

February 2017 Newsletter

What, if anything, do the infinity of different traditional and individual ideas of a garden have in common? They vary so much in purpose, in size, in style and content that not even flowers, or even plants at all, can be said to be essential. In the last analysis there is only one common factor between all gardens, and this is the control of nature by man. Control, that is, for aesthetic reasons. The essence is control. Without constant watchful care, a garden - any garden - rapidly returns to the state of the country all around it.

- Hugh Johnson, *The Principles of Gardening*, 1979

Upcoming Meetings

March 14, 2017

Rock Gardening Locally with Unique Plants. Speaker: Judy Wall, Rock Wall Gardens

April 11, 2017

Zero to Low Maintenance Perennials. Speakers: Laurie Bachand, Stoneridge Gardens and Nursery.

Meet with fellow gardeners. Many Seedy days have free gardening seminars. In Lanark County, your local Master Gardener group is on hand to answer your gardening questions.

Killing Me Softly With Ice Cubes

By Larry Hodgson,
The Laidback Gardener

Orchids often flower on and on for months. Worse yet, they tend to bloom again when treated too well. That is sooo boring!

Fortunately, it's possible to kill an orchid fairly easily if you put just a little effort into it. Here's how!

1. Water it with ice cubes

This is the method advocated by sneaky orchid growers who want to you to kill your orchid so you'll buy a new one... and it really works! Not only are orchids tropical plants that hate the cold, but an ice cube doesn't provide enough water, so the plant is always stressed by a constant lack of moisture. This is an excellent method for sadistic people because the plant dies very slowly.

Seedy Sunday

Perth Seedy Sunday

March 5, 2017, 10am to 3pm
Royal Canadian Legion,
26 Beckwith St E, Perth, ON

Seed sellers, farmers, horticultural societies, food and more! Free workshops as well as a seed swap table and lunch available. For more information or to inquire about being a vendor please check out the Perth Farmers' Market website www.perthfarmersmarket.ca or email: perthfarmersmarket@gmail.com.

Seedy Saturdays and Sundays take place across Canada in January, February and March. Many are free admittance and all are fun. You can swap and exchange seeds and buy seeds from suppliers.



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: Robin McIntosh • Newsletter: Irene Hofmann

2. Let the roots soak in water

It's so easy to do! Nowadays, orchids are often sold in transparent pots placed in a cachepot, that is, a container without a drainage hole. What a great idea for killing orchids! All you have to do is to pour water abundantly on the roots without ever checking to see whether they're soaking in water afterwards. Above all, never empty the cache-pot 15 to 20 minutes after you've watered, otherwise your orchid might last for years!

3. Water every day

Don't wait until the soil is dry to the touch before watering: that would be giving the orchid what it wants! Instead, water every time you walk by, killing it with kindness!

4. Place it near a radiator in winter and do nothing to increase the ambient humidity!

It is well known that orchids love humid air and that our homes are super dry in winter. So avoid bending to the whims of your orchid by applying techniques that would increase the ambient humidity. Instead, avoid humidifiers and humidity trays. Better yet, place yours directly in front of a hot radiator. That will kill it in no time!

5. Place it in a dark corner

Sunlight is to orchids as food is to people: their unique source of energy. And what better way to kill either than to starve them! Place yours at the back of the room, in a windowless bathroom, behind curtains, or beside the window rather than directly in front of it. Better yet, set it in a dark corner for months, then move it suddenly, in the middle of summer, directly in front of the sunniest window of the house. It will literally burn! (Hi hi hi!) Especially avoid brightly lit spots that get an hour or so of direct sunlight in the morning: your orchid could live for years there! Yuck!

6. Fertilize it massively

It's well known that orchids need less minerals for their survival than most other plants and that reducing their diet of fertilizer to a quarter or eighth of the recommended dose can keep them alive forever. So go ahead! Double, triple or quadruple the recommended amount of fertilizer. After all, if a little is good, more must be better, right? And apply it often! There is no better way to kill a defenseless

orchid than overfertilizing!

