



Oakville Horticultural Society May 2020

May Monthly Meeting

Date:

Cancelled

Location:

Knox Presbyterian Church, 89 Dunn Street

Set-up Volunteers:

Hospitality Volunteers:

Flower Show Clerks:

The May 11 Oakville Horticultural Monthly meeting has been cancelled due to health risks of COVID-19. This is not something the Executive Committee had any choice about doing, but is now required of all of us to slow the spread of this pandemic. Given the rapidly changing nature of the situation, we do not have a specific resumption of activities date to share with you today. We will continue to assess the environment and make the decision that is best for our membership.



a potted plant
Philadelphia Flower Show

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As I write these notes, I can't resist smiling as I gaze out at the partially edged and cleaned up back garden. I have fallen in love with everything about gardening once again! There are so many shades of green and then all the early bloomers like Hellebores, Daffodils and Fritillaria. Although we are still required to stay home and keep our distance, Mother Nature is giving us lots to appreciate.



At the last (remote) Executive meeting, we recognized that communication is one of our most important priorities right now. Of course, we wanted to alert all of you to changes we had to make to our usual spring activities, but more than that, we wanted to be sure that all of you were coping well under these new circumstances. Because we miss catching up with you at our monthly meetings, we decided to reach out individually to each one of you. It was a pleasure to take the time to chat and to discover how you are spending your new-found time. Being resilient and resourceful as most gardeners must be, we found members were keeping active and looking forward to good weather ahead.

We will not be having our usual Junior Gardening Program this season, but Helen has brought a suggestion forward that will allow us to make use of the garden space on Cornwall. See her article below to learn more about her innovative ideas and how you can get involved.

As we approach the time we would normally be preparing for our plant sale, it seems that some of us have done the usual starting from seeds and perennial splitting and now would like a way to share these treasures. We think it should be possible to do this and stay safe – so watch for news from the OHS site as we develop a process to make sure every plant and shrub finds a good home for the season.

Aki Tanaka has approached the Executive with a thoughtful idea that we want you to consider. Members know that the OHS has an obligation to increase awareness about the importance of Horticulture and to bring the joys of gardening to all citizens of Oakville. This includes elderly residents of facilities that are currently restricting visitors – a situation that is even more distressing for those who are lonely and confused. Aki wants to brighten the day for these shut-ins and the staff looking after them, by bringing them flowers from our gardens. She is prepared to look after pickup and delivery. This could be daffodils and tulips right now, but as the season moves forward, it could be anything from the garden that does well as a cut specimen. Watch for details about this endeavour.

Please get in touch if you have ideas about other things we can be doing right now. We want you to feel that the OHS is your garden club and that it offers everything you want to be able to take advantage of.

Before I sign off, I want to mention that our favourite local nurseries – Cudmores and the 2 Bulow locations – are offering modified services. They have always been incredibly supportive of us in Garden Tour ticket sales, so I hope that you will favour them if you need something for your garden in the weeks to come.

Looking forward to being able to share more news soon. In the meantime, I will be in the garden!

Paula



next page





News from the Junior Gardener Space

Unfortunately, with the current situation being what it is, the Junior Gardening program will not be running this year. Instead of letting the garden go fallow I have asked Town staff, Ward Councillors, MPP Stephen Crawford, and the OHS executive if I can use the space to grow food for the local food banks. My request was approved a few days ago, so now we will be able to move forward with the proposed alternative activity.

The garden is tucked behind the greenhouses, away from the general public. I plan on locking myself in when I work and locking everything up when I leave. I will bring my own tools and until permitted otherwise will work by myself or with my teenaged children.

My plan is twofold:

- 1) I am going to record myself as I garden and share the videos with the Junior Gardening families as well as school groups if I can.
- 2) Any produce I get from the garden will go to those in need; Food Share on Rebecca and Kerr St Ministries being top of mind.

How can you help? Now that I have the go ahead I need plants! If you have any extra tomato, pepper or other starter plants I would gladly take what you want to give away. I have seeds from the Compost Council (kale, beans, peas, spinach, beets) and a few green onion seeds, but I would be grateful for carrot seeds.

