ask the landscape professional

Linda K. Lillie of Sprigs & Twigs

Welcome to my weekly series!

Feel free to send me questions you'd like to have me answer and I will do my best to address the ones of most general interest.

Email or mail your questions to: info@sprigsandtwigs.net or Linda Lillie, Sprigs & Twigs Inc, PO Box 245, Gales Ferry, CT 06335

Question of the Week:

I recently ate a seedless watermelon and I got wondering. How do seedless fruits like watermelon and grapes reproduce if they don't have seeds?

Answer:

That is a great question. Plants can reproduce by several ways other than by seeds. Surprisingly, most fruit that we eat today (except citrus) doesn't come from seeds. One way strawberries reproduce is by sending out "stolens" or runners which are long roots that spread out from an existing main strawberry plant. These runners are capable of becoming new plants. In the case of seedless grapes, most commonly, they are grown from cuttings from existing grape vines that are dipped in a rooting hormone and planted. These cuttings are clones of the original plant. Using cuttings to grow seedless grapes has been around since Roman times!

Seedless watermelons are a bit different. The seedless watermelon was first "invented" over 50 years ago and commercial production started about 25 years ago. Early versions of seedless watermelons lacked the sweetness and color of their seeded counterparts, but watermelon breeders have been steadily improving them so today they are of high quality. A seedless watermelon is a man-made hybrid that has 33 chromosomes. Since normal seeded watermelons have 22 chromosomes, creating a watermelon with 33 chromosomes took some doing.

Autumn Crocus, *Colchicum autumnale L.*

Scientists discovered that if they applied a chemical compound, Colchicine, which comes from the seeds and bulbs of Autumn Crocus, *Colchicum autumnale L.*, to the early growth stages of normal 22 chromosome watermelons, they could create a seeded watermelon with 44 chromosomes. They also discovered that if they took the male pollen from a 22 chromosome watermelon and fertilized a female flower of a 44 chromosome watermelon plant, the result was a seeded watermelon that had 33 chromosomes. When the 33 chromosome seeds grow, they produce the sterile seedless watermelon that we know today. Ironically, even though a seedless watermelon is grown from seed, it doesn't produce any of its own! It's easy to see why seedless watermelons are more expensive in the store!

"Ask the Landscape Professional" Now Offering Classroom Lectures

I look forward to meeting you there!

"Ask The Landscape Professional" is offering periodic classroom lectures on a variety of topics.

The sessions will be open to the public and will be held in our Gales Ferry office at 41 Kings Highway, Suite 207. Space is limited and you need to call the office **(860-235-0752)** to make a reservation.

Lecture 1 - "Top Ten Low Maintenance Garden Habits"
January 21 from 3:00-4:00 (SESSION FULL)

Lecture 2 - "Unusual Native Perennial Plants"
February 3 from 3:00-4:00 (space available)

Sprigs & Twigs is booking 2014-2015 Snow Removal services now and scheduling appointments for 2015 Garden Design, Spring Leaf Clean-ups, Garden Spruce-ups, Landscape Maintenance, Organic Lawn Care, Mowing and Trimming Services, Stonework and Custom Carpentry Services. Go to www.SprigsandTwigs.net for details. *Call us anytime to discuss your landscape needs and to meet with our staff.*

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Linda K. Lillie has been President of Sprigs & Twigs, Inc. for the last 19 years. She is a graduate of Connecticut College in Botany, an accredited NOFA Organic Land Care Professional, a Connecticut Master Gardener and a national award winning landscape designer for her design and installation projects..

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