

February 2016 Newsletter

Gardening is an exercise in optimism.
Sometimes, it is a triumph of hope over experience.

- Marina Schinz

From the President's Pen

I hope all of you are enjoying this mild winter. The days are getting longer and we finally turned the page on January. February is the month for caring and renewing friendships. Family Day brings young and old together to share stories of recent accomplishments and create new experiences.

Soon we will peel back the blanket which lies on our gardens and start working feverishly on them. Today I even noticed green grass brazenly coming up on our lawn, proving the mild winter we are having so far is teasing us to think spring is just around the corner. Just wait; it's not over yet.

Please give some thought to

volunteering to help at some of our numerous events this year as we will be extremely active throughout Perth and its surrounding areas.

Lastly please take time to introduce yourself to someone who you don't know this evening. We all bring resources and knowledge to each meeting. Collectively we all formed this society and we make it what is today. Chances are you will be received with a friendly smile and someone very willing to provide you with advice and information. Have a restful month; our gardens are soon waiting for spring rejuvenation.

Jane Law

Upcoming Meetings

On March 8th, the subject of "*New Annuals and Perennials*" will be presented by Carol Onion of Hillside Gardens.

On April 12, 2016, the planned topic is "*Garden Features*" with speakers Colleen O'Connell and Dave Cybulski.

Head Starts — Deadlines for Seeding

Dale Odorizzi,
Lanark County Master Gardeners
Why should I bother starting

my own transplants? I can go to any garden centre and purchase all I want. It's hard and it's messy and takes a lot of TLC to grow your own plants.

I have many reasons for starting my own plants:

- More choice from a seed catalogue than buying plants at the store
- Heirloom seeds from local seed exchanges
- Grow something before the snow is off the ground
- Pride in knowing that the produce from my garden started from a few packages of seeds.

Growing transplants is not



Lanark Orchid

Renals

Perth & District
Horticultural
Society

P.O. Box 494
Perth, ON, K7H 3G1
www.gardenontario.org

District #2 of the
Ontario Horticultural
Association

President: Jane Law • Newsletter: Irene Hofmann

difficult. Start with a moist soilless medium that contains a combination of peat, sand and perlite or vermiculite in clean pots or containers that drain well. Check your seed packet for directions. Plant the seeds in this mixture. A rule of thumb is to plant the seeds two to three times as deep as the seeds are wide. Cover the seedlings with clear plastic or a clear dome and place in a warm spot. Once the seedlings emerge, remove the plastic and place trays under fluorescent lights or next to a bright window. Keep the lights on 14-16 hours per day. Feed the seedlings every two weeks with a weak liquid fertilizer. Water plants from the bottom but do not overwater and make sure the seedlings do not sit in water. Transplant seedlings to larger containers after true leaves appear. Do not overcrowd seedlings. Plants in the Tomato Family do best if they are planted and replanted.

Seed packets and instructions often refer to Average Last Frost Date. Find yours at <http://www.plantmaps.com/interactive-ontario-last-frost-date-map.php>

Cabbage Family—Broccoli, Cabbage, Brussels Sprouts, Cauliflower, Rutabaga and Radish—Plants in this family can be directly sowed outdoors in early spring. To get an even earlier crop, start some seeds indoors in early spring. Transplants can be set out from early April until the end of May. In August, you can set out another crop that has been started 4-6 weeks earlier. Brussels Sprouts take longer to mature and are not suitable for fall planting. Radish, a member of this family, can be planted as soon as the ground can be worked and does not benefit from starting indoors. Keep planting until it starts to get too warm and plant again late August or early September.

Squash Family—Cucumbers, Melons, Winter Squash and Summer Squash—Seed directly in the garden after all danger of frost is passed and the soil is warm. To get an earlier crop, start seeds indoors in peat pots 3-4 weeks prior to setting out. The Squash Family transplants must be handled very gently to avoid damage to their root systems. Thin seedlings by cutting them off to avoid damage to other plants. Put “Kozy Koats” or Floating Row Covers over the Squash Family seeds and seedlings. They help to keep the soil warm and keep Cucumber Beetles away from the new plants.

