



Geddy Garden News



Issue 50

May – 1998

**“If you sweep the house with
blossomed broom in May,
You are sure to sweep the
head of the house away.”**

Old Sussex Proverb

May Day, the first of May has been for many centuries the day that marked the beginning of spring with great ceremony. Plays and theatrical performances were presented on that day. The setting for the Shakespearean comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, was on May Day. Maypoles were also a popular feature of the May Day celebration. Poles were decorated with streamers which the celebrants held as they danced about the May poles. The last of the May poles in London was taken down in 1717 and that custom does not seem to have ever found it's way to the colonies, in fact we do not seem to have adopted any national customs for the observance of May Day in our country.

I have done a great deal of planting in the garden and was careful to follow the instructions of John Randolph from his *Treatise on Gardening*. His instructions for May say, “Sow cucumber seeds that are to be used for “Picklers” in May... about 9 seeds in a hill. In 5 or 6 days they will appear above the ground, and are liable to be destroyed by sparrows – as they are very fond of them.”

I also planted in the same bed with the cucumbers, squash, rudbeckia, dill and broccoli.

At the garden symposium this year there was an emphasis on wild flowers and native plants. We have right now a wild flower look in our

JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR. LIBRARY
COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION
P. O. Box 1776
Williamsburg, Virginia 23187

orchard. There is a certain casual, relaxed feeling that comes from a field of wild flowers. The benefits of growing such a garden are many.

Although the flowers often appear small and delicate, they are generally very hardy and they offer a beautiful color show. Best of all they thrive on benign neglect! In a wildflower garden nature is in control, not the gardener. Plants will procreate and pop up at will. The gardener must be undemanding and learn to sit back and enjoy the show, which sometimes includes many surprises. The gardener is rewarded with a low maintenance, aesthetically pleasing garden.

We have experienced a great deal of rain this past month but I hesitate to complain because we have been spared some of the more drastic effects of weather. The Hermitage in Tennessee, the home of Andrew Jackson, suffered from a tornado and as a result two thirds of the trees at Hermitage were destroyed. So I guess our excessive rainfall is nothing in comparison.

Fifty days after Easter the colonists celebrated Pentecost. This was one of the three major holy days of the church and was called Whitsunday. It was called that because the sacrament of Baptism took place during the Easter season and white garments were worn. It was customarily observed in several ways. Slaves were released that day from their daily duties. Beer and ale were brewed for the celebration of this holy day and it was the custom to eat gooseberry tarts on white Sunday.

Gooseberries were grown in Virginia. On May day in 1766, Landon Carter wrote in his diary how a late frost on April 24th injured most all of his fruit, even his gooseberries of which he had "a great plenty." John Randolph gave advice about the growing and pruning of gooseberries in his *Treatise on Gardening*. Joseph Prentis in his monthly *Kalendar and Garden Book* instructs the gardener to set out his gooseberry slips in the months of February and March. The cookbooks also contain gooseberry receipts. Hanna Glasse in the *Art of Cookery* in 1747 wrote a receipt for gooseberry cream and Susannah Carter in 1772 in *The Frugal Colonial Housewife or Complete Woman Cook*, wrote a rich receipt for making paste for tarts and gooseberry pie. She also includes instructions in the

proper way to preserve gooseberries in bottles as well as how to make gooseberry wine.

In our flowerpots by the back gate we are growing China pinks which are some times also know as Indian pinks. The word pink is a derivative of pinksten, meaning a flower that bloomed at Pentecost or Whitsuntide. Many of our well known 18th century Virginian gardeners grew this plant, such as Thomas Jefferson, John Custis, and Lady Jean Skipwith at Prestwoud, her enormous plantation near Clarksville, Virginia which consisted of 10,000 acres, seven hundred slaves and indentured servants.

This year Whitsunday falls on May 31st so we conclude this month of May with the celebration of the holy day.

We sadly said farewell to our co-worker Chris Trowbridge who has assumed new duties at the brickyard. We miss her and we wish her great success.

Janet Guthrie