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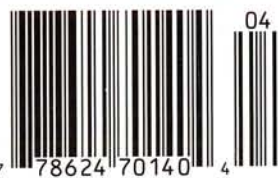
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The World's Oldest Spruce on Canadian Soil

Mount Allison student makes discovery of a lifetime

SACKVILLE, New Brunswick—Ben Phillips, a third-year student at Mount Allison University, described his woodland discovery as magical. “The tree itself just has this glow about it. You can tell it’s significant when you approach it.” What makes it significant is that the red spruce is possibly the world’s oldest specimen. After analyzing a core sample, Phillips counted 445 rings under a high-powered microscope. His research team estimates the tree took root in 1560, four years before William Shakespeare was born.

And if the Bard had anything to say about such a tree, he might have used a word slightly less pedantic than “magical.” But Phillips is no English major, he’s a dendrochronology (tree-ring analysis) major, and good thing, too, or the old spruce might have never been discovered.

That’s one of the reasons why Phillips is keeping the tree’s location secret. “I’m worried gawkers might trample its roots,” he says. “Besides, it’s healthy and could live many more years.” Most red spruces have a lifespan of 400 years. The previous record was held by a 405-year-old specimen in New Hampshire.

The Case of the Purple Carrots

Harvest of foreign vegetable shocks unwary Newfoundland gardener

GAMBO, Newfoundland and Labrador—Ches Davis was shocked when he pulled purple carrots from the soil of his backyard vegetable patch. After all, he did not recall sowing any unusual seeds. Could it be there’s something in the water or the soil? Half a row of the carrots he harvested had purple-coloured skin surrounding an orange flesh.”

But what is abnormal today was definitely the norm a few hundred years ago when purple carrots were first grown in the Middle East. It wasn’t until the 16th century when the Dutch bred for the orange pigment in honour of their national colour.

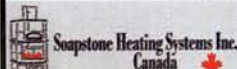
Still, it doesn’t explain how the purple carrots ended up in Davis’s backyard... unless there’s some sort of coloured-carrot conspiracy at hand. “The only reason I can give is the conditioning of the soil,” says Mae Tizzard, the original seller of the seeds. As for wonky chemistry at play, Davis says he grows organically, without the aid of any chemical fertilizers or pesticides.

John Gorso, a farmer far away in Ontario, says he can’t explain the mystery in Newfoundland, but he does know that a regular orange carrot will turn purple—sometimes green—if the shoulder is exposed to sunlight. Another answer might come from across the ocean in Britain. Three years ago, a grocery chain announced that it would start selling carrots in their original, purple hue. A spokesperson for the store said it was hoped more children would be enticed to eat more carrots if they were purple. Could it be that some of those seeds made their way to Newfoundland on some cross-Atlantic breeze? Unlikely, which still leaves Ches Davis scratching his head.



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