



Trowel Talk!

July, 2015

Tough but pretty

Name a plant you can trim with your lawnmower and that still continues to bloom. As I learned from watching an interview with Phoebe Noble, the answer is hardy geraniums. Ms. Noble grew geraniums under the trees in her B.C. orchard. Not only did the plants act as a ground cover, they offered the additional benefit of attracting pollinators to the orchard. A mass planting of this scale would be a “dead-heading nightmare” so Ms. Noble used her riding mower to cut them back. Within weeks, these tough garden sprawlers came back looking refreshed and ready to put on a second show of blooms.



Photos: Mary Ann Van Berlo

Geranium sanguineum var. *striatum*

This hardy geranium, *Geranium* spp., also called “cranesbill” because its seed head resembles the bill of a crane, is very different from the annual plant that has the common name geranium. The latter, with its lollipop-shaped cluster of flowers, is found in many patio planters and is actually a *Pelargonium* spp.

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- Editor: Mary Ann Van Berlo
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With over 300 species and many more cultivars, the Geranium family is very large. There are annual, biennial and perennial forms with many of the perennial species being hardy to our region. There is a geranium for nearly every location. They tolerate most types of soil and will take sun or part-shade.

The 1-5cm flowers come in the white, pink, mauve and blue hues and are often streaked. Some are continuous bloomers and some are repeat bloomers if cut back after the first bloom. The leaves are also of interest with varying textures, shapes and colourations. Certain cultivars have aromatic foliage.

Geraniums can be propagated from division or seed. They can spread quickly to form a large patch and are easily transplanted to other areas of the garden.

One of my favourite geraniums is *G.* ‘Anne Folkard’ whose new foliage is tinged with gold – the perfect backdrop for its deep magenta flowers with an even darker eye-zone.



Geranium ‘Rozanne’

Another favourite, *G.* ‘Rozanne’ is a continuous bloomer with 5cm blue blossoms. Rozanne tends to lounge, so by September she is well over a foot into my lawn. Since the plant grows from a central crown, I simply roll the stems back onto the flowerbed, pass the

lawnmower over the lawn and unroll the plant back into its sprawling position.

For interesting foliage, try *G. wlassovianum*, *G. thunbergii* ‘Jester’s Jacket’ or *G. x oxonianum* ‘Katherine Adele’. These all offer variegated foliage, some green and white, some mottled with purple.



Geranium cinereum ‘Ballerina’

G. cinereum ‘Ballerina’ or *G.* ‘Tanya Rendall’ are two dwarf cultivars. These dainty plants excel in an alpine bed or at the front of a border where they can be viewed up close. Both form a perfect mound with purple-red flowers held above the foliage.



Geranium oxonianum ‘Phoebe Noble’

My final recommendation is a particularly dark pink cultivar of *G. oxonianum* that was discovered in Phoebe Noble’s garden. It is a continuous bloomer and was appropriately named *G. oxonianum* ‘Phoebe Noble’.

Just remember, while you can trim mass plantings with your lawnmower, the garden shears will do the job in smaller spaces.

Mary Ann Van Berlo
Master Gardener



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, Lansdowne Park: Sundays, July to Sept, 9am-1pm

Main Farmers Market, Museum of Nature: Saturdays, July 25, Aug 8, Sept 5, 9am-1pm

Cumberland Market: Saturdays, Aug 8, Sept 5, 9am-1pm

North Gower Farmers Market, 2403 Roger Stevens Dr, North Gower: Saturday, Sept 19, 8:30am-1:00pm

HerbFest, Herb Garden, 3840 Old Almonte Rd, Sunday, July 26, 9am-5pm

Carp Garlic Festival, Fairgrounds, Carp, Aug 8-9

Richmond Fair, Sept 17-20

Carp Fair, Sept 24-27

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Making Daylily Babies in the Backyard – September 2 – 7:00 pm

Kelly Noel, Master Gardener

St. Andrews Presbyterian Church Hall, 39 Bridge St., Carleton Place.

Carleton Place & District Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$3)

Up and Down the Garden walls with Vines – September 2 – 7:15 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Portland Community Hall, 24 Water Street, Portland, Ontario

Rideau Lakes Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$5)

Forcing Bulbs – September 9 – 7:30pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Carveth Care Centre, Herbert Street, Gananoque

Gananoque Horticultural Society (Guest fee: N/A)



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

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

July TO DO List

- Enjoy your garden! Take the time to appreciate all of your hard work.
- Share the harvest with friends and family. Preserve some for the winter. If you have more than you can handle, consider a donation to a local foodbank or harvest-share organization.
- Don't share the harvest with pests. Keep slugs, earwigs, Japanese beetles and other pests under control. Check for them daily and take action.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

Lawn is one of the most high maintenance and expensive ground covers used by gardeners; but it doesn't have to be.

The dog days of summer are coming so now is the time to raise your lawnmower blade to at least 7.5cm. This height allows the blades of grass to shade their own roots to conserve their precious water reserves. This in turn means the grass can spend more of its energy developing a healthy root system instead of trying to grow upward to provide its roots with shelter from the sun.

Don't water the lawn during periods of drought. The lawn's natural defence is to go dormant and it will recover when the nightly dews of August arrive.

Kentucky bluegrass is from the cool, moist Appalachian Mountains and is not equipped for our hot dry summers. Instead, plant a mix of grasses and include Dutch white clover in the mix. Low growing and fast spreading, Dutch white clover is very drought tolerant, fixes nitrogen, and remains green all summer. Another plus is that clover flowers are a nectar source for our pollinators.

If you're not already using a mulching blade and leaving the grass clippings to feed your lawn, it's time to change your lawn care habits.

The fertilizer that is spread on our lawns is stored in the blades of grass which break-down quickly and feed the grass again. Hauling the clippings away is like throwing the fertilizer away instead of letting it do its job.

Earlier it was stated that clover fixes nitrogen – but how does that nitrogen then become available as a food source for the lawn? The nitrogen is stored in the leaves and roots of the clover plant. Each time you mow your lawn, the nitrogen rich clover clippings are feeding

the grass plants. If you bag the clippings, again, you're throwing away a natural source of fertilizer.

There is a common misconception that grass clippings cause thatch in the lawn. This is not the case. Certain varieties of turf grass (Kentucky bluegrass, creeping red fescue, creeping bent-grass.) are more prone to thatch than others. These varieties generally are rhizome spreaders and the root and stem growth on this type of grass does not break down quickly. Over-fertilization can also cause accelerated root and stem growth which subsequently increases thatch. This link provides [more information on thatch.](#)