



Lanark Orchid Renais

Perth & District Horticultural Society

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District #2 of the
Ontario Horticultural
Association

February 2010 Newsletter

You can count
how many
seeds there are
in an apple,
but you can't
count how
many apples
are in a seed.

President's Pen, February 2010

We have "lost" our History! By this I mean, exciting rumours abound that the Hort Society has albums with photos and articles documenting from whence we came and whom were our founding members. Photos document past socials, events and milestones. However, no one seems to know where they might be found.

If you are a past board member and know where they might be, had volunteered to store the albums or any other boxes of our formal history, would you let one of the current board members know? Roots are an important part of anyone's back ground, and as any good horticulturist will tell you, hold important keys to continued growth and development.

If you can help us solve the mystery of the missing albums, we would be very grateful. Thank you in advance for your help!

Meet you in the garden,

Lynda

Junior Gardeners

This is a reminder to all who have started cuttings for our Junior Gardeners program. Could you please bring the cuttings to our next society meeting on March 9. I will then be able to put the care instructions on the pot, ready for the students when we start our program in early April.

If you do not have pots or soil available, then bring them as is and I will pot them. Thank you.

We now have enough tuna cans, and strawberry containers for all the schools, thank you to those who collected and brought them to me. We do need styrofoam meat trays, the base of which should be at least 4" wide, to accommodate a strawberry container. Please bring in to the March meeting, or contact me, Janet Cain at 613-264-1065 and I can collect them from you.

Janet Cain, Co-ordinator
Junior Gardeners Program

Book Sale

We are collecting used gardening-related books for the giant used book sale to be held at the District 2 AGM on April 10 in Kemptville.

Please bring your donations to our March meeting. All contributions gratefully accepted.

Pruning Deciduous Trees and Shrubs

By Dale Odorizzi

Late winter is an excellent time to prune many trees and shrubs. The trees and shrubs are dormant and without leaves, it is easy to see the structure of the trees so that you can see which branches should be cut out. Also, gardeners are looking for an excuse to get outside and start working in the garden.

Think about the 5 "D's" of pruning and do them in the order given. Remove limbs that might be *dangerous*. Then take our any *dead, diseased* and *damaged* branches. Finally, consider the overall *design* or shape of the plant when deciding which branches to remove. Remove any branches that are crossing, especially if they rub on each other. Do not prune more than one third of the tree or shrub annually.

There are other good reasons to prune but these are not essential to your tree or shrub's survival. You can prune if you want more flowers and fruit, a tidier or more shapely shrub, a shaped formal hedge or a controlled growth of certain branches or overall size.



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The basic pruning equipment that you need in an average yard is good quality secateurs (or hand clippers), lopping shears (long-handled shears) and a pruning saw. Secateurs are used to cut branches less than $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch. Lopping shears cut branches from $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches. They are very useful for removing old stems from older shrubs. A pruning saw can remove branches up to 6 inches in diameter.

To prune a large branch, make a pre-cut about 18-24 inches up the branch from the crotch, where the branch joins trunk. This pre-cut effectively removes the weight of the branch so that while the final cut is being made, the weight won't carry the branch down and tear the bark. If the branch falls before you finish cutting it, there is a risk the bark will tear, resulting in a large wound that won't heal. Make a cut on the underside of the branch about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way through the branch. Make a top cut slightly ahead—towards the branch end—of the bottom cut. Continue cutting until you are through the branch. After the pre-cut, you have a short stub that is easier to remove.

Look closely where the branch comes out of the trunk. You should see sort of ring of bark around the branch. This is called the collar. If you cut the branch stub off immediately outside this collar, healing may be slightly slower but the chance of getting disease into the trunk is less. Black wound paint does no good and may harm the tree. If you have cut close to the collar, it will grow over the wound in time. The final cut should be clean and straight and close to the collar, starting near the collar and angling slightly away from the tree.

Maple, birch and beech bleed if pruned when dormant. This is messy but not damaging. Prune after they leaf out to avoid this. You will often read that you should prune summer blooming shrubs as they leaf out and spring bloomers right after they bloom. This is recommended so that you can enjoy the blooms before cutting the branches off. Many of us plan to do our pruning at this time but get busy with other gardening chores. Pruning now will not hurt the trees and shrubs and in fact makes your job easier.

"Gardening au Natural"

District 2 AGM 2010 by Pat Kiteley

Kemptville College, Kemptville, April 10, 2010

Where: WB George Centre, Kemptville College

Cost : \$25.00 per person

Speakers:

- Edythe Falconer, Gardening au Natural
- Rob Caron and Dave Dunn, Rideau Woodland Ramble
- Lyle Slater, Upper Canada Cranberries

Market Place: 15 vendors selling plants, pottery, seeds, herbs, Garden art, books and more!!

Special Features

- ALL Door prizes supplied by Kemptville Horticultural Society

- HOT LUNCH from College Catering Services (food allergies, and vegetarian preferences are requested upon registration)
- Gift bag to all who attend, full of useful gardening items
- Large venue with lots of parking, easy access
- Registration
- Registration Package by mail in January 2010
- Registration Deadline March 20th, 2010
- Maps to Kemptville and to college building included
- Outline of the day included in package

Pink Or Blue - It's Up To You!

