



Bermuda Botanical Society

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FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER 2011 FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PLANTER

Kindly allow me to wish you all a healthy, hope-filled New Year that is 'seasoned' (pun intended) with an abundance of memorable botanical experiences during this our 25th anniversary year.

The winds may be howling and the rain 'a-pouring' but botanical life is still abundant both above and below ground here within our archipelago of Bermuda.

Loquats are maturing on the boughs and many Surinam Cherry trees are in bloom. Hopefully we will have a bumper crop to line the shelves once again of local preserve makers.

Check with Aberfeldy or Parks Dept which plants you can pop in your garden to bring back 'the bees'.

In January we were rather fortunate to be educated by Matthew Bradfield a PhD student from BIOS who spoke to a gathering of 18 members about Sargasso Sea algae and his research into a specific strain for extracting biodiesel. He went on to answer a barrage of excellent questions about the effects on the environment and economy etc. The President called upon Vice President Barry Gibbons to give our vote of thanks.

Thanks again to member Sonje Bremar for proving some of her organic earthy seaweed-wrapped edibles for our January members meeting. Please don't hesitate to share from your culinary expertise for our monthly meetings.

Peter Lee, Sonje Bremar and Quincy Burgess are part of our line-up of speakers over the

next several months. So please stand by for any monthly updates.

It was an honour to have organised the first Annual President's Thanksgiving Dinner and a big thank you to Barritts, Burrows Lightbourne, SuperMart, Hunts Family Foods, The Cake Shop, Butterfield & Vallis and Goslings who all gave to make the event a success. Thank you to Marijke & George, Barry & Nigel who did a great job on that special night and we look forward to the next.

By now most of you will have witnessed the 'raping' of the land along Point Finger Rd which was rezoned for the new hospital development. We can only hope that there will be no further encroachment into the Botanical Gardens and that they will be protected for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike for centuries to come.

Please submit your ideas for store merchandise to the VC and if you are interested in volunteering as an Executive Member, Tour Guide, yearly Stock Taking, or helping out at the annual events Plant Sale, Fall Event or Thanksgiving Dinner, please submit a short biography to the Visitor's Centre with "Attention Mr. President".

We are still in need of a Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer so kindly spread the word or come introduce yourself to us with your bio.

Yours in Botanicals,

Paul Harney

President

2010-2011



SPOONWORT

BY GEORGE PETERICH

In May 1597 two ships set sail from Holland to the North to find the northeast passage to the East Indies.

Somewhere north of Norway and Russia they went separate ways. One of the ships under the command of Jacob van Heemskerck and Willem Barentsz got stuck in the ice on the coast of the Northeastern tip of Nova Zembla. It was the end of August and soon it was certain that they would not be able to leave anymore. This was the start of an epic battle for survival. The men had to spend the winter in a house that they built from driftwood and from planks that were taken from the ship. There were some dangerous encounters with polar bears and they caught some polar foxes that could be eaten as a welcome change from the regular diet of salted meat and bacon (and the pelt was used for making bonnets).

Total darkness set in at the end of October and lasted for several months. The men mostly stayed inside. Some of them died.

In January the sun finally appeared above the horizon, which was a cause of great joy, but the troubles were far from over. It still took several months until the temperature rose enough to melt some of the ice so that open water could be seen. However, the ship was now pushed away further from the open water by the drifting ice.

The situation got worse by the day and finally, at the end of May, Heemskerck made the decision to leave in the sloops.

It was not an easy task to get them ready to sail, as they had to fight off the bears constantly, a battle that went on as they started

off, pulling the boats across the ice to the open water. With them they took two very sick men. One of them was Willem Barentz. When they reached open waters they had to fight heavy seas. Willem Barentz felt his end was near and passed away leaving his men in great sorrow. His body was committed to the waters that to this day bear his name.

Now they were without their navigator, but continued southward and reached an island where they met some Russian fishermen, who were quite friendly and with whom they exchanged some clothes (of which they wore many layers) for food.



Looking around the island they made an important discovery. They found SPOONWORT, a wonderful remedy for scurvy! The men ate it by the handful and the effect was so strong that soon they were able to eat ship's biscuits ("hardtack") again.

