

January 2014

Favorite Winter Flower – the Pansy

by Linda Heideman, Somervell County Master Gardener



My favorite flowering plant for January is the pansy. Their little brightly-colored faces are still cheerfully blooming in my yard after being covered in ice a few weeks ago! As I read about pansies, I learned that they are the number one flowering plant for winter in North Texas. Once these flowers are placed up for sale in plant or home improvement stores, you need to get there early to beat the landscapers from buying them up first. That is how quickly they can sell around here. It may not appear to most who are not from North Texas that these flowers are so popular. Take a look around at businesses that landscape what little land they have. You will find pansies everywhere you go.

These cool climate loving flowers have such a range in color it will make your head spin. They can come in white, yellow, red, orange, blue, purple, green (which looks odd), and even as dark as black. The deep purple ones are the most popular as this may also be the original color. The reason for this being is that these are the most fragrant out of all of the other colors.

Once your Esperanzas start losing flowers, you know it is time to start planting your pansies. Be patient in finding healthy plants if you are not going to plant from seeds. Any unhealthy pansies can infect the others nearby. You can start them from seeds, and it will take anywhere from two to three weeks before you might see them sprouting up from the ground. Try not to over-water them.

Pansies should not be planted any closer than six inches from each other, as their foliage will spread out quite a ways. The recommended distance for planting pansies is 8" to 10" apart. Keep in mind that if you are going to plant these delicate flowers in containers, they not live as long as if they were planted in your yard. You may find that you need to feed them once a month as their root systems grow quickly.

You will find that pansies can survive through mild snowy conditions without any protection. These hearty winter flowers are a showcase around any home or business. Accentuate your boring green garden or dying green yard with these colorful flowers.

A Miracle of Nature

by Katie Hunholz, Somervell County Master Gardener Intern

Used for 8000 years...known for its versatility, appearance, performance, and comfort...America's number one value-added crop...provides thousands of products and millions of jobs. What plant could I possibly be describing? It's *Gossypium hirsutum*, or Upland Cotton.

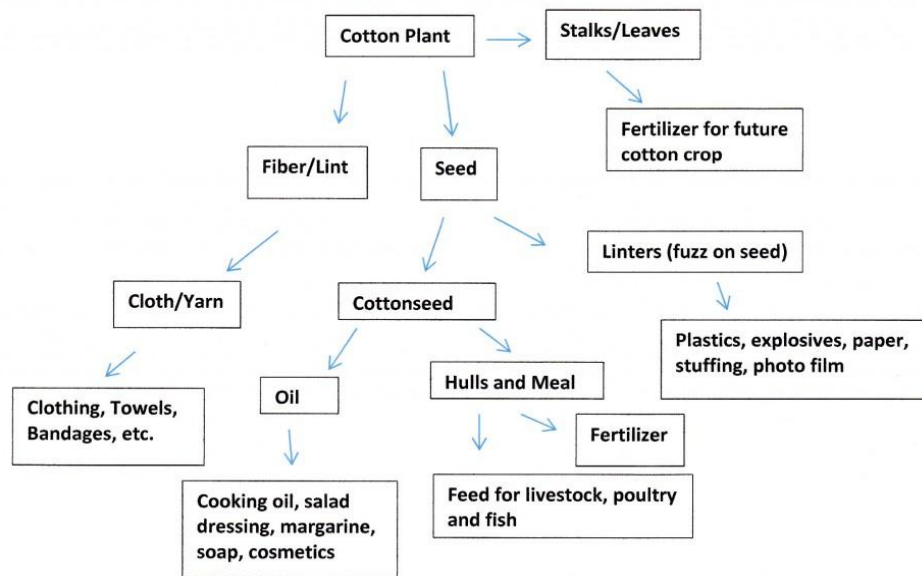
Used throughout history in places all throughout the world- China, India, Pakistan, Africa, and North America- cotton continues to play a vital role in the economy and industry of the United States. In fact, the US is the second biggest producer of cotton (China is the top producer), and 37% of the world's cotton is exported from the United States.

With a growing season that lasts 150-180 days, cotton is an extremely time-consuming crop (the longest of any annual crop in the US). However, the products that are produced from this crop make it all worth the wait. Cotton farmers have an advantage since all parts of the cotton plant are useful. The cotton boll (the white, fluffy part of the seed head) forms when the plant is ready to seed (~130 days after planting). It is then plucked from the plant, ginned (separating the lint from the seeds), carded (combed to straighten out the fibers), spun into yarn, and woven into cloth. Cottonseed oil, from the seeds, is found in many of our foods. And the leftover seed portion becomes food for livestock. The leaves and stalks of the cotton remain behind with the farmer, who can then till the plant material back into the soil- acting as fertilizer for future crops.

