



Trowel Talk!

May 2018

Standing on rocky ground - scree gardens

If you have poor, sandy soil and a south or west-facing lawn that goes dormant in summer, it might be the perfect place for a scree garden. You will already have good drainage and the remaining preparatory work is fairly simple.

Mark out your chosen area with a garden hose and, ideally, remove 30cm of soil. It doesn't matter if buried rocks, builder's rubble or tough roots prevent you reaching that depth as long as you have dug down 15cm if possible. Spread a 10cm layer of good soil or garden compost over the bottom of your excavated area, and then a 10cm layer of stone dust or crushed stone. Level off the site with 10cm of gravel or pea stone. Measurements don't need to be precise and quantities for a shallower depth can be adjusted accordingly. (My own plants flourish despite only having a prepared depth of 10cm in some places.)

Surprisingly, a great many attractive plants will flourish in these well-drained gravelly conditions. Their roots will reach down really deep to help them withstand winter conditions. The surface drainage round the crown or base of the plants is

extremely important to prevent them rotting in the cold. Freeze and thaw winters are bad for all plants, but those that grow in scree survive remarkably well.



Scree Garden in Bloom

Photo: Josie Pazdzior

Planting small rock or alpine plants in gravel is not always easy. First, water the pots well and place them where you want them to grow. Persevere with scooping out a depression in the gravel deeper than the pot. Add compost to the scooped hole, remove the pot and place the plant so the crown will be level with the surrounding gravel. Add more compost round the sides but not up towards the crown, and then replace the gravel. Water again and let your plants settle in. If the weather is dry, water regularly until established. Gravel stays damp and cool below the surface and provides ideal conditions for new roots to form. Once your plants are growing well, no further care is needed except to cut back after flowering each year to keep them in check. In a good year, some may flower again in the fall. Scree plants should never be fertilised because they prefer to find

their own nutrients from the lean and mean soil that suits them best.

Here are some low-growing, easy plants to try:

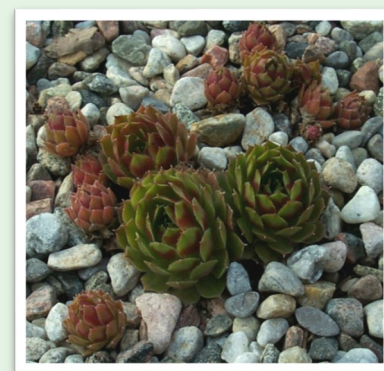
Creeping phlox (*Phlox subulata*), pink, red, white, blue-mauve;
Creeping thyme (*Thymus serpyllum*) pink;

Dwarf veronica (*Veronica alpina*, *V. rupestris*), blue, white;

Pinks (*Dianthus alpinus*, *D. amurensis*, *D. arenarius*, *D. gratianopolitanus*), pink, white;

Pussytoes (*Antennaria dioica*) pink, white;

Rock cress (*Arabis* and *Aubrieta* spp) purple, pink, white.



Sempervivum spp.

Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo

Healthy scree plants are extremely tough and you can tread on them without damage. After flowering, I often walk or push a wheelbarrow over mine without them minding a bit. A scree garden is ideal for drought-resistance and low maintenance. Keep things simple and let your plants look after themselves while you sit back and enjoy!

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Gillian Boyd
Master Gardener

May To Do

- Plant cool-season crops like peas and lettuce; check the weather forecast before planting things that like warmer weather.
- Harden off seedlings in preparation for planting them outside.
- Add compost, manure, and/or mulch to gardens.
- Plan to attend a plant sale, and try something new in the garden.
- Start the season off right, and keep on top of weeds while they're small.
- Ask an MG if you have any gardening or plant ID questions

mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

Tip of the Month

Pruning clematis can be intimidating, especially if you're not sure what kind of clematis you're dealing with. The result may be no pruning, and a tangle of overgrown stems after a few years, which is even more difficult to deal with.

