

Welcome to Spring's Festival

Gloucester is looking radiant in anticipation of this weekend's Daffodil Festival. We should thank all the people who have worked so hard to make it better each year. The colder weather has preserved our signature host of daffodils to welcome the visitors, a real plus. One other sign of spring is the crop of good-looking t-shirts sporting our favorite flower.

Words on sport shirts began as elitist little logos decades ago and progressed (or regressed depending on the sentiments expressed) to political theatre, boosterism, even in-your-face bad taste. The Gloucester Daffodil Festival t-shirt is a model of decorum and civic pride and I must have one!

It is not just words on shirts that tell a story, but the shirt itself. Before it reaches the store the average cotton t-shirt has used three ounces of active ingredient in pesticides and between 500-1800 gallons of water. It would seem, given the value of all that water that the price would reflect it, but prices of clothing have become relatively lower so we can really stuff our closets!

Sometimes there is a slide in cotton prices due to over-production or a rise due to crop failure. Australia, before their worst drought in 1000 years, was a major cotton producer and the government does not subsidize cotton growers. In another major producer, the US, the growers receive subsidies. An Oxfam study of impoverished West African cotton growers noticed that a single 40,000-acre farm in the Mississippi River area of Arkansas collected subsidies equal to the income of 25,000 people in Mali.

Recently I was told that the price of cotton fabric is due to go up. Wool is wonderful, silk delightful, linen cool, but cotton is best! A closet of neatly stacked boxes of left-over cotton from sewing and quilting projects attests to my bias but since no piece is larger than a kerchief, there is no fortune there, just memories.

These days super-sized industries have such a bad press it is cheering to read about those industries trying to take care of both customers and the planet despite their necessary attention to the bottom line. Textile industries in India are leading the way toward the use of low-waste, recycled cotton.

According to a story in a recent Christian Science Monitor the impact of the global textile industry is tremendous. One-third of the water used worldwide is used in the manufacture of fabrics. For every ton of cloth produced 200 tons of water is polluted with chemicals and heavy metals. 25% of insecticides used worldwide go on cotton fields and 2600 gallons of water

are used to grow one pound of fluff. Remember the 85%-shrunken Aral Sea? It was a victim of irrigated cotton. The figures for the energy used to make all those sheets and shirts go across the page.

Realizing that this industry cannot be sustainable for the long term, textile manufacturers are making clothes with organic cotton, investing millions in sustainable technologies and using salt-free, low-impact dyes. Innovative heavy machinery is now capable of recycling solid textile waste into usable fabric. Good news!

ABOUT GRASSES

It took ornamental grasses a long time to become favorite plants for many of us. We are conditioned to think ‘color’ equals garden. Grasses are colorful, but gently so: their charm lies in the way they move in the slightest breeze and the way they catch the light of early morning and late evening and hold it. My appreciation for grasses grows as their truly easy care becomes more important to me. The High Country Gardens catalog has a new variety of variegated Northern Sea Oats, *Chasmanthium latifolium* ‘River Mist’, remarkable for its ability to grow in shady places. Good in containers, it grows to 30”. It does need to be deadheaded before the seeds mature because the seedlings are not white-striped but revert to green.

Another grass, a native for a hot, sunny spot, *Muhlenbergia* ‘Pink Flamingo’, four to five feet tall, is a cross between Gulf Coast Muhly and Deer Grass. With narrow blue green foliage and soft pink fall flowers, it is recommended for our Mid-Atlantic region. This catalog also shows a 2011 grass, Plant Select Winner *Bouteloua gracilis* ‘Blond Ambition’ with big showy* chartreuse flowers that fly out from the stem.

*This is a grass, ergo those terms are relative.