



Geddy Garden News



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"A housewife coming in from the garden with an apron full of succulent variety is a pleasant sight.."

The Old Farmers Almanac

August is the midpoint of summer, and I can feel the heart of the summer beating. August first is Lammas Day. It celebrates the beginning of the harvest season and is named for the Roman goddess of grain, Ceres. Our word cereal is derived from that word. In Christian times, the first grains harvested were offered to the church for use in the sacrament during the liturgy. There were Lammas Day Festivals and faires in many countries and some places still celebrate Lammas Day.

The Geddy garden is very productive this year and that success is due in large to the richness of the soil. This year my beds were raised and the soil was improved with the addition of compost. The drainage and acidity benefited from the attention paid to the beds and the soil. As Karel Capek wrote in the Gardener's Year, "A real gardener is not a man who cultivates flowers; he is a man who cultivates the soil If he came into the Garden of Eden he would sniff excitedly and say: 'Good Lord, what humas!'"

I grew some parsnips in the garden this year, along with lots of onions, squash, cucumbers, and sweet potatoes. Parsnips were enjoyed by the colonists. I found an eighteenth-century receipt from a woman in South Carolina named Rebecca Motte, who became a Revolutionary heroine. When the British took over her plantation and called it Fort Motte, she chose to have it burned to the ground to rid her house of the British invaders! She had the following receipt for mashed parsnips: "Boile six large parsnips in a cast iron kettle, drain and mash them with a wooden spoon. Remove the stringy fibers. Add 4 tablespoons of cream and two tablespoons of butter, one teaspoon of salt and half teaspoon of pepper. Heat in a saucepan, remove from heat and beat hard and serve hot." Parsnips were also included as an ingredient in the making of marmalade wine in colonial times.

I was never partial to parsnips, but it was in Ireland that I found a way to enjoy them. There they mixed parsnips with mashed carrots, which resulted in a tasty dish.

Parsnips were among the 250 varieties of vegetables that Thomas Jefferson grew in his 1,000-foot-long vegetable garden at Monticello. Jefferson enjoyed a vegetable diet. He once wrote, "I have lived temperately, eating little animal food, and that . . . as a condiment for the vegetables, which constitute my principal diet." Incidentally, it was in the month of August, on August 3rd, 1767, to be exact, that Thomas Jefferson first mentioned the name "Monticello" for his homesite, when he wrote in his garden book an entry about his cherries in his fruit garden.

I have enjoyed watching the hummingbirds hovering around the trumpet vines on the fences. Humming birds are fascinating to watch. They remind me of nervous helicopters.

There have been several good garden helpers this summer. I have been helped with weeding and watering by Caroline Hollis, Sara Finklestein, Phyllis Putnam, and even Jennifer Poirier, in her delicate condition! The fig trees have been producing delicious figs again this year and one day, Robert Watson became a helper by generously offering to help me pick the figs from the higher branches.

Figs were a favorite fruit enjoyed by our founding fathers. Jefferson boasted that his Marseilles fig was, "incomparably the finest fig I've every seen," and another good farmer, George Mason, wrote a letter to George Washington during the Revolutionary War, "May God grant us a return to those halcyon Days; when every Man may set down at his Ease under the Shade of his own Vine, & his own fig-tree, & enjoy the Sweets of domestic Life!"

Janet Guthrie

