Her 'natural' interest spurs study of herbs

By FRAN WEBER
Staff Writer

Esther Allen, president of Wissahickon Nature Club, calls herself an enthusiastic, but amateur, naturalist.

"I am interested in nature and try to do something in the area that would be different, that people can learn from."

This has led her into study and research of herbs. "When you say herbs, you think of medicinal plants. The main definition of an herb is a flowering plant with no woody stem." Allen prefers the Indian definition, "an herb is any plant with a use."

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Using herbs requires care, according to Allen. "It is nothing for people to use without making a study of it. Definitely there are many things used medically that are poison. Actually there is no line between poison and medicine, it is the extent of use." Allen says she doesn't recommend this. "It isn't anything I am interested in plants for medicine and food today. People laughed at herbs when medicine came up with synthetic drugs."

Allen says after people realized the harm of some drugs, like thalidomide, "A re-learning started into the use of natural medicine."

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