

Lochac

Herb & Garden Guild



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The Quiet Time

A warmish but damp winter here at Boxers Creek, between Sydney and Canberra.

Still no fun to be out in the garden, bring on those sunny winter days we often get. Time to clear some stuff out and get ready for spring.

Thanks to those who have supported the guild by sending in articles.

Cristoval, Guild Chronicler

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Patron: Master Seger Boom.

4 *Heliotropium Tricoccum*,
Widowwaile Turnsole.



Gerard's Herbal

See the article inside. Gerard's says 'small turnsole' is used for dyeing, but the 'widowwaile' turnsole looks more like the correct species.

Broad Beans

By Mistress Rowan Perigryne

Broad beans (*Vicia faba*) are also known as fava beans, or faba beans - which is a tautology, since 'faba' is Latin for bean!

One of the oldest known cultivated food plants, they have been eaten for millennia. Scientists believe that domestication of the crop may have begun as early as 8250 BC, with carbonised faba bean remains found at Neolithic sites in Israel. After 3000 BC, they spread to southern China.

Before the introduction of green beans from the Americas in the 15th century, broad beans were a staple crop throughout Europe and the Middle East. They were eaten both fresh and dried and remain an important part of the Middle Eastern diet.

Broad beans have the highest protein ratio of all legumes - 58% carbohydrates, 26% protein, and a lot of essential nutrients such as folate, B vitamins and minerals.

Fuch's Herbal of 1543 recommends them for stomach upsets, gall bladder problems and coughs (with honey and fenugreek) and many other ailments.



Growing broad beans

I've grown broad beans for many years now. They are easy to grow and very productive! They do need a good amount of water, so I grow them in wicking beds (along with all my other veg).

Sow the seeds direct, about 20cm apart adding a little lime. In Canberra I plant in March and a second block in August to spread the harvest. In warmer climates, plant from April-June.

Plant in blocks so they support each other – I usually stake around the outside and put some horizontal stringlines to keep them from falling over.



They take about 20 weeks to mature, but you can eat the young leaves before the pods appear – they taste like peas. You can eat them in the pod when very small, or wait until they show in the pods and eat the beans inside.

Once they get larger, you should peel the beans for a fresher taste. If you see a black line on the bean, they are too old to eat fresh – dry them and use for peas pudding.

They freeze well – shuck them out of the pods, blanch in boiling water and then freeze. Once thawed, the second skins peel off easily.

Tart of Broad Beans

There are many medieval recipes for broad beans, particularly from Italian sources. I have redacted several recipes, including this one for a lovely green tart from Scappi's 16th century cookbook.

This lovely green tart is a great way to use an abundance of broad beans, with subtle medieval flavours. It can be eaten hot or cold. If you are using frozen broad beans or older fresh beans, allow plenty of time to peel off the skins – tiresome, but worth it for the improved flavour and colour.

Original recipe - Tourte di fava

To prepare a tourte with split chickpeas.

Get split chickpeas that are clean, well washed and cooked in water and oil.

When they are done, put them through a strainer.

For every pound of the strained chickpeas add in two ounces of ground fine mostaccioli, beaten fine herbs, a little sautéed spring onion, one ounce of pepper and cinnamon combined, eight ounces of sugar, a little saffron, and three ounces of almond oil to keep it soft.

Then have an oiled tourte pan prepared with rather a thick sheet of dough on it, and put the filling into the pan.

Cover it with another sheet of dough made like a shutter's slats or in some other manner.

Bake it in the oven or braise it, and give it a glazing. Serve it hot. You can do the same with split broad beans.

(Source: *Bartolemeo Scappi's Opera 1570*, Terrance Scully (trans) Recipe V, #225)

My redaction - 1 x 20cm tart

300g fresh young broad beans, podded weight (approx 1.2 kg in the pod)

(or 500g frozen broad beans, thawed)

2 tbsp Olive oil

4 whole spring onions (or a small onion, for ½ leek), sliced fine

1 tbsp chopped parsley

2 tsp chopped thyme

2 tsp chopped savoury

Pinch of saffron threads, ground with ½ tsp salt

1/4 tsp fresh ground pepper

Scant 1/2 tsp cinnamon

1 tbsp almond oil (or other nut oil)

4 Amaretti biscuits, crushed

1 sheet shortcrust

1 sheet puff pastry, cut into strips (or latticed)

Beaten egg for glazing

Line a 20cm tart case with shortcrust and refrigerate

If using frozen broad beans, remove the outer grey skin of each bean (allow LOTS of time).

