



Trowel Talk!

October, 2012

Taking a shine to black gold

There's a large pile of black gold in my driveway - more precisely, 15 cubic yards of City of Ottawa Leaf and Yard Waste Compost. Why am I so pleased about this? Well quite simply, I need to add organic matter to my soil and fall is an ideal time to do so. Whatever you call it - humus, organic matter, compost or even manure - it is what keeps our soil healthy.

Without organic matter in our soil, there would be less food, air and water for the plants and the plants' roots would be less able to absorb nutrients from the soil. When organic matter is added to clay soil, it allows air and water to penetrate and will make it easier to cultivate. Sandy soil also benefits from organic matter since it helps to retain moisture so that the water does not just pass through.

Perennial beds are dormant and vegetable gardens are bare now, so spreading a good 2-4 cm layer of compost around the plants is easy to do. Avoid putting compost directly on the crown of a plant, as this could cause water to collect and rot the plant. An easy way to avoid this is to cover the crown of the plant with a large flowerpot. Spread the compost, remove the pot and you are done.

Lawns benefit from a top-dressing



Photo by Mary Ann Van Berlo

Leaf and yard waste compost is a great way to amend soil by adding valuable organic matter.

of organic matter. Simply spread the compost around and rake it out to a depth of 2 cm. If the soil in your lawn has become compacted, consider renting an aerator, aerate the soil and then apply the compost. The compost will fill the holes left by the aerator and will provide nutrients to the lawn's roots as it decomposes. If your lawn is not compacted, just leave the compost on the surface and let the worms move the organic matter into the soil and aerate it in the process.

Healthy plants and lawns are better able to withstand droughts, disease and insect infestations. The plant world has a natural selection process; the weak are the first to go.

Organic matter continues to decompose, so it needs to be added regularly to your soil. But take heart, healthy soil means you

will have one of those green, lush yards that we all envy.

You can make your own compost - but I find there is never enough of it to go around. Due to the size of my yard, I opted for the dump truck delivery of Leaf and Yard Waste Compost, but smaller quantities can be purchased directly at the Trail Road Waste Facility. The cost is \$26.50 to fill a trailer or pick-up truck. Bring your own shovel, containers and muscle power - this is strictly a do-it-yourself operation. For more details go to the [City of Ottawa](http://www.cityofottawa.ca) website.

One more benefit of having a big pile of compost in your yard is that you don't need to go to the gym - shoveling, wheel-barrowing and raking give you a pretty decent workout!

*Mary Ann Van Berlo
Master Gardener*

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October 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.
- Clay or ceramic pots need to be brought indoors or emptied of all soil and stored in a garden shed or garage. Decorative plastic pots can be left outside if you ensure that water does not collect in them where it will freeze, causing the pot to split. Putting a plastic pot on its side (with the soil still in it) works well.
- Drain rain barrels and turn them upside down to store them for the winter.
- Winterize your garden pond.
- Plant any left-over pots of perennials or heel them in to ensure they survive the winter.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month:

It's time to dig up and store tender tubers, corms and bulbs for the winter. Plants such as gladiolus, cannas, dahlias, taro are not hardy in our area. However they can be saved for next season with a little work and care.

Use a fork (as there is less chance of damaging the tuber/corm/bulb with a fork than with a shovel) to dig around the plant and loosen the soil. Gently ease the plant out and uncover the tuber.

Shake off the excess soil and allow the tuber to dry off for a day or two in a garage or shed (i.e., not outdoors where frost or rodents can damage the tubers).

Tie a label to each tuber (if you have different varieties) or find a separate container for each variety.

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:

What to do with a Mature Garden – October 17, 2012 – 6:30 p.m.

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Maxville Complex Hall, Maxville, Ontario

Hosted by the Maxville Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Planning a Garden Make-over – October 22, 2012 – 7:30 p.m.

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Meredith Centre, 23 Cecil Road, Chelsea, Quebec

Hosted by the Gatineau Valley Gardeners (guests welcome \$5 for non-members, which can be applied to membership of \$15)

Touring Memorable Gardens of Northeast North America – October 23, 2012 – 7:30 p.m.

Rebecca Last & Judy Wall, Master Gardeners & Nora Lee

Tom Brown Arena, 141 Bayview Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario

Hosted by the Ottawa Horticultural Society (guests welcome)

Seasonal Planter Demonstration – November 7, 2012 – 7:00 p.m.

Catherine Disley-Engler, Master Gardener

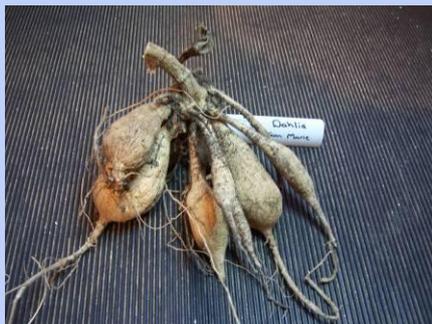
Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely, Ontario

Hosted by the Greely Gardeners Group (fee may apply for guests)



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>



Dahlia tuber ready to be stored

Use a paper bag or cardboard box (with air holes poked in) to store the tubers. Some people wrap the tubers in newspaper to help keep them at the correct moisture level. Another method to control moisture is to cover the tubers with slightly moist peat moss.

Store the box of tubers in a cool dark area (such as a cold storage room) where the temperature is about 10°C.

Never store the box of tubers directly on a cement floor. The cold damp cement is inhospitable to tubers and may result in the loss of your 'crop'. Put an empty box or a sheet of styrofoam under the box of tubers if the floor is your only storage spot.

Check on the stored tubers regularly to ensure they are not too dry or too moist (and possibly rotting). Open the containers to allow more air flow or add water as needed.

In March, you may want to plant some of the tubers in pots to get a head-start on the coming season.