



Trowel Talk!

March, 2010

Reading up on grasses

I fell in love with ornamental grasses several years ago when I saw them in some wonderful gardens that the Niagara School of Horticulture had planted. From that time on I started learning as much as I could about my new-found passion and years later I continue my quest.

One recent find for my home library is a book entitled *Grass Scapes* by Martin Quinn and Catherine Macleod. Published in Canada in 2003 by Whitecap Books, it costs \$30.00 and is well worth the money.



Various Grasses (photo M.A. Van Berlo)

Martin Quinn, a horticulture graduate of Algonquin College in Ottawa, owns a nursery in Kin-cardine, Ontario, where he has experimented with growing many different varieties of grasses. He puts this vast experience into words with the help of his spouse, writer and co-author Catherine Macleod. Together they have produced not just an

Trowel Talk!

- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton
- Volume 1, Number 3
- <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>
- editor@mgottawa.mgoi.ca

educational book, but a very enjoyable read. As well, the book abounds with beautiful pictures that not only help to identify the plants but also show the use of grasses in many different gardens.



Miscanthus purpurascens (photo N. Seppala)

The first chapter describes the botanical aspects of grasses and then clarifies the maintenance, division, and planting of them. As well, grasses should be chosen for their forms and the book categorizes them as to which particular shape each can provide in the garden.

I believe that most people think of grasses as being only green but the authors are quick to dispel this myth with a chapter on the different colours of grasses and how they can be combined with other plants. I can't wait to try the powder blue *Festuca glauca* 'Boulder Blue' with *Carex buchanani* (bronze leather leaf sedge) and *Sedum* 'Vera Jameson' just as the authors suggest. The book even devotes several pages to describing the best perennials for combining with grasses and gives the zone for these flowering plants as well

as form, height, flower colour, bloomtime and growing conditions. This makes it very easy to choose various combinations. If you are still hesitant about designing your own garden, fear not, for the book even offers several garden plans using grasses, shrubs and perennials.

The authors devote several pages to special conditions and to the grasses which grow best in these specific cases. We find out which ones are suited to wetlands, those which are drought tolerant, provide winter interest, thrive in shade and can stand alone as a beautiful specimen plant.

In the final, "at-a-glance" section, *Grass Scapes* features over 100 grasses and elaborates on their shape, size, landscape use and growing conditions. Perhaps when a second edition is published there will be a small photo accompanying each grass description. Nonetheless the book is still very useful for choosing plants and is small enough to accompany any gardener to the nursery or garden centre.



Calamagrostis acutiflora (photo N. Seppala)

A gardening friend once said that when she saw grasses in a garden, they looked like weeds. I have no doubt that if she planted with the help of *Grass Scapes*, her garden would transform itself into a little piece of paradise.

Nancy Seppala
Master Gardener

March TO DO List

- sharpen, clean and oil your secateurs, shovels and hoes (if you didn't last fall).
- spray fruit trees with dormant oil spray to kill overwintering fungal diseases and some pests. Follow the package instructions.
- remove the protective coverings from shrubs and perennials, but do so on a cloudy day to avoid sun scorch of the plants.
- as the snow starts to melt, check for perennials that may have been "lifted" by the frost. Gently push them back in the ground.
- to avoid soil compaction, don't walk on the garden until it dries out after spring thaw

Tip of the Month:

Speed up the flowering of tuberous begonias by potting up the tubers now. Each tuber can be placed rounded side down just beneath the soil surface. The pot can be placed in bright light at about 15°C and kept moist. Move outdoors when all danger of frost is past. If growing the begonias as container plants, accompany them with trailing green ivy.



Tuberous begonia in bloom

There are two main types of begonias used in our gardens: tuberous and fibrous. Fibrous begonias don't form a tuber. Tuberous begonias can be kept from year-to-year by digging up and storing the tuber in moist peat moss in a cool, dark place each fall.



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:

Gardening – for better, for worse – March 23, 2010 – 6:30

Speaker: Lee Boltwood, Master Gardener

Stittsville Public Library, Stittsville

Hosted by Stittsville Public Library (Free – register at 613-836-3381)

Ottawa Home & Garden Show – March 25-28, 2010

Talks by Master Gardeners will be featured on the Garden Stage

Lansdowne Park, Ottawa

For more info: www.ottawahomeshows.com

Good Bugs – identifying and attracting them – March 27, 2010 – 2:00

Speaker: Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Greenboro District Library, 363 Lorry Greenberg Drive, Ottawa

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

The Art of Pruning Trees & Shrubs – April 5, 2010 – 7:30

Speaker: Lee Boltwood, Master Gardener

220 Old Chelsea Road, Chelsea Community Centre, Chelsea, QUE

Hosted by Gatineau Valley Gardeners (**Cost:** \$4, info: 819-827-2068)

Managing Fruit Trees & Shrubs – April 6, 2010 – 7:00

Speaker: Lee Boltwood, Master Gardener

Building 72, Arboretum, Central Experimental Farm

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

Home-Grown! Vegetable Gardening – April 7, 2010 – 7:00

Speaker: David Hinks, Master Gardener

Kanata United Church, 33 Leacock Drive, Kanata

Hosted by Kanata Environmental Network (guests welcome)

Solutions to Common Garden Problems – April 13, 2010 – 7:00

Speaker: Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Building 72, Arboretum, Central Experimental Farm

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

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)

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)



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>