

DECEMBER 2021

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**WINTER
POTPOURRI**



ROAD TRIP MEMORIES

QUÉBEC GARDENS WITH DEAR FRIENDS

by Jennifer Mix

Two of the gems of the gardening world in North America are found in unlikely locations on the north and south shores of the lower St. Lawrence River, both located even more north than Ottawa or Québec City.

In 2003, Nathalie Chaly and Heidi Geraets, two OHS members now, alas, no longer with us, attended a talk given by Frank Cabot at the Museum of Nature. His presentation with slides blew them away and, luckily, that night both managed to get tickets to visit his garden near La Malbaie, PQ.

Nathalie invited me to accompany them on a road trip to visit Cabot's garden and the Jardins de Métis, another garden in the same general area. Intrigued and flattered, I leaped at her kind offer and was very happy that I could offer my extremely comfortable Passat station wagon, a car of unheard-of luxury, in which to make the long journey.

Our initial destination was the Jardins de Métis/Reford Gardens, on the south shore of

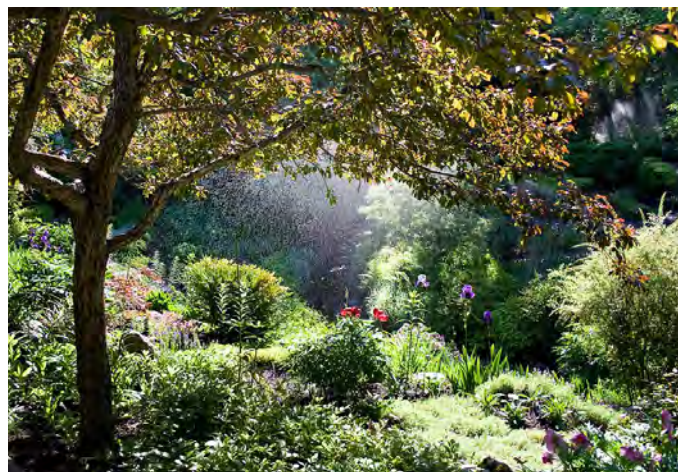
the St. Lawrence, beyond Rimouski at Grand-Métis. In the 1920s, the redoubtable Elsie Reford began transforming what was originally her family's wooded fishing camp into a 20-acre plant collector's dream, with English-style gardens, paths, orchards, belvederes, wooded ravines, and meadows. With no horticultural training, she did it on intuition and grit, learning as she went and trading with local farmers for compostable materials to build the soil: they gave her leaves, she gave them fish! Her husband dutifully brought back exotic plants from around the world in his luggage and Elsie proved they could thrive in her gardens, protected by deep snow in winter and a moderating maritime climate in all seasons. Her Himalayan blue poppies are famous to this day.



We spent the day at Métis strolling through some dozen eye-popping gardens. We were enchanted by the stream garden (photos above & right) that took advantage of changes in landforms, water, outcrops of rock, and the azalea garden, which was in bloom at the time.

The Grande Allée leading to Estevan Lodge, where we had lunch, was fragrant with roses and blasting with colour from perennials (photo lower right). The plants in our gardens at home that were out of season were still blooming vigorously here and later bloomers were advanced, creating a riot of spring, summer, and early fall blooms competing for our attention. Such is the effect of that special combination of longer northern summer days; cooler, moist breezes from the great river; and the shelter provided by careful management of deciduous and evergreen trees over the years.

The last stop that day was the new (at the time) International Garden Festival site, which had begun in 2000 and featured



artists from around the world in celebration of artistic imagination in the garden. They created aesthetically challenging, sometimes

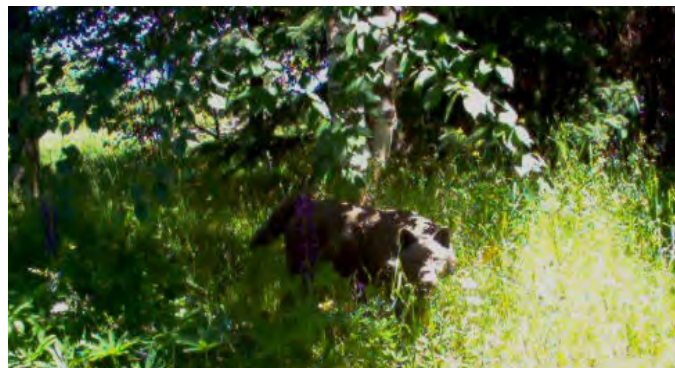
outrageous works of art using natural and man-made materials (photo top right). Though we admired and appreciated the more traditional gardens at Métis, we argued endlessly over the Festival offerings, so different from our own gardening experiences. That in itself was an interesting lesson for us three, with Heidi hugely enthusiastic about the far-out 'gardens,' Nathalie somewhat scornful and unappreciative of the emphasis on hardscaping, and me somewhere in the middle, liking some of the works and bewildered by most of them.

From Les Jardins de Métis we took the ferry across the St. Lawrence, from Rivière-du-Loup to Saint-Siméon, sighting beluga whales en route. Because Heidi was a potter, we made a quick but reverent visit to the famous pottery at Port-au-Persil. Always a generous soul, she marvelled at the work of others and, of course, acquired some of it.

The day spent at Les Jardins de Quatre-Vents was extraordinary. We walked unescorted up the tree-lined lane, past the stables, to the cobbled courtyard of the family home, picked up a map of the gardens, and began our tour, just the three of us (photo at right). Anyone who has seen the film "The Gardener" can appreciate that an open visit, unencumbered and unhurried by guides and 'interpreters' and other tourists, is a gift beyond measure. To say that we revelled, that we bathed in the glory of these gardens, understates our feelings. We felt blessed at every turn, and each turn surprised, delighted, enlightened us (photo at right). We soon learned that the minds and eyes directing these gardens were not only well-educated, horticulturally speaking, but were also sophisticated, playful, inventive, and patient. Every square foot of this amazing place had been planned carefully, from the quick glimpses of stony nymphs revealed by a slim cut in a hedge, to whimsical sculptures of



musical frogs (photo previous page, bottom) and startlingly lifelike iron wolves (photo at right), to pavilions of exquisite calm and beauty, reflected in pools created for the purpose but so natural in appearance that the cascading stream feeding the pond seemed as old as the surrounding hills (photo at right).



We marvelled at the aesthetic of the couple, Frank and his wife Anne Cabot, who with seemingly endless financial resources, managed to create so many garden spaces with intent, with never a false step. Perhaps Frank regretted planting a butterbur here or an astrantia there but, if he did, we didn't notice. Nathalie and Heidi, no slouches in the garden design area, could barely contain their joy, yet we all walked reverently, as in a cathedral, through the 20-odd gardens. It was unseemly to make noise, to exclaim, to shout in surprise.

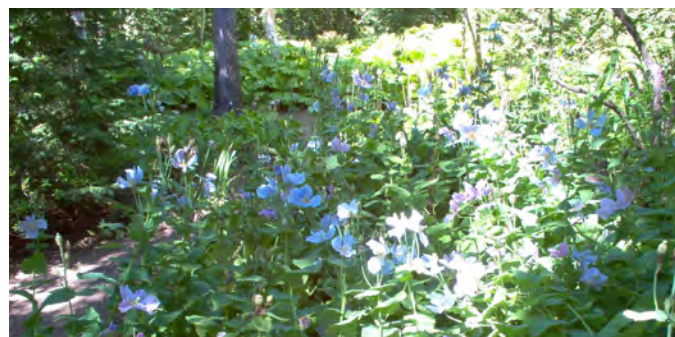


But back to the gardens, in no particular order:

The Goose Allée was in full bloom. After wandering across the Tapis Vert - a large, flat, plain green lawn that rolls away from the house toward the small lake - we found the Allée next door, couched between high cedar hedges. It comprises two wide gardens running on either side of a centre aisle down to the lake, with hardy and mostly familiar perennials growing so much larger than life and twice as floriferous. We marvelled at the intricate knotting of cords within circular plant supports that held tall perennials such as delphiniums erect, each one having been woven by hand and set early above the growing plants (photo at right).



We gasped at the banks of primula in the dappled shade of its own white birch woods, traversed by many tiny streams which were engineered to both water the grounds and provide subtle background music for contemplation. There we saw the magical,





impossible-to-grow Himalayan blue poppy in bloom, seemingly just growing wild (photo previous page, bottom).

The arched Chinese bridge, created in concrete instead of the usual wood, crossed high over a stream and was reflected perfectly in its own pool, softened on the banks by plantings of massive Japanese butterbur.

The potager was full of monster delphiniums to grace the table, line the hallway, fill the ballroom! Vegetables for the table grew in abundance in large, well-raised beds set in rows in their own garden, surrounded by shelter belt trees. The meadow nearby was awash in lupins of all colours, with a path mowed through them.

The Pignonier, the most famous structure on the site, though frightfully formal in presentation, complete with its own reflecting pool, greets each visitor with a delightful song about imaginary gardens and, beyond that, frogs play jazz or classical music, depending on how you choose to walk (photo upper left). Do not mess with the swans, however; they are not friendly in the least or, rather, that generation of swans was not.

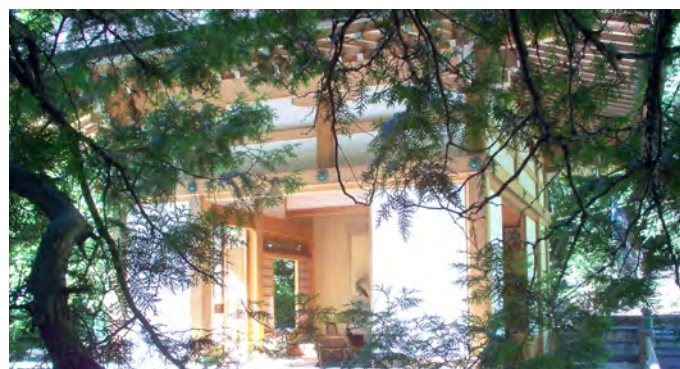
The two Japanese tea houses and their environs affected Nathalie most deeply, as she had spent a memorable summer working in the Canadian pavilion at the World Fair in Osaka in 1970. The tea houses, nestled in a dell, are a marvel of gracefully strong and elegant construction and are poised above a reflecting pool with its mossy, plant-rich waterfall, all elements in perfect harmony (lower left and next page).

After eight hours in these gardens, we retired to 'À la Chouette,' our B&B in Baie-Saint-Paul, to contemplate and talk about what we had experienced from these visits. Over great food and wine, our discussion took that trip to a different level of appreciation for the skills and sensibilities of the builders of these gardens, and the sheer determination to create that drove these



people. Heidi, an artistic and spiritual being to the core, felt her heart go out to both gardens, her senses enriched, and her sense of humour constantly tickled. Nathalie, the scientist with deep artistic roots, was totally awed by the scope of Cabot's horticultural knowledge that still could play in a garden and delight its visitors. We could not deny the role of deep financial resources in the success of these gardens, especially Quatre-Vents, but more importantly, realized that both gardens are works of vision, of joint commitment between those who hold the vision and those who help carry it through to realization.

We, a charmed trio, came away with our minds stuffed with treasured images, enough



THE GARDENER (film)

In 2018 Sebastien Chabot directed a documentary about Frank Cabot and Les Quatre-Vents. Copies on DVD are available through the Ottawa Public Library.

to last a lifetime, and a deepening of our companionship shared in these remarkable places. Requiescant, Nathalie and Heidi.

Photo credits:

All photos from Les Jardins de Quatre-Vents by Jennifer Mix
Reford Gardens photos in order of appearance:

Jardins de Metis by Gachepi, CC BY-SA 3.0

Remaining Reford Gardens photos are by Louise Tanguay, used under Creative Commons licence and available at <https://www.musees.qc.ca/en/museums/guide/reford-gardens>

JARDINS DE MÉTIS/REFORD GARDENS

The Reford Gardens are located in Grand-Métis, Québec, on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River, midway between Rimouski and Matane. The gardens are open from the beginning of June until the beginning of October. For further information, see jardinsdemetis.com.

JARDIN DE QUATRE-VENTS

The garden is located in La Malbaie, in Charlevoix County, Québec, on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River. The gardens are only open for four Saturdays a year, in July. Tickets are very limited, and must be purchased in advance. Last year ticket sales began online in late May, although in previous years sales began earlier. See the website at <https://cepas.qc.ca/jardins-quatre-vents/>.