Tomato Family — Tomatoes, Peppers, Eggplant — These warm-weather crops must be started indoors 6-10 weeks before the average

frost-free date. Because you start your seeds early, they will require transplanting into larger pots. Every time you transplant, remove a few lower leaves and set the plant more deeply in the soil. Tomatoes love to be transplanted, repeatedly. See companion article. Do not set out transplants until the soil has thoroughly warmed. Although many people in Eastern Ontario religiously put out their Tomato plants on the May long weekend, they risk losing their crop to a late frost. Hold off until early June. Try an experiment and plant a few plants early and others in June. Even without a frost, your June plants will catch up and may even pass your May plants. Potatoes are another member of this family. They do well by planting directly into the garden.

Onion Family — Garlic, Leeks, Onions — The three members of this family require different starting treatment.

- **Garlic**—Plant cloves in October and mulch well. They will be ready to harvest at the end of July. If you did not get around to planting in the fall, you can plant in the spring. They will produce smaller bulbs and may not be suitable for drying and storage. They will provide delicious “Green Garlic”. In fact, if you have any sprouting garlic from last season in the spring, plant it and use until your new crop is ready.

- **Leeks**—Start seeds indoors for early spring transplants. Transplant seedlings deeply to produce the long, thick, blanched stems. Mulch well. With good mulching, they can be left in the ground and harvested throughout the winter.

- **Onions**—Use sets, seeds or transplants. Start seeds indoors 8 weeks before setting out. If you start seeds outdoors, you will not get good storage onions. Use a cell pack and put 3 seeds in each cell. When it is time to set the plants out, plant each cell 2.5-5 cm apart. Use one or two of each onion as green onions and leave the third plant to mature.

Aster Family—Lettuce—Lettuce is a cool season crop that has different types and different dates to maturity.

- **Crisphead**—Iceberg type that requires long, cool growing season. Start seed indoors in late winter and transplant in early spring. Apply mulch to stabilize soil temperature. Cover with floating row cover to reduce heat.

- **Cos or Romaine**—Nutritious and easy to grow. Start indoors in late winter and transplant in early spring.

- **Leaf**—Fast growing and long lasting. Direct

sow as soon as ground can be worked or start seedlings indoors 4 weeks prior to planting out for earlier crop. Continue starting indoors and planting out. Does not germinate well in high temperatures.

- Butterhead or Bibb or Boston—This is another good choice for succession planting. Sow outdoors as soon as ground can be worked. Start indoors for a longer season or to start in midsummer when temperatures are high.

Other vegetables do not benefit from earlier starting indoors and do better directly planted into the garden.

So what can you do now in January? Review the December 2015 Edible Garden Newsletter to remind you of what you need to grow seeds. Set up your gardening calendar—either electronically or on paper. Mark the dates for starting each of your plants so you are ready for spring. Plan to visit a local Seedy Saturday and order your seeds. The days are getting longer and Spring is not too far away.

How I grow tomatoes from seed

by Helen Halpenny

By mid-winter many gardeners get 'the itch' to start growing plants. If tomato plants are on your list, resist that urge until at least the beginning of April. Seedlings started too early will become tall and spindly, and you will have to look after them indoors longer.

It is a satisfying activity to browse seed catalogues during winter and decide what varieties you need. Tomato seeds remain viable for several years if stored in a cool, dark dry location so check out left over seeds before you order more. I like to grow several varieties—small cherry type (both yellow and red), an early maturing kind, a paste type, a large meaty variety that will fill the slice of bread, and experiment with a couple of heirloom varieties. Tomatoes are either determinate or indeterminate. Determinate varieties are preprogrammed to produce fruit which ripens more or less at the same time. Vines are short and don't require support. Indeterminate ones continue to grow and produce fruit as long as growing conditions allow, thus producing over a longer period of time. They need staking.

I prefer to start my plants in pots of sterile soilless mix, planting seeds about three times as

deep as their width. Cover the moist mix with plastic and give bottom heat, I use an old heating pad set on 'low'. Seedlings will emerge in 8-10 days. It is always a thrill to see this happen. No fertilizer is required until the seedlings get their true leaves. My seedlings grow under fluorescent lights in my basement. I use one warm white and one cool white bulb. This gives a wide spectrum of light that they seem to like. 'Grow lights' are available but cost more. A timer can be set to supply about fourteen hours of light per day. It is important to keep plants within 10 cm of the light source.

In a few weeks, transplant to give plants more growing room. Never over water, as that can contribute to damping off. An all-purpose water soluble fertilizer at half strength is fine. Fish emulsion also works well. I find it beneficial to run a fan nearby each day for an hour or so to increase air circulation. The air flow makes stems grow sturdy.