The name Scurvy grass tells it all, although it must be of a later date than Spoonwort. It is in the genus *Cochlearia* in which there are almost 30 species. One of them is the Arctic kind, which was probably the one that the sailors found. *Cochlearia* belongs to the family

Cruciferae. Here in Bermuda Scurvy grass can be found on the beaches, in the dunes, and on rocks close to the ocean. The plant is related to the mustard plant. The leaves of the scurvy grass are a bit fleshy and indeed have a somewhat pungent taste. I would advise you not to pick too much of it, but just a few leaves to add interest to a salad. After all scurvy is not a modern concern.



THANKSGIVING/25TH ANNIVERSARY



On Thanksgiving Day the Bermuda Botanical Society had its first President's Thanksgiving/25th anniversary Dinner, which was a huge success. The food (from the Supermart) was delicious, George Peterich carved like a pro and Paul Harney dished the mac and cheese and peas & rice, and a good time was had by all.



THE BBS CHRISTMAS PARTY



Organisers Nigel Chudleigh & Marijke Peterich



Visitors' Centre Manager Patricia Best & grandson



PLANT GROWERS WANTED!

BY NIGEL CHUDLEIGH

Our annual BBS Plant Sale is planned for Saturday 29 October 2011. This may seem like a long way ahead, but it's not too early to start slower growing perennials so they are of a decent size by time of the sale. Now is a good time as Spring is almost upon us!



Plants can be propagated from seed, cuttings, division, air & ground layering or, for the more adventurous, grafting and budding.

The easiest way is to dig up any interesting seedlings that may have self sown in your garden, or clumping plants that need dividing. You just have to pot them and grow them on. This needs doing well ahead of the sale so that the plants are well established and actively growing by time of the sale - these will sell much better than plants that look as if they were potted only yesterday!

It would be great if there are any members who specialize in any particular plant type who would undertake to provide a few plants of their specialty. Perhaps such members could recruit one or more fellow aficionados to pitch in. Specialities that come to mind include African Violets, Orchids, House Plants, Bonsai, Roses, Hibiscus etc..

If any would-be propagators are inhibited by lack of pots, let me know - I have a good supply of 1-gallon pots, thanks to the response to an earlier appeal through the Newsletter. Just call me at 293-0128.

IT'S ANNUAL EXHIBITION TIME AGAIN

BY LISA GREENE

The deadline for entering is Friday March 11th. Don't forget to get your entry form in and your entries ready.

The Annual Exhibition is to be held April 14, 15 and 16, 2011 and catalogues are now available. Contact the Exhibition Office at 236-5902 ext. 2351 or

exhibition@logic.bm to learn more about entry details and deadlines for this year's Annual Exhibition.

If you have internet you can download a catalogue by going to <http://www.bdaexhibition.bm/portal/server.pt>

THE FLOWERS OF JAMAICAN DOGWOOD, *DODONEA VISCOSA*

“The flowers, which grow at the ends of the branches, are either male or female, and individual plants generally bear one or the other (in which case plants of both sexes are required for successful reproduction). In other cases, however, they may bear flowers of both sexes. The pollen is transported by the wind, and the lack of petals maximizes exposure to the breeze. The female flowers, after pollination, develop into 3 or 4 winged papery capsules, each with 2-3 black seeds. These capsules turn red or purple as the fruit matures.”



Excerpted from the Kew Gardens Plants and Fungi (<http://www.kew.org/plants-fungi/index.htm>)

Excerpted from Nature Magazine, Vol 468, 2 Dec 2010:

Plants check global warming.

“Plants’ response to a twofold increase in atmospheric carbon dioxide could put a much stronger brake on global warming than expected. Greater vegetation growth in hotter, wetter climates leads to more evaporation and transpiration from leaves and therefore more heat loss from land. ... “

Do your part to reduce global warming – plant lots of plants now!

“A wreath was laid at the Cenotaph [London] on Remembrance Sunday, 12 November 2010, by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary,

on behalf of the UK Overseas Territories. As usual the wreath was made by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. ... [It was] the only wreath of natural foliage laid at the Cenotaph. All other wreathes are made at the Poppy Factory. ... Sprigs and flowers from... the Gardens were collected.” The plants chosen to represent Bermuda were the Bermuda cedar (*Juniperus bermudiana*) and Bermuda snowberry (*Chiococca bermudiana*). There are 12 UK Overseas Territories.

