



Trowel Talk!

August, 2013

Berry good idea for your garden

If you like "win-win" situations, then grow some of these wonderful berry bushes. You can't go wrong – blossoms, foliage, berries and birds – all are yours.

Elderberry (*Sambucus*) is a fast growing, sometimes short-lived, shrub. It multiplies easily by suckering and seeding. This member of the honeysuckle family has many desirable features – attractive composite leaves that provide good fall colour, gorgeous clusters of white flowers, and shiny maroon-coloured berries – good for jams, juice, pies, wine and dyes. I don't always use the berries but birds see that they never go to waste. It's a special treat to see dozens of goldfinches swooping in and out of the bushes. Sometimes there are so many that the tree shakes and shivers as the birds energetically dine.



Photo by Monique Paré

Ripe elderberries ready for harvest

As a child I used to accompany my mother on berry picking expeditions. Mostly we picked Saskatoons (*Amelanchier alnifolia*). Saskatoon berries were used by prairie tribes to make pemmican, a mixture of pounded buffalo meat, animal fat and berries. In my time the berries were important because they provided us with fresh or canned fruit for most of the year. Saskatoons are self-pollinating and take at least seven years from planting to production. I should be enjoying a really good crop next year. Up to now their few berries have been gobbled up by birds, usually robins, who really fancy them. Even if I don't get to enjoy a bowl of berries laced with fresh cream, I can still enjoy the lovely frothy white blossoms and the brilliant fall colours of these handsome bushes.



Photo by Monique Paré

A few Saskatoon berries that the birds missed

Chokecherry (*Prunus virginiana*) is good for jellies and syrups. I was once given enough to make three batches of delicious syrup. Note – the poisonous pits must be removed before preserving the pulp. My own plants have not produced well but I delight in the blossoms. The bushes are healthy and not too particular about location. They do have a tendency to sucker freely and I've started many a new plant from those suckers. Tent caterpillars like them but I

monitor carefully and destroy the pests immediately.

Finally there are red currants (*Ribes sativa*), an easy to grow berry bush that produces lavishly over a four to six week period. Loaded with heavy trusses of shiny red berries these bushes are a sight to see. Any well-drained soil will do and watering is only necessary during prolonged dry spells. I will never forget the year I was able to stealthily observe four young blue jays under the arching branches of the bush, busily consuming fallen fruit. With this bush there are always enough berries for both birds and people. Red currants make wonderful wine! A word of caution, however, don't plant them near white pines as they can be a carrier of a serious rust infection for that particular tree.



Photo by Monique Paré

Red currants

If I were really serious about getting all the berries for myself, I would net my bushes at the appropriate time, but so far I am more than willing to share.

Edythe Falconer
Master Gardener

Trowel Talk!

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- <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>
- Editor: Mary Ann Van Berlo
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Announcing our upcoming workshop: Growing a Modern Day Victory Garden.

Go to page 3 for more details!

August TO DO List

- If you don't have time to pick weeds, at least remove the seed-heads to stop them from dispersing their seeds.
- Share the harvest from your veggie garden with friends, neighbours and your local food bank. Try your hand at pickling, drying or freezing veggies.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month:

In response to a reader's request, fertilizer is our tip of the month and because it is an extensive topic, we've stretched the newsletter to three pages.

The large variety of fertilizer products available can make the task of feeding your plants more complicated than it needs to be.

There are specialty fertilizers for conifers, perennials, roses, annuals, tomatoes and trees – to name a few.

To understand why plants may need different formulas, it is necessary to know that those three numbers on the package stand for the percent by weight of Nitrogen, Phosphorus & Potassium (or NPK) in the product. A label that says 18-24-6 mean the bag has 18% nitrogen, 24% phosphorus and 6% potassium – the remaining 52% is filler.



The percent of NPK as labelled on a fertilizer bag



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 (all year)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

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

CLINICS:

Ottawa Farmers Market (Brewer Park): Sundays, July - September (9 am – 1 pm)

Main Street Farmer's Market: August 24, September 7 & 21 (10 am – 2 pm)

Richmond Fair: September 19-22

Carp Fair: September 27 (noon-8pm), 28 (9am-9pm), & 29 (noon-4pm)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Water Features for Every Backyard – August 20 – 7:00 p.m.

Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

United Church, Elizabeth Drive, Iroquois

Hosted by The Gardeners Gathering Group, donation at the door

Ornamental Grasses – September 4 – 7:00 pm

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Street, Greely

Hosted by the Greely Gardeners Group (guests welcome)

Garden Design to Attract Birds to our Gardens – September 10 – 7:30 pm

David Hinks, Master Gardener

Carp Memorial Hall, 3739 Carp Road, Carp

Hosted by the West Carleton Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

You're Not Done Yet – Tasks to do now to improve your garden next year – September 10 – 7:00 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Building 72, Arboretum, Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa

Hosted by Friends of the Farm, click [here](#) for admission fees & other details

Spring Bulbs – A Must for Every Garden – September 10 – 7:00 pm

Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Ottawa South Community Centre, 260 Sunnyside Ave., Ottawa

Hosted by the Old Ottawa South Garden Club (guests welcome – fee charged to non-members)

Spring Bulbs – A Must for Every Garden – September 16 – 7:30 pm

Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Top Generation Club Hall, 4373 Generation Court, Ramsayville (Ottawa)

Hosted by the Gloucester Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Vines for All Occasions – September 17 – 7:00 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Athens District High School (Cafeteria), Church Street, Athens

Hosted by the Athens Garden Club (guests welcome)

Water Food Shelter: wildlife in our backyards – September 18 – 7:00 pm

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Greenboro Community Centre, 363 Lorry Greenberg Drive, Ottawa

Hosted by the Greater Ottawa Rock Garden & Horticultural Society (guests welcome – \$5 entry fee)

Fall Final Garden Fling: activities to beautify, nourish and protect your garden! – September 19 – 7:00 pm

Nancy McDonald, Master Gardener

Orleans Branch, City of Ottawa Public Library, 1705 Orleans Blvd, Ottawa

Hosted by the City of Ottawa Public Library (free – register at 613-824-1962)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: speakers@mgottawa.mgoi.ca
For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

Most plants will be happy with a balanced fertilizer – meaning all the numbers are the same. So a 10-10-10 or a 20-20-20 would be a balanced fertilizer. As you may have guessed, the 20-20-20 has double the NPK and less filler which is why it may cost more and have a lower rate of application. **Always follow the directions on the package** when deciding how much to apply.

All three components are essential to overall plant health but each has a specialized task:

Nitrogen: promotes the growth of leaves and vegetation.

Phosphorus: promotes the growth of roots, stems and flower buds.

Potassium: improves the overall vigour of the plant.

Transplant fertilizer has a high middle number because its intent is to stimulate root growth to get the plant established quickly so that it can take nutrients from the soil.

The timing of fertilizer application is important. Fertilizer is best taken up by the plant when it is in an active growth period, such as spring and early summer. Don't apply a high nitrogen fertilizer to shrubs or broad-leaf evergreens after mid-August as it will promote new growth that will not have time to harden off before winter.

Fertilizer can be found in a granular or water soluble form. Both work well and the decision on which to use may depend on the size of the garden or the specific plant or nutrient deficiency you are trying to address.

Another consideration is whether or not the granular fertilizer is a slow release (or coated) fertilizer. A fertilizer that is not coated needs to be watered in immediately or it may burn the plants (or lawn) so it is often applied just before rain. Unfortunately, the

downside is that a heavy rain can wash the fertilizer away.

There are extremely slow release fertilizers designed especially for potted plants and hanging baskets. Their label claims they last up to 6 months and require a single feeding for the entire season.



Slow release fertilizer has a special coating that releases the nutrients through osmosis over an extended period of time

Water soluble fertilizers are great for watering potted plants (indoors & outdoors).

Chemical fertilizers are often used to target a specific problem or need of a plant. As an example, roses are known to be heavy feeders so an application of rose fertilizer (with a higher middle number) can help promote more flowers.

Some people say that using chemical fertilizers is like putting your plants on steroids – there is short-term gain, but then long-term pain. The plant bulks up or has a growth spurt, but that does not continue unless the feedings continue. The plant would have better overall sustainable health through the enrichment of the soil around it.

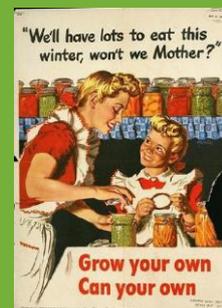
There are organic fertilizers such as bone meal, blood meal, clover pellets, corn gluten meal (note: a side effect of corn gluten meal is that it inhibits seed germination so should not be used in areas where seeds have been planted), sea weed, fish emulsion, etc. These natural fertilizers provide a boost for plants just as chemical fertilizers do.



Blood meal is often used to deter rodents from the garden but is also a good source of nitrogen

Organic soil amendments such as compost or well-rotted manure are the best choice to feed your plants since they also contain trace elements of minerals and micronutrients. They also have low NPK percentages, which is why large amounts can and should be used regularly. Organic matter improves the overall health of the soil by improving drainage and/or moisture retention as well as increasing aeration. Organic mulches that break down over time also feed your soil. Remember healthy soil means healthy plants!

Growing a Modern Day Victory Garden



Saturday,
October 26, 2013
Carleton Place, ON

Click here: [For full details](#)