



Bermuda Botanical Society

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MAY NEWSLETTER 2015 FROM THE EDITOR

Some two-three years ago, when I was madly keen on bread-making (in a machine, needless to say) I raided Lindo’s Devonshire for all kinds of flours and seeds from Bob’s Red Mill. Most of the latter were far too heavy – my loaves sank depressingly and resulted in indigestible lumps – and, spotting the packet of golden flaxseed, my husband told me that flax was very bad for prostate problems. Consequently the 1-lb package of flaxseed remained in my freezer until March this year, when we were expecting house guests and I emptied the freezer to make room for soups and casseroles. The flax I flung out on the grass as birdseed.

Two months later – last week, in fact – I walk outside and spot a small but exquisite light blue flower on a tall stalk, and I spot more of those stalks growing in the grass. The next morning there are two flowers open, and many more stalks. I take a picture and email it to Lisa Greene, who tells me it looks like a flax plant, and advises me to check with the Internet.

And yes! I have a forest of flax plants, with pretty blue flowers. Now who would have thought that seeds for bread-making, kept in the freezer for 2-3 years, would still be immediately viable?



Should I, perhaps, buy packets of Chia and sesame seeds, barley and buckwheat, cast them to the winds, and see what springs up in the months to come?

Helle Patterson
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THE REAL STORY ON LICHENS! BY LISA GREENE

On the walk at Government House, I gave incorrect information about lichens. I don’t remember exactly what I said on the walk, but I think I may have said that lichens feed on dead bark. Fortunately, someone queried me on it, and I am taking this opportunity to give you the correct information, very much simplified because there is still a lot that is not

understood about lichens. For a full understanding of the complex partnership that is a lichen, you will have to turn to books or the Internet, I’m afraid.

Lichens are the growths that are commonly seen on tree and shrub branches and palm trunks in Bermuda. On trees and shrubs they

are often the 3-dimensional lichens that look like coarse, wiry growth; on palms they are often the 2-dimensional ones that look like circular patches on the trunks.

Lichens are made up of two organisms that live together cooperatively in a partnership: a fungus and an alga (and/or a cyanobacterium). It is generally thought that the fungus provides the structure for the alga to live in, absorbs moisture and nutrients from the atmosphere, and often anchors the lichen; the alga or cyanobacterium contains chlorophyll and manufactures carbohydrates.

From Wikipedia: “Lichens do not have roots that absorb water and nutrients as plants do. Instead they produce their own food from sunlight, air, water, and minerals in their environment. When they grow on plants, they do not live as [parasites](#) but use the plants only

as a substrate.” According to the North Carolina State University Cooperative Extension Service, “When lichens are found growing on trees or shrubs, it may simply be a sign that a plant is naturally slow growing, such as Japanese maple, or that it is an older plant that is not growing at a vigorous rate. Lichens do not harm the plants they grow upon, but often plants that are struggling will be covered in them. When lichens are found growing prolifically on a plant that also has lots of dead twigs and branches it is usually a sign that something more serious is wrong. Lichen are rarely found on healthy, fast growing trees and shrubs because they are always shedding bark, making it difficult for lichen to attach. If you have a tree or shrub that has recently been inhabited by lichen, and this has been accompanied by loss of leaves and dying stems, there is a very good chance your plant is not healthy.”

GOVERNMENT HOUSE WALK

At the end of March Lisa Greene led members of BBS on a walk through the grounds of Government House. She had prepared very thoroughly for this, and we were delighted with the knowledge she imparted. As one member of the group said to me, “I just like listening to her. She is so knowledgeable.” So kudos to Lisa for an educative and thoroughly enjoyable afternoon.





HUMMINGBIRDS IN BERMUDA

BY LISA GREENE

On the 29th of April, David Wingate reported four (4!!) hummingbirds in his garden – two male and two female ruby-throated hummingbirds. He said that they were feeding on the flowers of four plants: *Justicia secunda* (Father John), *Erythrina* (sword tree), nasturtium (*Tropaeolum majus*) and gladiola (*Gladiolus*) – the naturalized soldier glad, I believe.