If you have any old tarps I will use those too. It is a large space so I will need to tarp over some of the garden to make it a manageable size.

Fencing - the rabbits are plentiful in that area! I have some chicken wire but if anyone has any fencing material in the back of his or her shed I would love to borrow it for the summer. Or I could borrow your coyote but I am not sure they like car trips so fencing will have to do.

As soon as I am allowed volunteers would be most appreciated. Bring your own watering can!

Thank you – I am truly grateful to Paula, the executive committee and OHS for allowing me to contribute what I can to making our community better.

Helen



My passion for gardening may strike some as selfish, or merely an act of resignation in the face of overwhelming problems that beset the world. It is neither. I have found that each garden is just what Voltaire proposed in *Candide*: a microcosm of a just and beautiful society. **Andrew Weil**






Plants have it rough. If they are attacked by a predator, they cannot just run away and hide. They are attached to the spot and must defend themselves as best they can. They are clever though, and have developed several strategies to ward off attacks, such as thorns, tough bark, bad taste, toxic sap and so on.

Similarly, if they just dumped their seed at the base of the plant, they would have a problem with overcrowding and an inability to spread to other areas. They can't FedEx their seed away to establish new colonies, but something obviously happens. The Ice Age stripped the land bare of all vegetation but over millennia vegetation migrated back thousands of kilometres to give us the lush countryside which we now enjoy.

Plants have developed some innovative ways of distributing their seed, and they employ five main ways of doing it – gravity, ballistic, wind, water, and animals, (including birds, insects, and humans).

Under gravity heavier fruit simply falls to the ground, like Newton's apple, where it may germinate, or be eaten or carried away by an animal or bird to establish elsewhere.




Ballistic distribution occurs when the seed pod dries out in such a way that internal stresses cause



it to burst explosively. This happens with impatiens, geraniums, some legumes, and an extreme example is *hura crepitans*, the



 sandbox tree, which grows in tropical areas of Central and South America. The seed pod explodes so violently that the seed can be thrown as far as a hundred metres at speeds of up to seventy metres a second!

Wind is a major vector for distributing seed. Living in the dandelion capital of Canada, you will have a passing acquaintance with them, and have to admire the beautifully designed parachutes which make landfall on your lawn. Many trees in the poplar family have cotton-woolly seeds which blow like a snow storm in early summer, as do milkweed and bulrushes later in the year. Winged seed like maple and ash flutter to the ground and are carried by the wind away from the tree. The whole plant of tumbleweed forms itself into a ball up to a metre in diameter, and can be blown great distances along the ground. A recent BBC Earth program showed a mid-western town inundated with tumbleweed piled high against houses and fences.

Water can also transport seed great distances, and the world's largest seed, the coconut, and other palm seeds, can be transported across oceans. Waterlilies form seeds which float until they become waterlogged and sink to the mud where they take root. A species of Amazon fish eat the seeds of a water plant, digest the fleshy coating, and excrete the seeds, which take root.

Finally, animals transport seeds by variety of means. Some seed pods form hooks spines or barbs which latch onto clothing or an animal's fur, and we all know how frustrating it is to try to remove burdock from our clothes. It's said to be the inspiration for Velcro. Birds, many of which are seed eaters, pass the indigestible parts of the seed through their digestive system and it is claimed



“The flower that smells the sweetest is shy and lowly.”

William Wordsworth



did you know....

Fortunately only a tiny percentage of seeds actually germinate or we would be inundated with a forest of plants, and they would all be invasive species.
If winter comes can spring be far behind?

[illegible]

In southern California, spring is defined by music festivals and wildflower blooms. The festivals might be postponed, but flowers are still very much in session. Although not a super bloom this year, in Walker Canyon (southeast of Los Angeles) and in Antelope Valley (north of LA), the hillsides are blanketed by a sea of bright orange poppies. And even though you can't visit them this year, the California Department of Parks and Recreation has set up a [live cam](#) so you can have a peek at the vibrant blossoms.