Preheat the oven to 180C.

Cook the broad beans in water to cover, with 1 tbsp oil for 10 minutes, then drain.

Sauté the onion/leek in olive oil until soft.

Process the beans, herbs and onion/leek in a food processor (or mash thoroughly).

Put into a bowl and mix in the spices, almond oil and biscuits.

Put the filling into the case, spread evenly, cover with a lattice of puff pastry and glaze with egg.

Cook at 180C until done (20 -30 mins). Cool a little before removing. Serve hot (also good cold).



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Diggers.com.au; Wikipedia.com

Growing Cotton

By Katherine Chuk

The plant

Cotton has been an important source of fibre since ancient times; various species of cotton have been utilised by multiple cultures on multiple continents since around 6000 BCE.

It grows best in warm places, as an annual in places with a long growing season, or as a perennial in frost-free climates. It prefers moderate rainfall or irrigation, plenty of sun, and loam or light clay soils.

My experience

My own attempts at growing cotton in the sub-optimal sands of Perth have been mildly successful. Although my plants are all less than 20cm tall (they are supposed to be 50-100cm) they have survived and bloomed yearly for over five years.



Flowering cotton plant

The summer flowers are short-lived but quite beautiful in their own right, resembling their close relatives the mallows and hibiscus.

After the flowers fade, the pods swell and burst revealing 2-4 cotton bolls, each containing 4-8 seeds.



Cotton bolls and seeds

While they are generally sun-loving, Perth's summer sun can burn the leaves and they appreciate some light shade in the hottest months.

As far as pests go, aphids have been a mild nuisance from time to time, and I have had rats eat the pods.

The harvest

My harvest has been meagre and is mainly used to stuff small toys, but spinning and papermaking are interesting possibilities.

The seeds keep well and can be saved to replant in spring or give away.

Extending the Growing Season

Unheated glasshouses and heated greenhouses

By THL Melissa Wijffels

Reading this title in a publication of a society concerned with recreation of material culture prior to 1600 may be slightly surprising – large glass panes, a hypothetical pre-requisite of all of the technologies mentioned above, weren't made at scale until the 19th century (Chopiniet 2019).

Although glass windows were already present in Rome, and fragments of them have been discovered in Pompeii (Chopiniet 2019), these technologies used materials other than glass, due to its expense.

Specularia

The earliest historical record we have of a season extending chamber is the *specularia* created for Roman Emperor Tiberius (42 BC – 37 AD) to provide him with *cucumis* year-round. According to Pliny the Elder, in his book *Natural history*, *cucumis* was a “*delicacy for which the Emperor Tiberius had a remarkable partiality; in fact there was never a day on which he was not supplied with it.*”

Year-round production is *substantial* season extension. *Cucumis* has often been translated (as you will see below in the excerpt from Columella's *De Re Rustica*) as ‘cucumber’ (*Cucumis sativus*), but recent scholarship has shown it to be *Cucumis melo* (snake melon, faqqous), which normally has a production season of May – July (across 43 modern landrace populations; Omari et al. 2018).

What were these *specularia* that they were able to extend a 3-month production season into a 12-month production season? Pliny describes them (Book 19, 23: 64):

“...*specularia consisted of beds mounted on wheels which they moved out into the sun and then on wintry days withdrew under the cover of frames glazed with specularis*”

Specularis, after which the *specularia* are named, was a fine sheet of transparent stone (*lapis specularis*, modernly known as gypsum). Great

sheets of gypsum are still mined today in Spain, and were also used to make windows for Roman and post-Roman buildings.



Remains of Roman mica window in the Forum of Cartagena, Spain. CC-BY-SA-4.0 Orniosviajero

Columella's *De Re Rustica* (X1. III. 52–53) gives additional detail, and also suggests that Pliny's 12-month claim may not be entirely accurate:

“*Anyone who wishes to have the fruits of cucumber [cucumis] ripen earlier than usual should, when midwinter is past, produce well-manured soil enclosed in baskets and give it a moderate amount of water; then, when the seeds have come up, he should place the baskets in the open air on warm and sunny days near a building, so that they may be protected from any blasts of wind; but if it is cold and stormy, he should bring them back under cover and continue to do so until the spring equinox is over. He should then sink the whole baskets into the ground. He will then have early fruits. It is also possible, if it be worth the trouble, for wheels to be put under larger vessels, so that they may be brought out and then taken indoors again with less labour. In any case the vessels ought to be covered with slabs of transparent stones [specularibus] so that even in cold weather, when the days are clear, they can safely be brought out into the sun. By this method Tiberius Caesar was supplied with cucumis during almost the whole year.*” (Forster and Heffner, 1955).

