

Incredible edibles

Perhaps you don't want to worry about average frost-free dates, seeding, hardening off seedlings or buying flats of this and that, but you still want fresh produce from your own garden. Here are examples of edible perennial plants that will grow year after year with little fuss and bother. An annual application of compost and/or well-rotted manure is all that they ask.



Photo: Monique Paré

Rhubarb is a food associated with spring

If you have tried to transplant rhubarb you know that it has roots that are large and stubborn. However, the chunks that you do manage to get will grow almost anywhere you put them. Let the root establish itself the first year, go easy on it the second year and

after that you can harvest freely. Rhubarb stems are the raw material for many delicious desserts, my favourite being rhubarb and raspberry pie. Although rhubarb is sometimes available in grocery stores it is expensive and not nearly as tasty as when pulled directly from your garden.



Photo: Monique Paré

Asparagus takes a while to establish but produces faithfully for years.

Another trusty perennial for the vegetable garden is asparagus. The spears of this delicious plant appear early in the season and can be enjoyed for four to six weeks, longer if you freeze your surplus. A modest amount of weeding, some fertilizer in the fall, a bit of mulching for the winter and asparagus will perform for years and years. When the spears have leafed out you have a ready-made supply of fernery to set off cut-flower arrangements. Don't harvest for the first year or two.

Less well-known is the Jerusalem artichoke (aka sun choke) – not a real artichoke but a member of the sun-flower family. It is probably not a good addition to a small yard as it needs to be carefully contained. On the other hand it can provide an inexpensive deciduous hedge that will grow as high

as 1.5 metres. Its flowers are like small sunflowers in appearance. At the same time that it is providing privacy, it is growing tubers that can be dug and eaten – like potatoes. It tastes best when harvested after the first frost. Completely starchless, they make a good substitute for potatoes for people who are sensitive to the Solanum family – or for people who just like to try new food.



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo

Egyptian onions are tasty and ornamental

Egyptian onions are another perennial food plant. The stalks are great chopped into stews and soups, and the bulblets at the top of the stalks go well in stir-fries. The bulblets finally get heavy enough to bend the stalks and when they touch the ground each one is capable of growing a new plant, earning this plant its other name: "walking onion". If they do get away on you it is easy to dig them up and put them somewhere else – in the garden or into a cooking pot.

For a relatively carefree edible garden, you can't go far wrong with these four plants. They are worthwhile additions to your vegetable garden or to your landscaping and once you have them you can count on them forever.

Edyth 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

- monitored daily

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

CLINICS:

Byward Market: Saturdays, May 10 through June (9 am - 1 pm)

Parkdale Market: Saturdays, May 10 through June (9 am - 1 pm)

Carp Market: Saturdays, May 10 through June (9 am - 1 pm)

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

Cumberland Market: June 14, July 12, (9 am - 1 pm)

North Gower Farmers' Market: July 5 (8:30 am - 1 pm)

Main Farmers' Market: July 12 (10 am - 2 pm)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

FRIENDS OF THE FARM LECTURE SERIES:

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

Lecture series (5 lectures) FCEF members \$50, non-members \$60

Building 72, Arboretum, Central Experimental Farm, Ottawa

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

Water Gardening - the Final Touch to your Landscape - May 27 - 7:00 pm

Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

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

Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Big, Bold and Beautiful Plants for Your Garden - June 3 - 7:30 pm

Old Town Hall, 821 March Road, Kanata

Nancy McDonald, Master Gardener

Hosted by Kanata March Horticultural Society - guest fee \$5.00

Climbers in your Garden - June 4 - 7:00pm

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

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Hosted by the Carleton Place & District Horticultural Society - Guest fee \$3

Dazzling Daylilies - June 4 - 7:00pm

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely

Kelly Noel, Master Gardener

Hosted by the Greely Gardeners Group - Guest fee \$2

Renovating an Older Garden - June 17 - 7:00pm

Royal Canadian Legion, 7 Main Street East, Smiths Falls

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Hosted by the Smiths Falls & District Horticultural Society - Guest fee \$3



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>



May TO DO List

- Harden off seedlings, house-plants and greenhouse plants (sometimes even those you purchase may not be ready for the outdoors) by gradually increasing their exposure to sun and wind over a period of 5-7 days.
- Plant your vegetable garden and annuals when there is no frost in the forecast.
- Start a weed control regimen. Set aside a bit of time a couple of days a week to stay ahead of the weeds.
- Mulch garden beds to conserve moisture and to add organic matter to the soil. Top-dress mulch annually since it will decompose (and add organic matter to your soil).
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

Over the past few years, many Ontario gardeners were let down by their favourite shade loving annual - the common impatiens (*Impatiens walleriana*). If you were able to find them for sale last year, their demise followed shortly after planting.



Fungus blight on Impatiens

The culprit is a fungal blight that affects only that specific impatiens. The fungus has become so prolific that nurseries and growers have stopped supplying impatiens. Until the fungus is under control, gardeners should try some different shade annuals such as:

- Wax begonias
- Tuberous begonias
- Angelwing begonias



Polka dot plant (*Hypoestes*)

- Coleus
- Fuschia
- Polka dot plant (*Hypoestes*)
- Edging lobelia (*Lobelia erinus*)
- Caladium (tuber)
- Torenia
- New Guinea impatiens (not affected by the fungus)