



Trowel Talk!

November 2019

Evergreens in season

At this time of year we can truly appreciate the role of the evergreen in the home garden. I am speaking here of coniferous evergreens such as juniper, cedar and spruce. The foliage of most perennials has withered and is covered by a blanket of snow. The branches of deciduous trees are bare and, although they form interesting patterns against the sky, we can see right through them so they do little to define our vertical space. Without the bulk of snow-decorated evergreens, the landscape would look flat in winter - and birds would be hard-pressed to find shelter!



Spruce decorated with snow.

Photo by Kelly Noel

Evergreens provide stability in the home landscape with their year round consistency of colour, form and texture. In summer, they are the backdrop to the bright foliage and blossoms of deciduous trees, but in winter they take centre stage. At this time of year, our gardens are often viewed from a distance so we need some larger focal points to

catch the eye and provide interest.

Now is a good time to look at your garden to see where you wish there was still some mass and colour - a good place to plant an evergreen. Think of the balance in the garden too - a few nicely spaced evergreens can provide both vertical and horizontal definition.



Conifers add colour to the dreary late winter landscape. Photo by Josie Pazdzior

The most important consideration when choosing an evergreen is space - both on the ground and above. Although each individual evergreen presents a picture that changes little during a single season, they do grow, both up and out. You must consider the mature size of your selection. Estimate the "footprint" available. Write this down, along with the maximum height if there is a limit.

If this is a foundation planting, do not go too close to the house. There should probably be the better part of a metre between the edge of the branches and the house - so that you can walk behind the plantings to clean windows, paint and do other maintenance chores. This will also get the plant out from under

the overhang, a good thing since this will give it much better moisture and root space on all sides.

Make notes about light and exposure. Is it a sunny spot? Consider the impact of any adjacent deciduous trees on the amount of summer sun. Is it windy? Is it near a road where salt may be spread in winter or there is a high volume of traffic? Is the area dry or moist? All these factors should influence your choices. Some evergreens are quite specific in their requirements for optimal growth and they are not equally hardy.



Evergreens give volume to the landscape in winter. Photo by Mary Ann Van Berlo

There will be an evergreen that fits your requirements. They come in all sizes from majestic trees to shrubs to low-growing ground covers, and in a great variety of forms: columnar, conical, rounded and spreading. There are also dwarf and even mini conifers if space is limited; a collection of these can make an interesting garden feature.

*Kelly Noel
Master Gardener*

November To Do

- Wrap shrubs and young tree trunks after freeze-up, for protection against salt, winter sun and wind, or rodents.
- Put a good layer of mulch like leaves or straw around tender plants after the ground freezes, to protect them from freeze-thaw damage.
- Finish cleaning up gardens and ponds for the winter.
- Clean and organize tools and storage areas.
- Ask an MG if you have any gardening or plant ID questions.

Tip of the Month

In our climate, unless you live in a rural area with your gardens far from the road, salt getting into your garden or lawn during the winter is a perennial hazard. And that can lead to trouble with plants – brown needles on conifers, witches' broom on shrubs, and plants declining and dying, not to mention all that salt getting into your groundwater and soil. What's a gardener to do? Here are a few strategies to try.

Choose salt-tolerant plants:

Look for salt-tolerant plants if you're having a hard time growing things near a road or walkway. Often these may be plants that are native to coastal areas.

Perennials which can take some salt include *Sedums*, butterfly weed (*Asclepias*), *Gaillardia*, Russian sage (*Perovskia*), columbine (*Aquilegia*), *Calamagrostis*, silver mound *Artemisia*, *Campanula*, catmint (*Nepeta*), creeping thyme (*Thymus*), *Dianthus*, daylilies (*Hemerocallis*), lady's mantle (*Alchemilla*), sea thrift (*Armeria*), yarrow (*Achillea*), garlic chives (*Allium tuberosum*), false indigo (*Baptisia*), blue oat grass (*Helictotrichon sempervirens*), Japanese spurge (*Pachysandra*).

If you're looking for **shrubs** that can take some salt, consider rugosa and pavement series roses, *Yucca*, cranberry and bearberry cotoneasters (*Cotoneaster apiculatus* and *C. dammeri*, respectively), barberry (*Berberis*), peashrub (*Caragana*), summersweet (*Clethra*), and mugo pine (*Pinus mugo*).

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:

Closed for the season

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Tuesday, November 19th, 2019 6:30pm

Culinary Delights with Herbs and Edible Flowers

Nancy McDonald - Master Gardener

Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society (annual AGM and potluck)

Stittsville United Church 6255 Fernbank, Stittsville

No guest fee

Tuesday January 21st, 2020 7:30pm

Cheap and Easy Gardening Techniques (bring your questions)

Lee Boltwood - Master Gardener

Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society.

Pretty Street Community Centre

2 Pretty Street, Stittsville

No guest fee



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

Larger trees that can be used in a yard facing a roadway, are *Tamarix*, blue spruce (*Picea pungens*), Russian olive (*Eleagnus*), *Ginkgo*, *Catalpa*, and honey locust (*Gleditsia*).

Cautions! Please note, however, when choosing plants, that barberry, peashrub, and Russian olive can be invasive. Also, several of the shrubs and trees listed (roses, barberry, peashrub, some honey locusts) have thorns, so it's probably best to plant them set back from a walkway or driveway.

Shield plants:

By putting up a barrier in front of plants, you can shield them from salt spray. This is most important for evergreens, which suffer from desiccation more easily in winter, but deciduous shrubs can also suffer bud damage. You could also try covering the soil in front of plants with something impermeable after freeze-up. Make sure snowmelt near salted roads and walkways will drain away from your plants, or shovel as much as possible away before it melts. Rinsing plants in spring can help also,

and irrigating thoroughly to leach salt away from plant roots.

Avoid salt:

If you're the one deciding what gets put on walkways, you can use less salt or find alternatives for these areas. Non-sodium salt de-icers are less harmful to plants. Sawdust, sand, ashes, and coffee grounds are all options which have been used with some success to increase traction. Shovelling the walkway or driveway first will also decrease the amount of product you need to use.

Amanda Carrigan, Master Gardener

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