



Trowel Talk!

January, 2015

Garden odyssey

It seems that humans have always found enrichment and comfort in interaction with plants. Archaeological evidence of terraced hillsides and potted plants dates as far back as 3600BC. In the Odyssey (800BC), Homer describes orchards, vineyards and "beautifully arranged beds of flowers that are in bloom all the year round".

All ancient cultures had the concept of a "paradise" garden – an enclosed outdoor area, near water, where trees and plants were grown for shade, ornamentation and food. It provided sanctuary, privacy and aesthetic pleasure as well as nourishment. It was a tranquil setting where people sheltered from the sun, enjoyed the company of friends and took pleasure in the sounds of water and the fragrance of flowers.

In addition to the fundamental elements of plants and water, gardens have always included structures, functional or decorative, such as benches, shelters, statues and fountains. What distinguishes the gardens of various cultures over the centuries is how all these elements are woven together to create the design.

In the western world, starting in Egypt, and continuing through Greek and Roman eras, the Middle Ages and Renaissance Period, gardens were laid out formally

and symmetrically on a central axis. Originally lines were straight but eventually included elaborate, but still geometric, curves. There was extensive use of ornamentation – at first statues with religious significance but later including monuments to kings, governors and generals.

Italians, in the style of ancient Rome, used mostly native evergreen plants which they clipped into geometric shapes. Spanish and Middle Eastern gardens often featured specimen plants as decorative elements and all greenery was allowed to grow lush and unrestrained. The French, Dutch and English made extensive use of colour from bulbs and bedding plants.

The characteristic of all these formal styles is the contrast between the strict discipline of the symmetric and geometric layout and the almost excessive use of stylized plantings and grand and elaborate decorative accessories.



Photo: Kelly Noel

A private backyard that is planned and formal but softened with curves

From antiquity, gardens in the Orient developed in a completely different style. The Chinese and Japanese kept their gardens smaller and more intimate – places for contemplation and meditation. Elements were placed for artistic effect and symbolic significance in natural and informal compositions. Structures such as pavilions, gateways and

bridges were used but many natural elements such as stones, weathered wood and sand were also featured. The greenery was simple and minimal. The characteristic of this uncluttered and asymmetrical style is an understated and subtle elegance.



Photo: Kelly Noel

Hollis Garden, a public garden in Lakeland, Florida, features a neoclassical design

Throughout the centuries, the explorers who travelled the world in search of new lands and new ideas also brought plant materials and design ideas back with them. Europeans began to incorporate exotic plants into their landscapes. By the 18th century, the English had developed a more relaxed style - still with formal gardens near the residence but with irregular and asymmetrical areas such as lawns and groves of trees in the mid-ground, and a natural or "wild" background.

Whatever the design, the purpose of the garden is universal – it is a place of relaxation and pleasure where both soul and body can be refreshed and nourished. Garden design in North America has always shown the influence of both natural and formal styles – many modern gardens, both public and private, include elements of both.

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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:

No advice clinics until next spring.

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

10 Must Grow Culinary Herbs – January 19 – 7:00pm

Fran Dennett, Master Gardener

Royal Canadian Legion/Lion's Hall, 24 Legion Lane, Russell

Hosted by Russell & District Horticultural Society (No guest fee)

"All from a Little Seed" – February 3 – 7:30pm

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Old Town Hall, 821 March Road, Kanata

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

Garden Pests and Diseases – February 5 – 7:00pm

Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely

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

Edible Gardening – February 9 – 7:00pm

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

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

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

Late Bloomers: Perennials and Shrubs – February 10 – 7:00pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Champlain Park Field House, 149 Cowley Avenue, Ottawa

Hosted by Champlain Garden Club (Guest fee: \$5)

"Mucking about" in the Dirt is Good for your Health (and ways to stay healthy when gardening) – February 24 – 7:30 pm

Nancy McDonald, Master Gardener

Tom Brown Arena, 141 Bayview Road, Ottawa

Hosted by Ottawa Horticultural Society (No guest fee)

"Vegetable Growing Possibilities in the Urban Landscape" – March 3 – 7:30pm

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

Old Town Hall, 821 March Road, Kanata

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



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

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

We've set up a Facebook Group for sharing gardening information. Check us out:



January TO DO List

- Review seed and plant catalogues. Research new plant introductions to see if they are worth adding to your garden.
- Watch for pests or diseases on houseplants so that you get them under control before they become a major problem.
- Consider joining a garden club or horticultural society as a way to learn more about gardening.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

Soon gardeners will be ordering seeds and thinking about starting some indoors. Many will take inventory of what seeds they have left from last year or may look at the seeds they saved from their garden and wonder if those dried up little kernels will grow.

The length of time seeds stay viable (able to germinate reliably) varies by type of seed and can be greatly affected by its storage method (cool and dry is best).

Some seed packets can be used multiple years. Carrot seed, for instance, often comes in packets of 500 seeds – way more than the average home gardener needs in one year. Gardeners have been known to use the same packet over 3 or 4 summers with good results.

In some cases the germination rate decreases over time, but if you sow extra, then you should still have a good crop.

There are seed viability tests that the home gardener can do, to test their stored seeds. Test them now to find out if you need to order replacements.

One of the simplest test methods is to fold up a paper towel (fold to ¼ of the original size so you have four layers), moisten it thoroughly but not dripping wet, place it in a clear plastic container or sandwich bag and put 10 seeds in the middle layer. Then place the sealed container in a warm spot – the top of the refrigerator works well. Check it every day,

making sure it hasn't dried out. Within 7-14 days the seeds should have germinated. If all 10 germinate, your seeds are still 100% viable, if less germinate, you may want to adjust how many you sow or purchase fresh seeds. 80% germination is considered 'acceptable' by most seed companies.

This viability test method is best suited to mid to large seeds.

In an early season viability test, the germinated seeds are thrown out. Seeds germinated in March using this method could be planted in flats and kept growing under lights until you are ready to harden them off and transplant the seedlings outdoors.