

# February 2015 Newsletter

"Really, this is the very worst time of year to be making plans. Winter in these climes keeps a person trapped inside for so long that by the time February comes around one is positively delusional with grandiose plans for the coming year."



## Upcoming Meetings

The planned speaker for the **March 10** meeting is **Alison Shannon** who will be speaking about "Vegetables Old and New."

For the **April 14** meeting, we will have Joanna Kowalczyk informing us on "The Art and Science of Pruning."

## Herb Gardens on Your Windowsill

*Helen Halpenny,  
Lanark County Master Gardeners*

The snow may be piled high outside, but starting your garden indoors can happen right now. Come February, the light level begins to increase and a sunny windowsill can be the perfect place to get a head start on the gardening season. There is lots of time before mid-May to get herbs growing. The smell of basil, mint and thyme and the taste of fresh herbs is a harbinger of spring.

The seed racks at retail stores are filled with dozens of choices. Many herbs start well from seed while others are best grown from

transplants. If your goal is to grow herbs that you can clip for culinary use or use as garnishes then the following suggestions may help. These favourites can be started now indoors and moved to the garden when the weather dictates. Most herbs will thrive in a sunny location.

Basil seeds are easy to grow indoors. The seed will germinate in one to two weeks in a warm location, such as on top of a fridge. When the sprouts show, move to a sunny window sill and keep the soil moist. Water with lukewarm water and fertilize every week with a half strength soluble fertilizer. Fresh basil has a wonderful smell and combines with tomatoes in any dish. As well as the common basil you might like to try 'purple ruffles' or 'cinnamon' or a host of other varieties.

Mint is one of the easiest plants to grow. Since it travels quickly by root it can be invasive outdoors. It is best contained in a pot. It is quick to grow indoors and fun to watch the seedlings grow and to smell the fragrance.

Parsley is rather slow to germinate, sometimes taking 3 weeks to begin growth, but it is well worth the wait. To keep



Lanark Orchid

Renals

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the soil moist it is best to cover the pot with a transparent cover while germination takes place. In a sunny window sill you can have parsley plants that look and taste great and when planting time comes, the plants will be well established to transplant into the garden. Outdoors, parsley will tolerate half-day shade. Curly parsley may be pretty for garnishing, but flat leafed parsley has the best flavour.

Oregano is a popular Mediterranean herb. Sow now for transplants that are good to transplant in May. Don't cover the seeds with soil. Thin seedlings to give them space to grow. There are many varieties from which to choose. The entire plant is edible.

Chives can be grown indoors from seed, but I usually pot up a portion of a plant in fall, leave it in a cold place to give it a period of dormancy and bring it to bright window in February. It bounces into growth really quickly and its mild onion flavour enhances salads and such. Plant a few of your sprouting garlic cloves and use the greens for a mild garlic flavor.

These are but a few of the worthwhile experiments you can try to lift your spirits and enjoy gardening even though winter continues.

*Enjoy The Edible Garden Newsletter  
published monthly by Lanark County  
Master Gardeners and available on our  
website [www.lanarkmg.blogspot.com](http://www.lanarkmg.blogspot.com)*

## Monthly Financial Statement

December 31, 2014

Ledger Balance December 1, 2014      **\$4,863.70**

### Receipts -

Grants	\$ <u>100.00</u>
	\$ 100.00

### Expenses -

Community Projects	\$ 47.00
Miscellaneous	<u>2.50</u>
	\$ 45.62

### Ledger Balance

December 31, 2014      **\$4,914.20**

Reserve fund – GIC  
matures July 18, 2016 - \$2,553.92 (invested)  
+ interest (\$41.96 Nov. 4, 2014)

## Terrariums: Gardens In Glass

*Dr. Leonard Perry,  
Extension Professor University of Vermont*

What do fish tanks, brandy snifters, and Mason jars have in common? They are all containers that can be used to make gardens in glass, or terrariums. Whether you put together a terrarium on a rainy summer day or for garden-relief in the dead of winter, this activity is suited for all ages. Terrariums are once again quite popular, perhaps due in part to the interest in fairy gardens—one possible theme for a terrarium.

