

Lochac

Herb & Garden Guild



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Turn, turn, turn

It's autumn, and back to where this volume of the newsletter started.

In some exciting news, I advertised the vacant position of Head Gardener (aka guild administrator). There was one nomination, THL Melissa Wijffels. You will recognise her from her wonderful articles in this newsletter.

From the next issue, she will be running the shop, or estate, so look for some changes then.

At the Guild AGM at the Rowany Festival, we approved the updated charter, which will make online meetings easier in future.

Master Cristoval, Guild Chronicler
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Gerard's Herbal

Sun-hats through the ages

Materials, styles and how to make your own

By THL Melissa Wijffels

The harsh sun in Lochac means it's advisable to cover up while outdoors to prevent getting sunburned.

Woven hats provide excellent sun protection, particularly if they are broad-brimmed, but as they are made of extremely perishable materials, few historical examples survive today.

Extant hats

In the literature, I was able to find three preserved hats: a Roman grass hat (420-580AD), a pine root hat from Novgorod (13th - 14th century), and a few plaited straw hats from Germany (15th - 16th century).

There are a number of post-period examples from all over the world utilising similar materials and techniques to these, and many traditional craftspeople make similar hats today.

The Roman example in particular is very 'modern' in style and quality – who would have thought the Romans were walking around in woven trilbys?



Figure 1. Roman grass hat from Egypt (420-580AD; Pitt Rivers Museum).

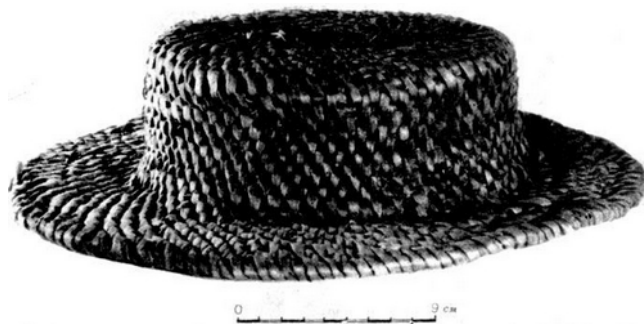


Figure 2. Woven pine-root hat from Novgorod (13th - 14th century; Artsikhovskii 1969)



Figure 3. Hat made from 7-part plait from Kempten; 15th-16th century (Anon 2005).



Figure 4. Straw hat made from 5-part plait from Lengberg Castle, Nikolsdorf; 15th century (Anon 2017).

Iconographic sources

In iconography, we see depictions of people wearing sun hats in classical Greek pottery and Roman mosaics.

There then seems to be a gap until the ~1200s, where straw hats begin to be depicted in manuscripts.

It is unlikely there was a gap in use of straw hats during this time as straw was available to those harvesting grain, but the turmoil following the collapse of the western Roman Empire may have resulted in these images not being recorded until economic conditions improved.

As the hats themselves rarely survive, we can only speculate. However, when they do reappear, it is with enthusiasm, and we rapidly see many shapes and styles emerge.



Figure 5: Roman mosaic depicting a man in a straw hat. 2nd century AD. Bardo National Museum, Tunisia (Girón 2012).



Figure 6: Several men wearing straw hats. Maciejowski Bible, 1250. Morgan Library & Museum MS M.638, fol. 17v



Figure 7. Straw hat, Manesse Codex (UBH Cod. Pal. germ. 848, fol. 394r), 1300-1330.



Figure 8. Detail, Allegory of the Good Government, Effects of Good Government in the Countryside, by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, 1338-40, at the Palazzo Pubblico in Siena.



Figure 9. *Labours of the Month of August, England, 1450-1475* (CC-BY-SA-2.0 David Jackson)

Many of the images available depict wheat harvest in the autumn, when the weather would have been quite hot.

Nearly universally, later examples depict farm workers, although there are some more stylish straw hats worn in urban settings in the 15th and 16th century.

For more examples, I highly recommend looking at Larsdatter's page listing images of straw hats by period.

Materials

This style of hat is often called a 'straw hat' today, but as we have just seen, they were made of a variety of materials, not just straw, but also fine grasses and roots.

In more arid regions, there is extensive evidence for the widespread utilisation of straw as fuel, fodder, building material, and craft material, with Roman records from Egypt describing the trade of braided straw strap (Van der Veen 1999).

However, there is less evidence from temperate areas, and the artefacts we see from these areas are made from a wider variety of materials.

Bulrush (also called reedmace, cattail, raupō, cambungi or pucai (蒲菜); *Typha* spp.) has a global distribution, and its leaves have been used to make a wide variety of utilitarian items, including hats (Morton 1976). As this is widely available in marshy areas globally and is easy to access and work with (unlike pine roots!), I chose to use it in my hat-making.

