

Hold a Garden in Your Hands

For yourself, or for a garden-loving friend, give the book “Flowers and Herbs of Early America” by Lawrence D. Griffith with photography by Barbara Temple Lombardi. This treasure is published by colonial Williamsburg foundation in association with Yale University Press, New Haven and London.

The author is curator of plants for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and conducts ongoing research into the origin of these old plants so, as you would expect, the text contains a wealth of history. For example, the flower pictured on the book’s jacket, “Love-in-a-Mist”, *Nigella damascena*, appeared in England around 1570 and acquired its second name, ‘damascena’ because it was thought to have originated in Damascus, Syria. Closer to home, Love-in-a-Mist is mentioned in a Boston ad in 1760.

Because Lawrence Griffith, an accomplished gardener, obtained and grew these historical plants, information about each flower and herb is developed not only historically but horticulturally with instructions for propagation and use. The beguiling stories germane to each plant are partnered by the pictures. A staff photographer with Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Barbara Lombardi’s work is art, her camera catching the singular beauty of each subject.

Adding to the interest there are illustrations from some of the earliest herbals, from the 16th century onward. I was delighted to read about one old favorite that I had been told would not survive our summer heat. Indeed it does, as Thomas Jefferson grew it! *Calendula* has had centuries of medicinal importance and in a resurgence of interest, the flower petals are being used in salads or as an alternative to expensive saffron in rice dishes. *Calendula*, pot marigold or Marygold is on my list. I hope I can find some seeds as I would rather plant them outside in fall rather than risk killing the seedlings by planting them in the dimmer light inside.

This book should come with a warning: “prepare to create a garden and plant everything featured”. The book itself will be read and reread. It is truly a ‘keeper’.

Cabbages & Kings

Reading a well-regarded pundit recently who celebrated the availability of coal, (no mention of mountain top removal) and the oil from shale fields in Canada (no mention of the loss of the carbon absorbing forest) I thought: “He is answering the wrong question!” We do HAVE energy, all but a small percentage based on fossil fuel. The supply is not infinite and as the world’s overpopulation results in increased demand, availability will become a problem. However the immediate problem is USE of these fossil fuels with the resultant warming of the planet as confirmed by thousands of scientists.

The recent storm with its economic damage to Southeastern Virginia is but a small instance showing that climate change is not a future concern but a present one.

As the Greenland and West Antarctic ice sheets accelerate their shrinkage sea levels rise worldwide. This threatens rice crops, food for millions. Not only ice sheets are shrinking but also glaciers.

Melting glaciers may not interest us since we don't have any in our state but for those places where glaciers are melting, it means without water there is less food. The disappearance of glaciers in the Himalayas will reduce the flow of water in the Indus, Ganges, Yangtze and Yellow Rivers during the dry season reducing the irrigation needed for food crops. When we consider that among wheat producers China is #1 and India is #2 and most of the wheat crop irrigation dependent, we can see the connection between climate warming and food.

In India as the original glaciers retreat, farmers are struggling to create new ones. Working in a boulder-strewn high desert area, they are creating rock lined holding ponds. They divert the unneeded fall and winter runoff into the ponds where it freezes and melts early enough to rescue farmers from a dry spring. Farmers have been planting later since the glaciers are now too high to melt early and there is no longer snow cover in the valleys. Crops don't mature if planted too late. These artificial glaciers would have been a solution had not the ponds and earthworks been wiped out by unprecedented floods. Undeterred, these farmers are studying ways to built better artificial glaciers. It costs more money than they have but they are hoping for "climate justice, a term we are hearing more frequently as people in poor countries suffer the first effects of the climate change resulting from the rich countries' unrestricted use of fossil fuels. As owners of a single planet, are we responsible for our breakage?