

These plants hold long, interesting U.S. history

Yesterday was Thomas Jefferson's 250th birthday. He said, in 1811, "No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden. Such a variety of subjects, some one always coming to perfection, the failure of one thing repaired by the success of another, and instead of one harvest a continued one through the year."

For many years he developed the gardens at his beloved estate, Monticello, in Charlottesville, Va. Last year the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants opened there. Quoting from a letter I received from John T. Fitzpatrick, director of the Center, "The mission of the Center is to locate, preserve and make available to the public varieties of plants that have been grown in the U.S. In the past, and to document this aspect of our horticultural heritage. The foundation for the Center's work is the collection of plants being grown in the restored gardens at Monticello, but as the program develops, the collection will expand and cover up to the early twentieth century."

Some of the plants that will be available are: double buttercup (*Ranunculus repens* 'Fiore Pleno') a yellow-flowered perennial with spreading habit; climbing rose (Rose glantera), with fragrant leaves and small pink flowers; and wallflower (*Cheiranthus cheiri*), the species form of this yellow-flowered biennial. Historic and cultural information will be included with each plant.

THE CENTER'S plant shop, located in the Monticello Shuttle Station,



down to earth
Marty Figley

is open to the public at no charge from April through October. Plants are available in the gift shop in the visitors center. Plants and packets of seeds for some of the plants grown on the estate can be purchased at the Monticello Gift Shop and are also available by mail. Unfortunately orders for seeds for this year were to be placed in March, but if you would like a list of those available for next season write to the Center, P.O. Box 316, Charlottesville, Va. 22902.

The current list includes 25 plants, some of which are African marigold (*Tagetes erecta*), love-lies-bleeding (*Amaranthus caudatus*), and larkspur (*Consolida originalis*), all grown at Monticello by Jefferson.

Perhaps you will include this newly established Center in your vacation plans.

If spring bulbs are blooming, can rhubarb be far behind? The taste of fresh rhubarb, a stout hardy perennial herb, is one of the first real signals that spring has arrived.

A clump takes little space and likes to be in rich soil well supplied with moisture. Plant it in a hole 8-12 inches across and 8-10 inches deep. Put compost and/or commercial fertilizer at the bottom of the hole,

fill in the soil and plant the clump so that the crown is just below the surface. Water well. After new growth appears, mulch it heavily to conserve moisture. Leaves or straw will work fine.

EACH SPRING thereafter, top dress with some 5-10-5 fertilizer. If any flower shoots appear, cut them out as they will weaken the plant. We want the energy to go to the stalks that we will use. Don't harvest the first year, but after that there will be many years in which you can enjoy the harvest.

When you gather the stalks, pull them by gripping the stem near its base and pull upward. A soft pink area with little whitish fins on each side will be just below ground level. This is the mildest portion.

When cooking rhubarb add a bit of the leaf or stalk of the herb sweet cicely (*Myrrhis odorata*) so the amount of sugar can be decreased. Fresh stalks can be frozen by cutting them into small pieces. A rhubarb pie in the middle of winter is something to remind us of summer.

One caution, the leaves contain poisonous amounts of oxalic acid and should never be eaten.

Mozart concerto will rank among the best renditions

Conductor Hartmut Haenchen and pianist John O'Connor both made their debuts with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra last week.

Haenchen, who grew up in East Germany, is presently music director of the Netherlands Opera and the Netherlands Philharmonic and has a good reputation throughout Europe. He also had some close ties with music director Gunther Herbig in his native Dresden.

O'Connor, a native of Ireland, was a replacement for Maria Joao Pires, who had to cancel. O'Connor is also recognized throughout Europe and several of his recordings have won prizes and high acclaim.

On this occasion he played Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 12 K. 414 in A Major, instead of the No. 11 in F the first year, but was originally planned. The change of the work came too late to be included in the insert attached to the program.

Handel's "Royal Fireworks" Suite opened the program. Performed with the full orchestra, which unchained all its forces, it evidently evoked enthusiasm in the larger than average audience. This was the one item on the program with which I had some serious stylistic reservations.

While nobody could ignore the mighty display of shine and glory of each instrumental section, much of the music sounded more than a century out of place. The long French-style overture sounded as if it was orchestrated by Wagner and rear-



Avigdor Zoromp

anged by Stokowski.

Stylistic integrity, orchestral balance and uncompromised artistic insight were the rule in the other selections, however. The Mozart concerto was one of the best renditions of its kind that one is likely to hear in years. It is the kind of work that requires both soloist and orchestra to penetrate its apparently simplistic shell.

O'Connor opted for refined, well shaped phrases, graceful passages and intimate reflection rather than an overblown virtuosic approach. Of the several live performances of this work that I have heard, I can't recall one that depended so exclusively on the intrinsic value of the music without resorting to artificial means to make it sound more impressive. The tender dialogue between soloist and orchestra was a very rare kind.

Mendelssohn's Symphony No. 3, "The Scottish," was the major orchestral component of this program. Here, Maestro Haenchen demonstrated his most impressive ability to handle a complex orchestral score

in a commanding manner. The tendency here was more toward a later Romantic style than one would typically expect from Mendelssohn. In the more heavily orchestrated passages the sound was overly brassy. The enhanced effect wasn't necessarily negative. However, some of the Mendelssohnian agility was lost in the process. This was even true in the second, fast movement, in which the excessively fast tempo failed to counteract the excess orchestral weight.

Maestro Haenchen does take the musical detail into consideration. The major drawback in his approach is his tendency to magnify these details into a grandiose scale. Toning down his approach at the extreme end would go a long way toward first-class excellence — he does have the musical talent to achieve it.

Haenchen will be the conductor again this weekend with works by Mozart and Shostakovich, to be performed on Friday and Sunday at Orchestra Hall.

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