

Seeds for Thought!

Do you remember those ribbed clay heads that were around decades ago? After soaking the heads and sprinkling them with seeds you waited for a few days for a bright green G.I. 'brush cut' to appear. The seeds were chia, *Salvia hispanica*, a member of the mint family native to Mexico and South America.

This flowering plant grows quickly, sprouting in a few days but those seeds are no longer valued for sprouting: they are for adding to your salad. Chia is the newest 'miracle' food, with more omega 3 fatty acids than salmon, lots of antioxidants and minerals as well as being a complete protein, very rare in something that is neither meat nor dairy.

Those tiny seeds have more fiber than the other recent 'eat now' wonder, flax seed. In 2011, 21 new chia products were introduced and so far this year there have been 13 new uses including chia used in health bars and other snack foods, even added to yogurt. Our morning oatmeal has become so passé!

The fashion to dine on seeds is fairly new in American diets but the Aztecs raised chia as a main crop, using it both in religious ceremonies and as a medicine. Often people would like to improve their health as well as boost their budgets by having more meatless days in the week but they are concerned about a possible lack of protein in a diet so restricted.

According to the health experts, the average American eats twice as much meat as is good for health, risking high blood pressure, cancer, obesity – the whole dreary lot. Somehow it is easier to see mac' n cheese as a substitute for beef than chia sprinkled on a salad. Next step may be a kit to raise *Salvia hispanica* on kitchen windowsills?

Be careful what you wish for...

Remember Midas, the king whose hands turned whatever he touched to gold? This item may be less intriguing than creating gold, but can you believe turning sand into sandstone? University of California/Davis's Soil Interactions Laboratory has found a bacterium that, when sprayed on sand, results in a surface as hard and tight as concrete. Could this mean 'instant' roads, erosion-proof beaches? Surely it may be a blessing when years intervene between a bright idea and its practical applications.

Vacation notes:

Master Gardener Nancy Choquette has a tip for those of you who are reluctant to leave home without acquiring a friendly neighborhood plant-sitter:

"Having traveled a lot in the past ten years and worrying about my houseplants, I have come up with an idea for my orchids, African violets, and smaller plants. I take a lampshade, turn it upside down, put the plant into the shade and tightly enclose the two of them in a large trash bag.

"So far I have come back to healthy plants. In fact, last time I came back to an African violet full of blooms. What a nice surprise!"

My houseplants are outside for the season, which is reasonable as they do poorly inside where both thumbs are black. Late May I went to Boston for a few days. Traveling seems increasingly complicated by little things: the wrong form downloaded as per instructions; a tube of toothpaste can be a prohibitively large 'gel'; shoes with laces a nuisance when both hands are full. Occasionally it is the big things you notice, such as the amount of fuel needed to keep that busload of frequent flyers up in the air!

Things are changing. Some major airlines are beginning to use algae-derived biofuel. Recently I read that 60 gallons of biofuel can be produced from an acre of soybeans per year, that amount of corn produces 400 gallons a year but the amount potentially from algae is 5000 gallons. Amazing such ingenuity. These efforts have been ongoing for decades and slowly the science has been able to solve the inherent problem of scale. Algae doesn't gush from a wellhead even though a patch can double in size in a few hours.

As a gardener one other thing concentrated my attention, the greatly green, linguini-lush carpets of grass. Of course grass is more easily grown in New England but still, I had to touch it to believe it was real. When I got home I read that when that particular grass looked scruffy it was treated to a lavish dose of compost tea. If I had grass I would investigate online sites simplici-tea.com or growingsolutions.com.