That doesn't mean people aren't still hopping the fence to get their flower fix. California State Parks Interpreter Jean Rhyne told [SFGate](#), "There are a lot of people not obeying the stay-at-home order, but visitation to the valley is only a fraction of what it would normally be at this time."

While it's certainly a bummer that you can't enjoy the poppies in person this year, it's somewhat reassuring to know that the fields are safer than ever from the negative effects of human interference.

A wide-angle photograph of a vast field of orange poppies. The flowers are in full bloom, covering the ground from the foreground to the horizon. The sky is a clear, bright blue. In the background, there are rolling hills and a few distant structures, possibly wind turbines. The overall scene is bright and sunny.



Diary of a MGIT (Master Gardener in Training)

NOTES ON BECOMING A MASTER GARDENER IN HALTON

Two months ago I had no idea that I would try to become a master gardener but life is always a strange place and we are never too old to learn, (I hope) - I am 73. This all got started when a friend, Kathleen, invited me to a horticultural meeting in Burlington to see what it was all about. She asked me to go with her just for support and it is lucky I did because the first thing we did was get lost! We managed to find the meeting room and still be on time. To my surprise, I recognized about six of the members.

So a couple of weeks later, Kathleen posed a question: why was I not a master gardener? I thought about it, and decided to join Kathleen on this new adventure. I could foresee joint discussions regarding the lectures and we could share study time. Well, so it happened.

In order to register for the programme, we were required to:

1. Complete a prelim exam to see if you do know SOMETHING about the subject. Well this was around March 15th and we were now into social distancing and how could we do this? So I thought how about a telephone exam and I managed to get 43/50. (Some of them I guessed right on.) Ah, this was promising!
2. Complete the required paperwork, sign them and other little bits and pieces. The postal service still works.
3. Third, there is a manual that we will require. To acquire such, you have to get the manual printed. This was done through Oakville Blueprinting on Kerr Street and again this was done through emails and telephone and no one even saw anyone else.
4. Fourth, you are committed to this programme, you need to start studying. 368 pages of facts and more facts. 18 chapters which are sometimes very technical and scientific. But the good news is you cannot take the final exam for two years! I am a MGIT. That is a Master Gardener in training. I will be studying and volunteering time to help other gardeners with their problems and then studying some more.

So far it is really interesting. And the most interesting thing is that though I have been a gardener for 50 + years there is still a lot to learn. But I am working at it.

I am currently working on the chapter called SOIL. I decided to skip the BOTANY chapter for now. It will be the hard one for me.

Anyone who is interested can contact me at larsonmzz@yahoo.ca

More next month, Margaret

did you know ...



World Environment Day is held on June 5th every year. It isn't a public holiday, it is an environmental awareness day, run by the United Nations. It is sometimes also unofficially called Eco Day or Environment Day. The aim of the Day is to raise awareness of the environment and specific environmental issues.





Oakville Horticultural Society

Where Gardeners come to flourish



AN IMPORTANT NOTICE: 2020 CONVENTION CANCELLATION & OHA AGM TO BE RESCHEDULED

We are sad to advise members that the 2020 Ontario Horticultural Association's Convention scheduled for July 17-19, 2020 has been cancelled due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

We were hopeful that we would be able to host the yearly convention at a later date, however, due to the directives coming from the Chief Medical Officer of Canada to avoid any large public gatherings, as well as the recent declaration of a state of emergency by the Government of Ontario, the very difficult step to cancel this year's convention has been taken. This decision was made in consultation with the Convention Host District and the OHA Officers.

Although we are heartbroken over the decision, the health and safety of our members, sponsors, vendors, speakers, and volunteers are our top priority. With many health-related concerns, the financial uncertainty many are facing, and the uncertainty of the longevity and other effects related to the global COVID-19 (Coronavirus) outbreak, we felt it was best to err on the side of caution and announce the cancellation of our 2020 Convention at this time. While we are disappointed with this decision, we believe this is the most responsible decision for the organization and our members.

Continuing on with our association and society business is still our top priority. At this time, we are reviewing alternatives to hold the OHA Annual General Meeting (AGM) that will provide members with the opportunity to participate in the important business of the association and societies.

