

the pits

NEWSLETTER

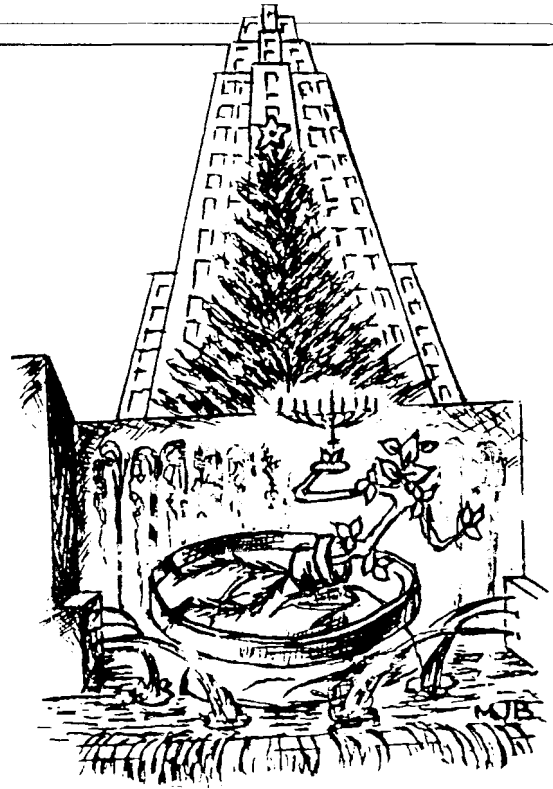
Winter 2001
Volume 21 #7

WHAT'S IN THE MARKET

Arrowroot, Carambola, Carob
Cherimoya, Chestnut, Date, Feijoa, Hardy
Kiwi, Kumquat, Lemon grass, Malanga,
Mango, Papaya, Passion fruit, Pomegranate,
Persimmon, Prickly pear, Tamarillo,
Tomatillo. and Water Chestnut.

SEEDS

This month, Debbie is offering seeds of
Hardy Orange courtesy of Doug Litchfield and
Medlar, courtesy of Joseph Mule. These seeds
will be packed in moist sphagnum moss and
sealed in plastic. Send a sturdy envelope. Cost
is \$1.00 per packet. Checks should be made
payable to the Rare Pit and Plant Council and
mailed to Debbie Peterson- address below.



SOMETHING TO CRY ABOUT

Some months back we received a sad little package and letter from Joseph Moreno
...a sad story about Durian. I love the fruit, and can get good tasting frozen Durians here in St. Louis
However, I really wanted to grow a tree indoors and, as you know, the frozen seeds aren't viable. I've been to
Thailand twice in the last year and just returned recently. I got a friend to find several Durian tree seedlings.

These were in perfect condition, about 6-8" in height. I bare-rooted them, kept them
moist in my suitcase and planted them in pots upon arrival. For several days they looked
fine, and then inexplicably, all just up and died. They had sunlight, moderate watering
etc. I also took back some seeds. Kept them in a plastic bag. The seeds began to
germinate before even being planted." The seeds also passed away and Joseph sent me a
dead germinated Durian seed.



Your editors only suggestion would be to keep both the sprouting seeds and the
seedlings tented in plastic. Durians are native to a very warm and humid country. No
matter how hot and humid it may feel during our summers, it is not enough humidity for frail tropical plants.

SOMETHING TO CROW ABOUT

Michael Riley's papaya, age two, height 2' has bloomed. He fears it is a boy and not self-fertile.
Debbie's tree finally held its fruit only to have them knocked off while trying to move them indoors. Our local
nursery, Kennedy's Country Garden, has volunteered to store it for the winter in a warm greenhouse where it
will set more fruit. Here's hoping!

The Rare Pit & Plant Council

17 Circuit Ave. Scituate, MA 02066

Caels
Coffee
K. W. Apple
L. Apple
D. Apple
S. Apple

HARDY ORANGE- *Poncirus trifoliata*



The center of our garden of thorns is dominated by a large, shrubby, Hardy Orange- *Poncirus trifoliata* 'Flying Dragon'. Michael Dirr, renowned horticulturist and plants man says of this shrub, "...because of its dense growth and thorny character; even a dumb football player would not attempt to penetrate this hedge." The young man who planted our shrub said, "If this ... thing dies, I'm not taking it out!" Thorns aside, this is a stunning plant. We exhibited one at the New York Flower Show in the Pit Exhibit and were offered \$300.00 for the plant.