Stories Behind the OHS TROPHIES

The long and rich history of the Ottawa Horticultural Society is reflected in the trophies that have been donated over the years. These include trophies donated by Governors General and their families, as well as by prominent local businesses and members of the OHS, and were given for flower shows and garden competitions. The following is the first in what is hoped will be a periodic series.

The Nelms Trophies by D-J Smith

The Emily Towne Nelms Trophy - "a beautiful cup, donated by Mr. George Nelms as a gracious tribute to his mother" - and the George H. Nelms Trophy

Those who follow the OHS show circuit know that many generous donors have given the society impressive silver (sometimes silver-chromed) trophies. While some tell about the OHS's early connection with Rideau Hall, even the less distinguished trophies have stories to tell. For this issue I will let the Emily Towne Nelms Trophy and the George H. Nelms Trophy speak.

The official trophy description for the Emily Towne Nelms Trophy given above tells the basic facts. Somebody named George Nelms loved his mother and, after her death, wanted to keep her name alive in Ottawa's gardening world. Then there is a second trophy from the same man suggesting someone who might

have been quite keen on garden shows. Not quite, but there is something to say about the Nelms family and about the trophies.

George was born the son of a railway labourer in rural Oxfordshire, England in 1905. His mother, Emily Towne Ayers (1869-1959), came from a family of agricultural labourers. Emily may have had a somewhat rocky start in life. Her mother was Mary Ann Ayers but I have not been able to trace her father, William Towne, and she was baptized under her mother's surname.

It seems that Emily was raised by her Ayers relatives in Stodhampton even though her mother married and raised a family while

working as a laundress a few miles away in Thame. Emily must have had contact with her mother, as she married Charles Nelms in Thame where son George was born. Yet years later, when she asked George to bring back from a trip to England photos of her home, she was not asking about Thame. For her, the family home had been in Stodhampton.

In 1913 Emily left Thame for Ontario, leaving behind her husband but bringing her three children including her youngest, George, aged seven. Her half-sister, Kate (Loader) Treble, had left Thame with her family for Ontario the previous year. So Emily may have acquired the immigration bug from Kate. As well, though, the Canadian government was encouraging English rural labourers to immigrate and times were hard for rural workers. In the end we do not know why Emily chose to immigrate but, unlike some chain migration stories, she did not follow Kate to the Toronto area. Instead, Emily chose Ottawa, first settling in Eastview (now called Vanier) and then, in 1915, moving the family to the Bowesville Road, which then extended past Hog's Back.

By 1918, and into the 1940s, Emily's older son William was a market gardener living with his mother near Mooney's Bay. At that time, the area was still rural with working farms and cottages. George, on the other hand, became a city boy as soon as he started working at age fifteen in 1920.

He began as a messenger for an optician and then learned how to grind lenses. In 1938 he launched into business for himself. By the 1950s he had built an optician company with outlets across Ottawa. Between the optical business and smart investments, he quickly became a wealthy man.

George got into city politics, starting with a successful run for the Board of Education. He

then ran for a position on the Board of Control which held office parallel with City Council between 1908 and 1980. The controllers worked with the mayor on the detailed running of the city. Finally, George served two terms as mayor between 1957 and 1960.

George Nelms was very much a pro-business, pro-development city politician known for his clashes with the mayor who preceded him and who retired rather than run against him – Charlotte Whitton. Whitton came triumphantly back the moment Nelms left politics. If you prefer trams to buses you can blame Nelms. He oversaw that change while a controller.

Emily must have been a gardener, but her formal horticultural connection was with the Billings Bridge Horticultural Society which was founded in May 1930. It thrived, holding shows and meetings every year for over twenty years until it held its last show in 1953. By then Emily's home and garden had been expropriated by the Federal District Commission to make way for Riverside Drive and Mooney's Bay park. Emily Nelms had moved to Otterson Drive just east of Riverside and Mooney's Bay. She died there in 1959.

Emily was not a member of the Ottawa Horticultural Society and we do not know how active she was with the Billings society. Activity is hard to see from this distance. People who won prizes in shows are visible well into the mid-twentieth century because both Ottawa newspapers printed their names in reporting on the shows. So we know that in June 1932 Mrs. E. Nelms was a show winner in a Billings show. But this is the only time I have seen her name in connection with any horticultural activity until her obituary. If she was active behind the scenes or a regular at meetings, it is no longer visible.

So what about the trophies?



THE GEORGE H. NELMS TROPHY

is a large silver tray donated to the Ottawa Horticultural Society in 1959. It was a show trophy, awarded for the highest number of points in the open classes of a show, first in the Tulip Show and then, until 2008, in the Spring Show. It ended its active life as a trophy in 2009

when it was awarded to Maureen Mark for the Indoor Plant Show, Best in Show - Gesneriad. The first winner was John W. Johnstone in 1959. Johnstone was a long-time and practiced exhibitor, going back at least to 1943. He was also a pillar of the society, serving as a director and was eventually made an Honorary Life Member. This distinction was given to the few in the Society who were noted for their service, not just to the Society, but to horticulture in general. This trophy, for me, is a politician's trophy. Nelms had in fact been something of a trophy-donating fool in 1959, for he gave two other trophies that year, one to a city-wide lawn bowling competition and the other to a city junior hockey competition. All three trophies had his full name on them, keeping his profile up across the city.

THE EMILY TOWNE NELMS TROPHY

came, I feel, from the man rather than the politician. Nelms presented it to the OHS in 1962, three years after his mother had died. At the same time, he was no longer running for office and had no need to showcase his name in quite the same way. This trophy feels like a true tribute to the single mother who had raised him in the new country where he had thrived.

To make this tribute, however, he had to find an alternative horticultural society to the defunct Billings Bridge society. A logical choice would have been the Gloucester Horticultural Society since it and Billings had both been supported by the Gloucester Council, met in the Gloucester town hall, and some Billings members had shifted to the Gloucester society. The two, along with the Manotick society, had even held a joint meeting in 1953. I can only



guess that Nelms, as an Ottawa politician and a recent OHS Honorary President, saw the Ottawa Horticultural Society as closer—and Billings Bridge had been amalgamated into Ottawa while the

rest of Gloucester Township had not.

The initial category for which the trophy was awarded - "Best Spring Garden" - perhaps reflects Emily's gardening love. After all, her one show win had been for a collection of spring flowers. It also points to an early OHS objective - city beautification.

The Society founders thought that invoking

a spirit of competition between neighbours would spur homeowners to plant gardens, thereby beautifying the city, garden by garden. And so from time to time the OHS would run a garden competition.

The competition resembled today's Trillium Award competition, with two OHS members judging gardens by assigning points against various criteria. As now, there was a winner and there were honourable mentions. Where it differed was that people entered the competition from across the city, as it existed at that time, by cutting out an application form from the newspapers. At the end of each competition the newspapers published the names of the competing garden owners, their addresses and the points awarded.

The first winner of this "Best Spring Garden" competition was Mrs. Jean M. Gower of 880 Riddell Avenue. There were four runners-up, among whom were Mr. and Mrs. William Bell. William and Gwen were members of the OHS and, later, Honorary Life Members. I found that many who entered the garden competitions were OHS members. Somehow the sight of a neighbour winning a trophy just did not invoke enough of a spirit of competition to turn non-gardeners into gardeners.

The newspapers gave the new Emily Towne Trophy a lot of press when launched onto

the Ottawa scene in 1962, including a full description of the winning garden in the Citizen. It reported that Gower's garden had been judged "one of the best small gardens in Ottawa" - small being a lot 120 by 160 feet. It was an "English-type informal garden" giving continuous blossom through the year. This "small" garden had large elm trees, an ornamental apple tree, a pear tree, raspberries and up to two thousand tulips interspersed with white candy tuft and pink phlox. At the time the reporter visited, he saw blooming purple delphiniums, white regal lilies, daylilies, shasta daisies, and perennial baby's breath.

After about two years, the OHS ceased this particular round of garden competitions only to resurrect the idea in 1967 with the Trillium Garden Competition. In the meantime, the Emily Towne Nelms Trophy had become an annual trophy awarded for the highest points in the open classes of the shows. And there it remained for over forty years. The last winner of the trophy was Rosi Mikalajewski in 2009; it was officially retired in 2010.

SOURCES:

Census - England and Canada 1860 to 1921
Ottawa City Directories 1917 to 1927
U.S. immigration lists to Canada
Newspapers.com - Ottawa Citizen and Ottawa Journal
Ottawa Horticultural Society yearbooks



The last winner of the Emily Towne Nelms Trophy, Rosi Mikalajewski, with another of the trophies she won that year.



GOT ANTS IN YOUR PLANTS?

TUULA TALVILA

Anyone who grows peonies will be familiar with the sight of ants busily walking around on the flower buds. I've always assumed this was because of some sort of sweet food supply available to the ants. This past summer, as I lazed in my Muskoka chair beneath a towering castor oil bean plant, I noticed some similarly interesting ant behaviour. On the underside of nearly every leaf, there was an ant parked right near where the petiole meets the leaf blade. What, I wondered, were they up to, so far away from the flowers? They seemed to just be sitting there. Were they merely enjoying the shade under the giant leaves, as I was, or were they up to something else?

Upon closer inspection, the ants seemed to be sitting at a pair of little bumpy structures found on the underside of each castor oil bean leaf. I also spotted them at similar structures on the main stems of the plants. After a bit of reading, I think I've discovered the story behind the ants.

Castor oil bean, *Ricinus communis*, is a tropical plant considered to have probably been native originally to north-eastern Africa but that has become naturalized throughout Africa and some regions of Asia, Europe, and the Americas. Here, it is often grown as an annual for its ornamental interest. Each summer I usually grow four plants from seed and have them in large pots on our deck and under the pergola. I love the tropical look of the plants and their massive size – both



An ant dining at an EFN on the main stem

the leaves and the height. *Ricinus* has been in cultivation for a long time. The seeds are composed of up to 60% oil, which has been used for lamp fuel (prior to the use of kerosene and electricity), medicine (as a purgative), and today primarily as an industrial lubricant. The seeds are also the source of ricin, a very strong toxin that has featured in some interesting stories of poisoning, both attempted (Former U.S. President Donald Trump in 2020) and successful (Bulgarian dissident and BBC journalist Georgi Markov in 1978).

Like many other plants, such as Acacia trees, castor oil beans have a mutualistic relationship with ants, i.e. each species benefits from its interaction with the other. The bumpy structures I noticed are called extra-floral nectary glands (EFNs): nectar sources outside of the flowers. The EFNs produce sugars that the ants are attracted to and feed on. In turn, the plants get the benefit of ants providing defence against herbivores and also dispersal of seeds by the ants (myrmecochory). Now, in my backyard, I've never seen a lot of herbivory on the castor

oil bean leaves – perhaps a little by Japanese rose beetles – but I assume that in their native habitat the ant-defence system is more significant. Castor oil beans are a host plant to a handful of butterfly and moth caterpillars. None of these Lepidoptera species, however, are native to North America, so herbivory is uncommon here and the ants get off easy in terms of providing defence.



The common castor butterfly, *Ariadne merione*, specializes exclusively on castor oil bean plants as a host for its caterpillars in its native range in southern Asia. (butterfly, next page) (Caterpillar photo by Vinayaraj, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ariadne_merione_caterpillar_05.JPG)

The seed pods of castor oil bean are spectacular spiny globes, inside of which are the large, beautifully marked seeds. At one end of the seed, there is a fleshy knob called an elaiosome. These appendages are rich in proteins and lipids, and the ants collect the seeds, bring them to their nests, and feed the elaiosomes to their larvae, disposing of the remainder of the seed elsewhere (where it will later germinate). I'm not sure if this actually happens with the ants and seeds in our environment, or only where castor oil beans grow naturally. Our native bloodroot, *Sanguinaria canadensis*, is another plant with seeds having elaiosomes and ants for seed dispersal.

As I write this in mid-October, the ants are long gone from my castor oil bean plants and the seeds have not yet fallen; they are still enclosed in their spiny pods, which are drying and shrivelling. I will keep an eye out for seeds on the move, with little ant legs sticking out from underneath the large loads!

