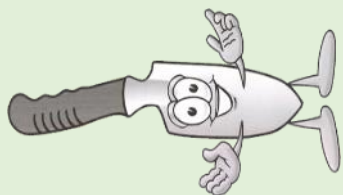


# Trowel Talk!

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## Gardens come up dry

When rain or snow is pelting down, worrying about a lack of water is not likely to be a priority. However, when we endure even short summer droughts, we become anxious about long-term water supply. Xeriscaping (dryscaping) is an approach to gardening that aims to conserve water by reducing to a bare minimum the need to water plants while at the same time creating an attractive landscape.

In dryscaping, you can make the right plant choice by matching soil requirements, light exposure, and topographical differences as a first step and choosing plants that tolerate extended periods of drought without pampering as a second step. Another consideration in choosing plants is that they be fully hardy in our growing zone to make maintenance easier. Native plants often answer to these requirements with the added bonus of lower susceptibility to insect damage, disease and general weather stress. We need to eliminate as many stress factors as possible.

Knowing when to water is almost as important as choosing the right plant: this requires regular inspection, anticipation of need and perhaps even a handy-dandy little moisture meter.

As with regular gardens, attention to colour through the seasons, height and plant form, is necessary. The underlying theme in your choices, though, is resistance to dry, dry weather.

Time spent on building good soil for your plants is fundamental and this is especially true in xeriscaping. Plants flourish in soil that is humus rich and regularly replenished with composted material. "Well-built" soil provides our ornamentals with the nutrition they need for growth, blooms and over-all vigour.

With soil well prepared and plant choices made you will want to get on with planting. Spring or fall with their



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo

**This meadow garden near Ashton combines native plants and grasses that enjoy the same cultivation requirements.**

usual wet weather and cooler temperatures are the best times. Early morning or evening is better than mid-day. It is difficult for plants to deal with excess heat and get their roots established at the same time. It is hard on the water person, too. Once the planting is done, further moisture conservation can be achieved through the use of mulch.

Mulch does this in two ways -- by reducing the amount of soil moisture lost through evaporation and by discouraging weeds that would otherwise compete for water, nutrients and light.

Xeriscaping doesn't intend that water never be used. Plants that are newly transplanted will need help to get started. How-

ever, they should be weaned from this assistance as soon as possible. If you cannot resist some favourite water-guzzling species, place them in partial shade to lessen moisture-loss through evaporation or locate them at the base of a natural slope in your garden. As rain runs down the grade, they get an extra drink. Another option is to put them in naturally low spots. When you do water, aim for the soil over the root zone and water deeply but less frequently. The best time to water is early in the morning.

Once your project is well-established you can move into the maintenance mode. Again, regular gardening practices apply -- deadheading, removal of dead or yellowing leaves, monitoring for insect and diseases, eventual division when plants grow too large, and occasional topping up with more compost and more mulch to keep things in good shape. It may seem that xeriscaping is almost the same as traditional gardening. In many ways it is. The crucial difference is that its practice results in reduced use of a valuable and sometimes scarce resource. Water can become scarcer than we want to believe, and ever more expensive to process and purify. These are reasons enough to adopt this approach.

*Edythe Falconer*  
Master Gardener

## February TO DO List

- If starting from seed, now is the time to plant onion, leeks and celery indoors.
- Prune and shape fruit trees while they are dormant. Grape vines should also be pruned now.
- Continue to keep an eye on houseplants for pests and diseases.
- As the days lengthen, start fertilizing and increase watering of houseplants, as needed.
- If you have gardening or plant ID questions, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

## Tip of the Month

When to prune *Clematis* vines can be confusing. The important thing to keep in mind is: when does the plant bloom? Knowing that will dictate when to prune – for instance, an early bloomer will flower on the existing vine that overwintered, so you don't want to prune away those blooms.

**Group 1** -- Blooms in early spring on last year's growth. Prune only dead or weak branches after flowering to tidy the plant. This would include some of the small flowered clematis like *C. alpina* 'Constance' (below) or *C.* 'Markhams Pink'.



*Clematis alpina* 'Constance'

**Group 2** -- Blooms on new growth in May, June or July. Light pruning to strong buds in April is recommended to promote branching. This is often the larger flowered forms of clematis, although some of the small flowered varieties also bloom during this timeframe. Since they bloom on new growth, cut the vine down to a level that

## Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



## Where to find us 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](mailto:mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca)

- monitored daily

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

### CLINICS:

**March 23-26, 2017 – Ottawa Home & Garden Show** – EY Centre, 4899 Uplands Drive, Ottawa – Visit us at our booth.

We'll be there all weekend at this annual spring show, to answer your gardening questions.

### SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

**Garden Makeovers – Rejuvenating your garden** – February 23 – 7:30 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Community Hall, 380 Springfield Road, Ottawa

Hosted by Rockcliffe Park Garden Club (Guest fee: \$7)

**Raised Bed Gardening** – March 2 – 7:00 pm

Catherine Disley Engler, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely

Hosted by Greely Gardeners Group (Guest fee: \$3)

**Know your Soil** – March 20 – 7:30 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Top Generation Hall, 4373 Generation Court, Ottawa

Hosted by Gloucester Horticultural Society (Guest fee: N/A)



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



will allow for 4-6 feet of new growth, striving to keep the flowers at eye-level.



*Clematis* 'Asao'

**Group 3** -- Blooms late in the season, from July through the fall. They can be pruned back hard in early April to just above a good set of buds, usually around 30 cm.

*Clematis* 'Sweet Autumn' or *C. tangutica* are in this group. They have an aggressive growth rate and can tolerate a hard pruning.



*Clematis tangutica* 'My Angel'

If in doubt, just give the vine a light pruning to clean up any dead or damaged parts. Observe the vine for a year and then reassess your pruning strategy the following season.

# Rain Barrel Sale

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



## Coming Soon!

DATE: Sunday, April 30, 2017

TIME: 10am to 2 pm

PLACE: 17 Tristan Court, Nepean

**More details to follow! <https://rainbarrel.ca/mgottawa/>  
Buy a rain barrel and help the planet (and your water bill).  
Profits will help support our volunteer activities.**