We will continue to keep you updated here as plans evolve and hope that you and your family will stay safe during this pandemic.



<https://haltonmastergardeners.files.wordpress.com/2020/04/cross-pollination-2020-05.pdf>



**Cross Pollination
May 2020 Issue**



Nino's Self-Watering Bucket System

Step 1– Purchase 2 – 2 gallon pails



Step 2



Top Bucket Turned Upside Down

Step 4



Assembled Empty S-W Bucket

Step 3



Self-watering Container - Top Bucket Upside Down Showing Watering Pipe and Cup

Step 5



Overflow drain holes on bottom should be drilled 1/4" to 1/2" below the bottom of the side bucket (easy way to see this, is hold assembled buckets to light and see where the shadow is for the inside bucket and drill just below it).

Step 6

Complete Self-watering Bucket



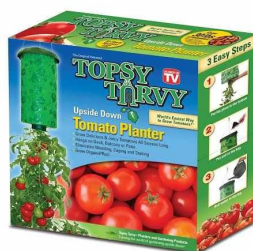
nino's corner...



An Adjustable Height Planter



An Eaves Herb Planter



Topsy Turvy Completed



Fairy Lake Bonsai Tree

SEVENTY MILES FROM THE PORT city of Victoria, British Columbia on Vancouver Island, a plucky arboreal wonder can be found on the quiet waters of Fairy Lake.

Living up to its name, Fairy Lake is in a remote and unspoiled landscape near the town of Port Renfrew. Sticking up out of the lake's stillness is a submerged log. Clinging to that log for dear life is a tiny Douglas fir tree. The log itself is a Douglas fir. As the stunted tree's only source of support and nutrients, it feels like the dead tree made a sort of noble sacrifice to the tiny tree growing on it. Tourists, boaters and hikers come seeking it as a unique window into nature and rebirth.

The "bonsai" tree has attracted more than a few photographers to capture its struggle of endurance, including a winner of the Natural History Museum of London's Wildlife Photographer of the Year award. Award or no award, each photograph of the little guy clinging to his dead log has demonstrated its own symbolic twist on survival. You needn't even hike through the wilds to find it. You can find bonsai serenity from the road.



Our Journey from Oakville to Ferryland



As the robins sing and forsythias bloom here in Oakville. we are preparing to return to Ferryland. Spring has not arrived there but the snow has melted and the sun is warmer. Icebergs are moving through the North Atlantic which signals spring with a chill in Newfoundland.

Our first summer of farming in Ferryland was an adventure. We started with very poor rocky ground with limited top soil in a small area beside our house. Our neighbours surely wondered what these mainlanders were up to. We planted radishes, beets, onions, strawberries and rhubarb.

Brian fed the soil with kelp, compost, organic matter and a fair measure of tender loving care. Despite the wind, rain, cool temperatures and fog, our crops grew. In November, we planted 1000 hardneck garlic cloves.

Brian covered the garlic with a blanket of kelp as protection against freezing and thawing during the long winter ahead.

We were delighted to see the garlic pop through in the spring. Some neighbours had not seen garlic growing; in fact it is not widely grown in our area.

The traditional Newfoundland Jigg's dinner consists of root vegetables such as potatoes, carrots, turnip, turnip greens and cabbage. Interested parties sauntered over to ask us "what're you at?" We didn't understand that question at first. Now, we understand it to mean, "What are you up to? Or what are you doing?"

One of our fondest memories was meeting with 2 chefs to offer them our garlic harvest. They took the garlic scapes and confirmed that we should return in the fall with as much garlic as we harvested. At that happy moment, we became garlic farmers! We did not imagine that this would be our retirement lifestyle. What a transition from commuting on the Go train to spending endless hours digging in fields overlooking the ocean.

We developed a marketing strategy to sell to restaurants in the St. John's area. Our first major restaurant had just won an award for the Best New Restaurant in Canada. This gave us the inspiration to continue to "grow" our business and find more customers to take our expanded offerings of more products in our second year.

We have learned so many lessons over our years farming and the process is actually one of continuous learning.

