



JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER, JR. LIBRARY  
 COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG FOUNDATION  
 P. O. Box 1776  
 Williamsburg, Virginia 23187

GEDDY GARDEN NEWS

*"The cuckoo comes in April,  
 He sings his song in May  
 In the middle of June  
 He whistles his tune,  
 And in July he flies away."*

This has been a difficult gardening summer so far. The drought and the extreme heat we are experiencing has made the restriction of water usage necessary in the community. Aside from the weather, personal physical conditions have made gardening for me problematic. I first suffered a strained leg muscle which kept me from my work for a while and then I experienced a strange allergy attack which caused my eyes to swell shut and my whole face to become swollen. The doctor attributed it to a reaction to radishes. I have always planted radishes and have never before had a problem with them, but allergies are inclined to come and go in that manner.

Over fifty million Americans suffer from seasonal pollen allergies as well as year round allergies to dust, mold, and animals. April through June is the pollen season, so I was in the proper season for allergies from plants, grass, or trees. The pollen count is highest in the early morning when it is the best time for watering the garden and around sun down. The count is lower after rain, which we have had little of, and lower on cool, cloudy days. It is also helpful to shower quickly after gardening. As of this writing I am still taking medication for my allergy attack. I wonder how many colonial gardeners experienced these occupational hazards. I imagine many did, and without the benefits of antihistamines, steroids, or even showers!

In April I had the opportunity to visit Monticello and Tufton Farms as the guest of Peter Hatch, the director of the Gardens and Grounds since 1977. The Center for Historic Plants was a special treat. The headquarters and nursery is a behind-the-scenes working area which is not open to the public. It was a fine April day when I visited. I, of course, was especially interested in Mr. Jefferson's kitchen garden which is a 1,000 foot long terrace garden. The vegetable garden has been carefully restored in the last twenty years and researched by archaeological excavations and documentation. His fruit garden was impressive as well. He experimented with plants and documented every thing from the weather conditions to the size and color and quality of fruit. His garden was enclosed with a ten foot high solid poled fence with a gate for an entrance. He originally owned 5,000 acres, but today there are only 2,500 acres and two beagle deer dogs are used to protect the gardens at a cost of \$800 a year for veterinary bills. Thomas Jefferson began planting the south orchard with 170 varieties of fruit trees two years before building the house.

In his vegetable garden he grew over 250 varieties of vegetables and contracted seven slaves to work in it. One interesting vegetable that caught my eye was sea-kale, a cabbage-like vegetable

which was eaten like asparagus and usually blanched. It is said to have a bitter taste. It grows wild in Great Britain along the coast and is grown today as an ornamental in English gardens.

I think it is interesting that Jefferson reserved the word garden for his vegetable garden. He had great respect for vegetables. Though not a true vegetarian by the strictest sense of the word, he actually consumed a very moderate amount of meat as compared to a very large quantity of vegetables. His granddaughter wrote of him, "He lived principally on vegetables... The little meat he took seemed mostly as a seasoning for his vegetables." He wrote on that same subject in a letter to Vine Utley in 1819, "I have lived temperately, eating little animal food, and that... as a condiment for the vegetables, which constitute my principal diet."

I also enjoyed seeing the oval flower beds, round about walks and perennial borders. At the time of my visit, the wild flower known as the twinleaf was in bloom. The bloom is a small white flower that appears around April 13<sup>th</sup>, which is Thomas Jefferson's birthday. This plant, which is known as *Jeffersonia diphylla*, was named for Mr. Jefferson in 1792 by Benjamin Barton. The other flowers in the perennial border were a collection of the varieties that were of interest to Mr. Jefferson and botanical curiosities of his time. He seemed to have extreme enthusiasm for the fragrances that certain flowers offered. He often mentioned that in his writings. For example, of the Heliotrope he wrote, "The smell rewards the care." This he wrote in a letter to Francis Eppes in 1786. In another letter to W. Hamilton in 1806 he wrote, "I remember seeing in your greenhouse a plant of a couple feet height in a pot the fragrance of which (from its gummy bud if I recollect rightly), was peculiarly agreeable to me." On another in 1809 he emphasized the importance of flower fragrance in another letter. This time to W. Flemming, "I have received safely... the foliage of the Alleghany Marathion. A plant of much beauty and fragrance will be a valuable addition to our flower gardens." It seems the perfumed flowers ranked highly with Mr. Jefferson. He wished for his flowers to gratify not only his sense of sight, but of smell as well. He sought beauty in form, color, texture, and odor.

He wrote, "The greatest service which can be rendered any country is to add a useful plant to its culture."

*Janet Guthrie*