Whatever material you choose, you need to let it dry for 1-3 days between harvesting and beginning to braid. If you don't, the moisture leaving the material will cause the braid to loosen substantially, weakening it and making your finished hat rather holey due to shrinkage.

With care, you can even use a commercial plaited straw hat; just carefully remove the stitching and free the plaited band.

Making a plaited hat

Making a hat out of plaited plant material is relatively straightforward, and is a suitable project for even beginner sewers, whereas there are a considerably larger number of pitfalls for weaving a hat.

The first thing to do is to dip your dried material in water, soaking for 10 minutes or so to increase flexibility and prevent snapping.

If you have chosen to use wider leaves (like bullrush), you will need to first split them into evenly sized strips suitable to the size of braid you wish to make. I split mine roughly in half (1 cm strips).

If you are making your own braid rather than purchasing braid, you have the option to sew as you go to avoid having to manage a large coil of braided material.

It also means you are less likely to produce too much or too little braid, even on your first time, as it is easy to visualise when you are nearing completion (or conversely, when you still have some distance to go yet!)

I made my first braided hat in 2024 in under two days while completely wiped out by illness, so this can be a relatively quick project, even for those who have never made one before.

Don't be afraid to unpick stitches if things aren't turning out, though! It's much easier to unpick and start again than to correct a problem with curvature.

For final touches, you can soak the hat, sandwich it between two layers of cloth, and gently iron it to even out the brim.



Figure 10: Step-by-step instructions on how to construct a plaited bulrush or straw hat.



Figure 11: Completed bulrush hat.

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Thomasina's Kitchen

Of the most perfect mixed salad

Recipes by Mistress Thomasina Coke, OP

Recipe

This recipe is from *Opera dell'arte del cucinare*, Bartolomeo Scappi; Louise Smithson (trans.).

Of all the salads we eat in the spring, the mixed salad is the best and most wonderful of all.

Take young leaves of mint, those of garden cress, basil, lemon balm, the tips of salad burnet, tarragon, the flowers and most tender leaves of borage, the flowers of swine cress, the young shoots of fennel, leaves of rocket, of sorrel, rosemary flowers, some sweet violets, and the most tender leaves or the hearts of lettuce.

When these precious herbs have been picked clean and washed in several waters, and dried a little with a clean linen cloth, they are dressed as usual, with oil, salt and vinegar.

It takes more than good herbs to make a good salad, for success depends on how they are prepared. So, before going any further, I think I should explain exactly how to do this.

It is important to know how to wash your herbs, and then how to season them. Too many housewives and foreign cooks get their green stuff all ready to wash and put it in a bucket of water, or some other pot, and slosh it about a little, and then, instead of taking it out with their hands, as they ought to do, they tip the leaves and water out together, so that all the sand and grit is poured out with them. Distinctly unpleasant to chew on.

So, you must first wash your hands, then put the leaves in a bowl of water, and stir them round and round, then lift them out carefully. Do this at least three or four times, until you can see that all the sand and rubbish has fallen to the bottom of the pot.

Next you must dry the salad properly and season it correctly. Some cooks put their badly washed, barely shaken salad into a dish with the leaves still so drenched with water that they will not take the oil, which they should to taste right. So I insist that first you must shake your salad really well and then

dry it thoroughly with a clean linen cloth so that the oil will adhere properly.

Then put it into a bowl in which you have previously put some salt and stir them together, and then add the oil with a generous hand, and stir the salad again with clean fingers or a knife and fork, which is more seemly, so that each leaf is properly coated with oil.

So to make a good salad the proper way, you should put the oil in first of all, stir it into the salad, then add the vinegar and stir again. And if you do not enjoy this, complain to me.

*The secret of a good salad is plenty of salt, generous oil and little vinegar, hence the Sacred law of salads: *Insalata ben salata, Poco aceta & ben oliata*. : Salt the salad quite a lot, Then generous oil put in the pot, And vinegar but just a jot.*

And whosoever transgresses this benign commandment is condemned never to enjoy a decent salad in their life, a fate which I fear lies in store for most of the inhabitants of this kingdom.

Redacted recipe

- Mixed spring greens (baby spinach, rocket, etc.)
- Herbs of your choice; mint, chives, parsley
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 teaspoon wine vinegar
- Flowers; marigolds, viola, pansy, etc.

Wash the greens and dry them well. Wash herbs, dry them well and chop. Wash and dry flowers, gently remove stems and green bits. Place all ingredients in a bowl; sprinkle with salt, mix well, add the olive oil, mix well, add the vinegar, mix well. Serve it.