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BBC News: Witness. (2016, Sept. 21). The BBC journalist assassinated with a poison-tipped umbrella. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/magazine-37376130>

Heslin, A., Liceaga, L., & Carmona-Galindo, V. D. (2013). Relationship between elaiosome and EFN gland size in castor bean (*Ricinus communis* L.), an exotic myrmecophyte (sic) in Southern California. *Bios*, 84(3), 180–183. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23595292>

Neustaeter, B. and B. Cousins. (2020, Sept. 22). Quebec woman charged with threatening the U.S. president. CTV News. <https://www.ctvnews.ca/world/ricin-letter-quebec-woman-charged-with-threatening-the-u-s-president-1.5114674>

Ricinus (2021, Sept. 16). In Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ricinus>



Spiny seed pods (above) and seeds with elaiosomes visible on the ends (below). Some people describe the seeds as resembling engorged ticks and, in fact, ricinus is the Latin word for tick.



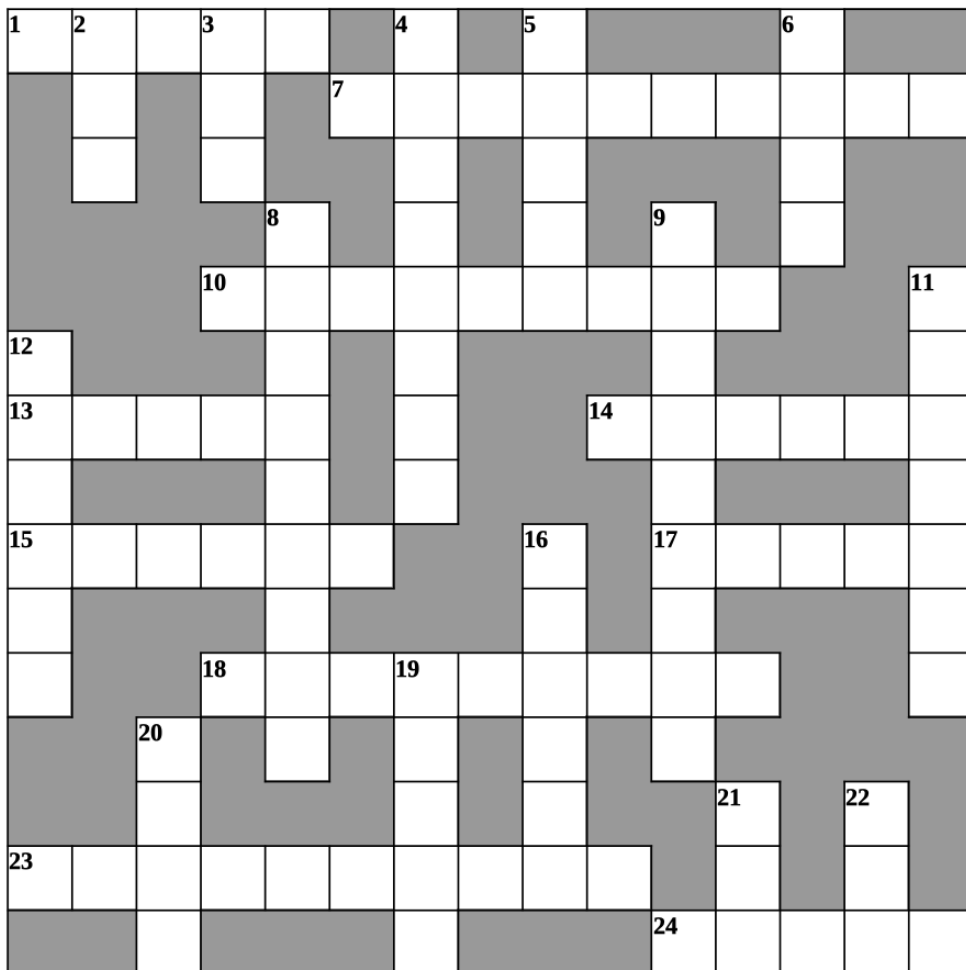
Butterfly photo by Vinayaraj, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ariadne_merione_-_Common_Castor_20.jpg

Seed photo by H. Zell, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ricinus_communis_008.JPG



HOLIDAY CRYPTIC CROSSWORD PUZZLE

BY TUULA TALVILA & LELAND McINNES



It's time to take off your gardening gloves and put on your thinking cap! For this year's December head-scratcher, instead of a gardening quiz we are offering up a cryptic crossword puzzle. Each answer is the name of a plant or part of a plant.

In case you're unfamiliar with cryptic crosswords or would like a refresher, this webpage from *The New Yorker* magazine explains the different types of clue constructions that are commonly seen, with a sample of each that you can try: <https://www.newyorker.com/puzzles-and-games-dept/cryptic-crossword/reintroducing-the-new-yorkers-cryptic-crossword>

The answers to our puzzle will appear in the next issue of the OHS newsletter.

Good luck!

THE CLUES:

Across

- 1** Good decking wood is apparent but lacking fifty (around five hundred?) (5 letters)
- 7** Small purple fruit, but only for those who are the oldest? (10)
- 10** Sounds like a natty feline might be in a yellow-spotted lawn! (9)
- 13** Enclosure around backed-up cooler for pie nut (5)
- 14** A hundred left over and four leaves are lucky (6)
- 15** Red edible in the veggie garden changed to atom (6)
- 17** A shot scattered a shade plant (5)
- 18** On a ship, left UCLA confused with a flowering succulent annual groundcover (9)
- 23** Mixed-up, tense loner provides a very early evergreen bloomer - a Helleborus in fact (6,4)
- 24** See 4 down

Down

- 2** Chicago train coupled with male shade tree (3 letters)
- 3** Like hospital, a tree disappearing from Ottawa (3)
- 4** With 24 Across, Very liberal but old-fashioned pink flower (8, 5)
- 5** Part of a blossom or part of a bicycle, I hear (5)
- 6** Elegant rhizomatous flower for the rainbow goddess (4)
- 8** Buttonhole flower in the United States maybe? (9)
- 9** Tall flower girl with a joint (9)
- 11** Is she ever vain! (Must be concealing a purple bloomer!) (7)
- 12** The spa swapped for part of a jack-in-the-pulpit (6)
- 16** Sounds like you kiss with these to get some spring flowers at an Ottawa festival! (6)
- 19** A rosy prickly from a reconfigured pole (5)
- 20** Tree with cones to yearn for (4)
- 21** Grain crop is planted in every environment (3)
- 22** Plush-sounding evergreen? (3)



MICROGREENS

A DELIGHTFUL EDIBLE

BY NANCY McDONALD

I confess that by the end of October, when fall chores are completed and the garlic bed is tucked in, I am ready to take a break from gardening. Getting caught up on reading and finishing rug hooking projects fill the gap. But then, the green thumbs get itching. It's too early for seed starting so growing microgreens is just the crop for me. And many home cooks grow microgreens year-round to add to their culinary endeavours.

For anyone unfamiliar with microgreens, these are immature, edible greens harvested when they are 5 - 7.5 cm in height. The stems, the cotyledons (seed leaves) and first sets of true leaves are microgreens. According to my reading, the idea for microgreens started about 20 years ago by a Chicago chef who was looking for a new “avant garde” product to capture diners’ attention. Microgreens, sometimes called vegetable confetti, are trendy as toppings on everything from appetizers to entrées in restaurants and are now grown commercially. Alternatively, you can grow them at home within 7-28 days for your culinary enjoyment. And, may I add, for the cost of pennies.

So trendy, but do microgreens have any nutritional value? A study from the College

of Agriculture at the University of Maryland, working with the United States Department of Agriculture, examined nutrients in microgreens compared to the mature plant. Vitamins C, E, K and beta carotene were found in 25 different types of microgreens including cilantro, celery, red cabbage, green basil and arugula. Their results verified that microgreens contain four to 40 times more nutrients than their mature counterparts.

And because of the nutritional aspects and ease of growing, a research team at Pennsylvania State studying food resilience in the face of catastrophic global events is looking at how microgreens could be utilized. One focus area of their research is to develop a soilless “emergency greens growing box” of microgreens to improve food security during an emergency. Scientists at NASA and the European Space Agency look at microgreens as providing nutrition during long space travels.

Harvesting microgreens: “Two-week blend” on the left; sunflowers on the right. (photo by Tuula Talvila)



Arugula topping a freshly baked flatbread (photo by Nancy McDonald)

But let's get back to microgreens in our kitchens. Did I mention growing microgreens is easy? It's a great indoor gardening project to do with children. I have a tabletop grow light system which I set up in early winter for seed starting. But if just growing microgreens, I often use recycled take-out food containers or even an aluminum pie plate. Poke a few holes in your recycled container for drainage. Fill your shallow container with pre-moistened potting soil to a depth of 2.5 – 4 cm. If you Google, you will find other suggestions for growing media including hemp mats, coconut coir mats, and pumice stone. I have used both a seed starting mix and a soilless potting mix successfully. Sow your seeds evenly. If you are growing pea shoots or corn, they require pre-soaking. I spread seeds quite densely as these plants will not be growing to maturity. Sprinkle moistened potting soil lightly to cover seeds. After placing the container on a drainage tray, I water lightly.

As with all seed starting, until germination occurs, light isn't required but it is important to keep your growing tray in a warm location with humidity. I use the take-out food cover initially as a dome to preserve humidity and then remove it to use as a drainage tray once germination has occurred. Germination times depend on the seeds you have planted. Radish and arugula take approximately four days to germinate while sunflowers can take 10-14 days. Once seedlings emerge, move the tray to your sunniest windowsill or under grow lights. Keep the soil moist by spritzing or bottom-watering the tray daily. No fertilization is necessary. I cut the greens at the soil line with scissors when they are 5 - 7.5 cm tall. Some growers prefer to pull the plant, wash and eat the whole thing, root and all. Fresh is best, but you can refrigerate the harvest if you don't plan to use it all right away.



Microgreens that do well in window light or lower light conditions are lettuce, arugula, mustards and Asian greens. These, along with kale, radish, broccoli and cress, are considered both fast and easy to grow. Consider any of them when starting out.

My interest in microgreens began just over two years ago, so I am still experimenting with seed varieties for the first time. So far, I have enjoyed kale, arugula, Swiss chard, pea shoots, corn, and radish microgreens. I plan on growing sunflower microgreens this winter as many microgreen growers rave on about their nutty flavour and enjoyable crunch.

Most seed catalogues have informative sections on growing microgreens. Look around for these and other sources for interesting ideas of seeds and combinations of seeds to grow as microgreens. I find growing microgreens in the winter is a good way to use up those partial seed packets, as any untreated herb and vegetable seeds you grew in your garden can be grown as microgreens. Your seed package would always indicate if the seed was treated with any sort of pesticide, fungicide or chemical. It's unusual to see treated seeds in the home garden but noted here as a precaution to avoid when growing microgreens. And a reminder not to grow members of the nightshade family - plants such as potatoes, tomatoes, eggplants, and peppers - as microgreens, since nightshade plant sprouts are poisonous.

And once you have harvested, enjoy. Just adding microgreens to a dish adds colour, flavour, texture and of course additional nutrition. I use mine as toppings on soups, salads and flatbread just out of the oven. I have also incorporated them into frittatas and love the additional crunch that microgreens bring to a sandwich. I encourage you to grow microgreens and enjoy this delightful edible.

An earlier version of this article appeared in the January 2021 issue of Trowel Talk, the newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton. You can find previous issues of Trowel Talk and sign up to receive monthly electronic issues at mgottawa.ca.

Arugula microgreens growing (photo by Nancy McDonald)



GROWING ROOT PARSLEY

By Tuula Talvila

I had given up on growing root vegetables after a few tries that resulted in razed seedlings or minuscule roots, courtesy of a local groundhog and clay soil. After getting a new raised planting bed installed this spring, however, I decided to give them another try. The planting bed is long, narrow, and deep, running alongside our deck. With fresh new, loose soil, plus the mysterious disappearance of the groundhog a few years ago, things were bound to be better!

We planted daikon, which grew well but, with fifteen of them, we had too many! Our carrots mostly did very well and I would've liked more. We also planted something I hadn't heard of before called root parsley.

Root parsley is described as being similar to parsnips but with a milder flavour. It is the same species as leaf parsley, *Petroselinum crispum*, but is a different horticultural cultivar, developed for its tap root. (The parsley species is divided into three main cultivar subgroups: leaf parsley of the French or curly leaf type is in the Crispum Group; Italian or flat leaf types make up the Neapolitanum Group; and root parsley is in the Radicosum Group.)