Clematis come in three groups. Group 1 (or A) clematis are early flowering, and bloom on old wood (i.e. from last season's growth). This includes *Clematis alpina*, *C. macropetala*, and *C. montana*. They tend to be smaller flowers, less showy than the big hybrids. Prune these after their spring flowering. Remove dead and weak stems, and do any necessary pruning to keep them in bounds.

Group 2 (or B) are early- and mid-summer bloomers, such as the popular *C. jackmanii* and its hybrids, and many of the double and semi-double hybrids that grow in Canada. They may have two flushes of bloom in a season; the first on old, and the second on new wood. Cut them back in late winter/early spring to a strong pair of buds on each stem between 50cm and 1m high. Or, if you want lots of height, just remove weak or dead stems.

Group 3 (or C) are late-summer bloomers, usually large-flowered. *C. viticella* and *C. texensis* belong in this group. They bloom on new wood, of the current season's growth. They can be cut back in late winter/early spring to 50-75 cm high, and the weak or dead stems removed.

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:

BYWARD MARKET: Saturdays, May 5th to June 9th, 9:00 am-12:00 pm

CARP MARKET: Saturdays, May 12th to June 16th, 8:00 am-1:00 pm .

HERB EVENT: June 23rd, 8:00 am-3:00 pm,

June 30th, September 1st to September 15th, September 29th, 8:00 am-1:00pm.

CUMBERLAND MARKET (1115 Dunning Rd):

June 9th, June 23rd, July 7th, August 11th, September 8th, 9:00 am-1:00 pm .

MAIN MARKET: July 7th, July 21st, August 11th, August 25th, September 8th,

September 22th, 9:00am-1:00 pm

NORTH GOWER FARMERS MARKET: June 2nd, June 16th, September 15th,

8:30 am-1:00 pm

OTTAWA FARMERS' MARKET (Lansdowne Park):

Sundays, June 17th to September 23th, 9:00 am-1:00 pm

PARKDALE MARKET: Saturdays, May 5th to June 16th, 8:00 am-11:00 am

RIVERSIDE SOUTH MARKET (Riverview Park & Ride):

June 10th, June 24th, July 8th, July 22th, August 12th, August 26th, September 9th, September 23rd, October 14th, 10:00 am-2:00 pm

WESTBORO FARMERS' MARKET (Byron Linear Park):

May 26th, June 9th, June 23rd, July 14th, August 11th, September 8th, 9:30 am-1:00 pm

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Tuesday, May 22nd 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Gardening for the Bees

Julianne Labreche, Master Gardener

Building 72 at the Arboretum at the Central Experimental Farm, east of the Prince of Wales roundabout

Friends of the Farm Lecture Series. \$12 FCEF member, \$15 non-members

Wednesday, May 30th – 7:00pm

Scented Gardens

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive in Greely. Guest fee \$3

June 16th – 24th Garden Days

<http://gardendays.ca/>

Tuesday, June 19th—7:30 pm to 9:00 pm

Flowers with Vegetables: Beauty and the Eats

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

2 Pretty Street, Stittsville,

Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society. No guest fee



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

Don't know what clematis you have, or what group it belongs to? Look at last year's flower heads to see if they occur on new, thin stems or older, thicker stems. Do you know when it bloomed, and if it had small or large flowers? Observe it for a season if you're not sure at all – you should at least be able to determine if it's group 1 or not. Groups 2 and 3 have similar requirements for pruning, so if it's probably one of those, you could just treat it rather like a group 2 and cut it back 50 cm to 1m high in the spring, removing weak and dead stems



FAIRY GARDEN WORKSHOP

for child and parent.

Saturday, June 23rd

10:00 am or 1:00 pm

Each child, helped by accompanying adult, will make a fairy garden to take home.

\$35 per child.

Must pre-register.

See <http://mgottawa.ca> for details and registration form.

*Amanda Carrigan
Master Gardener*



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