The one we planted this spring is about 5' x 4' with dense thorny and contorted branches. The trifoliate foliage is a dark glossy green and each leaflet is about 1-2" long. In the spring the plant has lovely, waxy, white fragrant flowers. These are followed in the fall by perfectly round 2", slightly fuzzy, light orange fruits.

Hardy Orange is a true citrus and the sour flesh smells and tastes just like a lemon. Within each fruit there are 6-12, 1/2" seeds. The first time we met these fruits was in October 1989, in a Japanese Strolling Garden. There were lots of flying bugs and our guide gave each one of us a fruit to rub on our skin to ward off insects, it worked. He also said the fruits could be dried and used as moth repellents. We have found no other references for these uses and have found one source that claims that some people may be allergic to the rind. Dirr notes that marmalade can be made from the fruits, the flesh used as a substitute for lemon pulp and the rind can be candied. Hard to imagine, by the time you de-seed the fruit, there isn't much pulp left.

Picking the fruit is a bit of a

challenge, we suggest heavy gardening gloves and a sturdy long sleeved shirt.

Hardy Orange is native to China and Korea. It is hardy to zone 6 and zone 5 with some winter protection. The tree is deciduous but the bark is green giving it the appearance of being evergreen. Even in winter, its contorted branches add interest to the garden.

The plant that we grew as a houseplant for several years, would drop its leaves, but would leaf out in a month or so. It made a stunning houseplant, leaves or no leaves.

To Grow: Here's the Rub
STRATIFICATION:

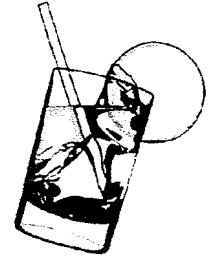
The seeds of hardy trees, shrubs and perennials require a cold period to break their dormancy and germinate. Typically the seeds ripen in the fall when the soil is becoming cold and the warming rays of the sun are brief, if at all. Seedlings that germinate in this hostile environment will not be strong enough to survive the onslaught of winter. To germinate these seeds in the home it is necessary to mimic nature and give them a cold period.

Here in zone 6 and 7 our winter temperatures range from 10^o to 50^o F. We may have several weeks below freezing only to have temperatures climb into the 60s for a week before plunging back into the 40s. Many of our native trees and shrubs require a "double dormancy"-a prolonged period below 40^o and another prolonged warmer period only to be returned to another cold treatment. Magnolias and Hollies both require this treatment.

Mercifully most hardy plants are quite happy with a dormant period at 42^o F (the temperature of your refrigerator) for 6-10 weeks. Some pits that require this treatment are, Chestnuts, Hardy Kiwis, Medlars, Apples, Apricots, Peaches, and Hardy Oranges.

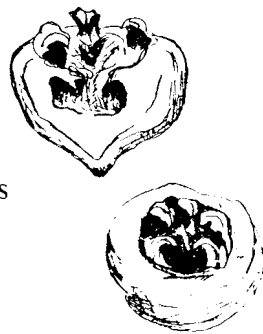
To stratify your seeds, fill a small container with fine, slightly moist, peat moss and scatter the seeds so they are well covered by all the moss. Seal the container in a plastic baggie and place in the back of the refrigerator. Hardy Orange should be stratified for 3 months. After that remove the seeds from the moss and pot them up as you would any other seed. They should germinate in 2-4 weeks. Last year we stratified chestnuts and were surprised to find them rooting in the bag. Stratification may sound complicated, but it is very easy and you feel so successful when you succeed.

This is an old story, but true. Horticulturist, Frank Bowman, suggested another very simple way to stratify seeds. (In this instance he was referring to Kiwi seeds that are very fine.) Sow the seeds in an ice cube tray for about 3 months. Take them out and plant the ice cube in a pot. The plants will be guaranteed to be watered as the ice cube melts and you don't have to separate the seeds until they sprout. (We tried this, but accidentally drank them in a glass of ice tea)



MEDLAR-*Mesipilus germanica*

The Medlar is a small, attractive, deciduous tree in the Rose family. It has been cultivated for 3,000 years but was especially treasured in the middle-ages. The 2" flowers are white, blushed with pink and bloom in mid-spring. The hard brown fruits are most peculiar, holding on to the calyx at the bottom, giving them a rather exotic look. They are harvested when rock hard, just as the leaves



begin to fall. To be edible the fruit must be "bletted" (a genteel word for softening or rotting) by a long chilling period, similar to the American Persimmon. Simply put them in the freeze for 24 hours. The ripened fruits have the consistency and flavor of a baked apple.

Medlar is hardy to zones 5 and 6. The trees bloom at a very early stage one year from grafting and probably 3 grown from seed. Medlar have somewhat of a cult following and I believe you can join the Medlar Society.