While I was unfamiliar with root parsley, apparently it is much more common in central and eastern European cooking. We grew only a few and pulled them up in October, some in time for roasting at Thanksgiving, while the rest were left in the ground until later in the month, in the hope that some cold nights would sweeten and enhance the flavour as with parsnips. The leaves have a very strong parsley flavour; I didn't use them in cooking but they could be used sparingly in place of leaf parsley. Despite having five months of growing time, the roots were not especially large. When roasted, the flavour was pleasant and mild, almost a cross between a carrot and parsnip. In the end, though, I think I prefer parsnips and plan to grow them next year in what is now referred to as the "root vegetable planting box," after this year's relative success.



GROWING PAWPAW

— BY PAUL BOULT

The fruit of *Asimina triloba* (the pawpaw) is the largest of any native North American fruit. Long cherished by Indigenous Peoples, it quickly became a favourite of European settlers in the eastern parts of the United States.

Known colloquially as prairie banana, or myriad other common names, the pawpaw was enjoyed for centuries before fading into relative obscurity. Other fruit (like apples, pears and peaches) became widely available and the pawpaw's delicate nature made it almost impossible to transport for long distances. The practicalities that came with modern mass-production made the pawpaw obsolete. But these days, thanks to a renewed interest in biodiversity, *Asimina triloba* and its delicious fruit seem to be making a comeback. And so it should be!

Fruit as it appears mid-season.



Spoon at the ready for a delicious and exotic experience.

Fruit matures over the course of about 15 days. This batch represents a one-day harvest.

Asimina triloba is the most cold-hardy member of the otherwise mostly tropical Annonaceae family, which includes custard apples, cherimoya, and soursop. The pawpaw is native to most of the eastern United States, from Florida in the south all the way to the southernmost tip of Ontario in the north. But despite its natural distribution, like many plants, *Asimina triloba* can adapt – or even thrive – in a much wider variety of climates, including Ottawa’s. I’ve been growing them successfully for over 35 years, first in Orléans when I lived at my mother’s house, and now in my Aylmer garden where they have been flourishing since 1999.

Asimina triloba is a very handsome medium-sized tree with tropical-looking foliage and interesting reddish, early-spring flowers on bare branches. And if that’s not enough, it sports brilliant clear-yellow colour in the fall. Even if it didn’t produce one of the most delicious fruits I’ve ever tasted, I’d still be tempted to grow it as

a beautiful ornamental plant.

But back to the fruit! Describing the taste is not always easy. ‘Tropical’ often comes up. Based on what my buds are telling me, I’d say they taste a bit like a ripe banana, with tones of vanilla and mango. Oh, and perhaps with the after-taste of pineapple. Now, other people may say something different. And it’s often the texture people find surprising: creamy, not unlike a thick custard. I prefer them fresh, cut lengthwise and eaten with a spoon. They are also sometimes baked into cakes, breads, or made into ice cream. Pawpaw is quite healthy, as it is rich in magnesium, copper, zinc, iron, manganese, potassium, and phosphorus.



Pawpaws can grow as large as – and in many cases larger than – a mango.

The large seeds are inedible and therefore need to be discarded. But what's wonderful for us gardeners: they can be kept to grow new trees... and pretty easily at that. (Even if, like me, you have no – like *really* no – space left in the garden!)

Pawpaw trees have few known pests and are very easy to grow. I may have been lucky, but I've never had a single problem with damage from animals or cold temperatures. There exists some confusion online as to winter hardiness, but I can guarantee that they shrugged off a record -33C in my garden years ago, with not a trace of damage, either to vegetative tissue or to flower buds. These little Southerners aren't afraid of the cold.

Because two different plants with separate genetic makeup are required to set fruit, I spend early spring evenings taking pollen from the flowers of one tree with a watercolour paintbrush taped to a long bamboo stake. I then go pollinate another tree with that pollen. Of course, pollen from the second tree then gets on my brush, so off I go to the first tree and pollinate it. If I do this with a glass of wine in my free hand, I've realized that it's one of the better ways to convince my neighbours that I've completely lost my marbles.

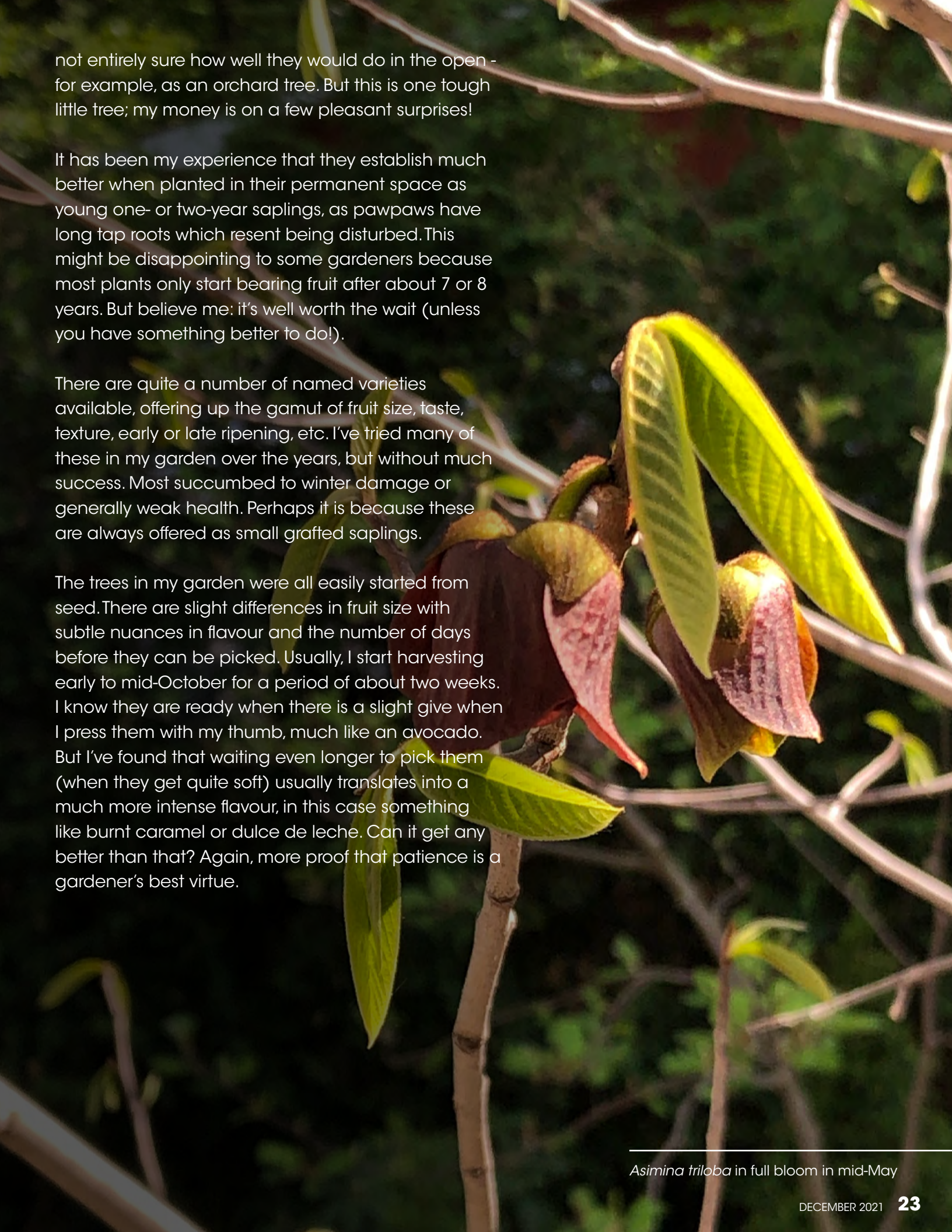
Pawpaws grow in colonies, sending out new shoots from the roots to form thickets. When choosing the appropriate site for a pawpaw tree in an urban garden, that spreading habit should definitely be kept in mind because they will require space. This said, these new shoots can easily be pulled out on a casual basis if they are not desired. The trees tolerate some shade, as they are usually found growing in the understory in their native habitat. In my garden, they are growing quite happily in areas with rich loamy soil, and in other parts with very heavy clay. My garden, as a general rule, is pretty well-protected from open winds, so I'm



Pawpaws grow in groves, sending up new shoots every year (some can be seen at the foot of the more mature plants).



Fertilized bloom has dropped its petals to show the very start of fruit development. In this case, a single fruit was produced, but in many instances whole clusters of up to 9 or 10 fruits also appear at this stage.



not entirely sure how well they would do in the open - for example, as an orchard tree. But this is one tough little tree; my money is on a few pleasant surprises!

It has been my experience that they establish much better when planted in their permanent space as young one- or two-year saplings, as pawpaws have long tap roots which resent being disturbed. This might be disappointing to some gardeners because most plants only start bearing fruit after about 7 or 8 years. But believe me: it's well worth the wait (unless you have something better to do!).

There are quite a number of named varieties available, offering up the gamut of fruit size, taste, texture, early or late ripening, etc. I've tried many of these in my garden over the years, but without much success. Most succumbed to winter damage or generally weak health. Perhaps it is because these are always offered as small grafted saplings.

The trees in my garden were all easily started from seed. There are slight differences in fruit size with subtle nuances in flavour and the number of days before they can be picked. Usually, I start harvesting early to mid-October for a period of about two weeks. I know they are ready when there is a slight give when I press them with my thumb, much like an avocado. But I've found that waiting even longer to pick them (when they get quite soft) usually translates into a much more intense flavour, in this case something like burnt caramel or dulce de leche. Can it get any better than that? Again, more proof that patience is a gardener's best virtue.

WHEN IS A WEED NOT A WEED?

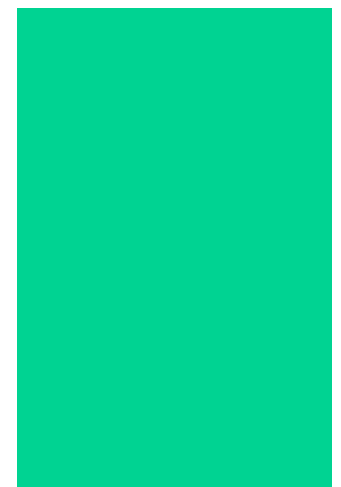
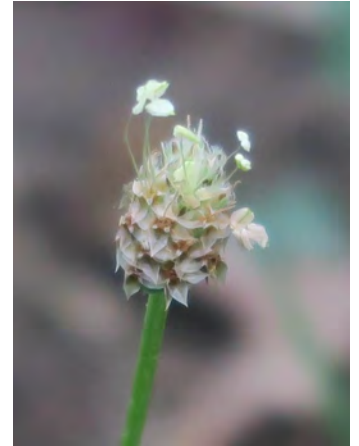
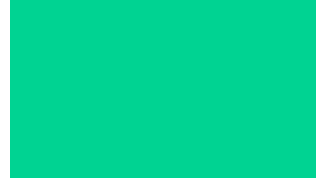
PLANTAIN

Writing by Roberta Woods © 2021

Photography by Robin Woods © 2021

INTRODUCTION

Long before I had completed the writing for the portrait of the dandelion, published in the December 2020 edition of the OHS Newsletter, I knew that the plants we name “weeds” were worthy of study. To this end, whenever I took a walk or went shopping, I was constantly on the lookout for “old friends” and eager to become acquainted with new ones. And after our move to The Junction, an older area of Toronto with back lanes, I discovered a veritable treasure trove of weeds. In addition, I was assisted in my search by an accomplice - Henry, our daughter’s dog. Henry loved to dawdle along seeking the scents of the canines who had passed that way and I loved dawdling to look for weeds. As I became more familiar with the locations of individual weeds and paid more attention to their growth patterns, I recognised that these plants had successfully established themselves in the harshest of environments. Weeds grew in the crevices between paving and the walls of buildings; they grew in fissures in tarmac and disturbed gravel; and, they even grew in the small heaps of plant debris which accumulate alongside road kerbs. Yet no one tends these plants, they depend on rain to get watered, and they are experts at sowing their own seeds, as every gardener knows. Only rarely does a garden escape seed itself in a crack in the sidewalk.



