

## WHAT'S IN THE MARKET

Cape gooseberry, Carambola, Carob, Cherimoya, Bitter melon, Feijoa, Guava, Litchee, Longan, Loquat, Kumquat, Lemon grass, Malanga, Mango, Name, Pepino melon, Papaya, Passion fruit, Prickly pear (pads & fruit), Tamarillo (orange and red varieties) Taro, and Water Chestnuts.

## SEEDS

This month Bob is offering a potpourri of quick growing annuals for their edible flowers and seeds; nasturtium, signet marigolds, and 'Fennel flower' and a separate packet of fig seeds.

If you are interested send, \$1.00 per packet and an SASE (Self addressed stamped envelope) to: Bob Jurgens, 116-32 227th St., Cambria Heights, NY 11411 and list seeds ordered. Checks should be made payable to the Rare Pit and Plant Council. Please use a sturdy envelope.



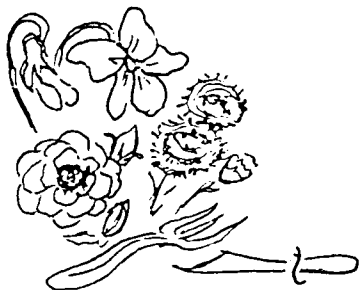
## SUMMERTIME

Kids, cats, dogs, plants OUT, OUT, OUT!! Not a bad idea for all of us either. Many people are still under the delusion that our houseplants must be protected from drafts, bugs and the hazards of fresh air. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Most of the bugs outside are beneficial. I put an infested ficus outside a week ago. Today it is clean as a whistle thanks to some

fat little lady bugs! There is one precaution that must be taken when you put your plants outside....Shade them! House plants will scorch when exposed to real daylight. Even greenhouse grown plants burn. An ideal location is under the shade of a tree where they get filtered light. Plants thrive with fresh circulating air and a night-time drop in temperature, however, don't forget to water your summer campers.

## EDIBLE FLOWERS

from Garden to  
Palate  
Cathy Wilkinson  
Barash  
Fulcurm Publishing  
Golden, CO 1993  
\$29.95



Valerie Williams recently gave a talk on edible flowers at a Pits Meeting that inspired me to research the subject in a treasured book of mine. How I wish I'd owned this book before I plunged myself and my family into eating garden flowers. More on that later.

The introduction is a charming, frequently witty, common-sense approach to eating flowers. "It is important to collect flowers before eating at the optimum times than...those in an arrangement." Visions of noshing the hostess centerpiece!

"Smell the flower, if it smells good continue. Take a tiny bite...Relax and close your eyes...Chew carefully with your front teeth. Breathe through your mouth...After chewing the flower, slowly roll it over your tongue." Why not have a flower tasting instead of a wine tasting, or better yet, combine the two.

The remainder of the introduction includes generic recipes for drying, candying, flower butters, dips, vinegars etc.

Chapter I "The Big Ten" is a list of the authors favorite flowers, how to grow, what and when to harvest, and at least 5 recipes per plant. The "Big Ten" include, calendula, chives, daylilies, mint, nasturtium, pansy, rose, sage, marigold and squash blossoms. The photographs of the flowers and the recipes are mouth watering.

Chapter II includes 50 more flowers with recipes and cultural instructions. These range from the ordinary to extraordinary - lavender flowers to tuberous begonias. When discussing any edible flower, Barash gives warnings when necessary. Elderberry. "Warning. The leaves, bark, branches and roots of elderberry contain poisonous alkaloids. Only the flowers, not even the

stems of the recommended elderberries should be eaten...." Elderberry is one of the most treasured plants in our edible landscape - so far we have only made syrup, but hope to make elderberry blossom pancakes. The berries, also make a delicious wine.

The last chapter "Edible Flowers in the Garden includes, "The Ten Rules of Edible Flowers" Rule 4. Appealed to us "Do not eat flowers from Florists, nurseries or garden centers". Also included is a brief list of poisonous flowers and a warning to approach flower-eating as you would mushroom eating. And last of all, "The Organic Edible Flower Garden."

This is a lovely book that is fun to read and full of tempting projects. We are about to go to the garden and candy the pansies.



### Candied Flowers

1 egg white	100 proof Vodka
Superfine sugar	Pansies

Artist paint brush, wire cake rack, baking parchment.