By mid-May plants can be introduced to the outdoors gradually. This process entails taking plants to a shady outdoors location and moving to sunlight over the course of ten days. If nights are cool, bring the plants indoors at night time. After the hardening off process, choose a cloudy day to transplant tomatoes in the garden and protect them from the elements with plastic covers or shingles to help them transition to harsher conditions.

If your plants are too tall, strip off the lower leaves and plant them deep up to the topmost leaves. The stems have the ability to grow roots from the nodes on their stems. This will result in an enhanced root system. By the end of June, when the soil is warm, it is very helpful to mulch the plants with 5-7 cm of mulch which will help maintain soil moisture, and control weeds.

If you are providing support for your tomatoes, make it sturdy. Retying vines will be ongoing. A side dressing of fertilizer will aid fruiting. At the same time keep a watch out for pests and diseases. The tomato hornworm is a monster. Aphids can sometimes cause damage. Blossom end rot is caused by a deficiency of calcium in the fruit and worsens in unfavourable growing conditions, especially drought. Early and late blight can devastate your tomato crop. To help prevent this disease, plant tomatoes in different areas of the garden each year, as disease spores and dormant over winter in the soil. I choose some varieties that are resistant to disease.

Tasty garden-grown tomatoes are one of the

joys of summer. It is amazing that up until the nineteenth century they were considered to be poisonous.

Editors Note—Helen's tomato plants are always sturdy and the first to sell out at plant sales.

One Writer's Garden: Eudora Welty's Home Place

*Charleston Horticultural Society,
11th January, 2016
Submitted by Lynda Haddon*

Whenever I am in Charleston, I enjoy attending their monthly horticultural meetings. Their AGM is held in January and the speakers are usually amazing and informative.

This year Susan Haltom spoke and shared her connection with Eudora Welty's garden in Jackson, Mississippi.

Not only was Eudora (1909-2001) happy when her hands were digging in the dirt, she also wrote short stories, novels, loved photography and won a Pulitzer Prize.

Haltom used Eudora's love of gardening to explain how gardening and gardens became important to many women, encouraging them to get together and safely create when the rest of their lives were so closely controlled.

But I get ahead of myself. Traditionally women were married and stayed home, running the house, cooking and raising the children. There were few areas for women to excel and step outside of these defined roles. Most homes were built close to the road and had front porches so that women could chat and connect with passersby.

Women being as creative as they can be, found a way that they could come together as a group and sow seeds, both flower and vegetables. They exchanged seeds and shared the challenges and solutions to improving garden production.

With the invention of the automobile, roadways now needed widening and sidewalks were introduced. Houses no longer automatically had front porches, so women began creating gardens in the backs of their homes so they could putter, design, weed,

water and view the gardens from the back windows of their homes.

Eudora Welty was one of these very women and she worked along side her mother to create and care for their gardens. On her mother's passing Eudora inherited the garden and kept it up until her late 80s when Haltom was asked if she could assist Eudora in keeping the amazing gardens alive and tended. What was going to happen was that the gardens were about to be razed and given over to a more modern purpose. A member of the community got involved and phoned Haltom to see if she could do anything to save these long-lived gardens. Haltom showed us before and after shots of when she, and a large group of volunteers, first took over the gardens and what they look like today. A bonus was that Eudora's mother left a copious amount of written detail about the gardens, including drawings, so Haltom was able to accurately recreate them.

One of Haltom's points was that while gardeners study and appreciate old world European and North American gardens, there are many gardens of the 20th Century of equal beauty and design. So many of the older flowers have been cloned, grafted, grown by cuttings, or hybridized that the original plants we were working with are beginning to disappear. Two examples: daylilies and hyacinths. The scope and varieties of day lilies is so enormous that the original plant is hard to be found. Hyacinth bulbs can be a challenge to locate. I can attest to that as I tried the last two falls to find some locally as I always like to add some each year to my garden, but there were none to found.

For more detailed information, Google Susan Haltom (One Writer's Garden: Eudora Welty's Home Place) and Eudora Welty. It is all very interesting reading.



Si hortum in bibliotheca habes, nihil deerit

*"He who has a garden and a library
wants for nothing"*

Marcus Tullius Cicero

The deadline for the D2 Photo Contest is March 16, 2016. For entry information and details, go to <http://www.gardenontario.org/site.php/district2>