*Petunia self-seeded
from a planter outside
the Riwoche Tibetan
Buddhist Temple.
Photograph courtesy of
Nicola Woods © 2021.*

I concluded that weeds are the stalwarts of the urban landscape. I may have exchanged a garden for a condo balcony, but I still have my weeds. In addition, my preoccupation with all things “weedy” has proved to be a wonderful distraction from the restrictions and irritations of the Covid-19 pandemic.

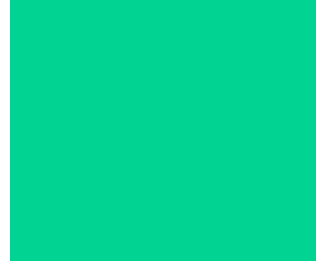
The decision to follow the dandelion with the plantain came easily. The two plants are “lawn-mates” and the sources I consulted for the dandelion often had material about the plantain.

THE PLANTAGINACEAE

The Plantain Family

***Plantago major* L. Great, common or broad leaf plantain**

This member of the plantain family is so well known to gardeners that it hardly needs an introduction. It is a European native first identified in North America in 1748. In Canada, it was recorded in Montreal in 1821 and by the end of the nineteenth century it had become established in British Columbia. As all gardeners are aware, it is a phenomenal producer of seeds. In one season, one plant can produce up to 14,000 seeds, and should the conditions prove unfavourable for germination, the seeds can remain dormant for as long as 60 years. The flowers have 4 petals, 4 sepals and 4 conspicuous bi-lobed anthers. But the flowers are so small that a X10 botanical lens is required to see them. The leaves are ribbed with long stalks arising from a basal rosette. The roots are particularly tenacious when growing in lawns, or when a gardener approaches wielding a trowel. It is a perennial, pollinated by the wind. *P. major* is ubiquitous in Toronto.



Plantago major
growing alongside
a modern path.
Photograph
courtesy of Nicola
Woods © 2021.



***Plantago lanceolata* L.**

Ribwort plantain, ribgrass

P. lanceolata is a close relative of *P. major*, again introduced into Canada from its native Europe. The flower structure closely resembles that of *P. major*. The leaves are narrow, have prominent ribs, and arise from the roots on long stalks. Again, this species is a perennial, pollinated by the wind and ubiquitous in Toronto.

***Plantago media* L.**

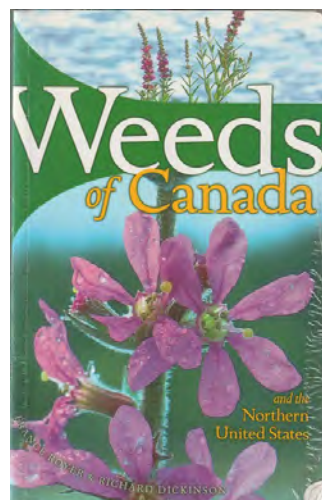
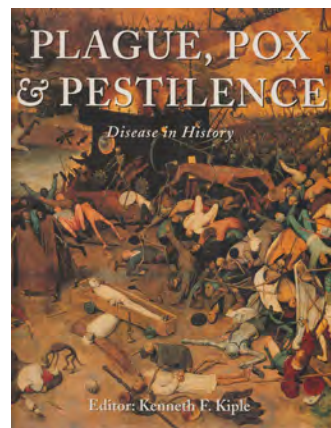
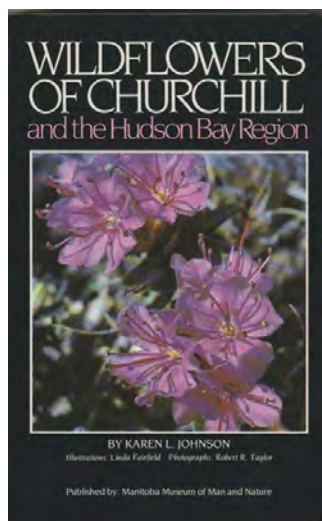
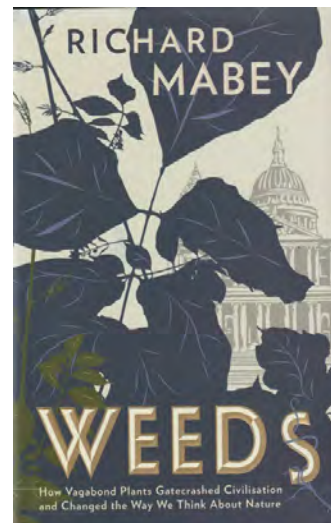
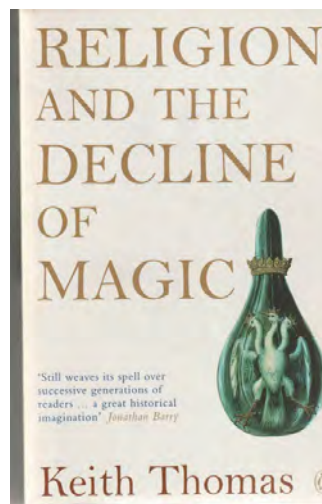
Hoary plantain

P. media is a native of Britain, parts of Europe and the temperate regions of Asia. As far as I can determine, it is not found in Canada but I have included it here because its flowers are perfumed and pollinated by insects. Also, unlike the anthers of *P. major* and *P. lanceolata* which are yellow, *P. media* has lilac or white anthers with purple filaments. Although I have only seen photographs of *P. media*, the scented flowers and the colourful anthers go some way to mitigate the rather drab appearance of its close relatives. The enthusiastic entry in Phillips' and Foy's book, 'Herbs,' describes *P. media* as "pretty enough to grow in a herb garden." However, there is an accompanying caveat stating what all gardeners are only too well aware of, that "all species of plantain can become obnoxious weeds if not kept under control."

***Plantago coronopsis* L.**

Bucks-horn plantain

P. coronopsis is a native of Britain and said to have been introduced into North America. But as its natural habitat is sandy or gravelly soil close to the ocean, it is not likely to become established in Ontario. *P. coronopsis* stands apart from its close relatives on account of the variability in leaf formation. The leaves can be narrow and linear, long and oval, tooth-edged or pinnate. The latter arise from a central rib but have deep narrow indentations. I have included it here and will refer to it later.



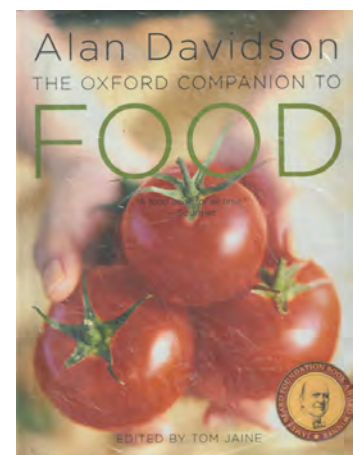
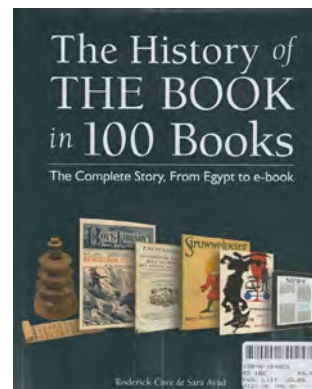
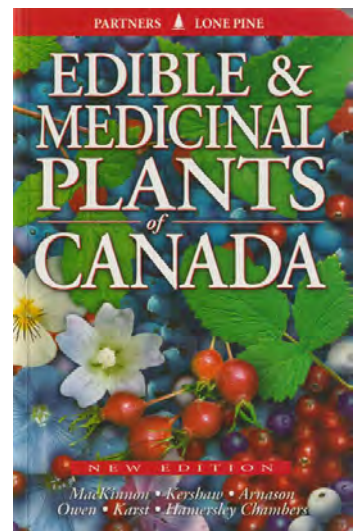
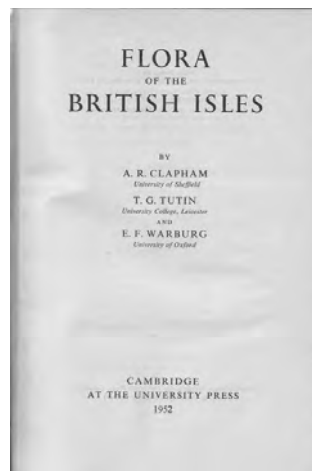
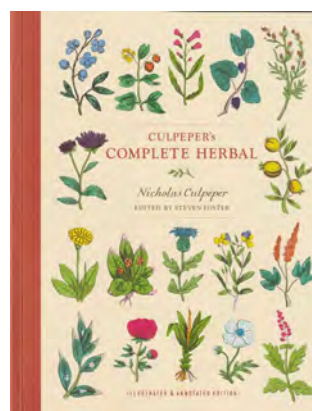
***Plantago juncooides* LAM.**

Seaside plantain, goose-tongue

Plantago juncooides is a perennial established around Hudson Bay, James Bay, and inland in salt marshes or salt pools. The flowers are either absent or indistinguishable to the naked eye. The leaves are 2-3 mm wide and 5-10 cm long. Unfortunately, in 'Wildflowers of Churchill,' Karen Johnson does not say whether any other of the plantain species grow in the sub-arctic.

Despite these variations in growth patterns, leaf size and shape, the rat-tail-like appearance of the plantain's flower stem signals its identity. But since scientists discovered that the DNA of certain plants closely resembles that of the Plantaginaceae family, a decision was made to change their botanical classification. Four such plants are listed in the Royal Ontario Museum's 'Field Guide to Wildflowers of Ontario.' They are: dwarf snapdragon or lesser toadflax, *Chaenorhinum minus*; turtlehead, *Chelone glabra*; butter-and-eggs, *Linaria vulgaris*; and hairy beard-tongue, *Penstemon hirsutus*. To my way of thinking, this change in classification is esoteric and, for wildflower enthusiasts, unhelpful and confusing.

The common or local names attached to plants prompted Geoffrey Grigson, a botanist, to look into this aspect of botanical nomenclature. He recorded his findings on an existing map where the counties of England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland had been divided into "botanico-geographical" subdivisions. His research method entailed the examination of all manner of glossaries, dictionaries, county records, herbals and floras. To avoid confusion, he followed the sequence of plant families established by Linnaeus (1707-1778). Grigson found so many common names for *P. major* that I am unable to list them here. The meaning of some of the words is obvious - "birdseed" and "Pony's Tails" for example, but others, such as "ripple-girs" are obscure. The common



name “fire leaf” for *P. lanceolata* and that of “fire leaves” for *P. media* certainly suggest an association with fire but one could hardly guess in what way. Apparently, farmers were able to test the heat and fire risk of a haystack by the rate at which the plantain leaves dried up in the rick. Plantains would have been growing in the hay fields, become scythed at the same time as the grass, and then incorporated into the stack.

One common or local word, “waybread,” remains in use today. Waybread or “wegbreed” had its origins in the Anglo-Saxon, pre-Christian era Lay, or Charm, of the Nine Herbs, of which the plantain was one.

The word actually means “growing by the wayside” but the word “bread” has suggested to some that the leaves of the plantain growing alongside the path could provide travellers with something to eat. Plantains are edible and, according to the entry in ‘Edible and Medical Plants of Canada,’ they are rich sources of vitamins A, C, and K. But the leathery leaves and the stout ribs, especially as the latter are said to have been used as fishing line, are off-putting rather than appetising. A more appealing option would be the leaves of *P. coronopsis*, bucks-horn plantain, which are used in Italy to make *misticanza*, a spring salad of mixed greens. Steven Foster, the editor of the 2019 edition of Culpeper’s herbal, writing about the modern uses of bucks-horn plantain, says that between 1500 and 1800 it was grown in England and France as a garden vegetable.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when there was a widespread belief in the existence of elves, wee folk, elf shot and poisonous miasmas, the plantain was believed to have magical powers. Believers in these powers took to wearing plantain amulets in the hope of either restoring their health or warding off illness. The treatment for “the falling evil,” or

epilepsy, was the wearing of plantain amulets around the neck or by application of the roots to the head. “The king’s evil,” or scrofula, an infection of the lymph nodes in the neck or groin caused by the tubercle bacillus, was treated in a similar fashion.

