



# Trowel Talk!

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## Underused plants – A Master Gardener survey, part I:

Many gardeners in a given climate probably have a lot of the same types of plants in their gardens. And why not? The common plants are going to be the ones that are easy to find, and give maximum result for minimum effort.

There are plenty of plants that deserve to be more widely used, plants that garner comments from garden visitors, and beg the question ‘Why don’t more people grow this?’

When you ask some Master Gardeners about their favourite underused plant, you get many different suggestions - enough for at least two issues of Trowel Talk

One of our members says English lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) “... is most definitely my ‘go to’ plant. It’s easy to care for, has few pests or diseases, likes poor dry soil, smells divine, attracts bees and other pollinators and is very pretty.” It is usually hardy here, but will do better in a sheltered spot.

Another’s favourite “...is perennial pinks – *Dianthus spp.* In particular the cheddar pink - *Dianthus gratianopolitanus*. They have low growing but spreading grey/green foliage and flower early summer and have a lovely scent! They tend to be short lived but are easily propagated from seed. They like sunny, well-drained spots (although I’ve had them do well with just morning sun), neutral or slightly alkaline soil.” She

recommends deadheading after flowering, saving some seed, and feeding them with well-rotted manure in spring.

For those who like astilbes, one gardener says she was “really impressed with dwarf goat's beard - *Aruncus aethusifolius*. It has lovely ferny foliage and delicate flowers. I planted it on the north-west side of the house and it grew very well there. Cutleaf goat's beard is also lovely (*Aruncus dioicus*, possibly 'Kneffii'), I grew it in a pot last summer in the morning sun. Neither is as susceptible to drier soil as are astilbes, so the foliage holds better even if I forget to water.” The former is 30cm tall, the latter 60-90cm.

Also about 60cm, Cupid’s Dart (*Catananche caerulea*), with lavender-blue daisy flowers was recommended as “easy to grow from seed; it will come back from the roots; it self-seeds but not to the point of annoyance; the grayish green foli-



*Catananche caerulea*  
Photo: Kelly Noel

age is very recognizable when the seedlings are tiny so they can easily be lifted and relocated; it has a long bloom period – starts at the end of June and still has blooms in October; the seed heads are small and interesting – it does not need deadheading.”

One gardener suggested two ‘statuesque’ plants in the 1.2-2.4m range – the cup plant, *Silphium perfoliatum*, with yellow daisy flowers, and colewort, *Crambe cordifolia* with large lobed green leaves and a cloud of scented white flowers. Sea kale, *Crambe maritima*, has huge blue leaves and white blooms.



*Crambe cordifolia*  
Photo: Josie Pazdzior

For lovers of foliage, another member likes a variegated knotweed cultivar, *Persicaria virginiana*. She says “It will grow from dropped seeds in one season. The leaf has a chocolate zig zag line going across it. It has tiny flowers but they don't amount to much, it is unusual and adds interest to my garden.

More underused plants next month to inspire you for spring!

Amanda Carrigan, Master Gardener

## January To Do

- **House plants:** check often for pests and diseases, also signs of over or underwatering. This is when those pesky white flies, fungus gnats, scale, and other problems are likely to start showing up. Try putting a yellow sticky strip in some plant pots to indicate if/when a new generation of flying insects has arrived. Reduce watering and fertilizer for the next month or so, as growth is slower.
- **Seeds:** If you grow perennials, shrubs or trees from seed, check the germination instructions carefully. You may need to submit them to a period of cold (often 6-8 weeks) to break the seed's dormancy, so you may need to start some of them now.
- **Tubers:** Check on any bulbs and tubers you have stored to make sure they are not going moldy or conversely are not drying out completely.
- **Outdoors:** Keep bird feeders topped up. Shovel snow onto troughs and less hardy perennials.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener.

### Tip of the Month

#### Share the Gardening Fun!

Now is a good time to think about how you want to change/improve your gardening experience. One great way to add to your enjoyment is to connect with local organizations. I am not talking here about the numerous online groups.

There are many groups in the Ottawa area, from "all-purpose" gardening groups and horticultural societies to those focused on special interests and plant genera. Most groups meet monthly, from September through to May or June, and welcome new members; a modest annual membership fee of \$15 to \$30 is involved. You should find a horticultural society close to home, no matter where you live.

You can also come to a meeting, (some charge a small non-member's fee) and see what they're all about before joining up.

The specialist societies include orchid, bonsai, African violet, cactus, water garden, and rock garden. There are also ones focusing on vegetable growing or

## 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](mailto:mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca) - monitored daily

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

#### CLINICS:

**Closed for the season, resuming in 2019**

#### SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Tuesday, February 11<sup>th</sup> -7:00 pm

##### **Growing Colourful Spring Flowering Shrubs**

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener  
Old Fire Hall, 260 Sunnyside Ave  
Old Ottawa South Garden Club, guest fee \$7

Saturday, March 9<sup>th</sup> -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 12<sup>th</sup> - 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 18<sup>th</sup> -7:30 pm

##### **General Care of Perennials**

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener  
St. Mary Magdalene Anglican Church, 537 Highway 105, Chelsea.  
Gatineau Valley Gardeners

Wednesday, April 3<sup>rd</sup> -7:00 pm

##### **Amazing Annuals**

Josie Pazdzior, Master Gardener  
Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely  
Greely Gardeners Group, guest fee \$3

##### **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 2<sup>nd</sup> - Savvy Choices for Spring 2019**

Mary Shearman Reid and Stephanie Sleeth, Master Gardeners

##### **Tuesday, April 16<sup>th</sup> -The Art of Rock Gardening**

Josie Pazdzior and Rob Stuart, Master Gardeners

##### **Tuesday, April 30<sup>th</sup> -Trees and Shrubs - the Backbones of your Gardens**

Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

##### **Tuesday, May 14<sup>th</sup> -Kitchen Gardens**

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

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



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

community projects. A partial list of links is posted on the [Ottawa Horticultural Society's website](http://Ottawa Horticultural Society's website):

You just may find a new opportunity to expand your gardening horizons

*Josie Pazdzior, Master Gardener*