

Geddy Garden News

"This day about 1 it began to rain as sultry hot terrible thunder and a heavenly shower we have had, and it is likely to continue which I pray the Lord it may, if it is his good Pleasure." Landon Carter wrote these words in his diary on August 23rd, 1774, after experiencing a long drought. On August 24th he continued, *"The great blessing of rain still continues."*

Here in Williamsburg we can relate to Landon's words. After a very dry summer we finally experienced a blessed rainfall over the last few days. It felt good and the rain even smelled good! I'm sure every garden in Virginia celebrated.

Marigolds and Globe Amaranths seem to be thriving in my garden, as well as the Morning Glories. Amaranth is the Greek word for "not withering" and they are certainly living up to their name. They are written about in Paradise Lost:

*"Immortal Amaranth,
a flower that once in Paradise,
fast by the Tree of Life began
to bloom, but soon for
man's offence to heaven
removed, where first
it grew, there grows,
and flowers aloft,
shading the Font of Life."*

These flowers were used by the ancient Greeks and Romans in their religious ceremonies, especially in funeral rites as symbols of life everlasting.

These past few rainy days were conducive to comfort seeking and I found myself doing just that with a hot cup of tea. I began reflecting on the practice of tea drinking.

The word *tea* comes from an old Chinese word *tai*, which means peace. It is no wonder that we choose to have a cup of tea to soothe ourselves. The name itself implies restfulness. We become calmed and refreshed.

The concept of afternoon tea served to allow people a chance to stop, pause, and brace themselves for the rest of the busy day ahead. It became a pleasant ritual. Today tea is the most popular drink in the world. Tea drinking also became a social behavior and activity. It developed into a custom that could be followed by not only the upper classes, but it could include most people. Of course, the upper class acquired expensive accouterments to accommodate the custom. Thomas Jefferson, in his book in 1779, mentions that it took 11 lbs. of double refined sugar to one lb. of good Congo tea. Congo was a variety of black tea from China which was usually prepared in an elaborate ritual.

There are three kinds of tea: Green, in which the leaves are usually steamed immediately after picking; the other two types are Black and Oolong. The leaves of these are dried and crushed after picking.

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An attractive feature of tea drinking is the lack of calories involved. Another good feature is that there is only 1/3 as much caffeine in a cup of tea as in a cup of coffee.

As the popularity of tea drinking increased, a need was created for the proper equipment to accompany the ceremony. As the 18th century colonists began to prosper, they also began to spend their money on stylish and expensive articles to accommodate the afternoon ritual. Tea tables, table linens, silver spoons, china cups, tea chests, as well as the tea and the expensive sugar, as Thomas Jefferson mentioned, began to be bought and a consumer society developed.

As early as the 6th century herbs were being cultivated in gardens for medicinal uses. Landon Carter's diary gives us a clear view of how many kinds of herbal teas there were. Chamomile seemed to be a basic medicinal treatment by Landon Carter to his slaves for a variety of ailments. He prescribed it for everything from worms, fever, stomach ailments such as colic, restlessness, to severe cold symptoms. He tried unsuccessfully mixing Chamomile tea with bitters in an effort to reduce swelling in legs and feet. Chamomile, with its fruity, apple scent has anti-nausea qualities and was relied upon heavily for a therapeutic remedy in the 18th century. The tea was made from the dried daisy-like blossoms. It has relieved headaches and has served to calm people for centuries.

Another tea often used by Carter was Ipecacuan tea, a purge, used to induce vomiting. And many of the herbal teas, such as Rosemary, Mint, and Valeria, are mentioned in diaries for the treatment of nerves.

Purdie and Dixon, in the January 13, 1774, *Gazette*, included a long article which served to encourage the use of native plants in tea. It included a detailed list of medicinal uses for such plants.

Over 200 years later Americans are heeding the advice offered in the 1774 *Virginia Gazette* and finding tea to be not only good, but good for you. It has been found that there is a disease-fighting compound in tea called phytochemicals that are useful in reducing the risks of some serious diseases and also useful in lowering blood pressure.

As flu season approaches, I recommend enjoying tea time. I think of tea as the comfort drink!

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