The plantain also had a role to play in another type of magic - that of sympathy, where the desired effect is brought about “by performing an associated action.” One example of how sympathetic magic played out was the lighting of bonfires at the Summer Solstice in the belief that the heat and light generated by the fire would increase the power of the sun as it began its journey to the darkness of the Winter Solstice. To enhance the power of the fire, plants with red, yellow or white petals, colours in sympathy with the sun, were included in the fuel. The plants deemed to have the appropriate powers - the plantain was one of them - had to be picked before dawn on Midsummer’s Eve with the dew - itself magical - still on them. The most conspicuous of the plants was what is now known as St John’s wort but not then. Unfortunately, the earlier name has been lost. The choice of St John’s wort was perfect since it had all the botanical features to make sure the sun retained its energy: the five yellow petals are shaped like a star; they exude a red juice when damaged; and the leaves are speckled with translucent red dots.

Divination was another of the plantain’s magical powers. On Midsummer’s Day, young women picked the flowering stalks of the plantain in order to predict whether or not they would marry. One version says two stalks were used, one for the woman, the other for the man. A more elaborate version was the removal of all the anthers from two stalks, and then wrapping the plantain in a dock leaf before placing it under a stone. If by the next day more anthers had appeared, marriage was on its way. A third version, dated 24th

June 1694 - Midsummer's Day - was recorded by John Aubrey who, when walking in a "London Pasture," came across a group of women looking for coal under the roots of the plantains. And, should they find it, the coal had to be placed under their heads that night in order to dream of a future husband. The date of this record shows that the Christianisation of Midsummer's Day to honour St John the Baptist - with the naming of the plant we now know as St John's wort - had not disturbed the young women's faith in the plantain to predict marriage.

That young women believed in the power of the plantain to predict the coming of marriage is not surprising in the seventeenth century when economic security depended on finding a husband. And they would have known that one of their housewifely duties would have been to oversee the health of the family. In order to carry out this task they would have been familiar with the preparation of medicinal herbs, a skill passed down, perhaps, from mother to daughter. To assist women of means with medical matters, one section of Gervase Markham's 'The English Housewife' offers many remedies for a wide range of illnesses. The following is one example of how the plantain could be used:

FOR BLEARED EYES

"Take celandine, rue, chervil, plantain, and anise, of each alike, and as much fennel as of all the rest, stamp them well together, then let it stand for two days and two nights, then strain it very well and anoint your eyes morning and evening therewith."

Christianity was another system of belief which had an impact on how the plantain was understood. Waybread, the pathway lined by plantains, became the path of the

faithful on their quest to seek God. When Albrecht Dürer (1471-1582) painted *Das Grosse Rasenstück*, the Great Piece of Turf, he was inspired by his religious beliefs. In her introductory essay to 'Nature's Artist: Plants and Animals by Albrecht Dürer,' Victoria Salley writes, "His nature studies...express Dürer's constant determination to depict nature as 'life' and a 'divine creation.'" In *Das Rasenstück*, Dürer portrays the plantain within a barely discernible, inverted triangle at a time when it signified the Trinity, "suggesting three equal parts into one." The plantain can also be found in medieval books of hours, the most sumptuous of which is said to be *The Hours of Anne of Brittany*, a late fifteenth century work of Jean Bourdichon, a court painter to the kings of France. Essentially, books of hours were prayer books with calendar pages depicting agricultural activities throughout the seasons. And the plantain was not forgotten. In her book, 'Flowers in Medieval Art,' Celia Fisher includes both *P. major* and *P. lanceolata* in a list of identifiable plants found in books of hours. On a more humble level, the monks of the Abbey of Bury St Edmonds in Suffolk made a copy of an extant manuscript housed with them of the *Herbarium of Apuleius Platonicus*, one of the first herbals to be printed after movable type was in use. Again, the plantain was included.

Another belief system which influenced how the plantain was understood was that of astrology and one well-known herbalist who subscribed to the practice was Nicholas Culpeper (1616-1654). Culpeper believed that everyone should be able to "preserve his Body in Health" and to achieve this he published a herbal designed to be within the reach of his targeted readers - "literate gentlewomen." To keep the price reasonable there were no expensive illustrations and he used the text of John Parkinson's (1567-1650) *Theatrum Botanicum* to produce a handy-sized herbal

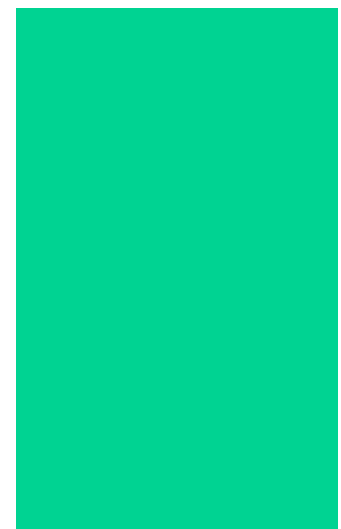
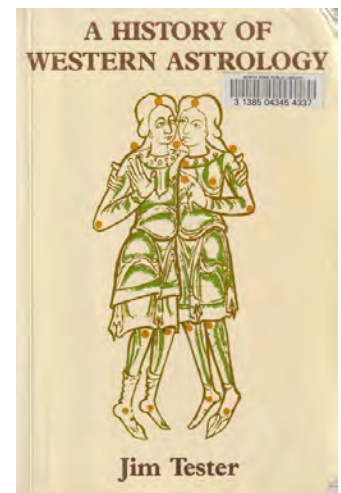
of 324 pages costing three pence. In the first edition Culpeper cautions his readers that if they want to know “the reason of the operation of the Herbs [they] must look up as high as the stars, astrologically.” In other words, Culpeper believed that the movements of the planets and the stars, recorded since ancient times by early mathematical astronomers and subsequently interpreted by astrologers, influenced every aspect of life on earth.

In his herbal, Culpeper places bucks-horn plantain, *P. coronopsis*, under the Dominion of Saturn, a planet known to be associated with drying and binding properties. When bucks-horn plantain is boiled in wine and then drunk, it “strengthens weak stomachs and treats diarrhea.” For the ague (fevers), bruised leaves and roots applied to the wrists bring relief. Boiled in ale and wine, bucks-horn plantain “helps all sorts of sore eyes.” It can also be used for haemorrhage, the bites of vipers and adders, and stones in the kidneys.

Culpeper’s entries for both *P. major* and *P. lanceolata* show that astrologers did not always agree with one another. Culpeper criticized Antonius Mizaldus (active in the sixteenth century) for assigning these two plantains to the Government of Mars because they cure diseases of the head and private parts. The truth, according to Culpeper, is that they are under the Government of Venus. To the modern reader, assignment to any planet seems superfluous given that the plantain’s virtues read like the ultimate panacea. The uses of the plantain range from being a vulnary, that is a herb used to staunch blood and heal wounds, first recorded c. 30-50 CE by Pandanus Discorides in his *De Materia Medica*, to what appears to be treatment for psychiatric illnesses. Interestingly, Culpeper includes two remedies where the plantain is combined with another herb. Plantain roots are beaten to a powder with pellitory of Spain to

relieve toothache. For burns, scalds, and any inflammation of the skin, the mixed juices of plantain and houseleek are recommended. For the treatment of phthis (tuberculosis), Culpeper considers the plantain to be “an especial remedy.” Today, those words evoke an “especial” poignancy knowing, as we do, that Culpeper died aged 39 from tuberculosis.

Despite having been considered a remarkable medicinal herb, believed to have had magical powers, endowed with aspects of Christian theology, and recognised as a food plant, today the plantain has been relegated to the status of an obnoxious weed.



As a reminder of its former glory, I would like to conclude with the verse pertaining to the plantain from the pre-Christian, Anglo-Saxon Lay or Charm of the Nine Herbs, quoted by Geoffrey Grigson in *The Englishman's Flora*.

And you, Waybread, mother of worts,
Open from the eastward, powerful within,
Over you chariots rolled, over you queens rode,
Over you brides cried, over you bulls belled;
All these you withstood, and these you
 confounded,
So withstand now the venom that flies
 through the air,
And the loathed thing which through
 the land roves.

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The Book Nook

TITLES SUGGESTED BY THE OTTAWA PUBLIC
LIBRARY FOR OHS MEMBERS



The Collection Development staff at the Ottawa Public Library have specially selected a list of materials for OHS members. This list includes new titles added to the OPL collection.

Among the materials for this winter are titles relating to:

- Roses
- House plants
- Landscape design
- Heirloom gardening
- Micro foods
- Composting
- Restoring soil

Click on the link below to see the complete list from the Library. This also allows you to view availability and place a hold from the link.

https://ottawa.bibliocommons.com/list/share/354296247_collection_development/2007260511_ottawa_horticultural_society_winter_titles



HOUSEPLANTS 101

By Lori Gandy

Now that we've put away our outdoor gardens, it's time to set our sights, and our green thumbs, indoors.

There are lots of reasons to bring greenery into your home. The foliage and colourful flowers are a welcome sight in the dead of winter. Plants give off moisture that helps offset the dry interior atmosphere of our air-conditioned homes. They also emit oxygen that improves the air we breathe. **Perhaps most importantly, considering that we have been starved for companionship during the pandemic, plants fulfill our basic human need to have living things around us.** They need our care to survive and they reward us for our attention. Oh, and bonus - they don't generally produce weeds!

If you are thinking about introducing some plants into your indoor environment this winter, you have lots of beautiful specimens to choose from, including exotic plants from tropical rain forests or the desert.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines "houseplant" as any plant adapted for growing indoors. *Adapted* because most common houseplants are native to the tropics and near tropics – warm, frost-free parts of the world. Getting them to survive and thrive in our Canadian homes takes a bit of effort and know-how.

Fortunately, there is plenty of advice available online to help you with those pesky questions about lighting and watering and the many other aspects of keeping plants alive in our homes. And if you attended the OHS meeting on 26 October 2021, you were treated to a fascinating presentation from Darryl Cheng entitled "An Engineer's Approach to Houseplant Care," chock full of information.

Image credit: Houseplants <https://www.flickr.com/photos/50697352@N00/8083486437> by F.D. Richards CC BY-SA 2.0

CATEGORIES

Houseplants are categorized into a number of groups, including **aroids, bromeliads, succulents, ferns, and palms**. Plants in these groups are generally considered the best houseplants because they are attractive and easy to care for. Other plants that are grown primarily for their flowers – African violets, geraniums and orchids – are slightly more demanding.

Below is a snapshot of some of the best bets for beginners.

AROIDS

In their natural habitat, plants in the aroid (*Araceae*) family often grow on the forest floor and therefore have adapted to survive in various conditions, including low light. Aroids are some of the most popular houseplants.



Philodendrons are popular for their attractive leathery leaves that are heart-shaped and often cut into lobes.



Monstera deliciosa, or *Philodendron pertusum*, known as the Swiss cheese plant, has showy, glossy, perforated leaves.



Pothos (*Epipremnum aureum*), also called golden pothos, money plant, or devil's ivy, is a hardy indoor foliage plant. It resembles, and thus is often confused with, the common philodendron.



Pothos has thick leaves that are heart-shaped with golden, white or yellow variegation.



Chinese greens (*Aglaonema*) display a variety of colours in their leaves and are an attractive addition to an indoor plant collection.



Dieffenbachia is another popular houseplant that produces leaves in variegated patterns of cream, yellow or white. Photo by Robert Cicchetti/Getty Images.



Peace lilies (*Spathiphyllum*) – not a true lily – are easy-growing, vigorous tropical plants with green foliage and a succession of flower-like leaves, usually white. Photo by Georgina198/Getty Images.



ZZ plant (*Zamioculcas zamiifolia*)
The ZZ plant has wide, attractive, dark green leaves. Beware, though, because all parts of the plant are poisonous.

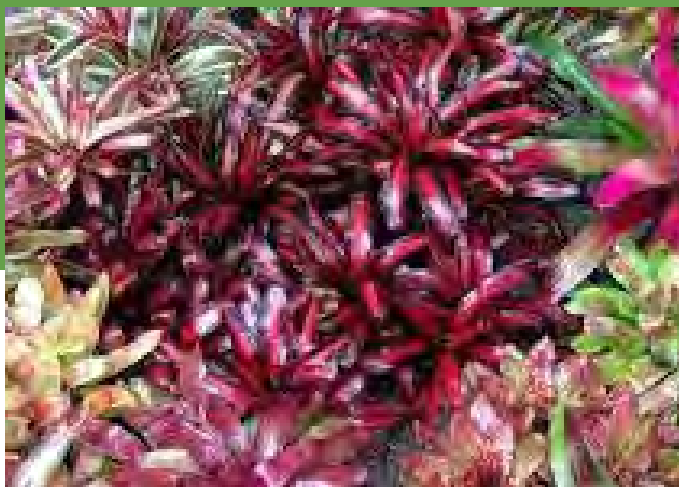


Laceleaf (*Anthurium*) is a showy, prolific flowering plant with striking colours, including red, purple, lavender, pink and hot-orange.