Excerpted from the UKOT’s newsletter *Forum*, December 2010



THE FRUIT OF NIGHT-BLOOMING CEREUS

BY HELLE PATTERSON

Last year Lisa Greene asked whether anyone had seen a fruit on a night-blooming cereus (*Hylocereus undatus*) in recent times, as these plants used to fruit frequently in her childhood. I'd been cultivating mine for years but had never found anything once the glorious flowers had died, so I did more than a double take when, last October, one of my last faded blooms seemed to take an extraordinarily long time to drop off. When I went to take a closer look, sure enough! – there was a bud. Gradually over time the bud reddened, and when it finally softened I cut it open:



I'm told that the flesh is edible, but I don't like jelly-like pulp, so did not taste it. That's up to someone more adventurous! Lisa, meanwhile, is wondering which moth or other night insect pollinates this plant, and whether there has been a reintroduction to account for several reported fruits in recent seasons.



Need somewhere to host your next event??

Look no further.....

The Visitors' Centre located in the heart of the beautiful Botanical Gardens is the perfect venue

It has a central location and off road parking

For more information please email

botanicalrentals@gmail.com or call 236-5291

A NOVEL TECHNIQUE WITH TOMATOES

BY NIGEL CHUDLEIGH



This technique, a variant of the Ring Culture method, is based on the fact that tomatoes (*Solanum lycopersicum*) have two kinds of roots. The long tap roots penetrate deeply into the ground and primarily seek out and absorb water.

The other kind of roots are finer and shorter, grow from the stem just below ground level and are responsible for most of the nutrient uptake. These finer roots will grow from any part of the stem below ground level. The object is to cause the plants to grow more of these nutrient-absorbing roots by progressively burying more of the stem in the soil.

The lower leaves are snipped off a young tomato plant, leaving just three or four leaves below the growing tip. Then a sprinkle of potting mix is placed on the bottom of a 1-gallon pot, the plant positioned and then further compost added to fill the pot up to the lowest remaining leaf and substantially more of the stem is now

below the compost surface. Having “leggy” seedlings is actually no drawback with this method.

After further growth, the plant is planted out in the garden or into its final container. Again, the lower leaves are removed (see picture above). Dig a hole in the soil or potting compost about 6-8 inches deep, place the plant, backfill with soil and firm in.

Now cut the bottom out of the one-gallon, or larger, pot, making a cylinder open at both ends. Place this over the plant, gently “screwing” the cylinder about half an inch into the soil surface. Add more soil or potting mix inside the cylinder to bring the level up to the lowest leaf. Water in and place staking or cage for the vine (picture at right).



As the plant grows, more lower leaves can be removed and soil added until the soil level inside the cylinder is an inch or two below the rim, thus leaving room for watering and fertilizing.

Grow on with normal tomato cultural practice. Remember, experts say that the three commonest mistakes in home tomato growing are over-crowding, over-watering and over-fertilizing.

This technique of stem-burying could also be tried with other solanaceous plants (peppers, egg-plant) or indeed any plant that you see has a tendency to put out roots from the lower stem.



The Botanical Society is partnering with Somersfield Academy to present a lecture:

Planting and maintaining a butterfly garden at home (or at school).

Sunday, March 13th at Somersfield Academy, in the afternoon.

Presenters Lisa Greene and Dorte Horsfield will also touch on biodiversity, sustainable gardening, pollinators and

adaptations, using the butterfly garden at Somersfield Academy as a model.

To register: email (preferable) Lisa Greene at elgreene@ibl.bm or call her at 297 1804.

Spaces are limited.

Fees: \$5 for Botanical Society members or Somersfield "family" members, \$10 for non-members.



The Visitors' Centre's children's corner is proving to be a delightful and entertaining focus for our younger visitors



UPCOMING EVENTS

- Feb. 27** **Visitors' Centre, Botanical Gardens.** Interesting speaker – watch for flyers and Bermuda Calendar in the newspaper for details
- March 13** **Somersfield Academy.** *See information above.*
- April 24** **Visitors' Centre, Botanical Gardens.** Another interesting speaker - more information to follow.