
GEDDY GARDEN NEWS

**“Season of mists and mellow fruitness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Conspiring with him how to load and bless
With fruit and vines that round the thatch eves run.”**

John Keats, ‘To Autumn’, 1819

We survived the hurricane Floyd. Luckily the Geddy property did not have damage. Our scarecrow withstood the storm and merely lost her hat. She seemed to be more of a guardian angel than a scarecrow.

Colonial Williamsburg, however suffered the loss of many trees in the hurricane, especially near the Cascades. When we lose our trees we lose not only aesthetic beauty but we also lose the practical functions that trees offer. Their placement can alter the effects of wind and screen out objectionable views and lighting in residential communities. They can control intrusive noise by serving as sound barriers and by proper placement they can aid in our comfort by providing warmth in winter and coolness and shade in summer.

We received approximately 18 inches of rain in our Tidewater area as an aftermath of Floyd, which is above average, but the most severely damaged city in Virginia was Franklin. There was also great harm done in the state of North Carolina. So we cannot really complain.

At a recent seminar in Toronto, Ontario I had the opportunity to attend a lecture given by Ken Parker, a Seneca Indian. As the only nursery that is owned and operated by a Native American in North America his lecture focused on the history of native American plants and their reestablishment and Indian culture.

His nursery is located above Buffalo, N.Y. in zone five. With the deepening concern we all share about the environment it is important to remember that the Native Americans were our very first environmentalists.

There is a trend being established in gardening to contribute to responsible environmental caretaking. A result of the trend is an aesthetic style called “new naturalism.” The featured plants of this style are the ornamental grasses of the American prairie. Prairie is a French word for meadow and the American prairie extends into Canada.

It is interesting to learn how the Indians of that territory were using some of the plants. Tribes such as the Mohawk, Iroquois and Senecas burned sweet grass for spiritual cleansing and to communicate with the Great Spirit. Tobacco was also used in such ceremonies.

There were medicinal uses for many of their plants. The Tall Coreopsis was made into a tea as a remedy for what we call arthritis. Seeds from sunflowers were used for oil and gum. Wild bergamot leaves were used to soothe insect bites and were also made into tea. Tea was made from the flower of the American Highbush Cranberry. Indians ate both the flowers and leaves of Spiderwort in salad form and the pods of the Prickly Pear were eaten and the yellow flowers were made into a jam like dish. Boneset, like the name implies was used to set bones but also as a cough remedy. Another cold remedy used by the Indians came from rose hips. A tea was made from Fireweed and the flowers of the Fireweed plant was made into honey.

One of the more interesting uses of a plant was of the *Silphium laciniatum*. Because the leaves of this plant align north to south, the plant was used by the Indians as a compass and became known as the compass plant.

By planting some of these native plants we can restore natural resources as well as create habitats of wild life and insects. As an added bonus we will be beautifying the land especially with the showy plumes of the Indian grasses.

Janiet Guthrie