This article is adapted from one at
Mistress Thomasina's blog, at
thomasinacoke.wordpress.com

In My Garden

By Master Cristoval

A dry summer

I live near Goulburn NSW, in the Southern Tablelands. We're a 10 minute drive from the Southern Highlands, which are hilly and rainy and green. The Tablelands, by contrast, are flat and inclined to be dry and brown.

Summer this year was mostly hot and dry, which was tough on the new trees I've planted. We've had hotter, but not for such long stretches.

The new farm

I used to live at Cockatrice Farm, which was closer to Canberra. The new place came with the name "Chivari Lodge", named after a mediocre trots racehorse. It comes with its own racetrack, which is good for grandchild mower racing but of limited horticultural value.

The new place is much smaller, 10 hectares or 25 acres. It's much poorer country, which turns out to be a good thing if you have horses. The last place had lush grass and my Clydesdales were forever having problems.

Our new carrying capacity is three horses, half a dozen deer and 327 kangaroos. The deer in particular make growing things something of a challenge.

(I'm an aspiring cooking laurel, so you'd think there was an obvious and tasty solution here. But the deer disappear as soon as you look at them, and does the universe really want me to have a gun?)

A round yard

When we arrived, there was a fenced-in horse roundyard which had at some stage been planted out with vegetables. We got a lot of pumpkins and tomatoes out of it in our first summer here.

We then ran chickens in it, which worked for a while, until a fox got in and that was that.

We planted it again for this summer,. Once the heat started seriously, it was doomed. It's some distance from the house, and near no taps, so it was rarely watered or attended to. We're on tank water, so have to be careful anyway.

My wife (Mistress Alys Dietsch) planted rhubarb on the shady side, and that's done OK with an occasional big bucket of water dumped on it.



Planting at the back door

Permaculture says you should plant your most visited plants at your back door. Actually we're a farm so everybody comes to the back door, and the disused front door is near the kitchen. So I started there.

I planted a stack of herbs, which have mostly done OK. The tastiest things were munched by the deer and Paulie the Horse, so we've made a fence of high mesh steel around it. That now works pretty well, though Paulie got in and munched the comfrey again recently. And heard some rude words as a result.



A wicking bed

At the side of the house, between the front and back doors, we now have a wicking bed. It was made by our friend Ross (aka Lord Ragnar of Adora) and is quite handsome.

It's right near a tap, and did get watered over the hot part of summer. Whether it actually works as a wicking bed is to Be Determined, as there's no way to tell the water level. The missing step is to make the overflow tub of clear plastic, or at least cut off at our ideal maximum water height, and fill it through that. We were worried about our tank levels, so haven't really got that happening.

Ross made it with a lot of woodchips on top, to make absolutely sure we got no weeds. That's had the effect of sucking the nitrogen out of the plants.

We got some nice black tomatoes, decent sorrel and some leafy greens, but the zucchinis were pretty lame and the eggplants were hopeless.

I think it will go better next year.



Chicken house

Ross is now building us a raised chicken house, in exchange for being number one test dummy for all my cooking experiments. *They can't be too bad...*

Conceptually, it's a continuous-feed chicken composting system.

The plan is that we add chicken feed, kitchen scraps and garden weeds at one end, and then the

chickens are meant to kick it around and scratch through it as it breaks down.

In the end, it will all be kicked through a grate at the other end, and we'll have a kind of rich compost deposited neatly into a wheelbarrow at the other end, for redeployment around the garden. We'll see.

Citrus area

We had some native trees outside the laundry door, which dumped endless leaves into our water tank. They have been chopped down, but keep re-shooting, so we may need some form of nuclear option.

Our concept has been to plant this area with citrus. It can get very cold in this part of the world, but this is a north-facing, somewhat sheltered microclimate. We are about to order the citrus, so we'll see.

This area is open to the deer, so Alys has been planting groundcovers and lots of salvias to discourage them. So far, it's working reasonably well.

Berries

We brought some boysenberries from the last property, and Alys has bought a few other types. I've planted the original transplants against our deer fencing, and have largely neglected them.

Alys has a heavily fortified area near the laundry door, and has gone to great efforts to get her berries established.

Both plantings are doing OK, but nothing great. We might give them some serious horse manure next spring and see how they go.

Compost

The farm came with a couple of big composting bays. They were already growing a large quantity of elephant garlic, so we have plenty of that.

We've acquired a fancy poo-collection blade which pulls behind our ride-on mower, and it makes fairly efficient work of the accumulating horse manure.

