

#14 July 2019

# Green Thoughts

*Conversations and ideas about growing at The Spring Gardens*

My handwriting has never been the best. Recently I misread a note/reminder I had left for myself. I thought it said - “Bring

*Disappointments*

mirth to the plot.” A nice request, in a league with - whistle while you work. On closer inspection what I

*Edible*

*Flowers*

really had written was more prosaic “Bring mulch to the plot”.

Pedestrian rather than uplifting. It got me thinking about a gardening aspect we don’t usually bring up – disappointment. In gardening, we want to be cheerful and relish our successes but it doesn’t always happen.

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## **Disappointments**

So let’s talk about disappointment – anybody who has gardened has met failures. Mine started early. I grew up with my family in a small apartment. In early spring when I was a kid Kellogg's Rice Krispies (or some other brand) inserted a packet of flower seeds into each of their cereal boxes. I had a window box on the sill of my bedroom. The box contained soil. I put the seeds in the soil, watered the soil, and waited for flowers to emerge. Nothing happened. It was frustrating. I tried again the next year. No flowers, no plants. I never figured out why. I was 8 or 9 at the time. I didn’t think about my failure in any systematic way. But growing plants from seed seemed very difficult.

Here at the Spring Gardens I have regularly had success with the usual crops like tomatoes and green beans and lettuce and

peppers. So has everyone. As I have mentioned before, eggplant is something else. I have grown different varieties from seed or from bought plants. Over a long season I might harvest a few fruit but the plants tend to be scrawny. Nice purple flowers develop and then mostly fall off. But here is the thing – people in plots near me seem to have no trouble. They will grow the same variety and get much better results. I ask them questions about what they did and they just shrug their shoulders. So not only do I fail but I don’t know what I did wrong. Also, there is the social stigma of being in a community garden. My failures are for all to see. It is embarrassing!

Last year in Green Thoughts I wrote about my adventures growing asparagus. Asparagus is a hardy perennial and the same clump can keep going for 30 or more years. It was the second growing season since I planted the asparagus and they seemed to be

doing fine. One root clump in particular had produced many healthy stalks. I looked forward to 2019 to start selective harvesting. This year two other root clumps started sending up stalks but the really productive system from last year did nothing. Meanwhile my neighboring fellow gardener just north of us had started a set of roots the same year as we did. She is a very good gardener. This year Sarah Lyon's asparagus stalks were plentiful and sturdy. What happened to my asparagus? I was puzzled and yes, disappointed. I looked a bit closer. Winter rains had exposed that really good root clump - I had planted it too close to the surface and it was drying out. It was a big set-back but not a disaster. I applied mulch from my compost pile to cover the root system and it came back to life. The stalks were few and scrawny but I should be able to invigorate the root system over time with an extra thick layer of good soil.

I vividly remember my failures from times past. Many years ago I lived in the city of Ibadan, Nigeria in West Africa, where I was teaching. I lived on the ground floor of a government flat. There was an adjacent backyard available to me. Ibadan is at the edge of a lush rain forest. Put any stick in the ground and seemingly within a few weeks shoots will emerge from the stick and leaves will soon follow. Ibadan, a city of a million people, had great outdoor markets with all kinds of fruits and vegetables on sale. For some reason they did not sell cantaloupes, which I missed. A downtown store sold packets of cantaloupe seeds from east Africa. Surely I should be able to grow *these* seeds. I waited for the rainy season and sowed the seeds in the ground.

They germinated, seed leaves emerged from the ground, regular leaves followed and soon runners spread out. Flowers popped up along the runners. With warp speed fruits were set and I watched them grow into cantaloupes. The real thing. About 8 inches in diameter. Netting covered the outside of the fruits. The fruits ripened on the vine. The skin changed from green to tan. I could smell that wonderful cantaloupe aroma. I invited friends over to share the first fruit. I harvested and brought to the table the best looking fruit and ceremoniously split it in half. And there it was, palpable and mute. The flesh, a deep orange color, was very juicy and aromatic. Then we looked closer. The fruit was permeated with quarter inch long wiggly worms. So much for that. Perhaps the worms were edible, but I didn't know. Foiled again. [In Italy, mostly in Sardinia, there is a pecorino cheese called casu marzu that is purposely infused with live maggots. It is safe to eat as long as the maggots are still slithering around. On public health grounds the EU has banned the shipment of this cheese. With the lack of casu marzu combined with the threat of Brexit, it is hard being a European these days.]