7. Either don't repot or repot at the wrong season

Why repot when, after 2 or 3 years, your orchid's potting mix begins to turn soft and mushy and retain too much water? After all, you are so close to your goal of killing it! If you decide to repot it in spite of my recommendation, do so while the plant is in full bloom or, better yet, in December or January when it's pretty much dormant. With a little luck, the shock will do it in! The worst thing to do is to repot it in a well-aerated growing mix created expressly for orchids. Instead, just dig up some dirt from your garden and use that: it will be everything orchids hate: dense, compact and full of doubtful microbes.

8. Never ask an expert or consult a website or book dedicated to orchids when you have questions or doubts

These sources seem dedicated to prolonging the life of orchids. What a crazy idea! Never pay any attention to anything they recommend and your orchid will croak much faster!

There you go! With a little deliberate neglect, anyone can kill an orchid. Try it and you'll see!

Pruning Notes

Lanark County Master Gardeners

Towards the end of February, or in early March just before the buds swell is a good time to prune fruit trees.

- Start with the 4Ds—the dead, diseased, damaged and dangerous.
- Prune away only to a maximum of 25% of the tree.
- Prune to thin branches to allow in light and air flow throughout the tree. Remove crossing branches and inward growing branches.
- Prune to encourage horizontal growth on laterals (branches growing out from the trunk) by pruning out branches and twigs pointing up or down.
- Prune back 20 to 30% of last year's growth on branches to a bud facing the direction you want growth—Spur pruning. This restricts size and encourages strong branches and in many cases fruiting.
- Pruning stimulates growth so prune where growth is wanted.
- Use sharp tools to make clean flush cuts.

- Disinfect tools between cuts.

Many online catalogues are now offering smaller bare-root trees for spring planting. They often offer more unusual trees and varieties than garden centres. Remember to check for disease resistance and the hardiness zone, 4 or less to be safe, zone 5 only for a sheltered location in the Ottawa area.

Shutterbugs - Snap To It

2017 District 2 Photography Competition

The District 2 competition will take place at the 2017 District 2 Annual General Meeting on April 22, 2017 in Eganville.

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 – 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

2017 OHA Photography Competition

Host: District 5, Richmond Hill, Ontario,
July 21-23, 2017

Theme: *"Green From Shore to Shore"*

Entries must be mailed to the Photography Chairperson and postmarked no later than May 1st, 2017. Please include your email address (if you have one) for better and faster communication.

CHAIR: Dianne Westlake, 1189 Greencrest Drive, Peterborough, ON K9J 8K9.
Phone: 705-742-9167, dianne.westlake@gmail.com

For classes, rules and regulations, visit the OHA website: www.gardenontario.org/sho/pho.php

Pollinators In Our Gardens

Helen Halpenny
Master Gardener of Lanark county

One of the joys of gardening is to sit for a spell and just watch the pollinators who flit and buzz about amongst the flowers. As hummingbirds, bees, butterflies, some types

of moths, flies and beetles go about their work of feeding themselves and offspring they are also transferring pollen from male to female parts of plants. This plant sex is necessary for this year's production of fruits and vegetables and for next year's seed.

Some plants are pollinated by wind (such as corn, beets and spinach) but most require pollinators. Over a billion dollars worth of commercial crops depend on pollinators, including blueberries, strawberries, apples and pumpkins. With the decline of honeybees and many other species of bees, home gardeners are reporting declining crop yields and fewer berries and seeds. Some native bees live underground and as their habitat is destroyed, their numbers decline.

So, what can we do to help? First of all, when it comes to pests in the garden, we need to know who are the good guys and who are the bad guys. 90 % of the insects are beneficial.

Understanding life cycles of insects, close monitoring to catch problems early and using physical barriers to protect crops enables us to forgo pesticides. Many insecticides, including organic ones, are lethal to bees. If you must 'save' a crop, use spray only on calm early mornings or late in the evening when bees are not in the garden.

A little benign neglect in tidying your garden will provide homes for pollinators. Leave a pile of stones, a stump or some unmown grass for nesting sites. Allow some crucifers, like lettuce and herbs to flower. Construct a 'bee house' with holes for insects to crawl into. Pieces of dowel, dried grass, drilled holes in wood, bark, etc. will provide homes for pollinators.