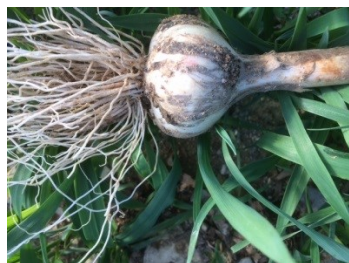
Mistakes are inevitable when starting any new adventure. Mother Nature demands respect. It makes sense to start off planting the area that you feel can be handled with your available resources. Do not scale up too quickly. Some seasons and soil conditions make for wonderful harvests but continuous work is involved in crop rotation for garlic.



“Help us to be ever faithful gardeners of the spirit, who know that without darkness nothing comes to birth, and without light nothing flowers.”

May Sarton





Documentation is key. We record everything we do to allow for year over year comparisons. Drawing maps, labeling fields, keeping track of soil test reports and keeping a diary are essential tasks. Documenting what you grow and in which field is an essential planning tool, particularly for crop rotation strategies. You also need to plan and document which soil amendments are added to specific crops and the date this work was performed. It is critical to keep this information current and readily available for review.

If your goal is to farm on a commercial scale, you must develop a market for your products. We are fortunate to live 80 km from the largest city in NL where local food is valued. These chefs await our produce and plan menus around seasonal local fare.

In the next newsletter, we will expand upon the crops we grow and why we chose to grow them.

Happy Gardening from Brian and Jane!

Use the Goodness of Newfoundland Sea Kelp to Make Your Garden Grow

Need help (help) for your garden?
Use the goodness of Newfoundland sea kelp to make your garden grow!

What is plant booster?
It is a concentrated kelp liquid.

How does it work?
(how will it work for my plants?)
Kelp has natural growth hormones, vitamins and minerals for:
✓ improved seed germination
✓ more extensive root systems
✓ healthier foliage and flowers

Kelp Powered PLANT BOOSTER

A time-honored tradition in Newfoundland, using kelp to grow healthy food and strengthen plants has been updated to deliver a liquid concentrate to all who love gardening.
The Natural Gardener, Brian Yager, began using liquid kelp concentrate soil conditioners in his own garden in Ferryland in 2012 and his plants have never been happier.
The fresh kelp is washed to reduce salt content and then allowed to steep in fresh water to produce a "kelp tea". Through a process of decomposition, the kelp becomes a dark liquid rich in micronutrients, which plants require for growth.
Harvested from beaches on the Irish Loop of the Avalon's Southern Shore, kelp's nutrients added to your soil will:
✓ Improve seed germination
✓ Help plants develop more extensive root systems to produce healthier foliage and flowers
✓ Contribute to your plant's resistance to diseases and pests

The Original
Start Your Plants Off Right With This Soil Conditioner

Plus 20:20:20
With Added Nitrogen, Phosphorus And Potassium For Increased Plant Vigor And Accelerated Growth

Plus Fish Extracts
A Natural Nutrient Booster For Established Flowers, Fruits And Vegetables

Kelp Powered PLANT BOOSTER

The Natural Gardener
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Find us on Facebook at The Natural Gardener Inc.



We are selling them for \$15 each (hst incl), with \$5 from each bottle purchased going back to the OHS.



To order, please contact Brian by phone/text at 709-330-0889. Pick ups or deliveries can be arranged! Etransfers can be made to: naturalgardener2013@gmail.com

