

THE FRINGED GENTIAN

(1)

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WINTER - THE SUNSET OF THE YEAR

Once again the cycle of seasons has passed and the long procession of the days of the year is drawing to a close.

The sun is sinking lower in the southwest, the shadows are lengthening and the shortest day will be reached when the sun sets at 4:31 p.m. It is then at its solstitial turning and seems to stand still.

The spectacle of a winter sky is one to make us wonder as we gaze at its beauty.

The snow which now covers the earth plays a beneficent part towards vegetation. Its like a blanket, keeping in the warmth, preventing excessive freezing of the ground, protecting it against a too rapid evaporation of its moisture, and by its occasional melting contributing evenly to the soil the water stored in the glistening crystals.

What a fairyland the woods present after a snowstorm, when every tree is outlined in softest white, and every branch sparkles wherever the sunbeams rest. The new snow muffles the echoes, and there is new beauty where only bare bleakness existed before.

During the winter leafless trees make it possible to become familiar with the shapes of the many species, also to distinguish a tree by its bark and twigs. Leaf buds are fascinating to study at this time.

Also now revealed are the dozens of bird nests which were completely hidden by the summer foliage.

February is the time to look for our first spring migrants, the Horned Larks. They should be looked for on wind-swept bare knolls, where the snow has melted. Often found with them are Lapland Longspurs and Snow Buntings.

"When falls the snow on gray and silent days
How much they miss who do not seek the wood" - Goodale

The Cyclamen of the Primrose Family is a native of Persia where it is plentiful. It does not take kindly to our homes, but if given a temperature of 50 degrees at night and not over 70 during the daytime and a very light window, yet not full sunlight it will bloom all winter. It should not be allowed to dry out yet not kept soggy. The leaves are evergreen. When grown from seed they bloom in about 15 months.

File this issue with the others in your "Fringed Gentian" green cover.
A new cover will be sent upon request.

LEATHERWOOD OR MOOSEWOOD

Leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*) of the Mezereum family is a low attractive bushy, rather stocky with a thick protruding root or trunk.

The dull-green egg-shaped leaves closely follow the pale yellow flowers which appear in early spring in clusters of three or four, each having four or five sepals and no petals.

It seldom exceeds four to six feet in height. The bark and younger twigs are exceedingly tough and pliable, one cannot break them. The Indians used them for thongs and laces or for repairing.

The autumn color of the foliage is bright yellow. It grows naturally in damp woods and pastures and takes kindly to cultivation, thriving in any fairly good soil.

It has been well established in the Wild Flower Garden many years.

This family includes about 450 shrubs and trees of warm and temperate regions, but most of these are native to South Africa and Australia. The *Dirca* is our only native representative.

RHODODENDRONS

Of the 100 species of Rhododendrons (the ancient name for the genus, meaning Rose Tree), the majority are found in Asia. The most magnificent of our native flowering shrubs, is the Great Laurel or Rose Bay (*Rhododendron maximum*) with thick green leaves which droop and curl up in winter. This is merely to lessen evaporation while the ground is frozen and plants get little moisture. The large pink or white flowers, each broadly bell-shaped, grow in showy compact clusters. Great Laurel is most abundant throughout the Allegheny Mountains where they grow as large as trees.

Mountain Rose Bay or Purple Laurel (*Rhododendron catawbiense*) a smaller shrub with more rounded leaves and lilac or rose-purple flowers is found on bluffs and mountain slopes from West Virginia to Alabama. The clusters of these handsome flowers are like bouquets among the large glossy evergreen leaves.

The leaves of *Rhododendron* are evergreen while those with smaller deciduous foliage are called Azaleas, altho all are now classed under one genus.

The planting in the Wild Flower Garden of the two mentioned Rhododendrons as well as several varieties of Azalea came thru the seventh successive winter and bloomed beautifully during May, June and July.

BIRD STUDY

The late Dr. Thomas S. Roberts stated that the only opportunity to become acquainted with the elegant Bohemian Waxwing, the Pine Grosbeak, or the more common but less interesting Redpoll, Purple Finch, Snow Bunting and Lapland Longspur, is during their sojourn here as visitors in the winter from their northern homes.

