

Academy Garden Club Thymes

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY GARDEN CLUB OF LENOX

MARCH 2020

Hello, Everyone!

The nicest thing about March is that the clocks move forward on March 8th, giving us one more hour of daylight, those dark and dreary late afternoons are over for this year. This week has been unbelievably warm! But, according to the Farmers' Almanac, March will be a bit colder than average and with more precipitation, that is snow, at least for the first half of the month. I can remember years ago planning on planting peas into my garden on St Patrick's Day, but haven't for quite a while, and probably not this year!

Even so, at our February meeting, Kathy De Vylder got us all ready for Spring with an excellent presentation on starting seeds. Thank you, Kathy! We also were able to collect \$133.00 to send off to the Lenox Food Pantry.

Writing this, I am watching the birds nibble at the last of the suet hung by my window. According to the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, it is time to take down the bird feeders. The bears, who love suet and black sunflower seeds, are waking up. The fun of having birds close up is over for this year. Consolation will be found. The Bulb Show opens at the Berkshire Botanical Garden on March 2nd, and also, there will be a really wonderful show of photography of trees in the Gallery.

Horticultural Column By Harriet Wetstone

Lavender is one of those plants that is treasured around the world and has been for time immemorial. As an herb, lavender has been in documented use for more than two thousand years. In ancient times, lavender was used for mummification and for perfume by the Egyptians and the Phoenicians. It is said that when the Tomb of Tutankhamun was first opened one could still discern the scent of lavender!

Our next meeting is March 10th at 7:00 pm at the Academy Building. We were to have a presentation on ticks which, sad to say, has been cancelled as our presenter had an unavoidable conflict, but Chris Ferraro was happy to step in and provide a presentation on Hydrangeas. It seems to me that there are new cultivars every season, and I will be very happy to have a chance to sort out which ones work best for the Berkshires and how best to place, plant and care for them and how best to sort out the mysteries of pruning them!



See you all March 10th, at 7:00 pm!

Harriet Wetstone
President

The Romans used lavender oils for bathing, cooking and scenting the air. The word 'lavender' can be traced to the Latin 'lavere', to wash, or 'livendula', livid or bluish. The Romans valued lavender for its soothing qualities, and for its insect repellent effects. They even carried lavender into battle for dressing wounds.

The Greek name for lavender was 'naardus, after the Syrian city Naarda. In the Bible, lavender

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is referred to as 'spikenard. Luke reports: "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus."

In Medieval and Renaissance Europe, the washing women were known as 'lavenders'. Lavender was grown in "infirmarians' gardens", in monasteries. According to Hildegard of Bingen, Germany, who lived from 1098 to 1179, lavender water, a mixture of lavender and brandy or gin was a great cure for migraine headaches.



In sixteenth century France, lavender was used to resist infection. Glove-makers, who were licensed to perfume their leather with lavender were said to escape cholera. During the great plague in 17th century London, people were told to wear bunches of lavender attached to their wrists, and grave-robbers, who were known to wash in a mixture of lavender and vinegar, managed to not get sick. I wonder if wearing lavender might protect us!

Lavender is said to have spread from the Greek Islands into France, and, of course, now is common throughout the Mediterranean and also southwest Asia to southeast India. It was introduced to England in the 1600s, and later to the Americas.

Lavandula, or lavender, is a genus of 47 known species of flowering plants in the mint family, Lamiaceae. The Lamiaceae is the seventh largest among flowering plant families and encompasses about 7,000 species. In addition to lavender and the mints, the group includes most of the culinary herbs like basil, oregano, sage, thyme and rosemary.

Lavender species are most often organized into what is known as English, French, and Spanish lavenders. The English lavenders (*Lavandula angustifolia*), thought to be the most aromatic and best for extracting essential oils, are also the ones we can grow. They are hardy in Zones 5-9. In contrast, the French/Spanish lavender (*Lavandula stoechas*) is more suitable to hotter climates. Interestingly, *Lavandula stoechas* is supposedly known as Spanish lavender in the United States and as French lavender in the UK. But that is not all, there is Fringed Lavender (*Lavandula dentata*), Portuguese Lavender (*Lavandula latifolia*), and Egyptian Lavender (*Lavandula multifida*).

English Lavender, (*Lavandula angustifolia*), originated in the Mediterranean. The flower clusters grow in long upright stems from the middle to late summer. The flowers can be lavender, violet blue and purple blue, but also white pink; the foliage up to three feet tall is thick, grey green to silver. This is said to be the strongest scented lavender.

There are so many cultivars of English lavender, perhaps the most familiar being Hidcote and Munstead. Hidcote is one of the dwarf varieties which has dark purple-blue flowers with strong fragrance. It flowers in late spring to late summer, in clumps of 1.5 to 2 feet tall and wide and is wonderful in walkways and garden borders. It is also an excellent container plant. Munstead can be a somewhat darker bluish lavender, and it blooms twice a year in late spring and in mid to late summer, and it grows in clumps of 1 to 2 feet. Loddon Blue is the hardiest of the English lavenders, down to Zone 4-9. There is at least one white lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia* Nana Alba) and a pink one (*Lavandula angustifolia* Miss Katherine).

Lavenders are said to be pretty easy to grow, although touchy for us in the Berkshires if we have an excessively cold winter or not enough sunshine (perhaps less of a concern as climate change progresses).

They are draught and heat tolerant, and tolerant of acidic to alkaline sandy and chalky soil, so long as it is well drained; they do not do well with a lot of fertilizers or, compost.

Many thanks to
www.gardenmandy.com; homeguides.sfgate.com;
www.reed.edu; www.wildflowers-weeds.com;
wikipedia.com