BROMELIADS

A plant family native to the Western Hemisphere, they dwell on trees and rocks or on the forest floor. Prized for their thick foliage, they bring interesting texture and colour to the interior garden. They usually form rosettes of leathery, concave leaves, many with bizarre designs or striking variegations. Their flowers may be hidden deep in the centre of the rosette, surrounded by a cup of brilliant crimson inner leaves, as in *Neoregelia* and *Nidularium*.



Neoregelia



Nidularium

Species of **Aechmea** and **Guzmania** form colourful spikes or heads of long-lasting leathery bracts or bright berries.



Aechmea



Guzmania



Queen's tears (*Billbergia nutans*)

This is a striking plant, with its thick strappy leaves that arch outward into a fountain shape. The flowers, which are pink, purple, yellow or green and are surrounded by red or pink bracts, appear when the plant reaches maturity, usually in 2-3 years.

SUCCULENTS

Succulents are any plant with thick fleshy tissues adapted to water storage.

According to The Spruce website: "While there's a difference between cacti and succulents, they're also closely related. "Cactus" denotes a botanical family. Succulents are a broader group referring to a type of plant included in several botanical families. While all cacti are considered to be succulents, there are succulents that are not cacti."

The **cactus** family offers an amazing array of beautiful choices, with unique shapes and flowering habits. Some colourful varieties are:



Tiny button cactus
(*Epithelantha*)



Pincushion cactus
(*Mammillaria*)



Tom Thumb cactus
(*Parodia*)



Crown cactus
(*Rebutia*)

Succulents other than cacti also make attractive houseplants.



Spurge (*Euphorbia*)
– has angled candelabra-like columns resembling those of cacti.



Hens and Chicks (*Echeveria*) have very shallow roots so they thrive in small, miniature or shallow containers.



Aloe (*Aloe vera*) is known as the healing plant as people often use the liquid in the leaves to help with burns or skin rashes.



Kalanchoe are a popular choice with their showy red, orange, yellow and pink flowers.



Jade plant (*Crassula*), also known as lucky plant, money plant or money tree, has rounded, fleshy and glossy jade-green leaves that are sometimes tinged with red when grown in high light levels.



Snake plant (*Sansevieria*) also known as mother-in-law's tongue, comes in many shapes and sizes.



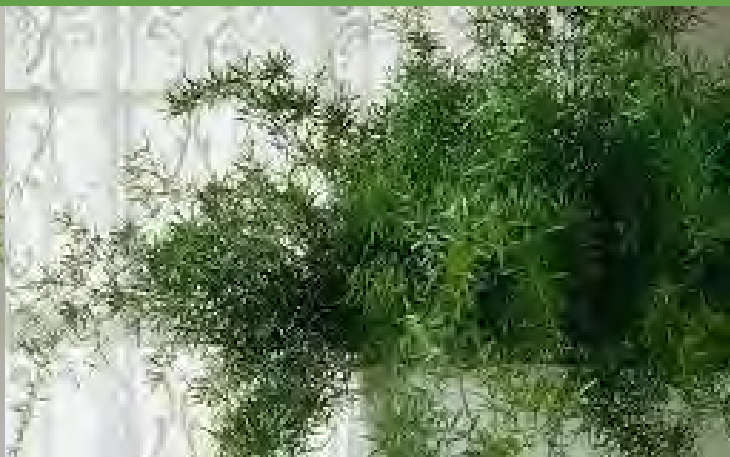
Zebra cactus (*Haworthia*) has rosettes with pearly-dotted leaves.

FERNS

Ferns love moist air and therefore make perfect houseplants for bright bathrooms or kitchens. Some popular ferns include:



Boston fern (*Nephrolepis exaltata*) has sword-shaped blue-green fronds.



Asparagus fern (*Asparagus aethiopicus*) has feathery light foliage.



Leatherleaf fern (*Rumohra*) has lacy-looking, finely-cut, glossy, and triangular-shaped leaves or fronds.

PALMS

Palms add a dramatic element to any room. It's almost impossible to look at one and not think of a tropical environment, a salve for the soul during a snowy Ottawa winter.



Areca palm (*Dypsis lutescens*), also known as the bamboo palm, is popular for its soft fronds.



Ponytail palm (*Beaucarnea recurvata*) has gracefully arching leaves.



Chinese fan palm (*Livistona chinensis*) has star-shaped leaves.

FLOWERING HOUSEPLANTS

What better way to introduce a splash of colour to our homes than to include a few flowering plants. There are many flowering houseplants with varying degrees of care needs.



African violets (*Saintpaulia*) are one of the most successful flowering houseplants, producing blossoms ranging from violet blue, to rose, to white in single- and double-flowered forms.



Geraniums (*Pelargonium*) are a great flowering plant for the sunny window; foliage can be variegated or scented, with flower clusters in reds, pinks and whites.



Orchids

With tens of thousands of species to choose from, orchids come in an astonishing array of colors and sizes, many with lovely fragrances. These delicate, exotic plants have a reputation for being difficult, but there are some that give good results with ordinary care.

One of the most popular orchids is the moth orchid (*Phalaenopsis*) because it is long-flowering and easy to grow.



The *Epidendrum* species include orchids in a variety of shapes and sizes, from small to large, with bright and fragrant blooms in a rainbow of colours, including yellow, purple, pink, orange, red and white.



Oncidium species, often called dancing ladies or butterfly orchids, have brightly coloured, long-lasting flowers, usually yellow, but also available in white, pink, red, green and purple.

PLANT CARE

A WORD ABOUT LIGHT

Just like humans, houseplants are individual in their needs. Some like a lot of direct light, some don't. For information on the light requirements of specific plants, check out Darryl Cheng's site: <https://www.houseplantjournal.com/bright-indirect-light-requirements-by-plant/>

AND WHAT ABOUT WATERING?

When it comes to houseplants, the issue, from what I've read, is usually overwatering, not underwatering. Darryl Cheng's website provides some great information at this site: <https://www.houseplantjournal.com/2017-1-15-how-often-should-i-water-this-plant/>. You might also enquire at the nursery at time of purchase.

Whether they climb or trail, produce colourful or zany flowers, or just show off their glossy leaves, houseplants add a touch of natural beauty to any home. For more information about the plants mentioned in this article, and many others, here are some useful resources:



SOURCES AND RESOURCES

<https://www.almanac.com/content/easy-care-houseplants>
<https://www.almanac.com/content/houseplant-care-guide>
<https://www.almanac.com/10-indoor-plants-clean-air>
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<https://www.gardenista.com/posts/experts-favorite-houseplants-loved-with-ease/>
<https://www.houseplantjournal.com/bright-indirect-light-requirements-by-plant/>
<https://www.houseplantsexpert.com>
<http://www.ottawaorchidsociety.com>
<https://www.thespruce.com/houseplants-4127735>

Seasonal Traditions: A Festive Miscellany

Sources: Wikipedia, The Canadian Encyclopedia, The Laidback Gardener blog, etc.



❄️ **The winter solstice occurs on Tuesday, December 21, 2021, at 10:59 am. This is the astronomical moment when the sun reaches the Tropic of Capricorn. In the northern hemisphere, this means that the sun is at its lowest point in the sky, making for the shortest day and longest night of the year.**

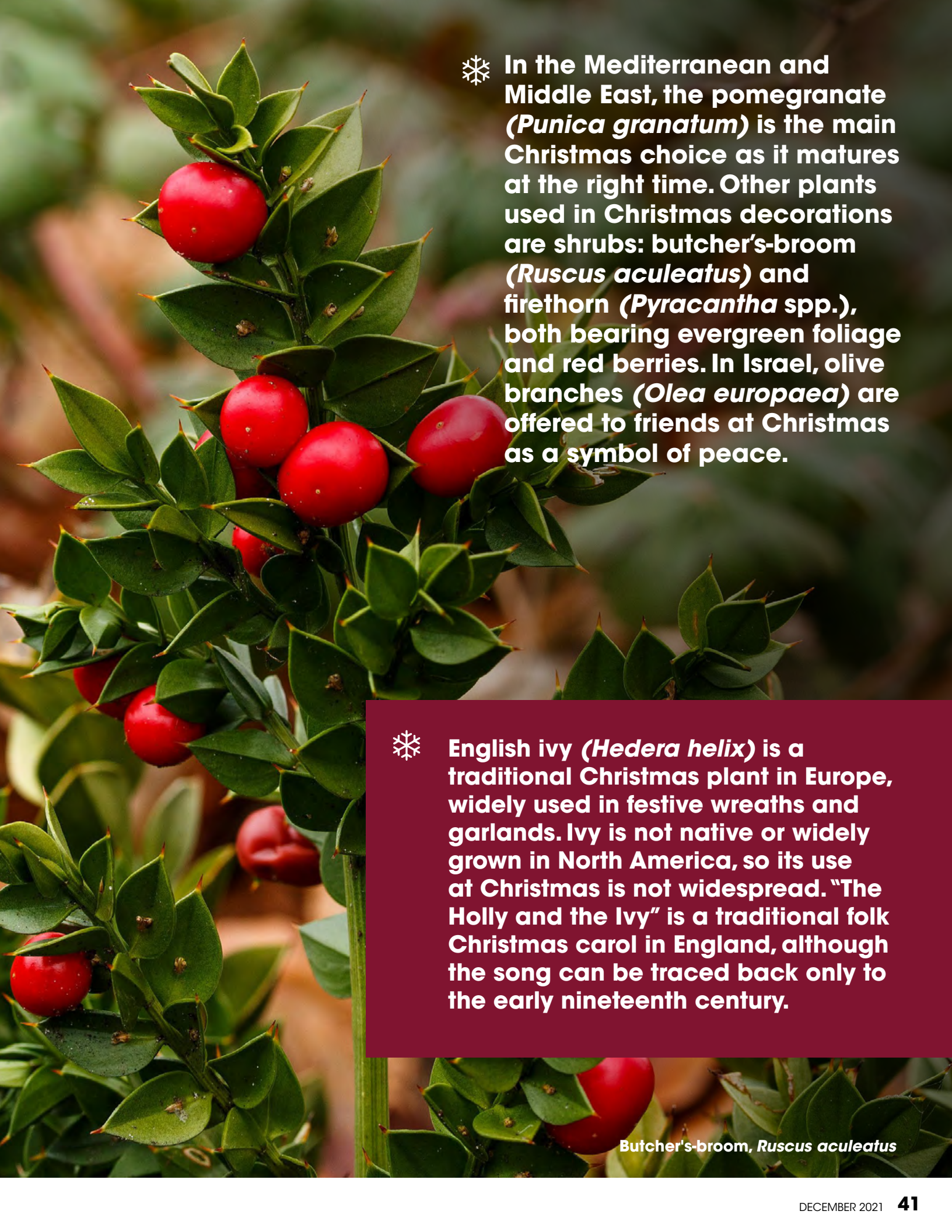
❄️ **Given the significance of the winter solstice in agricultural societies, it is not surprising that many traditions have a horticultural element.**

❄️ In North America, the Indigenous peoples celebrated the winter solstice as a time for regeneration and introspection by holding winter ceremonies and festivals. The Iroquoian groups held week-long celebrations in mid-winter, determined by observing the moon and stars, and these eventually became associated with the winter solstice.

❄️ Various festivals and rituals developed in conjunction with the winter solstice, such as Brumalia (Ancient Rome), Alban Arthan (Welsh), Dongzhi (east Asia), Yalda (Iran), and Korochun (Slavic). The Roman solar feast of Natalia Invicti was held on December 25, and its cult reached its zenith under Emperor Aurelian (270-275 AD). Christmas is celebrated shortly after the winter solstice, and absorbed various traditions from winter solstice celebrations.



❄️ The earliest mention of the celebration of Christmas among Indigenous Peoples dates to 1641. Jean de Brébeuf, a Jesuit missionary who lived among the Huron of Georgian Bay, adapted the story of the birth of Jesus to the characteristics of Indigenous culture – the holy child was wrapped in rabbit skin and slept in a lodge of broken bark rather than a manger. Hunters replaced the shepherds and First Nations chiefs stood in for the wise men and offered fur pelts in place of gold, frankincense and myrrh.



