

A POSY PICKER'S PAPER

New Meadows Garden Club

Topsfield, Massachusetts

December 12th through January 16, 2018



Gingerbread House Day is December 12th, the date of our Holiday Social this year! The tradition of creating decorated gingerbread houses had its start in the early 1800's in Germany, and was based on Grimm's fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel."

The objectives of the New Meadows Garden Club shall be to foster knowledge of home gardening, decorative arrangements and an interest in civic projects.

December 12



Our annual **Holiday Luncheon and Yankee Swap** will be held at the Bradford Tavern, 87 Haverhill Street, Rowley at 12 noon. As in past years, we will be ordering individually from a limited menu of delicious dishes. For those who would like to join in the fun of the Yankee Swap, the suggested gift amount is \$15.00 The deadline for your **RSVP** is Sunday, December 10th to Gerrie Bunker or Linda Flynn.

****Be there for a very special presentation to someone dear to our club.**

► Since the holiday season should be a time of cheer for everyone, our board is requesting that each member bring a non-perishable food item to be donated to the **Topsfield Food Pantry**. For canned foods, low-salt is preferred. Also needed are items such as laundry detergent, toothpaste and other household items.

► And, also at our luncheon, Barbara Shade will be collecting new pajamas on behalf of the **Community Giving Tree**. For some children, this is the only Christmas gift they will receive. Needed are new pj's for babies through teens.

December 14



Our Garden Therapy Committee, with Rita Galvin at the helm, will hold a **Boxwood Tree Workshop** for members of the Topsfield Council On Aging at the Trinity Church Meeting Hall, 124 River Road, Topsfield at 9:30 am. **Members of the club should register with the Topsfield COA to participate in the workshop.** As always, helpers will be needed. Please contact Rita if you are able to lend a helping hand at this very popular workshop for our Topsfield seniors. **Helpers should arrive at 8:30 am, club aprons and a pair of clippers in hand!**

January 16

Our next board meeting will be held at the Topsfield Library Meeting Room at 10 am.

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There is no regular membership meeting scheduled for January.

NOTES



Rita Galvin represents New Meadows Garden Club at Rooms in Bloom Open House!



The Rooms in Bloom Open House, an event to showcase the creative talents of local floral designers and garden clubs, was held at the Stevens-Coolidge Place in North Andover on November 18th, and we are thrilled that our member, Rita Galvin, beautifully represented our club with two designs. The floral arrangements were creatively designed to express the theme of each room in this elegant historical house.

These are the florists and garden clubs which participated in the event: Les Fleurs, Betsy Williams, iFarm LLC, North Andover Garden Club, Andover Garden Club, Semper Virens, Flowers By Rennie's, and New Meadows Garden Club.

Research on the house and the beautiful property which surrounds it reveals a very interesting and rich history. The Stevens family was one of the founding families of North Andover and acquired what was Ashdale Farm in 1729 and farmed there for many generations. Helen Stevens, who ultimately inherited the property married John Gardner Coolidge, a member of the wealthy Boston elite, who was a descendant of Thomas Jefferson, and a nephew of Isabella Stewart Gardner. The property became their summer home. They filled the house with art and furniture from around the world and transformed the farm into an elegant agricultural estate. Following Helen Stevens Coolidge's death in 1962, Ashdale Farm was bequeathed to the Trustees of the Reservations. It was renamed The Stevens-Coolidge Place to honor Helen and her husband.

This is the backdrop for what was a very beautiful event. Here, in Rita's own words, is a description of her room and the designs she created for it: "The room my designs were in is the owner's bedroom...the staff member of the Estate sent pictures of the bedroom. After studying the photos, I decided to incorporate some Peacock feathers into my design as there were several pictures of various birds adorning the walls. Since pink was one of her favorite colors, I featured pink roses in my design, with a small additional clear globe with a nosegay type arrangement of pink roses. It was fun to participate in the open house and I enjoyed the challenge."



Thank you, Rita, for representing our club in grand style!

***Illumination Nights at the Stevens-Coolidge Place Fridays-Sundays, December 8-23, 2017 5 to 7 pm!*

...more news on the following page...



We were sad to hear the news that Jean Hampton, one of our most loyal active members, is leaving our club after 45 years, as she and her husband relocate to Maine. We will miss her dearly, but are happy that our club board has voted to make her our newest Honorary Member. Goodbye Jean, and may your new life in Maine be blessed with happiness, good fortune and good health.

More Topsfield Fair News

It seems that this year's Topsfield Fair was just yesterday, but can you believe that it was two months ago now, and the next one is just 10 months away? Time moves much too quickly, especially when you don't want it too. Before we put this year's fair into the history books, an update is in order about the entries of our club's premier chef, Donna Ryan. One of the two contests Donna entered was the pumpkin pie contest sponsored by Mann Farmstand, Methuen. She created a Chai Pumpkin Mousse Pie, which sounds like it was to die for! Unfortunately we have no photo to show you. But there is a photo of Donna's second entry in the coffee cake contest sponsored by the King Arthur Flour Company, which I have included for you below. It was a Christmas Cranberry Coffee Cake with a streusel topping and simple icing drizzle. Thank you, Donna, for sharing these photos of your "2017 fair triumphs!"



Unfortunately, Donna's successes this year disqualifies her for next year's 200th fair anniversary!

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Decorating the Topsfield Library for the Holidays!



Many thanks to Artistic Co-Chair, Rose Ann Waite, who together with her family and club volunteers has once again provided the Topsfield Town Library and our community with seasonal decorations, both beautiful and simple. We are grateful for the care and effort of Rose Ann's family, who have hung the wreaths and removed them after the holidays for several years now...a daunting task indeed. And many thanks to those members who always show up to help decorate the inside spaces. We couldn't do it without our many faithful helping hands!