If you would like to encourage hummingbirds to your garden by providing food for them, here are some additional plants that grow well in Bermuda and are known to attract hummingbirds elsewhere.

Lonicera sempervirens

Justicia secunda

Justicia brandegeana

Ruttya fruticosa

Asclepias curassavica

Salvia coccinea

Salvia spp.

Aloe vera and *Aloe abroscens*

Monarda

Callistemon citrinus

Cinnamomum camphor

Holmskioldia sanguinea

Passiflora suberosa

Red honeysuckle

Father John

Shrimp plant

Jammy mouth

Milkweed

Scarlet sage

Salvia

Aloe

Bee balm

Bottlebrush

Camphor tree

Chinese hat plant

Inkberry

Mirabilis jalapa
Russelia equisetiformis
Sophora tomentosa
Odontonema tubaeforme
Campsis radicans

Four o'clocks
Mexican heath
Coast sophora
Odontonema
Trumpet vine

The following is from a University of Florida IFAS Extension Service publication about the hummingbirds of Florida:

“Adult hummingbirds feed primarily on nectar. ... The ideal flower colour is red, orange, or pink. Hummingbirds are not born with an attraction to certain colours but learn by trial and error which flowers give the best results. ... Tubular flowers that are either large and solitary or in loose drooping clusters are best. Generally, tubular flowers hold large amounts of nectar at their base.”

Let us know if you have any success! Post a photo on the Society’s Facebook page or send me an email (elgreene@ibl.bm) or call 293 2727 x 2123!

NASTURTIUM: THE MORE YOU LOOK . . .

BY GEORGE PETERICH

The plant nasturtium was described first by Linnaeus, who gave it the name *Tropaeolum majus*. The genus *Nasturtium* is used for a totally different plant, namely Watercress, *Nasturtium officinalis* (see below: Trivium No.12), which does have the pungent taste in common with nasturtium.

The Greeks had the custom to take the shields and the helmets of their conquered enemies home and hang them there on a tree as a trophy (tropion). Linné chose the name *Tropaeolum* because the leaves of the plant look like a shield. It can be argued that the flowers have the shape of a helmet, but they are more like a Phrygian hat.

Incidentally when you look up what the botanical term for this shape of leaf is (also found for example on Lotus) you’ll find they are called peltate, which is also derived from a Greek word: “peltè” is a word for shield.

When looking at nasturtiums on the roadside, we get the general impression that the flowers are orange or yellow. Looking closer we find a great variety of colours, from the palest yellow to the darkest red, even some salmon pink and a dark brownish red.

Burt that’s not all: on close inspection all flowers, except the very dark ones, have patterns in contrasting colours, that look as if someone has meticulously applied a paintbrush to them. The

variety and the beauty are incredible. It does not take much time to collect a bunch of at least ten totally different flowers. What they have in common, of course, is the anatomy of the flowers. To fully understand that, we would have to dissect a flower, which is of course what anatomy does. The flowers have five petals and also five sepals; a couple of them are fused together at the base, giving the shape of the “helmet”



Here I mainly wanted to point out the esthetical value of the nasturtium. I advise you to go and collect a few of these marvellous flowers and enjoy them in a small vase on your table at home. They will last a few days.

The more you look – the more you see!

TRIVIUM #12

BY GEORGE PETERICH

Three very useful Latin words, that we frequently see as epithets after a genus:

officinalis: of the kitchen, or used in the kitchen

edulis: edible

utilis: useful



We apologise for the lateness of this newsletter, scheduled for the beginning of May. The President was unavailable for her usual welcome, and some articles had to be omitted because they were submitted in .pdf form and could not be adapted to the newsletter. These will appear in a later issue.