When snow and ice bury all other sources of food, then do not forget to scatter crumbs and seeds and provide suet. Feeding the winter birds is a worth while undertaking. The results will well repay the effort.

Winter birds seldom go far from houses in their haunts or habits of feeding.

EVERGREENS IN WINTER

Evergreens attract very little attention during the summer when all other trees and shrubs are green, but in winter they come into their own. The restful green of pine, hemlock, spruce and fir is an outstanding contrast among their leafless neighbors.

They are interesting in many ways, being cone-bearers, and retaining their leaves throughout the year. However, there is one cone-bearing tree common in this locality that drops its leaves in the fall. It is the Tamarack or Larch, (Larix laricina). Although the others are called evergreens, they do not keep the same leaves indefinitely, shedding them at irregular intervals, after the new leaves have formed.

The three pines native to this area are White Pine (Pinus Storbuss), Red Pine (Pinus resinosa) and Jack Pine (Pinus Banksiana).

The native Spruces are Black Spruce (Picea mariana) and White Spruce (Pices canadensis).

Another interesting evergreen is the Balsam Fir (Abies balsamea) which grows abundantly in either moist or dry areas in the northern part of Minnesota.

The cone-bearing trees have very elastic branches, and the needle-shaped leaves tend to shed the snow. This prevents the branches from breaking down under the weight of heavy snow.

HOLLY

Outside of the Mistletoe no other plant is so closely associated with the Christmas season as Holly. The bright red berries, contrasting with the dark green foliage, produce a cheerful effect in keeping with the holiday atmosphere.

Its use for decorations dates back to the days of the Druids, when Holly was given the place of honor in the holiday ceremonies. Even before Christmas was known in England, Holly was used in the festivities which marked the turning of the sun.

The greater bulk of our native Holly (Ilex opaca) comes from the South. It grows from New England to the Gulf of Mexico and as far west as Texas, but it is most abundant along the Atlantic coast.

Our native Minnesota Holly (Ilex verticillata) grows commonly in swamps and wet woods in the northern part of the State. Altho it has attractive red berries it is not used for decorating. The leaves turn black and the berries shrivel soon after picking. However it will remain fresh several weeks if placed in water.

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING

The regular annual meeting of Friends of the Wild Flower Garden, Inc., will be held at its office, 2318 Chestnut Ave., Minneapolis, Minnesota, on Tuesday, January 4, 1955, at 2:30 p.m. (Our office is in the Burma Vita Plant.)

STRANGE AS IT MAY SEEM

Devil's-Club or Devil's Walking-Stick (*Panax horridum*) is a member of the Ginseng Family. The densely prickly stems grow as tall as 13 feet. Both sides of the large leaves have scattered prickles.

This plant often forms extensive thickets and because of the sharp prickles these are almost impenetrable.

It grows abundantly in the forest of the pacific slope from Oregon to Alaska, and is also found about Lake Superior as well as in Japan.

The family includes 500 species of herbs, shrubs and trees common to temperate regions, but only a few are native to the United States.

A number of plants are thriving in the Wild Flower Garden.

DID YOU KNOW

That the Wood Duck is strictly a North American species and principally a bird of the United States.

That Pocket Gophers are seldom seen above ground.

That the Peanut pushes its yellow flowers under ground to ripen its pods.

That the Castor Bean (*Richinus communis*) belongs to the same family as the Poinsettia (*Spurge*).

That African Violets and Gloxinias are both of the (*Gesneria Family*). They come from the hot, moist jungles of the tropics. They prefer good light yet not a great deal of direct sunlight.

That Okra or Gumbo is of the Mallow Family. The plant was brought from Africa in the early days. Northern summers are often too short for it to mature.

That wasps work down a stem to fertilize plants while bees start at the bottom and work up.

Minnesota is the only State that has designated an Orchid as its State flower. The Showy Lady's-slipper (*Cypripedium reginae*). At least four other States chose the Rose and as many the Violet and several Golden-rod and Apple Blossom.

How keenly observations were made by that great American Naturalist - Philosopher, Henry David Thoreau, from whom we could learn so much, is clearly depicted in his following lines --

"The morning wind forever blows,
The poem of creation is uninterrupted;
Yet few are the ears that hear it.
Olympus is but the outside of the earth everywhere"

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Martha E. Crone -- Editor