



Trowel Talk!

August, 2014

Getting bogged down

If your yard has an area that is chronically wet or damp for several days after every rainfall, where you've never been able to grow anything but grass, do not despair. This problem area can easily become an interesting site. It can provide you with the opportunity to add interesting new species to your property that you may not have thought of growing before.



Photo by Mary Ann Van Berlo

Caltha palustris 'Flore Pleno' – the double form of our native marsh marigold

The site may not be draining properly because of the heavy clay soil often found in and around Ottawa. Or it may be that the water table on your property is too high. You can create a natural looking bog garden on such a site by growing plants that thrive in moist places. All perennial plants that naturally grow at the edge of a pond will do well as bog plants. Bog gardens are among the easi-

est water features to install and maintain. They do not require heavy machinery and are inexpensive to build. Any gardener with a wheelbarrow, a shovel and a pitchfork can complete the job in a day. Your chosen site should receive at least six hours of direct light per day and if the layout of the wet area permits, try to leave or plant some bushes or small trees on one side to give it a natural pond look.

Begin by digging a hole of the desired shape and size – from 15 - 45 cm. deep. Spread an inexpensive polyethylene liner over the hole to make sure the bed retains moisture. Pierce it every three feet or so with a garden fork. Do not make too many drainage holes in the beginning since you cannot seal them after the depression has been filled with soil. If you find out later that the drainage is too slow, you may make additional holes with a pointed stake and mallet. Spread 4-6 cm. of pea gravel on top of the liner. The gravel allows the excess moisture to drain from the soil when it is too saturated. Bog plants need lots of moisture, but they also need some drainage to prevent the roots from rotting.

Trim the plastic so that the edges will be concealed under the soil surface. Then fill the hole with a high quality, moisture-retentive topsoil mixed with the same amount of compost. You can also mix in sphagnum peat moss, but use it sparingly. At that stage you can plant your chosen moisture-loving plants in your new bog, and water them well. Fertilize occasionally with compost only, since slow-release fertilizers break down too quickly in moist conditions. The soil should always be kept almost soggy and never allowed to dry out completely.



Photo by Mary Ann Van Berlo

Lobelia cardinalis

Some marshy bloomers include: *Iris pseudacorus* (Yellow flag iris), *Caltha palustris* (Marsh marigold), *Iris sibirica* (Siberian iris), *Astilbe* sp. (Astilbe), *Eupatorium purpureum* (Joe-Pye weed), *Lobelia cardinalis*, (Cardinal flower), *Monarda didyma* (Bee-balm), *Aruncus dioicus* (Goats-beard), *Trollius* sp. (Globeflower), *Chelone glabra* (Turtlehead), *Ligularia* sp. (ligularia).

Some handsome non-bloomers are ferns, aquatic grasses, and cattail. Many other aquatic plants may be added if your space permits. Non-hardy plants like *Canna* sp (canna lilies), *Colocasia esculenta* (taro or elephant ears) and *Cyperus papyrus* (papyrus) can also be added but will need to be lifted and stored for the winter.

Install a bench nearby. It is now time to allow yourself the luxury of enjoying your former problem area. It has been transformed into a haven for water-loving varieties of plants and a beauty-loving gardener.

Gaston Tessier
Master Gardener (Deceased)

Trowel Talk!

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- Editor: Mary Ann Van Berlo
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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 through Sept. (9 am – 1 pm)

Main Farmers' Market: August 23, September 6 & 20 (10 am – 2 pm)

North Gower Farmers' Market: September 6, October 4 (8:30 am – 1 pm)

Cumberland Market: September 6 (9 am – 1 pm)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

FRIENDS OF THE FARM LECTURE SERIES:

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

Lecture series (this is the final lecture of the 5 lectures in the series)

Building 72, Arboretum, Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa

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

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

Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

You're Not Done Yet (Fall gardening) – September 3 – 7:00pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Dr., Greely

Hosted by Greely Gardeners – Guests \$2

Vertical Gardens (Vines) – September 8 – 7:00pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Ottawa South Community Centre, 260 Sunnyside Ave. Ottawa

Hosted by Old Ottawa South Garden Club – Guests \$7

Making (Daylily) Bables in the Backyard – September 13 – 1:30pm

Westboro Masonic Hall, 430 Churchill Avenue, Ottawa

Kelly Noel, Master Gardener

Hosted by the Ottawa Valley Rock Garden & Horticultural Society – Guests welcome – no charge)

Introduction to Garden Design – September 16 – 7:00pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Athens District High School, 21 Church Street, Athens

Hosted by Athens Horticultural Society – Guests \$3

Vertical Gardens (Vines) – September 22 – 7:00pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Brockville Wesleyan Church (basement) 33 Central Ave, Brockville

Hosted by Brockville & District Horticultural Society – Guests \$2

Soft Fruit – October 14 – 7:30pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

St. Paul's United Church, 25 Gore Street, Perth

Hosted by Perth & District Horticultural Society – Guests \$3



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

- Save seeds from your annuals for growing next year.
- Make notes of what needs moving or dividing so that when the cooler weather arrives you have an action list.
- Continue your weed control regimen. Set aside a bit of time a couple of days a week to stay ahead of the weeds.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

If only plants could read! Then of course their own tag should be the first thing on their required reading list.

The problem is the tag says it should be 25 cm tall so you give it that coveted, front of the border spot, only to have it grow to double that height and block its neighbouring plants from view.

Perhaps the opposite happens; you carefully do your research find the perfect, statuesque plant for the back of the border, only to have it underwhelm you. Before you act too hastily and start re-arranging all your plants, eliminate possible causes of the 'problem'.

- Over-fertilized plants may grow taller than they would under normal conditions.
- A plant that has struggled in the wrong location may put on a burst of growth in a new location that is better suited to its growth requirements (sun exposure & soil conditions).
- Young seedlings or small transplants will take a while (up to 3 years) to develop their root systems and be able to reach their full potential.
- Were the roots loosened and some of the peaty nursery soil removed before transplanting? Sometimes the plant's roots are not growing into the garden soil, but instead staying within the potting mix which can dry out quickly, thus retarding plant growth.

Time may solve some of the above problems – it's just a matter of letting the plant establish in your garden soil.

In some cases, it will be necessary to move plants that don't perform. Just

don't be surprised if the plant that was always too short or too tall in its old location, suddenly does the opposite in its new soil and exposure.

Ahhh, the joys of gardening!