Magic word: garlic



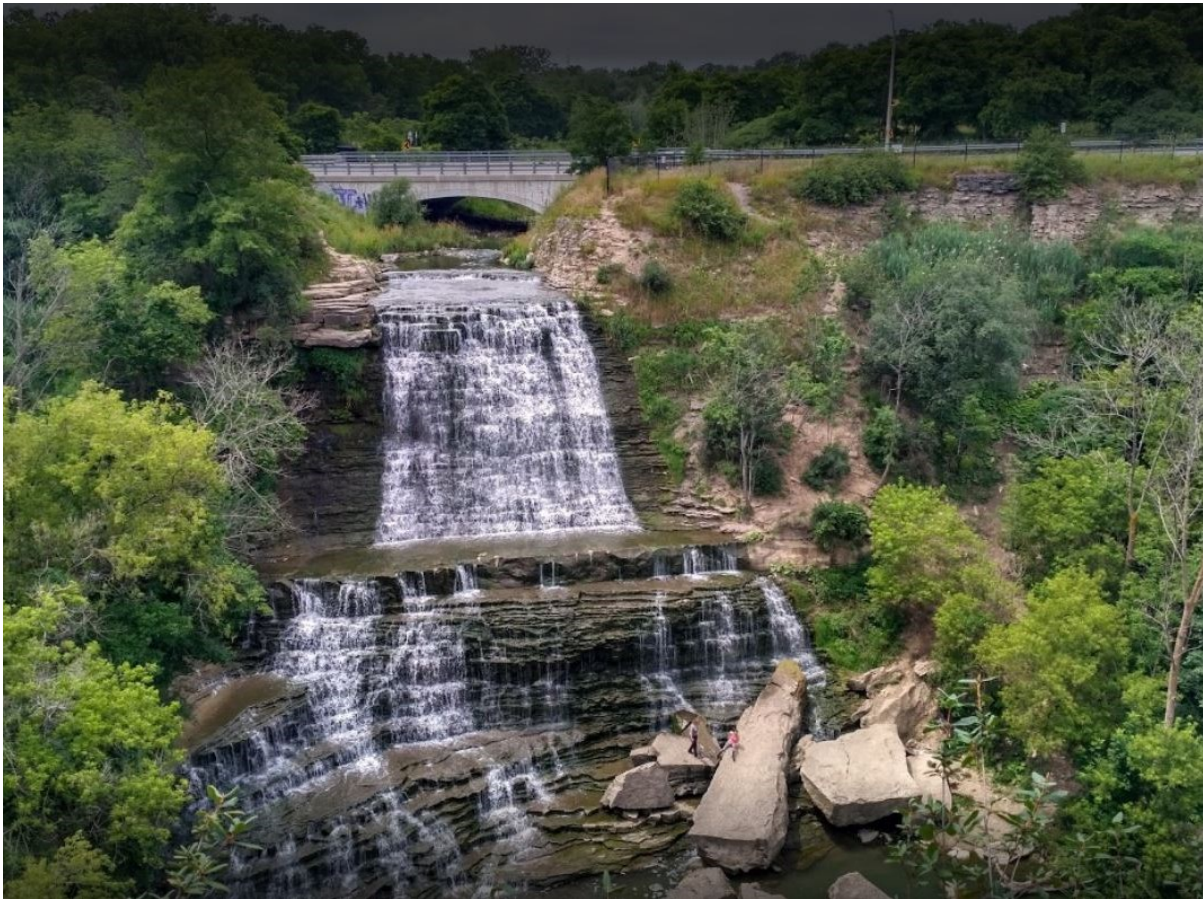
Niagara Escarpment - Hamilton the City of Waterfalls

You'll be surprised to learn that the Niagara Escarpment it's much more than just the famous waterfall to which it owes it's name.

An escarpment is basically a geological ridge separating differing elevations. The Niagara escarpment — named for Niagara Falls located toward its eastern end — takes a 625-mile trip from Rochester, New York, horse-shoeing up through the Great Lakes, and finally dipping down along the western side of Lake Michigan into northern Illinois.

Along the way it meanders through Hamilton, Ontario, leaving behind over 130 waterfalls and cascades within the city limits.

Hamilton prides itself on being the City of Waterfalls, celebrating its moniker with festivals, books, artwork, a waterfall fan group, Facebook pages, and waterfall-themed hikes, walks and adventures. The Niagara Escarpment cutting through the middle of the city provides the best possible setting for falls of all shapes and sizes, from the crashing waters of Webster's Falls, to the 120-foot pour into the Devils Punchbowl, to the steady tiered cascade of Princess Falls. None of the drops in Hamilton are as dramatic as their flashy cousin to the east, but the diversity and sheer number within a single city of 430 square miles is awfully impressive. Take that, Niagara Falls.

