

Geddy Garden News

The Chinese proverb states, *"Keep a green tree in your heart and perhaps a singing bird will come."*

I wonder if that rule also applies to trees of color? Our trees are changing from green to red and golden shades of yellow and brown. I find autumn is the season that keeps things in perspective. It serves to remind me of my place in the universe.

I removed the dead vines from our picket fence around the yard. The Morning Glories are gone for the year, but I collected the dipper gourds in an effort to save and dry them.

I shared some parsley, which is still thriving in our garden, with Jim Gay of the Wythe Kitchen staff. One of the dishes he made with the parsley was a carrot and onion receipt prepared in the Dutch style.

I received an inquiry about the making of persimmon beer in the 18th century. I knew very little about the subject, so I contacted Frank Clark, who is our resident beer expert in the Foodways Program. He told me where I could find the answers to the questions I was seeking. I learned that the early Virginians were experimenting with substitutes for ingredients in their beer. If barley was unavailable they substituted wheat or oats. They also experimented by adding certain fruits to their beer. This was done by crushing the fruits, seeds and all, mixing it with wheat bran and baking it in cakes. Persimmons were used, and sometimes pumpkins and the Jerusalem Artichokes.

A British traveler in the 1730s wrote a description of the persimmon. He said that it was "not unlike a Medlar (pear), tho' somewhat larger." He mentioned that the planters in Maryland used it to "sweeten a beer which they brew of caffena and divers herbs, which is vastly wholesome."

Sometimes hops were unavailable in Virginia, even though hops were native to America and grew wild in some areas. When unavailable, the resourceful colonists substituted with spruce, Sassafras, and a variety of herbs. Spruce was credited with medicinal value for being effective against scurvy.

I retired our scarecrow, Lady Dunmore II, as she was looking quite weary and worn. I planted fall cabbage, broccoli, and cauliflower. If we experience a mild winter, we will be enjoying these vegetables in the spring.

I recently had the opportunity to see and handle some artifacts in the Archaeological Collection. Among the garden tools were two that were excavated on the Geddy site. There was the bird bottle, which the colonists used to attract the birds to nest in an effort to reduce the insect problem. There was also an interesting rake made from scrap metal. I could envision William or David Geddy finding themselves in need of a new rake, and putting together bits and pieces of scrap metal to fashion a new, useful rake for the kitchen garden. As I handled that old rake, the scene really came to life.

Many of you probably topped off your Thanksgiving feast with pumpkin pie, just as my family did. Today

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we value the pumpkin more than they did in the 17th century. It was animal fodder then. In 1653 Edward Johnson wrote a description of the pumpkin in which he called it, "a fruit which the Lord fed his people with till corn and cattle increased." Thomas Jefferson fed pumpkin to the horses, but by 1796 we find it had reached the dinner table in the form of the familiar pumpkin pie. A receipt for it appeared in the American Cookery by Amelia Simmons. That receipt called for nine eggs, as well as three pints of cream. It seems at that time there were no worries about high cholesterol or being overweight!

I hope all enjoyed a happy Thanksgiving!

Janet Guthrie

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