NOTES IN PASSING

There is one great solace in these dark and dreary winter days. The first day of spring on the window sill is December 21. The days will begin to lengthen and soon our plants will begin to show new growth.

For those of us who have outside gardens, remember to apply anti-desiccant to broad leaf evergreens at least twice during the winter months. This product is frequently sold under the name of Wilt-Proof. It gives the plants a protective coating

against sun-scorch and in our case, salt spray. Apply when the temperature rises above 42° F.

When planting paper whites for winter blooms: Plant them in soil with 1/2 of the bulb above the soil, give them one shot of gin or vodka in their first watering and place them in cool dark period for about a week (doesn't have to be as cold as the refrigerator). When the bulbs are rooted, place them in a cool sunny spot. The liquor stunts their growth! Gail Robinson taught us this trick and it really works. No floppy stems.

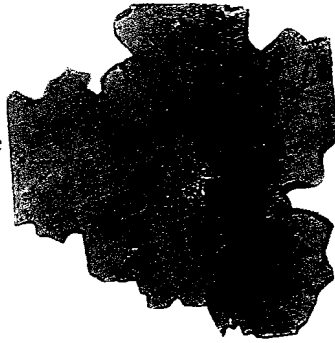
A GARDEN OF THORNS

Our good friend and local nurseryman, Doug Litchfield, always grows a few "Debbie Plants". This year he out did himself and gave me four spiny perennials in the

Solanum genus. One has sage green, matte finished, stiff, deeply serrated 5" leaves with bright orange 1/2" spines on the mid-rib and stem. Another had glossy, almost black leaves with black spines on the stem and mid-rib. Another had beautiful, 2" pure white flowers, small red fruits and was the least spiny. If anyone can identify these plants by the above description, please write me.

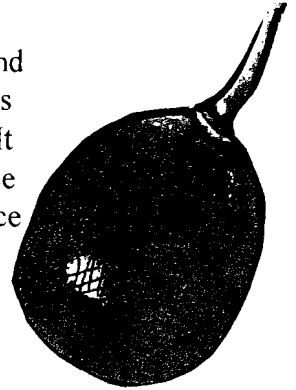
The only one of the four can be identified is *Solanum quitoense* or Naranjilla¹, a shrubby tender perennial that can grow from 3-5'. The striking foliage is huge, (1-2' x 10") fuzzy with deep purple veins. The trunk, branches and mid-rib of the leaves are covered with fine, but very prickly thorns. The dusty mauve flowers are 3" across and have a thick fuzzy texture. Our Naranjilla bloomed most of the summer, but did not set any fruit. Authorities claim it is very hard to fruit in northern climates. Fruit or no fruit, the plant is an absolute show stopper.

Naranjilla is native to the cool regions of the Andes where it receives 50 - 150 inches of rain a year. These conditions are hard to duplicate in this country. However, it made a very showy addition to our garden this summer and a smaller one is



growing in the greenhouse. The plant needs full sun, and lots of moisture. Its size can be controlled by pot size, ours in a 6" pot has a limited spread of 12". Under ideal conditions it can bear fruit within 6 months from seed.

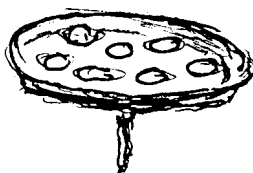
The 1-3" fruits are round and orange-yellow. The pulp is green and said to be delicious. It can be eaten fresh, made into ice cream, cooked in pies, etc. Juice made from the pulp was called, "Nectar of the Gods"². In Colombia they make a tasty liqueur from the juice.



We have ordered seeds and if and when they come we will offer them to our membership. Germination is easy. Sow the seeds as you would tomatoes, in small flats or jiffy pellets. A little bottom heat would speed things up, but is not necessary. If you do not have space for this plant in the house, sow the seeds in March and transplant to a sunny, well drained location in the garden.

Naranjilla is a gorgeous plant and a breeze to grow.

1. Two wonderful reference books are on-line. [The Lost Crops of the Incas](#) and Julia Morton's [Fruits for Warm Climates](#)
2. J. L. Hudson Seed Catalog, Star Rt.2 Box 337, La Honda CA 94020 \$1.00



Lotus pod

PIT PROJECT: *Lotus- Nymphaea odorata*

Matt Sheehan, a local nurseryman suggested this growing project to the Pits. Take a dried lotus pod and remove the seeds. The pod resembles a shower head. Florists are full of these for dried arrangements and will happily give you a damaged pod. Place the seed (belly button side up) in the rounded part of a pair of pliers. Using coarse sandpaper or a hack saw, gently scour the seed until you see either a green or white inside. Put the seed in a jar of water and put in a warm place. The seeds, should germinate in a couple of weeks.