Planting flowers in drifts will enable pollinators to do their job efficiently and native plants are especially important. Gardens that have blooms from early spring to late fall are needed. Coltsfoot is a very early bloomer and sedum and wild asters provide food in late fall. Different colours appeal to varied pollinators. Bees do not see red, preferring blue and yellow flowers. Hummingbirds love red. Evening bloomers like moonflower and Datura attract moths. A sheltered garden with a few flat stones and a very shallow source of water will be appealing to pollinators.

Let us give our pollinators a helping hand by providing vital food and lodging in our gardens.

Unusual Edibles

Ester Bryan,

Master Gardener of Ottawa Carleton

For those of us who enjoy growing vegetables it's nice to take a break from the old standard crops and try something a little different. Here are three crops that are worth considering.

Cucamelon (*Melothria scabra*) is a tiny cucumber that looks like a watermelon. It is an old crop from Central America and is also known as mouse melon or Mexican sour gherkin. It is a relative of the common cucumber with better habits for the urban garden and certainly worth considering for small spaces. The vines are excellent climbers, smaller in size than the average cucumber plant and prolific in fruiting. These vines have excellent resistance to most diseases. Although cucamelon is a tender perennial, with enough time it may form tubers that can be pulled when the plant is frost-killed, and then saved for planting the next year.

Culture is fairly simple, treat like melons. Although seed is available, starting from the saved tubers is probably easier. They should be started inside and transplanted into a warm sunny location when the danger of frost is past. They are slow starters, so it is not uncommon for three weeks to pass before a sprout appears. Rest easy though, they can reach up to 3m (10 ft) in length and will be soon covered in small ivy-like leaves. It might be worth considering growing them in a hanging basket as they don't mind being pot-bound and are also drought tolerant and more cold-resistant than the average cucumber or melon. Their ornamental appearance is a bonus.

The vines will need support as they grow and their tiny flowers are pollinated by insects. The fruit should be harvested when firm and about the size of a grape. Waiting longer will mean the fruits become better for pickling than popping into your mouth. This is a fantastic crop for children. They love the tiny watermelon-looking fruits just ready to eat!

Ground Cherries (*Physalis pruinosa*) are an old favorite. Also known as Cape Gooseberry or simply *Physalis*, they can be found nowadays in many a fruit section of a typical supermarket. This tasty treat is originally from South America and has been cultivated in North America for quite some time, even if it has been somewhat unknown until recently.

In appearance the hanging fruit resembles its close relative, the Chinese Lantern. Both have a husk with a round fruit inside. However the fruit of the Chinese Lantern is not considered to be edible. The ground cherry is easily grown in the typical vegetable garden, and does just fine in poorer soils provided the drainage is good. Full sun and warmth is a must for this plant but it is an easy and abundant cropper.

Ground cherry is a nightshade family member like its relative the tomato and is best treated like one for the purposes of care. It can be slow to germinate and get started but once going is mostly pest and disease-free. Growing to about the size of a medium tomato plant, the papery green husks that form will turn yellow and crispy when the fruit within is ripe. Even easier, the fruit often just simply falls off the plant when ready. Ground cherries are excellent raw and cooked into jams and pies.

Jerusalem Artichoke Or Sun Choke (*Helianthus tuberosus*) is beautiful and generous. The name of this crop is commonly thought to be a corruption of the Italian "girasole" meaning "sunflower" and it is indeed a type of sunflower and perennial one at that. Like traditional annual sunflowers it is native to North America and is cultivated for its edible tubers of varying colors and shapes. This plant is often tarred as "invasive" or weedy, but all the better because it can be heavily harvested and still come back. It is certainly important to keep it under control though, because it will spread.

In appearance it grows up to 3m tall and produces a bunch of beautiful medium sized yellow blossoms with a dark centre. Bees adore them and they bring lovely late summer and early fall color to wherever they grow. They are not typically bothered by pests but powdery mildew and a few ailments can occur. When the frost kills the tops then is the time to dig the tubers. Leaving a few in the soil will ensure next years crop but they will likely come back regardless, just from scraps of root. They can be stored in a cool dark place or in the refrigerator crisper until use. The tubers can be added to stews or roasted, even eaten raw in salads.

So – as well as the standard tomatoes and cucumbers, why not try one of these productive and not fussy additions to your crop list? You'll be glad you did. After all, variety is the spice of life!