



Trowel Talk!

June, 2012

Heucheras' true colours dazzle

Heuchera sanguineum (bless you!). Why is such a pretty little plant burdened with such an awkward name? This non-stop performer deserves better! At least its common name of 'coral-bells' appeals to our senses by conjuring up images of its dainty, bell-shaped flowers.

H. sanguineum is an old, tried and true garden plant with green foliage that complements its coral flowers. This species has various cultivars that offer different flower forms and leaf sizes such as 'Scintillation', 'Apple Blossom', or 'Snow Angel'. Hummingbirds avidly visit the pink, coral and red flowered coral-bells since they are such good nectar sources.



Photo by Mary Ann Van Berlo

Heuchera sanguineum

The plant was named after Johann von Heucher, an 18th century

German physician who discovered its medicinal uses. Alumroot is another common name for the Heuchera.

The genus Heuchera (pronounced HEW-ker-ah) has been the focus of much of the plant hybridizers' attention over the past few years. Every year at least two or three new cultivars are introduced at the spring flower shows. Recent introductions include *H.* 'Ginger Ale', a mottled ginger and pink foliage plant and 'Cinnabar Silver', a compact plant with cinnamon-red flowers and metallic-purple leaves that turn silver.

Today's Heucheras have been bred for their variety of foliage colours ranging from burgundy/ purple to gold/bronze and shades of green. The foliage can have a silver sheen to it and often has interesting patterning or veining. The leaves can be ruffled or smooth, large or small. The flower is often not the prominent feature of these plants.



Photo by Mary Ann Van Berlo

Heuchera americana 'Dale's Strain', *H.* 'Green Finch', & *H.* 'Dolce Crème Brûlée'

H. americana hosts some of today's popular cultivars such as 'Chocolate Veil', 'Dale's Strain', 'Mint Julip', 'Pewter Veil' and 'Ruby Veil'. Under the species *H. micrantha*, there are cultivars such as 'Chocolate Ruffles', 'Palace Purple', and 'Pewter Moon'.

Another interesting relative of this plant family is the Heucherella,

which is a cross between Heuchera and Tiarella. Often the result of this cross-hybridization is a plant with the interesting foliage of the Heuchera and the more defined flowers of the Tiarella. A very popular cultivar is *Heucherella* 'Stoplight' which features yellow leaves that are marked with a deep red blotch in the centre.



Photo by Mary Ann Van Berlo

Heucherella 'Stoplight'

Both Heuchera and Heucherella are hardy perennials that tolerate a fair amount of shade. They are also drought resistant and are easy to propagate from divisions. They prefer a humus rich soil, but can survive in somewhat leaner conditions. Sometimes these plants are described as evergreen, but the foliage that makes it through the winter is often in a very poor state. Not to worry though, new foliage emerges as soon as the spring weather starts to warm, then remains fresh and holds its colour until the snow falls.

These plants make good companions to hostas and ferns in the shade bed. Some of the brighter foliage colours are particularly useful for adding light and vibrance to a shady spot. Floral designers like both the dainty flowers and the vibrant foliage for arrangements. Heucheras – easy care and great looking – what's not to like!!

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Trowel Talk!

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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)
- Wednesday 7-8 pm (April -September)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca

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

CLINICS:

Byward Market: Saturdays, May through June (9 a.m. - 5 p.m.)

Parkdale Market: Saturdays, May through June (9 a.m. - 1 p.m.)

Carp Market: Saturdays, May through June (8 a.m. - 1 p.m.)

Ottawa Farmers' Market (Brewer Park - formerly located at Lansdowne Park):
Sundays, July through September (9 a.m. - 1 p.m.)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Japanese Beetle Day - June 24, 2012 - 2:00 p.m.

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener, will share info on dealing with this pest. Bring a jar of soapy water and pick beetles. Presentation & info sheet available.

Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa (West of Prince of Wales Drive, adjacent to lilac and iris displays. Watch for the signs)

Hosted by the Friends of the Farm (Free & open to the public)



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

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

June TO DO List

- Deadhead plants and shrubs to make them look tidy and to reduce self-seeding (unless it is your intent to increase the stock of that plant).
- Watch for larvae and caterpillars on shrubs and perennials. BTK is a biological control for this type of pest. It is bacteria that gets ingested by the pest and kills them. Follow the directions on the package.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month:

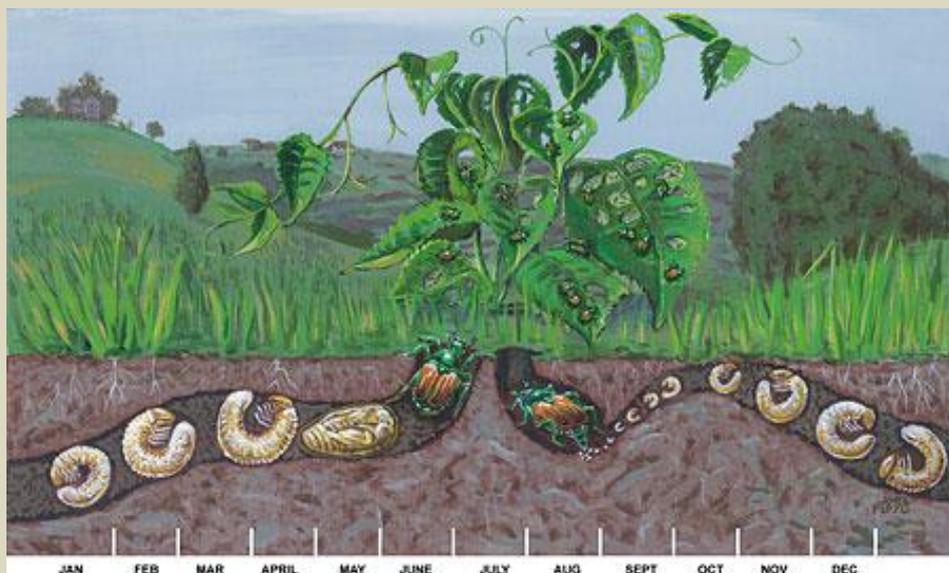
Japanese beetle season is almost here (boo hoo!). Unfortunately, there is no fail proof control for these voracious feeders. While they prefer certain plants (such as roses, grape vines, fruit trees) no plant is safe.

