



# Trowel Talk!

March, 2016

## Finding a natural route to success

How little we know about the natural world! New species are being discovered even as others face extinction. The great naturalist, Edward O. Wilson, estimated that there are many times more kinds of insects than there are varieties of all larger animals. Varieties of fungi, moulds and algae are even more numerous. Science is nowhere close to cataloguing all these different species.

Many people enjoy gardening because it helps them connect with nature. By using native plants and avoiding chemicals, we can encourage wildlife into even the smallest city garden. Many gardeners enjoy watching birds almost as much as they enjoy flowers.

These days, we often feel helpless in the face of environmental challenges, like pollution and climate change. Only in our own backyard can we sink our hands into the earth and hope to make a positive difference. But that is where we come face to face with our ignorance. What kind of bird just visited the feeder? What is eating my beebalm? And why is my pond turning green?

Identification is only the first small step towards understanding. I know now my beebalm was eaten by the larvae of the



moth, *Pyrausta signatalis*, but I know almost nothing of its habits and life cycle. Consequently, my choices for control are (a) use a pesticide or (b) hand pick the little nasties off my flowers. Because I value the butterflies that also visit my beebalm, it's down to option (b); yucky for me, but the birds get a tasty snack in their birdbath where I drown the caterpillars.

Nature is vastly more complicated than any one species. Even if I knew everything there is to know about *Pyrausta signatalis*, I might still never know why it chose my beebalm in my garden at this time.

The interrelationships of all its various parts are what make the natural world so fascinating! The concept of companion planting relies on beneficial relationships between different plants. For example, tall plants shelter smaller, more delicate ones. Plants with long tap roots break up hard soil, making it easier for their neighbours to grow. Some plants deter

pests and diseases. Roses do well near members of the allium (onion) family, which provide protection against aphids, blackspot and mildew. (See <http://www.attra.org/attra-pub/complant.html> for other companions.)

Last spring was mild, so I put the fish out in the pond (see photo above) before the end of April. There were no leaves yet on the maples that normally shade my pond. The pond got too much sun and algae rapidly formed, threatening the fish's oxygen supply. The solution was simple. I put up a sun umbrella. The algae subsided as the fish munched away on them. My little ecosystem was back in balance.

So before you reach for chemical sprays or other quick fixes, take a few minutes to study your garden and the way its different parts work together. Doing so will make you a better gardener and a better steward of the environment.

Rebecca Last  
Master Gardener

### Trowel Talk!

- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton
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- <http://mgottawa.ca>
- Editor: Mary Ann Van Berlo
- [mgottawaeditor@gmail.com](mailto:mgottawaeditor@gmail.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](mailto:mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca)

- monitored daily

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

#### CLINICS:

**Ottawa Home & Garden Show** – March 25-28, 2016

EY Centre, 4899 Uplands Drive, Ottawa – Visit us at our booth. We'll be there all weekend at this annual spring show, to answer your gardening questions and presenting two talks:

**Flower Pots that WOW!** – March 25, 2016 – 4:00pm

Laura Moses, Master Gardener

**Plant Guilds – taking companion planting to the next level** – March 27, 2016 – 1:00pm

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

**Rare & Unusual Plant Sale:** Sunday, May 15 (9 am – 2 pm)

Parking lot beside the Neatby Building, Carling at Maple Drive, Central Experimental Farm <http://friendsofthefarm.ca/events.htm>

**Byward Market:** Saturdays, May 7-28 (10 am – 2 pm) and June 4-25 (9 am – 12 pm) & Mother's Day, Sunday, May 8 (10 am – 2 pm)

**Parkdale Market:** Saturdays, May 7 – June 25 (9 am – 1 pm)

**Carp Market:** Saturdays, May 7 – June 25 (8 am – 1 pm)

#### SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

**Creating a New Garden Bed** – March 22 – 7:00pm

Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Athens District High School, 21 Church Street, Athens

Hosted by the Athens Garden Club & Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$3)

**Lawn Maintenance for the Traditional Lawn, Plus Some Lawn Alternatives**

– April 5 – 7:30pm Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Old Town Hall, 821 March Road, Kanata

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

#### FRIENDS OF THE FARM LECTURE SERIES:

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

Lecture series (4 lectures) FCEF members \$40, non-members \$50

Building 72, Arboretum, Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa

Register at: 613-230-3276 or [online](#)

**Yes, you can grow vegetables** – April 5 – 7:00pm

Esther Bryan, Master Gardener

**Herbs in your garden – easy, nutritious & delicious** – April 19 – 7:00pm

Nancy McDonald, Master Gardener

**Plant guilds – taking companion planting to the next level** – May 3 –

7:00pm Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

**All the dirt on container gardening** – May 17 – 7:00pm

Catherine Disley-Engler, Master Gardener

**From the Ground Up – Soil, the Great Provider** – April 11 – 7:30pm

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Main Hall RCMP Long Island Campground, 415 Nicolls Island Road

Manotick

Hosted by Manotick Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$5)

## March TO DO List

- Start tomatoes, peppers and eggplant indoors and grow under lights.
- Pick up garbage, branches and pet droppings from your property while the ground is still frozen so that you don't compact the soil OR wait until the yard thaws and dries out completely before walking on it.
- If space permits, pot up some of the tubers that you stored for the winter or purchase new ones to start now. This will give you a flowers earlier in the year.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

## Tip of the Month

Frugal gardeners may have taken annuals such as geraniums or coleus out of their gardens last year, potted them up and kept them over winter.

Now would be a good time to propagate these plants to increase your stock for the coming season. Geranium cuttings take about 4-6 weeks to root so they should be ready for the May planting weekend.

Cut about 10cm from the top of the stem. Make the cut above a leaf node (junction) so that the parent plant still looks tidy. Then take the stem cutting and cut just below the leaf node on an angle. Remove all but 2-3 of the upper leaves (as seen below).



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Ensure that the stem is clean of leaves and leaf stalks as these can cause rot when placed in the soil. Rooting hormone is not necessary for geraniums.

Fill a flat or a pot with potting mix. Use a pen (or a dibber) to make a hole in the moistened soil. Place the cutting in the hole.

The pot with the cuttings should be placed in a warm spot but not in direct light. Provide bottom heat with a heating mat if possible. Ensure the soil stays moist but not wet which can cause rot.

The same steps would apply for coleus cuttings.

Some gardeners root their cuttings in water but in the long-running debate about the strength of water roots vs. soil roots, we prefer soil.



## Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton

### SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS (Continued)

#### **Reviving a Tired Garden** – April 12 – 7:30 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Carp Memorial Hall, 3739 Carp Road, Carp

Hosted by the West Carleton Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$5)

#### **Friendly Garden Pest & Weed Control** – April 19 – 7:00pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Athens District High School, 21 Church Street, Athens

Hosted by the Athens Garden Club & Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$3)



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



Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton present:



## Garden Design for Evolving Realities

Full day workshop: Saturday April 23, 2016

Location: Rideau Park United Church, Alta Vista

**Registration fee \$60, includes refreshments and lunch. Space is limited. Register early!**

For program and registration information, see [www.mgottawa.ca/Design\\_Workshop.php](http://www.mgottawa.ca/Design_Workshop.php).