



# Trowel Talk!

February 2020

## Sweet smells, the sequel:



Lilacs

Photo: Josie Pazdzior

You can find scent in the garden almost any season of the year, starting with the spring bulbs. Hyacinths are strongly scented (too much so for some people), but some varieties of tulips and daffodils are scented also. The best known of the latter is probably the Poet's Daffodil (*Narcissus poeticus*). Lilacs and crab-apples in flower please both the eyes and the nose. Lilac species and cultivars all have slightly different scents, some stronger than others. Apple and crabapple trees are not as heavily scented as lilac, but a whiff on a warm spring breeze is wonderful. Sweeter, but not as showy, are grapevine flowers, and linden tree blossom. 'Witch hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) is a scented fall-blooming shrub. Or try *Ptelea*, a native shrub/tree with fragrant blooms, or golden currant, with clove-scented flowers. Mock orange has flowers both showy and scented. And don't forget the classic rose. Many, especially older forms, are well scented. *Clethra's* fragrant flowers have given it the common name of summersweet, and the round flowers of buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) look a

trifle unusual, but smell like honey.

Walk into a garden center looking for annuals, and your nose will lead you to petunias and honey-scented sweet alyssum. Slightly less common are heliotrope, nicknamed 'cherry pie', and the night-scented flowering tobacco. For a little more spice in the odour, nasturtiums have a peppery overlay to their sweetness.

The annual geraniums grown for their blooms have cousins which rarely flower, but which have a wide range of scents in their leaves. Rose and lemon (or 'citronella') are most easily found, but apple, nutmeg, and coconut-scented geraniums, among others, also exist.



Peony

Photo: Amanda Carrigan

In the perennial garden, lily-of-the-valley has its perfumed bells, and peonies their rose-and-pepper smell. Various *Dianthus* garnered their names, sweet William and clove-pink, from their scents. The oriental and trumpet lilies will add scent to the garden. The old yellow daylily, *Hemerocallis flava* or *H. lilioasphodelus*, smells like a milder oriental lily, as do some of the late-blooming

hostas. Some of the bearded irises have a scent like grape flavouring, matching their often purple colour, and late summer brings the perfume of phlox.

Leaf scents are usually sharper than those of flowers. Cranesbill geraniums, true, often mimic roses in odour. But beebalm and catmint are spicy, with notes of oregano and cinnamon respectively. This is true of many other scented-leaved plants and herbs, which are often members of the mint family. Russian sage, salvia, lavender, and thyme are only a few of the possibilities. Plant them where you can rub the leaves to release the odour. There are few shrubs with scented leaves, but one example is bayberry (*Myrica*), with a lovely spiciness that will linger after rubbing against it.

Different scented species also may release their fragrances in different ways. A searching nose will often find the scent getting stronger as it gets closer to the flower, but some fragrances are more elusive. They waft past us in tantalizing eddies, leading us to seek out the source, but slip away as you approach the flowers. The lovely katsura tree is like this; in October, once there are enough fallen leaves lying about, they give off a sweet caramel smell which rises gently up into our faces. Working in the garden is a feast for all the senses, as we wait for the next breath of that evocative burnt sugar smell.

Amanda Carrigan, Josie Pazdzior  
Master Gardeners

## February To Do

- Winter is a good time to repot houseplants, while they are semi-dormant.
- Get your seed orders planned and sent if you haven't already. Plan to attend Seedy Saturday to see what local growers have available.
- Check on stored bulbs and tubers.
- If the weather allows, consider doing a little work outdoors - clean up of winter debris or pruning woody plants that aren't spring bloomers or bleeders.
- Ask an MG if you have any gardening or plant ID questions.

## Tip of the Month

When you're planning for your garden this spring, are you looking at ground-cover plants? The usual garden style we see, with plants placed individually and separated by areas of mulch or open ground, produces a tidy, clean impression if well maintained. However, most plants have not evolved to grow that way - look at any wild area, and the ground is covered with plants. Layering in lower plants between and in front of tall ones isn't as clean a look, but it can improve your garden's health and decrease maintenance. The ground cover layer acts as a living mulch, keeping the soil cooler and moister (and shading out weeds), and the plant roots help stabilize and aerate the soil.

To go between larger plants, choose lower plants and ground-covers that can take some shade. Ground-covers that prefer full sun are better in the front of beds. Many of the species suggested below also have interesting colour, texture, or flowers to add to your garden.



*Phlox subulata*

Photo: Josie Pazdzior

For part shade to shade, try creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*), dead-nettle (*Lamium*), carpet bugle (*Ajuga*),

## Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



### Where to find us for free gardening advice!

#### ONGOING:

**E-mail Help Line:** [mgoc\\_helpline@yahoo.ca](mailto:mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca) - monitored daily  
Send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID.

#### CLINICS:

**Closed for the season**

#### SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Wednesday, February 19<sup>th</sup> - 7:00 pm

##### **Culinary Delights with Herbs and Edible Flowers**

Nancy McDonald, Master Gardener

Queenswood Heights Community Centre, 1485 Duford Drive  
Gloucester Horticultural Society

Tuesday, March 3<sup>rd</sup>—7:30 pm

##### **Organic Gardening 101**

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Old Town Hall, 821 March Road

Kanata-March Horticultural Society, guest fee \$5

Monday, March 9<sup>th</sup> - 7:00 pm

##### **Grow Natives in Urban Spaces – A Floral Legacy**

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Old Ottawa South Community Centre, 260 Sunnyside Ave

Old Ottawa South Garden Club, guest fee \$7

Saturday, March 14<sup>th</sup> - 3:00 pm

##### **Gardening with Wildlife**

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Harrowsmith Stage, Canada Blooms

Toronto, ON

Free with price of admission to show.