I have a laundry list of disappointments but I'll stop here. I talked to fellow gardener Paul Buttner about his handling of disappointment. Paul is a matter-of-fact kind of person. He is not someone to dwell on these things. "Just plant something else," he suggested as he thinned and weeded his plot. Indeed.

## Edible Flowers

Our daughter works at the Gowanus Canal Conservancy trying to make a silk purse out of a Superfund site's sow's ear. She coordinates horticulture along that Brooklyn location and knows her plants. She was



getting married this past June and recruited us to bake wedding cakes for 180 people. She wanted the cakes to be adorned not with home-made marzipan flowers, which can be elegant and beautiful but when we have fashioned them in the past we colored them with highly dubious industrial dyes (vegetable-based dyes tend to be pale and look washed out). Instead, she wanted actual edible flowers on the cakes. This spring she gave us seeds of 8 different kinds of plants that produce edible flowers. It was hoped we could harvest flowers before the wedding. She wasn't sure which varieties would take and which would look good. I planted borage, cornflowers, dianthus, chamomile, nasturtium, calendula, pansies and violas.

Almost all varieties produced flowers on time and we had a nice mix (see nasturtium and calendula above). Pansies were particularly varied and sturdy. Here are the results:



Three-tiered butter cake with chocolate frosting (left); 10" x 20" lemon cake with lemon frosting (right). Cakes adorned with various edible flowers. At the base of each cake is a crowd of crystalized edible flowers.

On a completely different edible flower tack, it is July as I write this. Our zucchini plants are producing many large, gorgeous, orange-colored flowers. They too are edible. We follow the Italian custom of stuffing the flowers with cheese (we use hot pepper cheese), wetting them in a garlicky fritter batter spiced with oregano and frying them - *fiore di zucca fritti*. We have had several servings. Results - Divine.

## The latest on the resident bees

It has been a roller coaster ride for our Spring Garden bee keeper, Karen Cherubini. As reported last year in Green Thoughts, there was a sturdy new hive for the honey bees in the northeast corner of the Gardens. The bees seemed to be doing splendidly. There was lots of activity of foragers going in and out of the hive throughout the 2018 growing season. With the cold weather came

dormancy but great expectations for spring 2019. But then, no sign of bees. When the hive was opened up there was no evidence that honey had been stored up – a necessity for survival over the winter. And so the bees perished. Why things didn't work out for the colony is not clear. Bee forensics is more art than science.

A new set of bees was ordered but there was a delay and TSG was put on a waiting list. Meanwhile, a set of feral honey bees colonized the hive. Presumably a bee colony nearby had too large a population so a subset of the bees along with a new queen split with the rest of the colony. They seem to be doing well. Besides, they chose the hive rather than the hive choosing them. We wish them all the best and will monitor things from a discrete distance.

### **Pat Schuyler on best Planting times and Weeds of Pennsylvania**

Fellow Spring Gardener Pat writes in: *Hi Ed, I've attached a guide to when you should plant - from the Farmer's Almanac. When we do orientations, new gardeners are always asking what to plant and when. I have also attached a list of common Pennsylvania weeds. Strangely, it doesn't have bindweed. I use both guides quite a bit.*

## Master Gardeners Philadelphia Planting Guide

All Plants Are From Seed Unless Noted. Average Last Frost Date for the central parts of the city is April 20th. Higher and more outlying parts are a week or two later. Adjust recommended dates for warm weather crops accordingly.

	First Date	Plants	Last Date
<b>Cool</b>	Mid March	Peas, Fava Beans, Onions, Leeks, Garlic, Greens (Collards, Kale, Mustard, Turnip, Etc.) Turnips, White Potatoes, Cabbage	Mid April
	Late March	Lettuce*, Radishes*, Beets*, Carrots*	Mid May
	Late March	Shallots, Spinach*, Bok Choy, Parsley <b>Plants:</b> Cabbage Family (Broccoli, Collards, Etc) Leeks, Onions	Late April
	Early April	Swiss Chard, Beets	Mid June
	Mid April	Celery	Mid May
<b>Warm</b>	Early May	Watermelons, Winter Squash, Melons, Summer Squash, Cucumbers, Pumpkins <b>Plants:</b> Sweet Potato	Mid June
	Early May	Okra, Chinese Cabbage, Sweet Corn, Peanuts, Lima Beans	Late June
	Mid May	Beans (Bush, Pole, Shell, Dried)*	Mid July
	Mid May	Black Eyed Peas <b>Plants:</b> Eggplant, Peppers, Tomato, Basil, Gandules	Late June
<b>Cool</b>	Mid June	Collards, Cabbage Family, Celery	Early June

	First Date	Plants	Last Date
	Early July	Carrots, Beets, Swiss Chard <b>Plants:</b> Cabbage Family (Broccoli etc.)	Mid August
	Mid July	Radish*, Spinach*	September
	Early August	Salad Greens*, Greens (Mustard etc.), Peas	Early September
	Early September	Garlic (for spring harvest) <b>Cover crop:</b> Hairy Vetch, Annual Rye Grass, Oats	Early October

\*Plant seed every 2 weeks to extend harvest.

