



Trowel Talk!

August, 2011

Camels bloom

A few years ago I decided I had had enough with my lawn! There was one crisis after another it seemed. Take the grubs. I discovered it was not one beetle species I was trying to get rid of but three, all laying their eggs in my turf so their larvae could eat their way to adulthood – on my grass roots. And each of these beetles has a different life cycle. What to do?

I always liked my turf grass – before the days of battling grubs and escalating water costs – but did I absolutely want to keep it? No! So several years ago I converted my front yard into a beautiful display garden. I had decided that grubs would have to look elsewhere for their meals.

I was amazed at the number of plants that do quite well without extra water. Spring blooming bulbs for example rarely need watering. They get enough moisture from the snow melt and spring rains. Crocuses, muscari, daffodils, squills, and our ever so popular tulips can grow in poor soil and even on rocky terrain because they originally came from arid mountainous regions.

However, once the spring flowering bulbs begin to die back, the real stalwarts are the herbs and long-blooming perennials.

Many herbs are drought tolerant whether they are small fleshy plants or tall and woody but one

group stands out for its finely cut foliage, fragrance and shimmering silver aura – the artemisias. They are not only drought resistant but they come in all sizes, from 90cm tall southernwood (*Artemisia abrotanum*) down to the elegantly mounded, compact, 30cm silver mound (*Artemisia schmidtiana* 'Nana'). Many of these plants have silvery foliage that is as beautiful in the moonlight as it is in daylight setting off the pinks, yellows and blues of other perennials nearby. Almost as important as their lack of thirst is the ease with which they can be cultivated, even when grown in poor soil.



Photos: Mary Ann Van Berlo

Views of the author's garden 3 years after planting

Colour in my converted lawn garden comes from the yellows of *Coreopsis* and the blues of *Veronica*, both long-blooming, non-thirsty perennials.

Coreopsis, commonly known as tickseed because of the shape of its seed, comes in shades of yellow from buttercup to lemon. Selections such as 'Early Sunrise' are long-stemmed and the blooms are double. They make excellent cut flowers. 'Moonbeam' is a verticil-

lata type and displays the unique foliage of this species, thread-like leaves, over which masses of blossoms appear to be floating on air. *Coreopsis* also comes in delicious shades of red.

Veronica's cool blue creates contrast, softly but perfectly, with the yellows of tickseed. The spiky flower stalks stand straight up above basal leaves. 'Glory' Royal Candles is a compact selection ideally suited for the front of the border while other selections such as sunny border blue grow to a height of 60cm.



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo

Colourful perennials and shrubs are healthy despite never being watered other than rainfall

There are other flowers such as evening primrose that require little care and perform well rain or shine.

All of the plants that I have mentioned here don't need extra water, making them true "camels" in the garden. Plant catalogues and nurseries are excellent sources for more information on drought resistant plants.

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EDITOR'S NOTE:

For a list of other drought tolerant plants go to our fact sheet on water wise gardening: [H₂O Facts](#)

August TO DO List

- Deadhead and cut back perennials that have finished blooming and no longer look attractive.
- Collect seeds from annuals for next year. Allow them to dry completely. Store them in a breathable package and place in a cool, dry place.
- Continue to water newly planted shrubs and trees (i.e., planted last year and this year) – especially during periods of drought. Their root systems are not established deep enough to sustain them through drought periods.
- Make sure the birdbaths are clean and topped up so our feathered friends can get a cooling drink.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month:



Slugs = yuck.

While no garden pest is welcome, slugs have to be one of the least tolerated. They do lots of damage, are very prolific and are just plain icky to touch. That disgusting slime that covers their bodies serves many purposes – it keeps them hydrated, helps them to maneuver and repels predators.

Some commercially available slug controls are:

- **Slug bait pellets** are ingested by the slugs causing their death. These types of baits should be reapplied monthly. The new environmentally friendly form of slug

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)
- Saturdays 7-8 pm (April through September ONLY)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

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

CLINICS:

Lansdowne Market: Sundays, July through September (9 a.m. – 1 p.m.)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Tips Tricks & Techniques – September 6 – 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener
Old March Town Hall, 821 March Road, Kanata, Ontario
Hosted by the Kanata March Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Seed Saving Workshop for Kids – September 10 – 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Rebecca Last, Master Gardener
Children's Garden, Robert F. Legget Park, Main St at Clegg St., Ottawa, Ontario
Hosted by Sustainable Living Ottawa East
Registration required; e-mail childrensgarden@sustainablelivingottawaeast.ca

What to do with a Mature Garden – September 13 – 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Mary Shearman-Reid, Master Gardener
Navy Club, 30 Sixth Street East, Cornwall, Ontario
Hosted by the Cornwall Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Winter is coming – Is your garden ready? – September 14 – 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Josie Pazdzior, Master Gardener
Carlingwood Branch of the Ottawa Public Library, 281 Woodroffe Ave., Ontario
Hosted by the Ottawa Public Library (guests welcome)
Register by calling: 613-725-2449, ex. 24 or online at: www.biblioottawalibrary.ca



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

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bait is a vast improvement over the old (now banned) metaldehyde which was toxic to pets.

- **Diatomaceous earth** is a form of silica. To us it looks and feels like powder, but to insects it is sharp and cutting. When the slugs crawl across the diatomaceous earth that has been sprinkled around the plants it cuts their undersides which leads to desiccation and death. NOTE: diatomaceous earth must be re-applied after heavy rain.

There are also many “home remedies” that people use to control slugs.

- **Egg shells, oyster shells or wood ash** in a ring around plants act as a sharp and cutting barrier that the slugs can't cross without risking death.

- **Copper wire or foil** can also act as a barrier because the slugs' slime reacts with the copper and gives them a shock if they try to cross it.
- **Bran buds** sprinkled among the plants as a slug bait. The slugs eat the bran and it messes with their digestive system causing death.
- **“Traps”** made from tuna tins filled with beer or a fermenting yeast solution and sunk in the ground to the brim. Slugs are attracted by the yeast, go in for a drink and drown. NOTE: traps must be cleaned out regularly.
- Encourage **toads**, one of the slug's few natural predators, to make the garden their home.