As the desire for cotton increased throughout the world, new technologies, such as the Spinning Jenny and cotton gin, made the production of cotton a more efficient process. Cotton was the inspiration for much of the technology developed in the 1700s, as well as a huge contributor to the Industrial Revolution. As cotton production increased in North America, the economy began to rapidly increase as well. The economy of the northern states was booming through the selling of cotton products, whereas the southern economy was being fueled by the farming of the cotton crops. In fact, the need for more land for growing cotton was one of the main impetuses behind the Western expansion.

Despite the many benefits that come from such an influential plant, the production of cotton is not without its trials. As America's biggest export in the mid 1800s, the production of cotton fueled the increase of the slave trade. This increase of slavery was a large contributor to the American Civil War, as many people objected to the owning of fellow human beings. Another negative impact of the production of cotton has been the increase in the use of aggressive pesticides. Even though less than 3% of the world's farmland is dedicated to the production of

cotton, this production uses 25% of the world's pesticides. The boll weevil, a small insect with a huge appetite for cotton, costs the industry almost \$300 million each year as farmers fight to control this pest. And, this financial impact does not consider the inevitable impact this will have on the environment.



The advance of modern technology makes many things obsolete, but cotton is not one of them. Cottonseed oil is found in food, margarine, cosmetics and soaps. Cotton fibers are still used to make clothing, sheets, and towels. Even with the creation of synthetic cotton, the authentic cotton has many superior qualities- including, better absorbency, a texture ideal for cleansing, and the ability to withstand extremely high temperatures (a quality necessary for sterilization). All of these facts concerning cotton, point to one obvious conclusion: the impact of cotton- both in the past, and in the present- has greatly changed our world.

Sources:

- Laws, Bill. 2012. Fifty Plants that Changed the Course of History. New York. Firefly Books, Inc. p. 88-93.
- Cotton Counts. The Story of Cotton. Cotton.tamu.edu. cotton.tamu.edu/kidseducation.html. (12/20/2013)

Gardening Tips for January 2014

by Shirley D Smith, Somervell County Master Gardener



Have you been outside lately? Well, do so and look at the ground. Unwanted plants (i.e. weeds) are coming up everywhere – especially where you don't want them! Well, here are a few ideas to help with that problem.

Layers of newspaper are a good way to cover areas where you don't want weeds. But, another is using some of that cardboard you now have after Christmas. Just cut the cardboard into the shape you need and lay it down. Now, cover it with a layer (2"-4") of mulch. Cardboard tends to last longer than the newspaper so you are spared at least one garden chore.

Another way to get rid of weeds is to spray them with 20% vinegar. This is not your grocery store vinegar. The white vinegar that I have here at home is 4% and my apple cider vinegar is 5%. The 20% vinegar can be bought at most places that sell organic gardening products. Spray the weeds in the morning and wait for the sun to do its work. By that evening the weeds should show definite signs of wilting. Not sure how well it will work in cold weather, but on a hot summer day it works wonderfully. Be careful when using it, however, because it can and will burn your skin, eyes and nose. I have used it for years with no problems because I am aware of how strong it is and am very careful!

If you are dedicated to using only organic methods to rid your area of weeds, then try boiling water. This works especially well when the weeds are firmly settled into cracks in sidewalks, stone walks, or a flagstone patio. Just DON'T do this to poison oak or poison ivy because you can get an allergic reaction from the oils in the steam!

And speaking of poison ivy, it won't be long before the weather is warm enough for that noxious plant to show itself. One of the best ways of ridding your place of poison ivy is to use a goat (yours or borrowed). Goats are browsers and would rather eat brush than grass. They strip bark from shrubs, eat twigs, and reduce fire hazards by chomping their way through overgrown weeds. However, you might want to fence off any trees, bushes, and plants where you don't want the goats to go, then let 'em at it.

Enjoy your "down time" because it won't be long before spring will be here and all gardeners know what that means!

Community Horticultural Education Series – CHES

Next CHES Meeting – Monday, January 13, 2014, 6:30 pm
Senior Citizens Center
209 SW Barnard
Glen Rose, Texas
“Firewise Landscaping”

presented by Phylliss Webster, Hood County Master Gardener

During extended periods of drought, when the risk of wildfires is highest,
your plant choices and their placement in the landscape could make your home
vulnerable to fire damage. We will learn how to protect our homes from wildfire
by using methods that are effective in our area.