Tuesday, March 17<sup>th</sup> -7:30pm

##### **Kitchen Gardens through the ages**

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

2 Pretty Street, Stittsville

Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society, No guest fee

Monday March 23<sup>rd</sup>—7:00 pm

##### **Climate Change and your Garden**

Diane McClymont-Peace

Queenswood Heights Community Centre, 1485 Duford Drive

Gloucester Horticultural Society

Tuesday, April 7<sup>th</sup>— 8:30 pm

##### **Savvy Choices for Spring**

Mary Shearman Reid

Old Town Hall, 821 March Road

Kanata-March Horticultural Society, guest fee \$5

Wednesday, April 8<sup>th</sup>— 7:30 pm

##### **Blowing in the Wind**

Edythe Falconer

Larkin House, 76 Larkin Drive

Barrhaven Garden Club, non-members - \$5.00 fee

sweet woodruff (*Galium odoratum*), violets, or barren strawberry (*Waldsteinia*). In a sunnier spot, some possibilities are bellflower (*Campanula*, there are several low-growing species), golden oregano, low sedums, thyme, speedwell (*Veronica*; *V. whitleyi* is particularly nice as a ground cover), cranesbill (*Geranium*), or pussytoes (*Antennaria*). There are many other possibilities to explore and experiment with – tufts of low sedges (*Carex*), plants such as sun-drops (*Oenothera fruticosa*), low fleecflower (*Persicaria affinis*) and woodland phox (*Phlox divaricata*), with low carpets of leaves punctuated by slender flower stalks, or slightly taller plants like Japanese spurge (*Pachysandra terminalis*) or wild ginger (*Asarum*).



***Vinca* lining ditch sides**

Photo: Josie Pazdzior

Some ground-covers, though, can be a little too aggressive. Periwinkle (*Vinca*) is a lovely plant, but requires some monitoring to keep it under control – as a ground cover it may be better between large, woody plants than smaller perennials, but it does do well in difficult areas like dry shade. Goutweed (*Aegopodium*) is still available for purchase, as is Chameleon plant (*Houttuynia*), but both spread vigorously underground and can be almost impossible to eradicate once established, so are perhaps better avoided.

Amanda Carrigan, Master Gardener

- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa Carleton
- <http://mgottawa.ca>
- Vol 11, number 2
- Editorial team—Josie Pazdzior, Amanda Carrigan, Judith Cox, Kelly Noel, Susan Bicket, Rob Stuart
- [newsletter@mgottawa.ca](mailto:newsletter@mgottawa.ca)

Wednesday, April 15<sup>th</sup>— 7:30 pm

**Plant Guilds – Taking Companion Planting to the Next Level**

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

St Andrews United Church Hall, 2585 County Rd No 29

Pakenham Horticultural Society

Tuesday, April 16<sup>th</sup> -7:30 pm

**Garden design – Looking at the Elements and Principles of Designs**

Mary Ann Van Berlo

City View United Hall, 6 Epworth Ave, Nepean,

Nepean Horticultural Society, \$4 for non-members

Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup>—7:00 pm

**Perennials for Colour**

Candace Dressler – Master Gardener

Queenswood Heights Community Centre, 1485 Duford Drive

Gloucester Horticultural Society

Tuesday, April 21<sup>st</sup>—7:00 pm

**Our Gardens and Climate Change**

Diane McClymont Peace – Master Gardener

Building 72, Central Experimental Farm

Purchase an individual lecture for \$12 as FCEF Member or \$15 as Non-Member or

purchase the series of 5 for \$50 Member and \$60 as a Non-Member

Tuesday, May 5<sup>th</sup> - 7:00 pm

**Colour through the seasons**

Candace Dressler and Rob Stuart – Master Gardeners

Building 72, Central Experimental Farm

Purchase an individual lecture for \$12 as FCEF Member or \$15 as Non-Member or

purchase the series of 5 for \$50 Member and \$60 as a Non-Member

Tuesday, May 19<sup>th</sup> - 7:00 pm

**Into the Night Garden**

Judith Cox – Master Gardener

Building 72, Central Experimental Farm

Purchase an individual lecture for \$12 as FCEF Member or \$15 as Non-Member or

purchase the series of 5 for \$50 Member and \$60 as a Non-Member

Wednesday, May 20<sup>th</sup> - 7:00 pm

**Plant Guilds – Taking Companion Planting to the Next Level**

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Kemptville Pentecostal Church, 1964 County Road 43, Kemptville,

Kemptville Horticultural Society, visitors welcome

Tuesday, June 16<sup>th</sup>—7:30 pm

**Going Grassless**

Julianne Lebreche, Master Gardener

2 Pretty Street, Stittsville

Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society, No guest fee

Monday, June 22<sup>nd</sup> - 7:30 pm

**Gardening with Wildlife**

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Cornerstone Community Church

Almonte Horticultural Society, visitors welcome



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