

"This morning is extremely pleasant the Country full of Flowers, & the branches full of lovely singing Birds."

Philip Fithian, April 10, 1774



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Redbud and dogwood glorify our gardens and woodlands in April. Redbud's tight pinkish-red blossoms look somewhat like pea blossoms. It is a member of the legume, or pea family--its blossoms can be eaten. Colonists sometimes called it the salad tree. It is said that Judas Iscariot hanged himself from the Oriental species. Judas tree is another common name. Both Redbud and dogwood are small trees of the understory in our woodlands.

Dogwood flowers unfold from gray, roundish winter buds. They are arranged in dense greenish-yellow clusters which are surrounded by white, sometimes pink petal-like bracts, making the entire structure look like a large flower. The hard strong wood was once used for textile mill machinery, turnery handles and forms. Mark Catesby wrote, "In Virginia I found one of these dogwood trees with flowers of a rose color, which was luckily blown down, and many of its branches had taken root, which I transplanted into a garden." The garden belonged to John Custis.

Sassafras's greenish yellow flowers open with the first unfolding of the leaves. Their nectar is irresistible to the handsome black spicebush swallowtail butterfly. Sassafras leaves are of three shapes--some are oval, others have one lobe, looking like a right or left mitten, others have three distinct lobes. Hariot described sassafras as "a wood of the most sweet and pleasant smell and of rare virtues in medicine for the cure of many diseases." Sassafras was one of the first exports Capt John Smith sent to England, making it the first commercial crop of North America. Colonists used the wood for chicken houses and bedposts. Today it is used for posts, rails, boat building and cooperage, according to the Virginia Dept. of Forestry.

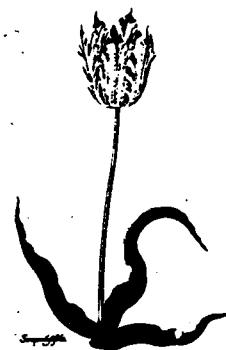
Pawpaw is another Virginia native with April blooms. There are young pawpaws along the wall at the Wythe house. Grace Greenwood shared notes with me on pawpaw she found in American Home magazine. It is a member of the custard apple family, its bright-green oval fruit has yellow flesh. The unique flavor and smooth, creamy texture make a wonderful addition to ice cream and puddings. The author notes that they nearly become extinct after World War II.



According to my Dutch bulb catalog, we are celebrating the 400th anniversary of the tulip in 1994. The tulip is commonly thought to have originated in Turkey. Actually the plant probably first appeared farther east in the steppes of western and central Asia, primarily in Armenia, Persia and the Caucasus. From these lands, the tulip spread into areas along the Black Sea, throughout the entire Mediterranean area, even into China,. As early as 1000 A.D. the Turks were cultivating tulips.

The tulips from Turkey arrived in Europe via Vienna where the ambassador in Constantinople of the Hapsburg Emperor Ferdinand I, gave some to the head of the Imperial gardens, Carolus Clusius. On an Autumn day in 1593 Clusius planted some tulip bulbs in a small garden at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands.

"Tulipmania" followed when single bulbs might sell for over \$2,000. The tulips had value as an investment, but the crash came in 1637, when prices plunged. What an exciting history for the beautiful many-colored tulips that fill our gardens this month. Note especially the tiny species tulips in the Elkanah Deane garden. These striped beauties are closest to those original wild tulips.



Many HIs have asked me about garden training. 4 P.M. garden lectures at the Hennage are a learning opportunity. April 6 Terry Yemm will discuss plant exploration. April 13 Rollin Wooley will discuss the gardens at Carters Grove. April 20th Wes Greene will talk about changes through time, and April 27 Kent Brinkley will discuss garden archeology. April 22 James Reveal will speak as a guest of the John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society.

Reveal is the author of Gentle Conquest, a delightful book about North American plant explorers. He puts our Virginia exploration into the larger context of the entire continent, including experiences of early Spaniards and native Americans.

Another special opportunity for garden tours--Terry Yemm appears in costume, with eighteenth century tools, weekend days in the Wythe garden, 9-12. According to Darci he is usually there on Saturday, but sometimes he appears on Sunday. Be sure to visit the wildflower garden near Bus Stop 1, also one of Terry's projects. Spring wildflowers in bloom now include columbine, Jacob's ladder, and lesser celandine.

I am grateful for the opportunity to begin the seventh volume of the Garden Journal this month. Back issues are available at the Foundation Library. I wish all of you pleasure in the garden, "...it is the greatest refreshment to the spirit of man."

Cynthia

Cynthia Long



Archie