In a small bowl, beat the egg white to a froth, add 2 drops of vodka. Cover wire rack with parchment.

Grasp the top of the stem of the pansy between thumb and forefinger. Dip the paint brush in egg white. Gently paint all surfaces of the petals. Make sure to get between all the petals. Gently sprinkle sugar on the flower, covering all surfaces. Place flower on parchment.

Place flowers (still on rack) in a cool, dry ventilated room. When the flowers are dry, they will be brittle. Store in an airtight container or gently place them in a heavy duty plastic freezer container. Layer no more than 3, and separate with a layer of parchment. They will keep up to a year.

Candying the flowers is a tedious business and you should do no more than 2 or 3 at a time, after they are done, go out and pick some more.

## SOME TASTY FLORA

Summer time is time for us to go outside or open the window. Almost all of us have access to a window sill, window box, tree pit or small garden. The plants listed below can be grown in at least one of these, are readily available or can be easily and quickly grown from seed. chives nasturtium, marigold, daylily and fennel flower.

### **Chives:** *Allium schoenoprasum*

Chives have been cultivated for 5,000 years. They originated in the Orient, but spread to Greece in ancient times. They became a staple of the European Herb garden by the 16<sup>th</sup> century.



Pots of chives can be purchased in any supermarket or garden center this time of year. They can be grown in containers in the house on a sunny windowsill or in the garden. Everyone knows to snip the leaves and add them to salads, soups etc. The flowers, also, can be chopped and added to salads for extra zest. Be sure to chop up the flowers, as one head is enough to overwhelm all other foods.

A favorite in our house is chive blossom vinegar. Pick enough flower heads with an equal portion of dill leaves and 3 crushed garlic cloves, pack a pint, quart or gallon jar. Fill the jar with white vinegar and keep in a dark spot in the kitchen. Give the jar a gentle shake every 2-3 days. The vinegar will be ready in 3 weeks. When it is ready, strain the vinegar. Select attractive glass containers, add one chive blossom to the jar and pour the vinegar into the jars. Seal and keep in a dark cupboard.

**Nasturtium:** *Tropaeolum majus*

Nasturtiums (sometimes called Jesuit Watercress) is a native of South America. It was brought to Europe from Peru by the Spanish Conquistadors in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Its popularity spread to England and the rest of Europe by the end of the century.

Nasturtium seeds are available in supermarkets, garden centers and any small store that sells seasonal seeds.

They are easy to grow, one seed per 4" pot covered to a depth of ½ an inch. The seeds will germinate in days and bloom within 6 weeks. They can be grown on window sill, window boxes, and any sunny spot in the yard. Do not fertilize...fertilizer encourages lush foliage and few flowers.



In our family we use both the flowers and the leaves for salads. A mound of nasturtiums blossoms on top of a tossed green salad is a delight to the eye as well as the palate. Both the leaves and the flowers have a peppery taste. The flowers have the extra bonus of a drop of honey in the spur. Nasturtiums have one problem, Aphids. Once while leading a garden tour with about 20 - 30 people I was extolling the virtues of the flowers, I plucked one and popped it into my mouth, only to notice all the flowers were covered with black aphids. I gulped it down, but did not offer any to the tour. Check the flowers carefully - the aphids do wash off.

Follow the recipe for chive vinegar to make nasturtium vinegar. It deliciously peppery.

### **Daylily:** *Hemerocallis spp*

There are many species of daylilies and they are native to Eurasia, Nepal, India, Japan, China and Siberia. They gradually spread their way westward to Europe. The

Colonists brought them to the New World where they have become naturalized.

Daylilies are available through many sources, mail order, garden centers, friends with gardens and in the wild.



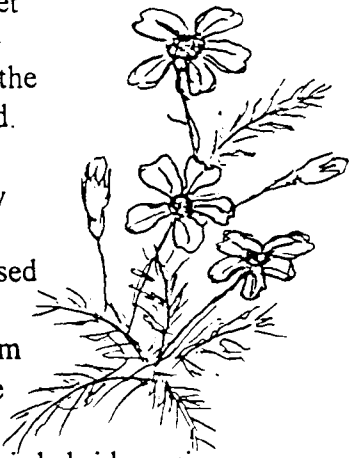
Daylilies grow from tubers, much as dahlias. Plant the tubers 4-6" below the surface. They will grow in full sun or partial shade. If you have a tree pit or a small city garden, they are an excellent choice. If you do not have space in a garden for a daylily, simply walk or drive along a country roadside in the summer, the daylilies will be at their peak.

