



Trowel Talk!

July, 2014

Marvelous mulch

High summer is here and plants are growing like mad, including weeds that seem to pop out of the ground overnight. Growing plants need plenty of moisture, so you may be watering often. If you're tired of this back-breaking work, pulling weeds and lugging hoses and watering cans around, here's good news; there is another way! It's called mulching and it can be your best friend.

The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines mulch as: "a mixture, usually of vegetable matter, spread around or over a plant to enrich or insulate the soil or suppress weeds".



Photo by Mary Ann Van Berlo

Pine cones are an example of a 'found' organic mulch

Organic mulches range from free "found" materials such as shredded leaves, newspapers, cardboard, grass clippings and compost; through purchased wood

products like shredded pine or cedar bark chips, composted pine mulch, or the more exotic cocoa husks – a by-product of chocolate-making.

Inorganic mulches include plastics, landscape cloth, rocks and gravel. Newer mulches containing shredded rubber are controversial. It may be an excellent way to recycle old car tires, but studies suggest it contains concentrations of heavy metals, which can be bad for your health and can kill plants. Shredded rubber is also flammable.



Photo by Monique Paré

Wood chips mulch needs to be refreshed every year since they decompose – but the benefit is that they improve the soil by adding organic matter

When choosing mulch, consider where you are using it. Plastic, newspaper and straw make inexpensive, practical mulches for a vegetable garden but they would detract from the look in an ornamental bed, where shredded wood products are more aesthetically pleasing.

When I installed a decorative dry-stone stream bed in my front yard, I discovered that the fist-sized river rocks also retained moisture in the sandy soil. Green mulching – leaving grass clippings on your lawn – will provide extra nutrition for your lawn, reduce the need to water, and save you the trouble of raking.

Some garden suppliers sell a bright orange-red plastic mulch that supposedly reflects the spec-

trum of light most beneficial for tomatoes. Over several years, I've proved to myself that this red plastic really does hasten the onset of fruit and seems to increase production.

Plastic mulches can be either biodegradable or nonbiodegradable. The latter must be removed at the end of the growing season. Organic materials, like compost, will eventually break down and enrich the soil, but this means that these kinds of mulches need to be topped up yearly.



Photo by Monique Paré

River stone as a mulch

While mulch will insulate delicate plants from the damaging freeze-thaw cycles of spring and fall, no amount of mulch will protect your beautiful zone 8 plant from Ottawa's harsh winters. Best bring that baby inside!

Remember to always weed and water well before applying a mulch, especially if using a porous material. If you are using gravel or river stones, lay landscape cloth under the rock first to minimize weeding but be prepared for a few weeds to eventually poke through.

So throw some mulch around and discover how marvelous it can be for keeping in moisture, suppressing weeds, enriching your soil, preventing erosion, creating decorative effects and finding a good use for unwanted organic materials.

Rebecca Last
Master Gardener

Trowel Talk!

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- trowel_talk_editor@rogers.com



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:

Ottawa Farmers' Market: (Brewer Park) Sundays, July through Sept. (9 am - 1 pm)

Main Farmers' Market: July 26, August 9 & 23, September 6 (10 am - 2 pm)

HerbFest: The Herb Garden, 3840 Old Almonte Rd, July 27 (9am-5pm)

North Gower Farmers' Market: August 9, September 6 (8:30 am - 1 pm)

Carp Garlic Festival: August 9 (8 am - 3 pm) & August 10 (10 am - 3 pm)

Cumberland Market: August 9, September 6 (9 am - 1 pm)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

FRIENDS OF THE FARM LECTURE SERIES:

Individual Lectures: FCEF members \$12, non-members \$15

Lecture series (this is the final lecture of the 5 lectures in the series)

Building 72, Arboretum, Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa

Register at: 613-230-3276 or by e-mail info@friendsofthefarm.ca

Spring Bulbs - an Essential for every Garden - September 9 - 7:00 pm

Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Vertical Gardens (Vines) - July 15 - 7:00pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Iroquois United Church (basement) 2 Elizabeth Dr., Iroquois

Hosted by Gardeners Gathering - Guests \$2

You're Not Done Yet (Fall gardening) - September 3 - 7:00pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Dr., Greely

Hosted by Greely Gardeners - Guests \$2

Vertical Gardens (Vines) - September 8 - 7:00pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Ottawa South Community Centre, 260 Sunnyside Ave. Ottawa

Hosted by Old Ottawa South Garden Club - Guests \$7

Hemerocallis (Daylilies) - September 13 - 1:30pm

Westboro Masonic Hall, 430 Churchill Avenue, Ottawa

Kelly Noel, Master Gardener

Hosted by the Ottawa Valley Rock Garden & Horticultural Society - Guests

welcome - no charge)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: speakers@mgottawa.mgoi.ca

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



July TO DO List

- Continue your weed control regimen. Set aside a bit of time a couple of days a week to stay ahead of the weeds.
- Be vigilant - a daily walk through your garden will keep you alert to pests and diseases allowing you to minimize their damage.
- Take the time to go on a garden tour. Check with your local horticultural society for upcoming tours or watch for notices in your community paper. Garden tours can be educational, provide inspiration and are a relaxing way to spend a summer's day.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

A recent garden tour in the UK is the source of inspiration for this month's tip on plant support. (TIP: use Adobe's zoom feature to see detail in the photos.)



Plastic or wire mesh (a 10-15cm grid) stretched between four posts allows plants to grow through the mesh and be supported but without looking trussed up. As in the photo above, slope the mesh so that the height goes up towards the back of the border.



Every gardener who's tried to grow the majestic delphinium knows that

they need support. Individual obelisks made of bamboo stakes (photo to the left) do the trick and look good while the delphinium grows to its full stature.

Garden vertically and add height to a bed by growing a vine on an informal obelisk made of willow branches (any fine, flexible branches will do) trussed together with some strong twine (photo to the right).