The colour of hydrangeas , pink or blue, is dependent on the acidity of the soil. To achieve a pink colour the soil must be a high pH in the range of 6.0 to 6.5. This is achieved by using fertilizer high in phosphorous (middle number) or adding dolomitic lime to the soil.

For a blue colour, the pH must be in the 5.2 to 5.5 range. Aluminium sulfate (1 teaspoon per gallon of water) may be used. (be sure roots are very wet before using this compound to prevent burning them). It is hard to maintain a blue colour in hydrangeas planted close to cement structures due to the leaching of lime from concrete.

NOTE: white hydrangeas cannot be turned pink or blue.

Using Ashes In Your Garden

Dawne Howard

Frederick County Master Gardener Program

Since Roman times, wood ash has been recognized as a useful amendment to the soil. In fact, North America exported wood ash to Britain in the 18th century as a fertilizer, and today, 80 per-cent of the ash produced commercially in the Northeastern United States is applied to the land.

Woodstoves and fireplaces are great for warming gardeners' chilly hands and feet. So, what can we do with the ashes? Since wood ash is derived from plant material, it contains most of the 13 essential nutrients the soil must have for good plant growth and health. When wood burns, nitrogen and sulfur are lost as gases, and calcium, potassium, magnesium and trace element compounds remain. The remaining carbonates and oxides are valuable liming agents, raising pH, thus neutralizing acid soils. Soils that are acid and low in potassium benefit from wood ash. However, acid-loving plants such as blueberries, cranberries, rhododendrons and azaleas would not do well at all with an application of wood ash.

Wood ash has a very fine particle size, so it reacts rapidly and completely in the soil. Although small amounts of nutrients are applied with wood ash, the main effect is that it is a liming agent. The average ash is equivalent to a 0-1-3 (N-P-K). The chemical makeup varies with the type of wood burned. Hardwoods produce three times as much ash per cord as do softwoods.

Calcium and potassium are both essential to plant growth. Calcium is needed for root development, strong cell walls and protein formation in the plant. Potassium is an important catalyst in photosynthesis and is essential for the movement of sugars, seed formation, protein synthesis and the use of nitrogen in plants.

Wood ash should never be applied to areas where potatoes will be planted as ash can promote potato scab. For most garden soil, 20 pounds (about a 5-gallon pail) per 1,000 square feet can be applied safely each year. That equals about 6 pounds of ground limestone applied to the same area.

The best time to apply wood ash is in the spring when the soil is dry and before tilling. In compost piles wood ash can be used to maintain a neutral condition, the best environment for microorganisms to break down organic materials. Sprinkle ash on each layer of compost. This is especially good if you have oak leaves or pine needles in your compost heap.

Wood ash can be used to repel insects, slugs and snails because it draws water out of these invertebrates. Sprinkle ash around the base of your plants to discourage surface-feeding insects. Once ash gets wet, it loses its deterring properties. Too much ash can increase pH or accumulate high levels of salts that can be harmful to some plants, so use ashes carefully.

Ash should be stored in a metal container with a secure lid. This helps prevent accidental fires from live coals and prevents water from flowing through the ash and leaching out the nutrients before the materials are applied to the soil.

Caution should be used when handling wood ash:

- Protect yourself as you would if you were handling household bleach or any other strong alkaline material. Wear eye protection, gloves and a dust mask.

- Do not use ash from burning trash, cardboard; coal or pressure-treated, painted or stained wood. These materials contain potentially harmful chemicals, The glue in cardboard contains boron, an element that can inhibit plant growth if applied in excess.

- Do not scatter ashes during windy periods.
- Do not mix ash with nitrogen fertilizer such as ammonium sulfate or ammonium nitrates or urea. These fertilizers lose their nitrogen as ammonia gas when mixed with high pH materials such as wood ash. For a lawn, wait at least a month after wood ash is applied before putting down a nitrogen fertilizer to allow for the soil to reduce the alkalinity of the wood ash.

Never leave wood ash in lumps or piles. Concentrated piles of wood ash causes excessive salt build-up in the soil through leaching and can create a harmful environment for plants.

I hope this information will help you and others with wood ash this winter. Cozy up to the fireplace all you gardeners, keep warm, enjoy the time of rest from your labors and read those seed catalogues.

Compost Feeds The Soil. Or Does It?

Composting and organic gardening go together like peas and carrots or peanut butter and jelly: they complement each other perfectly. Yet the feature that many gardeners consider to be compost's prime asset – adding nutrients to the soil – is actually a fairly minor side dish in compost's larger menu of benefits.

The truth is that the fertility content of compost is extremely variable (depending on the ingredients used to make it), and usually quite low. In general, compost contains about 1 to 4 per cent nitrogen (N) and more or less the same percentages of phosphorus (P) and potassium (K), creating average nutrient ratios anywhere from 1-1-0.5 to 2.5-1-2, similar to the 2-1-2 fertilizers found at garden centres.

