

Tale from the Garden!

Border Control! As it becomes more difficult to travel abroad & borders are closed to reduce the risk of Covid-19 spreading from country to country, why not concentrate instead on filling your own garden borders with late-flowering blooms for a burst of Autumn glory!

Most of our weekly floral subjects are known by names that elicit pleasing connotations, or are at the very least descriptive of their appearance. Poor old 'Sneezeweed' (or 'Helenium') doesn't exactly fall into this category with its unfortunate (albeit appropriate) name. But thanks to the timing of their display, these flowers are certainly not to be sniffed at! Its flowers are very distinctive, helping it to stand out among the enormous host of other yellow ray flowers that share its bloom time. The sunny yellow, lobed rays surround a spherical disc. The rays are somewhat reflexed, further accentuating the flower's central dome. With a little imagination, the flowers look like ladies twirling in yellow skirts!



But despite its name, allergy sufferers need not balk at this humble plant, for it was named by those who sought it out wanting to sneeze! Sneezing, historically, has not always been merely associated with nasal irritation and allergies. To sneeze was considered quite auspicious or even downright dangerous by our ancestors. Many ancient cultures believed the soul resided in the head, and to sneeze meant that your soul actually left your body & a body without a soul was sure to die! It was considered especially important during the Plague, when violent sneezing was one of the final symptoms preceding death. Other cultures had less morbid associations with sneezing. To the ancient Romans, Greeks and Egyptians, a sneeze was thought to reveal prophetic truth, whether forecasting misfortune or good luck. Sneezing in the middle of a conversation was supposed to reveal the truth of what was stated. They also believed that a sneeze purged the body of any evil spirits. In East Asia, a sneeze means somebody is talking about you. If you sneeze twice, they are saying bad things about you. In later cultures, forcing a sneeze was desirable to help clear up nasal and sinus congestion, helping to cure colds. The flowers were dried and powdered into a snuff that was inhaled to treat coughs, colds and headaches.

"Coughs and sneezes spread diseases" was a slogan first used in the United States during the 1918-20 Influenza Pandemic & then later used in the Second World War by Ministries of Health in Commonwealth countries – to encourage good public hygiene to halt the spread of the common cold, influenza & other respiratory illnesses. And here we are again!

We know that Coronavirus spreads by droplets from coughs, sneezes and speaking & that's why we're all wearing masks as we go about our daily business. Face coverings are intended to protect others against the spread of infection because they cover the nose and mouth, which are the main confirmed sources of transmission of the virus that causes coronavirus infection.

But back to the flower! While Sneezeweed is the most memorable common name, it does go by a handful of others, like False Sunflower, Bitterweed, Helen's Flower and Yellow Star. Its botanical name is *Helenium autumnale*. The genus *Helenium* was named for Helen of Troy, whose tears falling to the ground were supposed to sprout into little yellow flowers. *Autumnale* simply means "to bloom in Autumn." There are at least 20 species of *Helenium* found in North America, and almost 40 worldwide.

British Summer Time officially ends today (Sunday 25th October) - so breathe easy, enjoy the fresh air in your gardens & the late season wildflowers on show, because crisp autumn mornings and clear blue skies are upon us!

And maybe this is one 'breath' we wouldn't mind spreading ...

1 Breathe on me, breath of God:
fill me with life anew,
that I may love as you have loved
and do as you would do.

2 Breathe on me, breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until my will is one with yours
to do and to endure.

3 Breathe on me, breath of God;
fulfil my heart's desire,
until this earthly part of me
glows with your heavenly fire.

4 Breathe on me, breath of God;
so shall I never die,
but live with you the perfect life
of your eternity.

Edwin Hatch (1835 - 1889)
Hymn 370 Singing the Faith