From Penn State Ag School:

## Broadleaf Weeds


Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	Aster, Whiteheath	<i>Aster pilosus</i>	
	Brambles	<i>Rubus spp.</i>	
	Buckwheat, Wild	<i>Polygonum convolvulus L.</i>	








Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	Burcucumber	<i>Sicyos angulatus</i>	
	Burdock, Common	<i>Arctium minus</i>	
	Buttercup, Tall	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	
	Butterfly-weed	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	
	Carrot, Wild	<i>Daucus carota</i>	<a href="#">Wild Carrot Video</a>
	Catchfly, Night-flowering	<i>Silene noctiflora</i>	
	Chickweed, Common	<i>Stallaria media</i> L.	<a href="#">Common Chickweed Video</a>








Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	Chickweed, Mouse Ear	<i>Cerastium vulgatum</i> L.	<a href="#">Mouse Ear Chickweed Video</a>
	Chicory	<i>Cichorium intybus</i> L.	
	Cinquefoil	<i>Potentilla</i> spp.	<a href="#">Cinquefoil Video</a>
	Clover, White	<i>Trifolium repens</i>	<a href="#">White Clover Video</a>
	Coltsfoot	<i>Tussilago farfara</i>	
	Cornmint	<i>Mentha arvensis</i>	
	Cucumber, Wild	<i>Echinocystis lobata</i>	










Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	<a href="#">Dandelion</a>	<i>Taraxacum officinale</i>	<a href="#">Dandelion Video</a>
	<a href="#">Dock, Broadleaf</a>	<i>Rumex obtusifolius</i>	<a href="#">Broadleaf Dock Video</a>
	<a href="#">Dock, Curly</a>	<i>Rumex crispus</i>	<a href="#">Curly Dock Video</a>
	<a href="#">Dogbane</a>	<i>Apocynum cannabinum</i>	
	<a href="#">Dogfennel</a>	<i>Eupatorium capillifolium</i>	
	<a href="#">Fern, Easter Bracken</a>	<i>Pteridium aquilinum var. latiusculum</i>	
	<a href="#">Evening Primrose,Cutleaf</a>	<i>Oenothera laciniata</i>	








Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	Galinsoga	<i>Galinsoga ciliata</i>	
	Geranium, Wild	<i>Geranium carolinianum</i>	
	Goldenrod, Canada	<i>Solidago canadensis</i>	
	Goosefoot, Nettleleaf	<i>Chenopodium murale</i>	
	Ground Cherry, Clammy	<i>Physalis heterophylla</i>	
	Groundsel	<i>Senecio vulgaris</i>	
	Hawkweed, Yellow	<i>Hieracium pratense</i>	








Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	<a href="#">Healall</a>	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	<a href="#">Healall Video</a>
	<a href="#">Henbit</a>	<i>Lamium amplexicaule</i>	<a href="#">Henbit Video</a>
	<a href="#">Horsetail, Field</a>	<i>Equisetum arvense</i>	
	<a href="#">Ivy, Ground</a>	<i>Glechoma hederaceae</i>	<a href="#">Ground Ivy Video</a>
	<a href="#">Ivy Poison</a>	<i>Toxicodendron radicans</i>	
	<a href="#">Jimsonweed</a>	<i>Datura stramonium</i>	
	<a href="#">Knotweed, Prostrate</a>	<i>Polygonum aviculare</i>	<a href="#">Prostrate Knotweed Video</a>

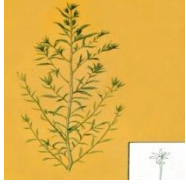






Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	Kochia	<i>Kochia scoparia</i>	
	Ladysthumb	<i>Polygonum persicaria</i>	
	Lambsquarter	<i>Chenopodium album</i>	
	Lettuce, Prickly	<i>Lactuca serriola</i>	
	Mallow	<i>Malva neglecta</i>	Mallow Video
	Marestalk	<i>Conyza canadensis</i>	
	Medic, Black	<i>Medicago lupulina</i>	Black Medic Video

