

*Issue #71*

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*"February brings the rain,  
Melts the frozen lands again."*

February is fickle. Our temperatures this month are proof of that. Our temperature today is a balmy 75° but in some shaded spots there are still small, dirty piles of snow left over from recent days. The soil in my garden is still somewhat wet due to February's fickleness. "This rule in gardening do not forget: Always sow dry and set wet."

February 6<sup>th</sup> is the feast of St. Dorothy, who is one of the three patron saints of gardening. The other two are St. Phocus and St. Fiacre. Dorothy in 313 AD. was accused of witchcraft and tortured. When taken before a judge he asked, "How longe wilt thou drawe us along with thy witchcraft? Eyther do sacryfyse and lyve or ellis receyve the sentens of thy hide smytyne of." A lawyer named Theophilus mocked her and asked her to produce the fruits of the Garden of Paradise. Legend has it that at that time an angel appeared and delivered to her 3 apples and 3 roses. Theophilus became a Christian convert and eventually a martyr himself. Dorothy became associated with roses and in ancient times, in England, brides were crowned with dried roses and both the bride and groom wore caplets of red and white roses. Rose petals were thrown at the wedding couple instead of the rice that is often thrown today. So in this month of February, I dedicate this newsletter to St. Dorothy, a patron saint of gardening. I trust she will guide me as I begin planting my Geddy kitchen garden for this new millennium, and I will begin with the planting of peas. We find both beans and peas were grown very early on in Palestine and used for food as vegetables and also dried. The green garden peas that I'll be planting however began to be mentioned after the Norman conquest when "green peas for Lent" were recorded. Then after 1536 edible podded peas were described in France. In Virginia Captain John Smith wrote, "We daily feasted with good bread, Virginia pease, pumpions, putchamins (persimmons), fish, fowle, and diverse sorts of wild beasts, so fat as we could eate them." Rosier in 1605 on Monhegan Island wrote in True Relation of Wymouths Voyage and Exploration, "Wed. the 22 of May, wee sowed pease and barley, which in sixteen days grew eight inches above ground."

We find the mention of peas in the colonies in letters indicating the important role the pea was playing. In 1637 Governor Winthrop of Massachusetts, in a letter to his wife, advises her to protect herself in the cold weather and adds that she should feed the Ram, "lock him up and give him meals, the greene pease in the garden etc. are good for him."

Seventeenth Century Governor William Bradford of Plymouth Plantation mentioned green peas growing along with other vegetables and grains in the gardens in a poem he wrote.

There are 17<sup>th</sup> Century receipts for pea soup, using pea purée in cook books for the English Royalty. Peas were also suggested as the main ingredient for a sauce to be made for boiled chicken.

We find them advertised in 1738 by Thomas Crease in the Virginia Gazette and Thomas Jefferson considered the pea his favorite vegetable. In 1791 he wrote in a letter to his daughter Maria, "Oh the 17<sup>th</sup> of February I saw blackbirds and robin red breasts and on the 7<sup>th</sup> of this month I heard frogs for the first time this year. Have you noticed the first appearance of these things at Monticello? I hope you have, and will continue to note every appearance, animal and vegetable, which indicates the approach of spring, and will communicate them to me. By these means we shall be able to compare the climates of Philadelphia and Monticello. Tell me when you shall have peas, etc. up; when everything comes to table. When you shall have the first chickens hatched; when every kind of tree blossoms, or puts forth leaves; when each kind of flower blooms . . . ." I just love that letter.

Jefferson competed with his neighboring farmers each spring to have the first peas in the garden. The winner served peas to the others at a dinner and Jefferson was very often the winner. In his 1774 Garden Book he noted "the first dish of peas from the earliest patch was on May 16, the second patch of peas comes to table on May 26<sup>th</sup>. June 5<sup>th</sup> a third and fourth patch of peas comes to table. June 13<sup>th</sup> a fifth patch of peas come in. July 13<sup>th</sup> - last dish of peas." He definitely paid close attention to his peas. Minded his Peas and Qs.

Landon Carter's diary in 1770 mentions planting Nottoway pea, a wild pea which he claims "makes a prodigious fine soup." He also complains on Feb. 17<sup>th</sup> that the frost had left the ground too wet to plant his garden peas.

George Wythe in March of the same year wrote to Thomas Jefferson, "Mrs. Wythe will send you some garden peas." So we find the garden peas were a noble and highly regarded colonial vegetable.

We also find peas and pea pods were popular vegetables in needlework in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Several 17<sup>th</sup> century samplers exhibit pea pod designs on the raised or stump work embroidery.

There is a connection made with love and pea pods as told to us in a Devonshire proverb,

"Wintertime for shoeing,  
peascod time for wooing."

Shakespeare also used the peapod in As You Like It in a similar way. The daisy is used in determining whether one is loved or not. If the peas remained in the pod upon picking the pod off the vine then it was considered to be a positive response. Peas and peapods are included in a 17<sup>th</sup> century pattern book for embroiderers but seem to disappear in needlework during the 18<sup>th</sup> century for some unknown reason. They make a strong comeback during the Victorian era and even continue on in today's machine embroideries. So peas can be grown, eaten and worn on your clothing. A most versatile vegetable.

*Janet Guthrie*