



GEDDY GARDEN NEWS

*"It will be a bad winter if trees
keep their leaves until late in the fall."*

October is the month that attacks our senses. It is time to enjoy the smell of burning leaves in bonfires and the visual effects of glorious fall foliage. This season is a special favorite of mine, but then I love all the seasons and look forward to the arrival of each when the time comes. It is a time of falling temperatures as well as falling leaves. If the leaves fail to fall in October, but instead wither on their branches until late autumn, that indicates an extra cold winter. Leaves drop off branches due to the lack of fluids in their veins, the length of days, temperatures, and the moisture of soil. These things all have an effect on the leaves. Hormonal changes take place in the leaves as the days get shorter and nights longer. As daylight diminishes and temperatures fall, trees prepare themselves for winter. The colors are a result of the transformation in the pigments of the leaves.

The drought this summer should not spoil the beauty of the fall foliage this year unless the leaves fall from the trees before they get the chance to change colors. The stress from the drought can in some cases cause the leaves to drop earlier than normal. A drought can sometimes cause a more intense red color in leaves, which could possibly add to the beauty of the fall foliage show.

As many Americans get involved in availing themselves to view the changing of the season by taking road trips, my thoughts go back to the early American botanists who dedicated themselves to the study and exchange of plant life in our country. The contributions of men like our own Virginia botanist, John Clayton. He was a pioneer in the field of botany in America and his *Flora Virginica* was of great significance. Clayton's work was painstaking, took place when traveling and conditions were difficult, and was all done in his spare time, as he operated a farm full time. Peter Collinson called him the "great botanist of America" in 1764.

The letters of John Clayton to John Bartram and Peter Collinson tell us clearly how devoted Clayton was to collecting specimens. He was an explorer of nature and a plant hunter who was responsible for a thorough and valuable unique piece of work, a great contributor to science.

October cannot pass without the mention of Halloween, that ancient pagan Celtic festival.

I like to discover the customs of other countries for holidays. For instance, in ancient Greece it was believed that celery seeds prevented witches from falling off their brooms. Their brooms were always made of the wood from the ash tree and bound together with willow twigs.

In Ireland for the past several hundred years children have played certain games at Halloween. The games of snap-apple and ducking are played. Snap-apple is played by trying to bite apples hanging from cords without the use of your hands. Ducking for apples is what we call bobbing for apples. It is the game where apples are put in a large pail of water and you attempt to bite them as they float with your hands tied behind your back. Certain foods are traditionally served on Halloween in Ireland. Usually colcannon, also known as pandy or champ, is enjoyed. It is a big bowl of mashed potatoes prepared with cabbage and chopped raw onions and butter. Some hide coins wrapped in foil for the children in the family to find. They also eat Bairin breac, which is a large Halloween fruit cake baked with certain small objects within. The objects foretell the future for the finder. They are usually the following objects: There is a ring, which means an early marriage; a coin, which predicts wealth; a button, which means the finder will remain a bachelor; a thimble, which means the finder will be a spinster or an old maid; and a pea, which indicates a life of poverty. These simple games of fun are still played in Ireland and, like in America, the children of Ireland dress in costumes and go about the neighborhood trick or treating. This year my grandchildren have chosen what I consider unique costumes. One is going to be a domino and another, who claims she saw the tooth fairy, is going to be dressed as the tooth fairy.

The chill in the air on the eve of all hallows is usually just right to create some goose bumps at the sight of ghosts and goblins and even dominos and tooth fairies!!

Happy Halloween.

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