I've made an extra-long pool scoop to pull azolla fern off the surface of the dams, which makes first-class compost really easily.

Sources for plants (New Zealand)

By THL Melissa Wijffels

Introduction

In a small country with strict biosecurity measures, it can be hard to find obscure plants. Here are some places to look for unusual herbs, trees, and shrubs.

Live plants

Palmers

A large chain garden store, which seasonally stocks tea (*Camellia sinensis*), coffee (*Coffea arabica*), and a selection of olives, common citrus, berries, summerfruit and pipfruit. Sometimes stocks unusual herbs (e.g. lovage, garlic chives, hyssop).

Oderings

A chain garden store with branches in Napier and Christchurch. A good selection of common fruit and nut trees, berries, and seasonally available saffron corms. Has a few unusual herbs (e.g. lovage).

Flying Dragon Nursery

The largest citrus nursery in New Zealand, based in the Far North. Stocks a number of cultivars of pomello, kumquat, orange, mandarins, lemon, and Buddah's hand citron.

They also stock a variety of other subtropicals, including carob, coffee, cassava, bananas, date palm, allspice, cinnamon, pandan, ginger, lychee, jujube, jackfruit, and other delights.

Kahikatea Farm

A small organic nursery based in Hastings. Has a number of unusual trees and shrubs including basket willows, Cornelian cherry, elderberry, damson plums, quince, other summerfruit and pipfruit, fodder willow, Chinese hawthorn, black mulberry, white mulberry.

Also has dyeplants (madder, woad, weld, and others), old-fashioned purple viola, teasel, and some unusual culinary herbs (motherwort, hyssop, parcel, olive herb, loveage, salad burnet)

Wairere Nursery

Commercial nursery that also sells to the public. Huge variety of olive, pipfruit, summerfruit, nuts, citrus, and roses.

They also carry medlar, pomegranate, tea (*Camellia sinensis*), coffee, berries (including black and white mulberry), and a variety of herbs, including seed garlic. You may need to join a waitlist up to a year in advance.

Te Mata Garlic

A number of garlic varieties for planting.

Wildflower World

Seeds and bulbs for a variety of ornamental flowers, including many European cottage garden favourites. They also stock *Linum rubrum*, for those interested in alternative fibre plants.

Special note: saffron corms. These are available from a handful of suppliers including Oderings, Greenleaf Nursery, Wynyard Estate Saffron, and intermittantly in local markets in Canterbury and the Hawke's Bay. You may also be able to source some via word-of-mouth.

Seeds

Kōanga

Heaps of heirloom vegetable, herb, and flower seeds. They stock heirloom grains including millet, barley, oats, rye, wheat, and sorghum. Seeds including the only commercially available fibre flax (*Linum usitatissimum* 'Essene') and breadseed poppy are here as well.

Unusual herbs are available including angelica, arnica and hyssop. This is one of the few places in NZ to purchase Chinese skullcap seeds.

Setha's Seed

A small-scale seed producer in the Hawke's Bay. Many varieties of leafy greens (including some hard-to-find east Asian brassicas), breadseed poppy, and in-season garlic and shallot bulbs.

Sentinels Seed

Run by a collective of gardeners, Sentinels carries some unusual vegetable varieties not found elsewhere.

They have Hamburg parsley, Alexanders, and, historically, this has been one of the few places to source skirret seed, but they are presently out-of-stock. Fortunately, members of the SCA on the North and South Island are now successfully growing skirret, so ask around if you need some.

Southern Seed Exchange

A seed bank run by local Canterbury members, but you can join from anywhere in NZ. They sometimes have unusual things, but stock may be slightly old depending on the plant variety.

Lusetti Seed

A commercial company in Canterbury that allows pick-up orders (20kg sacks). Great for field peas.

Kings Seeds

Commercial seed company that imports and stocks a wide variety of plants.

Their selection changes every year, so the weird plant that's in stock one year may be gone the next.

At present, their selection includes cumin, caraway, chervil, ginseng, ladies' mantle, licorice and more.

They also have different traditional varieties of fava bean, peas, carrots, and other garden vegetables.

Egmont Seeds / Mr Fothergills Seeds / Yates Seeds

Commercial seed companies with a range of vegetable seeds, and smaller selections of herbs.

Local craft markets, plant sales, crop swaps, seed banks and enthusiasts

There's a really substantial number of individuals saving seed that was imported pre-1996 in their home gardens who only attend occasional markets in person.

If you ask the right people, you might be able to get double-seeded chickpeas, rice, and other plants not currently commercially available today.

If you're struggling to find a particular weird plant, I strongly recommend asking a member of your local branch of the NZ Tree Crops Association.