...Bits and pieces...



Artistic Co-Chair, Rose Ann Waite, demonstrates fall flower arranging at the club's October 2017 meeting.



Many thanks to all who contributed items for our fundraising table at this year's joint meeting of the five area garden clubs in November! Our items were well received and our effort was a great success!

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Green Thumb Corner

When I realized that our Holiday Social would fall on Gingerbread House Day, it got me thinking about the main ingredient of these festive houses...ginger. Thinking back to my childhood, ginger was not one of the ingredients my Mom typically used in the food she prepared. I think ginger ale was the closest we ever came to anything that contained



ginger, and depending on the brand, maybe there wasn't even any real ginger in the beverage at all. We always were given ginger ale when we were sick because my Mom believed that the brew had magical powers. Maybe she was right! These days you hear a lot about ginger as an excellent natural remedy for stomach and intestinal ailments. And some say that ginger may also help prevent certain forms of cancer! So, as many of you can appreciate, my inquisitive mind had to know more about ginger. What would I ever do without my trusty computer and Google??? What follows is what I learned! So, where to start? I guess a good place would be at the beginning! Let me introduce you to *Zingiber Officinale*, the perennial flowering plant at the center of the ginger craze.



Zingiber Officinale
flower

It is the rhizome of this plant that is widely used as a spice and is also used medicinally. Ginger plants produce clusters of orchid-like flowers and because of their aesthetic appeal they are often used as landscaping plants around subtropical homes. Ginger is thought to have originated in Southeast Asia more than 5000 years ago, and has been traded throughout history, longer than most other spices. The plant probably originated as ground flora in tropical lowland forests, and requires hot, humid, shady conditions and loamy, nutritious soil.

Today, ginger is grown primarily in south and southeast Asia, tropical Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, especially Jamaica, and Australia. As a spice, ginger is spicy and fragrant, and is commonly used in Indian, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese and south Asian recipes for meat, seafood and vegetarian dishes. Ginger belongs to the same family as the spices turmeric and cardamom. Medicinally, many consider ginger a universal medicine that can cure various ailments, including motion sickness, joint pain, indigestion and loss of appetite. The spice was even used to combat the effects of shellfish poisoning, which might explain why ginger is an important ingredient in many Chinese seafood dishes even today. A cup of ginger tea is also recommended by some for colds, fatigue and headache. And ginger oil is known for its anti-inflammatory properties. It can be applied topically to relieve pain and promote blood circulation. Amazing stuff, don't you think? Believing in the multitude of benefits of ginger, it is no wonder that folks in ancient times became very creative when it came to the use of ginger in their diets. Ancient Greeks ate slivers of ginger wrapped in sweetened bread to settle their stomach after an overindulgent meal. This led to baking ginger spice into sweetbread, giving birth to the first gingerbread cookie! In Elizabethan England, ginger beer, a fermented mixture of ginger, water, sugar, cream of tartar, yeast and water, was a popular stomach-settler. Since it was mildly alcoholic, it was a fun way to rid

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oneself of a stomachache! Somewhere along the way, ginger beer evolved into ginger ale, which is a soft drink made by combining carbonated water with essence of ginger, plus other flavorings, coloring, sugar or artificial sweeteners. Crystallized ginger is another fun way to reap ginger's benefits. This confection is made by boiling the root in a simple syrup and then letting the candy dry out. It's not too difficult to make at home, but I find it easier to drive down to Trader Joe's and pick up a few packages to have at the ready!

Now, just a bit more about gingerbread. Food historians believe that ginger has been used as a seasoning in food and drinks since antiquity. According to legend, in addition to gold, frankincense and myrrh given as gifts by the three wise men in Bethlehem, ginger was the gift of one wise man who was unable to complete the journey due to illness. It is believed that he gave his chest of ginger roots to a Rabbi who cared for him. The Rabbi told him



that a great King was prophesized to come to the Jews, and would be born in Bethlehem, which in Hebrew meant "House of Bread." A custom among the Rabbi's young students was to make houses of bread to eat over time to nourish the hope for their Messiah. The wise man suggested adding ground ginger to the bread to add zest and flavor. Legend also has it that gingerbread was brought to Europe in 992 by St. Gregory of Nicopolis, an Armenian monk. He lived in France for 7 years, where he taught gingerbread baking to priests and other Christians. In the 13 century, monks in Germany shaped gingerbread into different forms and in 1395 Nuremberg, Germany was recognized as the "Gingerbread Capital of the World." From there, the custom spread throughout Europe and became quite an item. Elizabeth I of England even had gingerbread figures made in the likeness of some of her important guests!



Gingerbread Mold

Eventually, gingerbread bakers formed professional baker guilds. In the 17th century only professional gingerbread bakers were permitted to bake the treat, except at Christmas and Easter, when anyone was allowed to prepare it! Gingerbread was sold in special shops and outside churches on Sundays, and given as gifts or as tokens of love. Some gingerbreads were decorated with iced patterns in colors and also gilded with gold leaf. Gingerbread was sometimes worn as a protection from evil spirits or as a talisman in battle. In addition, in

Europe, molded gingerbread became an important art form. Finally, the tradition of making houses from gingerbread, especially at Christmas, came to America with Pennsylvanian German immigrants, and the rest is history!

And a fun fact...the gingerbread house to the right broke the Guinness World Record in 2013. It was located in Bryan Texas and was as large a real home at 2520 square feet!



Best wishes to you and yours for a beautiful holiday season!