon serves as a major inspiration for the garden. He speaks of lilies, pomegranates, saffron, myrrh and aloe, all of which can be found in the cathedral's garden.

Solomon also wrote these lines, which serve as something of an eternal invitation to the garden:

"Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden and eat his pleasant fruits" (Song of Solomon 4:16).