



Trowel Talk!

April, 2014

Bright ideas for shady gardens

Some of us long for colourful blooms in our shade gardens. Unfortunately many plants prized for their flowers only perform well in the hot sun. Hostas and astilbes are shade plants that combine to bring colour into our gardens from late spring into fall. They are wonderful companions that look great together and share the same moisture, light and soil requirements.



Hosta 'Zounds'

Over two thousand varieties of hostas exist and they range in size from tiny plants to giants. Their flowers are lavender or white although the main attraction is their magnificent foliage. Hostas such as 'Elegans' have huge, heavily corrugated powdery blue leaves while 'Zounds' has bright golden leaves which light up any corner of a shade garden. Many variegated hostas such as 'Patriot' with its bright green center and wide creamy white margins make bold colourful statements.

Trowel Talk!

- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton
- Volume 5, Number 4
- <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>
- Editor: Mary Ann Van Berlo
- trowel_talk_editor@rogers.com

Astilbes are prized for their unusual and distinctive feathery blossoms. They bloom at different times throughout the summer; for example, the beautiful deep red plumes of 'Fanal' in July are followed in August by the shorter pink blooms of 'Pumila'. Put three to five plants of the same type together to make the best show possible. Another advantage of mixing astilbes and hostas is the wonderful contrast in foliage that the fern-like astilbe provides against the solid leaf of the hosta.

Both plants do best in dappled shade although they can enjoy some morning sun. Many hosta leaves have a brighter colour when exposed to those cooler rays and astilbes tend to bloom more profusely. Hot sun will brown hosta leaves and astilbes will just curl up and turn crispy.



Two astilbe cultivars and Hosta 'Sum & Substance'

Although astilbes such as the chinensis cultivars and 'Sprite' are somewhat drought tolerant, moist soil is still essential for all these plants. Snake soaker hoses throughout your shade garden and water to reach the roots twice a week. Amend your soil with compost, well-rotted manure and some bone meal. This mixture ensures your plants will receive the nutrition they need and maintain moisture while allowing for good drainage. Adding mulch will also help preserve moisture. These plants pre-

fer not to vie with tree roots but some green thumbs have enabled them to thrive under maples, apples and cedars. Try them in the location of your choice; if they don't grow well, move them.



Slugs are a problem on some hostas

Few pests bother my astilbes but slugs and snails can devastate hostas. Those plants with thick, waxy corrugated leaves are more resistant to these pests. I have tried traps and diatomaceous earth with limited success. Pine needles spread under my plants seem to have protected them better. Non-toxic slug baits are available and recently I heard a hosta grower claim coffee grounds will protect the plants. I intend to give that method a try this summer.

Once you have amended your soil and rigged up a watering system, hostas and astilbes require little work. Add a bench and you'll have time to sit and enjoy your colourful shady retreat.

*Nancy Seppala
Master Gardener (Retired)*

A few spaces left!

Garden Design Workshop (beginner level)

*Hosted by Master Gardeners of
Ottawa-Carleton*

*April 26, 2014
Building 469, Uplands AFB
10 de Niverville Private, Ottawa*

*Space is limited.
For more info, click [here](#).*



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:

Rare & Unusual Plant Sale: Sunday, May 11 (9 am - 1 pm)

Parking lot beside the Neatby Building, Carling at Maple Drive, Central Experimental Farm

Red Trillium Studio & Garden Tour, May 10-11 (10 am - 5 pm)

MGOC advice clinic & plant sale at 112 Terraview Drive, Kinburn.

Byward Market: Saturdays, May 10 through June (10 am - 2 pm)

Parkdale Market: Saturdays, May 10 through June (10 am - 2 pm)

Carp Market: Saturdays, May 10 through June (9 am - 1 pm)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

FRIENDS OF THE FARM LECTURE SERIES:

Individual Lectures: FCEF members \$12, non-members \$15

Lecture series (5 lectures) FCEF members \$50, non-members \$60

Building 72, Arboretum, Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa

Register at: 613-230-3276 or by e-mail info@friendsofthefarm.ca

Practical Pruning Techniques - April 29 - 7:00 pm

Lee Boltwood, Master Gardener

Trouble in Paradise: Common garden pests and diseases - May 13 - 7:00 pm

Caroline Dabrus, Master Gardener

Water Gardening - the Final Touch to your Landscape - May 27 - 7:00 pm

Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

Spring Bulbs - an Essential for every Garden - September 9 - 7:00 pm

Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

All from a Little Seed (Starting seeds) - April 15 - 7:30pm

Pretty Street Community Centre, corner of Pretty St & Orville St, Stittsville

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Hosted by the Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society - Guest fee \$4

Tips for Keeping Indoor Orchids Healthy - April 15 - 7:00pm

Osgoode Branch, Ottawa Public Library, 5630 Osgoode Main St, Osgoode

Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

Hosted by Ottawa Public Library ([Registration required](#))

Planters for Colour, Enjoyment & Food - April 17 - 7:00pm

Manotick Branch, Ottawa Public Library, 5499 South River Rd, Manotick

Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

Hosted by Ottawa Public Library ([Registration required](#))

Insects in the Garden! Positive and Negative - April 28 - 7:30pm

Meredith Centre, 23 chemin Cecil, Chelsea

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Hosted by the Gatineau Valley Gardeners - Guest fee \$5

All from a Little Seed (Starting seeds) - April 28 - 7:00pm

Carlingwood Branch, City of Ottawa Public Library, 281 Woodroffe Ave, Ottawa

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Hosted by Ottawa Public Library - ([Registration required](#))

Renovating an Older Garden - May 6 - 7:30pm

Old Town Hall, 821 March Road, Kanata

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Hosted by the Kanata March Horticultural Society - Guest fee \$5

Big, Bold and Beautiful Plants for your Garden - May 7 - 7:00pm

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely

Nancy McDonald, Master Gardener

Hosted by the Greely Gardeners Group - Guest fee \$2

April TO DO List

- If your vegetable garden is dry enough, plant some cool weather crops such as lettuce, mesclun mix, spinach, brassicas (cabbage family) or onions. Some of these could even be planted in a flower bed as they will be harvested before the flowers get too large.
- Remove protective winter coverings from plants on an overcast day to prevent sun & wind burn.
- Spray fruit trees while still dormant with oil spray which will smother and kill overwintering pests and diseases. Do this when the daytime temperature reaches 10 degrees Celsius but before the leaf or flower buds start to open (i.e., tree is still dormant).
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

To build a DIY birdbath, you'll need some old glassware (try the thrift store or dollar store) and some clear epoxy (rated for outdoors). Test fit your pieces before you buy them. A heavy bowl makes the base. Two vases (bottoms together) make the pedestal - the vases should have the same size base for a good fit. Then a large plate or shallow bowl can be used for the top. Allow the epoxy to dry completely before adding the next piece. The sample below uses clear glass but coloured glassware could also be used.

