



Trowel Talk!

October, 2015

It's for the birds

Tucked into my garden is a green and white sign with an orange butterfly winging through the words "Certified Backyard Habitat". I am very proud of this sign which arrived with a certificate from the Canadian Wildlife Federation (CWF). They identify my gardens as a safe, welcoming environment for wildlife.

To receive this certification a yard should offer food, water, shelter and space. The use of herbicides and insecticides should be avoided. The mix of plants must include native species - those which have been in this region for centuries and upon which local wildlife has grown dependent. The owner needs to complete a form describing the yard, including aspects which attract wildlife and attach sketches and photos of key features.



Photo: Nancy Seppala

American Goldfinches love sunflower and coneflower seeds.

Offering food is easy. In addition to my birdfeeder, several trees, shrubs and flowers provide nectar, berries, seeds and cones. I

was thrilled to observe a flock of cedar waxwings in my service-berry (*Amelanchier canadensis*). In three days they had picked off all the fruit. I allow a few common milkweed plants to feed the Monarch butterfly larvae, while parsley and Queen Anne's lace nourish the Black Swallowtail larvae. Later in the season purple coneflower (*Echinacea*) and *Verbena bonariensis* feed the butterflies while chickadees and goldfinches eat the sunflower and other seeds. My garden doesn't just feed birds and butterflies. I often see other creatures such as toads and the occasional frog or garter snake.



Photo: Nancy Seppala

A shallow dish can be a source of drinking water for birds and insects.

Although a pond would be a lovely way to provide water, I have two birdbaths instead. One sits on my patio where I have watched birds practically line up for their daily splash. The other is in my wildflower garden which provides a more secluded spot for shyer birds. Many insects and squirrels also stop to sip the bathwater! I wash and refill these baths every other day to keep them from breeding mosquitoes.

Several different native shrubs and trees such as nannyberry (*Viburnum lentago*), sumac (*Rhus typhina*) and white pine (*Pinus strobus*) provide shelter as well as food. The denser the foliage the better hidden the creatures are

from marauding cats. A brush pile sits amongst a grove of eastern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) and looks to be home for chipmunks and rabbits.

CWF tells us that birds see a yard as a three-dimensional space. Tall trees, medium height shrubs and lower ground covers increase the amount of space. I am reminded of the importance of groundcover when I walk into my overgrown wildflower garden and numerous small birds fly up from where they were hidden.

Since insecticides and herbicides can harm creatures in the garden and leach out to our waterways, CWF asks us not to use them. It is naive to attract wildlife and then spray poison believing it will only harm the bad guys.



Photo: Nancy Seppala

The CWF's Backyard Habitat sign in the author's garden

Nowadays, when natural environments are rapidly being lost to development, we can each do our part to help protect our wildlife. For more information on creating your own backyard habitat, contact The Canadian Wildlife Federation at <http://cwf-fcf.org>.

Nancy Seppala
Retired 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:

No clinics until spring.

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Spring Bulbs – A must for every garden! – October 19 – 7:00 pm

Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Russell Legion, 24 Legion Lane, Russell

Hosted by Russell & District Horticultural Society (No guest fee)

Gardens of the UK (Lake District & Scottish Borders) – October 24 – 1:30pm

Mary Ann Van Berlo, Master Gardener

Westboro Masonic Hall, 430 Churchill Avenue, Ottawa

Hosted by Ottawa Valley Rock Garden & Horticultural Society (No guest fee)

Handy Fruits (fruits grown at easy to reach heights) – October 26 – 7:30 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Charlottenburg Recreation Centre, Williamstown

Hosted by Williamstown Green Thumb (No guest fee)

The Hardy Garden – November 9 – 7:00 pm

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Ottawa South Community Centre, 250 Sunnyside Avenue, Ottawa

Hosted by Old Ottawa South Garden Club (Guest fee: \$7)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: mgottawaspeakers@gmail.com

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

October TO DO List

- Plant your fall bulbs before the ground freezes, they need to establish their roots.
- Cut the lawn short for that final mowing of the season (mid to late October depending on the weather). Voles and meadow mice like to live in long grass so a short lawn will encourage them to move elsewhere.
- Insert stakes around the shrubs that you plan to wrap for the winter. It is too soon to wrap them but by having the stakes in the ground before freeze-up, the job will be easier later on. Wait until the ground is frozen to wrap shrubs or to put rose cones over plants – the mice and voles are still looking for a winter home so it best to wait until mid to late November for applying plant protection.
- Taps should be drained. Hoses should be drained and stored.
- Delicate garden ornaments (such as ceramics or glass) should be put away. If a concrete ornament has a hollow that can collect water, tip it on its side to avoid splitting. Keep any that need touch-ups or repairs handy so that you can get access to them for a winter project.
- Tender bulbs should be lifted, dried and stored.
- Tools should be cleaned and stored. Bring any that may need repair or sharpening indoors for a good winter project.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

Gardeners always consider bloom period, foliage texture, colour, and height when selecting plants, but one aspect that is often overlooked is fragrance. Hybridizers also seem to

have left that characteristic off their 'desired traits' check-list as more and more cultivars are being developed that lack scent – probably because colour and a beautiful bloom are what sells a plant in a garden centre display.



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo

Paeonia 'Fancy Nancy' on display in the peony collection at the Central Experimental Farm

Some good plants for fragrance include:

Perennials & Bulbs

- *Dianthus* (pinks)
- *Hyacinthus* (hyacinth)
- *Iris germanica* (bearded iris)
- *Lavandula* (lavender)
- *Lilium orientalis* (Oriental lilies)
- *Paeonia* (peony)

Annuals

- *Alyssum maritima* (sweet alyssum)
- *Heliotrope*
- *Matthiola longipetala* (evening scented stock)
- *Mirabilis jalapa* (four-o'clocks)
- *Nicotiana* (flowering tobacco)

Shrubs

- *Clethra* (summer sweet)
- *Daphne*
- *Philadelphus* (mock orange)
- *Syringa vulgaris* (lilac)

Gardens should engage all of our senses, so this winter when you're making your plant wish-list, check for fragrance.