To get a sense of how low (and slow-release) the nutrient content of compost is, compare application rates used by conventional and organic farmer. A conventional farmer adds 150 pounds per acre of a 2-1-2 NPK fertilizer to produce field corn, whereas an organic farmer adds 10 to 20 tons of compost per acre to achieve similar NPK results in the first year. (It sounds like a lot, but 10 to 20 tons of compost doesn't even cover the ground.) What the organic farmer gets from those tons of compost, however, isn't found in a thin dusting of synthetic fertilizers.

Compost's extra mass is a case of more equaling more: carbon, microbes and fungi are present in abundance. And it's the synergistic



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alchemy of these biological ingredients that generates the vitality and resilience in organic garden or farm soils. Here's how.

Carbon provides food for the microbes and fungi living in the soil and in the compost. The well-fed microbes, in turn, rev up nitrogen cycling in the soil, converting the N from organic into the forms that are most readily used by plants. However, this biological N conversion happens quite slowly compared to the quick shot of inorganic N provided by an application of synthetic fertilizer. In general, plants take up all the inorganic N they can while growing, but a burst of chemical fertilizer sometimes provides more N than the plants can use. At those times, the unused N, which is extremely water soluble, washes down through the soil of the root zone into the groundwater, often creating pollution problems.

The microbe processed N, on the other hand, is made available to plants more slowly and over a longer period. Plants are able to take up more consistent (if smaller) amounts of N throughout their growing cycle.

Also, carbon material in compost and soil acts like a sponge, wicking up moisture (and any unused N that's dissolved in that water) and keeping it in the root zone where the plants can continue to take it in between rainfalls. Thus compost helps shield crops from drought and nutrient stress longer and more successfully than synthetic fertilizers do.

Finally, the active and well-nourished beneficial fungal community in compost is integral to holding these soil components together and prevents them from eroding with each rainfall. Fungi produce hyphae (threadlike filaments) and carbon-rich exudants that bind soil particles together into small clumps known as aggregates. The formation of aggregates keeps essential soil particles, such as carbon and minerals, in place and accessible to plant roots. The process also creates spaces between the aggregates, called pores, which help hold air and water near the roots as well.

Mycorrhizal fungi in compost colonize among plant roots, creating a symbiotic relationship. The fungi take sugars from the plant and in return send hyphae out from the roots. This increases the surface area of each root, allowing it to scavenge more nutrients from the soil, particularly phosphorus, which aids photosynthesis.

Compost is therefore one of the best amendments for soil, especially when produced with materials from your own garden and kitchen. And the compost heap is the ultimate recycling machine: returning materials to the ground that produced them is beneficial because it keeps carbon and nutrients cycling on the property without excessive loss or gain, virtually eliminating any increase in the garden's carbon footprint.

So, compost may not be the plant-specific, super-

nourishing "vitamin pill" that many people think it to be, but it's actually much more. Think of it as a complete whole-foods diet for the soil that will help you garden plants grow and glow with vibrant health.

*Christine Zeigler, research and science editor,
Rodale Institute.*

Myth of the Month **"Evergreens Need Sun in Winter"**

Perhaps the most obscure, least travelled myth in gardening, but I mention it only because of the conversation I had with a person this summer.

I had just finished a tidy landscaping job for a nice client that involved a renovation of her foundation shrubs and the addition of a new garden bed that ate up some of her front lawn and curled down to the street at the corner of her driveway.

Among the shrubs I placed near the street was one of my favorites, *Chamaecyparis 'King's Gold'*, a low growing, flop-top little cutie. A neighbour came by walking her dog, and offered her assessment. In winter, she pointed out, the snowplows were going to come along and deposit quite a bank of snow onto the new roadside bed. Yes, I agreed, that's why most of the bed along the street contained perennials, in addition to the aforementioned 'King's Gold', which doesn't mind in the least being flattened by plowed snow.

"But it will be completely covered!" she exclaimed. "It won't get any sun all winter!"

It took me a moment to figure out what exact point she was trying to make. Then it hit me — she thought that shrubs needed sunlight in winter. When it's twenty below, in other words, and the ground around them is filled with frost to a depth of eighteen inches.

No, they don't. Nothing does, not mature oak trees, woody shrubs, or evergreens of any variety, shape or size. It's winter. They are all completely dormant.

Best thing in the world is for your landscape to get so much snow in winter that your plants — particularly your evergreens — are completely covered by the stuff. I used to shovel my driveway and sidewalks and carry the snow over to my bird's nest spruce, junipers, macrobiota, and 'King's Gold' and try to bury them as best as the snow supply would allow. A dwarf Mugho pine is another good one to completely bury in snow.

All the snow does is insulate evergreens from the bitter temperatures and the winter sun that dries them out and causes their needles to burn and go brown by spring. Get a lot of snow to the point where your low evergreens are completely buried from December through March, and yippee, it means they never will look better the next spring and summer

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