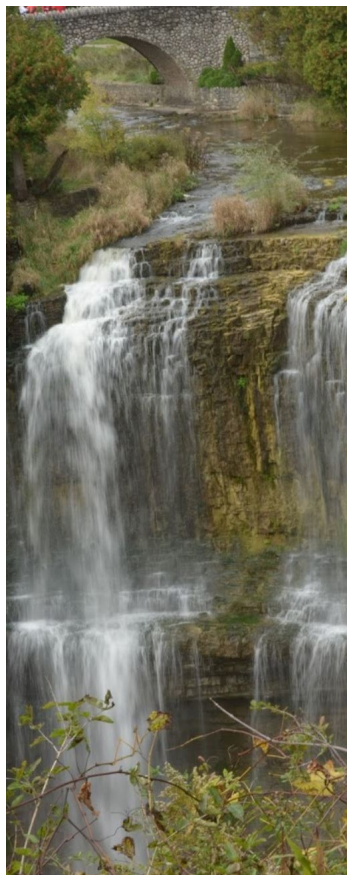


did you know ...

Albion Falls



Niagara Escarpment - Hamilton the City of Waterfalls continued.....



Webster Falls



Tiffany Falls

Dear Gardeners:

April 11, 2020

It has been almost a year since Paula and associates inspected our premises as a possible stop for the 2019 Oakville Horticultural Society Annual Garden Tours.

It was a dull and cold day with nothing inspiring to see, yet, they departed excited at what they saw? A few weeks later they returned to re-examine our yard and again left evermore enthusiastic. I remain puzzled at what they saw and what I was missing? I was deeply honoured to be considered by the Society and gave them my blessing to add me to their list of participants.

Needless to say I made an extra effort to have the gardens clean, freshly mulched and the lawn well-trimmed.

I must congratulate the volunteers during the open day. It was hot with little shade for the OHS members manning the gates and those acting as garden guides etc. I personally met some of the touring guests and was amazed at the number of positive and encouraging comments regarding the gardens.

I found it unexpectedly interesting at the number of young people taking these tours. I overheard one young couple comment on how they hoped to have a home some day with a garden of their own.

I was amazed at the number of guests that passed through our yard.

I'm fortunate to have a clear and excellent view of my back yard from our breakfast table. I enjoy watching the various birds that visit my feeders and no less so, the mischievous squirrels, chipmunks and belligerent red squirrels that visit their own feeders.

Often I look across our lawn to see these beautifully shaped 7 foot shrubs which at the moment display a grey/brown bark and bare limbs. Yet, in a few weeks these shrubs will be rich in greenery and display a cloud of beautiful white flowers.

I would like to thank the Oakville Horticultural Society for opening my eyes.

Respectfully,

A. Edward Gadzala Ph.D.





Heather's Philadelphia Story

This year, Heather Reccord had an opportunity to visit and enjoy The PHS Philadelphia Flower Show in Philadelphia. This is the nation's largest and longest-running horticultural event and features stunning displays by the world's premier floral and landscape designers. Started in 1829 by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, the show introduces diverse and sustainable plant varieties and garden and design concepts. In addition to the major garden displays, the Flower Show hosts world-renowned competitions in horticulture and artistic floral arranging, gardening presentations and demonstrations, special events, and the citywide Bloom Philly pre-Show celebration. The Philadelphia Flower Show has been honored as the best event in the world by the International Festivals & Events Association, competing with events such as the Kentucky Derby Festival, Tournament of Roses Parade, Indianapolis 500 Festival, and other international celebrations.

A Royal History

Show organizers wanted to invite a special guest for the 1976 show held during the year of the nation's bicentennial and were delighted when Princess Grace of Monaco accepted their invitation.

Princess Grace, a Philadelphia native, was a Practitioner of the floral arts and studied the art of pressed flower compositions from Katie King, a long-time show competitor.

Photo courtesy PHS McLean Library & Archives.



the garden show...



pid

History of the Apricot - Chapter 1

Four radiant, yellowish-orange apricots were depicted on each of the cellophane packages stacked on a shelf in a Middle Eastern grocery near my home. An avid fan of dried apricots, I was drawn to the sheets of dried apricot paste imported from Damascus. *Amardine*, as it is called, is especially beloved in the Ramadan season, when it is used to make a juice that the faithful drink to break their fast or to savor during the festive time after sundown.

