



Trowel Talk!

August, 2016

Gardening can be a barrel of fun

We have rain barrels at each corner of our house. Even a medium rainfall fills them to the top. Raised pail-high above the ground and outfitted with taps, our barrels are easy to get at and easy to use. Only during prolonged droughts have we had to refill them from our well. Barrels not attached to the eaves are filled by siphoning from those that are.

These former olive containers provide us with all or most of the water that we need for our plants. This water comes at a temperature that is less shocking for the plants than water straight from the well. We like to go easy on our underground water supply, especially during long dry periods.

Some maintenance is required. Each year late in the fall we empty and clean the barrels and leave their taps open. Each barrel requires a mesh cover to keep out small animals and to prevent mosquitoes from laying eggs on the surface of the water inside. There are ways of disguising our black plastic barrels but we haven't done so. They look fine to us. A more attractive and rustic look could be achieved with wooden barrels but they are more expensive.

With barrels located all over the property I don't have to go far for

water no matter where I am working. When I manage to stay organised, watering cans are available near each barrel. I still have to haul water for short distances, but I find this preferable to using hoses. Hoses can bring a tangle of problems with them.



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo

A plastic rain barrel with a planting space in the lid.

Water being essential to all growing things we are fortunate to have this relatively free source close at hand. We further conserve our supply by using mulches on our flowerbeds and vegetable gardens. Mulches preserve moisture and keep the soil surface cool so that our plants need to be watered less often.

A few words of water wisdom: Try to do your watering in the morning. If watering is done mid-day much of it can be lost to evaporation, and if it is done in the evening plants are more susceptible to fungus infections. Rather than watering every day, water once a week giving your plants a thorough soaking each time. Soak them at their roots rather than on their foliage. If you can group plants according to their watering

needs, this will make your work even easier.



Photo: Kelly Noel

A green rain barrel will blend in with the plants. The lid keeps debris and animals out.

The "once-a-week and deep" rule does not apply where transplants are concerned. Transplants need help every day for the first week or more. The amount of rainfall and prevailing temperatures may lengthen or shorten the period that is needed to get transplants established.

When we moved back to urban Ottawa, we brought some of our barrels with us. They have become a habit now and stand for something we believe in, namely water conservation. That belief goes back to childhood days in Saskatchewan where water was and is still a very serious matter.

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"A gardener learns more in the mistakes than in the successes."

— Barbara Dodge Borland

August TO DO List

- Deadhead plants to encourage a second flush of blooms.
- Remove the seed heads from aggressive self-seeders (before they start to disperse their seeds).
- As the temperatures cool, plant another crop of leaf lettuce or spinach.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

Bearded iris (*Iris germanica*) require some care to keep them at their best. These irises grow from rhizomes (enlarged roots) that can become too crowded which reduces the amount of blooms.



Photos: Mary Ann Van Berlo

Shown above is *Iris pumila* 'Ruby Eruption'. *Pumila* means this is a dwarf bearded iris. Bearded irises come in a range of heights. The fuzzy bit on the petal gives them their name 'bearded'.

Every 3-5 years, the rhizomes should be divided. Now is the best time for this chore – the rhizomes will have time to re-establish their roots before winter.



An overgrown clump of dwarf iris.

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:

Cumberland Market: Sept 3, (9am–1pm)

North Gower Farmers Market: Sept 17, (8:30am–1pm)

Main Market (Museum of Nature): Aug 20, Sept 10 & 24, (10am–2pm)

Ottawa Farmers Market (Lansdowne Park): Sundays, July 3 - Sept 25, (9am–1pm)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Bringing Plants Indoors for the Winter and Dividing Plants for Sale or Donation –
October 5 – 7:00 pm

Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely

Hosted by Greely Gardeners Group (guest fee: \$2)

Late Bloomers – Perennials for Fall – September 26 – 7:30 pm

Josie Pazdzior, Master Gardener

Cornerstone Community Church, 1728 Concession 11, Almonte

Hosted by Almonte & District Horticultural Society (guest fee: \$2)



For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.ca>



To start, trim the leaves to about one-third. Then dig up the whole clump. Examine each rhizome, cutting off the older parts and also any parts that show signs of infestation by iris borer.

A hole or tunnel in the rhizome is the telltale sign of iris borer. If there is borer damage, cut sections of the rhizome off until you no longer see tunneling by the borer.

Discard all old and infested rhizomes. Replant healthy, young pieces of rhizome, allowing adequate growing space. To replant, dig a hole about 12cm deep, make a mound of soil in the middle of the hole, then place the rhizome on top of the mound,

allowing the roots to fall down the sides of the mound.



An iris division placed on mound of soil in hole for planting.

Bearded irises like to be exposed to the sun so don't bury the rhizome too deep. It should be at surface level. Water in, but don't overwater – bearded irises prefer hot dry conditions.