**Note:** Use the buds not the opened flowers. We cleverly served a bee in a blossom. Not a popular treat..

#### Sauteed Daylilies

12 daylily flowers  
2 chive flowers broken into florets  
½ tsp salt.  
Put all the ingredients into a frying pan. Cover and simmer until just tender and all the moisture is cooked away. Do not over cook. Toss with butter just before serving. This same recipe can be used for squash blossoms. Again - it's the buds.

**Signet Marigold:** Signet marigolds are a species - not to be confused with the common hybrid marigold. They can be easily recognized by their ferny foliage and small single flowers. This species used to be hard to find and could only be grown from seed. They are by far the most attractive of all the marigolds, and unlike their hybrid cousin, they bloom all summer until hard frost.



The foliage has a scent of tarragon and the petals, not the foliage, can be used as a substitute. The following recipe is from the Barash book.

#### Marigold Butter

Petals from 20 signet marigolds  
½ pound softened butter  
Remove the white tip of the petal where it was attached... It is bitter. Finely chop the petals then mix with the butter. Cool it and roll it into a log using wax paper. Keep refrigerated for 2 weeks and 6 months if frozen. Cut slices to garnish any grilled fish or mix in with deviled eggs.

#### Fennel-flower: *Nigella sativa*

This is not an edible flower, only the seeds are edible, the flowers are not poisonous, just not tasty. We have included it in the collection because it is easy to grow and lovely to look at



It is a charming delicate 10" tall plant. The foliage is feathery and the solitary 1 ½ " flowers are a clear sky blue. It will make a colorful addition to your potpourri from Bob. Sow the seeds after all danger of frost - they will sprout in a couple of weeks and bloom 8 weeks later.

### PIT PURSUITS

1. What is the derivation of the common name Chaste Tree? And what is its Botanic name?
2. To what plant does the biblical reference "the rose of Sharon" refer?
3. What is Iceland's second greatest export?
4. Translate: POMA EDIMUS UT ARBOROUS CONSERAMUS

## Mycorrhizae ?

The April issue of Tropical Fruit News has a wonderful article reflecting a talk by Al Will, Jr. a retired Professor of Botany at Broward (Florida) Community College. We do not have space or permission to reproduce it in toto but if what follows intrigues you we suggest obtaining a copy of the original. This brief summary is taken directly from the TFN article.

In Greek “mycor” refers to fungus and “rhizae” to roots. Mycorrhizae are a class of fungi associated with the roots of most plants. The relationship is symbiotic meaning mutually beneficial or dependant, that is to say the roots help the fungus and the fungus in turn benefits the roots. The absence of these fungi may explain why tropical seeds we plant sometimes grow poorly or not at all in spite of a major effort to mimic growing conditions in the wild. Will asserts that 99 % of all plants in the world have an affinity for mycorrhizae.

Mycorrhizae are divided into two general types: Ectomycorrhizae which exist in soil adjacent to the roots and are most important in temperate regions and Endomycorrhizae which live inside the roots and are more important in tropical climates. Endomycorrhizae must be dug into the soil in contact with the roots. One function of these useful fungi is to break down plant litter into nutrient forms that can be absorbed by the roots.

Mycorrhizae is available commercially. “Root Saver” contains both the ecto and endo forms and “Palm Saver” only the endo form. The later is probably the best bet for tropical plants. Once inoculated the fungus should persist in the soil unless treated with a fungicide.

We would like to see some of our readers experiment with these fungi and are eager to publish results. If there is enough interest we might obtain some and share it.

John Hart

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## Notes in Passing

Murray Corman of Garden of Delights in Davie, Florida is our most knowledgeable and patient guru who is game to answer all questions. Murray has been a county agent, on the board of the Rare Fruit Council International, and is the proprietor of Garden of Delights.

**Q:** What is your experience with Mycorrhizae?

**A:** We have been using it for over a year now. It does no harm and seems to have turned some of our trees around. You know those plants that just seem to barely hang in there no matter what you do...these have responded. It is certainly worth a try.

