

# Th. Jefferson

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## What We're Growing: *Feathered Hyacinth*

PLANT PROFILE FROM THE THOMAS JEFFERSON CENTER FOR HISTORIC PLANTS

In 1812, Thomas Jefferson received a shipment of “6 feathered hyacinth roots, *Hyacinthus monstrosus* L.” along with other spring-flowering bulbs from Philadelphia. Native to the Mediterranean region, the feathered hyacinth was praised in 1629 by the English herbalist and botanist John Parkinson for its “excellent purple or Dove color.”

The feathered hyacinth begins as a tight cone. Its buds eventually unfurl into soft, loose clusters, rising on a 10-inch stem above medium-green, strappy leaves. As the common name indicates, this unique flower is covered in tiny bursts of thin, feathery, bright violet-purple filaments.

Jefferson first mentioned feathered hyacinths as early as 1767, when he observed them blooming at Shadwell on April 25. The flower is the last of the *Muscari* species to bloom in the spring, typically beginning to emerge in late April or early May in Virginia. As McMahon instructs in *The American Gardener's Calendar* (1806), a book owned and consulted by Jefferson, the small, hardy feathered hyacinth bulb should be planted in the fall at a depth of three to four inches “along the borders of the flower-garden and pleasure-grounds” in full sun to part shade, where it will slowly naturalize.



To view the feathered hyacinth, visit the Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic plants at Tufton Farm during five Open Houses in 2013. Each Open House features a tour of the gardens, garden-related workshops, and a chance to shop for hundreds of varieties of rare heritage and native perennials, trees, and shrubs (go to [www.monticello.org](http://www.monticello.org) for dates and details). A wide selection of unusual plants and seeds are also offered year-round at the Garden Shop at the Monticello Visitor Center, or shop online at [www.monticellocatalog.org](http://www.monticellocatalog.org). Plants are available for purchase online on January 7, 2013, and begin shipping in late February for the spring season.