



Trowel Talk!

October, 2011

Pumpkin: Fruit of our labour

Have you ever wondered where the word "pumpkin" originated or where pumpkins come from and how our carving custom started?

The word "pumpkin" comes from the Greek "pepon" meaning a large melon. There are reports that Jacques Cartier saw some growing during his navigation of the St. Lawrence as early as 1584. He called them "gros melons". A little later, William Shakespeare referred to them as "pumpions" in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. English colonists gave them the name we use today – pumpkin.

Pumpkins are indigenous to the Western Hemisphere and their cultivation is believed to have originated in Central America. They are members of the family of fruits which includes cucumbers, melons, squash and gourds. They are now grown on all of the world's continents except Antarctica.

If you would like to grow your own next year, here are a few guidelines. Sow seeds in groups of three on mounded hills, allowing two meters between hills. Mounded soil heats up more quickly in the spring and retains the heat better than low-lying land. Pumpkins love rich, moist, well-drained soil with a pH of 6.0 to 6.8. Depending on the variety, they require from 90 to 120 days to produce mature fruits. 'Seneca

Longface' is a semi-bush variety that would suit a smaller garden. They can also be trained to roam vertically along a fence or some other support. A friend of mine grows beautiful ones in her compost heap. Two varieties that I prefer are 'Jack-O-Lantern', which is easy to carve, and 'Small Sugar' for cooking.



Vine with blossoms & first pumpkin

Each plant will produce a profusion of male and female flowers. If you want the biggest, well-developed pumpkins possible, allow only one or two fruits to develop on each plant. Once these are growing well, remove other flowers or small pumpkins that may form. The flowers are edible so don't throw them away. And don't forget, pumpkins should be watered regularly. You should also watch for insects and weed regularly around the root area.



Photo by Mary Ann Van Berlo

If you don't want to grow them, take the family out to a pumpkin farm or market where the kids can choose their own. Buy a bright orange one with no bruises and do not carry it by the stem, because if

broken, the fruit will not keep as long.

European settlers came to Canada with varied Halloween customs, but it is the Irish who brought the tradition of pumpkin carving. In Ireland, they used turnips as their Jack-O-Lanterns, but in North America pumpkins were more plentiful than turnips and much easier to carve. This tradition has persisted to this day. I usually involve children in drawing the faces and patterns for carving but, as a safety precaution, I do the actual cutting myself.



Photo by Anna Sipos

Jack-o-Lanterns ready for Halloween

Pumpkins can be used not only for decorations but also in desserts, stews or soups. They contain about 90% water; are low in calories, fat and sodium; high in fiber, protein and iron; and rich in Vitamins A and B and potassium.

After carving my Halloween Jack-o-Lantern, I use a small electric light to illuminate my creations. This prevents the pulp from becoming covered with candle soot and leaves it useable for cooking the following day.

I still remember the pleasure I had as a child preparing for Halloween. A visit to my grandfather's pumpkin patch always yielded the perfect specimen. At this time of year, every child is looking for the perfect pumpkin. Do you have yours yet?

Gaston Tessier
Master Gardener

Trowel Talk!

- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton
- Volume 2, Number 10
- <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>
- Editor: Mary Ann Van Berlo
- trowel_talk_editor@rogers.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

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

CLINICS:

No advice clinics until Spring 2012

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Renovating an Old Garden – October 17 – 7:30 p.m.

Speaker: Mary Shearman-Reid, Master Gardener
4373 Generation Court, Ramsayville, Ontario

Hosted by the Gloucester Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Planning and planting for Spring (Bulbs) – October 20 – 7:30 p.m.

Speaker: Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

City View United Church, 6 Epworth Avenue, Nepean, Ontario

Hosted by the Nepean Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Ask a Master Gardener (our panel will answer questions) – November 16 – 7:30 p.m.

Panel: Ann McQuillan, David Hinks, Stephanie Sleeth, Master Gardeners
St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, Prescott Street, Kemptville, Ontario

Hosted by the Kemptville Horticultural Society (guests welcome)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: 613-836-1491

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit our website:

<http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

October TO DO List

- Shred fallen leaves and use them to mulch garden beds.
- Put stakes around shrubs that will need winter protection. Once the ground has frozen, use those stakes to attach burlap or the white, felt-like protective fabric all around the shrub.
- Continue to water newly planted shrubs and trees even after their leaves drop. Their root system will still be taking up water until the ground freezes. They need to go into the winter with lots of water stored in their root system.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tips of the Month:

For this issue, the editor asked her fellow Master Gardeners: **“What did you learn in your garden this summer?”** Here are their responses:

Some of my ‘Black Cherry’ and ‘Stupice’ heritage tomatoes self-seeded this spring and as they did I transplanted them to better locations. They thrived and produced an abundant crop of tomatoes that were true to the original plant.

Edythe Falconer

This was the first year that I used floating row covers and I was very pleased with the results. In the spring the row covers gave my carrots and beets a bit of a head-start. I also wrapped row cover fabric around the tripod where I was growing cantaloupe. Not sure if that's what did it, but this year (my third year of trying) my melon plants actually produced a reasonably good crop of melons. This fall I discovered another use for my row-cover by using it to cover all my sensitive plants, from overnight frosts.

Rebecca Last

Hardy roses planted in front of climbing clematis plants make good companions. They both have similar needs for soil, nutrients and light. In

addition, the roses shade the clematis roots and clematis plants, because they are poisonous to many of the insects that feed on roses, help deter the insects.

Diane McClymont Peace

My best find this summer was White Oil which I used control a mealy bug infestation on a favourite orchid. The recipe came thanks to Wikipedia. The spray works by blocking the breathing pores of insects causing suffocation and death. It is effective in the control of mealy bug, aphids, scale and smooth skinned caterpillars. Here is the Wikipedia link:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_oil

Gail Labrosse

This year I used netting to cover my pond so that I don't have to fish the wet, dead leaves out every morning. So far, it's working quite well.

Rebecca Last

I learned to delight in the unexpected. I grew Malva sylvestris ‘Zebrina’ two years ago from seed. I mulch and am pretty avid in cleaning my flowerbeds

so imagine my surprise and delight when I found Malva (photo below) which had self-seeded, growing in 3 areas of my garden, adding lovely colour for September and October.



Nancy McDonald

Even if the label and the nursery owner say a plant is not invasive, listen to your instincts before planting. In this case, the plant in question was a Petasites palmatum ‘Golden Palms’, which went from a single plant to 15 in one season. It has found a new home where it is free to roam.

Mary Ann Van Berlo