The baskets Columella is describing are a miniature proto-glasshouse on wheels. While transparent mica and gypsum are not particularly available locally, one can use modern glass instead and achieve a similar result.

Glasshouses and cold frames are well-attested by modern gardeners everywhere to give seedlings an early start in the spring. Burying the whole plant, basket and all, avoids disturbing the roots and thus largely circumvents transplant shock. I have employed a similar method with paper pots rather than baskets (which modernly are often lacquered with plastics or resins) to good effect.

Glasshouses

While unheated structures for extending the growing season have been used for over a millennia, the heated greenhouse was invented much later.

In the European tradition, the origin of the greenhouse is the orangeries of the 1600's, developed to protect the newly-arrived sweet orange from the unsuitable climate of northern Europe.

However, the first written record of a heated greenhouse predates orangeries by at least a century – the Annals of the Joseon Dynasty describe a heated greenhouse which was used for the winter production of vegetables and flowers for the Korean royal family (Yoon and Woudstra 2007).

The Korean glasshouse is described in detail in the Sangayorok, written by Soon ui Jeon (1450s AD). The text describes temporary structures that are of a substantial height (over 10 *ja*, 3 metres) being built over mandarin trees during the winter, and an *ondol* system installed to provide direct soil heating (Yoon and Woudstra 2007).

The *ondol* was, at the time, a common means of domestic underfloor heating, by means of venting the flue of a fire through a hollow stone cavity – a system that had been in use in domestic settings in Korea since the 4th century AD, utilising the waste heat from the kitchen fireplace (Yoon and Woudstra 2007).

The same text also describes a more permanent structure, also with an *ondol*. In both cases, light is let in through oiled hanji paper (made from paper mulberry; *Broussonetia papyrifera*) supported by a wooden frame.

Oiled paper has several unique properties that make it particularly suitable for being used as glasshouse material – it is lightweight, making it easy to install over a large area; it has much higher tensile strength compared to regular paper, reducing the risk of tearing, and has a high transmission ratio for solar rays, and low transmission ratio for infrared rays, meaning that it lets light in, but prevents heat from escaping.

This more permanent glasshouse has been recreated by a group in Korea with heating provided under each raised garden bed (TigerMagpie 2021).

My trial

Given the excellent results with the Korean recreation of this greenhouse, I thought I might try a paper glasshouse myself.

My initial trial used butcher paper rather than the hanji paper described in the Joseon Dynasty text, as it is readily available locally for free.

The trial had very promising initial results, particularly as I live in a high rainfall region where snails will eat holes in cardboard or paper left outdoors after only a few days in wet weather.

Unfortunately, after about a month in winter conditions, it started developing holes. I plan to try greasing some real hanji paper once I can find a source for it.



Figure 1: greasing paper



Figure 2: putting it into a simple wooden frame



Figure 3: completed frame on 2 May



Figure 4: on 28 June, showing substantial deterioration.

Conclusion

The examples we have records of pre-1600 are the exclusive purview of royalty and the wealthiest nobility due to the expense of materials involved (although cheaper than pre-industrial glass, *specularis*, paper and oil are all luxury goods!).

However, I would encourage readers to trial them out in your own garden as we have much easier access to all of the necessary materials than in the past, and paper and oil in particular are an inexpensive material to test, and provide the benefit of a modern greenhouse without the modern plastic!

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Sources for Plants (Western Australia)

By Katherine Chuk

Introduction

Western Australia has strict laws for importing plants and seeds, which is important to protect our environment and farms, but it can present a challenge for the adventurous gardener.

Here are some legal, local sources of interesting plants.

Physical Stores

Friends of Kings Park Plant Sales, Kings Park - <https://www.bgpa.wa.gov.au/kings-park/events/friends-kings-park-plant-sales>

You probably already knew about this one, one of the best places to buy native plants. They only hold sales four times a year and often sell out so get there early.

Blooming Nursery, Jandabup - <https://www.facebook.com/bloomingnursery>

A huge selection of interesting plants including some exotic fruits and herbs.

Urban Revolution, Carlisle - <https://www.urbanrevolution.com.au/>

No live plants, but one of the best seed selections in Perth, they will also post their seeds locally by request.

Online Stores

All of these are WA based, so no need to worry about import restrictions or quarantine costs.

