

O Christmas tree

Did you ever think about growing your own Christmas tree? Last year, we harvested a spruce tree that came to us about 10 years ago as a 20cm seedling. We planted the tiny thing in a large flowerbed in front of our dining room window, watered it and forgot about it, knowing that in that spot, it would get lots of regular water, sunlight and fertilizer. We didn't think ahead to the day when it would be too large for this location, nor did we plan that it would become our Christmas tree.



Photo: Gail Labrosse

Harvesting our Christmas tree from our front yard is a family effort!

It has been an annual tradition for our family to cut our own Christmas tree. We drive into the countryside to a tree farm with our trusty red tree saw.

Trowel Talk!

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We search until we find the most beautiful tree in the forest. It's sometimes a challenge to find the perfect tree because there are so many to choose from. Over the years we've learned a few things about what trees make the best Christmas trees.



Photo: Gail Labrosse

The white spruce undergoes its transformation to our family Christmas tree!

The most popular Christmas trees in Canada are the Balsam Fir, Fraser Fir, Scotch Pine and White Spruce. Fir trees have soft, flattened, dark green, pleasantly fragrant needles. Their tall, slim shapes fit neatly into a corner of the living room. Scotch pines are renowned for good retention of their long needles and they have upward curving branches that are ideal for hanging heavy ornaments. White Spruce, with its symmetrical, cone-shaped crown, spreading branches and stiff prickly needles, is also popular.

A few simple tricks will help maintain your tree's fragrance and prevent the needles from

falling too quickly. Make a new cut at the base of the tree before putting it in the tree stand. This allows the tree to take in water more easily. Never let the water level fall below this new cut and check the water level every few hours as it may use several quarts a day for the first few days. Don't add anything to the water – just plain water and plenty of it.

Last year Christmas celebrations began when the whole family gathered around the white spruce in the front yard. We examined it with the same care as trees of past years. It was too large for its current location, but a perfect Christmas tree. While the tree adorned our front yard it put oxygen into the air, used carbon dioxide, added water to the atmosphere, controlled erosion and provided habitat for many neighbourhood creatures. And now it would save the exhaust emissions of a trip to the country. This time our excitement was mixed with a little sadness, but out came the trusty red tree saw and we made it our Christmas tree.

This spring we planted another white spruce, this time in the back yard, where it will have more room to grow in full sun and well-drained soil that is slightly acidic. It will be ready for harvesting by Christmas 2025. Something to look forward to!

Gail Labrosse
Master Gardener

December TO DO List

- Keep an eye on houseplants to control any pests that may have found their way into your home for winter. If necessary, isolate any infected plants. Use an insecticidal soap to control white-fly, spider mites and aphids. Scale requires a little more work to eradicate – dab each scale with a Q-tip dipped in rubbing alcohol.
- Another control for some houseplant pests is to hang a sticky trap in the plant. It will catch some gnats, white-flies and aphids.
- Check on any bulbs and tubers you have stored to make sure they are not going moldy or conversely are not drying out completely.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

In eastern Ontario, we have a native holly that provides bright red berries for seasonal decorations. The *Ilex verticillata* (commonly known as winterberry or native holly) is found in damp or wet low-land borders of deciduous forests. It would be very happy near the run-off of the downspout of your home



Bright red berries are held tight to the branches through fall and early winter.

The flowers are non-descript but the shrub itself is an attractive upright plant (2 to 2.5m) with dark green leaves. Like all other hollies, the winterberry requires a

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:

No clinics until spring.

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Lawn care and lawn alternatives – January 7 – 7:00pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely

Hosted by the Greely Gardeners (Guest fee: \$2)

Renovating an older garden – January 13 – 7:30pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Larkin House, 76 Larkin Drive, Nepean

Hosted by the Barrhaven Garden Club (Guest fee: \$3)

Vegetable gardening – from pots to plots – January 19 – 7:30pm

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

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

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

Plant guilds: taking companion planting to a new level – February 2 – 7:30pm

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Old Town Hall, 821 March Road, Kanata

Hosted by Kanata-March Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$5)

Growing wonderful plants from seed – February 4 – 7:00pm

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely

Hosted by the Greely Gardeners (Guest fee: \$2)

The raised bed garden – February 8 – 7:00 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Ottawa South Community Centre (Old Firehall), 260 Sunnyside Ave., Ottawa

Hosted by the Old Ottawa South Garden Club (Guest fee: \$7)

Hedges – planting, maintaining, renewing – February 18 – 7:30pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

CityView United Church, 6 Epworth Ave., Nepean

Hosted by the Nepean Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$4)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: mgottawaspeakers@gmail.com

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

male and a female plant to produce berries. Only three-year-old plants are old enough to bear flowers and that is when the sex of the plants can be determined. Nurseries will often grow them from cuttings so the plant's gender is known from the outset since vegetative reproduction means the cutting is identical to the parent. If you purchase winterberry from a nursery, make sure you get both genders. The male plant must be within 40 feet of female plants for adequate pollination.

If you are lucky enough to have some native holly in one of your arrangements, try taking a few of the berries (seeds) for growing in your garden. The seeds require a period of cold to break their dormancy (sometimes multiple seasons) so place the seeds outdoors now, either in a pot or seed directly in the garden if the ground is not frozen – just mark the spot well so you don't end up planting over the seeds as they may take a long time to germinate.