



Trowel Talk!

February 2019

Underused plants – A Master Gardener survey, part II:

Continuing from last month, here are some more favourites:

One contributor's favourite is *Omphalodes verna*. She says, "It's near impossible to find in a nursery but is SO easy to grow, well behaved and gives those beautiful blue flowers in spring in full shade. It makes nice drought tolerant ground cover for the rest of the growing season although it's happier in moist ground. Spreads at a moderate pace." The flowers resemble forget-me-nots, and although it's listed as zone 5, it can grow here, and has apparently been naturalizing in New England.

Native perennials are garnering interest from many people, and this group was no exception. One reports, "My aunt has field pussytoes in her garden, and it's a delight: low growing mat of fuzzy leaved flowers, tolerant of poor soil and shade. I'm going to give this native a try in my garden!" Officially known as *Antennaria neglecta*, the flowers look like a small creamy cluster of q-tips.

For showier natives, one gardener sent two suggestions: "One is not uncommon but in my opinion overlooked by people wanting a fabulous, hummingbird-friendly flower

that offers height and brilliant red especially when planted in drifts: *Lobelia cardinalis*. The second is one I've noticed in the wild ever since I was a kid (it grows along the shoreline at our cottage) but have never seen in a garden. It is now available at native plant nurseries: *Gentiana andrewsii*, or bottle gentian. It looks so exotic you can hardly believe it's not from Star Trek."

Tired of the same old annuals? We've got two suggestions. From a fan of blue and lavender blooms, "One of my favourites that I like to find room for is the annual pom-pom style asters. The Latin name for these is *Callistephus chinensis*."

Another gardener reports, "I have a lot of unusual plants in my garden, but one that gets the most comments and admiration seems to be the California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*). They are an annual and self-seed everywhere but are easy to remove if needed and provide blooms from July to October. Fine-cut blue-green leaves and bright, warm-toned flowers make these striking".

What if you're looking for something different in a shrub? One gardener suggested *Fothergilla* for its remarkable fall colour. It also has scented white bottlebrush flowers. Another noted, "One of my favourite underused plants is the shrubby St. John's wort, *Hypericum kalmianum*. The situation is changing, however, and it is being used in public plantings more and more, I notice. And why not? It's a tough, reliable bloomer, whose yellow flowers

brighten up any space -and it's inexpensive too. It can be nibbled by rabbits or cut back in spring almost like a herbaceous perennial and come back better than before."



Hypericum kalmianum

Photo: Josie Pazdzior

Right now, my own pick is the Red Tears barberry (*Berberis thunbergii* 'Red Tears'). Thorny, yes, but with arching stems and heavy clusters of small red berries that stay on in winter, and can be cut to add to evergreens for holiday decorations. With so many interesting plants that



Berberis thunbergii

Photo: Amanda Carrigan

deserve to be better known, why not make a resolution to try one (or more) new plants in the garden this summer? The hardest part might be deciding which ones!

Amanda Carrigan,
Master Gardener

- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton
- <http://mgottawa.ca>
- Vol 10, number 2
- Editorial team—Josie Pazdzior, Amanda Carrigan, Judith Cox, Kelly Noel, Susan Bicket, Rob Stuart
- newsletter@mgottawa.ca

February To Do

- Check seed packets and plan when to start things.
- Get equipment, pots and soil ready for starting seeds under grow lights.
- Re-pot houseplants while they're semi-dormant.
- Monitor houseplants for insects and disease.
- Get ready to prune certain trees and shrubs (except spring bloomers) when snow cover allows access.
- Check on stored bulbs and tubers.
- Ask an MG if you have any gardening or plant ID questions

Tip of the Month

While you're thinking of what to put in the garden next summer, here's another suggestion besides the ones above. The 2019 perennial of the year is *Stachys officinalis* 'Hummelo', also listed as *Stachys macrantha* 'Hummelo' or *Stachys monieri* 'Hummelo', commonly called betony. It isn't a super common plant, but it deserves to be better known. I've seen it in a few gardens, which prompted me to get my own plant a few years ago.



Stachys officinalis 'Hummelo'

Photo: Jennifer Mix

Betony is a member of the mint family, and a cousin of the fuzzy lamb's ears *Stachys byzantina*. Betony's leaves, however, are scallop-edged, and dark green, and in summer the plant produces spikes of bright rosy-purple flowers on 50-60 cm stalks. The plant is hardy to zone 4 (so fine in Ottawa), likes well-drained soil and takes full sun to some afternoon shade. It's also said to be deer-resistant, and will grow near black walnut trees. While I haven't tested

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:

[Ottawa Home and Garden Show 2019](#)

Thursday, March 21st-Noon - 9:00 pm

Friday, March 22nd-Noon - 9:00 pm

Saturday, March 23rd-10:00 am - 7:00 pm

Sunday, March 24th-10:00 am - 5:00 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 2nd - **Savvy Choices for Spring 2019**

Mary Shearman Reid and Stephanie Sleeth, Master Gardeners

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

Tuesday, February 26th-7:30 pm

1000 Island & Rideau Canal Garden Trail

Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Tom Brown Arena, 141 Bayview Road, Ottawa

Ottawa Horticultural Society, guests welcome

Thursday, February 28th -7:30 pm

The Art of Rock Gardening

Rob Stuart, Master Gardener

Community Hall, 380 Springfield Road

Rockcliffe Park Garden Club, guest Fee \$5

Saturday, March 9th -1:00 pm

Plant Guilds – Taking Companion Planting to the Next Level

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Canada Blooms, Hortus TV Garden Solutions Stage

EnerCare Centre, Toronto

Talks are free with show admission

Tuesday, March 12th - 7:30 pm

Perennials: Dividing and Maintaining

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Carp Memorial Hall, 3739 Carp Rd

West Carleton Garden Club, guest fee \$5

Monday, March 18th -7:30 pm

General Care of Perennials

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

St. Mary Magdalene Anglican Church, 537 Highway 105, Chelsea.

Gatineau Valley Gardeners, guests fee \$7

Wednesday, April 3rd -7:00 pm

Amazing Annuals

Josie Pazdzior, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely

Greely Gardeners Group, guest fee \$3

continued

either of those claims myself, I can report that mine is doing well near the edge of a parking lot, with very little supplementary watering. Betony forms a nice clump, which can be divided every 4-5 years in spring.

While the name 'Hummelo' honours a town in the Netherlands, it seems appropriate that 'Hummel' means 'bee' in German, since along with its other good points, betony is a pollinator magnet. So it seems there's a good buzz indeed about the perennial of the year.

*Amanda Carrigan
Master Gardener*

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 Reid, Master Gardener

Russell Meadows, 475 Church Street, Russell

Russell Horticultural Society



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