



Trowel Talk!

April 2019

The larch – harbinger of spring

Thankfully, not all trees shed their foliage in the fall. Some, like oaks and beeches, have rich coppery or tan fall foliage which persists on the tree into winter, providing a wonderful contrast to the white snow and the greens and blues of conifers.

Because their foliage persists year round, conifers are often called evergreens. Did you know that they also shed their needles? However, they shed only a few at a time so their branches are never bare. The larch (*Larix*) is the one exception. All larches are deciduous conifers which means they shed all their needles every fall so the trees are bare in the winter months, except for small, light to reddish brown cones which remain on the tree for several years. Winter is a good time to appreciate the larch's perfect form: a slender, unbelievably straight trunk and long, horizontal branches. Because of this form, it is sometimes called the northern ginkgo.

The larch is a true harbinger of spring among trees since its new needles appear earlier than most other species. If you have ever seen the larch unfolding new foliage, you will agree with me that its beauty is

breathhtaking. The needles are first pale green and then darken to bluish or grayish green. Unlike spruces or firs, which have single needles, larch needles like company and come in clusters called tufts. Each tuft may contain from 10 up to 60 short and thin needles. Their amazing flexibility and softness make the larch the most wonderful tree to "pet". White pine and hemlock are also lovely to touch but larch is definitely my favourite.



Larch needles

Photo: Gina Dobrodzicka

In the late fall, when maple leaves are brown and lie freezing on the ground, not much foliage colour remains. Except for the larch - it comes to the stage late - closing the fall show with brilliant yellow.

The larch's growth habit resembles tall, slender pyramids which may reach up to 30m but are only 10m wide. Despite its large size, the tree has a light and airy appearance due to its fine foliage and wavy branches.

The larch's hardiness is legendary.

Our Canadian larch, also called tamarack (*Larix laricina*), grows very far north. It is tolerant neither of city pollution nor drought so it would be a good candidate for cottage country. Unlike the tamarack, the European larch (*Larix decidua*) and Japanese larch (*Larix kaempferi*) are better choices for city gardens. However, remember that they are forest trees and need space. Both of these species come in weeping forms called *L. 'Pendula'*, which may be better choices for limited spaces. Pendulas are usually not wider than 2m but their height depends on the height of the standard they are grafted on and doesn't exceed 2.5m. The weeping or pendulous branches cascade like a fountain, providing a nice architectural accent.



Weeping larch

Photo: Gina Dobrodzicka

Larches are adaptive and forgiving but full sun is a must. If you are looking for a tree for a sunny exposure, please consider a larch.

Gina Dobrodzicka
Master Gardener

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April To Do

- Start any remaining or quick-growing seeds inside.
- Check for winter damage on trees and shrubs, and prune it out.
- Tidy winter debris off lawn and garden.
- Spray dormant oil if needed before trees and shrubs leaf out.
- Split perennials once they start growing a bit (so you can see they've survived). Large grasses, like miscanthus, are easiest in spring.
- Ask an MG if you have any gardening or plant ID questions

Tip of the Month

Spring tidying-up often includes pruning shrubs, so here are a few tips to help with that job.

If you wait until buds start swelling and changing colour, it's a lot easier to tell what's dead. If you're not sure a branch is dead, gently scratch or nick a tiny bit of bark to see if there's green showing under the skin (this is a wound, so try not to do it too often).

-You can prune out dead, damaged, or diseased branches at any time, but pruning for shape right now will decrease your show of flowers in spring-blooming shrubs, since you'll cut off flower buds. Wait until after flowering, then tidy the shrub's shape.

-As a general rule, don't remove more than about a third of the branches when pruning a shrub. Some more vigorous shrubs may be more drastically treated (usually for rejuvenation of old plants), but be warned that it can increase suckering.

-Evergreens such as cedar and juniper should not be pruned back past the last green needles on a branch. They will not resprout from bare wood as many deciduous shrubs do. Yews are an exception, and will grow from dormant buds.

-In all cases, prune back to just above a bud (deciduous shrubs) or where the branch joins another (evergreen and deciduous). Avoid leaving dead stubs, which are ugly and can invite disease.

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



Where to find us for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034—Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm (all year)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca - monitored daily

Send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID.

