



Trowel Talk!

September, 2016

Respect your elders

The native elderberry shrub (*Sambucus canadensis*) is found both in the wild and in cultivation in the Ottawa area. The shrub has numerous clusters of tiny white fragrant flowers in late spring which ripen to bunches of small dark-purple fruit in late summer. Although the flowers and fruit are sought for their healing properties, flavour and nutritional value, the entire plant is mildly poisonous. Once the berries are cooked, however, they are safe to eat and make very tasty drinks and desserts. Note that certain hybrids of elderberries may still be poisonous even when cooked so should be avoided.



Photo: Monique Paré

Elderberry flowers are pretty and a nectar source for pollinators

The genus is native to temperate to subtropical regions and there are about 40 species worldwide. Elderberries have a long history dating back at least to the Stone Ages. The name *Sambucus* comes from the Greek word *sambuke*, a musical instrument made

from elderwood. Egyptians used the flowers to improve their complexions and heal burns. The Romans used elderberry juice to dye their hair black. Mediaeval records document a cordial made from simmering elderberries and sugar to relieve colds, coughs, bronchitis and asthma. Recently, scientists have attributed this remedy to the presence of viburnic acid which induces perspiration and relieves congestion. Elderflowers have traditionally been made into a paste to relieve eczema, acne and psoriasis, used as a mouthwash, and a drink to reduce inflammation of the urinary tract or bladder.

Today the native elderberry is popular for its purple-black fruit which is used in pies, wines, jellies, jams, juices and soups. The liqueur sambuca is made with elderberries and anise. Elderflower cordial and elderflower champagne make delicious summer drinks and the blossoms are used to flavour Liebfraumilch wine. Elderberries are very high in vitamin C, higher than any other fruit except rosehips and blackcurrants.



Photo: Monique Paré

Elderberries in abundance on a *Sambucus canadensis* 'Aurea'

The elderberry is both an ornamental and fruit plant. The variety 'Aurea' has golden-yellow foliage rather than the native green. Newer cultivars 'Johns', 'York',

'Adams' and 'NY21' are vigorous and produce large fruit clusters. The fruit from some of these varieties is not as delicious as the native species.

The native elderberry is tough, tolerant to most types of soils and resistant to winterkill. The plant can reach four metres and does best in open areas where air movement can reduce diseases and damage from frost and insects. Although elderberries are usually disease-free, there may be an occasional problem caused by viruses, rot, mites, and insects such as the elder shoot-borer, Japanese beetles, sap beetles and aphids. Cleaning up the area around the site and pruning diseased branches will help keep the plants healthy.



Photo: Mary Ann Van Berlo

Sambucus 'Sutherland's Gold' and *S.* 'Black Lace' have attractive foliage

Elderberry shrubs are an excellent choice for attracting birds and other wildlife. If you want the berries, you will have to net them for protection or the birds will strip them in a few days.

These shrubs are ideal if you have the space. They make good shelterbelts, attract beneficial insects with their fragrant flowers in the spring and provide a valuable food source in the fall. A versatile shrub to be enjoyed!

Diane McClymont Peace
Master Gardener

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- Newsletter of the Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton
- Volume 7, Number 9
- <http://mgottawa.ca>
- Editor: Mary Ann Van Berlo
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September TO DO List

- Buy spring bulbs while the selection and supply are plentiful. They don't need to be planted immediately but should be planted by the end of October to give them a chance to establish roots before freeze-up.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

Tip of the Month

This summer's drought means plants may need some special care going into the fall. Since rainfall has been spotty, dig 25-30cm down to see if the soil is moist or dry at 'root' depth.

Fall is often the time when we move plants around. Since many perennials are stressed from the drought, water them well a day or two before you plan to move them. Water the hole before you put the transplant in. This ensures the surrounding soil is moist right down to the bottom of the rootball. If the surrounding soil is not moist, the roots won't move out into the new area, instead, they will grow back into the moist rootball (which is still holding some moisture from when it was watered before the move). Once the hole is moistened, add the plant, backfill and water until re-established.

Normally, the soil is moist in the fall and spring bulbs don't need to be watered when planted – this year will probably be the exception. Since roots form from the base of the bulb, that is where the soil needs to be moist. Place the bulbs in the hole, add about 2.5 cm of soil to hold them in place, water well, then backfill.

Shrubs and trees need regular watering until freeze up to ensure they are strong and healthy going into the winter season. Their reserves need to be topped up to survive winter and break dormancy next spring.



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:

North Gower Farmers Market: Sept 17, (8:30am-1pm)

Main Market (Museum of Nature): Sept 24, (10am-2pm)

Ottawa Farmers Market (Lansdowne Park): Sundays, Sept 4-25, (9am-1pm)

Richmond Fair: September 16-18 (various times)

Carp Fair: September 23-25 (various times)

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Lessons from My Big Fat Garden Reno – September 15 – 6:00 pm

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Carlingwood Branch of the Ottawa Public Library, 281 Woodroffe Avenue

Register [here](#). (No guest fee)

Fall – Final Garden Fling! – Sept. 24 – 1:00 pm

Nancy McDonald, Master Gardener

Orleans Branch of the Ottawa Public Library, 1705 Orleans Blvd

Register [here](#). (No guest fee)

Late Bloomers – Perennials for Fall – September 26 – 7:30 pm

Josie Pazdzior, Master Gardener

Cornerstone Community Church, 1728 Concession 11, Almonte

Hosted by Almonte & District Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$2)

Plant Guilds: Taking Companion Planting to the Next Level – October 3 – 7:30 pm

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

RCMP Long Island Recreational Centre, 451 Nicholl's Island Road, Manotick

Hosted by Manotick Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$5)

Fall - Final Garden Fling! – October 4 – 7:00 pm

Nancy McDonald, Master Gardener

Blackburn Hamlet Branch of the Ottawa Public Library, 199 Glen Park Drive

Register [here](#). (No guest fee)

Bringing Plants Indoors for the Winter and Dividing Plants for Sale or Donation – October 5 – 7:00 pm

Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

Greely Community Centre, 1448 Meadow Drive, Greely

Hosted by Greely Gardeners Group (Guest fee: \$2)

Don't Stop Yet – Fall Tasks – October 17 – 7:00 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Ottawa South Community Centre – the Fire Hall, 260 Sunnyside Avenue

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

Plant Guilds: Taking Companion Planting to the Next Level – October 18 – 6:30 pm

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Rosemount Branch of the Ottawa Public Library,

Register [here](#). (No guest fee)

Dirty Little Underground Secrets (Soil) – October 24 – 7:00 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Brockville Wesleyan Church, 33 Central Avenue, Brockville

Hosted by Brockville & District Horticultural Society (Guest fee: \$2)



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