The pods are probably from our native *N. odorata* that is hardy to all parts of the US where there are at least 2 months of 80-90 degree weather. They are large plants but can be grown in a lined whiskey keg that has 6" of soil at the bottom.

Matt germinated his seed from a pod he used 25 years ago in a wreath he made for his grandmother. Try it, it should be fun.

ROOT CUTTINGS

Naranjilla was probably the favorite curiosity in our garden and we want to keep it going for next years garden. We were distressed when it failed to set seed and digging it up did not seem a reasonable alternative. It was far too large to fit in the house, let alone all the prickers involved in transplanting such a monster. We came across the following description of "root cuttings" and think we'll give it a try. We lopped off the foliage and dug up the roots. Many are the size of a pencil. Member Joseph Mule has used this technique and says it not only works, but is easy. Good Luck

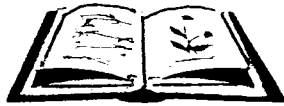
Root Cuttings It is a surprise to gardeners that many plants grown as annuals can be carried over and repropagated as sections of root, even when they are only single sections as thick, or less, than a pencil, with no crown or stem or bunch of leaves attached. Preeminent in this class are members of the family Solanaceae—petunias, nicotianas, and daturas—all of which produce thick fleshy roots and sometimes, as with nicotianas, small swellings or tubercles that remind us of their relationship to potatoes. ~~But any annual that is thick of root, or that will~~ sometimes show small plantlets about its base when disturbed by a trowel, is worth repropagating by root cuttings. Sometimes the technique is a great convenience, as with *Datura meteloides*, which may not set viable seed in cool gardens, and if it does produce seed, will flower a month after plants propagated by root cuttings. Sometimes also, as with the very rare variegated and double-flowered nicotianas, or the fine large-flowered form of *Nicotiana langsdorffii* bred at Sissinghurst, root cuttings may be the only way to preserve the strain in a pure form. The attempt is also fascinating in itself, adding one more to the good gardener's many skills, and it is not actually very difficult to do.

After frost has blackened the foliage of most annuals, those from which one wishes to take root cuttings should be carefully dug, and the fattest and starchiest roots put aside. (If they are warty, swollen, or lumpy, so much the better, for those may be sure signs of plantlets to come.) The roots should be kept moist, in a plastic bag or with a shovelful of earth, until they can be cut with a sharp knife or razor blade into sections approximately three inches long. It is from the top of the section that the new plants will usually come, and so it is important to know which end is which. Old gardeners made a straight cut across the top end, and a slanted one across the bottom, to avoid this confusion. The root cuttings are then placed in damp sand, or even in a plastic bag of barely moistened peat, and kept quite cool, just above freezing, until the days turn toward spring. They are then inserted into a sterile potting mix, with the top end just below the level of the soil. The mix should be kept evenly moist and warm until little plants begin to appear. The sections of root can then be lifted carefully, potted singly, and grown on as one would any new seedling.

Annuals for Connoisseurs, Wayne Winterrowd, Prentice Hall, NY, NY 10021, P. 189

Unfortunately this small gem of a book is out of print. If you can get it, it is well worth the price. Marvelous tender perennials, a few real annuals and lots of propagating tips.

BOOK REVIEW



The Herbfarm Cookbook. Jerry Traunfeld.
Pp 448. Scribners, NY, N.Y. 10020. 2000.
US \$ 40, Can \$ 59.

Minted Orange and Red Onion Salad, Smoked Salmon Benedict, Chicken Filets in Tarragon Cream Sauce, and Raspberry and Rose Geranium Sorbet. Sounds like a Millennium Celebration Dinner when actually it is just a few of the recipes in this book. The Herbfarm Cookbook is much more than a cookbook. It is also a very fine herbal with charts of what herb goes with what fish or vegetable, how to store, dry, and how to use.

Jerry Traunfeld is executive chef a highly acclaimed restaurant near Seattle and grows all his own herbs. We will concentrate on the back fourth of the book where he describes 27 herbs and edible flowers.

For example: English Thyme is described and it is pointed out that it is a low evergreen shrub in the mint family. How it is used in cooking is noted with the comment that it can be added to food at any time unlike herbs like basil which should not be added until the end of cooking. Thyme varieties are noted with the caveat that cultivars with variegated leaves generally have less taste. Growing conditions, how to harvest and how to store are noted.

