

Harvesting of the flax field began in mid-June. Terry Yemm and Marilyn Wetton are working together to produce flax which will eventually be spun into linen thread. Terry has been assisted by volunteer Emily Gerhold, (you may remember her mother Beth from the Geddy house and the Millinery shop.) The flax is pulled carefully by the roots, then tied in small bundles to dry in the sun. The next step will be the retting or rotting process, where it is soaked in water. After drying, the flax will be broken to free the fibers from the stems. There is a wooden flax breaker in the jailyard. If you would like to participate just let Terry know, he needs help from guests and us. Linen, in spite of all of these steps in processing, was the cheapest textile fiber.



Wayne Randolph is cultivating Venezuelan tobacco behind the corn field at the windmill. He says it looks like Orinoco tobacco favored by 18th-century growers. Ornamental tobacco, usually called by its generic name, Nicotiana, is growing in several of our gardens, notably at the Orlando Jones, and in the ballroom terrace garden at the Palace. Its blossoms close in the hot sun, but it reopens in late afternoon and evening, and is a good plant for the scented garden.

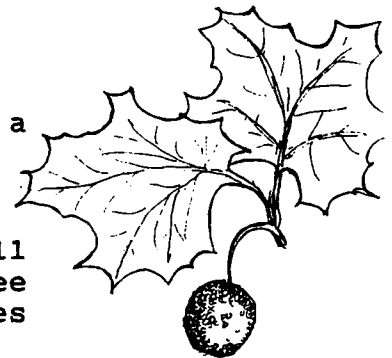
The Geddy garden is thriving under the care of Janet Guthrie and her volunteers. Their scarecrows have been a cheerful addition to the landscape. Seeds of sachet melon have sprouted. It is a small melon which can be carried in a woman's pocket, giving off a delightful fragrance, (if not kept too long!) Nasturtiums are a beautiful addition to the vegetable garden. John Randolph described these South American natives, "It is thought the flower is superior to a radish in flavour, and is eat in salads, or without....The Nasturtium is deserving of cultivation on account of its beautiful Orange-coloured Flowers, as their excellence in salads; the green seeds of this plant, make on of the nicest pickles." He referred to nasturtium as "Indian cress." Both Joseph Prentis and John Randolph say to sow cabbages and brocolli now, so they will be ready to transplant in July. Randolph also says, "draw up by the roots all your weeds."



Another glorious fragrance in the Geddy has been emanating from the American linden. Lindens are favored by bee keepers, as they attract bees and make a flavorful honey. Bee keepers like to construct the frames of combs from linden. The European linden, bloomed earlier in the Elkanah Deane garden.



Many have asked about the age of the sycamore that was cut down behind the Wythe house. After polishing a cross section of the trunk in the lab, Wes Greene was able to count 156 rings. He added a couple of years for the sprout and small sapling stage, and says the tree is 158-160 years old. Although the trunk was still alive, 75% of the root system had died, making the tree vulnerable to storm damage, and not to be trusted. Wes says that sycamores, native to bottomlands, are excellent trees for parking lots and areas with a lot of traffic and paving, because in their natural habitat they are able to grow with little oxygen. Bald cypress is another tree of bottomlands and swamps planted in parking lots. I was puzzled when I saw these two species planted in such apparently dry locations, this explanation solves the puzzle.



I recently had the pleasure of hearing our Thomas Jefferson discuss the gardens at the Palace. It was a sweltering morning, and he kept a large crowd of people involved as he discussed the architecture and plants of the gardens. Especially colorful now is the Prince's feather coxcomb, blooming on the North side of the Palace. The goldenrain trees are splendid as I write this, lovely from the garden, and also lovely looking out the windows of the Palace. Jefferson wrote to his friend Madame de Tesse in 1811. "Since I had last the pleasure of writing to you, I have to acknowledge the receipt of your favors of 1809...With the first came the seeds of the Paullinia or Koelreuteria, one of which has germinated, and is now growing. I cherish it with particular attentions, as it daily reminds me of the friendship with which you have honored me."



Zinnias are popping up this year in the Hartwell Perry and the Palace. Native to Mexico, they were introduced into England by 1770. The variety is Zinnia multiflora.

Mr. Kidd, aka Bob Chandler, gives us a wonderful tip for keeping cool. "My mother taught me to put a cabbage leaf under my hat on hot days, and to keep it wet. When I go home at night I eat it for dinner, it is already cooked and salted!" Thanks to our merry "King Cool".

Bouquets to all of you,

Cynthia Long

