



# Trowel Talk!

May, 2013

## So welcome, yet so fleeting

After a long hard winter, when the color scheme has mostly consisted of whites, greys, and coniferous greens, it is a pleasure to greet our early arrivals with their generous array of vibrant colors. Some of them don't stay very long, but while here they make a big impression.

When I was child growing up on the prairies, there was stiff competition to see who would spot the first prairie crocus. This silken little harbinger of spring would appear along roadsides and ditches, give a dainty lavender and yellow nod, and then disappear until the next year. The "real" crocuses that I have now, similarly cheerful and undemanding, provide new colour in the bleak early part of spring, and I welcome them just as I did the anemones of my childhood.



*Anemone patens* (prairie crocus)

Not too far behind these little fellows are the daffodils. They are

great naturalizers and are also at home in flower beds. The previous owners of our property were intensely fond of them and we benefit from that heritage. Clumps on our "back-forty" come back to bloom profusely, year after year. Their sunny dispositions gaze up at us in vibrant combinations of yellow, white and orange. "Doubles" are very beautiful but singles stand up to wind and rain more reliably. Deer and rabbits will not usually eat daffodils. Somehow they know that they are toxic.

Next to appear are the tulips. There are early, mid-season, and late bloomers, single and double petaled, species and hybrid types. Heights can vary from very short to almost a metre, and choices of color come in a dizzying range. If you have the patience to plan it is possible to enjoy tulips for as much as two months of each spring. When planting tulips or other hardy bulbs in the fall it is a good idea to deal with the squirrel factor. A length of chicken wire weighted down with rocks will deter them. Plant and fortify!!

Two of my favourite native "early arrivals" are Virginia Bluebells and Bloodroot.

I had seen pictures of Virginia bluebells before moving to rural Ottawa. The pictures didn't prepare me for the real thing. Our first spring here, I was very curious about some mysterious blue shoots poking up in an old flower bed. This curiosity was soon rewarded when this lovely plant had fully emerged. Its leaves are a peculiar green, its flower buds are pink and its blossoms are wonderfully blue. Because Virginia bluebells die back by mid-summer, I mark their location so that I don't damage their roots while digging near them. Virginia bluebells don't

like being transplanted so I leave them where I have found them, in the shady spot where they are doing so well.



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo  
*Mertensia virginica* (Virginia blue bells)

My daughter, when she was in her teens, was definitely not interested in plants, so I was pleasantly surprised when she brought me a couple of roots from a friend's farm – bloodroots. The delicate white flowers of this native plant last for only a short time. However, its large pale green scalloped leaves will remain for the whole summer unless a drought causes it to go dormant. The original plant was bull-dozed by accident, rescued, and has lived happily on. They are tough!



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo  
*Sanguinaria canadensis* (bloodroot)

These early arrivals – our garden their stage – faithfully repeat their performance year after year. They dazzle us for a while, and then gently disappear to make room for the next troupe of performers.

Edythe Falconer  
Master Gardener

### 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)

**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:

**Byward Market:** Saturdays, May through June (9 am – 5 pm)

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

**Carp Market:** Saturdays, May through June (9 am – 1 pm)

#### SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

**Container Gardening**– May 21 – 7:30 pm

Catherine Disley Engler, Master Gardener (with a demo by Ian Frei)

Stittsville United Church, 6255 Fernbank Road, Stittsville

Hosted by the Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

**Culinary Herbs in the Garden and on the Table: How to grow, store and use herbs in recipes**– June 4 – 7:30 pm

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener & Richard Guenette, Foodie

Old Town Hall 821 March Road, Kanata

Hosted by the Kanata March Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

**Low Maintenance Gardening** – June 5 – 7:00 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely

Hosted by the Greely Gardeners (guests welcome)

**Informal Advice Clinic** as part of the Water Garden tour – June 14

By the pond in Rebecca Last's garden, Master Gardener

See: <http://www.ottawawatergardens.com/Events.htm>

Hosted by the Greater Ottawa Water Garden and Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

**Rose Workshop** – June 16 – 1-3 pm

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Heritage Rose Gardens, Central Experimental Farm,

Hosted by the Friends of the Farm (<http://www.friendsofthefarm.ca/events.htm>)

**Culinary Herbs in the Garden and on the Table: How to grow, store and use herbs in recipes**– June 19 – 7:00 pm

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener & Richard Guenette, Foodie

Meeting Room A, in the Greenboro Community Centre (co-housed with Greenboro

District Library), 363 Lorry Greenberg Drive

Hosted by the Greater Ottawa Water Garden and Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

**Little Roses for Small Gardens** – June 25 – 7:30 pm

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Stittsville United Church, 6255 Fernbank Road, Stittsville

Hosted by the Stittsville Goulbourn Horticultural Society (guests welcome)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: [speakers@mgottawa.mgoi.ca](mailto:speakers@mgottawa.mgoi.ca)

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

### May TO DO List

- Lettuces, cabbages, potatoes, beets, radishes, and peas will tolerate (and in some cases actually prefer) cooler temperatures and can be planted now.
- Check the forecast before you plant the rest of your vegetable garden or else you may have the extra chore of covering tender transplants.
- Buy larger hanging baskets – the soil volume in a 12 inch pot is almost double that of a 10 inch pot. That means the plants have more root space. The larger volume of soil will require less frequent watering.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

### Tip of the Month:

Garden centres and nurseries are overflowing with plants right now and it is easy to get overwhelmed. Here are some tips to help you plan and get the most out of your visit.

- Plan ahead:
  - Survey the yard and/or garden beds that you want to enhance with new plants.
  - Determine the exposure, moisture level, soil type, and size of the space you want to fill.
  - Make a list of the surrounding plants including information such as colour, height, and bloom time.
  - Do some research to find out what plants would suit that spot or bring all of this information with you to the garden centre.
- Try to visit the garden centre or nursery in off-peak times. Staff will have more time to spend with you to help you with your planning.
- Check for a healthy root system. The roots should not be going round and round the pot and should be white and fleshy.
- Avoid plants that look diseased or distressed – even if you think it just needs a good watering, the plant is stressed and may be set back because of it.
- Check the labels carefully for the plant's characteristics.

- Avoid anything that says it is a fast spreader or 'can be invasive' – unless that is specifically what you are looking for.
- When buying trees or shrubs, check the plant's structure (i.e., look for a single leader on a tree or good branching) and no signs of damage to the bark or inferior graft unions.

- Nurseries display what is in bloom at any given time in high traffic areas. Don't get caught up with the 'pretty' flowers. Remember a plant has to perform and look good in your garden all summer long. Foliage, seed heads, plant structure, and fall colour should also be considered.