Australian Seed Supplier - <https://www.australianseed.com/>

Excellent selection of native, flower and vegetable seeds, not the best for herbs but they have the basics.

Kalamunda Plant Company - <https://kalamundaplants.com.au/>

Live plants only, a fascinating selection of culinary plants and herbs.

Made for the Earth - <https://www.madefortheearth.com.au/>

An excellent selection of herb seeds, including some hard-to-find varieties.

Community Sources

Some varieties which are no longer available commercially are still thriving in local gardens. Members of the community sharing seeds and cuttings from their gardens may be the only source of these plants.

Seed libraries - These can be found at Guildford, Mirrabooka and Mundaring Libraries, to name a few.

Local markets - Weekend markets and swap meets often have a good selection of plants, particularly Asian culinary plants.

WA Seed Exchange - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/waseedexchange>

A facebook group for exchanging seeds through the post (WA addresses only) or local pickup. If you have nothing to exchange, many are willing to give you some seeds if you send them a stamped self-addressed envelope.

Turnsole

By Master Cristoval

The challenge

At my other gig, with the Cooks Guild, I've been challenged by Mistress Kiriell to explore period food colourings. I've limited the scope to English cookery, for sanity. I'll be writing this up as a series of articles in the [Cooks Guild magazine](#), if anyone's interested.

All of them are still available today, even the most ancient colouring agents, except for one: turnsole, *Chrozophora tinctoria*.

About turnsole

Turnsole was a dyeing agent primarily. You could get a rich royal blue, or even a rich purple if you left it hanging for long enough over stale urine.

Apparently you could soak the dye-infused linen cloths in water to dye your own fabric. It was used in manuscript illumination, where it was often called "folium". In the absence of anything better, it could be used as food colouring. It is probably somewhat toxic. Yummo.

I suspected that perhaps some of the dye-infused cloths were imported to England for fabric, and somebody used it once or twice in cooking as a special thing. It can't have been in common use. However it kept popping up in recipes, including for a jelly in 1591; I gather there were some cheaper substitutes by then, also called turnsole.

The plant

Turnsole is a (mostly) annual shrub, native to the Mediterranean and the Middle East and thereabouts. It needs high temperatures and particularly poor soil.

They grew it in France, right up to the advent of modern chemical dyes, because it gave a truly great dye. A lucky thing for some remote southern French villages with really crap soil.

Apparently the whole plant will yield some dye. I have seen some sources saying that the colour is in the dried three-lobed seed case, and others saying you squeeze juice out of the unripe fruits.



Wikipedia, By Solanum - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=2870986>

Availability in Australia

You can't buy the plant or seeds in Australia, where it's considered a weed, though a fairly well-behaved one. Apparently it has naturalised in a few locations, particularly in South Australia.

My quest

I'm planning to take a road trip, somewhere from January to March when apparently I'm most likely to find fruit.

I live near Goulburn NSW, and I'm planning to drive via Wagga (where it's known from one location) to Adelaide, where it's known particularly in the drier areas north of the city.

I'll take some fabric squares, and some means to squeeze the juice, perhaps something I can fit over a regular lemon juicer.

I'll report on results in due course.

From the Head Gardener

By THL Melissa Wijffels

I have stepped up as Head Gardener (Administrator) of the Herb & Garden Guild, with changes to the charter meaning that now anyone can join the guild from anywhere in Lochac by joining the Herb & Garden Guild mailing list

(<https://mailman.lochac.sca.org/mailman3/lists/garden.lochac.sca.org/>)

The new changes also mean that any member of the guild is now empowered to hold official Guild meetings at local events - just let me know that a meeting has been held!

An official meeting of the guild, as well as a seed swap, is planned for Canterbury Faire 2027. The seed swap is in memory of Rohesia le Sarjent, an ardent seed saver and member of the Guild. Anyone who has saved seed from seeds Rohesia distributed is invited to bring seeds to Canterbury Faire to share (being mindful of any laws regarding transport of seeds).

If you'd like to find unusual medieval plants locally, check out the Herb & Garden Guild newsletter for member articles for plant sources in (Eastern) Australia

(<https://herb.lochac.sca.org/files/2025/07/Herbnews6-2.pdf>), Western Australia in this issue, and New Zealand (<https://herb.lochac.sca.org/files/2026/04/Herbnews6-5.pdf>).

If you've been working on projects with herbs or agriculture, we'd love to hear about it! Consider sharing a short article for our guild newsletter or on the Facebook group or Discord channel (links here: <https://herb.lochac.sca.org/contacts/>).