



Geddy Garden News



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*"What a desolate place would a
world without flowers!
It would be a face without a smile,
a feast without a welcome."*

Clara Balfaur

Today is the first day of summer and the Geddy Garden seems to be shouting out that news. The edible plants in the Kitchen garden are showing off their beauty with their lush foliage. To walk through the garden right now is like being in a large salad bowl amidst a variety of salad ingredients. The vegetable garden has a beauty all its own. The rich green leaves of Swiss Chard are a lovely contrast to the pale shade of the Kale plants. The sizes, shapes and textures of the diverse plants as well as the beautiful shades of color blend together to celebrate summer.

This year the perennial border of the Geddy garden is alive with color and the Bee Balm is attracting hoards of butterflies. The border encloses and enhances the garden and serves as an invitation to passersby to enter and enjoy the pleasures the garden has to offer.

I am often questioned about the "tall" flowers. When I receive such a question I know immediately that it is a reference to the hollyhocks, a cheerful addition to the yard this year.

The Hollyhock is native to China and one of the oldest plants in civilization. It is propagated by seed and produces large colorful flowers. It is a sun-loving plant but it can manage to still do fairly well with some partial shade.

Gerard's Herball, the 1597 Historie of Plants, shows woodcuts of the Hollyhock. One was a double purple flower. John Rea, in 1665, recommended that the Hollyhock be included in summer gardens in his plant catalogue. They can also be found in the art and literature of the 17th century Persian gardens. Probably the earliest reference of the Hollyhock is found in a 1420 painting known as *The Garden of Paradise* by an unknown Rhenish artist. It is shown among other flowers growing in the grass. They were also to be found in the beautiful Italian Renaissance gardens.

The gardens in England displayed Hollyhocks and they were being grown in the 17th century in the northern colonies of our country. John Josselyn mentioned them in Two Voyages to New England 1638-1663, and there are mentions of the seeds for sale in a Boston newspaper.

The respected Williamsburg resident, John Custis, who served as a member of the Governor's council for 22 years, was an avid gardener. He was one of the gentlemen who was very involved with exchange of plants and seeds with England. He was described by his correspondent, Peter Collinson, along with John Bartram, as one of the "Brothers of the Spade." In 1735 he thanked Peter Collinson for sending him Hollyhock seeds. It became one of the most commonly cultivated plants in 18th century gardens. In 1767, Thomas Jefferson wrote that his Pinks and Hollyhocks bloomed on June 10th and he again listed them in his Calendar of Bloom of Flowers in 1782.

The other name for Hollyhock is Althaea Rosea. Althaea comes from the Greek meaning to cure, so Hollyhocks were used medicinally. It was believed to be useful, when brewed, in voiding kidney stones and part of the root is used as an ingredient in cough medicine, both in ancient times as well as the present.

Hollyhocks come in a rainbow of beautiful colors, which includes a deep maroon flower, sometimes referred to as black. The Geddy garden has a color range from pale yellow to deep rose. They have contributed summer beauty to the Kitchen garden.

Janet Guthrie