Growing plants in clear containers dates back to at least 2,500 years ago in Greece. The terrariums we know today began with a 19th century London physician, N.B. Ward, and were named after him. These large, enclosed glass containers called "Wardian cases" were the original means of transporting newly discovered plants back to Europe from voyages around the world. In America, the earliest terrariums were made by women settlers placing the native partridgeberry in handblown glass bowls. This is a woodland plant with dark green, small evergreen leaves and red berries. These simplest of terrariums we know as berry bowls.

If making a larger terrarium, many plants may be used – in fact any that are small, or grow slowly and can be kept clipped to size. Keep in mind that, depending on the plants used, terrariums will need to be renovated every year or two as plants grow. You'll need to remove any that die, or get too large, and replace with new, smaller plants. When doing so, take the opportunity to introduce some fresh soil. If the plants are too out of control, you may just want to start again with new and different small plants.

Low woodland plants which can be used include mosses, ferns, lichens, foamflower, wintergreen, and partridgeberry. Some taller plants include other ferns and violets. Just make sure if collecting such plants during the summer that they are not endangered, and that you only collect a few plants from a native population.

Some common garden and house plants can be used such as aluminum plant, asparagus fern seedlings, creeping fig, English ivy, strawberry begonia, spider plants, nerve plant, selaginella moss, palm seedlings (which of course as they grow will need to be removed), and peperomias.

There are many low perennial plants you now can find for planting in walks and patios and stepping on, such as the herb thyme, which may be suitable in terrariums.

You may even want a theme of a specific ecological area. For a desert, use some of the many slower growing cactus seedlings and succulent plants such as echeveria, panda plant, or haworthia. For a bog, use mosses, ferns, and even carnivorous plants such as the Venus fly trap.

For a rock garden, consider perennials such as saxifrage, sedum, sempervivum (hens and chicks), erodium (alpine geranium), or low dianthus (pinks). Keep in mind, though, if using perennials that they may need some winter rest in a cool area. This may be an unheated, yet non-freezing garage, with indirect light.

Materials you'll need, beside plants, include proper soil (humus soil for woodlands, sandy for deserts, for instance), sand or fine gravel for drainage, and charcoal bits to keep the soil sweet. For desert themes, you may want to layer colored sands in the bottom. White or colored aquarium gravel, and miniature figures or fairy garden accessories (available at many garden and craft stores), can be used for accents. Sphagnum sheet moss is the usual liner for traditional and woodland terrariums.

Tools you'll need are scissors, a dowel rod, wire hooks or fork, water sprayer, funnel or tube, and brush or paper towels. Long-handled bamboo or similar tongs are useful for placing plants, pebbles, or accents. A small paint brush, as used in crafts, helps in cleaning leaves.

First, if using a moss liner, insert it green side out into the bottom quarter of the bowl. Then add a layer of gravel or sand. Sprinkle the charcoal bits on top. Finish with the soil, moistened. The container should now be about a quarter to third full. Add a little extra soil, as it will likely settle a half inch or so over the coming months.

Check your plants for pests before placing in the container. If foliage plants, it may be a good idea to dunk them in a mild, soapy bath and rinse before planting. This may help get rid of any lurking pests. Then check your terrarium frequently for pests, especially the undersides of leaves. If palm seedlings, check for mites, although mites prefer drier environments.

Mealybugs may be the more commonly found, and if so, swab them with a cotton swab and rubbing alcohol.

Insert the plants, roots first, into holes made with a fork. Start with the largest plants first, filling in with those smaller. Use the dowel rod to place plants, and firm soil around them. Spray the plants with water (unless of course a dry garden), clean the inner sides of the container, then add your decorative accents.

Keep the terrarium in bright but indirect light. In direct light it can get too hot, cooking the plants. Since the moisture and humidity remains in the container much longer than with houseplants, take care not to overwater. Closed containers will remain moist much longer than those with open tops. If your container is closed with a lid, open and check it every few days to give it some fresh air, and to make sure mold isn't growing inside.

