
Gerritsen Beach Has "Itchy Balls"

By James N. Fetter

The casual reader seeing this title may chose to read the article out of curiosity, but for residents of Gerritsen Beach, Brooklyn, New York the title requires no explanation.

Any red-blooded American from Gerritsen Beach recognizes these as the fruit of the "Itchy Ball Tree". These trees line the park on Gerritsen Avenue. This tree is a hybrid between



Platanus orientalis (Oriental plane) and *Platanus occidentalis* (American plane or American sycamore) and is grown extensively as a street and garden tree. The ball of tiny flowers matures to a dry seed head (itchy ball) that when broken up and brought into contact with

the skin, causes severe itchiness.

Being an expatriate of Gerritsen Beach I have frequently moved around this great and wonderful country of ours. For some reason I have this tendency to always compare wherever I am to Gerritsen Beach. I call this being home-sick. My wife on the other hand, a Pittsburgher, tells me, "no you are just being a New Yorker." Well, what does she know; she might know pierogies, but I know "Itchy Balls."

As the wonderful, cool, humidity-free air of the fall season begins to replace the oppressive muggy summer temperatures in Gerritsen Beach, as well as the rest of the northeast, nature's glorious autumn display of color begins. The leaves changing from their bright emerald green color through what seems to be a never ending hue of yellow, orange, red and finally brown. The magnificence of this display of color seems to be designed by nature solely to impress the human race. This seemingly painted display slowly moves down and across the mountains of New England and the Appalachians. Even Gerritsen Beach sees it share of this magnificent demonstration as leaves of the "Itch Ball Trees" join in this ostentatious display of color.

Fall festivals throughout the regions celebrate more than natures fall display of color and changing leaves. Local farmers and merchants over the years have learned to capitalize on the

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visitors. The farmer's opportunity to sell pumpkins, corn, cider and anything the visiting city folks will pay an exaggerated price for and think they have left with a bargain. In addition to the sale of produce and folk art. These festivals have grown every year and now include parades and festivities that have festival queens and special sporting events designed to bring more tourists and dollars to their town. As the local foliage is turning brown, local cash registers are turning green.

The proliferation of fall festivals is not indigenous to the northeast nor is the sale of over-priced home-grown or home-made articles. I (haven't we all) have attended these festivals in Texas, Alabama, Tennessee, Virginia, New York and Vermont to name just a few. Each festival claims "The World's Greatest ..." you name it: peaches, onions or pumpkins. Their products are magical, mysterious and heavenly. How can that be one might ask? They bring cash to the communities - a real *cash crop*.

At his point the reader is probably asking how this story has gone from "Itchy Balls" in Gerritsen Beach to fall festivals in Texas. Well the answer is a screaming opportunity for Gerritsen Beach to claim itself the "Itchy Ball Capital of the World." The opportunity for raising money for the community is unending.

Can you imagine the pride and glowing smiles on the faces of parents as their beautiful daughters exit their limousine and walking the red carpet to the Cort Club for the "The 2012 Gerritsen Beach Itchy Ball", and again at the "Annual Itchy Ball Ball" held annually at the Tamaqua as the winner is presented? Can you just see the diamond studded scepter and the silver polished tiara with the dangling "Itchy Balls"? It brings tears to eyes just thinking of this lovely scene.

Since this will be a fall festival coordinated with the Gerritsen Beach annual fall harvest of "Itchy Balls", it would be a perfect time to have a special event football game. Yep! You guessed it, "The Itchy Ball Bowl". High School teams would cherish the opportunity to play in this bowl and compete for the cherished cup overflowing with the current year's crop of "Itchy Balls"

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Aside from all of the pageantry, tee-shirt sales are a certain opportunity not to be missed. In addition to being a cash cow for the event tee-shirts would bring recognition to the community and only enhance attendance at the next annual event. Can you see the tee-shirt with the official logo? “I Got My Itchy Balls In Gerritsen Beach.”

This opportunity for Gerritsen Beach cannot be missed. Action must be taken expeditiously to avoid surrounding communities from taking this away. The Borough of Brooklyn has already considered making the Sycamore Tree the Official Tree of Brooklyn. Can the “Itchy Ball” be far behind in being declared the Official Fruit of Brooklyn?

Act now Gerritsen Beach! It will be devastating to our community to awaken to the news - “Sheepshead Bay - Home of the Itchy Ball”.



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