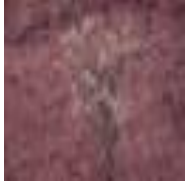






Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	Mayweed	<i>Anthemis cotula</i>	
	Milkweed	<i>Asclepias syriaca</i>	
	Morning-glory	<i>Ipomoea spp.</i>	
	Mugwort	<i>Artemisia vulgaris</i>	
	Nightshade, Bitter	<i>Solanum dulcamara</i>	
	Daisy, Ox-eye	<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>	
	Oxalis	<i>Oxalis spp.</i>	<a href="#">Oxalis Video</a>








Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	Passion-flower	<i>Passiflora incarnata</i>	
	Pea, Partridge	<i>Chamaecrista fasciculata</i>	
	Pear, Prickly	<i>Opuntia humifusa</i>	
	Pearlwort, Birdseye	<i>Sagina procumbens</i>	
	Pennycress, Field	<i>Thlaspi arvense</i>	
	Pigweed, Redroot	<i>Amaranthus retroflexus</i>	
	Pimpernel, Scarlet	<i>Anagallis arvensis</i> spp.	Scarlet Pimpernel Video








Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	<a href="#">Pineappleweed</a>	<i>Matricaria discoidea</i>	
	<a href="#">Plantain, Broadleaf</a>	<i>Plantago major</i>	<a href="#">Broadleaf Plantain Video</a>
	<a href="#">Plantain, Buckhorn</a>	<i>Plantago lanceolata</i>	<a href="#">Buckhorn Plantain Video</a>
	<a href="#">Pokeweed, Common</a>	<i>Phytolacca americana</i>	
	<a href="#">Purslane</a>	<i>Portulaca oleracea</i>	<a href="#">Purslane Video</a>
	<a href="#">Ragweed</a>	<i>Ambrosia</i> spp.	
	<a href="#">Redmaids, Fringed</a>	<i>Calandrinia ciliata</i>	








Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	<a href="#">Rocket, Yellow</a>	<i>Barbarea vulgaris arcuata</i>	<a href="#">Yellow Rocket Video</a>
	<a href="#">Sesbania, Hemp</a>	<i>Sesbania herbacea</i>	
	<a href="#">Shepherds-purse</a>	<i>Capsella bursa-pastoris</i>	
	<a href="#">Sicklepod</a>	<i>Senna obtusifolia</i>	
	<a href="#">Smartweed, Pennsylvania</a>	<i>Polygonum pennsylvanicum</i>	
	<a href="#">Snakeroot, White</a>	<i>Ageratina altissima</i>	
	<a href="#">Snow on the Mountain</a>	<i>Euphorbia marginata</i>	









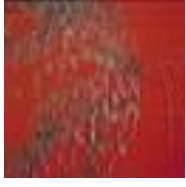
Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	Sorrel, Red Sheep	<i>Rumex acetosella</i>	
	Speedwell, Common	<i>Veronica officianalis</i>	
	Speedwell, Creeping	<i>Veronica filiformis</i>	<a href="#">Creeping Speedwell Video</a>
	Speedwell, Ivyleaf	<i>Veronica hederifolia</i>	
	Speedwell, Thymeleaf	<i>Veronica serpyllifolia</i>	<a href="#">Thymeleaf Speedwell Video</a>
	Spurge, Prostrate	<i>Euphorbia supina</i>	<a href="#">Prostrate Spurge Video</a>
	Spurge, Spotted	<i>Euphorbia maculata</i>	






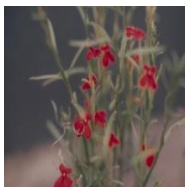

Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	Starbur, Bristly	<i>Acanthospermum hispidum</i>	
	Thistle, Bull	<i>Cirsium vulgare</i>	<a href="#">Bull Thistle Video</a>
	Thistle, Canada	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	<a href="#">Canada Thistle Video</a>
	Trefoil, Birdsfoot	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	
	Velvetleaf	<i>Abutilon theophrasti</i>	
	Verbena, Big-bract	<i>Verbena bracteata</i>	
	Verbena, Sandpaper	<i>Verbena bracteata</i>	

Image Gallery	Common Name	Binomial Name	Video Description
	Violet	<i>Viola papilionacea</i>	Violet Video
	Watermelon, Wild	<i>Citrullus lanatus</i>	
	Whitlowgrass, Early	<i>Draba verna</i>	
	Witchweed, Asiatic	<i>Striga asiatica</i>	
	Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	Yarrow Video

**Next issue:** Designs of plots at the Spring Gardens

Please send your ideas, thoughts, suggestions and observations to:

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that address can also be used for getting on the mailing list for **Green Thoughts**, or getting off.

Prepared by Ed Gruberg

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