



Trowel Talk!

July, 2011

Laissez-faire lawn care

Why do we love our lawns? They are greening nicely now and this got me thinking about our relationship with these lush expanses. Do we value them because they provide a buffer zone between us and the outside world? Is the lawn the evolution of the "castle and moat" of medieval times – when the moat made it difficult for invaders to get close to the castle? Or does it come from the "fort and clearing" of pioneer times – when the trees cut down to get wood for building forts resulted in open space that provided a good view of any approaching visitors?

There is no longer any threat from enemy feudal lords or competing armies, but still we build our homes with space around them. The open areas that surround our latter day castles and forts now boast artistically planned lawns, patios, ponds, play equipment, and swimming pools – to name just a few of their typical elements. The "home and play-ground" of today is intended to provide work, relaxation and aesthetic pleasure for its family.

But even now, attitudes and practices are constantly changing. The need for new kinds of defense systems is becoming more evident. For example, how will we protect our water supply? In addition to water supply we have safety concerns. Some of the products that



Photo: Nancy Seppala

Drought tolerant lawn seed mixes often include yarrow (as seen above).

we have typically used to help produce our pleasant surroundings – fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides – have become costlier and costlier. In some cases we are not at all certain of their long-range effects. In other instances we do know the consequences and they are not good.

With these concerns in mind, many of us are looking to alternative solutions to satisfy our lawn-lust. Meadows, dry gardens, and the laissez-faire lawn are three possibilities.

The laissez-faire lawn doesn't mind a bit of clover, thyme, or yarrow. It can put up with a few violets and some Creeping Charlie. It is relaxed and laid back. Its health is maintained through the practices of aeration, dethatching, thin layers of clippings and occasional top dressings of compost or well-rotted manure. Cushiony and pleasantly scented, it is a safe place to play and relax, and regularly mowed it does not look unkempt.

Clippings, provided the layer is not too thick, can provide up to 50% of the nutrients needed by the laissez-faire lawn. Compost can provide the rest.

About 1cm (not more) of thatch is a good thing. Thatch is that layer of dead plant material and young shoots that hugs the ground around the more mature grasses. It provides a temperature and moisture control system. If it gets too thick it becomes too much of a good thing. You need to loosen it up and let some air in.

Definitions of beauty and perfection change over time. The definition that each of us chooses will need to include attention to our water resources and to the preservation of a healthy environment. By easing up on our use of chemical inputs and by using drought resistant native plants we can make important steps into a healthy, happy future.

*Edythe Falconer
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Trowel Talk!

- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton
- Volume 2, Number 7
- <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>
- Editor: Mary Ann Van Berlo
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July TO DO List

- Take photos or make notes to remember which plants need dividing or moving.
- Also be on the look-out for annuals with special features. Tag them so you will know which one to collect seeds from later in the season.
- Take the time to sit back and enjoy your garden.
- For more inspiration, take a garden tour. Many of the garden clubs and horticultural societies host garden tours where you can view local gardens and meet gardeners who face the same challenges as you.
- As the vegetable garden starts to produce its bounty, consider donating excess produce to your local food bank.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month:

Squirrels, chipmunks and rabbits, while cute to look at, can be very bothersome in our gardens.



Some deterrents for these furry pests include:

- bloodmeal sprinkled around the plants.
- dog hair or human hair spread among the plants.
- prunings from roses or barberry bushes used to build a 'fence' around your plants. These thorny barriers can also be woven into the plants of hanging baskets.
- motion activated chasers spray water or emit a high pitched sound to deter many rodents.

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)
- Saturdays 7-8 pm (April through September ONLY)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

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

CLINICS:

Carp Garlic Festival: August 13-14, Carp Fair Grounds

Lansdowne Market: Sundays, July through September (9 a.m. - 1 p.m.)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Tips Tricks & Techniques - September 6 - 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener
Old March Town Hall, 821 March Road, Kanata, Ontario
Hosted by the Kanata March Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Seed Saving Workshop for Kids - September 10 - 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Rebecca Last, Master Gardener
Children's Garden, Robert F. Legget Park, Main St at Clegg St., Ottawa, Ontario
Hosted by Sustainable Living Ottawa East
Registration required; e-mail childrensgarden@sustainablelivingottawaeast.ca

What to do with a Mature Garden - September 13 - 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Mary Shearman-Reid, Master Gardener
Navy Club, 30 Sixth Street East, Cornwall, Ontario
Hosted by the Cornwall Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Winter is coming - Is your garden ready? - September 14 - 7:00 p.m.

Speaker: Josie Pazdzior, Master Gardener
Carlingwood Branch of the Ottawa Public Library, 281 Woodroffe Ave., Ontario
Hosted by the Ottawa Public Library (guests welcome)
Register by calling: 613-725-2449, ex. 24 or online at: www.biblioottawalibrary.ca



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: 613-836-1491

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit our website:

<http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

- a 60cm strip of aluminum or sheet metal wrapped around the trunk of a tree will stop squirrels from climbing up and eating blossoms or fruit. (NOTE: make sure there are no other trees or structures close to the tree that the squirrel can use as a launching pad.)

When planting bulbs in the fall, keep squirrel prevention in mind. In addition to the above remedies, here are a few more that work specifically for bulbs:

- bulbs can be protected by planting them very deep. Tulips can be planted at a depth of 25-30cm. Squirrels won't dig that deep and the bulbs will still grow.

- wire mesh (like chicken wire) placed over bulbs before back-filling, will stop squirrels from digging up the bulbs.



- plant daffodils, fritillaria, alliums and hyacinths instead of crocuses and tulips. The squirrels don't bother with these bulbs.