Translated into poetic Arabic, *amardine* means "moon of the faith." It is unlike your ordinary supermarket fruit roll that some call "shoe leather." According to Charlie Sahadi, owner of a vast Middle Eastern food emporium in Brooklyn, the Arabic delicacy has a "thickness" and "consistency" that ordinary fruit rolls lack.

The apricot, which was cultivated in China and Central Asia as early as 2000 B.C., migrated with the country's traders, who traveled the Great Silk Road. The Chinese merchants, botanist Berthold Laufer suggests, very probably introduced the fruit to the Persians. They called it the "yellow plum" (*zardaloo*). Widely dispersed, it was spread throughout the Eurasian steppe by nomadic, horseback-riding tribesmen.

This member of the rose family, whose relatives include the plum, peach, cherry and almond, is known botanically as *Prunus armeniaca*, a reference to the land from which the ancient Greeks believed it came. The Romans, who learned of the apricot in the first century A.D., dubbed it *praecocum*, the "precocious one." They noticed that the fruit bloomed early in the summer. A sensitive plant, it was easily injured by early frost or strong winds. The fragile fruit has long been a favorite of royals and aristocrats. The apricot's beauty captivated poets like English writer John Ruskin, who described it "shining in a sweet brightness of golden velvet."

The conquering Arabs took the luxurious fruit from Central Asia to the Middle East. The caliphs, who ruled the vast Islamic empire stretching from the Gulf to Sicily between A.D. 750 and 1258, imported apricots from Tus in northeastern Persia to their capital in Baghdad. The chefs of the court created dishes for the *al-barqouq* ("apricot" in Arabic), which were adopted in the many Islamic dominions.

From the Persians, the Arabs had picked up the technique of adding tangy fruit, such as apricots and cherries, to liven up their meat dishes. One of the cookbooks of the empire called for apricots in a delicacy called *mishmishiya* (lamb and apricot stew): "Take fat meat. Boil it in a little water. ... Take dried apricots and remove their pits and replace them with blanched almonds. And when the meat is done, throw the apricots on it, and raisins ... a stick of Chinese cinnamon, mint, mastic, saffron and jujubes, and sweeten it with sugar and honey." Middle Eastern cooks grasped the "special affinity," culinary historian Claudia Roden points out, "between lamb and apricots."

Passionate about sweets, the Arabs exploited the apricot for their sugary confections. A medieval syrup that blended its juice with sweet almonds was a forerunner of the apricot drinks later hawked in the Middle East by vendors or sold in cafés. The apricot also fit neatly into the repertoire of Arabic desserts. Stuffed with almonds or almond paste, the fruit complemented its nutty relative. Topped with chopped pistachios or almonds, one rich treat of pureed apricots and whipped cream was perfumed with either rose or orange blossom water.

Apricots flourished throughout the Islamic dominions. The Moors, who conquered Spain, planted apricots in [Granada]. Syria was another bastion of the fruit. In the garden oasis outside Damascus, the 19th century English naturalist Canon Henry Baker Tristram wrote, "The great apricot-trees were laden and bent down under strings of ripe, golden fruit. The lanes were strewn with apricots. Asses, mules, and camels in long strings carried heaped panniers of these 'golden apples.'"

To conserve the splendid produce throughout the year, the Syrians convert it to *amardine*. According to Middle Eastern food expert Sonia Uvezian, peasant women traditionally crushed apricots with their feet in stone troughs. They then extracted the pits and spread out the paste in the sun to dry.



The 'Turkey' apricot, a hand-colored engraving after a drawing by Augusta Innes Withers (1792-1869), from the first volume of John Lindley's *Pomological Magazine* (1827-1828). The Romans dubbed the apricot the "precious one." Poets praised its beauty. The conquering Arabs took it to the Mideast, where the luxurious fruit was exploited in sugary confections.

The Royal Horticultural Society Diary/Wikimedia



did you know.....