**Q.** Where can we get a hold of some?

**A.** Plant Health Care Inc. 1-800-421-9051. (We have called them, and have not heard back yet.)

**Q:** Someone wrote inquiring about an ‘new avocado cultivar’ that could be grown and fruited in a pot. Is there such a plant?

**A:** If there is I don’t know about it.

However there are small varieties of avocados that flower in March and April and fruit in July and August. These would be best for your group. The two cultivars he suggested were **grafted** varieties of ‘Pollock’ and ‘Simmons’.

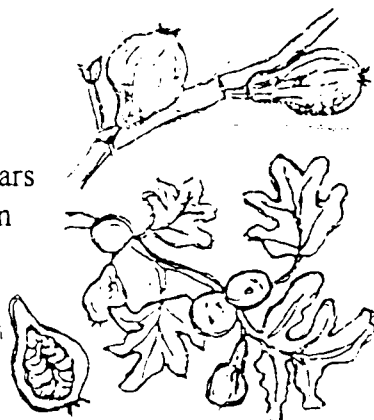
(My data base collapsed, and I don’t have a complete address for Murray.)

**FIG: (*Ficus carica*)**  
**'Smyrna'**

Twenty plus years ago, when Milly Selsam and I were researching the Don't Throw it Book, we grew a forest of figs! We had purchased sun-dried 'White Turkish Figs' in a health food store. We cleaned the seeds, and sowed them in a flat filled with slightly moistened seedling mix. Within two weeks we had a forest of charming little fig trees, all sprouting minute perfectly formed fig leaves, enough to cover an army of Barbies and Kens.

I grew one of the seedlings into a small tree and kept it for at least 10 years. My tree was about 6' tall, had lovely deeply lobed leaves about the size of the human hand. One year it even bore and abortive, inedible little fig. Figs are deciduous trees and once it dropped its leaves, I put it away in a cool dark shed for the winter. My fig was never lush but its angular trunk made an architecturally interesting addition to our jungle. I loved it, but one fall it was left out doors too long and it died. Since then I have tried and failed to germinate more figs.

The only fig that has fertile seeds is the 'Smyrna' from Turkey.<sup>1</sup> Figs are quite unique in the plant world. They do not have flowers as we think of them. The flower is inside the fruit which helps explain their very complicated form of pollination. (You could say they are the ultimate 'edible flower'. Fresh Smyrna figs are available for about two weeks in the fall in gourmet grocery stores. We have tried to grow their seeds, but the seeds looked immature and never germinated. Until recently I have been unable to find sun-dried figs in health food stores. However, while searching for *Nigella* seeds, I found 'Sun-dried, Organically grown white figs from Turkey' in an Indian market.



I have cleaned the seeds and sent them on to Bob.

**To clean the seeds:** Scrape as much of the seed-laden pulp as you can into a glass filled with lukewarm water and let stand for an hour or so. The flesh will soften and you will be able to remove some of it. Drain off as much of the water as you can without spilling the seeds. (Do not worry about seeds that are floating on top of the water. These are not fertile.) Refill the glass and repeat this procedure several times until all the flesh is dissolved. When the water is clear and the seeds are on the bottom, place a paper towel in a sieve and drain off all the liquid. Let the seeds dry on the paper towel - about 24 hours. Or better yet - send 1\$ to Bob.

**To grow:** Sow the seeds in a flat filled with a moist sterile seedling mix or perlite. The seeds are tiny and should have only a light dusting of your mix. Loosely cover the container with plastic wrap and place in a warm dark spot in the house. The seedlings should pop in a couple of weeks. Once the seedlings are 3-4" tall, transplant them to individual pots and place in a bright, but not too sunny location. If you live in zone 8 or higher, your fig can be transplanted to the garden after a year in the home.

We don't have THE POLLINATOR, *Blastophaga* wasp, in this country, that is needed to set fertile seed; figs it might set will not set fertile seed. Therefore, the figs grown in this country are all propagated vegetatively. The most common varieties are, 'Black Mission', 'Brown Turkey', 'Calisymna', 'Celeste', 'Texas Everbearing', and 'Magnolia'. The commercial center for fig production is in California. However, they are hardy to 15° and can be grown as far North as Boston if provided with some winter protection. We have a little 'Black Mission' fig that has

come through the past winter with no protection.