❄ In the Mediterranean and Middle East, the pomegranate (*Punica granatum*) is the main Christmas choice as it matures at the right time. Other plants used in Christmas decorations are shrubs: butcher's-broom (*Ruscus aculeatus*) and firethorn (*Pyracantha* spp.), both bearing evergreen foliage and red berries. In Israel, olive branches (*Olea europaea*) are offered to friends at Christmas as a symbol of peace.

❄ English ivy (*Hedera helix*) is a traditional Christmas plant in Europe, widely used in festive wreaths and garlands. Ivy is not native or widely grown in North America, so its use at Christmas is not widespread. "The Holly and the Ivy" is a traditional folk Christmas carol in England, although the song can be traced back only to the early nineteenth century.

Butcher's-broom, *Ruscus aculeatus*



Winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) is a deciduous holly native to eastern North America. It is leafless at Christmas, but its branches are covered with bright red berries that create vivid swaths of colour in Christmas arrangements. The shrub is hardy to zone 3, but at least one male plant is required in order to pollinate the berry-bearing female plants.

4.



The custom of Christmas trees developed in medieval Livonia (present-day Estonia and Latvia) and in early modern Germany where German Protestant Christians brought decorated trees into their homes. Through the nineteenth century, the practice was adopted by upper classes and royalty, and spread to non-Lutheran parts of Germany and other countries. In North America, fir trees (*Abies* spp.) are the biggest sellers, but Douglas firs (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), spruce (*Picea* spp.) and pines (*Pinus* spp.) are also widely used.



Holly is the plant most associated with Christmas in many European countries. Holly wreaths are hung on doors and sprigs of holly are used to trim Christmas puddings.



1.



2.



3.

Kwanzaa is the annual celebration of African-American culture, held from December 26 to January 1, culminating in a communal feast called Karamuk held on the last day. It was created in 1966 by Maulana Karenga, based in African harvest festival traditions from different parts of Africa.

1. Fraser fir Christmas tree photo by Tuula Talvila.
2. Photo: Holly <https://www.flickr.com/photos/ruthanddave/58687052> by Ruth Hartnup (CC BY 2.0)
3. Photo: Kwanzaa display https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kwanzaa_Display.jpg by Adjoajo (CC BY-SA 3.0)
4. *Ilex verticillata* (winterberry), fruit



The ancient Romans associated mistletoe with peace, love and understanding and hung it over doorways to protect the household as part of the Saturnalia festival. In the Christian era, mistletoe became associated with Christmas as a decoration under which lovers were expected to kiss, as well as with protection from witches and demons. It continued to be associated with fertility and vitality through the Middle Ages until, by the eighteenth century, it had been incorporated into Christmas celebrations. By the Victorian period, tradition dictated that a man was allowed to kiss any woman standing underneath mistletoe and that bad luck would befall any woman who refused the kiss. One variation of the tradition stated that with each kiss a berry was to be plucked from the mistletoe and that the kissing must stop after all the berries had been removed. (The berries are reportedly poisonous.) Photo: Mistletoe berries <https://pixabay.com/photos/mistletoe-berries-mistletoe-green-16393/> by Hans (CC BY-SA)



Since prehistory, the winter solstice has been seen as a significant time of the year in many cultures. Monuments, such as Stonehenge in Great Britain, were constructed and aligned to the movements of the sun. The winter solstice represents the nadir of sunlight, but also marks renewal and the return of light and warmth.



Since Hanukkah colours are blue and white (at least in North America), the most common flowers used in decorations are some combination of white lilies, roses, carnations or alstroemerias, and blue delphinium.



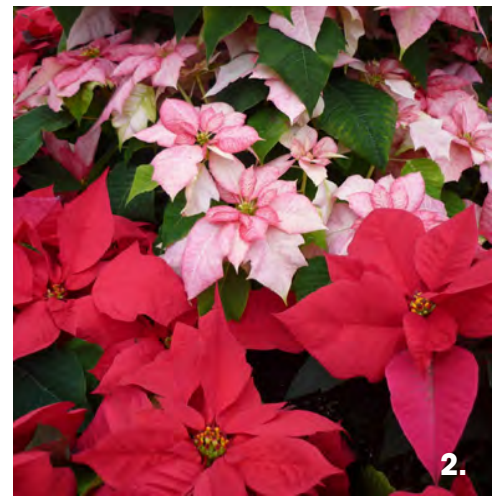
Eastern Orthodox churches in many countries – including Russia, Georgia, Ukraine, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia – celebrate Christmas using the old Julian calendar – it falls on January 7. In Serbian Christmas traditions the *badnjak* is an oak log or branch brought into the house and placed on the fire in the evening of Christmas Eve, much like a Yule log in other European traditions. There are many regional variations surrounding the customs and practices connected with the *badnjak*. A cluster of oak twigs with their brown leaves still attached has replaced the traditional log whose burning is usually unfeasible in modern homes. In some cultures, the Yule log has morphed into a log-shaped cake – *bûche de Noël* – that is traditionally served at Christmas.



1.



The ancient Aztecs prized the poinsettia as a symbol of purity. Centuries later, Mexico's early Christians adopted the poinsettia as their prized Christmas Eve flower. The Mexican poinsettia, known as the Christmas flower in North America, is used in many festive decorations owing to its bright red colour and the fact that its blooming season coincides with the holiday.



2.

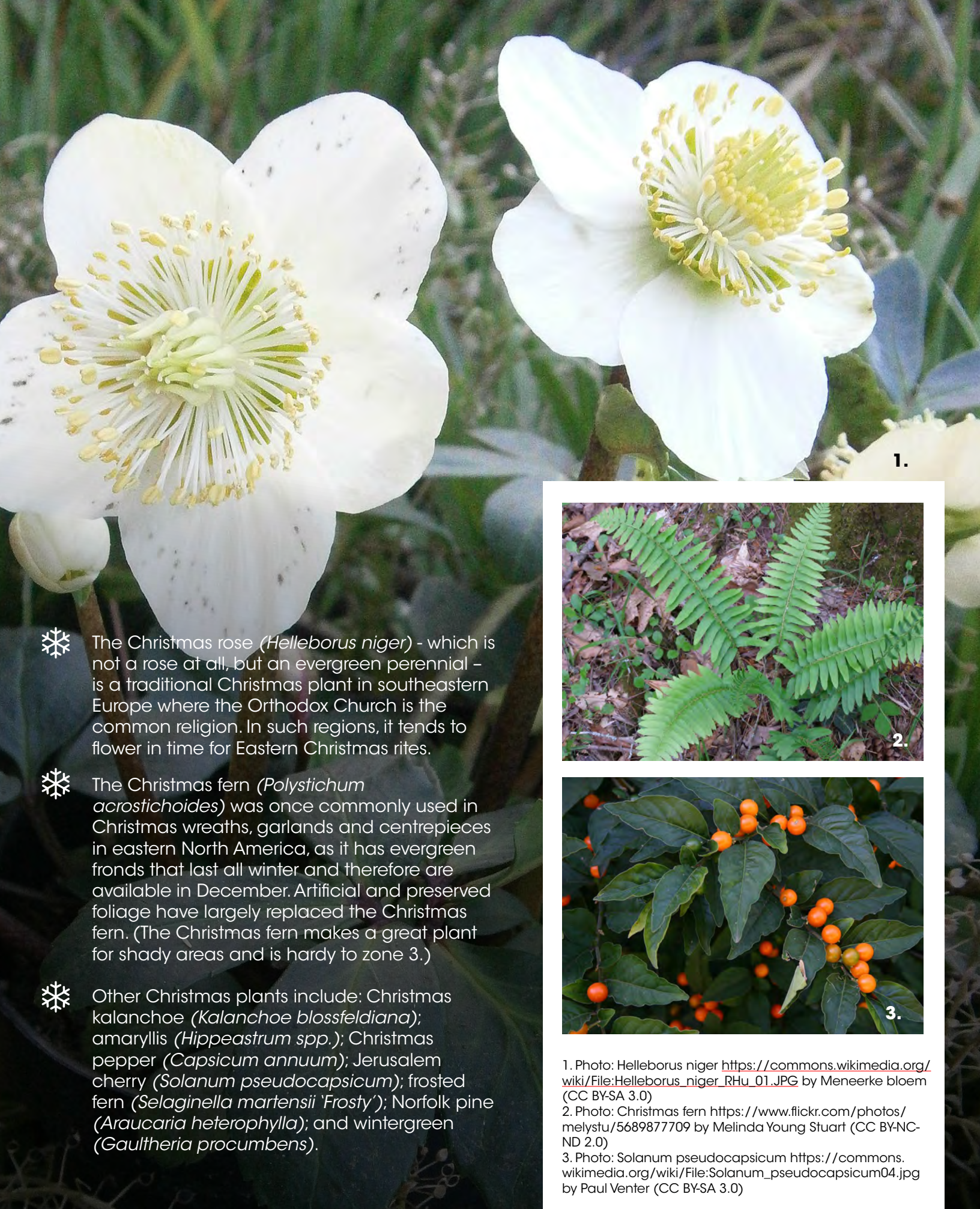


Christmas cactuses – *Schlumbergera* – are a small genus of cacti (the 'leaves' are actually modified stems) found in the coastal mountains of south-eastern Brazil. One legend is that a poor young boy in the humid jungle prayed for a sign of Christmas. For many days his prayers went unanswered, until one day he woke to find himself surrounded by beautiful bursts of colour on the tips of the nearby cacti. From that point on, the Christmas cactus symbolized the idea of answered prayers. Most modern houseplants are cultivars. (Different varieties bloom at different times, so a Thanksgiving cactus – named for the U.S. holiday in late November – is distinct from a true Christmas cactus.)



3.

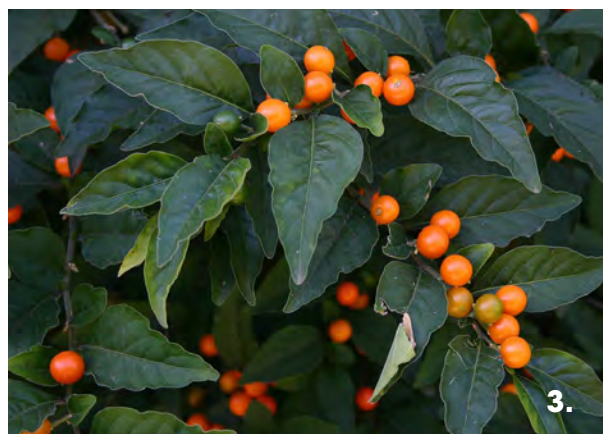
1. Photo: Badnjak <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Badnjak-Beograd.jpg> by Lazar (CC BY-SA 3.0) 2. Poinsettia photo by Tuula Talvila.
3. Christmas cactus photo by Tuula Talvila.



❄ The Christmas rose (*Helleborus niger*) - which is not a rose at all, but an evergreen perennial - is a traditional Christmas plant in southeastern Europe where the Orthodox Church is the common religion. In such regions, it tends to flower in time for Eastern Christmas rites.

❄ The Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*) was once commonly used in Christmas wreaths, garlands and centrepieces in eastern North America, as it has evergreen fronds that last all winter and therefore are available in December. Artificial and preserved foliage have largely replaced the Christmas fern. (The Christmas fern makes a great plant for shady areas and is hardy to zone 3.)

❄ Other Christmas plants include: Christmas kalanchoe (*Kalanchoe blossfeldiana*); amaryllis (*Hippeastrum* spp.); Christmas pepper (*Capsicum annuum*); Jerusalem cherry (*Solanum pseudocapsicum*); frosted fern (*Selaginella martensii* 'Frosty'); Norfolk pine (*Araucaria heterophylla*); and wintergreen (*Gaultheria procumbens*).



1. Photo: *Helleborus niger* https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Helleborus_niger_RHu_01.JPG by Meneerke bloem (CC BY-SA 3.0)

2. Photo: Christmas fern <https://www.flickr.com/photos/melystu/5689877709> by Melinda Young Stuart (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

3. Photo: *Solanum pseudocapsicum* https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Solanum_pseudocapsicum04.jpg by Paul Venter (CC BY-SA 3.0)

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We depend on our members for ideas, articles and information about what is going on in the gardening community.

PLEASE SEND YOUR SUBMISSIONS TO:
info@ottawahort.org

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