Most containers used for terrariums don't have drainage, so if you overwater you'll end up with a bog garden only suitable for specific plants. You can tell when to water if the plants wilt, of course, or if the soil looks dry and lighter in color. Not watering too much is probably the most important key to success. If in doubt, best is not to water. For a new terrarium, or one with young and small plants, you may need to water only a couple times a month. For those with well-grown plants, and little soil or sandy soil, you may need to water a couple times a week.

You may need to water cacti and succulents very seldom – once or twice a month – and during sunny days. If watering when cloudy, the soil may stay wet too long and these arid-loving plants can rot. When watering any terrarium plants in winter, make sure the water is room temperature and not icy cold. Avoid fertilizing, or do so very sparingly at very low rates, to keep plants smaller longer.

If a large container, such as large rectangular fish tank, you may want to put a layer of gravel on the bottom and very small pots of miniature plants on top, as in a greenhouse. Plant choices here might be miniature African violets, small seedlings of cacti and succulents, or rooted cuttings of small-leaved houseplants such as some gesneriads, peperomia and begonias.

There are many attractive containers you can purchase for terrariums, such as miniature



*February is  
merely as long  
as is needed  
to pass the time  
until March.  
~J.R. Stockton*

greenhouses and Victorian-style large glass cases with many sides. Round glass “rose bowls” are available at many florist shops. Those with sides lower than the plants are used to make “dish gardens.” Look around the kitchen for clear containers such as glass tea cups or mugs, large spice jars, gallon cider jars (the thin necks will be harder to work through), or the tops of plastic soda bottles cut off and placed over pots.

If you find a clear glass or plastic container, the size and shape of a Christmas ornament, this can be used for a one-plant hanging terrarium. I have one with a tillandsia air-plant which needs very little water, just an occasional misting. You also may find suitable and unique containers at craft stores, flea markets, yard sales, antique shops, and on the internet. The next time visiting any of these, think “terrarium containers.”

## District 2 2015 Photo Competition

The District 2 competition will take place at the 2015 District 2 Annual General Meeting on April 25, 2015 in Pettawa.

Entries will be accepted in digital format or print format. They can be mailed to Linda Bartlett, 1060 Ford Road, Perth, Ontario K7H 3C3. Digital photos will also be accepted by email as attachments (one photo per email) to [district2photos@gmail.com](mailto:district2photos@gmail.com) – Subject line: D2 Photo Competition.

For classes, rules, entry deadlines and further information, visit the OHA District 2 website: [www.gardenontario.org/site.php/district2](http://www.gardenontario.org/site.php/district2)



### WHEN TO START TRANSPLANTS

Vegetable	Start Transplant	Direct Seeding
Basil	Start May June Transplant out June July	June July
Bush Beans	No need to start indoors	Plant late May to Mid-July, every 2 weeks.
Dried Beans		Plant Late May
Pole Beans		Plant Late May
Beets	April to June. Transplant out April-July	May & June
Broccoli	April-June. Transplant out May to early June	May & June
Cabbage	May. Transplant early June	May
Carrots		Direct Seed in May
Cauliflower	April-June. Transplant out May to early June	May & June
Coriander		April to August
Corn		Mid May to June
Cucumber	Early May, transplant in June	Late May
Eggplant	March, transplant in June	
Garlic		October
Green Onions	March to July	April to July
Kale	June and July	June and July
Lettuce	March to July. Transplant April to August.	April and May and then Late July
Melons	Early May, transplant early June	
Onions	Seeds—Feb-early Mar. Transplant Mid-Apr	Onion sets in April
Peas		April and May and again in August 1
Peppers	Start early March, transplant June	
Potatoes		May and June
Radish		April and May and then August
Rutabaga	Mid May, transplant early June	Plant in May
Salad Greens		April to September
Spinach	Start March, April and July	Plant April, May and August
Swiss Chard		Plant in May
Tomatoes	Late March, transplant in June	
Turnip		April, May and August
Winter Squash	Early May, transplant in June	Plant Late May or early June
Zucchini	Start May, transplant in June	Late May