Figs have been a source of food and religious significance for thousands of years. They probably originated in Assyria and followed the Silk Road West to Greece, Egypt and Italy. Baskets of figs have been found in Egyptian tombs, the Ancient Greeks dedicated a grove of figs to Athena and they were a favorite mask for poison in Roman

times. From the Song of Solomon, "For low the winter is past, the rain is over...The flowers appear on the earth...and the voice of the turtle dove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs." Solomon 2:11-13. And from Matthew, "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as it puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near." Matthew 24:32

1. Cross-pollination is brought about by minute fig wasps, *Blastophaga spp.* Which are about 1 mm long. The species of wasp is specific to a given species of *Ficus* or a few allied species. When the figs with the gall flowers ripen the adult wasps hatch from the ovaries by biting a hole in the ovary wall. The small male wasps, which are wingless and almost quite blind, copulate with the somewhat larger females and die without leaving the fig. The impregnated female scrambles out between the scales at the mouth of the fig getting covered with pollen from the male flowers near the mouth. She then flies to another tree to oviposit. If she enters a gall fig she oviposits an egg down each of the short styles into the ovary and continues the process in this and other inflorescence until her stock of eggs is finished and then dies of exhaustion without having eaten any food since she hatched. The eggs then develop into larvae in the ovaries...The figs ripen in about three months and are eaten by birds and other animals. The seeds are passed with the feces and so spread. Figs taken to other countries where their particular species of *Blastophaga* is not present do not set fertile seeds. Tropical Crops & Dicotyledones, Purseglove, J. W., John Wiley & Sons, Inc. NY 1968

The Pits Annual Plant Sales and Subscriber's Party will be held Wed. Sept. 2, at 6:30 P.M. At Janet Sutta - 43 Great Jones St., NYC. If interested please contact us at the Scituate address by August 22. Please come!

### St. John's Wort Revisited

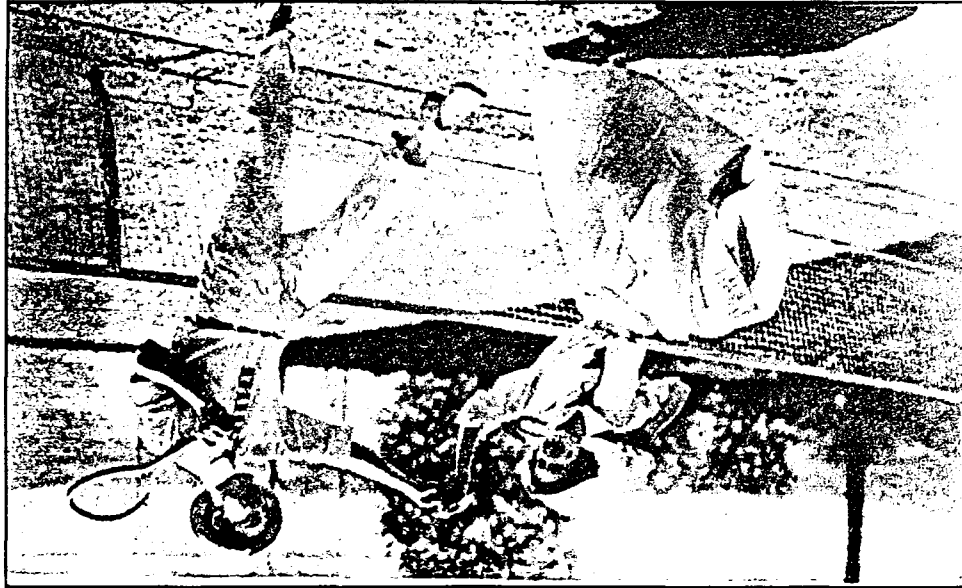
In a recent newsletter we discussed the naturally occurring herb *Hypericum perforatum* or St. John's Wort as a treatment for depression. There is a nice short article on same subject in the May issue of *Atlantic Monthly*. The author makes a mistake, however, by using its frequent use by German physicians as evidence of its value. American patients and German patients have

different expectations when they visit a doctor. Americans are generally satisfied when told they will get over it or it isn't serious. Also, American physicians are criticized for over prescribing. Germans however generally feel short changed if they leave the office without a prescription. This encourages over prescribing and the prescription of drugs of limited pharmacological merit but of considerable placebo effect.

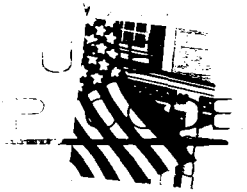


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