CLINICS:

Friends' Plant Sale, the Friends of the Farm annual plant sale

Sunday, May 12th - 9:00 am - 1:00 pm RAIN OR SHINE

Parking lot beside K.W. Neatby Bldg at Carling & Maple Drive

BEECHWOOD FARMERS' MARKET, June 15th, September 14th, 9 am-2 pm

BYWARD MARKET, Saturdays, May 4th-25th, June 1st & 8th, 9 am-1 pm

CARP MARKET Saturdays, May 11th-June 15th, June 29th, August 31th, September 7th, 14th, 28th, 8 am-1 pm

CUMBERLAND MARKET (1115 Dunning Rd), June 8th & 22nd, July 6th, August 10th, September 7th, 9 am-1 pm

HERB EVENT, (Carp Market) June 22nd

KEMPTVILLE FARMERS' MARKET, Sundays, May 26th, June 16th, July 14th, August 18th, noon-4 pm

MAIN MARKET, July 13th & 27th, August 10th & 24th, September 14th & 28th, 9 am-1 pm

NORTH GOWER FARMERS' MARKET, May 25th, June 1st & 15th, July 13th, August 17th, September 14th, 8:30 am-1 pm

OTTAWA FARMERS' MARKET (Lansdowne Park), Sundays, May 26th to September 22nd, 9 am-1 pm

RICHMOND FAIR, September 19th-22nd

RIVERSIDE SOUTH MARKET (Riverview Park & Ride), June 9th & 23rd, July 7th, 21st & 28th, August 11th & 25th, September 8th, 22nd & 29th, 10 am-2 pm

WESTBORO FARMERS' MARKET (Byron Linear Park), Saturdays, May 18th-June 22nd, July 6th & 20th, August 10th, 9:30 am-1 pm

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Friends of the Farm Lecture Series -7:00 pm -9:00 pm

Building 72 just east of the Prince of Wales roundabout. Free parking

Tuesday, April 16th -**The Art of Rock Gardening**

Josie Pazdzior and Rob Stuart, Master Gardeners

Tuesday, April 30th -**Trees and Shrubs - the Backbones of your Gardens**

Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

Tuesday, May 14th -**Kitchen Gardens**

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

\$12 members and \$15 non-members, per lecture

Monday, April 15th - 7:30 pm

Garden Design Basics

Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Top Generation Hall, 4373 Generation Court, Ottawa

Hosted by Gloucester Horticultural Society, guests welcome

Monday, April 15th -7:00 pm

A makeover for tired gardens and tired gardeners

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Russell Meadows, 475 Church Street, Russell

Russell Horticultural Society

continued



For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.ca>

Try to make your work invisible.

-To preview the effect of removing a branch, you could:

- a) have someone else bend the branch down somewhat while you step back to see the result or
- b) take a good picture of the shrub (from multiple directions if needed), then 'remove' branches on a print-out or in a photo-editing program.

Use this as a reference for the actual pruning (this works best with deciduous shrubs and trees, before they leaf out). When pruning, don't hesitate to step back between cuts to gauge what you still need to do.



Master gardeners at 2019 Ottawa home show, "manning" the advice table

Photo: Heather Clemenson



Tuesday, April 16th 7:15 pm

Vines

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener
Smiths Falls Legion (7 Main St. East)
Smiths Falls Horticultural Society

Wednesday, April 17th- 7:30 pm

Kitchen Gardens: harvesting your own bounty

Judith Cox, Master Gardener
St Andrews United Church, Hwy 29 Pakenham
Pakenham Horticultural Society, guest fee \$10

Thursday, April 18th- 7:30 pm

How to start seeds, 'All From a Little Seed' Equipment, timing, conditions, troubleshooting, hardening off

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener
City View United Church (corner of Merivale and Meadowlands)
Nepean Horticultural Society, guest fee \$4

Tuesday, April 23rd -7:30 pm

Vines and Trailers

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener
Tom Brown Arena 141 Bayview Rd
Ottawa Horticultural Society

Monday, - April 29th -7:30 pm

Gardening for the Bees

Julianne Labreche, Master Gardener
St. Mary's Magdalene Church, 537 Highway 105, Chelsea, Quebec
Gatineau Valley Gardeners, Guest Fee \$7

Wednesday, May 1st-7:00 pm

Gardening for the Bees

Julianne Labreche, Master Gardener
Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely
Greely Gardeners Group, Guest Fee \$3

Thursday, May 2nd-10 am

New Plants, Old Lives: Finding Joy Digging in the Dirt

Julianne Labreche, Master Gardener
St Mark's Anglican Church, 1606 Fisher Avenue, Ottawa
Coffee, Company and Conversation, All Welcome

Tuesday, May 14th - 7:30 pm

Herbs, What to Grow, How to Grow and Tips on Use

Nancy McDonald, Master Gardener
Carp Memorial Hall. 3739 Carp Rd.
West Carleton Garden Club, \$5 guest fee

Wednesday, May 15th -7:00 pm -9:30 pm

Designing your Water Garden: Elements and Principles of Design

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener
Greenboro Community Centre, 363 Lorry Greenberg Drive
Greater Ottawa Water Garden Horticultural Society,
guest fee free 1st visit, \$5 2nd visit

Monday, May 20th 7:30 pm

Into the Night Garden

Judith Cox, Master Gardener
Royal Canadian Legion, 57 Legion Way, Eganville
Eganville Horticultural Society, guest fee \$5



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