



Trowel Talk!

April, 2010

Pruning – shear delight!

There is nothing so delightful as learning how to do something the right way for the right reasons. If you have not pruned before, the idea of delightful cuts may seem somewhat far-fetched. I was a very reluctant pruner myself. Practice and study have changed all that. Now I wield my saw, scissors and shears with the best of them – if not with the best, then with the most enthusiastic. I now have reasons to prune.

Here are three important pruning basics to help you begin. One reason to prune parts of a tree or shrub is that they are dead. Dead wood can attract disease and insects. It is unsightly and we want our trees and shrubs to look good. Discarded twigs, branches, and trunks can serve in a number of ways – in the woodstove, chipped into compost, chipped and used as mulch, and for staking other plants.

If I am not sure that a branch is really dead I test it for flexibility. A live branch is usually pliable, and if you make a small nick in it, you will see an arc of green just under the bark.

If a plant is damaged it needs to be repaired. This was amply apparent after the Ice Storm. Accidental breaks are seldom clean



Photo by Roy Falconer

Spring is an excellent time to prune shrubs.

and neat. They need to be cleanly cut. Jagged breaks are unsightly and are an invitation to bugs and disease.

Occasionally, if dealt with immediately, some breaks will heal. This was so with one of our Nanking Cherries a few years ago. An animal became interested in our bumper crop of cherries and a lot of branches were broken. We tied the broken branches to the good ones, banded the breaks with strips of cotton, and saved many of the partially broken limbs.

You may think that your tree is diseased, but before you act, it is important to know what you are dealing with. Not all diseased plant parts need to be pruned so it is important to get an accurate diagnosis of the problem.

Disease is unsightly and weakens the tree, so we do need to act. I had my first lesson in disease control several years ago when two of my crabapple trees began to show alarming symptoms. I

found a tentative diagnosis and had it confirmed by a trained arborist. I was advised to prune away the diseased parts, cutting them off at 5 or 6 inches (12 to 15 cm) below the infection. I was able to save one tree but not the other. The pruned parts were bagged in plastic and put out with the regular garbage. They should never go into your composter. It is a good idea, with any pruning job, to dip your cutting implements into a solution of bleach after each cut. A couple of tablespoons of bleach in a quart (1.13 litres) of water is about right. However, if we are pruning for disease we need to make our solution stronger.

These three reasons for pruning – disease, damage and dead wood – are basic. Learning the how and why of pruning will help us to preserve and promote the health of our trees and shrubs, and will enhance their natural beauty. It's a "shear delight" when you achieve that.

Edythe Falconer
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- editor@mgottawa.mgoi.ca

April TO DO List

- Many perennial plants can be divided now. Move part of them to another area of the garden and pot up extras for sharing.
- Watch for the first signs of pests and diseases. Hand pick pests. Remove dead, diseased or damaged plant parts.
- Weeds are very easy to spot and pull up at this time of year.
- The first application of Corn Gluten Meal (CGM) to feed the lawn and prevent weed seeds from germinating should be applied when the "Forsythia" is in bloom (and that is early this year, so CGM should be applied now).

Tip of the Month:

Hardening off is a very important final step for seedlings started indoors or when bringing houseplants outdoors for the summer.

Like our skin, plant leaves cannot take full sun and wind after being sheltered indoors all winter.

They are prone to sun scorch and wind burn just as we are.



Sun scorch on an Astilbe

Plants can be left outdoors before all risk of frost has passed if they are in the protection of a cold-frame or similar type shelter – otherwise bring them in at night during the hardening off period

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

SPEAKING EVENTS:

Creating a Monarch Waystation – April 20, 2010 – 7:00

Speaker: Julianne Labreche, Master Gardener

Building 72, Arboretum, Central Experimental Farm

Hosted by Friends of the Farm (**Cost:** Go to www.friendsofthefarm.ca)

Ornamental Grasses – April 22, 2010 – 7:30

Speaker: Nancy Seppala, Master Gardener

380 Springfield Road, Rockcliffe Park Community Hall

Hosted by Rockcliffe Park Garden Club (**Cost:** guests \$7)

Ottawa is Blooming 11th annual show – April 23-25, 2010

April 23 – 3:00 p.m. Speaker: Kelly Noel “**Daylilies**”

April 24 – 2:00 p.m. Speaker: Julianne Labreche “**Monarch Waystation**”

April 24 – 4:00 p.m. Speaker: Gillian Boyd “**Ornamental Plants for Pollinators**”

April 25 – 3:00 p.m. Speaker: Polly McColl “**10 Unusual Easy Perennials**”

Kanata Recreation Complex, 100 Walter Baker Place (off Terry Fox Drive)

Ottawa is Blooming (Free with show admission www.ottawaisblooming.ca)

How to Make the Most Out of Your Garden – April 25, 2010 – 2:00

Speaker: Mary Reid, Master Gardener

St. Matthew’s Anglican Church, 217 First Avenue, Ottawa

Hosted by St. Matthew’s (**Cost:** \$20, 613-234-4024)

The Best Local Produce is Home Grown – April 27, 2010 – 7:00

Speaker: David Hinks, Master Gardener

Building 72, Arboretum, Central Experimental Farm

Hosted by Friends of the Farm (**Cost:** Go to www.friendsofthefarm.ca)

Tips Tricks & Techniques – May 11, 2010 – 7:00

Speaker: Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Carp Memorial Hall, 3739 Carp Road, Carp

Hosted by West Carleton Horticultural Society (Guests welcome)

Creating a Monarch Waystation – May 15, 2010 – 2:00

Speaker: Julianne Labreche, Master Gardener

Greenboro District Library, 363 Lorry Greenberg Drive, Ottawa

Hosted by Greenboro District Library (Free – register at 613-580-2957)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: 613-836-1491

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit our website:

<http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

It is best to bring them out for the first time on a calm and overcast day. Cover with a filter cloth to reduce the amount of sun reaching the plants or place them in the shade of a tree or overhang of a building. The next day increase the exposure by moving

the plants into more sun and wind – do this each day over a period of 7-10 days until they are at the same level of exposure as where they will grow.

Once they are hardened off, it is safe to place them or plant them in their permanent location.