Their lifecycle starts in the ground where the adult female lays eggs in July to August. Their preferred location for laying eggs is in lush moist lawns - since they know the larvae will need moisture and food to survive. (SIDENOTE: This is yet another reason not to water lawns, but instead to let them go dormant during the usual July or

August drought.) The eggs hatch to form larvae (white grubs) that begin to feed on the roots of the lawn in August and September. They then move further into the soil and remain underground

through the winter. It is the following spring that the damage of the white grubs is most evident - the turf grass they loosened last fall is easily dug up by skunks and raccoons foraging for a grub meal. As the soil warms up, the larvae migrate back toward the surface and start feeding again on the roots. In June or July the larvae pupate and emerge as beetles to feed on plants, shrubs, vines, trees, etc. (basically anything green), mate, lay eggs in the soil ... and the cycle continues.

A simple suggestion for grub control is burying pieces of potato about 7.5cm deep in early Spring or late fall. The potatoes will attract grubs and after a few days, remove the potato, grubs and all, into a bucket of soapy water.



Beneficial nematodes can be used to kill these pests at the grub stage. Nematodes are microscopic worm-like creatures that parasitize the grub and kill it. They do work, but the conditions have to be perfect – the grub should be at the upper level of the soil and the soil must remain moist for the nematodes to remain viable and to be able to move through the soil to find the grubs. Application is best after the eggs have hatched (August) assuming the conditions are not too dry or hot for the nematodes to survive. And unfortunately, if you treat your lawn but your neighbours and the municipality don't, then you will still be at risk to damage from both the grub (as the larvae migrate through the soil) and the adult beetle later on.



An adult beetle – actual size is 1.3cm

When the adult beetles emerge, hand picking is one control that works but can be very time consuming. One suggestion is to get a large pail or pan with a long handle, put some water, soap and a few drops of oil in the pail, hold it under an infested branch and give the branch a shake. The beetles fall to their death in the soapy water which with the addition of oil coats them and makes it impossible for them to escape. Doing this early in the morning will result in the largest 'catch' since the beetles cannot fly very well when temperatures are below 21°C.

Japanese beetles do send out 'scouts' so early detection and eradication of these first few beetles could greatly reduce the number that follow. Apparently the scouts mark your garden by scent as a potential feeding ground. Killing them before they can post



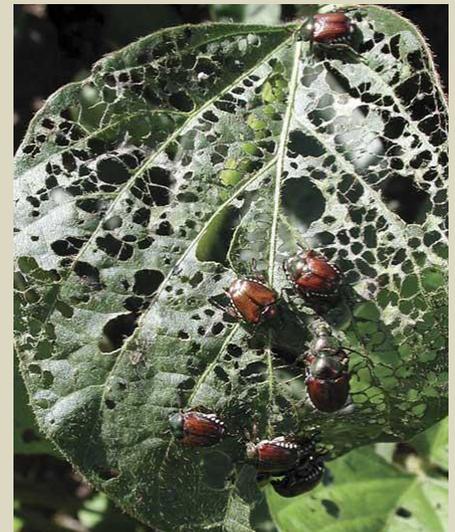
Commercially available Japanese beetle traps should be placed away from the plants that you are trying to protect

the "Buffet is OPEN" sign will lessen the number that follow.

A shop vac can be used to 'vacuum' the beetles off of plants. Empty the canister into a garbage bag and seal the bag tightly.

Commercially available Japanese beetle traps use a pheromone lure to entice the beetles. There is a debate about the trap's effectiveness, since while it is true they capture many beetles, it is said that they lure them in from neighbouring properties also. One pro-trap argument is that while they may attract more beetles, at least they are attracting them to the trap and keeping them off the plants. Traps need to be emptied regularly.

Another control that is said to work is to take the dead beetles that you capture, let them ferment for a day or two, add some water, whip them through a blender and then strain the juice out. Use this concoction as a repellent by spraying it onto plants. Apparently the beetles don't like the smell of their own dead and will move along to a less odorous location (but we probably won't like the smell either).



Beetles feeding on a bean leaf

Finally, some gardeners suggest companion planting – annual geraniums with roses or *Allium* family plants (garlic, ornamental onions, etc.) throughout the garden. Other plants with strong scents such as tansy or larkspur may also be effective to repel the beetles.

The adult beetle's feeding season is about 4-6 weeks and most plants can recover from their attack. Plants would definitely be stressed by beetle damage so a second stress, such as drought, could be enough to kill an already struggling plant.