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August: A Month Rich in History, Harvest and Summer Traditions

As summer begins its gradual transition toward autumn, the month of August brings more than warm days and family vacations. It is a month steeped in history, ancient traditions and memorable observances that have been celebrated for centuries.

The month is named in honor of Augustus Caesar (63 B.C. – A.D. 14), the first emperor of Rome. Born Gaius Octavius, Augustus was the adopted heir and great-nephew of Julius Caesar, whose name is commemorated in the month of July. Under Augustus' leadership, the Roman Empire entered a long period of peace and prosperity known as the Pax Romana, making him one of history's most influential rulers.

On August 1, many European countries once celebrated Lammas Day, an ancient harvest festival marking the beginning of the wheat harvest. The name "Lammas" comes from the Old English phrase meaning "loaf mass," as newly baked bread made from the season's first grain was traditionally taken to church for blessing. The day also marks the midpoint between the summer solstice and the autumn equinox.

The familiar Dog Days of Summer come to an end on August 11. Despite the name, the Dog Days have nothing to do with household pets. They originated thousands of years ago when the bright star Sirius, known as the "Dog Star," rose in the morning alongside the sun. Ancient civilizations believed this period brought the hottest days of the year.

On August 19, the nation observes National Aviation Day, established in honor of Orville Wright's birthday. Wright and his brother, Wilbur, made history in 1903 when they achieved the first successful powered, controlled flight of a heavier-than-air aircraft at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

Women's Equality Day is celebrated each year on August 26, commemorating the certification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, which guaranteed women the right to vote throughout the United States. The observance recognizes both that historic achievement and the continuing pursuit of equal rights.

The full moon of August, known as the Sturgeon Moon, reaches its peak later this month. The name comes from Native American tribes and early settlers who found that sturgeon were most easily caught in the Great Lakes and other large waterways during late summer. Other traditional names for August's full moon include the Green Corn Moon and the Grain Moon, reflecting the season's harvests.

August has two traditional birth flowers. The gladiolus, with its tall, colorful blossoms, symbolizes strength of character, sincerity and generosity. The poppy has long represented eternal sleep and remembrance, while also symbolizing imagination and peace.

The month's primary birthstone is peridot, a brilliant green gemstone formed deep within the Earth's mantle and occasionally found in meteorites. For centuries, peridot has been associated with strength, healing, harmony and good fortune. Ancient cultures believed it protected its wearer from nightmares and evil spirits while bringing happiness and prosperity.

August also marks the beginning of preparations for autumn. Schools reopen, county fairs begin across North Carolina, gardens reach their peak production, and daylight hours slowly become shorter. Although the hottest days of summer may still lie ahead, August serves as a reminder that another season is just around the corner.

Yellow-Legged Hornet Found in NC for First Time

Invasive predator poses a serious threat to honeybees and pollinators

The NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has confirmed the first established presence of the invasive yellow-legged hornet in North Carolina, prompting officials to urge beekeepers and homeowners to be on the lookout for the destructive insect.

The hornets were discovered in Matthews after a Union County homeowner reported unusual hornet activity around a hummingbird feeder. State agriculture officials confirmed the insects were yellow-legged hornets and later found additional adults near the Union and Mecklenburg county line. Survey, trapping and response efforts are continuing with assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The yellow-legged hornet is an aggressive predator of honeybees and other pollinators. The species was first detected in the United States near Savannah, Georgia, in late 2023 and was later found in the Charleston, South Carolina, area before spreading north into York County, South Carolina. That discovery prompted North Carolina officials to increase surveillance in southern Union and Mecklenburg counties this year.

"North Carolina has thousands of beekeepers statewide, and our apiary team has been working diligently to alert them to the threat yellow-legged hornet poses to their hives," said Dr. Bill Foote, director of the NCDA&CS Plant Industry Division.

State officials are asking beekeepers to watch for hornets displaying a distinctive "hawking" behavior as they hover near beehives waiting to capture returning honeybees. Their nests are also noticeably different from those of native hornets. Yellow-legged hornet nests have a reddish, muddy appearance rather than the gray color typical of bald-faced hornets. At this point in the season, nests are expected to be about the size of a volleyball, although they can eventually grow large enough to fill the bed of a pickup truck.

State Apiarist Don Hopkins said attacks by yellow-legged hornets can weaken or destroy honeybee colonies, reducing honey production and pollination of agricultural crops. Officials say the invasive insect represents a significant threat to both commercial and hobby beekeepers, as well as to native pollinators.

The Department of Agriculture is working to locate and eliminate the nest before the population spreads further. More than 200 survey traps have already been placed around the area where the hornets were found.

Homeowners and beekeepers across North Carolina are encouraged to help monitor for the invasive hornet by building and checking traps and reporting any suspected sightings. Information about identification, trapping and reporting is available at www.ncagr.gov/YLH.



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