

# Horticulture Hints

*Where flowers grow, so does hope — Lady Bird Johnson*

**June/July 2022**

It's been a difficult month, hasn't it? With the loss of our dear Carol, we're all in mourning. She was everyone's friend. And she really was. She cared about all of us. Our thoughts and prayers are with you, Kelley, and we will continue to celebrate the legacy she left us.

We are well into summer now, and things are growing, even without rain. I know there has been rain in the area, but we've gotten none



New Guinea Bean Flower (2)

here lately. Even so, my quest for summer vegetables continues. The New Guinea beans (*Lagenaria siceraria*) that I planted are growing beautifully, covering the trellis that we made for it. The leaves are large, dinner-plate sized, and thick. The one vine in full sun (well over eight hours) is doing the best of all of them. Tons of lovely creamy white flowers, but so far nothing has been pollinated to start growing an actual bean. There is very little information about this plant on the internet, and almost all of what I can find is out of Australia. But it is

technically a gourd, a member of the curcubit family (squash, melons, eggplants, etc.). They produce both male and female flowers. The female flower forms with a baby behind it. If the female flower doesn't get pollinated from the male flower, the baby shrivels and dies. So far, nothing has been pollinated. But it's my understanding that many of the curcubits produce an abundance of either male or female flowers at the beginning of their growth, but then settle into their routine. My fingers are still crossed.

Another crop that I'm attempting to grow is cassava, or manioc (*Manihot esculenta*). Also known as yuca. And possibly several other names. This root vegetable is a staple for people in many parts of the world. Tom



Cassava Tubers (Cornell University)

Ritchie told The Club about this vegetable several months ago when he spoke about world food crops at one of our meetings. Apparently, this is a crop that was grown rather extensively in Florida around the turn of the last century. Florida contains the three main ingredients that this food crop needs: sun, rain and well-drained soil. It doesn't

even require fertilizing, although the yield will be better if you do. I've heard that some people in this country like the taste of cassava better than potatoes. Unable to locate any cuttings in this country, I had to go all the way to Sri Lanka to get them. Through eBay, of course. It took them a month to get here, and I was way behind the eight ball getting them in the ground. Five cuttings arrived, and two of them are already growing. They should reach six to eight feet tall when ready to harvest, but take considerably longer than most root crops. Ten to twelve months is the average time before harvest. Tubers are produced underground radiating outward from the central stem cutting. At the end of said time, the entire plant is dug up, and the stem cut up again into foot-long pieces for next year's planting. Each tuber can weigh up to 16 ounces, with each plant producing ten to twelve tubers. That adds up to a lot of food! The nice thing, though, is that if you don't want to wait the entire year before harvest, you can carefully uncover one or more for harvest, and leave the rest of the plant for the full amount of time. The longer they're left, the bigger the tubers get. Even though they get tougher as they get bigger, cooking time remains about the same, so longer time equals more food. The only down side of this vegetable is that it contains a fairly high amount of cyanide. The only way to rid it of the cyanide is to boil it. Which is not a problem for me because I don't eat a lot of raw veggies any more. But then once the tubers are boiled, you can use the cooked flesh in any way you wish. I've even heard of using it as a substitute for zucchini in zucchini bread. Go figure. If I only get two of my cuttings to grow, I'll still be happy. Those two stems will provide fifteen or so new cuttings for the next year. I may even share some!

About a month ago, I detected a few whiteflies around my still-small pepper plants. This started a long, circuitous investigation into what whiteflies are, and what to do about them. I found more complex information than I could wrap my head around. Mostly from the University of Florida in Gainesville. Technical stuff. Words that were unpronounceable. But I did find

some very interesting things as well. There is more than one type of whitefly, so I'm not putting the Latin names here. Not what you need to know. Here's the skinny on what you *do* need to know: they are small (about 1/12" long), soft bodied insects with wings. They are closely related to aphids and mealybugs, and are active during the day. Their destruction of vegetables and ornamentals comes from lodging on the undersides of leaves and sucking the sap. They will then lay their eggs on the leaves as well, insuring the next generation. Enough of them can kill your plants, or greatly reduce your vegetable crop. The best way to get rid of an infestation without destroying your whole pollinator ecosystem is soap and water spray. Several tablespoons of an antibacterial dish soap and water in a spray



Whiteflies and Eggs on Tomato Leaf

bottle will kill them on contact. But be slow and deliberate in your movements as they will scatter when disturbed. And then the best way to deter them from returning is to plant plenty of nasturtiums, marigolds and basil amongst the other things in your landscape. They don't like the smell of any of these plants, and the nice thing is that two of those three are edible. Basil is, of course, a classic. And I love Dark Opal basil (*Ocimum basilicum*) - absolutely gorgeous with the nearly black leaves and glowing purple flowers. Nasturtium flowers and leaves are both edible, adding a bit of color and peppery zest to salads or sandwiches.

Happy gardening!