



Trowel Talk!

August, 2012

Rooting out a mystery weed

It usually pops up in the spring garden but because you weren't sure if you planted it or not, and it does have attractive glossy leaves, you've left it alone.

By July, you notice the mystery plant winding its way through your Weigela shrub. The flowers are dark purple, star-shaped, and arranged in clusters at the leaf axils. Each waxy blossom is about the same size as the eraser on the end of your pencil. You make a note to come back to this corner of your garden to remove the weed.

Now it's September. In the front yard you notice little fluffy parachute-seeds floating by in the breeze. The cat is chasing one across the lawn. You decide to investigate. You notice more of the same seeds along the house by the drive clinging to the hydrangeas and covering the cedar hedge. The source is your mystery weed which of course, you forgot to pull until now. The pointed leaves have turned a bright yellow. The unbranched stems have twirled their way over the Weigela and are heading straight for the fence and your neighbour's garden! You tear it away, managing to send up a cloud of seeds as you do so. The smooth and slippery stems are not an easy opponent. Despite your best efforts, each

one snaps off at the base leaving the underground crown and roots intact. You wrap the whole plant in on itself and march back across the lawn to dispose of it. There's no way it's going in the compost! Into a garbage bag it goes. Ha! You then spend the next ten minutes plucking seeds off your sweater, hair, gloves and the cat.



Dog strangling vine in flower (above) and with seed pods (below)

Fast forward to next spring! It's the last week of April and you spot your mystery weed's progeny; they're everywhere! Sprouts are coming up in the interlock, along the driveway, in your cedar hedge and everywhere you disturbed last fall! You dig out the mother plant and find that it has a massive system of fleshy roots clustered below the surface and a densely budded rhizomatous crown ready to send up new shoots. The stem

that snapped off the crown oozes latex, just like milkweed. The roots seem to have spread to the Weigela, and there are sprouts coming up **INSIDE THE SHRUB!**

Vincetoxicum nigrum, also known as dog-strangling vine or black swallow-wort, is a perennial vine in the milkweed family. It is an alien invasive vine that grows in a tangled mass, covering and suppressing native vegetation. It quickly invades disturbed sites and grows in any soil or light exposure. It can grow in wet or dry soil. A square meter of this plant growing in full sun can produce 2000-3000 seeds. The seeds are poly-embryonic, which means that one seed can produce multiple seedlings - and these seeds don't require pollination to be viable.



Dog strangling vine taking over a forest floor and choking out native plants

Because the Monarch butterfly mistakes this plant for its usual host milkweed, it deposits its eggs on the vine's leaves. The larvae do not feed on this particular species, so inevitably they die. Pulling the plants usually results in resprouting from the crown and the only sure way to destroy it is to dig it up. For more information about this formidable opponent, go to the [Fletcher Wildlife Garden](http://www.fletcherwildlifegarden.com) website.

Jennifer Hendrick
Retired Master Gardener

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- Editor: Mary Ann Van Berlo
- trowel_talk_editor@rogers.com



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)
- Wednesday 7-8 pm (April - September)

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 - formerly located at Lansdowne Park):
Sundays, July through September (9 a.m. - 1 p.m.)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Continuous Colour in the Garden - September 5, 2012 - 7:00 p.m.

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener
Martintown Community Centre, County Road 20, Martintown, Ontario
Hosted by the Martintown Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Renovating an Old Garden - September 25, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener
Tom Brown Arena, 141 Bayview Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario
Hosted by the Ottawa Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

The Winter Garden: Planning and Planting for the Naked Garden - October 10, 2012 - 7:30 p.m.

Julianne Labreche, Master Gardener
Larkin House Community Centre, Larkin Drive, Nepean, Ontario
Hosted by the Barrhaven Garden Club (guests welcome -- fee may apply)

Culinary Herbs - October 11, 2012 - 7:00 p.m.

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener & Richard Guenette, Foodie
Old Ottawa South Firehall, 260 Sunnyside Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario
Hosted by the Old Ottawa South Garden Club (guests welcome - fee may apply)



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>

August TO DO List

- Deadhead self-seeding perennials to prevent next year's abundance.
- Birds and insects are affected by drought too, so supply water in a bird-bath or shallow bowl. The pollinators will thank you.
- Share your vegetable garden's bounty with friends, neighbours and food banks.
- Gather a bouquet of flowers from your garden and bring it to a local retirement residence to brighten the common area.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month:

There are many interesting and unusual plants that you can grow in your garden. I asked Master Gardener colleagues to give me some examples of things they have grown that have left people saying "I didn't know you could grow that". Here is what they came up with:



Hardy Cactus: There are a number of varieties of prickly pear cactus, such as *Opuntia humifusa* shown above, that are perfectly hardy to our area and actually enjoy hot dry summers like this one.

Loofah sponges: These gourds (*Luffa aegyptiaca*) need a long growing season so starting them indoors would be helpful. Once they mature and dry, the peel is removed and they can be bleached to an off-white colour.

Yellow tomatoes: A heirloom variety named *Lycopersicon esculentum* 'Taxi' produces canary yellow tomato and ripens in about 65 to 70 days on a determinate plant which grows about 60 cm tall.

Black tomatoes: 'Black Cherry' is a dark blackish purple heirloom tomato

(shown below) with 2.5 cm fruits. It grows on a sprawling indeterminate plant and ripens in about 64 days.



Anise Hyssop: *Agastache foeniculum* is a favourite perennial herb that tastes like black licorice. Anise hyssop is a relatively well-behaved member of the mint family. Mature height is 60-80 cm with fragrant spires of lavender-blue flowers that attract pollina-

tors in mid- to late summer (monarch butterfly on hyssop shown below). Leaves can be used in salads and make a good substitute for basil. Hyssop also makes a delicious herbal tea or a refreshing ice tea. This plant is largely pest and disease free. It requires full- to part-sun in well-drained soil.