A chart on growing requirements lists common name, botanic name, family, life cycle (annual, biennial or perennial), USDA hardiness zone, height, pruning, number of

plants for an average kitchen and special growing requirements. A surprising number of these plants can be grown in northern climes but some may have to be potted and brought in. Many do not do well in the humid southeast and some such as bay laurel which is a zone 8 tree are poorly suited to much of this country. Bye-the-way did you know that California Bay or Umbellularia californica, the source of those Christmas wreaths, is unrelated and contains a toxin Umbellulone. We confess that we have been using it and haven't gotten sick. Perhaps if we switch to the real thing our spelling will improve.

A second chart on cooking with fresh herbs lists: name, part used, flavor characteristics, average amount for six servings, foods it goes well with and best herbal partners. Twelve mail order sources of plants and seeds are listed in the back. There are 16 beautiful illustrations of herb plants for those needing help with identification.

Any draw backs? We can't all have an outdoor herb garden but many of these can be grown on a window sill. Also, fresh herbs are increasingly available on super market shelves. Finally Mr. Traunfeld fails to address the perennial (silly) question which is. Is the "H" in herb pronounced or silent?

John Hart

Ed: "H" we once wrote an article about Herbert the Herbalist, not Erbert the Erbalist.

Answer to last month's Acrosspit - from My Garden Book, by Jamaica Kincaid:

Quotation: I discovered a book by ... Oakes Ames called "Jottings of a Harvard Botanist"

A) Jonathan	G) Also	M) Ingot	S) Roots	Y) Obsess
B) Avocado	H) Keillor	N) detests	T) ditto	Z) Kaffir
C) Motte	I) Ivory	O) Market	U) Either	
D) Abbot	J) Need	P) Yggdrasil	V) Nine	
E) Ionic	K) Canistel	Q) Grotto	W) Buddha	
F) Chough	L) Appeased	R) Agio	X) Otiose	

These are all the rage and there is no reason to be limited to a Peace Lily. Try ginger, cardamom, turmeric, or lemon grass. (All low-light)

BETA BOWL
for lack of a better name.



You will need:

- One 10 3/8" Standard florist urn
- One 3" vinyl saucer - make sure it is deep. Available at Kennedy's.
- One male Beta (Siamese Fighting Fish)
- One Peace Lily *Spathiphyllum* in a 4" pot.
- A collection of stones, glass, shells etc. to put in the bottom of the container. **Do not use beach stones or shells. Too much salt.** These are purely aesthetic, to cover waste and enhance the container.
- 1 qt. Clean water.

Use tap water and let it stand in a shallow container for 12 hours. **Do not use bottled water-too many chemicals.**

The day before:

1. Prepare the water.
2. Wash the roots of the peace lily thoroughly. Shake off as much soil as you can, then use a garden hose to flush off the rest of the soil. It is very hard to get off all the soil. Let the roots soak in water overnight and rinse again the next day.
3. Make a 2" round hole in the bottom of the vinyl saucer. Use a glue gun (without glue) or a heated heavy duty kitchen fork. You are going to have to pull the roots through the hole, but you want enough of the bottom left to contain your planting stones.

Planting the container

1. Line the bottom of the urn with about 1/2" of stones or shells etc.
2. Fill the urn to about 1/2 full with water that has been cured. (Urn holds 1/2 gal and fish are in 2 cups of water.)
3. Gently pour in the fish with the water he has been sitting in.
4. Gently pull the roots of the plant through the saucer. Tug down to get as many roots through as possible. Place stones around the plant to secure it in the saucer.
5. The level of the water should be 2" away from the base of the saucer. Roots should hang down into the water.
6. Place the container in a bright location, but away from direct sunlight.

Care the fish:

Betas are low maintenance fish. They live in the swamps of Thailand and are not too fussy about their conditions. **However, they do need to be fed.** Living off the roots is pure starvation! Feed them a couple of grains of special food 2-3 times a week.

Never put another fish in with your beta. Fighting fish is not a misnomer-they will eat any neighbors you give them.

Cleaning the urn: Their waste helps to fertilize the plant, but a build of uric acid is not good for fish or plant. Use a bulb baster to suck out the water in the bottom of the urn - this is where the waste is deposited. Take out a couple of cup fulls. Add a couple of cup fulls of cured water to the urn. This should be done every six weeks or more often. Of course, if you have a small fish net that will fit in the neck of the bottle, scoop out the fish with 2 cups of his water, scrub the bowl and fill with 24 hour aged water.

Temperature: Both plant and fish are happiest at temperatures from 70- 80 degrees.