



Trowel Talk!

November, 2012

Gardening skills go to pots in the winter

The winter holiday season is the time when I love to decorate the exterior of my home. One of my favourite ways is to "plant" containers. They can be attractive, inexpensive to fill and best of all, require almost no care.

It's important to select a container that will withstand our freezing winter temperatures. I use some of my summer pots; they are resin but look like pottery. Wood also works well but terra cotta and ceramic may crack in the cold. Window boxes also make attractive containers.



Photo Nancy Seppala

Window boxes don't have to look boring over the winter. Greenery will add interest through the dreary winter months.

If the pot is lightweight, it's essential to put something heavy such as stones on the bottom. I often use the soil that was already in the pot during the summer and at the end of the winter add it to my compost heap. I've also used wet florist foam instead of soil. I fill half the pot with anything to take

up space (upside down, plastic plant containers for example) and some stones. Then I pack in the previously soaked foam tightly and tape it to the sides of the pot. The foam holds the stems in place. Adding water until freeze-up keeps the stems fresher but it isn't essential.



Seedheads and dried flowers can make an interesting arrangement

Now for the fun part. I take my wheelbarrow, pruning shears and a pair of thick gloves and tour my property looking for anything that will look good in the pots. I am fortunate to have a stand of white pine at the back of my yard and I snip a few sprays. The soft pine needles make wonderful greenery for the containers. As well, the pine cones are very appealing. I often use thin wire to fasten several cones together and then wire and tape them to a longer branch or even a skewer that I can stick into the soil. I also cut some red dogwood stems, a few shoots of curly willow, and some cedar and blue spruce twigs. All of these will add beauty to my container.

The birds have already eaten the berries on my winterberry and I resist the urge to "borrow" the

bright red fruit from my neighbour's highbush cranberry. Instead I will have to purchase some durable synthetic ones that can look quite realistic. I avoid buying any made from foam covered with paint because they split when wet and lose their pretty colour.

I always keep pruning shears in the car. In the fall I collect cattails, teasels and milkweed pods from the ditches. A can of glittery spray paint provides an inexpensive way to brighten these brown seed carriers. This year I turned the large round datura seedpods into sparkling silver ornaments.



Photo by Nancy Seppala

All that is missing is a dusting of snow to make this winter scene complete!

Today I spent the morning doing what I love – planting winter containers. I have placed them on my porch where they won't be in the way when I shovel snow. Now I won't have to think about them the rest of the winter. I'll just enjoy their beauty as they brighten the outdoors on even the dreariest winter day.

Nancy Seppala
Retired Master Gardener

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November TO DO List

- Keep watering trees and shrubs (until the ground freezes). Even after the recent rain, it is important to water newly planted trees and shrubs well into the fall while their roots are still establishing. A well-hydrated plant will suffer less damage from drying winter sun and winds.
- It's not too late to plant spring bulbs or any pots of perennials that haven't made it into the ground yet. Plant them now before the ground freezes.
- Clean your garden tools and organize the storage shed so that you'll be ready to start gardening again when spring arrives.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month:

To protect or not to protect, that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler in the garden to suffer through winter with trussed up trees and shrubs, than to risk desiccation and plant loss.

Seriously – Master Gardeners are often asked what plants need winter protection and what type of protection is best.

The first thought that comes to mind is to choose hardy plants that don't need protection. It's less work and your yard won't have strange tents and styrofoam hats sticking out of the snow. However, even hardy plants may require some protection in their first season.

A burlap or landscape felt (in white or beige to reflect light) will not keep the plants warm. These forms of protection will shade the plants from sun scald and will reduce the effects of drying winter winds.

A styrofoam rose cone has a very similar effect to a good (approx. 25 cm) snow cover – the cone actually does keep the plants warmer. Just be sure to weigh the cone down with a rock or brick to prevent it from blowing away.

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:

No clinics until Spring 2013.

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Overwintering Roses & Indoor Geraniums – November 21, 2012 – 7:00 p.m.

Diane McClymont-Peace, Master Gardener

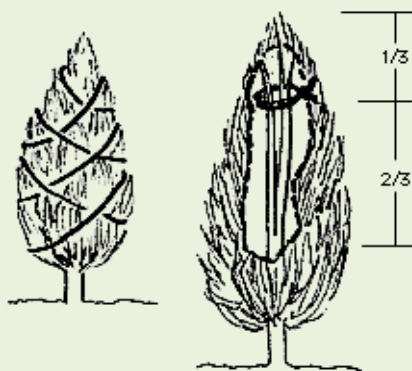
Osgoode Library, 5630 Osgoode Main Street, Ontario

Hosted by the Osgoode Garden Club (guests welcome)



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>



Two methods of rope wrapping a conifer

Another form of winter protection is to tie or wrap trees with mesh. Trees with multiple leaders (for instance a cedar) can be splayed open with a heavy snowfall. By wrapping the tree with twine or mesh, the multiple stems provide support for each other and cannot go in different directions.

Long lasting wooden A-frames can be built to keep heavy snow off the limbs of evergreens but your tree may out-grow the frame in a couple of seasons.

Trees trunks can suffer from a frost crack which occurs when the winter sun is warm enough to start sap flowing in the tree trunk, but then overnight temperatures dip well below freezing causing the sap to freeze in

the trunk and crack the bark. Tree trunks can be wrapped with burlap or a plastic tree protector to shade the trunk. Trunk protectors **must** be removed in the spring.

If you do have a plant that needs winter protection, just remember that you don't want to put the wrap or cone on the plant too early as the rodents in your yard are also looking for winter protection at this time. The last thing you want is for a mouse to decide the rose cone is a warm and toasty spot to live and to munch on your rose all winter.

The timing for removing winter protection is also important. In the spring, wait for an overcast or rainy day to remove the coverings from your plants. You've sheltered them from the sun and wind all winter, taking the protection off on a hot sunny day may lead to sun scorch.

Sometimes it's not the weather that your plants need protection from. A hungry deer can do a considerable amount of damage. Wrapping trees and shrubs with mesh or chicken wire is a good deterrent. And there are many repellants available commercially that work – but some need to be re-applied at regular 2-3 month intervals depending on the product.